Chapter 4: Refashioned Traditions and Exemplary Patriotism in Colonial Bengal

Introduction

This chapter examines the narratives of Padmini produced in Bengal in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first of these was Rangalal Bandopadhyay’s verse narrative, Padmini Upākhyan (1858). This was also the first literary narrative based on Tod’s Annals in colonial Bengal. Subsequent Bengali versions of the Padmini story included at least two plays: Jyotirindranath Tagore’s Sarojini bā Chitor Ākramān (1875) and Kshirodprasad Vidyavinod’s Padminī (1906). Haripada Chattopadhyay produced a jatra Padmini in 1915. An anonymous novel Padminī was published in 1894, and Yogendranath Gupta’s novel by the same name appeared in 1925.

The story was also the subject of several shorter prose narratives, in compilations of stories about Rajput history. These include Kaliprasanna Dasgupta’s account in his Rajput Kahini (1913), and Vijayaratna Majumdar’s account in his Rajasthan (1924). Similarly Chandrakanta Dutta Sarasvati’s Mebar Kāhīnī (1926) included the Padmini story. The best known of these shorter versions was Abanindranath Tagore’s account in the Rajkāhīnī (1909).

Further, the Padmini story appeared in Bengali translations of Tod’s Annals. Surendranath Majumdar’s Rajasthaner Itibritta was published in five volumes in 1872-73. Gopalchandra Mukhopadhyay published another translation in two volumes, Pabitro Rajasthan at the end of the nineteenth century. Yajneshwar Bandopadhyay’s Rajasthan in two volumes was published in 1883-84. This was the most widely read translation; a second edition came out in 1906.1

Several scholars have listed the various versions of this and other Rajput legends in Bengali. In this chapter I focus on five of the thirteen versions listed above. These are the versions by Rangalal Bandopadhyay, Kshirodprasad Vidyavinod, Abanindranath Tagore,

Jyotirindranath Tagore and Yajneswar Bandopadhyay. Together, they indicate the broad contour of the Padmini story as it evolved in colonial Bengal.

The Padmini narratives listed in this chapter range over a period of approximately seventy years, between 1858 and the 1920s. Rangalal’s Padmini Upākhyaṇ appeared a year after the 1857 Rebellion. Many of the Padmini narratives in colonial Bengal were produced at moments of comparable, if not greater turmoil. Jyotirindranath’s Sarojini (1875) was one among a spate of ‘historical’ plays seeking to instill patriotism in the subject people. A year later the British authorities passed the Dramatic Performances Act in an attempt to curb the growing politicization of the Bengali drama. Many of these plays in the 1870s articulated a growing criticism of British ‘misrule.’ The 1890s and 1900s again saw a spurt in adaptations of Tod’s Annals. Thus Kshirodprasad’s Padmini appeared in 1906 at the height of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Abanindranath’s Rajkahini (1909) appeared soon after the Swadeshi movement had ended. And while Yajneswar Bandopadhyay’s translation of the Annals had appeared earlier in 1883-4, a second edition was published in 1906.

Even this cursory survey indicates that the colonial Bengali writers adapt Tod’s Annals in the context of growing nationalism. Further, all the writers discussed in this chapter belonged to the new middle class or bhadralok (respectable folk), in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal. The section on ‘The bhadralok and colonialism’ explores the composition and character of the bhadralok, and the historical and economic contexts for the emergence of nationalism amongst the members of this class. Such nationalism defined itself by locating its antecedents in a reconstructed past. The section on ‘The uses of the past’ discusses how the Rajput heroism celebrated by Tod now became relevant for writers in colonial Bengal. The heroism in defence of kingdom that Tod celebrated, was recast as patriotism in defence of a new political entity, the ‘nation.’ Reinterpretation of the subcontinent’s past is a vital element in the definition of this new entity. The section on ‘The nation and its limits’ analyzes the role of this reconstructed history in re-drawing the political boundaries of the nation in the present. The same reinterpreted history
was also invoked to defend the domain of Hindu patriarchy against colonial intervention, and determine the extent of social reform. These are issues explored in 'Re-formed patriarchies, reconstructed histories.' At the same time, reformed language, together with revised canons and standards of taste, sharpened the emerging differentiation of modern Bengali culture along communal lines ('Aesthetics and audiences,' 'Reformed language, redefined communities'). Thus class formation and social and patriarchal reform, intersected with the evolution of modern language, literature and historiography. The cultural and religious boundaries of the emerging nation were determined by the overlap between these contexts.

The section on 'Histories and fictions' examines how such narratives of history evolved in late-nineteenth-century Bengal under the influence of colonial historiographic and literary conventions. Pre-colonial narrative traditions persisted in the shape of transmuted literary conventions. Many of these narrative contradictions were resolved in the evolution of a new, hybrid genre of historical fiction. The colonial Bengali writers appropriated and transformed the material they found in Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. In turning consistently to Tod, these writers of colonial Bengal ignored an earlier Bengali narrative of Padmini. In the seventeenth century, the poet Alaol had produced a free translation of Jayasi's Sufi *Padmavat* at the Arakan court. The section on 'Alternative traditions' examines this aspect of the refashioning of literary traditions in colonial Bengal, as it affected the shape of the Bengali Padmini narratives.

Briefly, the argument in this chapter is this: the linked domains of literature and history were redefined in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal, at the conjuncture of a refashioned politics and patriarchy. These pressures of historical context once again shaped the evolving structure of the Padmini story.
The bhadralok and colonialism

As indicated above, all the writers discussed in this chapter belong to the new middle class or bhadralok (respectable folk). As Sumit Sarkar points out, the social roots of this middle class in Bengal lay in government service or the professions of law, education, journalism and medicine. In this crucial respect it diverged from its European counterpart, whose base was in trade and industry. The bhadralok’s professional occupation was frequently combined with some degree of the intermediate tenures in the land that proliferated after the Permanent Settlement in Bengal. There was also considerable mobility between this educated middle class and the zamindars.

Changes in the late nineteenth century had their impact on the character of this class and consequently on its politics. From the 1870s, holders of intermediate tenures in Bengal saw their income from the land decrease significantly. Factors such as population increase, fragmentation of landholdings and lack of agricultural improvements contributed. So did new tenancy regulations and peasant resistance in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The shrinking of income from land meant that the Bengali middle class was now defined increasingly through administrative and professional employment. The newly visible group of intellectuals in the bhadralok defined themselves as a distinct “educated middle class” (sikkhita madhyabitto), in opposition to both the powerful landed magnates above them, as well as the vast majority of Indians below them, peasants and urban poor. By the 1870s they had their own political organizations, the Indian League and the Indian Association, distinct from the British Indian Association of the older, titled landed elite (established 1851). They articulated their distinct point of view in newspapers and journals like the Amrita Bazar Patrika and the Bengalee. In doing so,

2 I am aware of the problems in a sweeping use of the term bhadralok, to describe the Hindu, upper-caste, English-educated, male subject. The term ‘middle class’, however, suggests parallels with the historical and social origins of its European counterpart that did not apply in colonial Bengal. At the same time, the indiscriminate use of the term bhadralok does not adequately take into account the internal contradictions within this social group. Nevertheless, I use the term as it is in wide currency. One alternative, sikkhito
they diverged from older newspapers like the Hindoo Patriot, the organ of the British Indian Association.\textsuperscript{3}

These changes in the economic underpinnings of the bhadralok did not signify an absolute rift with the older landed elite. The old economic and cultural ties between the two groups continued to flourish, and members of the landed elite continued to contribute to the ranks of bhadralok intellectuals. Thus three of the writers discussed in this chapter, Jyotirindranath, Rabindranath and Abanindranath, belonged to the Tagore zamindar family of Jorasanko. Other bhadralok writers, however, were employees of the colonial government, or belonged to the professional middle class. Rangalal Bandopadhyay was a government employee. He also edited a Bengali weekly in the early 1850s, in addition to composing poetry. Kshirodprasad Vidyavinod was a Professor of Chemistry in a Calcutta college. He wrote plays in a modern dramatic tradition whose origins lay in the culture of the English-educated middle class.

English education was common to all these writers of the late nineteenth-century Bengali bhadralok. This education encouraged the bhadralok to search

... for its model in the European middle class, which, as it learnt through Western education, had brought about the great transformation from medieval to modern times through movements like the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and democratic revolution or reform.\textsuperscript{4}

The bhadralok saw itself as the agent of a comparable transformation in Bengal. Thus, it

\textsuperscript{3} Madhyabitto (educated middle class), is cumbersome, though no doubt a more accurate description of this social group.

\textsuperscript{4} Sinha 1995, 5-6.
... constructed through a modern vernacular the new forms of public discourse, laid down new criteria of social respectability, set new aesthetic and moral standards of judgment, and, suffused with its spirit of nationalism, fashioned ... new forms of political mobilization.⁵

Historians locate the consolidation of this “spirit of nationalism” in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Indications of the trend surfaced earlier however. Jyotirindranath Tagore later recollected that the propagation of national feeling and patriotism began with the Tattvabodhini Patrika, the monthly journal started in 1843.⁶ Pleas for the cultivation of the mother tongue were made by a number of newspapers and journals in the 1840s and 1850s (Smarajit Chakraborti 1976, 118). Jyotirindranath, Rajnarayan Basu and Nabagopal Mitra established the Patriots' Association in 1865. In 1866, Rajnarayan Basu proposed the establishment of a Society for the Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal (Smarajit Chakraborti 1976, 137).

Dwijendranath Tagore, Nabagopal Mitra and their associates established the Hindu Mela in 1867. The Mela was organized annually for fourteen years, until 1880. Included in the Mela were regular lectures and songs, exhibitions of agricultural produce, animals, birds and machinery and handicraft items. Plays such as Kiran Chandra Bandopadhyay’s Bharat Mata were staged.⁷ Bengal in the 1860s and ‘70s produced a large number of patriotic poems and songs bemoaning the plight of the country. Many of these were written for the Hindu Mela (Sumit Sarkar 1995, 82-3). Various attempts were made to define and preserve ‘indigenous’ values in education. Notable instances were Debendranath Tagore’s Tattvabodhini Pathshala for Upanishadic training, the Hindu Hitarthi Vidyalaya set up in 1845 at his initiative to fight Christian proselytizers, the

⁷ This description of the Hindu Mela activities is taken from Indira Chowdhury, The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 12.
National School of Nabagopal Mitra in 1870, the City College and numerous schools established by the Brahmos in Calcutta and the mufassil during the 1870s and 1880s. By the early twentieth century, education “on national lines and under national control” became one of the great slogans of the Swadeshi movement.

Sumit Sarkar lists the causes for the consolidation of this nationalist discourse and politics in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The slow growth of industry and the humanistic bias of English education in India made over-crowding of the liberal professions and government services inevitable. Unemployment among educated sections grew, fueling discontent. Thus in East Bengal, the strongholds of the Swadeshi movement were areas of Hindu bhadralok concentration, with multiplicity of intermediate tenures (which implied limited income from land), and the spread of English education. The bhadralok’s straitened economic circumstances and emerging nationalist ideology fed each other (Sumit Sarkar 1995, 110).

Another important factor was the growing awareness of the link between British policies and the stark poverty of the country. The connection became more obvious in the context of the repeated famines of the 1870s and 1890s (Sumit Sarkar 1995, 81-2). Thirdly, racism provoked intense resentment in the subject population in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many British officials insisted on racial superiority as the basis for British dominance in India. The agitation by the European community in India against the Ilbert Bill (1883) was most intense in Calcutta. The episode brought issues of race, equality before law and the nature of British governance in India, into sharp focus (Partha Chatterjee 1999, 19-21).

Thus, from the 1870s onwards was consolidated “a gradual, incomplete, often inconsistent, but still extremely important shift within the whole universe of discourse and action

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9 The Bill had allowed ‘native’ judges to try cases in which Europeans were involved. As a result of European agitation, the provision was ultimately watered down so thoroughly as to become worthless. See Partha Chatterjee 1999, 19-21.
of the intelligentsia towards various forms of nationalism" (Sumit Sarkar 1995, 81-2). This was the period in which most of the Bengali adaptations of the Padmini story were produced. By the 1880s, Bengali bhadralok writers were already urging the need for patriotism (swadesha prem) and defining heroism as the defence of one's country against invasion and conquest. They still eschewed direct criticism of colonial rule however. Further, in 1885, wealthy landowners, members of the mercantile community, and of professional and service groups in Bengal petitioned the colonial government with demands to volunteer for military duty in defence of the latter. This was just two years after the racial bitterness of the Ibert Bill agitation. Collaboration thus coexisted with a growing criticism of specific colonial policies. Both the collaboration and the criticism came from the western-educated bhadralok and vernacular literati (Mrinalini Sinha 1995, 70).

The uses of the past

The gradual shift towards nationalism was articulated with all its contradictions, in the field of historiography. Bankimchandra's urgent exhortation to educated Indians to write their own history is only too well known. The writing of history was essential because "history is the basis of social science and social betterment. The misery of a people without history is endless." And for Bankim, what impeded the writing of history in Bengal was the lack of "national pride" (jatiya gaurab): "There are a few wretched races that know not the glorious deeds of their ancestors. Of those disgraceful races the Bengalis are most prominent." Bankim explicitly sees "national pride" as instrumental in creating the history of "a people." In fact, the Bengali

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11 Bengal must have her own history. Otherwise there is no hope for Bengal. Who is to write it? You have to write it. I have to write it. All of us have to write it. Anyone who is a Bengali has to write it ... Bankimchandra, "Bangalir Itihas Sambandhe Koyeki Katha," Bankim Rachanabali, Dvitiya Khanda - Sathiya Samagra, ed. Prafulla Kumar Patra, 1983 (Calcutta: Patraj Publication, 1997) 311. All citations from Bankim are from this edition. This is Ranajit Guha's translation. See Guha, An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1988) 1.
bhadralok writers wrote and rewrote the story of the past with the avowed intention of inspiring such “national pride.”

Bankimchandra lamented the absence of “national pride” and a “national” history in the 1870s. By 1899, Rabindranath was applauding both the “newly aroused love for one’s own country” and the new “thirst for history” (itihasakshuddha), attributing these to the spread of education and awakening. Elaborating on the nature of this new enthusiasm, Rabindranath linked the emergence of a historical record to the emergence of a national identity:

When men experience their unity not merely as a religious community (dharmasampradaya) but as a people (janasampradaya) . . . then they record not merely a specific belief or creed, but their successes and sorrows, the glories of their deeds and an account of contemporary events.

Rabindranath’s formulation reiterated the connection between the writing of history and the definition of a national identity. It also seeks to clarify the scope of such a national identity, by contrasting it with other sectarian identities that Rabindranath suggested were narrower. The Bengali bhadralok writers were to engage repeatedly with this new concept of the ‘nation’, defining its boundaries and the nature of allegiances within it, as they told and retold the story of the past.

Rabindranath elaborated on the uses of such history for India under British rule: it is necessary to “rescue our history from the hands of others.” “We will see our Bharatvarsha with our own independent perspective.” This independent perspective was the essential prerequisite for the re-discovery of a genuine national identity:

Let no one think that we must enter the tortuous paths of history (purabritta), to discover [our] glory . . . Not the boastfulness of a people (jatiya atmashlagha), but the newly aroused

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love for one’s own country. We desire to know our country as it really is, directly by ourselves, completely – we wish to recognize it even in the midst of all its sorrow, misfortune and adversity – we do not wish to forget ourselves.  

The appropriations of Tod’s *Annals* in colonial Bengal were deeply implicated in this process, from the beginning. Thus Rangalal reveals his political agenda at the outset of the *Padmini Upakhyan* (1858), as he discusses his reasons for appropriating the Rajput history that Tod had made available. In his Preface, Rangalal spells out the uses of Rajput history:

From the time of the disappearance of Bharatvarsha’s independence (*s’adhinata*) until the present time, a continuous, genuine history is attainable. In this time, this land’s / country’s (*edesher*) former, most exalted genius and whatever remained of its shattered valour, was in the land / country (*desh*) of Rajputana alone. Just as the Rajputs were adorned with many virtues such as valour (*birattva*), resilience (*dhirattva*), and abiding by dharma (*dharmikattva*), in the same way their wives were renowned for the virtues of chastity (*satittva*), wisdom (*sudhittva*) and courage (*sahasikattva*). Hence out of these considerations I have composed the present tale (*upakhyan*) from the study of Rajput history, so that people can read a work (*padya*) about the honour of the people of their own country (*swadeshiya loker garimā*), and at once be pleased and inspired to follow that example.

Such use of a heroic Rajput past to arouse patriotic pride in the enfeebled present, was a consistent preoccupation in all of the colonial Bengali literature about the Rajputs. Thus Jyotirindranath consciously seeks for ways of awakening in people “a love for their own country (*swadesha priti*).” “Finally I decided that this could be accomplished to some extent, if I wrote plays singing praises of the heroism of the historical sagas (*oitihasik birattva gāthā*), of the story of Bharat’s glory (*Bharater gaurab kāhinā*).”

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These statements suggest the use Tod was put to in colonial Bengal, in the context of its overwhelming preoccupation with the 'nation's' past. The Bengali bhadralok writers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries read Tod's *Annals* as a series of inspirational narratives, exemplifying the personal and political values they wished to celebrate. They repeatedly inferred from Tod's narrative the lessons of love for one's country, heroism in battle, and resistance against oppression and tyranny. These were the values felt to be politically necessary in contemporary Bengal and India. As I argue in Chapter 3, Tod used the Rajput traditions celebrating heroic values, to consolidate the East India Company's system of Subsidiary Alliances with the regional kingdoms. Colonial authority was thus centrally implicated in the crafting of the *Annals*. In an unconscious historical irony, the Bengali bhadralok writers abstracted the same norms to argue for patriotism towards a 'nation' that would ultimately have no room for that colonial power.

This re-reading of Rajput traditions as the exemplary history of the 'nation' marked a shift in the uses to which the former had been put. As I argue in Chapters 2 and 3, the Rajput chronicle traditions emerged in a context where local polities were defining and negotiating the scope of their authority for themselves and for their Mughal overlords. In this sense, Tod's *Annals* continued in the same tradition. Local kings collaborated now with Tod in redefining and renegotiating the scope of the regional powers for the new overlord, the East India Company. In the reinterpretation and idealization of Rajput history by the colonial Bengali bhadralok, however, the regional traditions of the Rajputs were being put to a qualitatively different use. They were now being used to forge the history of a new 'nation', in new geographic, historical and cultural terms (see 'The nation and its limits').

Rangalal's Epilogue demonstrates how narratives of Rajput resistance to Mughal imperialism could still be combined with praises of English rule, denunciations of the Revolt of 1857 and assertions of continued loyalty to the British. From the 1870s, however, literary adaptations of Rajput history were increasingly anti-colonial. The Bengali theater and its plays
were used for purposes of political mobilization. The instance of Dwijendralal Rai’s *Mebar Patan* (1908) reveals how the medium of drama could be exploited for these purposes. Patriotic songs were used as set pieces within plays, easy to remove from the play and circulate. The songs in the play became very popular in their own right.

The colonial authorities were quick to recognize this growing politicization of the drama. Among all the literary genres in the period, the drama was subjected to the most sustained regulation, censorship and prohibitions. The Dramatic Performances Act was enacted in 1876 specifically to control and censor the growing trend of patriotic plays. The most popular among these were Dinabandhu Mitra’s *Nil-darpan* (1860), Jyotirindranath Tagore’s ‘historical’ plays including his *Sarojini* (1875), and Upendranath Das’s violently anti-British *Sarat-sarojini* (1874) and *Surendrabinodini* (1875) (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 296-97). And where the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, imposing censorship on the Indian language press, was withdrawn four years later, the Dramatic Performances Act was never withdrawn.

The Swadeshi movement was the occasion for another surfeit of such ‘historical’ plays. These included Girischandra’s *Sirajuddoulah* (1905), *Mir Kasim* (1906) and *Chhatrapati Shivaji* (1907); Dwijendralal Roy’s *Pratapsingha* (1905), *Durgadas* (1906) and *Mebar-patan* (1908); and Kshirodprasad Vidyavinod’s *Pratapaditya* (1906), *Padmini* (1906), *Palāśir prāyāśchitta* (1907) and *Nandakumar* (1908) (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 297). From 1908 onwards, the government once again started suppressing allegedly seditious plays. In January 1911, thirteen plays were banned under the 1876 Act, including Girischandra’s *Sirajuddoulah*, *Mir Kasim* and *Chhatrapati Shivaji*, Kshirodprasad’s *Palāśir prāyāśchitta* and *Nandakumar*, and Haripada Chatterji’s *Durgasur* and *Ranajiter jiban jajna* (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 300-01).

The overwhelming number of ‘historical’ plays on this list indicates the extent to which the genre of the historical play was now perceived, by its producers, consumers and the government, as a powerful vehicle for patriotic sentiment among urban audiences. Historical novels and stories were not subjected to the same degree of colonial censorship. These genres
may not have enjoyed the same mass circulation and popularity as the drama, requiring as they
did, a literate audience. They invoked the same values as the drama, however - of patriotism,
resistance against imperialism and a heroic past. In this context, the shared appropriations of
Rajput traditions are more significant than the generic differences between drama, narrative
poetry and fiction. I would extend the argument to suggest that writers and readers of 'historical'
fiction and poetry were engaged in articulating and interpreting the same political message as the
contemporary 'historical' drama.

