Conclusion

This dissertation began by noting the testimony of Rajput noblewomen in contemporary Rajasthan at the turn of the twenty-first century, who regard Padmini’s story as historically true and as exemplifying ideal Rajput womanhood. In conclusion, I present another version of the legend that circulates widely in contemporary India. This is the comic-book version called Padmini, published in the enormously successful “Amar Chitra Katha” series. The series is subtitled “The Glorious Heritage of India.” The preface to the comic-book makes clear the significance of Padmini’s story:

In the history of India, Padmini of Chittor holds a very prominent position. She was a perfect model of ideal Indian womanhood. The values cherished by her were threatened by Alauddin Khilji, the mighty Afghan king of Delhi. A lesser woman would not have been able to face Alauddin. But Padmini was not an ordinary woman. She faced her problems with exceptional courage, a living example of virtuous womanhood.

It was this story that inspired many a legend about her. The present story of Padmini is based on “PADMAVAT” by the famous poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi, and “Gora-Badal” by the poet Jatmal.1

The Preface makes several striking claims: one, that Padmini was a historical figure, two, that she represents ideal Indian womanhood, rather than merely Rajput norms, and three, that these ideal Indian values were threatened by the Afghan emperor of Delhi. The text is self-avowedly based on the Padmavat and on Jatmal’s poem. In yoking these two narratives together, the comic book is clearly blind to the internal contradictions between them, arising from their distinct contexts of production. At the same time, the Preface slides seamlessly Chittor to ‘Indian history,’ and sets up an antagonism between this ‘Indian’ norm and the ‘Afghan emperor.’ These strategies reveal the indebtedness of this comic book narrative to the version of the Padmini legend that acquired this distinctive shape in colonial Bengal. A recounting of this comic book narrative will illustrate this point further:

Chittor is the soul of Rajasthan. Its history is the saga of Rajput valour. Raja Ratnasen, a valiant ruler of Chittor was also a lover of music . . . . He was also a lover of beauty and fine-arts [sic] . . . . One day, a bard came to his court: "Maharaj, these objects are beautiful. I have yet to see a finer collection. But, pardon me, Maharaj, nothing hear equals the beauty of Padmini."

"Padmini?" "Yes, Maharaj, Padmini the princess of Sinhala island." Deeply impressed by the bard's account of Padmini, Ratnasen went to Sinhala and married her. On their journey back to chittor, Padmini's relatives, Gora and Badal, accompanied the bride. Soon king Ratnasen was back in the court of Chittor. "Long live Maharaj Ratnasen! Long live Maharani Padmini!"

Among Ratnasen's courtiers was a scholar named Raghav Chctan. One day [the king asked him] – "When is the second day of the moon?" "Today, Maharaj!" But Raghav Chetan had made a mistake in his calculations . . . . Being a stubborn man Raghav did not admit his mistake. "I am right, Maharaj, you shall have the proof tonight." That night Raghav used his sorcery and – "There it is, the moon of the second day." [The king replies] "Yes, you were right!" . . . But Raghav had lied against the eternal truth of nature. On the actual second day of the moon [another courtier points out to the king] "Look at the moon, Maharaj! Today is the actual second day of the moon." "Indeed it is."

Later in the palace, King Ratnasen discussed this matter with queen Padmini. [She says] "Pandit Raghav Chetan had deceived you." [The king replies] "Yes. I shall punish him for it. I shall drive him out of my kingdom." [Padmini dissuades him] "Don’t punish him. He might change his ways." "A simple man, who knows not what he does should be pardoned! But a learned man like Raghav should be punished for his clever lies." [She continues] "He knows many of our secrets. It may be harmful to drive him out." "A deceitful person is always harmful wherever he is." "But it can be dangerous for us, if he joins the enemy." [The king replies] "A Rajput is never afraid of danger."

Next day in the court – [The king says] "Pandit Raghav Chetan, since you are a Brahman, I shall not have you killed. But you shall not escape punishment." Raghav Chetan's face was painted black and he was carried through the streets on a donkey. Padmini was worried: "I wish to God that he does not join some powerful enemy."
Raghav Chetan then proceeded towards Delhi through jungles. [He swears to himself]

“You shall repent for this, King Ratnasen.” Alauddin, the Sultan of Delhi, was hunting in the same jungle. Suddenly a melodious tune filled the jungle air. The herd of deer ran in the direction from which the music came. Fascinated, Alauddin followed the deer. The deer stopped in front of Raghav playing his flute. They were hypnotized. So was the Sultan. He had never heard such music: “Subhan Allah, you should adorn my court.” Thus Raghav Chetan joined the Delhi court.

