Introduction

This dissertation deals with the transformations of the story of Padmini, believed to have been queen in the ruling lineage of Mewar (in modern Rajasthan) at the turn of the fourteenth century. In modern India, a particular version of the story of this Chitor queen has become one of the most widely known narratives about the past. Lindsay Harlan recounts a composite narrative reconstructed from interviews with contemporary Rajput noblewomen:

Padmini, a queen of Mewar, was renowned for her incomparable beauty. Alauddin, the notorious Afghan invader, determined to take Chitor and capture her. His initial charges proved unsuccessful, but lust spurred him on. Finally, frustrated, he submitted a compromise: he would withdraw his troops if he could be allowed but a glimpse of the fair lady's face. The Maharana consented but stipulated that to protect Padmini's modesty, the Muslim would only be able to see her face reflected in a mirror. The offer having been accepted, the queen was taken to a palace in the middle of a large tank. She stood next to a window with her back toward the outside. Alauddin was placed in a building at the edge of the tank, from which considerable distance he was allowed to catch a fleeting glimpse of Padmini's reflection in a mirror, which was held up to the queen for a few seconds. Far from satisfying his desire, this vision inflamed it. He decided to double-cross the Maharana and make Padmini his own.

Because the Muslim had arrived in Chitor alone and thus demonstrated his faith in Rajput honour, the Maharana felt compelled to return the compliment by personally accompanying him back to his camp. When they arrived, however, Alauddin took his escort hostage and demanded Padmini as ransom. The Rajput army could not contemplate such a trade. to ask the queen to compromise herself would contravene the Rajput code of honour, which protects women. Padmini herself ordered that the trade be executed but, having sized up Alauddin as no man of honour, also plotted an ambush. She sent Alauddin a message consenting to his terms provided that she be allowed to bring along her belongings and
attendants. He agreed. Then the queen ordered many curtained palanquins, which were designed to transport ladies-in-waiting, to be filled instead with soldiers. Because the soldiers who were to be concealed in this way knew they would not be able to defeat Alauddin’s powerful army, they prepared themselves to die in a battle of honour, a *saka*.

When the palanquin procession reached its destination, Padmini asked Alauddin that she be permitted to bid farewell to her husband before leaving him. Having agreed, the Muslim took his bride-to-be to the place where her husband was held captive. As soon as the Maharana’s location was known, the Rajput soldiers sprang upon the Muslims and liberated the captive king. In the uproar, both Padmini and her husband managed to escape. Padmini was whisked back to the palace, while the Maharana fled for the hills. Because it was clear that his forces would lose the battle, he retreated so that he might plot an assault on Alauddin at a later more promising moment. Back at Chitor, seeing that the Maharana’s forces faced defeat, Padmini led hundreds (some say thousands) of women to the vaults under the palace, where they committed *jauhar*, mass immolation.

As this dissertation reveals, this is but one of the multiple narratives of the Padmini story that evolved in medieval India. Contemporary historical sources in the fourteenth century that recount Alauddin Khalji’s conquest of Chitor, do not mention Padmini. This absence prompts most modern historians to infer that the queen was not a historical personage. This dissertation is concerned with a different issue: the persistence of the story over centuries, and across many different regions and languages. In each of these contexts, the retelling of Padmini’s story indicates that it was seen as resonant of contemporary concerns.

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The first available text of the Padmini story is Malik Muhammad Jayasi’s *Padmavat* (1540) in Avadhi (a dialect of Hindi spoken in modern east Uttar Pradesh). Heroic romances in which the prince embarked on a dangerous quest to woo and wed a princess of fabled beauty and wealth, were common to many literary traditions in medieval north India. The *Padmavat* is a Sufi mystical adaptation of this formula, and became the model for at least ten translations and adaptations into Persian and Urdu, between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.\(^2\)

Narratives of Padmini were also produced in various ‘literary’ and ‘historical’ genres in Rajasthan, between the late sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. The first of these late-medieval Rajasthani narratives is Hemratan’s *Gora Badal Caritra*, also known as the *Gora Badal Padmini Caupai* (1589). These narratives display significant variations from the Avadhi and Persian versions. The emphasis here is not on courting and marrying the queen, so central to Jayasi’s Sufi ethic. Instead, the Rajasthani narratives of Padmini focus on the attack of the Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji, and the exemplary honour of the Rajputs in defending their queen and kingdom.

In the nineteenth century James Tod compiled his accounts of early Rajput history from the oral and textual traditions of the Charans, Bhattas and Jains – chroniclers, genealogists and poets of the Rajput kings and their chieftains. Tod’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-32)\(^3\) (henceforth *Annals*) imposed the political and interpretive limits of colonialism upon medieval Rajput traditions. The reception of the *Annals* in late-nineteenth-century Bengal produced at least a dozen Bengali versions. These colonial Bengali versions narrate a story about a Hindu queen immolating herself to defend her chastity from the lustful, treacherous Muslim invader. Nineteenth-century Bengal thus witnessed the evolution of the stock narrative still

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\(^4\) The edition used in this dissertation is William Crooke, ed., introd. and notes, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India* by Lieut.-Col. James Tod, 1920, 3 vols. (Nece
dominant in modern India. This stock narrative helps to reconstruct a 'glorious' past as the basis for a specific construction of Indian nationhood.

These narratives of the Padmini story over the last four and a half centuries straddle the literary and historical domains in different regions (mainly modern north India and Bengal). Variations and modifications in each retelling of the story must be understood in relation to changes in literary and historical formations. Such transformations in the narratives are equally significant in the context of evolving patriarchies within distinct social formations at diverse historical conjunctures. Further, James Tod, Resident of the East India Company at Udaipur, played a vital role in recasting the story in its popular modern form. Therefore, this dissertation is concerned with the impact of colonial intervention on the shaping of historical knowledge as well as literary traditions in modern India.