The 'nation' and its limits

The new 'nation' was defined on the common ground of geography, history and culture.
At the same time, as an ideal political and moral order, it was predicated on criteria of
reorganized social relations internally and the exclusion of elements now defined as 'alien.'

The geographical boundaries of the nation were now seen as unifying more than just
territory. Aghornath Barat in his Preface to the Bengali translation of the Annals, speaks of the
"vast land of Bharatvarsha," extending from the Himalayas to "the remote Kanyakumari." He
evokes the image of a land revivified by a new strength coursing through it, a strength carried
"along the blessed waters of the Bhagirathi." Barat likens Bharatvarsha to a dead body brought
to life through some "miraculous" power. He also describes its offspring as regaining their
strength under the influence of the same force(Yajneshwar 1884). Similarly, Bhudeb
Mukhopadhyay, intending to write a "mystical history" of India in his allegorical Pushpanjali
(1876), demarcates the geographical boundaries of the nation by having the sages Markandeya
and Vyasa visit places of pilgrimage all over the subcontinent (Indira Chowdhury 1998, 48).

The Bengali bhadralok's demarcation of a unified territorial space was not new in the
Indian context. As C.A. Bayly points out, pre-modern Indian kingdoms did possess notions of a
regional territory characterized by a distinctive biological-ethical essence. Such an essence was

19 Aghornath Barat, "Publisher's Preface," in Yajneshwar Bandopadhyay, Rajasthan: Mibar (Calcutta:
Barat Press, 1884). All citations are from this edition.
often tied to the graves and memorials of its great heroes, kings, saints and preachers. Again, Bhudeb’s evocation of a trans-regional sacred landscape was of older provenance. Holy men, scholars and pilgrims had long traveled across the subcontinent, attesting to the notion of a sacred landscape marked by holy sites extending well beyond their own region. And yet, the bhadralok’s appropriation of these older notions marked a shift. The latter applied these older ideas of a ‘bio-moral’ essence that had been used to assert regional identities, to a much wider physical landscape.

What is significant about bhadralok attempts to define the geographical boundaries of the ‘nation’ is that they invoke these older ‘sacred landscapes’ for a radically new purpose. The landscape delimited by such sacred sites was now seen to be an entity united politically by its history and culture. Thus, in Barat’s description of the geographical expanse of Bharatvarsha, the idea of a ‘bio-moral’ essence survives only at the level of metaphorical allusion to the blessed, life-giving waters of the Bhagirathi. In place of such an essence, Barat substitutes as the defining attribute, the assertion of a common history and culture. Such a claim diverged from pre-modern, imagined maps of sacred landscapes that invoked a community of religious practice, not the historical or political boundaries of a people or a state. Thus Barat states explicitly in his Preface to a Bengali translation of the Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, that the history and culture of Bharatvarsha are “Aryan” and “Hindu” (Yajneshwar 1884). And Bhudeb’s landscape clearly omits the Muslim sacred landscape of the subcontinent, dotted with its own numerous saints and shrines (C.A. Bayly 1998, 44).

In order to achieve these exclusions, claims of historical and racial descent were invoked. These were used to assert trans-regional affiliations now seen as inherited from antiquity.

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21 See C.A. Bayly 1998, 43. Bayly also points out how regional deities were ‘being incorporated into wider networks of charismatic power,’ local goddesses ‘symbolically married the high gods of the wider Hindu pantheon,’ and artisans and merchant people migrating across the subcontinent, especially in the
Antiquarians like Rajendralal Mitra asserted that the topographical map of the land where the ancient Aryans settled, corresponded to present-day northern India.  

Bengali bhadralok historians expunged the 'barbaric' from the ancient Aryan past, and identified the 'superior' Aryans as ancestors of the Hindus. Thus a superior ancestry was located for Hindus in the colonial present. Further, by claiming an Aryan heritage, this historiography could claim for Hindus equality with the 'civilized races' of Europe. Indian history could be placed within the universal history of mankind (Indira Chowdhury 1998, 44). These were the premises of one strand in the early colonial historiography of India, a strand epitomized by Tod (see Chapter 3). In turning persistently to Tod, therefore, the Bengali bhadralok writers found not only a rich vein of heroic traditions. They also found a colonial master-text that ratified their search for a mythic 'superior' origin.

Thus new lineages in the past and new geographical affiliations offered the ground on which to invent the new history of the nation. Local and regional histories were incorporated into the history of the 'nation.' The history of Rajasthan was now seen as directly relevant for contemporary Bengal, regardless of the physical and historical distance between the two regions. Further, the reinterpreted history of Rajasthan was one of the instruments in the re-drawing of cultural, religious and political boundaries between communities in late colonial Bengal. The bhadralok writers adapted Rajput traditions to suggest that the re-fashioned boundaries of community, culture and the shape of conflict between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' were of much older provenance, and extended throughout the subcontinent.

The striking degree to which this new 'nation' was an imagined entity created by the willful forgetting of past and present realities, is indicated in bhadralok Bengal's newfound admiration for the Marathas. Two decades after the collapse of the Hindu Mela, a Shivaji festival

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seventeenth century, 'created further homologies and links between aspects of ritual and charismatic conceptions of land.'

was instituted in Calcutta in 1904. The emphasis was on the alleged role of Shivaji in founding the ideal of a single Hindu rashtra. By 1906, again during the swadeshi movement, the Hindu element in the Shivaji festival had grown increasingly strident, as an idol of the goddess Bhavani was introduced, overriding local opposition (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 304). Memories of the Marathas had been especially bitter in Bengal, after the plundering raids by the Bargis, Maratha mercenaries, in the 1740s. By the early twentieth century, however, the memory of these raids was dimmed. And replacing it was the narrative of the foundation of an ideal Hindu kingdom, which had had no historical connection with Bengal prior to the plundering raids of the mid-eighteenth century. In celebrating Shivaji, the Bengali bhadralok writers were evolving a new, pan-subcontinental pantheon of heroes, for their country/nation (swadesh). The heroes in this pantheon were no longer connected exclusively with the local region Bengal. And the new narratives of heroic patriotism often deliberately overwrote local memories that contradicted the new, grand narrative.

Past connections were not the only realities to be forgotten. The bhadralok idealization of medieval Rajasthan was equally blind to that region’s contemporary history. Thus, in 1905, 1913, and again in 1916, there were no-cultivation, no-tax peasant movements in Bijolia, Mevar, to protest against the local Rajput thikanadars. As Sumit Sarkar points out, this was the period when “patriotic intellectuals like R.C. Dutt, D.L. Roy, Abanindranath and Rabindranath were writing novels, plays, stories and poems hailing the chivalry and heroism of the medieval Rajputs of Mevar.”

The celebration of Maratha and Rajput heroism was predicated on a rejection of the Mughal rule that they had opposed. Such celebrations often explicitly demonized the Muslim

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23 For an account of peasant protests in early twentieth century Mevar, see Hira Singh, Colonial hegemony and popular resistance: princes, peasants, and paramount power (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira, 1998).
figures involved. Throughout this period the Bengali bhadralok in quest of a 'national' history resorted consistently to images of ancient Hindu glory and medieval Hindu resistance to Muslim rule. It has been argued that in much of this patriotic literature, the Muslims were serving merely as convenient whipping boys; that government officials like Bankimchandra could hardly attack the British openly. As Sarkar argues,

This explanation only reveals all the more clearly the unconscious but almost universal bhadralok assumption that the sentiments of Muslim contemporaries were not worthy of serious notice, since the English-educated among them (who alone could be – and were usually – treated as social equals) were just a handful while the vast majority were 'ignorant' peasants. Patriotism tended to be identified with Hindu revivalism, 'Hindu' and 'national' came to be used as almost synonymous terms (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 411).

The trend was not limited to the 'high' bhadralok literature, but extended to the "cheap literature published from the mofussil towns." By the end of the nineteenth century, Bengali Muslim opinion protested this reinterpretation of the subcontinent's history strenuously. The protests came not only from "the incorrigibly communal Mihir-o-sudhakar, but also journals broadly sympathetic towards nationalism, like the Soltau and the Mussalman." As the Soltan stated lucidly,

It has yet to be shown that Sivaji had any vast patriotic schemes in his contemplation . . . We know that the object of our Hindu brethren in celebrating the Sivaji festival is neither to wound Musalman feelings nor to vilify the reign of Aurangzeb . . . But . . . in order to give high praise to Sivaji, one cannot but censure Musalman rule.26

Further, just as the Hindu bhadralok was engaged in constructing a glorious history for their new 'nation,' so too Muslim journals and historical literature by the end of the nineteenth century . . .

century, emerged with a mirror image: assertions of the glories of pre-modern Islam. Among Bengali Muslims too, the renewed attention to history was seen as instrumental in consolidating the community in the present:

We, Bengali Muslims, have reached our present state of degradation solely by disregarding history . . . The history of the past greatness of the Muslims, if presented to the present generation of the listless Muslims, would certainly inspire them with confidence.  

Thus in the 1890s and 1900s, emerged a steady stream of historical works such as Abdul Karim’s Bharatbarshe Musalman Rājatver Itihas (1898), Muizuddin Ahmad’s Turashker Itihas (1903), and Shaikh Abdul Jabbar’s Makkā Sharifer Itihas (1906) and Madinā Sharifer Itihas (1907) (Ahmed 1996, 96). As these titles indicate, it was not only the glories of ‘Muslim rule’ on the subcontinent that were recuperated. The history of ‘Muslim’ kingdoms elsewhere was seen to be equally relevant for this audience in Bengal, as it now asserted its affiliation with a new notion of trans­-subcontinental, pan-Islamic identity.

These tensions were not played out at the level of narrative alone. They had consequences for the nature of political mobilization in Bengal at the turn of the twentieth century. As Sumit Sarkar points out, the swadeshi movement used the “traditional weapon[s] of the Hindu samaj” such as social ostracism, against persistent sellers and buyers of foreign goods. This meant that the nationalist swadeshi movement “was coming to depend to an unhealthy extent on the forces of religious and caste orthodoxy,” especially in the countryside where the majority of the population was the Muslim peasantry. Zamindari influence in propagating swadeshi ideals often translated into measures such as the forcible closing of local markets (ḥāṭī). Under these circumstances, nationalist mobilization often implied “a considerable degree of intimidation of the lower orders (in many East Bengal districts predominantly Muslim).” Further, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, British policy and attitudes towards the Indian Muslims

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underwent a sea change. Thus, British divide-and-rule tactics, together with “mulla communal propaganda, individual acts of oppression in the name of swadeshi [and] the long-standing social gulf between Hindu bhadralok and Muslim chasha” aggravated the class divide between the predominantly Hindu landowners and predominantly Muslim peasantry. In such circumstances, Bengal saw the outbreak of rioting by Muslims during the swadeshi period (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 319-30).

Attempts continued to find a common idiom and to evolve secular symbols that would unite the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal in the nationalist struggle. These included suggestions for festivals in honour of Mir Kasim and Akbar, and the efforts of the Anti-Circular Society. And the Swadeshi movement “took up Hindu-Muslim unity as one of its principal themes, and broadcast it through innumerable speeches, pamphlets and songs” (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 420). Sarkar also documents the significant participation of Muslims in the Swadeshi movement in Bengal.

And yet, by the 1900s, the idiom of traditional Hinduism had become “the primary communication medium between the intelligentsia and the masses” (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 421-22). In Bengal had emerged an extremely influential narrative of ‘nationalist’ history, which constructed a glorious ‘Hindu’ past for the imagined ‘nation,’ later tarnished by ‘Muslim’ oppression. The bhadralok writers’ appropriations of Rajput traditions were deeply implicated in this process. Such narratives defined the threat to the ideal, ‘Hindu’ order of the past, through a series of characteristic manoeuvres. The fact of Muslim rule was translated to signify tyranny and the oppression of the subject population. Such oppression was always understood to mean

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28 "The image of the dangerous fanatic of mutiny and Wahhabi notoriety was replaced by that of the dependable rough diamond full of martial virtues and preferable by far to the talkative and audacious Bengali babus." See Sumit Sarkar 1973, 418.
29 The same organization came up with a National Flag in red, green and yellow; the eight half-bloomed lotuses in it stood for the provinces of India, the sun and the crescent moon symbolized the Hindus and the Muslims, while at the centre was inscribed Bande Mataram in Devanagari. See Sumit Sarkar 1973, 307.
30 Sumit Sarkar 1973, Chapter 8.
enforced religious conversions. And the trope that was always metonymic for such tyranny was the defilement of two sacred spaces: temples and women. Thus, a typical litany against the demonized ‘enemy’ would run as follows:

... that the Muslims had once ruled and oppressed us, that they spread their religion with the Koran in one hand and the sword in the other, that the Muslim rulers had abducted our women, destroyed our temples, polluted our sacred places. 31

It is this metonymic logic that the narratives of Padmini in colonial Bengal exemplify.

Re-formed patriarchies, reconstructed histories

It has been argued so far that issues of national identity were contested and defined in the intersecting domains of political mobilization and social reform. It has also been argued that the reconstruction of history was harnessed to these definitions of ‘national’ identity. The avowed politicization of such reconstructed ‘history’ is revealed most strikingly in the debate about the position of women and its reform. It was in this domain that a reconstructed ‘history’ of the subcontinent was instrumental in defining the nationalist resistance to colonial authority.

This section explores how bhadralok resistance to colonialism crystallized around the defence of ‘Hindu’ patriarchy. The conceptualization of patriarchy as the domain of ‘tradition’ was linked to the celebration of a re-imagined, ‘Hindu’ past in which the position of women had been exalted. Just as ‘Muslim’ conquest was blamed for the degeneration in statecraft and ethics, it was also held responsible for the deterioration in the condition of women. The practice that simultaneously embodied the ancient woman’s exalted status and the oppression of the ‘Muslim’ conquest, was widow immolation. Once again, the sources of inspiration in Tod’s account of medieval Rajput traditions were obvious.

As pointed out by several scholars, the private sphere was beginning to be constituted as "an indigenist alternative to western materialism" by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This conceptualization gained strength with the emergence of nationalist discourse. Segregation of the feminine, domestic sphere and restrictions on the social intercourse of elite women had existed among the pre-modern Bengali elite, as elsewhere on the subcontinent. In bhadralok Bengal, however, the 'private' sphere was invested with exclusively affective, moral and spiritual functions and attributes. This involved a firm separation of the 'private' sphere from the workplace and the 'public,' political world. This particular construction of the home as the 'private' sphere of the affections had its antecedents in the Victorian middle-class ideology of 'separate spheres.'

As in Victorian England, the redrawing of the boundaries of the private sphere was a significant element defining the culture and identity of the middle class, the bhadralok. A new kind of segregation was imposed on bhadralok women as they were defined in opposition to women from lower economic strata (Sangari et al 1993, 11). Upper caste women, who in any case had had restricted access to public places, were now excluded from popular cultural forms. Participation in such performance traditions was seen as threatening the status and virtue of the bhadramahila. Simultaneously, the household was subjected to thorough reform. The bhadramahila was re-schooled into surrendering willingly to her subordination within a marriage now re-defined in companionate terms.

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36 As Tanika Sarkar points out, the mundane details of domestic life, such as diet, furniture and sanitation habits, were subjected to intense scrutiny. See her "Hindu Conjugalism and Nationalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal," in Jasodhara Bagchi ed. *Indian Women: Myth and Reality* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1995) 99.
37 I am indebted to Tanika Sarkar (1995) for this discussion of the relationship between bhadralok nationalism and the reform of 'Hindu' patriarchy.
The bhadralok saw such recasting of the household and of patriarchal relations as defining their capacity to reform themselves. The need for such reform was constantly highlighted by colonial and missionary attacks upon Indian social practices. However, official colonial policy on social reform changed direction after the 1857 rebellion. The government tended towards the Orientalist school of colonial administration, which favoured rule through supposedly ‘indigenous’ and ‘traditional’ means. This altered policy strengthened conservative Indian groups (Mrinalini Sinha 1995, 4). At the same time, the indigenous elite cast the realm of social custom sanctioned by religion, as a domain beyond colonial intervention. By the 1880s, Hindu marriage was identified as “the last unconquered space in colonized Bengal.” Reformist campaigns and a series of colonial interventions were seen as threatening this structure, now defined both by colonial authority and early nationalism as being at the heart of a “Hindu way of life.” Thus, nationalist resistance crystallized around the defence of patriarchy, now identified as a domain where reinvented ‘tradition’ held sway. Consequently, it was on the issue of reforming Hindu marriage that some of the sharpest nationalist criticism of colonialism emerged. This was accompanied by “a closure of debate and self-criticism in relation to the Hindu family within the most articulate and radical section of the nationalist intelligentsia” (Tanika Sarkar 1995, 99).

The attempts at reform thus sharpened the conceptualization of the ‘Hindu,’ bhadralok family as beyond the authority of the colonizer. As Tanika Sarkar points out, the home was understood as “the last independent space left to the Hindu” (100). The opposition between the home and the public world was also articulated in nationalist thinking in another way. The reformed ‘Hindu’ family was now held to provide “a contrast to and critique of alien rule.”

The nationalist bhadralok conceptualized their model of re-formed, ‘Hindu’ patriarchy, to critique colonialism at two levels. First, they denied the authority of the colonial government to

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38 “Forced surrender and real deprivation within the colonized world ... [was] seen as a stark contrast to what was now constructed as the willed surrender of the apparently subordinated partner at home: the women’s subjection was one that actually led to self-fulfilment attained through love within an affective domain.” Tanika Sarkar 1995, 100.
legislate on such areas as the family where 'custom' and 'tradition' imposed their superior sanction. The domain of patriarchal practices was constructed as "an indigenous response to external threat." Secondly, this re-formed family was re-imagined as an affective domain predicated on the willing subordination of the 'Hindu' woman, whose surrender to the authority of her husband was the sign and proof of her love (Tanika Sarkar 1995, 100). Specific "patriarchal forms and norms" were contested and redefined under the pressure of reformist campaigns. However, the patriarchal obedience of women remained a "basic consensual unit" for both liberals and conservatives. The bhadralok invested heavily in this idea of the re-formed, 'Hindu' family as a defence against colonialism. Thus the first middle-class, mass protest against colonial authority was organized against perceived threats to the Hindu marriage system, during the agitation against the Age of Consent Bill in 1891 (Tanika Sarkar 1995, 99).

The justification constantly offered for colonial intervention and reform was the miserable condition of women, which was an index of the degenerate status of 'Hindu' civilization. As argued above, bhadralok nationalism accepted the need for reform in this area but rejected the colonizer's authority to initiate it. Instead, the nationalists appealed to the idea of a glorious past in which women had occupied an exalted position. Several scholars have examined the tradition of mythmaking inaugurated by nineteenth-century reformers, in which the ancient Hindu woman was constructed as a free, mobile, intellectual person.

As early as 1831, an editorial in The Reformer attempted "to establish companionate marriage as an ancient 'Hindu' practice." The essay attributed the current, fallen position of women to the Muslim interregnum. The companionate model of a "rational interchange of ideas" was held up as a model, and the writer lamented that so many Hindus had "adopted the unnatural

40 I am indebted to Kumkum Sangari's formulations on the politics of patriarchal reform in bhadralok Bengal. See Sangari 1999, 160.
Mahomedan custom of considering women rather as slaves than as companions” (Sangari 1999, 154). These comments foreshadow the bhadralk’s later re-construction of the subcontinent’s history, in which evaluations of patriarchy were instrumental in measuring the stature of the ‘nation.’ Thus Romesh Chunder Dutt exalted the ancient, ‘Aryan,’ ‘Hindu’ past as a golden age, in which women were honoured more perhaps than among any other ancient nation in the face of the globe. Considered the intellectual companions of their husbands, as their affectionate helpers in the journey of life, and as inseparable partners in their religious duties, Hindu wives received the honour and respect due to their position.42 Dutt’s emphasis here on companionate conjugality points to the bhadralk’s projection of its own aspirations for re-formed patriarchal relations, back into an ancient age. And the purpose of reform was to re-educate and re-equip the ‘Hindu’ woman into accepting the onerous responsibility of that exalted status that she had enjoyed in the ancient past. Thus the Ladies Union set up by Keshub Chunder Sen in 1879 was called the Arya Nari Samaj and one of its distinctive features was the adaptation of traditional Hindu bratas (fasts) to new objectives (Uma Chakravarti 1993, 61).

The responsibility for the subsequent degeneration in the position of ‘Hindu’ women was ascribed to the rule of the ‘Muslim’ in the medieval period. The bhadralk thus reaffirmed the communal periodization of subcontinental history that had become influential through the works of colonial scholars (see Chapter 3). This typical maneuver allowed the bhadralk to construct a correlation between the perceived deterioration in the position of women on the one hand, and a perceived fall in the political fortunes of the subcontinent on the other.