[Alauddin enjoys his flute-playing] “Heavenly music!” [Raghav thinks to himself]

“Sultan, I know what you desire most. The wealth and the women of others. Ratnasen! Beware! Now it is only a matter of time. I am catching up.” One day a hunter presented a rabbit to the Sultan. [Alauddin] “There can be nothing more delicate than this creature.” [Raghav] “You are wrong, Sultan. Padmini, the queen of Chittor is. She is the most delicate and beautiful woman in this world.” “Are you sure? I have two thousand extremely beautiful begums. Surely Padmini can’t be more beautiful than all of them.” “No Sultan, I insist that Padmini is the most beautiful woman in the world.”

There and then Alauddin made a decision. “Well then, Padmini should be in my harem.” [Raghav] “And Chittor under your rule.” “Yes, a new kingdom and the most beautiful woman! I can kill two birds with one stone.” Soon Alauddin’s army began its march towards Chittor. So large was this army that the dust raised by its march masked the sun. Alauddin laid a siege around the fort of Chittor. But to conquer the well-fortified fort of Chittor was not an easy task.

After a long wait [Alauddin] – “We can’t stay here forever.” [Raghav] “Have patience, Sultan. Fruits of patience are always sweet.” After some more time [Alauddin] – “A rebellion is brewing in Delhi. I can’t wait here any more.” [Raghav] “Then proclaim Padmini as your sister.” “Have you lost your head? But why not? This may solve the problem. If I proclaim her my sister, can I meet Padmini?” [Raghav] “Of course! Being a noble Hindu, King Ratnasen will respect your brotherly sentiment. He will let you enter his fort.” “And then I can capture the stupid king and Padmini shall be mine.”

Next day Alauddin’s messenger visited the Chittor court. “Huzur, our Sultan calls for peace. He has proclaimed himself a brother to Queen Padmini. He wishes to see his sister. Then
he will go back. He seeks your permission to enter the fort.” [Ratnasen] “A brother needs no permission to meet his sister. Your Sultan is most welcome.” Next day – “My wife’s brother is most welcome in my home.” [Alauddin] “I am honoured.” Treacherous Alauddin carried twenty of his best soldiers with him into the fort. Unsuspecting King Ratnasen treated Alauddin with great respect. “Inform Maharani Padmini that her brother has arrived” . . . When Padmini did not come, Ratnasen himself went to call her. [Padmini] “No, I will not show him my face, he is an evil man.” [Ratnasen] “No one casts an evil eye on his sister. Come, otherwise he will feel insulted.” “I shall show him my face but only in a mirror.”

Alauddin was astonished by Padmini’s beauty. “What a divine beauty. I must have her. But how? If only I could capture Ratnasen.” [Ratnasen] “What are you thinking Sultan?” “Oh, I was thinking I should leave now.” “Come, I shall see you to the gate.” At the first gate of the fort – “For honouring me by coming with me I present you with one lakh gold coins, King Ratnasen.” At the second gate – “Here I present you with thirty forts.” [Ratnasen] “Please come again.” [Alauddin] “I will! Before I leave, I shall give you an exceptional gift. Arrest him!”

The unsuspecting Rajputs were caught unawares. Ratnasen was carried away on fast enemy horses. [In his own camp, Alauddin to the bound and captive king] “King of Chittor, do you like my last gift?” “I could have done the same to you, but we are not treacherous.” “Keep your nobility to yourself. Now I shall have Padmini with your cooperation.” “Never!” “Take good care of him.” [The bound Ratnasen is whipped.] [Alauddin] “Will you now ask Padmini to submit?” “Never!” Alauddin changed his tactics. “Inform Padmini that if she submits to me, her husband shall live.” Soon the messenger was in Chittor fort.

“It is either my husband or my honour. What shall I do?” Desperate Padmini asked her relatives, Gora and Badal, to help her. “Do not worry. We shall do everything to save the king and your honour.” . . . [After consulting with them] Padmini made a desperate decision – “Inform your Sultan that I shall come to him, but before that he must allow me to meet my husband alone.” “Yes. If you will not be accompanied by any soldiers.” “Our queen will be accompanied by only her maids.”
Padmini had five hundred maids. Next morning five hundred palanquins left the fort.
Padmini’s palanquin was carried to prisoner Ratnasen’s tent. King Ratnasen was very upset. “My
close, here? What a shame?” “I am not your wife Maharaj, I am Badal. We have come to rescue
you.” Ratnasen was released and rushed towards the fort. Gora dressed as a palanquin bearer gave
the signal. Ratnasen reached the fort safely. But Gora was killed in the battle.