The analysis of this story in all its multiple versions is an exercise in comparative literary history. This dissertation traces the emergence of the Padmini narratives within the evolution of different genres in distinct languages with their own literary traditions. Comparison of the several autonomous, yet connected, literary traditions that existed simultaneously on the subcontinent, helps to illuminate the relationship between various versions. Transformations of the narrative must be seen in terms of successive generic modifications. The analysis of these indicates not only the aesthetic but also the social and historical functions of literary genre.

Equally, this dissertation is concerned with a historical understanding of gender. As stories of a queen defending her virtue against an enemy king, these narratives have always been implicated in defining the norms of gender underpinning elite patriarchies and the social formations in which they are implicated. This dissertation explores the variations in the narrative to uncover the ideologies of gender buttressing specific patriarchal contexts. These patriarchies are in turn implicated in wider historical conjunctures, as they uphold the specific caste and class relations defining disparate political formations, from a medieval Rajput state to emerging bourgeois (upper-caste) nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal.
This dissertation is concerned with historical issues in another sense as well. The story of the heroic queen committing ritual immolation in a final act of resistance also assumed significance in the context of the prolonged and intense debates about widow-immolation in the nineteenth century. In this period, gender was reconstituted as a vital and defining aspect of the intersecting debates on colonialism, nationalism and social reform. Further, the story of Padmini is distinctive in that its historical veracity has been more open to question in modern times, than other stories of Rajput heroism. This dissertation argues that the status of Padmini as a historical personage is re-confirmed in colonial Bengal. Such re-confirmation occurs in the context of nationalism's quest for historical examples of resistance to imperial domination. Nineteenth-century nationalist accounts re-invented all subcontinental history from the eleventh century onwards, as perennial resistance by Hindus against Muslim invasion and domination. Thus, in the colonial Bengali versions of the story, Alauddin Khalji is not only the enemy king, he is also now defined in terms of his innate lust and treachery as a stereotypical Muslim. The story therefore becomes the locus for the production of an extremely durable and powerful set of assumptions about gender, communal identities and Indian history. This exploration of the transformations of the Padmini narratives represents an attempt to trace the multiple genealogies of this complex of ideas that has found renewed articulation and resonance in contemporary India.

The introduction begins by examining early accounts of Alauddin Khalji's siege of Chitor, in a Persian chronicle tradition associated with the imperial courts in Delhi. Dominant modern readings of these accounts have generated a controversy regarding the historical veracity of the Padmini legend. This has been the main focus of debate and disagreement among twentieth-century historians. The terms of the debate are determined equally by a dominant modern reading of the first narrative about Padmini, Jayasi's Padmavat. Such a reading is based on twentieth-century formulations of the disciplinary boundaries and narrative conventions distinguishing the domains of 'literature' and 'history.' Instead, this dissertation reads the multiple narratives of Padmini historically. Transitions in state formations and social and
patriarchal structures are relevant to understanding the successive modifications in the Padmini story. Similarly, the religious identities mobilized by successive versions of the Padmini narrative must also be read historically. Modern constructions of religious identities, affiliations and practices cannot be imposed retrospective on narratives from the past. Again, modern considerations of the circulation and transmission of Jayasi’s poem are constrained by the boundaries of contemporary regional and linguistic formations. In fact, such boundaries restrict our understanding of the multiple connections between contiguous, yet autonomous, linguistic-literary formations in pre-modern north India. Much dominant scholarship on the nineteenth century has been concerned with tracing the impact of colonialism on politics, society and culture. Tracking the continuing evolution of the Padmini legend involves an investigation of the continuities with pre-colonial institutions and cultural practices. Such an exploration avoids the pitfalls of over-privileging colonialism as a decisive point of rupture and transformation. It also enables a historical understanding of the processes by which the various narratives of Padmini were constituted in the modern period, out of the multiple contexts of existing pre-modern forms, the uneven impact of colonialism, and the social and cultural reform instituted by emergent nationalism in distinct ways in various regions.

The medieval Persian record

The earliest account of Alauddin Khalji’s victory over Chitor is provided by Amir Khusrau. The Sultan’s court poet and panegyrist accompanied his patron on many of the latter’s military campaigns. Khusrau’s Khaza’inul Futuh (“Treasures of Victories”) narrates Alauddin’s conquest of Chitor thus:

5 Many conventional literary histories of the subcontinent examine either the northern region or the south. Such a focus is shaped as much by an understanding of South India as following a relatively autonomous historical trajectory, as by the linguistic competence of individual scholars. For a recent exploration of the transmission and circulation of ‘northern’ oral epics and devotional cults into South India, see Alf Hiltebeitel, Rethinking India’s Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