As argued elsewhere in this chapter (‘The nation and its limits’), a celebration of the Aryan golden age was inseparable from a corresponding rejection of ‘Muslim’ rule in the

42 Romesh Chunder Dutt, History of Civilisation in Ancient India, cited in Uma Chakravarti 1993, 51
medieval period. A reconstructed history of patriarchal relations reinforced this periodization. The conjunction of these histories revealed itself in another, typical maneuver. The 'Muslim' ruler of medieval India, so frequently characterized in bhadralok reconstructions of Indian history as fanatical, ambitious and treacherous, was also now depicted as being lustful.

The bhadralok evolved a complex response to colonialism, even while attacking colonial policy from the vantage point of custom, tradition and the defence of the 'Hindu' family. On the one hand, descriptions of the Hindu marriage system by Orientalist scholars were rejected. In 1887 there were sharp attacks against Max Mueller's pretensions (Tanika Sarkar 1995, 104-5). On the other hand, however, as argued above, the bhadralok drew the inspiration for conceptualizing and re-forming its 'Hindu' family from the metropolitan paradigm of the Victorian middle class. More ironically, in constituting the realm of custom and tradition as immune to colonial intervention, the bhadralok were drawing on the idealized reconstructions of Indian antiquity depicted in Orientalist scholarship. It was the same Max Muller's researches on philology that highlighted the common origin of the Europeans and Indians. For the nationalists, this theory of shared Aryan origins came to be isolated as the most significant aspect of Sanskrit studies (Uma Chakravarti 1993, 46).

The above discussion provides a context for bhadralok Bengal's enthusiastic reception of The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan. Tod belonged to the Orientalist school of scholarship and governance himself (see Chapter 3). Thus, he had ratified the glory of the ancient Indian past, by the standards of modern, European scholarship. More significantly for the purposes of the Bengali bhadralok, Tod had proved the uninterrupted descent of the Rajputs from the ancient Aryans. Their continued survival in spite of 'Muslim oppression' provided proof of the survival of those 'Aryan' elements into the present. Tod's ideas about the Aryan origins of the Rajputs continued to be influential in the late nineteenth century, and not among the Bengali bhadralok
alone. For instance, Madame Blavatsky reiterated the conviction that the Rajputs were the oldest inhabitants of India, "the carriers of its most ancient memory." 43

The bhadralok exaltation of 'Aryan' women also had its origins in the work of Orientalist scholars such as Tod. In Chapter 3 I argued that Tod made the exalted stature of ancient, 'Aryan' women an index of the glory of that Aryan past. For bhadralok Bengal as for many Orientalist writers, this stature was best embodied in the custom of widow immolation.

Widow immolation had been outlawed by William Bentinck in 1829, but the category of 'voluntary' sati (that is, suicide) had been reinserted into the law a decade later. 'Voluntary culpable homicide by consent' was re-legalized in 1839 through a legal amendment, and later retained in the Indian Penal Code of 1860 (Sangari et al 1993, 15-16). Thus, a generation after sati had been abolished, it continued to enjoy enormous symbolic power as a sign of the 'Hindu' woman's transcendent devotion to her husband. The immolation of the widow was reconfigured as an emblem of her love for her husband and her self-sacrifice for its sake. 44 It was also proof of her superior piety. Even liberal and reformist opinion that had supported the abolition of sati was not immune to this romanticization of the custom. As an 1875 article about "Heroic Women" in the Bamabodhini Patrika argued:

Who will deny that Indian women have long gained the ability to be heroic in the religious sphere . . . . To ascend the funeral pyre of a dead husband in the living body - the thought itself makes us tremble, yet millions of Indian women have borne this ordeal with smiling faces. 45

On these grounds as well, Rajput history proved extremely amenable to the bhadralok's reconstruction of an idealized, 'Hindu' womanhood located in the past. As argued in Chapters 1 43 Madame Blavatsky, From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan, 1892, cited in Kumkum Sangari 1999, 154. For Blavatsky and her disciple Annie Besant's ideas on Rajputs, and on the Aryan heritage of India, see Sangari 1999, 90-2, 424, n. 25 and 426, n. 29.
44 Bhadralkok and Orientalist-inspired European writers concurred on this re-presentation of sati. See Clarisse Bader's celebration of sati in Women in Ancient India (1867). Cited in Uma Chakravarti 1993, 46.
instances of female immolation among medieval Rajput groups had been construed as asserting the rank and honour of the lineage involved, rather than as signifying the love of the woman for her husband. For the bhadralok writer appropriating such narratives of female immolation, this added an extra dimension. As argued above, the bhadralok writer already inferred from the act of sati, the transcendent conjugal devotion and piety of the ‘Hindu’ woman. The Rajput traditions mediated by Tod were useful in linking such conjugal love and piety to the honor of the ‘nation,’ thus confirming the bhadralok’s own symbolic linkages between re-formed patriarchy and national identity. Thus Rajanikanta Gupta reconstrues the death of Krishna Kumari, the daughter of Rana Bhim Singh of Mevar at the turn of the nineteenth century (see Chapter 3). The death of the princess by poisoning was transformed into an act of self-sacrifice, ‘not for the sake of individual honour, but for the honour of her country and her father.’

The custom of mass immolation among medieval Rajputs, jauhar, became an even more potent symbol of these linkages between re-formed patriarchy, reconstructed history and the assertion of a ‘national’ identity. Once again, jauhar had been firmly linked to assertions of lineage status in medieval times, and had not been confined to Rajputs, but had spread across religious denomination through the Mughal imperial service. The reconstruction of Rajput history by the bhadralok extended the reinterpretation of jauhar. To the defence of family and country that sati among the Rajputs already signified, was added the defence of the woman’s chastity. The threat to this chastity was posed, as indicated above, by the ‘Muslim’ invader. Therefore, the medieval Rajput custom of jauhar offered one of the most potent symbols of the links the bhadralok defined between a re-formed patriarchal order, a reconstructed ‘history,’ and the assertion of a ‘national’ identity.

47 See the jauhar by Qasim Khan the Mughal governor of Dacca in 1617, cited in ‘Alternative Traditions,’ n. 129 below.
This, then, is the full context for the Bengali bhadralok’s fascination with Rajput history, and with the Padmini story in particular. The reconstruction of that history allowed the bhadralok to assert past glory and resistance to imperial domination. The virtue of women in that glorious past was constructed as the symbolic centre around which the ‘nation’ coalesced. This celebration by the bhadralok of Rajput women is in contrast to the ambivalence of medieval Rajasthani narratives about the role of elite Rajput women in politics (see Chapter 2). As argued in Chapter 3, the unease of the Rajasthani chronicle tradition about women in politics was reiterated by Tod in his Annals and in the policies of the East India Company. These contradictions disappear from the bhadralok appropriations of the Annals, that modify Tod’s account even as they receive it with adulation.

Aesthetics and audiences

I have argued so far that the bhadralok defined the boundaries of the nation through the invention of a new history based on new criteria of inclusion and exclusion. In this section, I argue that re-formed standards of literary decorum, the transition to print and the development of contemporary ‘literature’ reinforced these new criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

Rangalal distinguishes his Padmini Upakhyan from the “great proportion of this land’s language-poetry,” with its “obscenity and impurity, which until now had been so dear to the young and the old and women, to every sort of person.” In contrast, he sees his own poem as an attempt to compose in a pure, clean style (bishuddha prañālī) (Rangalal 1951, 11-12). Rangalal and his peers, the bhadralok writers and literary critics, were attempting to carve out a new aesthetic, defined in opposition to what they saw as the popular taste. Fourteen years after Rangalal’s Padmini Upakhyan was published, the first formal history of Bengali language and literature declared:

Readers are aware that for the past few years the number of Bengali books has been increasing daily . . . . It seems that some people have developed a disease of writing and publishing anything at all, irrespective of merit or value . . . . There are some among these,
which, in fact, smell of the gutter. Readers, please do not think that we will even touch them.\textsuperscript{48}

The bhadralok writers defined “merit” and “value” in terms of subject matter, language and literary genre. Mythological tales from the Puranas were seen to be outmoded. Contemporary literature was characterized as full of “immature, vulgar and obscene stories,” that were demeaning to the dignity required of Bengali language and literature. The emulation of European examples was seen as desirable in the forging of new genres, such as “blank verse, plays, travelogue, history, science, poetry, essays and so on.”\textsuperscript{49} As Sumanta Banerjee points out, these new norms of style articulated the social values of the bhadralok (the proscribing of “obscenity” as impure and indecorous). At the same time, it also worked to exclude the “vast audience of the unlettered poor” with whom the older, folk poetical forms had been popular.\textsuperscript{50}

Contemporary bhadralok writers and literary critics undertook a concerted redefinition of literature. One aspect of this re-fashioning of literary institutions and norms was the popularity of the new literary reviews. As Tapti Roy points out, Bengali journals from the 1860s onwards were “quite conscious of their roles as creators and guardians of literary taste . . . They managed to demarcate in institutional terms what qualified as good literature and what did not” (1996, 54).

The success of this project can be gauged from a survey of the books published on various subjects between 1853 and 1867. In these fifteen years, 37 titles were published about or drawing on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In contrast, 113 titles were published on contemporary social issues. Even more strikingly, 140 titles were published in the category “Bengali tales,” 250 titles in Bengali poetry and 225 in Bengali drama. (43 titles were published in the category

\textsuperscript{49} Bankimchandra, cited in Tapti Roy 1996, 56.
“Muhammadan religion.”)51 Not all these new works of poetry and drama may have conformed to the new social and literary decorum being gradually defined by the bhadralok. But the shift towards modern genres based on European examples was striking.

Madhusudan’s introduction of blank verse into the new poetry and drama further accentuated the shift towards new norms of literary value directed at the culturally dominant bhadralok. By the end of the century, it was clear that “the new and aesthetically pleasing Bengali literature of the modern times” was “ascendant on the path of progress.” It was equally clear that the new poets, “Madhusudan, Hemchandra, Nabinchandra, Rabindranath . . . [were] the poets of the educated Bengalis.” This new exclusiveness could have troubling implications for the reach of Bengali literature in the late nineteenth century. As Bankimchandra (the most influential practitioner and proponent of the new aesthetic) recognized, it was an older poet like Ishwarchandra Gupta who had had a far wider reach. Rather than being a poet merely for the educated Bengalis, he had been “the poet of Bengal.”52 There were other consequences as well for the character of the audience for this new literature.

Of the educated class of people in Bengal, the vast majority was Hindu. Where Muslims formed a majority of the population as in eastern Bengal, they belonged predominantly to the cultivating classes. Upper-caste Hindus had held nine-tenths of the zamindaris in Bengal even before the British established their rule. On the other hand elite Muslims had controlled the army, the criminal justice system and the top administrative positions. British rule brought drastic change – the resumption of land endowments originally made towards religious establishments; the takeover of the criminal justice system; and the abolition of Persian as official language in the 1830s.

Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the status of the Bengali Muslim elite declined sharply and suddenly, to a far greater extent than in North India. This was the period

51 See the list reprinted in Tapti Roy 1996, 51
when the Hindu bhadralok castes were switching over successfully to English education, "with a confidence buttressed by rising receipts from zamindari or tenure-holding." The consequent disparity in educational levels, and the disparity in "middle-class development," made the "Bengal Renaissance almost entirely a movement of the English-educated bhadralok Hindu" (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 407-11). In the 1881 Census, more than 90 per cent Muslims were recorded as belonging to agricultural or service groups. And of these, the vast majority were actual tillers of the soil, only a handful being non-cultivating landowners. Thus the land-holding, professional and mercantile occupations were dominated by high-caste Hindus – Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas, the main castes constituting the bhadralok (Ahmed 1996, 2-3).

Literacy levels between the two communities were equally skewed. In 1876, of Calcutta's Muslim male population, only 16.5 per cent could read and write, as compared to 42 per cent among the city's Hindu population (Sumanta Banerjee 1989, 120). These statistics point to the well-documented urban-rural and literate-unlettered divisions between Hindus and Muslims in nineteenth-century Bengal. Such social rifts were exacerbated by the new trends in literary production and classification.

This is revealed by Rangalal's prefatory comments in the Padmini Upakhyan. Rangalal discusses the contemporary redundancy of ancient, Puranic history in terms that align him firmly with the bhadralok literary establishment:

I have this to say that, the various episodes (ākhyāṁ) described in ancient/Puranic history (purāṇetihās) are known to all people all over Bharatvarsha; in particular, all those tales (upākhyāṁ) from having many supernatural (alaukik) descriptions (barnamā), they are not respected (shraddhāyī) to that extent by modern educated youth (Rangalal 1951, 13).

Rangalal uses two arguments here. The first is that Puranic history is far better known than Rajput history. By implication, the former sort of narratives is devoid of all novelty for the contemporary writer. The second, more significant argument is addressed to contemporary readers' tastes. As a result of having been exposed to "modern" education, such readers will be
skeptical of the supernatural elements in Puranic narratives. Thus, he clearly breaks away from what Bankimchandra would later call "the endless repetitions of the mythological tales from the Puranas," with a prescient eye on the re-formed expectations of his target audience.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Rangalal and the later Bengali bhadralok writers who adapted episodes from Rajput history, were quite self-consciously addressing a new, socially exclusive, culturally ascendant audience. Their reconstructions of Rajput history were implicated in the production of a new literature. As such, the Bengali literature on the Rajputs articulated the emergent norms of linguistic and literary "purity" and "taste," of this new cultural elite. This body of works exemplifies the definition of these norms in relation to the emerging political, cultural and moral locus of the 'nation.'

Reformed language, redefined communities

The other decisive shift was a re-forming of the language towards Sanskrit. This entailed a clear moving away from other languages Bengali had borrowed from in the course of its evolution – Persian, Arabic, and Urdu. It must be remembered that Bengal had been ruled by Muslim kings throughout the medieval period. Medieval Bengali economy, politics and society had been profoundly impacted by the centuries of Muslim rule. And as elsewhere in medieval India, medieval Bengali language and culture had evolved in the interplay of Islamicate and Indic cultural traditions. In this context, the nineteenth-century bhadralok reform of the Bengali language also clearly implied the marginalizing of a substantial portion of the region’s history and culture.

The drive towards greater borrowing from Sanskrit in the production of a new literary language inevitably sharpened a linguistic rift between Bengali Hindus and Muslims. As early as

53 Tapti Roy 1996, 56.
1850, one contemporary observer noticed the striking differences in the literature popular among Bengali Hindus and Muslims:

... their [the Muslims'] favourite books are of a totally different nature from those of the Hindus. True, they are printed in the Bengali character, and profess to be Bengali poetry, like all the rest; but the language contains a large admixture of Hindustani, and the subject matter usually consists of some Muhammadan legend.\(^5\)

On the one hand there were romances such as the Yusuf Zuleikha, inherited from medieval narrative traditions. Such romances continued to be produced in an alternate dialect, \textit{dohhāshi} (literally, 'derived from two languages'). This Bengali Muslim patois was the spoken language of the majority of the Bengali Muslim (unlettered) population, and publications in the dialect circulated widely among Bengali Muslim audiences (Sumanta Banerjee 1989, 120).

As Rafiuddin Ahmad points out, by the second half of the nineteenth century, however, educated Muslim resentment against "the Bengali of the Hindu \textit{pathsalas}" was growing. This sharp reaction was a response to the perceived "Sanskritization" and "Hinduization" of the language throughout the nineteenth century (Ahmed 1996, 124-26). It was widely recognized that the process had been initiated by the pandits at Fort William College. Public debate among Bengali Muslims intensified, when in 1871 the Government of India recommended "greater encouragement to the creation of a vernacular literature for the Mahomedans." On this occasion the provincial government in Bengal determined, that the vernacular of the Bengali Muslims was Bengali and not Hindustani or Urdu. The response of the Bengali Muslim elite was divided "between those who wanted a total change-over to Urdu and others who preferred a kind of Bengali for the benefit of the masses." The need was felt for a new vernacular language for use by ordinary Muslims in Bengal, "a mean between the highly Sanskritized Bengali of the Hindu \textit{pathsaläs} on the one hand and the Musalmani Bengali patois on the other"(Ahmed 1996, 124-26).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, educated Muslims published a number of works on Islamic subjects in modern Bengali. These were “aimed particularly at the educated, or semi-educated, youth . . .” (Ahmed 1996, 94). Some of the writers associated with the Muslim newspaper, Mihir o Sudhakar, were also engaged in the production and publication of religious tracts in a more modern Bengali (Ahmed 1996, 99). By the early decades of the twentieth century, “Muslim identity was perceived to be totally incompatible with local symbols, dress and language.” An exclusive Islamic identity was now perceived to require a distinctive, exclusive style in language as well. From the second half of the nineteenth century, thus, community identities were being forged on the battleground of language.

As in their address to a more exclusive audience, so in their choice of linguistic idiom and register, the Bengali bhadralok writers’ adaptations of Rajput traditions from Tod were centrally implicated in this process. Rangalal’s Padmini Upakhyan (1858) was an early specimen of the new trend. In its canto form and metrical schemes, the poem still reveals affiliations with pre-colonial Bengali poetry. In its subject matter and in its language, however, it exemplified the new aesthetic and cultural preferences of the bhadralok. Thus the linguistic strategy that Rangalal adopted in creating his new, “pure style” was the heavy use of compound words of Sanskrit origin. In the light of the above discussion, it is clear that such a strategy would have turned away potential Muslim readers, who were keenly aware of the links between the re-formed language and its rewriting of Bengali history and culture.

Jyotirindranath’s Sarojini reveals an explicit devaluation of dobhashi, and the valorization of the language called “sadhu bhasha” by Bankimchandra. Alauddin sends as messenger to the false priest Bhairebacharya, the Muslim commoner Fateullah. This messenger, who consistently speaks in dobhashi, is depicted as not very intelligent. The textual marker of this is Fateullah’s inability to adopt the “sadhu bhasha” spoken by the other characters in the play, including the disguised Bhairebacharya. Not only does Fateullah’s language betray him as a “Musalman,” it also casts him as “foreigner” and as a “spy” (Jyotirindranath 160).
Instances such as these reveal how the colonial Bengali narratives of Padmini were implicated in the bhadralok’s deployment of loaded linguistic standards required for membership in the emergent nation.

**Histories and fictions**

I argued in Chapter 2 that in the medieval period, there was a continuum of forms between the domains of literature and history as they narrated the past. Genres such as the inspirational biography (*charit*), local epic (*katha*), heroic poem (*rasa*), dynastic chronicle and genealogy (*vansavali*) often shared narrative tropes, even as differentiating conventions emerged gradually. Pre-modern Bengal shared such systems of generic classification. Thus, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, William Carey called his collection of imaginary tales *Itihasamala*. The work was subtitled “A Garland of History.” Stories from the *Arabian Nights* when retold in Bengali were called *Arabya Itihasa*. Nilmani Basak’s compilation of Persian stories was published in 1834 as *Parasya Itihasa*. In 1856, the same book was reprinted as *Parasya Upanyasa*.

By the end of the nineteenth century though, Bengali writers and audiences distinguished clearly between the domains of literature and historiography. Historiographic modes and methods evolved in the European Enlightenment and transmitted through colonial education played their part in delimiting generic boundaries. Histories of the subcontinent reconstructed by colonial scholars and administrators gained the status of authoritative knowledge. At the same time, narrative horizons inherited from pre-colonial contexts persisted in the bhadralok’s redefinition of literary genres. Tensions between the demands of historical veracity and the power of mythmaking traditions were frequently resolved in the newly dominant genre of historical fiction.

Crucial to the new definitions of literature and history as autonomous domains of cultural practice was a distinction between fact and fable. Such a distinction, evolved in the European

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made a crucial transition from the "history of kings" to the "history of this country." This shift is visible as early as 1858, in Tarinicharan's *Bharatbarer itihās*. As Chatterjee points out, notions of country, people, sovereignty and statehood were now firmly identified in the mind of the English-educated Bengali, who borrowed these equivalences from European historiography (1999, 95). I have already discussed the boundaries defining this 'country' ('The Nation and its Limits'). In this section, I am concerned with the generic distinctions between literature and history as they affected the recasting of Rajput traditions in late colonial Bengal.

For the bhadralok writers in the second half of the nineteenth century, the discipline of history now demanded rational explanations within the realm of human action, for the events of the past. Through the pursuit of history, the truth about the past could be ascertained and proved on the basis of evidence. In Rabindranath's words, the concerns of history are:

... how the people of one's own land and of other lands became great, became strong, came together as a group, how those who attained well-being did so, having attained well-being, how they defended it ... What men have done on the earth, and what they can do ...  

Elsewhere, Rabindranath also described history as a field of knowledge that is perennially growing and revising itself:

But when will that knowing be completed? When will I know for certain that all the evidence relating to the Crusades has been exhausted? How can I know that that which stands unshaken as the historical truth today, will not be forced to give up the throne of history tomorrow under the force of newly discovered evidence?  