Alauddin was furious. “Soldiers dressed as women and servants! They made fools of us. I
must avenge this insult.” The siege of the fort continued. The food supplies in the fort began to
dwindle. [Ratnasen] “Now jauhar is the only way left.” [Padmini] “Yes, for Rajputs their honour
is most sacred.” So, huge pyres were lit inside the fort. [Padmini] “No sacrifice is too big to save
one’s honour!” So, Padmini led the Rajput ladies to jauhar, the great sacrifice by self-immolation.
The Rajput women preferred death to dishonour.

Finally saffron-clad Rajputs rushed out to fight their last battle. After their women had
performed jauhar, no Rajput had any desire left to live. They were there to die, but they took a
heavy toll of enemy lives. The small band of Rajputs was no match to the huge enemy army. Soon
the battle was over. [Alauddin] “Why didn’t they surrender against my army? It was sure death
for them.” [Raghav] “But what a glorious death!” Finally Alauddin entered the fort with his
victorious army, to be greeted by the smouldering ashes of death. [Alauddin] “But why did they
kill themselves?” [Raghav] “Your Majesty! You will never understand.”

Since the Preface explicitly cites the Padmavat and Jatmal’s poem as sources, the
exclusions are striking. The parrot Hiraman who brought notice of Padmavati’s beauty to
Ratnasen and initiated him into the mysteries of love, has disappeared. So too has the elaborate
description of the physical and spiritual journey to Singhaldvip and Ratnasen’s ascetic exercises.
In effect, the defining Sufi elements in Jayasi’s Padmavat have been excised from this narrative.
the deception of Raghav Chetan and his role in instigating Alauddin to attack Chitor are retained
from the source versions. So too are Alauddin’s beholding of the queen’s reflection, and his
subsequent capture of Ratansen by treachery. The comic book also retains Alauddin’s successive
temptations of Ratansen at the various gates of the fort, that lead to the Rajput king’s capture.
The role of Gora and Badal in executing the captive king’s rescue is retained. However, at this point the comic book again begins to depart from its two acknowledged sources. In Jatmal’s poem, Ratansen briefly contemplated the surrender of the queen, before rejecting the idea. The very possibility disappears in the comic book. Further, in both sources, the palanquin plan is attributed to the ingenuity of Gora and Badal. In the comic book by contrast, the plan is attributed to Padmini herself. Medieval courtly anxieties that sought to restrict the political autonomy of elite women, have disappeared from this modern adaptation, that sees the queen as active in deciding her own political destiny. It is a different matter that in the comic book, her agency culminates in her willing self-immolation.

Even more striking departures from the acknowledged sources mark the conclusion of the comic book version. Jatmal’s poem ended with the successful rescue of the king by Gora and Badal, and the death of Gora in the ensuing battle. In the Padmavat, Ratnasen’s death occurred not in the battle against Alauddin but in single combat against the neighbouring Rajput king Devpal. The queens then commit sati, not jauhar. It is after these events that Alauddin ultimately conquers Chitor. In a stark departure, the comic book has the Rajput women commit ritual mass immolation, jauhar, before Ratnasen leads his men out to the last battle in which they are killed. The comic book ends with Alauddin’s incomprehension of the Rajputs’ motives. He is left puzzling over the Rajput women’s immolation and their men’s preference for death rather than surrender. The last word is left to the traitor Raghav who admires the Rajputs now in their heroic deaths: Alauddin will never understand such heroism.

The exclusions and departures from the acknowledged sources of Jayasi and Jatmal’s narratives actually reveal the comic book version’s silent debt to the colonial Bengali narratives. As the last chapter makes clear, it is these Bengali narratives that ascribe the idea of the captive king’s rescue to Padmini herself. And it is in the Bengali narratives that Padmini’s agency culminates in her willed self-immolation, a narrative trope that discursively reinstates the female immolation that had been de-legitimized in law.

Further, as argued above, it is in the colonial Bengali narratives that such Rajput valour is made to embody the (new) nation’s potential for similar heroism. It is in these Bengali narratives
that the threat to this new nation comes from an imperial authority that is demonized as Muslim and therefore inherently evil. In the comic book version, Raghav characterizes the Sultan as driven by his greed for others' wealth and their women. Further, the comic book renders the opposition between the Rajput king and Alauddin in striking visual terms. The Rajputs consistently wear saffron and are clean-shaven, whereas Alauddin and his army are consistently depicted as bearded and wearing ('Muslim') green robes. Finally, it is in colonial Bengal that the Padmmini story is recuperated decisively into the realm of historical occurrence, rather than imagined construction. The comic book acknowledges Jayasi's and Jatmal's narratives as its sources explicitly. However, its departures from these sources and the logic of its resolution actually indicate the degree to which the interpretive leaps first made in the colonial Bengali narratives of Padmini, have now become the dominant version of the story in contemporary India.