6 This English translation is by Mohanunad Habib, “The Campaigns of Alauddin Khalji Being the English Translation of ‘The Khaza’inul Futuh,’’ in K.A. Nizami, ed., Politics and Society during the Early
On Monday, the 8th Jamadius Sani, 702 A.H. the Conqueror of the World, resolved on the conquest of Chitor, ordered his high-sounding drums to be beaten. The crescent-banner was moved forward from Delhi and the imperial canopy was raised up to the smoky clouds; the sound of the drum reached the bowl of the sky and conveyed to it the good news of the Emperor’s determination. Finally, the confines of Chitor were reached. The imperial pavilion of which the clouds may be considered the lining, was pitched up in that territory between two rivers. The enthusiasm of the army shook the two seashores like an earthquake, while the dust raised by the feet of the troops rendered the two deep rivers fordable. The two wings of the army were ordered to pitch their tents one after the other on the two sides of the fort. It seemed that water-laden clouds had alighted at the foot of the hill. For two months the flood of the swords went up to the 'waist' of the hill but could not rise any higher. Wonderful was the fort, which even hailstones were unable to strike! For if the flood itself rushes from the summit, it will take a full day to reach the foot of the hill. Nevertheless, the celestial fort, which raised its head above the clouds, would have bowed to the ground at the strokes of the *maghribi* stones. But Jesus from the *Baitul Ma'mur* (Mecca) sent the good news of the building of Muhammad’s Faith; consequently, the stones of the building remained intact and kept their secret to themselves. On a hill, named Chatarwari, the Emperor raised his white canopy every day like the sun, and as is the custom of rulers, attended to the administration of the army. He ordered the eastern wrestlers (*pahlawans*) to draw the westerners (*maghribis*). Other warriors began to place heavy stones in the ‘arm’ (*palla*) of the *maghribi* – for, except the arm of the *maghribi*, nothing else could
measure their strength. Every warrior, as he raised the stone with his strength, made his hand a pillar for the hill that had no pillars. The army of Solomon dealt strokes, like those of David, on the fort that reminded them of Seba. On Monday, 11 Muharram, A.H. 703, the Solomon of the age, seated on his aerial throne, went into the fort, to which birds were unable to fly. The servant (Amir Khusrau), who is the bird of this Solomon, was also with him. They cried, ‘Hudhud! Hudhud!’ repeatedly. But I would not return; for I feared Sultan’s wrath in case he inquired, ‘How is it I see not Hudhud, or is one of the absentees?’ and what would be my excuse for my absence if he asked, ‘Bring to me a clear plea’? If the Emperor says in his anger, ‘I will chastise him’, how can the poor bird have strength enough to bear it? It was the rainy season when the white cloud of the ruler of land and sea appeared on the summit of this high hill. The Rai, struck with the lightning of the Emperor’s wrath and burnt from hand to foot, sprang out of the stone-gate as fire springs out of stone; he threw himself into the water and flew towards the imperial pavilion, thus protecting himself from the lightning of the sword. Wherever there is a brazen vessel, the Hindus say, there lightning falls; and the Rai’s face had turned as yellow as brass through fear. Surely he would not have been safe from the lightning of the arrow and the sword, if he had not come to the door of the royal pavilion.

On the day the yellow-faced Rai sought refuge on the red canopy from fear of the green swords, the great Emperor (May his prosperity continue!) was still crimson with rage. But when he saw the vegetarian Rai trembling with fear, like the trampled and withered grass under the imperial tent – though the Rai was a rebel, yet the breeze of royal mercy did not allow any hot wind to blow upon him. All the storm of the Emperor’s wrath vented itself against the other rebels. He ordered that wherever a green Hindu was found, he was to be cut

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8 Habib’s footnote: “Referring to a well-known story of the Quran, chap. Xxvii, sec. 2. Hudhud is the bird that brings the news of Balquis, queen of Seba, to Solomon. The famous Padmini is apparently responsible for the allusions to Solomon’s Seba.” Habib 1981, 199, n. 33.
down like dry grass. Owing to this stern order, thirty thousand Hindus were slain in one day.

It seemed that the meadows of Khizrabad had grown men instead of grass. After the wind of imperial wrath had uprooted all the *mugaddams*, he rid the land of its two colours, and helped the *raiyats*, the cultivators of the land, among whom no thorn raises its head, to grow.

The roots and branches of this azure edifice were assigned to the grand tree of the grand Empire, Khizr Khan and given the name of 'Khizrabad'. The red canopy was placed over Khizr Khan's head, like the red heaven over the blue sky... Thus by scattering rubies and diamonds and roses, the Emperor made the existence of his son prosperous and honourable.

Then freed from the affairs of Khizr Khan and Khizrabad, *he took hold of his successful bridle and brought his stirrups from the green meadows (of Khizrabad) to Siri*. After the 10th of Muharram, the banner of the successor of the Prophet (May it rise higher and higher!), having wonderfully predominated over the head of the Hindus, was ordered to be moved to the City of Islam, Delhi. He (the Emperor) made the killing of all Hindus, who were out of the pale of Islam, such an obligation on his infidel-smiting sword (*zulfiqar*) that should Muslim schismatics (*rafisz*) in these days even nominally demand their rights, the pure Sunnis would swear in the name of this rightful Caliph of God.

Mohammad Habib also briefly surveys the other major accounts of Alauddin's siege of Chitor. Ziauddin Barani relates the conquest of Chitor in one sentence, in the *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi*:

"Sultan Alauddin came out of the city with his army and marched to Chitor, which he invested and captured in a short time and then return to Delhi."11 In his narrative of the romance between Alauddin's son and the princess of Gujarat, Amir Khusrau again describes the conquest of Chitor:

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10 Habib's footnote: "The village headmen, who among the Rajputs were also officers of the army." Habib 1981, 199, n. 35.