Rabindranath pointed out how the discipline of history has firmly separated itself from the realm of literature in modern times:

At one time the Ramayana-Mahabharata were history. Now history feels extremely delicate, acknowledging a family resemblance with them [the epics]; it says their lineage (*kul*) has

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58 Rabindranath Tagore, "Itihaskatha", 13:490.
been blemished, from their wedding with poetry (kāhya). Now it has become so difficult to redeem their lineage, that history wishes to introduce them as poetry (kāhya). Poetry says, brother history, there are many falsehoods in you, as there are many truths in me; come, let us mingle with each other, as in earlier times. History says, no brother, it is better that we understand and partition our distinct parts. The surveyor called knowledge (jnān-nāmak āmin) begins that work of partition everywhere. He [knowledge] is obliged to draw a separating line between the kingdom of truth and the kingdom of imagination.  

While recognizing these divergences between history and literature, Rabindranath defends the hybrid genre of historical fiction (oitihasik upanyās). He argues that the novel as a literary genre depicts the joys and sorrows, the ebb and flow of individual lives. In doing so, it generates aesthetic enjoyment (ānanda) in the reader. There are, however, a few individuals whose personal joys and sorrows are tied to the great affairs of the world. The stories of their lives must be seen as emblematic of the great march of Time itself. Their lives must be established within the past, they must be seen as heroes upon the grand stage of the past. In depicting the lives of such individuals, the writer draws upon the tools of history. History must be read for the truth it offers, literature for the pleasure (ananda) it gives. For a comprehensive understanding of the Crusades in medieval Europe, the reader must read both history and Walter Scott's novel Ivanhoe. And the genre of historical fiction gives to the reader a pleasure so distinct, that it can be classified as a distinct rasa – the historical rasa (oitihasik rasa)  

Rabindranath provided here the aesthetic defence for a genre that was central to the bhadralok writers' reconstruction of the past. For instance, Romesh Chandra Dutt acknowledges the close interplay between his love of history and his love for historical fiction: "I do not know if Sir Walter Scott gave me a taste for history, or if my taste for history made me an admirer of

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Scott; but no subject, not even poetry, had such a hold upon me as history." Rabindranath’s formulation, however, went further than this. He adopted European, Enlightenment norms of classification in characterizing history as the “kingdom of truth” and literature as the “kingdom of imagination.” And he recognized that this definition imposed certain demands upon the field of historical narrative, such as fidelity to fact. Therefore, Rabindranath argues for the necessity of historical fiction as a genre mediating between the distinct domains of history and literature. In allowing the “imaginative” embellishment of historical “truth”, historical fiction as a genre aids in a better understanding of history. It also allows for the construction and celebration of heroes, unlike historical narrative that merely records the lives of its significant agents.

This rationale can be perceived in the Bengali bhadralok writers’ sustained appropriations of Tod’s *Annals*. As Jyotirindranath wrote of another historical drama *Ashrumati* (1879), that was loosely based on the *Annals*:

I accept that Pratapsinha did not have any daughter called ‘Ashrumati.’ She is solely a product of my imagination. I have only this to say, the imaginary events that are described in this play, have the effect not of diminishing Pratapsinha’s lofty character in the least, but of increasing it all the more.  

Speaking of the imaginary romance between Pratap’s fictitious daughter Ashrumati and Akbar’s son Prince Selim, Jyotirindranath readily acknowledges his deviations from history. He declares that his sole intention in writing the play was to display for Bengali audiences, the lofty ideals he saw enshrined in Rana Pratap’s character. Jyotirindranath’s *Sarojini* follows an identical method: it uses Alauddin’s siege of Chitor as the background against which to exalt the heroism of

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Lakshmansinha. The play does this by introducing a fictitious daughter, Sarojini, whom the Rana of Chitor must sacrifice to the goddess for the redemption of his kingdom.

The bhadralok writers followed the same method across literary genres. Bankimchandra discusses the introduction of fictional characters in his novel Rajsingha in similar terms:

Aurangzeb, Rajsingha, Zebunnisa, Udaipuri – these are historical figures. Their characters (charitra) have been kept as they are in history. But the events that have been described relating to them, are not all historical. In particular to preserve the fictiveness of fiction (upanyāṣer upanyāṣikata), many imaginary matters have been included. In fiction it is not useful to have the entire narrative (katha) from history. 65

As this discussion suggests, Tod’s Annals may have been received in colonial Bengal as an authoritative account of Rajput history. It was used, however, primarily as a master-text containing a series of inspirational narratives about heroic personages. The colonial Bengali writers freely adapted the historical episodes they appropriated from Tod. As Jyotirindranath’s comments on Ashramati suggest, the recourse to persistent fictionalization was justified by the didactic aims of these plays. History as a discipline demanded accuracy of facts, evidence and proof of arguments. Historical fiction (I now use the term to cover all the literary genres discussed in this chapter – drama, poetry, fiction/short story) effectively sidestepped these requirements. Therefore, sustained accuracy to historical fact was not even an issue for these writers. 66

I would further suggest that the bhadralok writers found the study of Tod’s Annals to be so exceptionally rewarding, because the latter’s treatment of Rajput traditions prefigured their own resolution to the problem of defining and delimiting the historical domain. As I argue in Chapter 3, on the one hand Tod adopted methods of historical enquiry that had evolved during the

66 This is where I disagree with Barun Chakrabarti’s otherwise exhaustive treatment of Tod’s Annals in Bengali literature. In describing the nature of the Bengali writers’ appropriations of Tod, he is preoccupied with issues of historical accuracy and fidelity to the source, the Annals.
European Enlightenment. These included norms for acceptable historical evidence and methods for ascertaining historical truth. On the other hand though, Tod’s brand of Romantic Orientalism enabled him to assert that Indians did have a ‘national’ history, encoded in their ancient narrative genres and their mythology. Thus he could recuperate the pre-modern narrative traditions of the Rajputs as ‘authentic’, even while transforming them by the standards of contemporary European historiography (see Chapter 3, ‘Materials for history’ and ‘Histories old and new’). As I argue in this section, the bhadralok writers’ fictionalized reconstructions of Rajput traditions achieved similar ends. They retained the ‘authenticity’ of Rajput traditions even while recognizing that the latter did not conform to the conventions of modern historical narratives.

It is important to recognize, however, that the bhadralok writers did not universally accept such demarcations between ‘literature’ and ‘history.’ The older system of generic classification (with its hazy boundaries between these domains) continued to be invoked as late as the twentieth century. Such reassertion of pre-modern categories affected the reception of both domains. On the one hand, a history rediscovered by the dominant European standards of historiography could still be re-read in the light of archaic conventions such as those of the katha and the charitra. And on the other hand, pre-modern genres such as the epic, narrativizing a mythic past, could be re-read as ‘history.’ Bipinbihari Nandi’s verse translation of the Annals illustrates these readjustments in generic categories. Nandi locates his Sachitra Sapta Kanda Rajasthan (1911) in the tradition of the medieval Bengali translations of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata:

If the great poets Krttibas and Kashiram Das had not written the Ramayan Mahabharata in simple, graceful and pleasing metres in the Bengali language, the said two precious works (grantha) would also have been as dreams [unreal, that is] for Bengalis, like the Vedas and the Upanishads.67

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Implicit in Nandi's statement are two assumptions about the perceived nature of the Annals. One, that Tod’s text is comparable to the epics in terms of didactic value. And secondly, that it exists in the same continuum of genres as the epics. In other words, the epics as well as the Annals are both seen as exemplary narratives about figures/characters believed to have existed in the past.

This seamless continuum between the domains of history and myth was a persistent feature of bhadralok Bengal’s understanding of the subcontinent’s past. The new pantheon of heroes for the ‘nation’ incorporated figures from both history and mythology. Thus Sarala Debi’s Birastami celebrations in 1902 included the recitation of a Sanskrit verse listing the heroes of the new nation. These included Krishna, Rama, Bishma, Drona, Karna, Arjuna, Bhima, Meghnad, Rana Pratap, Shivaji, Ranjit Singh, and Pratapaditya (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 304).

Therefore, the Bengali bhadralok writers’ appropriation of Tod’s Annals suggests a process of partial, incomplete transitions in the subcontinent’s history of narrative genres. For the Bengali bhadralok in the second half of the nineteenth century, historical fiction offered itself as a mode of mediation between received narrative forms such as the charitra and the raso, and modern, European historiographic modes, now endowed with factual authority. The recourse to Tod endowed the colonial Bengali re-interpretations of Rajput tradition with the authority of colonial scholarship. At the same time, the sustained recourse to historical fiction allowed colonial Bengali writers and audiences to retain the familiar interpretive horizons of pre-modern narrative genres.

**Alternative traditions**

This section explores the awareness of the bhadralok and their predecessors in Bengal, of medieval narrative traditions about the Rajputs. Pre-modern Bengali scholars seem to have known the bare outline of Rajput history. Historical transitions in language and culture marginalized this knowledge, rendering Tod’s Annals the definitive account of the Rajput traditions. Scholars, historians and writers in late nineteenth-century Bengal do not seem to have been directly aware of medieval Rajput chronicle traditions. However, in recasting episodes from
Tod's mediated version as inspirational narratives for their own political agenda, the Bengali bhadralok writers diverge from the Rajput heroic traditions. The latter had deployed these relations to define the ideal political and moral order of the kingdom. In contrast, the bhadralok reconstructions of Rajput tradition were engaged in defining the ideal political and moral order of the 'nation.' In doing so, the bhadralok narratives were elaborating on a set of assumptions incipient in Tod but absent from the medieval Rajput traditions.

Scholars in Bengal had been aware of the broad shape of medieval Rajput history, well before Tod's Annals became their dominant source. Partha Chatterjee discusses the treatment of Prithviraj Chauhan's defeat by Shihabuddin Ghuri, in Mrityunjay Vidyalankar's Rajabali (1808). This was among the first three books of narrative prose in Bengali, commissioned by the Fort William College for use by young Company officials. Mrityunjay, a teacher of Sanskrit at the College, was writing the story of "the Rajas and Badshahs and Nawabs who have occupied the throne in Delhi and Bengal." His accounts of the Sultanate and Mughal periods were probably based on the Persian histories in circulation among the literati in late eighteenth-century Bengal. As such, Rajabali provides an instance of the historical memory of elite Bengali society from the pre-colonial period.

Mrityunjay ascribes the fall of the "Hindu dynasties" and the establishment of "Yavana rule" to crimes (cannibalism and patricide) committed by the Chauhan dynasty, and the consequent dictates of a divine will that made the Yavana conqueror its instrument of retribution. Prithviraj's fate is prophesied before the fateful battle, and he is defeated and captured by Shihabuddin (Chatterjee 1999, 80-1). Thus, kings are believed to "acquire kingdoms and hold power by divine grace." And Mrityunjay asserts that kings hold power by adhering to the "path of dharma", guided by their Brahman advisors (81-3).

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68 Partha Chatterjee 1999, 77. I am indebted to Chatterjee for his discussion of this account in Rajabali.
As Chatterjee demonstrates, bhadralok writers by the middle of the nineteenth century had adopted a very different perspective, both on the rise and fall of kingdoms, and on the medieval 'Muslim conquest' of the subcontinent. Several factors contributed to this altered understanding. I have discussed above emergent distinctions in late colonial Bengal between the fields of literature and history, under the impact of English education and exposure to Enlightenment categories and classifications (‘Histories and Fictions’). In addition, Persian was abolished as the official language of administration in the 1830s. As has been well documented, Bengali scholars of the early nineteenth century such as Rammohun Roy were well versed in Persian literary and intellectual traditions. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Bengali literati were no longer familiar with the language. The end of the Mughal empire had also severely eroded the networks of patronage for Persian narrative traditions. Earlier scholars such as Mrityunjay perhaps had direct access to the medieval chronicle tradition in Persian. Writers and historians in the late nineteenth century relied instead on versions available in English, such as Alexander Dow’s translation of Ferishta, and most significantly, Henry Elliott’s translations of the medieval chronicle traditions.

Elliott clearly stated the principle guiding his selections from over 150 works in Persian—“Muhammadan tyranny” over “a long oppressed race” of “Hindus”:

We behold kings, even of our own creation, slunk in sloth and debauchery . . . . The few glimpses we have, even among the short Extracts in this single volume, of Hindus slain for disputing with Muhammadans, of general prohibitions against processions, worship, and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures, of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, of proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres,
and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them, show us that this picture is not overcharged . . . 69

The bhadralok writers appropriated Elliot and Dowson’s translations – with all their errors in translation and misreadings compounded by the English scholars’ biases.70 Of course, as I argue above, the social and ideological moorings of the bhadralok writers produced their own biases about communities, religious identities and sub-continental history. These would only have been confirmed by their reading of English scholarship such as Elliot and Dowson’s.

Thus by the middle of the nineteenth century, the decline of Persian historiographic traditions in Bengal resulted in the marginalization of a major alternative tradition narrating Rajput history. Far more striking however than the decline of the Persian chronicle tradition, was the obscuring of another medieval Bengali narrative, about Padmini herself. In the mid-seventeenth century, Saiyid Alaol had translated Jayasi’s Padmavat at the Arakan court. A brief discussion of Alaol and his poem is relevant to considering why this medieval Bengali narrative about Padmini was marginalized in late-colonial, bhadralok Bengal.

Alaol translated Jayasi’s poem at the request of Magan Thakur, the prime minister of the Arakan king, Thado Mintari Sad Umangdar (1645-52).71 The kings of Arakan72 were Buddhist, but absorbed a good deal of Muslim influence from the Bengal Sultanate: they styled themselves ‘sultan,’ they issued medallions bearing the Muslim confession of faith, and they adopted Muslim names alongside their Buddhist names. They lived primarily from the sea, engaging especially in raiding the Bengal delta for slaves. In this activity, which eventually

70 For critiques of Elliot and Dowson, see Muhammad Habib, “An Introduction to the Study of Medieval India (A.D. 1000-1400),” in K.A. Nizami ed. Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Professor Muhammad Habib (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1974) 3-32; and S.H. Hodivala, Studies in Indo-Muslim History: A Critical Commentary on Elliot and Dowson’s “History of India as Told by Its Own Historians,” 2 vols., 1939 (Lahore: 1979).
72 A coastal kingdom extending from modern south-east Bangladesh (Chittagong and its hinterland) to the western coast of Myanmar.
provoked the Mughal invasion and annexation of Chittagong in 1666, the Arakanese were often joined by renegade Portuguese adventurers and soldiers.73

Arakan’s flourishing maritime trade made its capital a “cosmopolitan” city, with traders from the rest of the subcontinent and from as far away as the Middle East.74

Alaol was born in Faridpur or Fatehabad in Gauda-Banga, in the first decade of the seventeenth century. His father was a minister in the court of Majlis Qutb, the ruler of Jalalpur. As a youngster, he was abducted by Portuguese pirates and sold as a soldier in the Arakan court. Here he won respect for his scholarship, his skill in music, his appreciation of poetry and his knowledge of many languages, including Persian and Avadhi. At the request of his patron, he completed Daulat Qazi’s Satimaina Lorandrani, which had been left unfinished upon the latter poet’s death. Among his other works were translations into Bengali of Nizami’s Iskandernamah and Hafi-Paikar from the Persian, and a version of the Arabic romance Saif-ul-mulk-Badi-uj-jamal. He composed the Tohfa, a collection of moralistic Islamic stanzas based on the Persian Tuhfatunnisa of Shaikh Yusuf Dehlavi (fourteenth century). He was initiated into the Qadiriya Sufi order by Qazi Saiyid Masud of Roshang (Debnath Bandopadhyay 1985, 2:2-3). Alaol was also one of many contemporary Muslim poets in seventeenth-century Bengal, who composed a number of Vaishnava padas.75

The poet’s oeuvre demonstrates his familiarity with medieval, subcontinental heroic-romance traditions, in Persian and in Avadhi. Like Jayasi (see Chapter 1) and many other Sufi poets in medieval India, Alaol also drew freely on the metaphysical and devotional idioms of Islamic as well as Vaishnavite mysticisms. While the phenomenon was familiar enough in

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73 Eaton 1997, 235, n. 19
medieval north India (see Chapter 1), Richard Eaton identifies a specifically Bengali context for this emergence of a hybrid idiom:

In Bengali literature dating from the sixteenth century – romances, epics, narratives, and devotional poems – poets identified the lore and even the superhuman agencies of an originally foreign creed with those of the local culture. The reasons poets employed this mode of literary transmission are not hard to find. Already exposed somewhat to Brahmanic ideas of the proper social order and its supporting ideological framework, the rural masses of the eastern delta were familiar with the Hindu epics. One sixteenth-century poet wrote that “Muslims as well as Hindus in every home” would read the Mahabharata. In addition to such Vaishnava sympathies, the people of this period were also saturated with the mangal kabya literature that celebrated the exploits, power, and grace of specifically Bengali folk deities like Manasa and Chandi. It is hardly surprising then, that romantic tales from the Islamic tradition drew on this rich indigenous substratum of religious culture (Eaton 1997, 276-77).

Parallels can also be discerned between medieval north India and Bengal in the field of political culture. The Mughal political elite of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Bengal spoke a form of vernacular Hindi-Urdu as their “mother-tongue.” They brought with them assumptions about honour and political service “that for several centuries had been nurtured in North India within the matrix of Rajput culture.” These included instances of the Rajput rite of jauhar, “assimilated into imperial culture through Akbar’s policy of incorporating Rajputs into the Mughal corps and the inclusion of Rajput women in the Mughal harem” (Eaton 1997, 176).

Further, as Eaton demonstrates, “Sufism, or more precisely the style of piety informed by institutionalized world-rejection and the cult of saints, was very much built into the ethos of

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76 "Thus the sixteenth-century poet Haji Muhammad identified the Arabic Allah with Gosai (Skt., 'Master'), Saivid Murtaza identified the Prophet's daughter Fatima with Jagat-janani (Skt., 'Mother of the world'), and Saiyid Sultan identified the God of Adam, Abraham, and Moses with Prabhu (Skt., 'Lord'), or, more frequently, Niranjan (Skt., 'One without colour,' i.e. without qualities)." Eaton 1997, 276-77.
Mughal service in Bengal" (1997, 176). In Chapter 1, I argued that Jayasi's Padmavat illuminates the continuities in mystical doctrines, political practice, and patriarchal relations, between the various religious and secular groups patronizing its production and transmission. Jayasi's own spiritual lineage had had a long history of deep involvement with state, politics and society. In Mughal Bengal as well, "Sufism's world-renouncing vision formed, not an antithesis to the worldly business of running an empire, but a complement to it" (Eaton 1997, 176). The career of Alaol himself illustrates this proximity. When Shuja, one of Aurangzeb's brothers and his rival for the succession, took refuge in the Arakan court in 1660, Alaol was seen as being close to the Mughal prince. After Shuja was murdered in Arakan with his family, Alaol was imprisoned for treason. Although he was freed after fifty days, his property was confiscated and he was impoverished (Debnath Bandopadhyay 1985, 2:3).

The resonance of Jayasi's poem for Alaol and his courtly audience in Arakan must be understood in the context of such continuities of political culture and Sufi practice between north India and Bengal in the Mughal period. In Chapter 1 I argued that Jayasi's Padmavat was read in medieval north India as belonging with a group of poetic narratives classified as 'tales of love.' I also argued that medieval, north-Indian audiences read these poems in two contexts simultaneously: as secular entertainment, and/or for mystical instruction. Alaol's translations of the Saif-ul-mulk-Badi-ul-jamat and his completion of Daulat Qazi's Satimaina Lorchanandrani, both undertaken at the specific requests of his courtly patrons, indicate that he and his audience were familiar with these generic horizons.

In one respect, though, Alaol's poem diverges significantly from the Avadhi Padmavat. In Alaol's poem, Ratansen recovers from the wounds inflicted by Devpal's poisoned sword. (It will be remembered that in the Padmavat the king of Chitor dies fighting not Alauddin but this Rajput neighbour). He rules for a few more years, and a son is born to Padmabati. But as in Jayasi's poem, when the king ultimately dies, the two queens Nagmati and Padmabati commit sati. In the most significant divergence from the Padmavat, in Alaol's poem there is a
rapprochement between the dying Ratansen and Alauddin. It is subtly suggested that Ratansen undertakes this reconciliation out of concern for his two young sons and the kingdom after his own death (Debnath Bandopadhyay 1985, 2:397). In a move resonant of Mughal policy from Akbar’s time onwards, this seventeenth-century poem has Alauddin becoming the guardian of Ratansen’s two young sons, who then enter the imperial service. In due course, Ratansen’s son Chandrasen becomes the king of Chitor, his father’s kingdom (*pitrihhumi*) (Debnath Bandopadhyay 1985, 2:408). Thus, Chitor is not ‘conquered by Islam’ as in Jayasi’s poem.\(^7\)

Debnath Bandopadhyay attributes the final rapprochement between the two kings in Alaol’s poem, to the influence of the Vaishnava bhakti ideology of love that was dominant in medieval Bengal (1985, 2:8). Alaol’s altered conclusion also suggests that the figure of Alauddin Khalji signified different things in medieval Bengal, from north India. I argued in Chapter 1 that emergent Rajput lineages in sixteenth-century north India projected their anxieties about contemporary imperial expansion on to the figure of this ruler from the past. I also argued particularly that the emergent Rajput lineages asserted their descent from the region’s earlier rulers, by focusing on the Khalji ruler who had destroyed the latter. Alaol’s altered conclusion demonstrates the degree to which these concerns were limited to the Rajput lineages of north India, even as a particular ethic of military and political service was much more widely shared.