Jayasi's Sufi tale told the story of a Rajput king finding true mystical love, through physical and spiritual discipline. Such was the transcendent power of this love, that these lovers defeated the imperial designs of Alauddin Khalji, by obliterating themselves and all barriers between themselves and the divine, in the ultimate fire of annihilation. As Aditya Behl points out, the poem's multiple engagements with several distinct spiritual and ascetic disciplines, reveal Sufi strategies for asserting their superiority on the competitive religious landscape of medieval India. 2 Equally, the Padmavat's negotiations with Rajput values reveal the multiple contexts of patronage and circulation for such heroic romances: regional Rajput and Afghan military elites that shared such values across boundaries of ethnic affiliation, as much as Sufi networks of shrines and hospices.

The narratives of Padmini in medieval Rajasthan reveal, at one level or another, the pressures of kingship in crisis. The Rajput kingdoms of medieval Rajasthan were making the transition from clan-based polity to monarchical state, in an uneven and partial fashion. The loss of authority and resources inherent in this transition for the Rajput chiefs, impelled them to evolve their own strategies to contest it. One alternative frequently exercised was military service in the

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2 See Behl 2001, especially Chapter 2 on the Candayan and Chapter 5 on the Padmavat.
Mughal imperial army. In this historical context, two distinct traditions of narratives about Padmini emerged in late medieval Rajasthan. Dynastic chronicles and genealogies produced under royal patronage coexisted with Jain narratives produced by monks under the patronage of powerful Osval clients of the Rajput kings. Given the differences of location in their origins, these two traditions of narrative diverged in their treatment of kingly valour and chiefly heroism. However, they converged in their depiction of queenly virtue, central to upholding the Rajput political and moral order. Such symbolic investment in virtuous queens must be understood in its historical context, where elite polygamy was a central institution helping to constitute the Rajput state and extend its political and military resources.

The intervention of the East India Company finally completed the historical transition to monarchical polity in the regional Rajput kingdoms. The Company actively consolidated the Rajput kings' authority, at the expense of the chiefs' resources. The simultaneous shrinkage of the Rajput elite's military resources and its scope for military expansion, entailed transformations in elite Rajput patriarchy as well. The significance of elite polygamy was transformed and reduced. Where it had earlier provided a mechanism for the real consolidation of political alliances and military resources, it was now reduced to a mechanism for determining and asserting the ritual rank and symbolic power of various elite lineages. In this historical conjuncture, Tod's own assumptions about literary and historical genres and the universal history of mankind played an important part in shaping his reading of the Rajasthani sources available to him. Equally significant were his Orientalist and Romantic assumptions about subcontinental history, chivalric values and medieval nostalgia. Tod's recasting of the Padmini narrative is over-determined by these multiple historical processes.

Colonial intervention in Bengal firmly subordinated the regional economy to the interests of empowering the industrial capitalist economy of Britain. Simultaneously, colonial authority in Bengal instituted 'reforms' of land relations aimed at maximizing the collection of revenue from the agrarian base. The policy of the East India Company and then of the colonial government encouraged the emergence of an English-educated middle class, mainly from the ranks of holders of intermediary tenures in the land. These changes empowered certain groups at the expense of
others. Further changes in political economy in the late nineteenth century restricted economic opportunity for this middle class. The exposure to western education proved further catalyst for the emergence of nationalism amongst the members of this class. The Padmini narratives in colonial Bengal emerged from this location. Colonial Bengali writers appropriated the account they found in Tod's *Annals*, and recast it to their own ends. A narrative that had celebrated Rajput heroism in Tod's account was now re-read to signify the virtues both latent and worthy of emulation in the emergent nation. The lines of conflict in Tod's narrative were appropriated and re-drawn to delimit the social and religious boundaries of the new nation. The comprehensive re-forming of social and cultural practices in colonial Bengal (an overhaul of forms ranging from the patriarchal to the linguistic and the literary) reinforced these new boundaries of the nation at a whole series of interlocking levels. Gender was reconstituted as a key structuring element of these interlocking formations. The Padmini story now signified the desired norms for the new nation and its new subjects, both male and female, as much as it excluded from its bounds, newly re-identified aliens and enemies.

As the comic book version narrated above demonstrates, this colonial Bengali version has emerged as the dominant version in contemporary India. This dissertation has attempted to trace the literary and historical genealogy of this now-dominant version of the Padmini legend.