Then he [Alauddin] marched against Chitor in state and reduced it in a single expedition. There, also, was a Rai with a large army, who, to speak the truth, was the most exalted of all Hindu rulers. But the Emperor did not waste much time; the fort was reduced in two months with such effect that Saturn became anxious about the safety of his own constellation. It was named Khizrabad and presented to Khizr Khan. Chitor, the paradise of the Hindus, is a wonderful fort and has springs and meadows on every side.¹²

Abu’l Fazl’s account in the A’in-i Akbari indicates the shape the Padmini narrative had taken in the Persian chronicle tradition, by the turn of the seventeenth century:

Ancient chronicles record that Sultan Alauddin Khilji king of Delhi had heard that Tawal Rattan Si prince of Mewar possessed a most beautiful wife. He sent to demand her and was refused, upon which he led an army to enforce compliance and laid siege to Chitor. After a long persistence in beleaguering the place in vain, he had recourse to artifice and proposed terms of peace and friendship. The Raja readily acquiesced and invited him to an entertainment. The Sultan entered the fort with his chosen followers and the meeting took place amid festivity and mirth, and finding his opportunity he seized the Raja and carried him off. It is said that the Sultan’s retinue consisted of a hundred men and 300 picked soldiers dressed as attendants. Before the Raja’s troops could assemble he was hurried away to the camp amidst the wailing of his people. The king kept the Raja in close confinement with a view to extort compliance with his desire. The faithful ministers of the Raja implored the king not to injure him and promised to deliver up to him not only the object of his love but other suitable partners of his harem. They also sent a forged letter purporting to come from the virtuous queen and lulled his suspicions to sleep. The king was delighted and not only refrained from personal violence but treated the Raja with cordiality. It is related that 700 of the choicest troops dressed as women were placed in litters and it was given out that the Rani with a large number of her attendants was on

way to the royal pavilion. When they approached the camp, word was sent that the Rani wished to have an interview with the Raja previous to entering the king's quarters. Lapped in his illusive dream of security the king granted the interview, during which the soldiers seizing the opportunity, threw off their disguise and bore off their prince. Time after time the Rajputs stood to face their pursuers fighting manfully and many were slain before the Raja had gone far. at length the Chauhans, Gaura and Badal made a stand fighting to the death enabling the Rawal to reach Chitor in safety amidst universal acclamation. The king having endured great hardships during the siege and finding it to no purpose, returned to Delhi. After an interval, he set his heart again on the same project but returned discomfited. The Rawal wearied with these assaults, conceived that an interview with the king might result in an alliance and that he would thus escape this state of continual strife. Guided by a traitor he met the king at a place 7 kos from Chitor where he was basely slain. His relative Arsi, after this fatal event, was raised to the throne. The Sultan returned to the siege of Chitor and captured it. The Raja was slain fighting and all the women voluntarily perished by fire.

Ferishta's slightly later account indicates that narratives of the past continued to be modified in every successive retelling:

In the meantime Ratan Sen, raja of Chitor, had obtained his deliverance in a most unusual way. The details of the incident are these. After the Raja had been in jail for some time, it came to the Emperor's ears that among the Raja's women (zanan) there was one, Padmaní - a woman of fine stature, with dark eyes and moon-like face, and adorned with all the accomplishments of a beauty. The Emperor sent the Raja a message that his release would depend on his presenting her (to the Sultan). The Raja consented and sent messengers to call his family, who had taken refuge in inaccessible hill-tracts, so that the Emperor's chosen may be picked out of them. But the Raja's Rajput relatives were shocked at the message.

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They reproached him severely and wished to mix a little poison in some food and send it to him; he would take it and withdraw into the world of the dead without becoming notorious for his dishonour. The Raja's daughter, however, who was famous for her intelligence among her tribe and kindred, disliked this proposal. "I have thought of a plan," she said, "by which my father's life will be saved and yet his honour will not be lost. It is this. Despatch a large number of litters full of warriors with a body of horse and foot to Delhi and at the same time publish the news, that in obedience to the Emperor's order, the Raja's women are coming to him. On reaching the suburbs, they are to enter the city at night and take the road to the Raja's prison-house. On reaching there all the Rajputs are to draw their swords, overpower anyone who stands in their way and enter the prison; then seating my father on a swift-footed horse, they are to take the way to their homes with speed." The counsellors approved of the plan and acted upon it. A body of devoted warriors sat in the litters and came to Delhi. When a part of the night had passed, they entered the city. "We have brought Padmini and all the relatives of the Raja," they cried. On nearing the prison, the Rajputs drew their swords, rushed out of their litters and quickly cut the guards to pieces; then they broke the Raja's chains, mounted him on a horse and struggled out of the city like a bird out of its cage. Joined, next, by a body of Rajputs, who had been waiting for the, they took the way to their homes. The Emperor's horsemen pursued them on their journey and overtook them at several places; many Rajputs were slain in the skirmishes, but the Raja, somehow or other, with great difficulty reached the hills, where his family was living. Rescued from the Emperor's torturing claws through the fortunate plan of his accomplished daughter, the Raja began to plunder the territory around the Chitor Fort. Alauddin, however, in accordance with the demands of political expediency, took the fort from Khizr Khan and bestowed it on the Raja's sister's son, Khariz Rai, who was in the Emperor's service and had given many proofs of his loyalty. In a short time Khariz Rai strengthened himself wonderfully in the place; all the Rajputs were pleased with his government and joined him. He remained firmly
loyal till the Emperor’s death. Every year he came with presents from his land to kiss the threshold of the great conqueror, and was honoured with the gift of a horse and a special robe, after which he returned to his home. Whenever the Sultan’s army went on an expedition, he appeared obediently with five thousand horse and ten thousand foot and exposed his life to many dangers. 14

Together with Jayasi’s Padmavat (1540), these are some of the chief medieval accounts used by modern historians in ascertaining whether Padmini was a historical personage. It is clear that the contemporary, panegyric account by the eyewitness Amir Khusrau, does not mention the queen. Modern historians have differed in their interpretations of Khusrau’s Quranic allusion to the hudhud (hoopoe) that brought news of the beautiful Queen of Sheba to Hazrat Suleiman Nabi (Solomon). From the context, it is apparent that Khusrau compares Alauddin to Solomon and sees himself as the bird. Mohammad Habib sees the reference to the Queen of Sheba as a veiled allusion to Padmini, the queen of Chitor (Habib 1981, 199, n. 33). K.R. Qanungo disagrees explicitly with Habib’s interpretation, as overreading a literary allusion. 15