To recapitulate the argument so far: continuities between Sufi practice and courtly culture between medieval north India and Mughal Bengal, made Jayasi’s *Padmavat* resonate with Alaol and his courtly audience at Arakan. At the same time, Jayasi’s poem was deeply implicated in the specific politics and anxieties of emergent ‘Rajput’ lineages in sixteenth-century north India. Alaol’s modifications of the Avadhi original demonstrate that these specific contexts and their narrative articulations were not as significant for this poet and his courtly patrons in Arakan.

The sparse information available about the transmission of Alaol’s *Padminabati* suggests broad similarities with the transmission of Jayasi’s poem. As in the case of the Avadhi ‘tale of

\(^7\) See Chapter 1 for the Sufi recasting of this trope of medieval imperial expansion.
love,' it would seem that local Muslim literati and Sufi networks provided one context of patronage and transmission for Alaol's poem. Debnath Bandopadhyay mentions one complete manuscript dating to around the mid-eighteenth century, transcribed by Abul Hochan son of Gholam Hochan. The manuscript was commissioned by Kamdar Ali, whose family were the scribe's patrons (1985, 2:4). Manuscripts of the Padmabati were commissioned well into the nineteenth century. Bandopadhyay's other complete manuscript dates to 1863, transcribed and owned by Munshi Hyder Ali, owing allegiance to a (Sufi) Pir Abdul Gafur Khan (1985, 2:4).

And yet, the bhadralok writers do not mention Alaol's Padmabati at all. The multiple versions of the poem by the bhadralok writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, show no awareness or influence of this medieval Bengali romance about Padmini. The available evidence points to a marginalization of this earlier Bengali tradition about the Rajput queen of Chitor. In the absence of more evidence, one can only speculate as to the reasons for this significant silence.

Several factors may have contributed to the disappearance of Alaol from the bhadralok canon for a Bengali literary tradition. For one, the decline of the Muslim landholding elite in Bengal would have drastically shrunk the patronage networks that supported the reproduction and transmission of the medieval romances. Secondly, bhadralok writers were engaged in defining and evolving new standards of literary value. By the new standards of taste, tales integrating elements of fantasy and/or mythology were now seen as outmoded. Alaol's elaborate treatment of Ratansen's journey to Singhal and his adventures in pursuit of Padmini would have made it likely that his poem was classified with the "immature, vulgar and obscene stories" that were being expelled from the canon in this period ("Aesthetics and audiences"). And finally, as I indicate above, there is clear evidence that medieval romances such as the Yusuf Zuleikha were now beginning to be identified with the "literature of the Muslims." Such romances, to which genre Alaol's Padmabati also belonged, continued to be retold in dobhashi, and continued to be popular among unlettered Bengali Muslim audiences ("Reformed language, redefined communities"). And
finally, even if the bhadralok writers were aware of the Padmabati, their acceptance of European historiographic standards (‘Histories and fictions’) would have provided strong grounds for the rejection of Alaol’s poem, as an ‘unreliable’ and ‘inauthentic’ narrative about the Rajput queen of Chitor.

The conjunction of social, historiographic and literary transformations that I have discussed so far, thus contributed to the marginalizing of alternative traditions about medieval history from bhadralok Bengal. In this situation, Tod’s Annals came to represent the definitive account of Rajput history.

The texts

Up to this point, this chapter has argued that the bhadralok writers saw their reconstruction of Rajput history as instrumental in defining a ‘nation’ and forging the desired ‘national’ identity. In the remaining part of this chapter, it is argued that the bhadralok versions of the Padmini story achieved this aim through their characteristic treatment of the symbiotic relationships between heroic kings, orderly chiefs, sacrificing queens and demonized enemies. As indicated earlier, this chapter discusses five bhadralok adaptations of the Padmini legend:

Rangalal Bandopadhyay’s Padmini Upakhyan (1858), Jyotirindranath Tagore’s Sarojini ba Chitor Akraman (1875), the version in Yajneshwar Bandopadhyay’s Rajasthan (1883-4), Kshirodprasad Vidyabinod’s Padmini (1906) and Abanindranath Tagore’s adaptation in Rajkahini (1909). This section provides outlines of four texts and their immediate literary and historical contexts.

Yajneshwar Bandopadhyay’s translation is not described here, since it is a translation of the account in Tod’s Annals. Translations of Abanindranath’s and Yajneshwar’s accounts can be found in the Appendices to the dissertation.

Rangalal Bandopadhyay (1827-1887) was educated at a missionary school in Bakulia village, Bardhaman district, where he grew up. He then attended the newly established Hooghly
College where he obtained an English education. Between 1860 and 1882 he was a government employee. He edited the weekly newspaper Sangbad Sagar for a couple of years in the early 1850s (Smarajit Chakraborti 1976, 204). Thus, like many other bhadralok writers (most notably Bankimchandra), he straddled the domains of journalism and imaginative literature.

His literary works included an essay on Bengali poetry (1852), the Padmini Upakhyan (1858), Karmadebi which was another verse narrative about a medieval Rajput princess (1862) and a translation of Kalidasa’s Kumarasambhavam (1872). Rangalal’s poems recounted Indic subjects in a style modeled on English examples. As he confessed in the Preface to his Padmini Upakhyan: “I have studied excessively and first of all English poetry and it has been for a long time my habit to write Bengali poems in this method.” He also translated English poetry (Cooper, Milton, Parnell, Goldsmith, etc.) into Bengali as a preparation for writing original poetry “in this method” (Zbavitel 1976, 231).

Rangalal composed the Padmini Upakhyan at the request of Raja Satyacharan Ghoshal Bahadur of Bhukailash, who desired him to write a poem in a “pure style” (see ‘Aesthetics and audiences’). This wealthy zamindar was a prominent member of the British Indian Association, the first political organization with an exclusively Indian membership (Smarajit Chakraborti 1976, 141). Rangalal acknowledges that he took the subject of the poem from Tod’s Annals. The Padmini Upakhyan was published with the blessings of the Reverend W. O’Brien Smith and Rajendralal Mitra, and the encouragement of the Vernacular Literature Society (Rangalal 1951, 8). The Society had been established in Calcutta in 1851, with the object of publishing translations of such works as are not included in the design of the Tract of Christian Knowledge Societies on the one hand, or of the School Book and Asiatic Societies on the other, and likewise to provide a sound and useful Vernacular Domestic Literature for Bengal (Smarajit Chakraborti 1976, 116-17).

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78 Brajendranath Bandopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das, ‘Sampadakiya Bhuniika,’ Rangalal 1951, 7.
79 Rangalal 1951, 8.
The Committee started a monthly journal, the *Bibidartha Sangraha* (edited by Rajendralal Mitra), with articles on matters of contemporary interest, including historical essays on the Rajputs (Smarajit Chakraborti 1976, 117). Rangalal's association with Satyacharan Ghoshal of the British Indian Association, the historian and antiquarian Rajendralal Mitra and the Vernacular Literature Society, suggests his proximity to the elite, 'proto-nationalist' politics of the mid-nineteenth century. As argued above (see 'The bhadralok and colonialism'), these circles were beginning to evolve a sense of patriotism and national feeling, especially in the domain of culture. It is significant that the first bhadralok version of the Padmini legend emerged in this context.

The *Padmini Upakhyan* is a verse narrative divided into twenty-two cantos. It begins with an unnamed traveller exploring the many provinces (*desh*) of Bharat, before reaching Rajputana. He is stirred by the glory of the Rajput cities, and eventually reaches Chitor. Here he encounters an old Brahmin performing his ablutions in the lake, from whom he wishes to hear the story of this city. The Brahmin mentions the names of the early kings of Chitor, before coming to the reign of Lakshmansinh. At the traveller's request, the Brahman goes on to narrate the "wondrous tale" (*bichitra katha*) of Padmini in detail.

Rangalal begins his poem with a description of Padmini's beauty and chastity. Hearing of her beauty, the Yavana king desires to obtain her for himself and marches against Chitor. The *Upakhyan* follows Tod's account faithfully in mentioning Padmini's natal lineage – the Chauhans of the island of Sinhala. As in the *Annals*, Bhimsinha is the Chitor king's uncle. His journey to Sinhala to marry Padmini is omitted. Following the *Annals*, the *Upakhyan* moves directly to cursorily recounting Alaudin's motives in attacking Chitor and describing his first siege of the fortress. Rangalal adds one detail to the narrative here, the death of Alaudin's son in the battle. This only makes the angry 'badshah' more determined to kill the Rajputs. The stalemate, Bhimsinha's acceding to Alaudin's desire to behold Padmini, the display of the queen's reflection and Alaudin's desire for her: these are elements clearly borrowed from Tod's account. So too are the capture of Bhimsinha by deceit, Alaudin's condition for the release of the king,
and the rescue by the palanquin scheme. Rangalal goes on to narrate Gora’s death battling the
pursuing Yavanas, the immolation of his wife, and Alauddin’s return to besiege Chitor. The
goddess’s utterance demanding the sacrifice of twelve royal princes follows, leading to the last
battles of the Rajputs. With eleven of his sons dead, Bhimsinha chooses to die himself, sending
his surviving son away from the besieged fort to preserve the lineage. Before the climactic battle,
the women led by Padmini immolate themselves. The conquering Alauddin enters the fortress,
eager to take Padmini back with him to Delhi.

Rangalal does not mention Alauddin’s disappointment and his destruction of Chitor. He
follows the Annals, however, in mentioning the preservation of the lineage through the survival
of one son. He also brings back the Brahmin narrator to conclude the Upakhyan with an elegy on
the destruction of the Rajputs and the relentless march of predatory Time. The narrator ends his
account by pointing to renewed hope for fallen Bharat, as the light of knowledge brought by the
English brings a new awakening.

Like his brothers and cousins in the Tagore family, Jyotirindranath Tagore (1848-1925)
was actively involved in the bhadralok move towards a new patriotism. As stated above (‘The
bhadralok and colonialism’), he was one of the founders of the Patriots’ Association in 1865,
along with Rajnarayan Basu and Nabagopal Mitra. He was also actively involved in the Hindu
Mela. Jyotirindranath composed several poems for the Mela, including one for the inaugural
Mela. This song depicted the country as the Mother, shackled by “Subjection and Ignorance,” and
exhorted the “children of Bharat” to rise. “In her present state . . . Mother India can only appeal to
her sons who have been chivalrous in the past” (Indira Chowdhury 1998, 20).

Jyotirindranath’s Sarojini ba Chitor Akraman appeared in 1875. The first professional
theatres in Calcutta had been established two years earlier (the National Theatre on 7 December
1872 and the Great National Theatre and the Bengal Theatre shortly after) (Zbavitel 1976, 227).
More plays were written on historical and mythological themes in the early 1870s, in contrast to
the predominantly ‘social’ plays of the 1860s. Sarojini belonged to a spate of plays in the mid-1870s that articulated a growing patriotism and anti-British sentiment. As indicated above (‘The uses of the past’), these plays prompted the enactment of the Dramatic Performances Act (1876) as an instrument of censorship.

The plot and many of the characters in Sarojini are imaginary, though the setting is Alauddin’s final attack on Chitor. When the play opens, Alauddin’s first attack on Chitor has already been repulsed and the captive Bhimsinha has been rescued. The play’s action is triggered by Bhairobacharya, the chief priest of Chitor who is actually a Muslim in disguise. As a ploy to help the enemy Alauddin, the false priest declares that the patron goddess of Chitor requires the ritual sacrifice of Rana Lakshmansinha’s daughter Sarojini. It has been noticed that the Rana’s agony as he weighs the claims of the city against his affection for his daughter recalls the conflict faced by another Rana of Mevar, Bhimsinha, in Madhusudan Dutt’s earlier play, Krishnakumari (1861). The influence of Euripides’ Iphigenia at Aulis has also been widely recognized (Barun Chakrabarti 1981, 58).

As the Rana wavers between these conflicting allegiances, he faces pressure from his commander Randhirsinha to complete the sacrifice and preserve the kingdom. Sarojini is betrothed to Vijaysinha, the chief of Badla who is one of the Rana’s foremost warriors. Vijaysinha has played a key role in repulsing Alauddin’s first attack on Chitor and rescuing Bhimsinha. After that first battle, he has brought back two hostages from Alauddin’s camp, the beautiful Roshanara and her maid Moniya. Roshanara is befriended by Sarojini and accepted into the Rana’s household, where she is treated honorably. She falls in love with her captor Vijaysinha.

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80 In the decade 1856-65, sixty out of a total of eighty plays written treated contemporary social themes. Zbavitel 1976, 225.
81 In 1874 alone, at least six ‘patriotic allegories’ were written that recalled the long-past glory of Mother India and lamented her enslavement by foreign barbarians. These included Kunjabihari Basu’s Bharat adhin and Haralal Ray’s Banger sukhabasan. Zbavitel 1976, 228.
and turns against her benefactor Sarojini out of jealousy. When the queen (Lakshmansinha’s wife) hears of the danger threatening her daughter, she asks Vijaysinha to defend Sarojini. Meanwhile, the Rana anticipates that Vijaysinha will refuse to sacrifice Sarojini, and withdraws the marriage proposal to deflect Vijaysinha’s resistance. This alienates Vijaysinha and he defends Sarojini against the Rajput soldiers.

The false priest thinks he has succeeded in his plan of weakening Chitor by instigating a crisis within the Rajputs. As Alauddin besieges the fort, Bhairobacharya declares that he had misinterpreted the goddess’s utterance, and Sarojini need not be sacrificed. Instead, another beautiful, young woman from the Rana’s household can be offered up to the goddess. Roshanara who comes to the temple of the goddess thinking that Sarojini has been killed, is offered up as sacrifice instead. At the moment of her death, the false priest realizes that he has beheaded his own daughter, who had been separated from him as a child and had grown up in Alauddin’s court.

Alauddin’s conquest of the fort is a foregone conclusion, and the women immolate themselves before the Rajput warriors depart for the final battle. As Alauddin enters the fort, he sees Sarojini about to jump into the funeral pyre. He mistakes her for Padmini, and begs her to desist. A scornful Sarojini corrects his mistake, informs him that Padmini has already immolated herself, and follows suit herself. The play ends with Alauddin’s tribute to the supreme heroism of the Hindu woman, and a choric lament on the fall of Chitor.

Kshirodprasad Vidyavinod (1863-1927) was a professor of chemistry at a Calcutta college in addition to being a commercially successful dramatist. He specialized in dramatic fairy tales and mythological plays, interspersed with numerous songs. He also wrote ‘historical’ plays like the patriotic Banger Pratapaditya (1903) and Padmini (1906), in addition to plays on subjects from the epics such as Raghubir (1903). Kshirodprasad’s plays reveal the mingling of

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83 His Alibaba (1897), based on the Arabian Nights tale, was a great stage success. Zbavitel 1976, 228.
elements from the jatra tradition and the colonial Bengali drama. This blending of forms can be ascribed at least in part to audience tastes. The establishment of the professional theatres from the 1870s onwards had widened the audience for the drama beyond the bhadralok. The tastes of the lower strata in matters of theme and form thus became factors relevant to the commercial viability of the drama. The result was the incorporation of more popular cultural forms such as the jatra, into the bhadralok drama (Zbavitel 1976, 262). As indicated above (‘The uses of the past’), Kshirodprasad’s ‘historical’ plays – Pratapaditya (1906), Padmini (1906), Palasir pravaschitta (1907) and Nandakumar (1908) – were written during the height of the Swadeshi movement and its immediate aftermath. ‘Historical’ plays articulating patriotic sentiment were seen as seditious by the colonial government. Two of Kshirodprasad’s plays, the Palasir pravashchitta and Nandakumar were banned in 1911, along with eleven other plays (Sumit Sarkar 1973, 300-01). These facts suggest the thorough politicization of such reconstructions of Indian history in the period.

The plot of Kshirodprasad’s play departs somewhat from the other bhadralok narratives about Padmini. The narrative begins with the accession of Alauddin to the throne of Delhi after having murdered his uncle, Sultan Jalal-ud-din Khalji. Alauddin has already conquered Devgiri, looted its wealth and used it to ease his path to the throne of Delhi. The new Sultan tricks Nasiban, the daughter of Jalal-ud-din’s Vazir, into marrying him. He does so to take revenge on her father, who opposed him in the old king’s lifetime and disapproves of his methods. Once married to Nasiban, he threatens her with the death of her father and throws her out of the palace. The Vazir’s life is spared and he is exiled. Nasiban, thinking that her father is dead, swears revenge against Alauddin and finds her way to Chitor. She meets Gora and makes him her brother. As a supplicant of the royal household in Chitor, Nasiban asks that Rana Lakshmansinha grant her a wish. She desires the king of Chitor to defeat Alauddin in battle. A reluctant

84 The text used here is Kshirod Granthabali, 6 vols. (Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandir. n.d.) 2:1-70. All citations from this edition.
Lakshmansinha is forced to grant the wish of the supplicant. Meanwhile Alauddin has set his sights on conquering Gujarat and Chitor.

Nasiban has second thoughts about the adversity she has brought upon her Rajput protectors, but Lakshmansinha is bound by his oath to go to war against the Delhi Sultan. As the Rajputs prepare for battle, Lakshmansinha's son Arun is deputed to sentry duty at the fortress gates. Attracted by the beautiful Rukma, the daughter of a poor Rajput living in the forest, Arun leaves his post and follows her into the forest where she lives. When Arun misses the Rana's summons for battle, Lakshmansinha orders his son's death for dereliction of duty. Arun marries Rukma in the forest. When he returns to Chitor, Padmini tries to intercede on his behalf with the Rana. Rukma, who has followed him to Chitor, threatens to curse the king and the land for the death of her husband. Padmini intervenes to remind Rukma of the Rajput wife's duty. Lakshmansinha spares his son's life but exiles him.

Alauddin's exiled vazir has become a wandering mendicant (fakir) and arrives at Chitor, where he is welcomed with respect by Gora. He is reunited with his daughter Nasiban.

Alauddin's is aided by the treacherous Hindu chiefs in his attempt to conquer the kingdom of Patan in Gujarat. The only resistance he encounters is from a lone Muslim chief, Kafur Khan, who sends a message to Chitor for help. There is bad blood between the kings of Patan and Chitor, both of whom claim superior rank over each other. Before the Rajputs of Chitor can respond to Kafur Khan's call for help, Kamaladevi surrenders herself to the Sultan. In return, she asks that the Sultan defeat the Chitor king and fulfil her husband's last wish. Alauddin spares the rebellious Kafur Khan's life, and makes him his commander instead.

Alauddin now sets his sights on Chitor, but he is defeated by Gora and Bhimsinha, who are advised on strategy by his former minister the Vazir. As Alauddin lies wounded on the battlefield, Nasiban finds him and asks Gora to spare his life. Alauddin allows himself to be taken prisoner by the unsuspecting Gora, demands to be treated as a guest, and desires to behold the queen Padmini. From this point onwards, the narrative follows the Annals account more closely.
The Rajputs feel bound by the laws of hospitality. Padmini devises the mirror scheme and Alauddin is determined to obtain her after beholding her beauty. He tricks and captures Bhimsinha. Padmini devises her husband's rescue by the palanquin ruse, and Gora is killed in the ensuing battle. Bhimsinha returns to Chitor, but Alauddin is not about to return empty-handed. A battle breaks out near the fortress. At the urging of his wife Rukma, the exiled Arun comes to his father's aid with his band of poor Rajputs from the forest. A rumour reaches the queens that Lakshmansinha has been killed. Led by Padmini, the Rajput women immolate themselves (jauhar). Lakshmansinha returns to the fortress too late. The patron goddess of Chitor appears before him at this point and demands the sacrifice of twelve sons of the royal blood. As the princes are killed in quick succession, Arun and Badal re-enter the fort and die defending its gates.

The victorious Alauddin enters Chitor, and is struck with awe at the destruction of the women. Lakshmansinha survives, and importunes the goddess for an heir. She reappears to give him the news that Arun's son by Rukma will preserve the lineage. The play ends here with Rukma being sent away to the safety of Kelwara.

Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) was "the leading artist and ideologue of the nationalist art movement in Calcutta:"

His emergence as the archetypal nationalist artist of modern India has its well-known history . . . [his] discontent with Western training and his restless search for a new creative idiom in the indigenous traditions of miniature painting and decorative arts . . . In 1905, he was inducted . . . into the post of vice principal of the Government School of Art . . . inaugurating his career as leader of a "new school of Indian painting."85

85 Tapati Guhathakurta, " Recovering the Nation's Art." in Partha Chatterjee 1996, 64. 79.
Abanindranath’s *Rajkahini* (1909) is an account of episodes from the history of Mevar, told for children. It has sold innumerable copies and gone through countless editions and reprints. It continues to be the most widely read popular account of Rajput traditions in Bengali to this day.\(^\text{86}\)

Abanindranath follows Tod’s account closely, beginning with a brief description of the glorious history of the Rajputs and of the Mevar ruling lineage in particular. Bhimsinha’s journey across the sea to Sinhala and his marriage to Padmini are mentioned in one sentence. As they spend their days happily in Chitor, Alauddin hears of Padmini’s beauty from one of his singing girls. He decides to march to Chitor and demand the queen. As he leaves, his wife Piyari Begum taunts him that he will fail in his endeavour. Holi celebrations in Chitor stop abruptly at the news of Alauddin’s impending attack. The king and his council debate their course of action. Bhimsinha offers to surrender Padmini to the Sultan, since it is her beauty that endangers the kingdom. The ministers and the king refuse this offer unanimously, and decide to fight for the honour of their queen and kingdom.

Alauddin’s siege is unsuccessful. On a hunting expedition one day, the Sultan sees his trained hawk capture a parrot; the companion bird follows them back to the camp of its own volition. Alauddin is inspired and thinks of his plan to capture Bhimsinha and demand the surrender of Padmini in exchange. When he beholds her reflection in the mirror, Alauddin is beside himself with admiration and desire. He rises inadvertently, Bhimsinha warns him, and Padmini smashes the mirror to end his glimpse of her. On his way out to his camp, Alauddin tricks Bhimsinha into accompanying him and captures him.

The Sultan demands the surrender of the queen, and she devises the palanquin scheme in consultation with Gora and Badal. The king is freed, but Gora dies in the ensuing battle. Alauddin is forced to return to Delhi abruptly as he receives news of Timur’s invasion. He returns to

besiege Chitor after thirteen years. Depleted of men and reserve supplies, Lakshmansinha considers suing for peace and accepting the Sultan's terms. Bhimsinha pleads that he be allowed to continue fighting for seven more days, in a last attempt to avoid the ignominy of a Chitor Rana serving as a feudatory of the Sultan. Lakshmansinha agrees.

When Bhimsinha informs Padmini, she determines to sacrifice herself so that the honour of Chitor can be preserved. With the blessings of Shiva and his priestess, she disguises herself as the goddess, appears before Lakshmansinha and demands a blood-sacrifice from the king and his people. She reappears the next night to convince the skeptical ministers. As the Rajputs prepare for their last battle, Bhimsinha wonders whether the apparition was Padmini in disguise. After the mass immolation of the women, the outnumbered Rajputs are killed on the battlefield. Alauddin enters Chitor, only to find a heap of ashes. He leaves for Delhi after razing the homes, halls and temples of Chitor, leaving intact only Padmini's palace. Abanindranath's account of the Padmini story ends at the same point as Tod's account, by mentioning the black python that guards the cave where Padmini immolated herself.

These summaries demonstrate the reliance of the bhadralok Padmini narratives upon Tod's account for the broad 'facts' of the story. At the same time, within that broad outline, these writers felt free to add tangential main plots (Jyotirindranath), imaginary sub-plots (Kshirodprasad) and metaphoric detail (Rangalal, Abanindranath). Overriding these variations, though, is a shared thematic structure in which heroic king and chiefs defend the ideal kingdom and the chaste women from the 'Muslim' enemy.

**The nation, its heroes and the enemy**

This section begins by identifying the markers of the new 'nation' in the bhadralok narratives of Padmini. The reconstructed 'history' of that new 'nation' is then outlined, within which a new significance is ascribed to Rajput history. The Rajputs are now depicted as defending their land and, by extension, the nation, against the 'Muslim invaders.' Therefore, the defeat of the Rajputs is seen as inaugurating a period of subjugation under the 'foreign,' 'Muslim'
conqueror. This change is defined in terms of a degeneration in statecraft and ethics, in which the ideal Rajput norm is contrasted with the subsequent 'guile' and 'treachery' of the Muslim Sultans. These linked representations of the Rajput and the Muslim serve to provide the nation with new heroes, and exclude from its limits newly defined enemies.

As discussed above, Yajneshwar’s translation of Tod’s Annals is prefaced by the evocation of a wider nation to which Rajput history is significant. The publisher Aghornath Barat appeals to the idea of a nation, “Bharatvarsha,” unified by geography and a life-spirit borne along its sacred rivers (“The nation and its limits”). Most crucially, the entity that is Bharat is seen as revivified and unified by a remembering of its shared past. This definition of nation-hood is shared by the bhadralok adaptations of Rajput history in general, and by the narratives of Padmini in particular. In Kshirodprasad’s play, the priest of Chitor instructs the young Lakshmansinha:

“The body of Bharat is now wounded and split apart into Sind (Sindhu), Gujarat, Ayodhya, Punjab, Bangala, Bihar and so on . . . in ancient times . . . that same Bharat was the mother worshipped by the Aryan rishis” (10). Jyotirindranath sacralizes a similar nation-hood in his Sarojini. The priest Bhairobacharya simulates oracular utterance by naming a network of pilgrimage sites that define this nation: Brindaban and Gokul, Kashi and Kurukshetra, Jagannath and Chandranath (?), Jwalamukhi and Haridwar (122). As discussed earlier in this chapter (“The nation and its limits”), this sacred geography offers an instance of a pre-modern concept now harnessed to nationalist purposes. This sense of a nation united by geography, history and culture is apparent even in the earliest bhadralok narrative about the Rajputs and Padmini, Rangalal’s Padmini Upakhvan. Rangalal’s traveller begins the poem by touring the provinces (desh) of Bharat with a newly awakened enthusiasm. The cities of Rajputana are named: Ajmer, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Kota, Bundi, Shikavati, Neemuch, Udaipur, Jaipur and Chitor. The act of naming serves as a strategy to populate the new nation with an aggregate of places, their people and their histories, now unified into a single, overarching history.
That reconstructed ‘history’ revolves around patriotic and chivalrous Rajputs defending
their motherland against an evil, lustful and ruthless conqueror. This conqueror is a foreigner, a
‘Muslim,’ and uses methods that the Rajputs are unfamiliar with. All the bhadralok narratives of
Padmini discussed in this chapter invoke the same interpretation of medieval history. The
differences between these versions lie in the degree to which this ‘history’ is elaborated. Rangalal
begins his Upakhyan by inserting the story of Padmini into a Puranic time frame of yugas:

In Treta the Suryavansha took the royal sceptre. In Dvapar the Chandravansha gained
renown. At the beginning of Kali the solar lineage again became kings. Shiladitya of this
celestial lineage was renowned throughout the earth (24).

Chitor embodies the ideal ‘Hindu’ kingdom: it was “built and made famous by the royal
Chakravartis, the Hindu suns” (Rangalal 19). The poet here uses the Sisodia emblem of the sun to
exalt the rulers of Chitor as shining examples of ideal ‘Hindu’ kingship. As discussed above,
Rangalal acknowledges Tod’s Annals as his source for the Upakhyan (Rangalal 1951, 12). Tod
recounts the Puranic scheme of periodization without subscribing to it himself. Rangalal deploys
that Puranic periodization, however, to assert the continuity of Rajput history with the preceding
‘history’ recounted in the epics, and the subsequent history of conquests. The Upakhyan recounts
the conquest of Chitor by the Pathans and ends with an Epilogue praising the benevolence of the
most recent conquerors, the British.

Abanindranath’s Rajkahini does not invoke Puranic chronology or periodization. It does,
however, recount the tales of Shiladitya, Goha and Bappaditya before narrating Padmini’s story.
At the beginning of his account of Padmini, Abanindranath describes the valour of Samarsinha of
Chitor, who gave his life battling Shahabuddin Ghori’s attack on his brother-in-law Prithviraj.
The Bengali bhadralok writers followed Tod’s interpretation, in seeing the battle between
Prithviraj and Shahabuddin as an event of epochal significance. Prithviraj’s defeat signaled the
end of ‘Hindu’ rule and inaugurating Muslim rule in Bharatvarsha. Kshirodprasad’s play makes
this interpretation of Prithviraj’s defeat explicit, when the priest of Chitor instructs the young
Lakshmansinha in Rajput history (9). Abanindranath’s description of Prithviraj’s loss and Samarsinha’s death as a prologue to the Padmini story indicates his adherence to the same shared perspective. Tod narrates the death of Samarsin in a separate chapter preceding his account of Padmini. He also includes the reigns of Karansi and Rahap in Chitor before describing the reign of Lakshmansinha. Abanindranath telescopes the succession of Ranas at Chitor and moves from depicting Samarsinha’s death directly to Lakshmansinha. In its very framing device, therefore, the Rajkahini construes the Padmini story as another episode in the conquest of a ‘Hindu’ nation. It is significant that for both Kshirodprasad and Abanindranath it is the defeat of the Rajputs that signifies the defeat of this ‘Hindu’ nation.

The status of the Rajput kingdom as a ‘Hindu’ polity is emphasized repeatedly. Thus, in Yajneshwar’s creative translation of the Annals, the Rajputs are asserted to be the descendants of the ancient Aryans: “Were the Rajputs not valiant? ... Did not pure and blessed (pabitra) Aryan blood flow through their veins?” (132). This assertion of lineal descent by the bhadralok translator is in contrast to Tod’s speculative and tentative explorations of Puranic genealogy. In Kshirodprasad’s play, Padmini describes the duties of the kings of Chitor. “To protect the weak from the hands of the oppressor, to preserve the Hindu gods and the Hindu faith, for this the lords of Chitor have ascended the throne” (36). In the same play, Gora’s normative patriotism is defined in his desire to avenge the subjugation of Bharat, defined in terms of the defeat of its Rajput kings and the plunder of its (Hindu) sacred shrines: “I would avenge the murder of Prithviraj, the destruction of the idol of Somnath, the demolition of Nagarkot” (Kshirodprasad 14). In terms identical to Yajneshwar’s, Abanindranath clarifies the status of Chitor in the face of Alauddin’s attack.

The Musalmans had nearly swallowed Bharatvarsh, the kingdoms of how many mighty Hindu kings had been devastated and had disappeared in battle with the Musalmans, but the throne of Chitor had been unshakeable like ancient times, was yet independent (sh’adhin). By what device could Chitor be saved from this grave danger? (61).
Abanindranath reveals here the other half of the formulation of community-identities. If the Rajputs were defending their ‘Hindu’ faith and ‘Hindu’ kingdoms, the invader was equally driven by religious zeal. This characterization of Alauddin is reiterated in each of the bhadralok narratives about Padmini. Thus Yajneshwar’s translation describes Alauddin as “Hindu-hating”:

Under his harsh and terrible assault, how many hundreds of kingdoms (pradesh) of Rajasthan were . . . uprooted for all time by the Hindu-hating Alauddin! Those kings of the sacred Agnikula in whose courts once all of Bharatvarsha’s destiny was decided, today they have been eradicated with their entire lineages for eternity, by the terrible atrocities of the Musalman warrior (142).

All the bhadralok narratives of Padmini depict Alauddin’s army as entirely and exclusively ‘Muslim’, in a misrepresentation of the mixed castes, creeds and ethnicities constituting medieval armies. They use the term ‘Yavana’ interchangeably with ‘Muslim,’ borrowing pre-modern terminology (see Chapter 2) to define identities reconstituted in the present. Rangalal depicts this army as eager to conquer Chitor: “They were happy, the Yavanas as they went, sworn to slay the Hindus” (32). They rush into battle with the Rawurs with cries of “Allah hu, Allah hu” (Rangalal 36). In Kshirodprasad’s play the advance of Alauddin’s army is compared to the crescent moon swallowing the sun (48).

In Rangalal’s poem, Alauddin himself is driven by the same motives: “In his mind was the firm conviction that the destruction of the Hindu earned him merit” (37). Later in the poem, Alauddin threatens the captive Bhimsinha: “Then will I capture Padmini and depart . . . I will cause the Hindus to give up their worship, rituals, devotions (brato puja yag): by bringing into the (Muslim) fold (imane) the wife of their leader” (Rangalal, 56). Angered by Bhimsinha’s rebukes and resistance, Alauddin swears:

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For the social composition of the medieval military labour market, see Dirk Kolff 1990.
Hearing the Koran ridiculed, my heart has been split open. I will destroy the satanic Vedic mantras entirely; your Ekling Shiva I will reduce to dust. I will pulverize it and use the dust for the door of the mosque . . . . I will reduce the city of Chitor to the ground. The Hindu gods and goddesses and Hindu women, I will pollute them in my anger (Rangalal, 60).

In Jyotirindranath’s Sarojini, Alauddin declares his intent to raze to the ground each and every temple of the Hindus (142). Elsewhere in the play, Roshenara, the hostage from Alauddin’s camp in Chitor, hopes for the “fall of the infidel (abishwasi) Hindu” (Jyotirindranath 174).

The bhadralok writers reinforce these representations of the Rajput and the Muslim by transforming the quality of the conflict between them. In Yajneshwar’s translation Alauddin’s forces are mere “Yavana soldiers” (Yavana sainya gan), while the Rajputs are always described as “valiant warriors” (Rajput bir gana). This persistent characterization of the two sides in the conflict indicates how far the bhadralok Padmini narratives have travelled from the medieval chronicle traditions. Medieval heroic narratives freely admit the valour of their enemy in battle. Such acknowledgement must be understood in the context of a competitive military labour market and a political-military culture shared by north Indian ruling elites across region and ethnicity. In such an ethos, an emphasis on the enemy’s valour heightened the degree of one’s own military prowess and achievements.

Further, pre-modern kingship operated in terms of a structure of overlordship and military service, established between kings aspiring to imperial status and the local kingdoms they subjugated. In contrast, the bhadralok writers appropriated the idea that the Rajputs were a ‘race’ or a ‘nationality’ from Tod’s Annals. The meaning of conflict between kingdoms in the medieval period was transformed within the new nationalist discourse that forged an absolute and inalienable bond between the ‘people’ and the ‘land.’ Therefore the political relationship between imperial overlord and regional vassal no longer carried its medieval significance for the colonial bhadralok writer. The latter is engaged in fashioning a ‘nation,’ predicated upon emerging notions of inalienable popular sovereignty over a well-defined territory.
In this new context the aspiring imperialist’s claims are recast as inherently illegitimate. It is consistent with this de-legitimizing agenda that the bhadralok texts shift their emphasis from the enemy’s valour to his guile. As discussed above, emerging boundaries of cultural geography and reconstructed ethnicity in the colonial period fed into this discourse of nationalism. Thus the Turk/Muslim invader from the northwest was recast as essentially alien.

In the bhadralok narratives about Padmini, the defeat of the ‘Hindu’ nation signifies the decline of Bharatvarsha. The index of this decline is the new politics practised by rulers like Shahabuddin and Alauddin. In his translation of the Annals, Yajneshwar laments Alauddin’s capture of Bhimsinha by fraud: “Alas! Did the wicked, treacherous Yavanas return the pure and boundless trust of the Rajputs in this fashion! The simple-minded Bhimsinha was oppressed in the most horrible way by the deceitful and treacherous (kapatochari) Yavana” (132). In summing up the lessons of the Padmini story, Yajneshwar makes such guile the crucial factor behind Alauddin’s success as a conqueror:

Alauddin was a very spirited and warlike king. Deception was an unfailing strategy for obtaining one’s desire; he was exceptionally skilled in adopting this strategy; so he was usually successful in earning victory. In this manner he can be counted without doubt, as the equal of the cruel, Hindu-hating Aurangzeb . . . (142).

All the bhadralok narratives of Padmini share this depiction of Alauddin’s methods. In Kshirodprasad’s play, the priest of Chitor summarizes the history of battles and conquest in Bharat for the young king Lakshmansinha. According to the priest, strategy and guile (kuta-niti) were absent from the battles in Bharat’s early history. It was only with Muhammad Ghori that guile became an element of military strategy in Bharat, when he realized that “defeating the kshatriya in fair battle (dharmmayuddha) was impossible” (Kshirodprasad 9). The priest teaches Lakshmansinha that Ghori defeated the brave Prithviraj and conquered Bharat through the use of guile. A similar characterization of Alauddin’s methods is apparent in Jyotirindranath’s Sarojini.
where the Sultan is depicted as employing the false priest Bhairobacharya as an agent provocateur.

It is Kshirodprasad’s play that goes furthest in emphasizing the immorality of Alauddin’s politics. The play opens with Alauddin’s murder of his uncle in order to ascend to the throne of Delhi. The choice of this beginning also points to Kshirodprasad’s reliance on other nineteenth-century translations of the medieval chronicles, in addition to the Annals. In the play, Alauddin justifies his regicide, arguing that the shedding of blood is necessary to strengthen the foundation of the throne (Kshirodprasad 5). He dismisses the distinctions between ethical and unethical conduct (dharma ki, adharma ki), and sees his regicide as a new strategy for building and strengthening a kingdom (samrajya pratishtha) (Kshirodprasad 6). “In order to conquer a kingdom (desh), one must be treacherous” (Kshirodprasad 45). Thus Alauddin is depicted as scornful of morality in his ruthless pursuit of power.

As counterpoint, the Rajput political order is constructed as normative through a series of sustained contrasts with Alauddin’s kingship. This strategy for idealizing the Rajput polity is shared by all the bhadralok narratives of Padmini. Describing the capture of Bhimsinha, Rangalal emphasizes the contrast between the ‘Yavana’ and the ‘Rajput’:

Cruel, immoral, wicked, oppressive demon... irreligious, treacherous, wicked; extremely haughty towards all other communities (jati); deceitful, lascivious, sly, thrilling to sinfulness; ignorant of the distinction between justice and injustice, extremely deceitful.

Honest and brave was the jewel of Hindu kings (Bhimsinha); for the sake of peace he showed his beloved. To preserve the decorum of politics he came along (Rangalal 55).

Yajneshwar’s translation describes the incident in similar terms:

That indecorous (kadachari) enemy who brought the worst injury to Chitor, he who began plotting to stain the pure Rajput lineage with a grave and indelible dishonour: today he was a guest. Because he was a guest, he could enter the city of Chitor without any hesitation or fear. The valiant-hearted, spirited Rajput king overlooked all his crimes and greeted him...
cordially as a friend. As long as he was received as a guest, so long he was dearer than a friend, even if he was the most terrible enemy. Hence the brave Rajput Bhimsinha accorded him the appropriate honour and respect and accompanied him in person beyond the foot of the fortress (Yajneshwar 132).

In Kshirodprasad’s play, when the young Lakshmansinha responds to the priest’s history lesson by espousing the use of guile in battle, he is chastised by his uncle Bhimsinha: “Such words do not befit the lord of Chitor, born from the mouth of the sacred fire and foremost among kshatriyas” (9).

It is noteworthy that the bhadralok writers ascribe kshatriya status to the Rajputs. Tod begins the Annals by tracing the descent of medieval Rajput lineages from Puranic dynasties. While he accepts these assertions of lineal descent from the Rajasthani royal chronicles that were his sources, Tod’s preferred term to describe the ruling dynasties of Rajasthan is ‘Rajput’ rather than ‘kshatriya.’ The bhadralok writers accept this assertion of lineal descent, and then use the two terms synonymously. As argued in earlier chapters, the medieval Rajput chronicles invoked claims of ‘kshatriya’ status to assert the legitimacy of their patrons in ruling lineages. Tod tacitly accepts these claims in buttressing the legitimacy of the Rajput ruling lineages as collaborators of the East India Company. The bhadralok assert the equivalence of ‘Rajput’ and ‘kshatriya’ within the context of emergent nationalism. First, this enables them to assume an unbroken continuity between ancient, Puranic and medieval histories. Secondly, it allowed the bhadralok writers to reinterpret and appropriate the values they associated with that ancient, ‘kshatriya’ order.

This also explains why all the bhadralok narratives insist on the continuity of the Sisodiya lineage at Chitor after Alauddin’s conquest. As discussed in earlier chapters, the late-medieval Sisodiya lineage claimed descent from the earlier rulers of Chitor to assert its legitimacy. Tod accepted these claims to reaffirm the legitimacy of the ruling lineage he was negotiating with on behalf of the East India Company. For the bhadralok, the stakes in asserting uninterrupted lineal descent are qualitatively different from either of these predecessors. Such a manoeuvre enables
them to construct an unbroken line of 'kshatriya' kings extending from Rama down to the present ruler of Mevar, who had preserved a 'Hindu' kingdom through the ages. The values associated with this ideal order can thus be recuperated more easily, since its resilience in the face of successive attacks and conquests has been established.

In the bhadrakalok narratives about Padmini, one consequence of this reinterpreted Puranic perspective is the consistent demon-ization, literally, of Alauddin. The bhadrakalok texts evoke a world in which kshatriyas battle asuras, often with the help of the gods, to describe the battles between the Rajputs and Alauddin. Thus Rangalal describes an angry Bhimsinha confronting his captor Alauddin, "The fire of a kshatriya's rage was exceedingly violent." Bhimsinha taunts the Sultan,

Born in an Asura lineage, do you desire to taste the nectar . . . . For the obliteration of the demonic horde, the goddess's trick; she took the form of a young lady in Vindhyachal. Hearing her beauty described by a messenger, the lord of the demons lost his senses, wanting to capture her. He died with his entire clan at the hands of Chamunda. In the same fashion. O evil-minded one, you will go to the house of Yama (Rangalal 58).