Historians have also questioned the credibility of Abu’l Fazl’s and Ferishta’s accounts of Alauddin’s conquest of Chitor, given the three centuries separating the events from these reconstructions. Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, one of the most influential historians of Rajasthan in the twentieth century, holds Ferishta’s account to be derived from Jayasi’s Padmavat. Qanungo argues that Ferishta’s account also demonstrates the jumbled nature of accounts circulating in seventeenth-century Rajasthan. For Qanungo, this confusion only confirms the fictive status of Padmini and her alleged role in instigating Alauddin’s conquest of Chitor.

The contemporary historians’ debate

As the preceding section makes clear, historians in the twentieth century have been concerned primarily with the problem of determining whether Padmini really existed in history. The terms of this problem are set by the fact that Jayasi’s poem, the first narrative of Padmini, makes abundant use of fantastic and supernatural elements. These attributes of the Padmavat prompt modern readers to comprehend it as a ‘literary,’ that is to say fictive, text. Thus, the best-known modern sceptic, Kalika Ranjan Qanungo, surveys “all the available evidence, historical and literary, about the heroine of Jaisi’s poem, Padmavat, and the nature of the poem itself,” to conclude:

... There is not even tolerably reliable evidence of the existence of Padmini as a historical personage of flesh and blood, and ... Padmini was purely a poetic creation of Jaisi, whose literary genius practiced a bluff on credulous chroniclers and the Bhats of Mewar of later times (Qanungo 1971, 3-4).

Historians in modern Rajasthan have been considerably more ambivalent about the issue. Qanungo cites one of the most important and influential historians in modern Rajasthan, Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha:

In the absence of history people accepted Padmavat as a history. But in truth it is only a story in verse, like a modern historical novel, the structure of which rests upon these historical facts that Ratansen was the ruler of Chitor, Padmini was his queen, and Alauddin was the Sultan of Delhi, who wrested the fort of Chitor from Ratansen (Ratna Singh) by fighting ... 16

Ojha’s resolution of the problem sets the precedent for those subsequent historians who assert that Padmini was indeed a historical personage. On the one hand, this reading accepts the fictive nature of Jayasi’s Padmavat. On the other hand, though, Ojha asserts the existence of Padmini to

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be as certain as Alauddin's conquest of Chitor. Further, Ojha attempted elsewhere to derive ‘real’ coordinates for the Padmavat’s account. Thus, he held that Padmini was in all likelihood the daughter of the Rajput chieftain of Sigauli in Rajasthan, deducing this geographical location from Jayasi’s Singhaldvip.  

In more recent times, Dasharath Sharma has modified Ojha’s findings. Sharma exemplifies the dominant trend among twentieth-century scholars of the Padmavat, in that he sees the poem as divided into two halves. The first part of the poem – dealing with the Chitor king’s quest for Padmavati, his asceticism, the journey to Singhaldvip, and ultimate success – is seen as fictive. The second half of the poem, dealing with Alauddin’s siege and conquest of Chitor, is seen as predominantly historical. Together with this reading of the Padmavat, the focus has also shifted to finding possible predecessors from whom Jayasi may have picked up the legend. In K.R. Qanungo’s pithy summary of the entire controversy,

The historicity or otherwise of the Padmini legend, therefore, hinges on the controversy whether Jaisi really picked up some older legend current in his time somewhere in India, or is it that Jaisi’s own knowledge of history and poetic genius made his love-epic of Sufistic mysticism, Padmavat, the fountain-spring of the Padmini legend of later generations with whom it became serious history (Qanungo 1971, 17).

Thus Dasharath Sharma cites the Nabhinandana-jinoddhara-grantha, a Jain narrative composed in 1336 in support of the historicity of Padmini. This contemporary source refers to Alauddin’s siege and conquest of Chitor, and to the Chitor “ruler being made to move from one village to another, after being deprived of his wealth” (Sharma 1970, 39-40). However, there is no mention of a queen Padmini.

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The other sources Sharma cites are the later Rajasthani narratives of Hemratan, Labdodhay and Daulatvijay, discussed at length in the second chapter of this dissertation. The earliest of these narratives by Hemratan dates to the late sixteenth century. Sharma refers to two fragmentary verses by a Kavi Malla Hetamdan, used by both Hemratan and Labdodhay (Sharma 1971, 33). Both Sharma and Muni Jinavijay believe this poet to have preceded Jayasi. No other works by this poet have been found, nor have other references to him. What is striking in these assertions by contemporary Rajasthani scholars, however, is the insistence on the local (and therefore more ‘authentic’) origins for the narrative of the Chitor queen. As discussed below, this insistence on the autonomy and implicit authenticity of local traditions has constrained scholars in Rajasthan from exploring the circulation and transmission of Jayasi’s poem, as it may have affected subsequent retellings of the Padmini legend all over north India, including Rajasthan.

This dissertation is not concerned with the question of whether Padmini really existed in history. The evidence currently available suggests that the queen of Chitor was indeed imagined by later literary and historical traditions. However, irrespective of these historical doubts, the legend has persisted in one form or another, down to the present. In late twentieth-century India, the story of her role in Alauddin Khalji’s conquest of Chitor is held to have actually occurred.  

This dissertation is concerned with three issues. One, it attempts to explain this persistence of the Padmini story: its multiple versions, their circulation and transmission, and the emergence of one version as dominant in contemporary India. Secondly, this research is concerned with exploring the connections and disjunctions between the various versions of an evolving legend. Much modern historical scholarship about the Padmini legend has been concerned with evaluating the veracity of two medieval traditions of narratives seen as competing with each other – the Persian chronicle tradition and the Rajasthani tradition inaugurated by Hemratan. Instead, this dissertation explores the two-way traffic between these as well as other

19 Lindsay Harlan records the testimony of contemporary Rajput noblewomen, who consistently mention Padmini as one of the best exemplars of Rajput womanhood in history. Harlan 1994, 182-204.
medieval historiographical and literary traditions: a process of lending and borrowing in terms of both method and content. And third, rather than ascertaining the historical veracity of specific medieval narratives of Padmini, this dissertation reads those narratives historically. It explores the manner in which the medieval, colonial and modern narratives of Padmini encode in their form and aesthetic norms, the political and patriarchal concerns of their historical context. Such an approach is based on the premise that there is no one overarching, universal system of genres within which these stories can be located. Thus, this dissertation explores each narrative of Padmini within the context of its specific social and literary histories. Such a method offers a more nuanced interpretation of these narratives. The specific variations in the contour of the story are seen as generated both by historical context – by changes in political economy, state formation and patriarchy – and by generic conventions, the latter in turn evolving within history and literary tradition.

**Patriarchy and gender in history**

Lindsay Harlan's account, cited above, reveals how contemporary Rajput noblewomen at the turn of the twenty-first century construe the Padmini story as exemplifying ideal Rajput womanhood. This mobilization of the story in defining an ideal womanhood is not a new phenomenon, but has been an element structuring its multiple variants from the very beginning. The four major contexts in which the Padmini story was transformed significantly, represent four distinct historical conjunctures. Patriarchies specific to these conjunctures were implicated in the very constituting of state formation and social relations. These formations and patriarchies evolved in a symbiotic relationship with each other, both displaying as much overlap and continuity as modification. The transformations of the Padmini narratives must be understood as shaped by these historical (political and patriarchal) processes.

Jayasi's *Padmavat* was composed in sixteenth-century Avadh. The historical context is marked by anxieties about the imperial aspirations of Sher Shah Sur, to whom Jayasi dedicates his poem. Such anxieties are likely to have been felt acutely in the poem's dual contexts of
production and circulation — local networks of Sufi shrines and centres, and the courts of the local rulers commanding the resources of regional military elites. Local networks of Sufi authority evolved an uneasy relationship with the political authority of the Delhi Sultanate under whose patronage they extended and consolidated their sphere of influence in medieval north India. This process of ongoing mutual negotiation has been fleshed out in the work of scholars like Richard Eaton and Simon Digby. On the one hand, Sufi pirs and centres depended on the continuing patronage of the Sultanate elite for their financial and material resources. On the other hand, they also claimed superior spiritual authority over the worldly kings of the Sultanate. This translated into claims of a degree of autonomy from the political control of the Sultanate elite. Kings and local chiefs in turn looked to the Sufi pirs for legitimizing their political authority. Similarly, local elites depended on the military expansion of the Sultanate for their sustenance and for avenues of upward mobility. At the same time, strong rulers in the Sultanate periodically attempted to extend their own power by centralizing authority at the expense of these local military elites.

Patriarchy was implicated in this conjuncture in upholding the authority of both monarchs and local elites. Overlapping patterns of marriage relations helped to establish and consolidate political alliances throughout this feudal-military elite, irrespective of ethnic affiliation. Similarly, the surrender of women to an overlord or a victorious conqueror helped define and consolidate hierarchical political relationships within the elite. Once again, such exchange of women was a practice shared across ethnic and religious affiliations. Given the instrumentality of marriage in negotiating political relationships, elite polygamy was widespread. Sufi ideology evolved its own responses to the social and patriarchal practices of its elite patrons, including an accommodation

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20 See the works by Eaton and Digby cited in the Bibliography.
of such elite polygamy. Jayasi's *Padmavat* reveals these multiple negotiations with its political, religious and spiritual contexts.

The narratives of Padmini in medieval Rajasthan date between the late-sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. These accounts belong to two distinct contexts of patronage. Accounts belonging to the genres of dynastic genealogy and chronicle, were produced under royal patronage by the 'bardic' castes in Rajasthan, the Carans and Bhats. The second group of narratives about Padmini was authored by Jain monks and sponsored by powerful Osval Jain clients of the rulers of Mevar.

The genealogies (vansāvali) and royal chronicles were vehicles for constituting and preserving the political and social status of Rajput families by defining and invoking ancient lineage. The Bhats also facilitated matrimonial alliances between different families, clans and states, in a quasi-feudal and militaristic elite where clan membership was the basis of sharing in economic and political power. Once again, the king's or chief's marriages provided him with a network of political alliances within the Rajput elite, and with an extended supply of military resources. Such resources were useful at three linked levels. They helped to consolidate authority internally, against rival chiefs. A steady supply of military resources was equally necessary in preserving and extending the territorial control of the individual Rajput kingdom, at the expense of Rajput and non-Rajput neighbours. And finally, such military resources were invaluable assets in gaining leverage through service with the imperial Mughal power, itself embarking on a process of steady military and political expansion.