Once again, other bhadrakalok narratives about Padmini share this perspective. For instance, Yajneswar's translation calls Alauddin "an evil demon" (papishtha dhuny) as it describes his desire for Padmini (132). Further, Alauddin's motives are seen as illegitimate. He is impelled by dreams of imperial conquest over other men's lands, other nations (Kshirodprasad, Yajneswar). Worse, he is consumed by illegitimate lust for another man's wife (Rangalal, Abanindranath). Haripada Chattopadhyay's jatra play Padmini, (B.S. 1322 / 1915) emphasizes Alauddin's debased character, depicting him as maddened with desire and engaging in obscene double entendre with the female slave who describes Padmini to him.88

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In predictable contrast, the Rajputs are chivalrous in their treatment of Alauddin when he enters Chitor as their guest. Alauddin describes them as “trusting” (sara! bish ‘asi) in Kshirodprasad’s play (54). The vazir similarly characterizes the Rana as valiant in upholding virtue (dharmmabir), but not necessarily shrewd and pragmatic (karmmabir) (Kshirodprasad 51). The bhadralok texts also extol the valour of the Rajput/kshatriya in battling Alauddin. They do so by casting the Rajput’s motives in terms of patriotism. This happens most consistently in Rangalal’s poem and Jyotirindranath’s play. As Vijaysinha asks rhetorically in the Sarojini, “What object on earth cannot be given up for the motherland (matrbhumi)? If she will be satisfied with the sacrifice of my life, I offer even that to her” (Jyotirindranath 136). In the same play, the Rajput commander Randhirsinha equates the king’s “kshatriya oath” (to sacrifice his daughter to the goddess) with his love for the nation (deshanurag), his devotion to the gods (daivohhakti) and the honour of the solar lineage of Rama (Jyotirindranath 202).

The above discussion demonstrates how the bhadralok’s refashioning of medieval Rajput history involved a reinterpretation of the nature of the conflict between the Rajputs and the rulers of Delhi. Tod had already reinterpreted the resistance of regional kingdoms to imperial conquest in terms of the patriotism of the Rajput ‘nation’ (see Chapter 3). The bhadralok writers appropriate this idea from the Annals, and superimpose upon it the Puranic idiom of the kshatriya defence of dharma. The emergent nation acquires a political ethic asserted to be continuous with its ancient norms.

Conflict with an external enemy was not the only subject of such reinterpretation. Just as consistently, the bhadralok texts recast the internal structure of the medieval Rajput kingdoms. Thus, Chitor is seen as based on sacred authority, the protection of the goddess and hierarchical obligations willingly fulfilled by chiefs. The insistence on these defining attributes aids in the depiction of the Rajput kingdom as a harmonious political order with no trace of coercion. The construction of such a political norm involved the erasure of all internal contradictions and conflicts in the medieval Rajput monarchies. Tod’s affiliations with the Rajput kings against their
chiefs had been forged as much out of the compulsions of East India Company policies, as out of his own reading of the royalist chronicle traditions (see Chapter 3). Thus Tod had represented the dissension of the Rajput chiefs in the past and present as an aberration from his inferred norm of stable monarchies. It is striking that the colonial Bengali writers practically erase such conflict between kings and chiefs. This enabled them to magnify the threat from an aggressive enemy to this ideal social and political order. Therefore, while the bhadralok writers take over and extend Tod's idealization of the medieval Rajput kingdoms, their reasons for doing so are quite distinct from Tod's reasons.

Thus in Abanindranath's "Padmini," the "patriotic" (rajbhakta) Rajput chiefs decide unanimously and unambiguously that they must fight Alauddin and avenge the insult to Bhimsinha, Padmini and the kingdom. They arrive at this decision in spite of Bhimsinha's offer to surrender Padmini and preserve Chitor (Abanindranath 62). Such unanimity is in stark contrast to the courtly intrigues surrounding the decision to fight Alauddin in the medieval Rajasthani narratives.

Two of the Padmini narratives discussed in this chapter, Jyotirindranath's Sarojini and Kshirodprasad's Padmini, also depict internal crisis and/or a threat to the Rana's authority within Chitor. In Jyotirindranath's play, a defiant Vijaysinha decides to resist the king in order to protect his fiancée Sarojini from being sacrificed by the false priest Bhairobacharya (193). Angered at this challenge to his authority, Lakshmansinha expels the rebellious Vijaysinha from the kingdom, freeing him of all obligations to serve his king (Jyotirindranath 182). The inflamed Vijaysinha defies the sentence of exile. This conflict between the Rajput king and a prominent chief is deflated abruptly, when the priest alters his interpretation of the goddess's demand for a

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39 When the bhadralok writers were forced to confront such conflict, as in the instance of Rana Pratap and his brother Sagat Singh, they veer between denouncing Sagat Singh as a traitor, and recuperating him into the fold of 'Rajput virtue' by emphasizing his rescue of Pratap at Haldighat.
sacrifice. Even as he does this, however, the priest congratulates himself on having successfully created a crisis within the Rajput kingdom that will help Alauddin (Jyotirindranath 207).

Kshirodprasad’s play introduces similar crisis, in the shape of the recalcitrant son Arunsinha. Distracted by Rukma, he fails to present himself for the first battle against Alauddin. For this dereliction of duty his father the Rana expels him from the kingdom (Kshirodprasad 40). Lakshmansinha continues to rebuff Arun’s subsequent offers of help with his force of Rajputs from the forest, even when he sorely needs reinforcements in the battle against Alauddin. Once again, however, this conflict is resolved with the death of the son defending Chitor, after he hears a rumour about his father’s death. As Arunsinha finally lives up to the ‘Rajput’ ideal in his death, the royal succession is ensured through his unborn child.

The bhadralok narratives about Padmini diverge from Tod and his medieval Rajasthani sources in one significant respect. This is in depicting relationships between communities within Chitor. By their very nature, the medieval Rajasthani traditions were concerned exclusively with the legitimization of Rajput kingship and chiefly valour. They excluded the condition of the commoner from their angle of vision. Tod’s reconstruction of medieval Rajput history is constrained by these inherited blinkers. One of the bhadralok narratives discussed in this chapter, Kshirodprasad’s Padmini, focuses on the commoners in Chitor. In particular, the play discusses relations between Hindus and Muslims in this ideal, ‘Hindu’ kingdom.

It is easy to guess at the reasons impelling such discussion on the part of Kshirodprasad. For one, as reiterated above, the bhadralok writers were concerned with constructing the history of a nation. Throughout the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, relations between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal had been one of the fields on which national identities and histories had been defined and contested. The issue was particularly volatile at the time of Kshirodprasad’s play, written during the height of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Secondly, the drama had emerged as one of the most politicized of literary genres in late-colonial Bengal. Thirdly, with the professionalization of the bhadralok drama in the early 1870s, such plays drew
the most heterogeneous audiences among all literary genres in the period. Such factors may help explain Kshirodprasad’s discussion of the pressing issue of Hindu-Muslim relations.

The play begins with Alauddin’s dismissing all distinctions between Hindus and Muslims as he describes his imperial ambitions:

This throne of Delhi once belonged to the Hindus, now it belongs to the Musalmans. The Muselman says, he earns merit and defends righteousness by seizing the kingdom from the hands of the infidel (kafer). The Hindu says, the infidels (bidharmira) come and capture our righteous kingdoms (dharmarajya). I cannot enter into these intricate calculations about virtue and vice (dharmadharma) (Kshirodprasad 6).

Alauddin defends his regicide and parricide from the same ethical perspective of an amoral, ruthless pragmatism. For him, conventional evaluations of morality and immorality are irrelevant to the pursuit of political power. Unlike Jyotirindranath’s play, Kshirodprasad’s Padmini does not end with the destruction of Chitor’s temples by Alauddin. Such elements point to the operation of a relatively less communal perspective in this play.

This more liberal angle of vision also colours the depiction of Hindu-Muslim relations in the ideal, ‘Hindu’ kingdom of Chitor. Thus, Gora greets Alauddin’s exiled vazir who is disguised as a mendicant (fakir): “Once one is a human being, then one is neither Hindu nor Muselman – as soon as I see a human being, I am respectful. That is why I respect you.” The disguised vazir agrees: “He who has created both Hindu and Muselman, He does not distinguish between them O brother – we make such distinctions among ourselves and commit suicide” (Kshirodprasad 43). Alauddin’s spies in Chitor report the same respect for fakirs and sanyasis in Chitor (41). Such respect extends to Nasiban, who is adopted by Gora as his sister even after he finds out that she is a Muslim: “From that first human couple you are descended – and we are descended” (Kshirodprasad 15).

However, this assertion of the oneness of all humanity and the redundancy of distinctions of religious creed surfaces only intermittently. As discussed earlier in this section, the same play
subscribes faithfully to the communal interpretation of medieval history, in which conquest by the
‘Muslim’ was seen to have caused the decline and oppression of ‘Hindu’ India. The same Gora
who makes the Muslim Nasiban his sister, also declares the rules by which Muslims can live in
this country: “If the infidels (bidharmi) wish to blend in, I would accord each one of them the
status of my own brother. If not, I would hurl each one of them over to the other side of the
Sulaiman mountain (Kshirodprasad 14).” Gora’s terminology reveals the limits to the play’s
accommodation of Muslims within the ideal Hindu kingdom. Even as the play acknowledges the
essential humanity uniting Muslims with Hindus, the former continue to be defined as “infidels”
(bidharmi). Implicit in such terminology is the identification of the ideal kingdom of Chitor with
its ‘natural’ creed, that of the ‘Rajput’ and the ‘Hindu.’ The ‘Muslim’ may be treated with
respect, but he continues to be perceived as an outsider.

To conclude this section, the bhadralkok writers invoke an ideal, ‘Hindu’ nation in
recasting Tod’s account of Padmini. In its geographical and cultural boundaries, this bhadralkok
construct of the nation appropriates pre-modern concepts of polity and transforms them. Vital to
the definition of the new nation was a particular interpretation of ancient and medieval history.
The bhadralkok narratives of Padmini assert the continuity of the medieval Rajput lineages with
the ‘Aryan’ dynasties of the epic traditions. Such descent is interpreted to signify an alienable
bond between the Rajputs and their motherland. The defeat of the Rajputs therefore signifies the
conquest and subjugation of the motherland by alien invaders. The claims of the conqueror are
de-legitimized by a nationalist idiom that cannot comprehend medieval practices of military
service, warlord-ship and state formation. Further, both sides in this battle for the motherland are
perceived as driven by religious zeal. Conquest by a newly homogenized enemy marks a decline
in politics and ethics, with the Muslim’s guile as a counterpoint to the Rajput’s righteousness and
patriotism. The bhadralkok writers project their aspirations for the nation’s present and future,
backwards into the past. Thus the medieval Rajput kingdom is re-presented as a normative,
‘Hindu’ order, purged of all internal contradictions and conflicts. New boundaries of culture,
ethnicity and religious practice are projected backwards as well, legitimized in the present through such assertions of their antiquity. The bhadralok narratives of Padmini define these boundaries of the nation most strikingly in their depiction of the Rajput woman, an issue discussed in the next and final section of this chapter.

Queen, hostage and goddess

The previous section explored the characteristic treatment of heroic kings and treacherous enemies in the bhadralok versions of the Padmini story. As argued above, the bhadralok writers used the conflicts and contrasts between valiant, patriotic Rajputs and devious Muslim conquerors to define the boundaries of the emergent nation. The figure of the sacrificing queen was constituted as the symbolic centre of this nation, at the conjunction of recast medieval history and re-formed bhadralok patriarchy. This symbolic aggrandizement takes place at three interconnected levels. First, the queen is made to articulate the central values defining the Rajput, indeed 'Hindu,' kingdom. Secondly, the queen is made to represent all the women of the Rajput kingdom. In a crucial modification of earlier accounts, this enables the 'Muslim' conqueror to be recast as threatening not only the queen but all the women of Chitor, and by extension all 'Hindu' women. And third, the queen is made symbolic of the kingdom itself through a close identification with the patron goddess or the land itself. The bhadralok narratives invoke the contemporary Bengali depiction of the nation as mother goddess in reinforcing the symbolic significance of Padmini.

In the bhadralok narratives discussed here, it is Padmini who repeatedly articulates the significance of the Rajput order. The definition of this political order involves a reassessment of the queen's beauty and the role it plays in determining the politics of the kingdom. Such a repositioning of Padmini is consonant with the refashioning of bhadralok patriarchy, in which the bhadramahila must be educated into functioning as the moral centre of the domestic sphere. In a historical context where that domestic sphere is constituted as a resistance to colonialism, the
woman is also entrusted with educating future citizens in the normative political and ethical values (‘Refashioned patriarchies, Reconstructed histories’).

Thus in Rangalal’s Upakhyan Padmini reminds her husband Bhimsinha of the king’s duties: “Destruction of the evil, protection of the virtuous, these are the king’s duties; if the slaying of the evil cannot be achieved, it is customary to preserve the virtuous” (45-46). In Jyotirindranath’s play Sarojini reminds Vijaysinha of his duty as a Rajput: “O prince! Give up your attempts to save me. That oath you swore before my father – to preserve all of Rajasthan from the hands of the Musalman – fulfil that oath” (192). Again, in Kshirodprasad’s play, it is Padmini who describes the duties of the kings of Chitor. “To protect the weak from the hands of the oppressor, to preserve the Hindu gods and the Hindu faith, for this the lords of Chitor have ascended the throne” (36).

The threats to this normative order come from two sources: Alauddin’s illegitimate desire for the queen and her own beauty. To take the second trope first, the bhadralok narratives repeatedly cast the queen’s beauty as the cause of the kingdom’s destruction. In deploying this trope the bhadralok writers were following Tod’s suggestion in the Annals: “the daughter of Hamir Sank (Chauhan) of Ceylon [was] the cause of woes unnumbered to the Sesodias” (Crooke 1995, 1:307). It will be remembered that the medieval Rajasthani narrative traditions were profoundly ambivalent about the queen’s beauty. From the twin perspectives of Jain monastic constructions of sexuality and elite Rajput norms of patriarchal decorum, these narratives had marginalized the trope of the queen’s beauty or de-valued it by ascribing to it the ruin of the kingdom. The bhadralok narratives appropriate this ambivalence, inherited from the medieval Rajput traditions through Tod’s mediation.

Yajneshwar’s translation reiterates Tod’s brief statement: “It was her incomparable beauty that was the foremost cause of the Sisodias’ countless misfortunes” (1: 131). In Jyotirindranath’s play Lakshmansinha reiterates this sentiment: “She is the root cause of all our misfortunes. It is because he is smitten by her beauty that the Pathan king Alauddin attacks Chitor
repeatedly” (115). In Rangalal’s poem Padmini herself curses her beauty and laments the misfortune she has brought on Chitor:

Because of me this battle takes place, there is such ill fortune in the land. I am ill-fated . . .

hence this overwhelming sorrow . . . Fie on this life, fie on this youth, fie on this beauty and virtue! Fie on the Lord, why did he make me beautiful (42-43).

Padmini curses herself similarly in Abanindranath’s account: “Alas, ill-fated Padmini, it is your cursed beauty that has brought about this ruin – this ruin is on account of you” (76). In Kshirodprasad’s play the issue is discussed at more length, with Padmini articulating the link between her beauty and her misfortune as proverbial wisdom: “It can often be seen, however much beauty one has, so much misfortune does one have equally” (16). And she refers to misfortune as her destiny: “It is written in my horoscope that wherever I enter, that place will be endangered” (16). Burdened with the curse of such beauty, the queen must recuperate her stature in other ways. Since it is the kingdom that her beauty endangers, the bhadralok narratives recuperate Padmini’s status by emphasizing her role in upholding the threatened Rajput order.

Meanwhile, Padmini’s beauty serves other purposes in the bhadralok narratives. Most of these texts concur on Alauddin’s motives for attacking Chitor. Tod’s account suggests a range of possible motivations: “The Hindu bard recognizes the fair, in preference to fame and love of conquest, as the motive for the attack of Alauddin” (Tod 1: 307). Yajneswar’s translation erases this ambivalence by clearly precluding the latter motivation: “As described by the Bhatta poets, it was out of his desire to obtain Padmini that Alauddin attacked the city of Chitor; the desire for conquest or greed for fame cannot be accepted as the causes for this military enterprise of his” (Yajneswar 1: 131-32). This direct link between the queen’s fabled beauty and Alauddin’s decision to lay siege to Chitor is captured strikingly in Rangalal’s terse formulation: “The fame of Padmini’s beauty filled the ten directions, the terrible Yavan only heard of it. No sooner had he heard, than he set out to hunt the lion” (Rangalal 30-31). Jyotirindranath and Abanindranath reiterate this interpretation of Alauddin’s motives. The only bhadralok narrative to attribute the
attack on Chitor to Alauddin’s imperial ambitions is Kshirodprasad’s play. This play makes its own contribution, however, to the trope of the Sultan’s desire for other queens. It does so through its subplot of the imperial conquest of Gujarat, which culminates in the surrender of its queen Kamaladebi to Alauddin. Lakshmansinha speculates whether desire for the beautiful queen did not motivate Alauddin to attack Gujarat (Kshirodprasad 34).

In their insistence on Alauddin’s illegitimate desire, the bhadralok narratives of Padmini reveal their subordination of a recast history of patriarchy to the demands of nationalist historiography. The previous section has already examined how the bhadralok narratives reconstitute the ‘Muslim’ conqueror as threatening both the political autonomy and the religious faith of the ‘Hindu’ kingdoms. Far more dangerous, however, was the threat to the honour of all ‘Hindu’ women. In suggesting this the bhadralok narratives of Padmini depart in a crucial sense from the Annals. It will be remembered that medieval heroic romances and Rajput chronicle traditions reconstructed their accounts of Alauddin’s conquests around threats to their kingdoms and their queens. These medieval narrative traditions were concerned, at one level or another, with legitimizing the upward mobility of specific lineages, caste groups and elite groups. This was the context in which the medieval Rajasthani narratives of Padmini configured the threat to the kingdom as a threat to the queen. Tod reports without comment his sources’ preference for this interpretation of Alauddin’s conquests. In recounting the jauhar, however, Tod refers to “the procession . . . of several thousands . . . whatever of female beauty or youth could be tainted by Tatar lust” (Annals 1: 311). The bhadralok narratives about Padmini pick up this element from Tod’s account, to emphasize the threat from Alauddin’s army to all Rajput women. This interpretive leap indicates a radical modification of the medieval accounts. The medieval queen now comes to stand for all the women of the kingdom. The impact of Tod the colonial interlocutor is obvious. The context for the bhadralok’s appropriation of this trope was their reconstructed history of perennial conflict between two entire, newly homogenized, communities.
The manner in which the bhadrakol narratives about Padmini homogenize the populations and armies of Chitor and Alauddin to construct such conflict has been explored in the previous section. The bhadrakol Padmini narratives extend the conqueror’s designs upon the queen, to imply a threat to all the women of the conquered kingdom. This extension is most explicit in Jyotirindranath’s play, where the queen warns her daughter Sarojini: “If the Muslims are victorious and enter the city then it will be difficult to preserve our chastity” (216). In the same play, the commander Randhirsinha reminds Lakshmansinha, “The Creator has entrusted such a heavy burden on your shoulders: the lives, honour, happiness and freedom of lakhs and lakhs of Rajput girls depend on you” (125). And again, Sarojini evokes the plight of the Rajput women under Muslim conquest: her sacrifice will rescue “hundreds and hundreds of respectable Rajput women from the unclean, impure hands of the Yavana” (Jyotirindranath 201).

Yajneshwar’s translation is equally explicit, clarifying what was implicit in Tod’s account: “All those beautiful kshatriya women, whom the wicked Musalmans would see and their bestial nature would be aroused, they were all in that gathering of wives” (1: 140). The equation between queen and all Rajput women is more implicit, but is nevertheless present in the other bhadrakol narratives discussed here. In Abanindranath’s account, the twelve thousand Rajput women who follow Padmini in committing jauhar address the fire as the preserver of their (sexual) honour (laja harana) (81). In Rangalal’s poem, Padmini addresses the Rajput women on the same occasion: “Especially, at the Yavana’s place, there is no kind of protection at all. The thought of our future plight makes the mind fearful” (109).