Polygamy was thus once again a central mechanism for securing and extending the political and military resources of the medieval Rajput elite. At the same time, lineage, consolidated and asserted through the domain of marriage relations as well, was vital in asserting membership within this medieval Rajput elite. These are the dual pretexts for Caran and Bhat

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21 See the discussion of Abdul Wahid Bilgrami's *Haqa'iq-i Hindī* in Chapter 1 below. Trans. S.A.A. Rizvi (Kashi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1957).
stories about purity of lineage defended through the heroism of the Rajputs. Given the centrality of lineage concerns in the material and ideological foundations of medieval Rajput states, the regional traditions therefore always had the ideological function of upholding norms of masculine and feminine virtue. Such narratives were directed at preserving the structure and privileges of this clan and caste network.

The medieval Rajput kingdoms also witnessed attempted transitions from clan-based polity to monarchy. Such a transition was never complete. It was always contested by the chiefs of the old clan-based hierarchies, who stood to lose resources, authority and stature with the consolidation of monarchical states. In the context of such an attempted transition, an alternative tradition of narratives about the Rajput past emerged in the regional kingdoms of Rajasthan. This was produced by Jain monks or laymen, under the patronage of powerful Osval Jain clients of the Rajput kings. The poetic texts of the Padmini story in medieval Rajasthan — sponsored by wealthy Osval (Jain) merchants and state officials, and authored by Jain monks — extended this ideological enterprise to a wider audience, composed predominantly of the trading groups who provided both financial backing to the medieval Rajput states and the most substantial patronage to Jainism in medieval Rajasthan.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the intervention of the East India Company in Rajasthan altered the balance of relations between the Rajput kings and their recalcitrant chiefs. The Company was concerned with establishing a single centralized authority, with whom they could negotiate on matters of political and trade concessions. It therefore intervened with its military might, to strengthen the hands of the Rajput kings at the expense of their chieftains. It was at this conjuncture that the regional kingdoms of Rajasthan finally made the transition to monarchical polity. The decline of the Rajput military elite and the consequent shrinkage of its material base, entailed transitions in elite polygamy as well. Where marriage alliances had earlier been a central mechanism for the extension and consolidation of political and military resources, they were now reduced increasingly to markers of ritual and symbolic rank. The altered
significance of elite polygamy implied a correspondingly greater loss of autonomy for the queens of the Rajput elite. These historical transitions in state formation and patriarchy once again shaped the contour of the Padmini story as compiled and recast by James Tod in his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*.

In Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century, a century under colonial rule had effected fundamental changes in political economy. The subordination of the regional and subcontinental economies to the expansion of British industrial capitalism was preceded and matched by the drive to ‘rationalize’ and maximize the collection of revenue from agrarian Bengal. The policy of the East India Company and later the colonial government encouraged the emergence of an English-educated middle class, to man the lower rungs of the colonial bureaucracy. This was the location of early nationalist resistance to colonial rule.

Middle class social reform embarked upon the recasting of its own social and cultural practices, in the domains of patriarchy and culture. This was the context—in which gender was reconstituted as a key component of the intersecting debates on colonialism, nationalism and social reform—when colonial Bengali writers saw a new significance to stories of Rajput heroism, including the narrative of Padmini.

In each of these instances, transitions in political and patriarchal formations had an impact on the received traditions of the Padmini narrative. There is no one-to-one correspondence between historical transitions in social relations and modifications of ideological formations and narrative traditions. Nevertheless, the successive modifications of the Padmini story must be read in the light of such historical transitions—that rendered some received elements of the story redundant, and generated other new tropes resonant of emergent practices and concerns.

**Linguistic and literary formations**

The dominant trend among twentieth-century histories of subcontinental literature has been to define the literary traditions of the past in terms of modern formations of linguistic and regional communities. Thus, the literature of medieval Rajasthan is separated from those of...
medieval Braj and Avadh for example, in twentieth-century histories of Indian literature. The latter traditions, contiguous yet emanating from different regions of north India, are both typically subsumed within histories of ‘Hindi’ literature. The literary history of the Bengali-speaking region is similarly compartmentalized. Further, the rise of nationalism had its own impact in shaping the limits of the ‘national’ literature. Thus the impact of one classical language, Sanskrit, and its literary tradition, is well explored and documented in this dominant literary history. However, the impact of the other dominant classical language of medieval India, Persian, is largely restricted to studies of the rise of Urdu.

Such reconstructions of literary history in the modern Indian nation-state fail to recognize that geographical, linguistic and cultural boundaries in pre-modern India were very different from their present shape. The narratives of Padmini in medieval India give the lie to any assumption of neat boundaries between classical and vernacular linguistic-literary traditions, or between the various regional languages. For one, the choice of scripts for particular languages has evolved in the course of history. It is now widely accepted that Jayasi’s Padmavat was written most probably in the Persian script. It is equally likely that Saiyid Alaol, who produced a Bengali adaptation of the Padmavat in the seventeenth century, had access to a manuscript of Jayasi’s Avadhi poem written in the Persian script.

Sufi poets writing in Avadhi, such as Maulana Daud, Qutban, Jayasi and Shaikh Manjhan Shattari, reveal their mastery of multiple linguistic and literary traditions, ranging from Sanskrit and Apabhramsa to Persian and Arabic. This phenomenon can still be comprehended as the poets’ awareness of classical and regional linguistic-literary traditions. The instance of Alaol is even more striking. Not only was he aware of the classical (Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian) and

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22 See Chapter 1.
23 See my discussion of Alaol’s poem in Chapter 4.
local (Bengali) traditions, he was also thoroughly familiar with the Avadhi-Sufi literary tradition of Maulana Daud and Jayasi. Similarly, Brahmin scholars in early colonial Bengal were still familiar with the Persian chronicle tradition of the Mughal courts. A Jain version of the Padmini narrative produced by Jatmal Nahar in seventeenth-century Lahore indicates the same phenomenon. Internal evidence suggests Jatmal's familiarity with both the Rajasthani tradition of Padmini narratives as well as Jayasi's Avadhi poem.²⁵