The previous section discussed how the bhadrakol narratives build up a sustained contrast between the honourable Rajput and the immoral Muslim conqueror. Two of the Padmini narratives sharpen this contrast by depicting the Rajputs’ treatment of Muslim women. Jyotirindranath’s play introduces the imaginary character of Roshenara, a woman of noble birth captured from Alauddin’s camp by Vijaysinha and brought back to Chitor. Although she is from the enemy camp, Sarojini befriends her and regards her as a sister. As discussed in the previous
section, nobody in Chitor hates her because she is a Musalman (Jyotirindranath 145). Her captor Vijaysinha reassures her, “O beautiful one! . . . Do not fear. Come with us. Rajput warriors know to honour women” (148). In fact, Vijaysinha behaves so chivalrously with her that she falls in love with him (148). Roshenara’s desire for her Rajput captor is ultimately thwarted by the narrative. She is sacrificed to the goddess by her own father Bhairobacharya who is ignorant of her identity. What is noteworthy here, though, is the contrast between the Yavana threat to “lakhs and lakhs of Rajput girls” (125) and the Rajputs’ honourable treatment of the female hostage from the enemy camp.

Kshirodprasad’s play introduces the character of Nasiban for similar ends. It will be remembered that Nasiban is the daughter of Alauddin’s vazir, whom the Sultan married and spurned for revenge against her father. Nasiban makes her way to Chitor, seeking a king who will retaliate on her behalf against Alauddin. Gora’s protection of her has been discussed in the previous section. In contrast to Alauddin’s ruthless treatment, Lakshmansinha regards Nasiban as a daughter. Kshirodprasad depicts the Rajputs of Chitor as so chivalrous that he ascribes the second round of battles between Lakshmansinha and Alauddin to Nasiban’s intervention. In Kshirodprasad’s play, Nasiban asks this of the Rana of Chitor as a supplicant. Since he is obligated to grant a supplicant’s prayer, Lakshmansinha finds himself committed to battle against Alauddin. He refuses to reconsider his decision even when Nasiban regrets her request and asks him to withdraw (Kshirodprasad 28). As in Jyotirindranath’s play, the Rajputs’ treatment of women from the enemy camp in Kshirodprasad’s play presents a striking contrast to Alauddin’s conduct in attacking Chitor or Gujarat to obtain its queen.

If the Rajput men thus prove their honour by their treatment of women, the Rajput women in turn adhere just as firmly to the norms of honourable conduct prescribed for them. As indicated above, the bhadralok writers display the same ambivalence about Padmini’s beauty as the medieval Rajput and Jain traditions, transmitted to them by Tod’s account. Unlike the medieval traditions, however, the bhadralok texts insist on the role the queen plays in defending
the kingdom’s honour. Again, the reasons for these narrative transformations must be sought in the altered patriarchal context of bhadralok Bengal.

It will be remembered that medieval Rajput queens were often active in politics, because of the stake they had in Rajput state formation through the military and financial resources they brought in marriage alliances. The unease of the medieval Rajput traditions with this phenomenon has been explored in Chapter 2. It will also be remembered that these medieval narrative traditions sought to control the intrigues engendered in the royal households by the practice of elite polygamy. Such attempts to constrain the role of the Rajput queens intensified in the early nineteenth century, with the collaboration of the East India Company. As argued in Chapter 3, Tod’s Annals reflects these pressures of historical and narrative context.

In bhadralok Bengal, the fashioning of middle class patriarchy involved the segregation of women in the private sphere, and their separation from control over productive resources. Bhadralok writers were also engaged in constructing an idealized Hindu past in which companionate monogamy was cast as the norm. In such a context, the bhadralok writers choose to elide over the practice of polygamy among the medieval Rajput elite. They also de-emphasize the queen’s independent access to military and financial resources, which had been one of the contradictions inherent in the medieval Rajput kingdoms.

The impact of these patriarchal transformations is visible in the bhadralok narratives of Padmini. None of these texts indicate that Padmini was a co-wife. The immediate source for this is of course Tod’s abbreviated account of the Padmini story. However, none of the elite marriages depicted in these texts suggests a scenario of elite Rajput polygamy. These include the marriage between Bhimsinha and Padmini in Rangalal’s poem, Abanindranath’s account, and the plays by Jyotirindranath and Kshirodprasad. Further, the marriages between Lakshmansinha-Mira and Arun-Rukma in Kshirodprasad’s play, between Lakshmansinha and his queen, and potentially between Vijaysinha and Sarojini in Jyotirindranath’s play, are also all monogamous. The contrast
with Alauddin's polygamy, mentioned in Abanindranath's account and Kshirodprasad's play, is significant.

Further, these texts retain from Tod the idea that Gora and Badal have accompanied Padmini to Chitor from her natal Sinhala. However, the medieval Rajasthani texts articulated contradictions between monarchical and chiefly aspirations through conflicts between the queen's kinsmen Gora and Badal and the king Ratansen. The bhadralok texts erase this possibility, as discussed in the previous section. The presence of Gora and Badal does not signify the queen's access to her own resources. Instead, it merely indicates the geographical spread of 'Rajput' virtue, even to faraway Sinhala (Kshirodprasad 11).

While the queen is thus deprived of the limited political autonomy she enjoyed in the medieval Rajput context, the bhadralok writers compensate in another direction. The queen is now made to articulate the moral norms governing the conduct of not only Rajput men but also Rajput women. In Kshirodprasad's play, Padmini defines the duty of the Rajput wife for Rukma, Lakshmamsinha's new daughter-in-law whom his son wed in the forest. Lakshmamsinha has banished his son Arun for dereliction of duty, and Rukma is angered at the way her husband is treated. Padmini placates her:

Wherever you are, remember, from now you are a daughter-in-law in the lineage of Bapparao. Do not forget to wish that lineage well, even if you consider yourself forsaken by your father-in-law. This foolish husband of yours is unaware of the distinction between virtue and folly. By setting an example through your good advice and your good deeds, inspire him to defend the country (desh) (Kshirodprasad 41).

Padmini thus urges Rukma to put the welfare of the lineage and the kingdom before her own husband's interests.

This subjugation of the conjugal and/or domestic unit to the political demands of the kingdom is reiterated in myriad ways in these bhadralok narratives about Padmini. The pressures of bhadralok nationalism— that subordinated patriarchal reform to the demands of symbolic
resistance against colonial domination – are visible in such narrative manoeuvres. Again, in Kshirodprasad’s play, Lakshmansinha’s wife Mira rejects a son who is remiss in his duty. When Arunsinha is found missing from his post at sentry duty, she supports Lakshmansinha’s decision to punish him: “Rather than have such a son so ignorant of where his duty lies, it is a hundred times better to have no son at all” (Kshirodprasad 29). In Jyotirindranath’s play, Sarojini is ready to give up her life as a sacrifice to the goddess: “The well-being of Chitor depends upon my sacrifice, knowing this how can I run away and save myself?” (185). At stake are the honour of her father the king, and the freedom of the country: “Let it not be said my father was the cause for the country’s bonds of slavery, for the blot on the pure lineage of Bappa Rao” (Jyotirindranath 202).

The honour of Bappa Rao’s unblemished lineage, frequently invoked in these bhadralok narratives, is ultimately preserved by the sacrifice of the Rajput women led by Padmini. The bhadralok fascination with sati and its romanticization as the epitome of the ‘Hindu’ woman’s transcendent conjugal devotion have been discussed above (‘Re-formed patriarchies, reconstructed histories’). The easy adaptability of Tod’s accounts of medieval Rajput traditions, which construed female immolation as reinforcing the status claims of Rajput lineages, has also been discussed. In the bhadralok reinterpretation of medieval history, jauhar was reinterpreted as the defence of the kingdom’s honour, vested in its women’s chastity, against a conqueror that sought to invade both public and private realms.

One instance of the bhadralok fascination for this trope of immolation by medieval Rajput women is revealed in Rangalal’s literary career. Rangalal composed three narrative poems based on Tod’s Annals, including the Padmini Upakhyan. The other two poems, Karmadebi (1862) and Surasundari (1868), also celebrate the heroism of Rajput women, epitomized in their willingness to sacrifice their lives in defence of their chastity. A similar exaltation of jauhar is

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90 Karmadebi celebrates the love of a princess of Jaisalmer in the fifteenth century, and her death by immolation as a newly-wed, after her husband is killed on his wedding day. Surasundari describes the
apparent in the Padmini narratives. Whatever the other variations between these different bhadralok narratives of Padmini, they are remarkably similar in the extended descriptions they provide of the final jauhar. Yajneshwar’s translation provides a striking instance. I cite the entire description to drive home the degree of the bhadralok’s elaboration of this incident from Tod’s brief account:

Now the Rana began making preparations to finally give up the blood from his own heart to fill up the bowl (kharpar, the skull in the goddess’ hand) of Chitor’s patron goddess. Before he completed these terrible preparations, it was decided that it was entirely necessary to arrange an even more terrible matter. The name of this even more terrible matter was the “jauhar vow” (johar brata). The women of the Rajput lineage were hurled into the blazing fire, to preserve their chastity and their freedom from the hands of the enemy; for this the terrible “jauhar vow” was observed. From the enemy’s terrible assault, when there was no way left for the Rajputs to preserve their land (swadesh) and their freedom (sh’adhinata); when all their hope had disappeared, in that terrible time – when the situation was beyond any hope the Rajput warriors would make preparations for this fearsome, most cruel vow.

Today that terrible time had come in Chitor; today there was no way left to preserve Chitor; so the arranging of that most terrible jauhar vow was extremely necessary. Underneath the women’s quarters in the royal palace there was an enormous tunnel; even during the day it was shrouded in complete darkness. In this huge tunnel enormous logs of the sal [tree] were piled up and a huge pyre was lit. Before their eyes, countless Rajput women with their hair loose and disheveled, their lamentations piercing through the city of Chitor, gathered in front of that terrible cave and began advancing towards it. All those beautiful kshatriya women, whom the wicked Musalmans would see and their bestial nature would be aroused, they

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imaginary encounter between the wife of Pridhviraj Rathor of Bikaner, and the emperor Akbar, during Nauroz festivities. The Bikaner princess not only successfully defends her honour against the inebriated Akbar, she also persuades him to give up altogether the custom of consorting with women freely during Nauroz. See Barun Chakrabarti 1981, 130, 136.
were all in that gathering of wives. Padmini who pleased the minds of the gods (\textit{sura manomohini}) brought up the rear of that procession. Chitor’s warriors stood wordless, motionless, as if struck by lightning, and beheld this terrible, heart-wrenching spectacle. — Loving women who gave birth, women who sustained by their love (\textit{hrdayer pritidayini}) and shared the burden of preserving virtue (\textit{sahadharmini}), and daughters and sisters who gave delight took their leave for eternity and before their very eyes were advancing towards the burning fire to give up their lives; still there was not one tear in their eyes! Today those eyes were dry, they were a deep red; as if from them was emerging a fire which would engulf the entire world! Those hearts which had once been the spring of love, today they were transformed into a desert burial ground! Hence they could behold this horrifying spectacle today. As they watched, the women came before the opening of the cave; in front of them was a flight of steps; slowly they descended; and then suddenly above them with a terrible clang the enormous iron gate closed over the tunnel! The piercing cries of countless ill-fated women were silenced in an instant! — Nothing more could be heard! Alas! everything was over! — beauty, youth, grace, honour, all were reduced to ashes in the all-devouring fire! (Yajneshwar 1: 139-40).

The amplifications, repetitions and redundancies in this narrative, intended as a translation of Tod’s account, indicate the extent of the bhadralok writers’ investment in the Rajput practice of jauhar. Yajneshwar’s extended treatment of the death of the Rajput women is repeated in the other bhadralok narratives discussed here. In Kshirodprasad’s play, the queen Mira describes their reasons for immolating themselves: “Our husbands and sons depart to sacrifice themselves in the fire of battle. Come, let us sacrifice ourselves in the fire of righteousness (\textit{dharmmanale}) for their well-being and the country’s well-being” (Kshirodprasad 69). The power of such prolonged descriptions as dramatic spectacle in the plays by Jyotirindranath and Kshirodprasad can be imagined.
The almost ritualized description of this mass immolation in the bhadralok texts presents a striking contrast with the terse, one-line mentions of the practice in medieval Rajasthani chronicles such as Nainsi’s Khwāt (see Chapter 2). In the bhadralok texts, the exaltation of the queen and her compatriots, both men and women, culminates in this final mass immolation. Thus in Rangalal’s poem, the Brahmin from contemporary Chitor who recounts Padmini’s story to the traveler, informs him: “With her unmatched beauty, virtue and chastity, she gave herself up to the devouring fire to preserve herself. Look, O traveller, at that fearsome cave. At this place, Padmini burnt her body. Men count this a sacred place” (Rangalal 26-7).

It is not just that the jauhar sanctifies Padmini’s life and death in these narratives. Some of these bhadralok texts almost deify the chaste queen, literally, by associating her closely with the patron goddess of Chitor. The first glimpse of Padmini in Kshirodprasad’s play reveals her worshipping the goddess in the temple at Chitor. The priest asserts her special relationship with the goddess: “Parbati has given you all her radiant beauty, and herself become dark and ugly. An assault on you is like her assaulting herself in a frenzy, such a thing is impossible.” It is on account of this special relationship that the worship of the goddess cannot proceed without Padmini being present (Kshirodprasad 8). Later in the play, the messenger who arrives from Gujarat asking for the Chitor’s Rana’s military help against Alauddin, mistakes Padmini for the goddess and prostrates himself before her (Kshirodprasad 37). Such an impulse towards deification is absent, of course, from Tod, and from his medieval Rajasthani sources. The reasons must be sought in the bhadralok’s celebration of the motherland as a mother-goddess. Jasodhara Bagchi has explored the roots of this iconography in Bengal’s religious traditions, and described its evocative power in the bhadralok’s nationalist discourse:

The human ideal was one of an all-suffering mother . . . As the stable centre of a fragile colonial society, she provides constant solace to the humiliated son; on occasion her heroism
acts as an inspiration to lift up the downtrodden spirit of the son. But she is also a divine idea. In her divine form she is the destructive Shakti, ready to destroy the demon of evil.\textsuperscript{91} Such iconography can be discerned in Abanindranath’s account and Kshirodprasad’s play. It is noteworthy that Abanindranath’s painting of Bharat Mata (1905) was among the earliest visual instances of such nationalist iconography.\textsuperscript{92}

All the bhadralok narratives appropriate from Tod’s \textit{Annals} the trope of Chitor’s patron goddess demanding the appeasement of her hunger for royal blood. The image would clearly have had enormous resonance in the nationalist discourse of the Bengali bhadralok, which embodied the nation as mother-goddess, exhorted citizens to patriotic sacrifice and which drew upon regional traditions of goddess worship that demanded ritual sacrifices.

Abanindranath’s account goes further than this in explicitly aligning the chaste and patriotic queen with Chitor’s patron goddess. The account in the Rajkahini makes Padmini disguise herself as the goddess and demand from Lakshmansinha the sacrifice of royal blood. This occurs at the point when Padmini realizes that she is the cause of Chitor’s destruction, and that Lakshmansinha is about to surrender to the superior might of Alauddin. At this point in the narrative, she secretly dons the robes of the goddess Ubardebi, even though the cost of doing so is certain death for herself. As the priestess warns her:

Maharani, I say again, what you are going to do, its outcome will be death! Once one wears the jewels and adornments of the goddess, there is no other escape! Within six months one must jump into the fire alive and be burnt! Padmini said, O mother, bless me, this beautiful woman for whom Rajasthan burns today, her cursed beauty may be burnt to ashes in that same fire. The ascetic replied, then so be it. My child, I bless you, that Chitor for which you disregard your own life, your name will be immortal in that Chitor forever. That Mahasati


\textsuperscript{92} “Visualized as a serene, saffron-clad ascetic woman, the Mother carried the boons of food, clothing, learning and spiritual salvation in her four hands. A conscious creation of an artistic icon of the nation.” Sugata Bose, “Nation as Mother: Representations and Contestations of ‘India’ in Bengali Literature and Culture.” in Bose and Ayesha Jalal, eds. \textit{Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) 53.

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whose ornaments you don today, after your death that Mahasati will keep you at her feet
(Abanindranath 76).

The impulses of self-sacrifice for patriotism and for preservation of chastity come together to create a powerful image of the queen as mother-goddess, inspiring her compatriots to defend their honour. Through the device of the priestess’s prophecy, the Rajkahini account also makes the jauhar a premeditated sacrifice on the part of Padmini. In disguising herself as the goddess, the queen deliberately undertakes to immolate herself. Such a manoeuvre serves to render the mass immolation as a voluntary act, allowing the bhadralok writers to retain the idea of the Hindu woman’s willed and voluntary sacrifice of herself to a transcendent ideal. Devotion to the husband and devotion to the nation converge in the political and patriarchal symbolism of the jauhar. The Rajput queen who wills the jauhar and the final death of the Rajputs in battle that inevitably follow it, almost attains the status of the patron goddess, at once embodying the land and protecting it. The cost of such exaltation is the queen’s voluntary obliteration of herself.

To sum up, the bhadralok narratives of Padmini construct the figure of the exalted queen as the embodiment of the essential values of the normative Rajput order: honour, chastity and patriotism. The queen is also entrusted with the burden of articulating these values when the Rajput order is threatened. She thus functions as the moral guide in times of crisis, inspiring those around her to live up to their ideals. In rallying the Rajputs to heroic action, the queen becomes a surrogate patron goddess, almost, determining the terms on which the Rajputs can preserve their kingdom and their normative order even at the cost of their own lives. Such exaltation of the queen serves to further demonize the enemy who poses a threat to her as well as to the kingdom. The bhadralok representations of Padmini thus articulate the role of a re-formed patriarchy in the construction of a nation as well as in the reconstruction of a national history.

**Conclusion**

To sum up the argument in this chapter, the versions of the Padmini story in colonial Bengal emerged in the context of growing nationalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These narratives were produced by writers belonging to the new bhadralok. Western
education combined with restricted economic opportunities to generate a growing disaffection with colonial rule in this professional middle class. The bhadralok’s overwhelmingly Hindu- upper caste composition shaped the character of the nationalist discourse it produced. Thus the social boundaries of the bhadralok were rearticulated in the history that they reconstructed for the nation. At the same time that reconstructed history was used to legitimate the direction of contemporary nationalist politics. Emerging norms of citizenship subtly marginalized the Muslim as alien in both spheres.

The bhadralok’s reform of society and culture simultaneously drew upon and reinforced the emerging contours of the nation. The areas of patriarchy that were subjected to reform aided in the bhadralok’s self-definition of itself as a class. At the same time, a strong resistance to the colonial government’s reform and regulation of patriarchy emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. The bhadralok family and the status of women in it were thus constituted as bulwarks of tradition. Legitimizing this tradition was the idealization of women in ancient, ‘Hindu’ India. The evolution of patriarchy on the subcontinent was inserted into a scheme of historical interpretation in which the contemporary degeneration in the position of women was attributed to the long period of ‘Muslim’ rule.

The transformation of Bengali into a modern literary language sharpened the linguistic and cultural divisions between the two communities. This was accompanied by a rejection of the literary genres associated with Muslim patronage and Muslim audiences – whether courtly romances or their popular and folk transmutations. Social reform intersected with the refashioning of literary genres to enforce new norms of respectability in the linked domains of class, patriarchy and culture.

Evolving systems of generic classification produced new distinctions between the domains of literature and historiography. Normative standards for historiography evolved in the European Enlightenment became available to the bhadralok through the mediation of colonial education. Histories produced by colonial scholars and administrators displaced pre-colonial traditions of historiography. Pre-modern narrative traditions, both literary and historical, were
subjected to thorough overhaul and re-evaluation within the context of an emerging middle class culture. However, horizons of expectation inherited from pre-colonial narrative traditions survived both in literary practice and in audience taste. Contradictions between the demands of the new historiography and the persistence of pre-colonial perspectives were articulated and resolved in the newly influential genre of historical fiction.

Nationalism and resistance to colonialism thus evolved within the intersecting contexts of class formation and the reform of patriarchy and culture. The bhadralok versions of the Padmini story reveal the impact of these historical processes. The phenomenal popularity of Tod's Annals in colonial Bengal points to the urgency of the bhadralok’s need for a heroic past. The appropriation of Rajput history also points to the forging of new geographic and cultural boundaries for the nation. These new, nationalist imperatives for an idealized Rajput history shape the bhadralok’s adaptations of the Rajput traditions they found in Tod’s Annals.

Thus the bhadralok writers recast the Padmini story to exemplify the heroism of Rajput heroes and sacrificing queens in the face of ‘Muslim’ conquest. The story itself is perceived as epitomizing the perennial conflict between two newly homogenized communities, one indigenous and the other alien to the subcontinent. The bhadralok’s idealization of the Rajput past extends to constructing the medieval Rajput kingdom as the norm, antithetical to the degeneracy of the Muslim political order. The political and patriarchal contradictions inherent within Rajput state formation in the medieval period are erased to construct a stable, harmonious order. When threatened by impending conquest, this Rajput order preserves itself, ironically, through the self-destruction of its agents. The ritualized mass immolation of the Rajput women becomes the ground on which the bhadralok narratives of Padmini reconstruct an uninterrupted, heroic past for the Rajput kingdom, ‘Hindu’ patriarchy and ancient, ‘Hindu’ civilization. This is the past that the emerging nation recovers in colonial Bengal.