This widespread competence of medieval poets in multiple linguistic-literary traditions demands a rejection of any cultural history that erects rigid boundaries on the basis of modern formations of region, language and literary tradition. Instead, this dissertation explores regional as well as wider networks along which narrative traditions were actually circulated and transmitted in medieval India, both orally and textually. Such networks were constituted under the impact of trans-regional religious networks such as Sufi silsilahs or Nathpanth establishments. Equally, changes in political formation such as Mughal imperial expansion and the entry of regional ruling elites into the Mughal military and administrative elite, paved the way for patterns of literary patronage that transcended the boundaries of local and regional culture. It is this historical context that explains how the authors of the medieval Padmini narratives were so strikingly literate in multiple linguistic-literary traditions that often transcended the boundaries of their own local region.

This dissertation hopes to avoid the pitfalls of arbitrarily imposed modern boundaries of region, language and literary tradition. Instead, it attempts to explain the variations between these sets of texts in terms of the continuities as well as disjunctions between distinct yet contiguous regional, historical and cultural contexts in medieval India. A historical understanding of the evolution of the Padmini legend in medieval times involves exploring multiple histories of "the genesis of forms, their properties and usages." The narrative was transformed both over time and "across language-literature clusters." Specific social grids and belief systems produced these

²⁵ See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of Jatmal's narrative, the Gora Badal Kavitt.
narratives. Equally, their "mutation, decline and replacement" also occurred in such changing historical contexts. Systems of generic classification evolved within specific regional and literary cultures. Such systems of classification also transcended the specific boundaries of their origins, borrowing and adapting from other contiguous, and/or classical literary traditions. An exploration of actual networks of cultural transmission allows for a probing of the continuities as well as disjunctions, between Jayasi's Avadhi Sufi romance, the medieval Rajasthani narratives of Padmini, and Alaol's Bengali adaptation.

The colonial transition

In the nineteenth century, James Tod compiled, collated and recast Rajput historical traditions to assemble a comprehensive account of the history of Rajasthan. The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (1829-32) soon became accepted as the definitive history of the region by audiences in England and India, and by the Rajput elite themselves. Tod's intellectual and methodological premises have been subjected to extensive critique. The Annals uses the early nineteenth-century English understanding of European feudalism as a model for understanding of the history and social organization of Rajasthan. Moreover, the Annals represents eighteenth-century Rajasthan as bordering on chaos, and describes British intervention as introducing immediate improvement. Tod's narrative is clearly driven by the desire to justify British intervention in the princely states of Rajputana, which culminated in the signing of Subsidiary Alliances with most Rajput kingdoms in 1818.

Further, the tacit communalism of nationalist historiography in late nineteenth-century India is widely recognized, as is the impact of colonialism and Orientalist scholarship on its genesis. Similarly, the derivative nature of nationalism and especially nationalist historiography

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27 See Chapter 3 for the reception of the Annals in modern Rajasthan.
28 See for instance, various discussions of the subject by Romila Thapar and Harbans Mukhia.
in Bengal, have also been the subject of sustained analysis. 29 Literary representations of Rajput history in colonial Bengal (including the Padmini story) have also been subjected to thorough analysis. 30 This scholarship analyzes the significance of the Padmini story in nineteenth-century Bengal, and its derivation from Tod's Annals. However, the relationship of the colonial Bengali narratives to earlier narratives from the disparate contexts of medieval Avadh, Rajasthan and Bengal itself, has not yet been explored.

Much of this contemporary scholarship has privileged the moment of colonial intervention as decisive, in setting off a systematic production of knowledge of the colony – knowledge that the colonial state needed in order to govern. This thesis is extended theoretically to comprehend all knowledge about the 'East' produced under 'western' influence. 31 As first stated polemically by Edward Said in his Orientalism, "all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact." 32 Thus, British Orientalists and native informants are seen to have collaborated in an unequal relationship, to produce knowledge about the subcontinent that served the ends of colonial administration. Such ruling forms of knowledge are then implicitly ascribed the potential to unlimited domination. Further, since the onset of colonialism is seen as decisive, colonial discourse theory postulates a (sharp) rupture between pre-colonial and colonial forms of knowledge.

The reception and transformations of Rajput traditions in the nineteenth century cannot be understood simply in these terms, as collusion between colonial power and (tainted) orientalist knowledge that then provided the master-narrative for subsequent nationalist historians and ideologues. To ascribe the emergence of modern social and literary formations exclusively to the

impact of colonialism is to neglect two vital issues. One, indigenous groups and elites in the
nineteenth century re-negotiated their political power and social rank with a colonial government
bent on creating multiple bases for stable political authority and administration. This dissertation
explores two such conjunctures, in nineteenth-century Rajasthan and Bengal. In both these
instances, the gradual entry of colonialism empowered some indigenous groups at the expense of
others. For some, the intervention of colonial government introduced severe restrictions on their
power and authority, effectively transforming their social and economic rank. For others, it
marked the consolidation and extension of existing privileges, or the successful exploitation of
new avenues for upward mobility. Secondly, in the domain of cultural practices, modern literary
practices and forms emerged in a complex process of negotiation with pre-modern genres and
practices. The instances of both Bengal and Rajasthan demonstrate that the emergence of modern
genres, narratives and institutions was marked by a selective appropriation not only of colonial
models but also of pre-colonial forms. Again, whether in the recasting of social institutions,
groups and hierarchies, or in the transformation of cultural institutions and practices, the
transitions were never abrupt or absolute. The instances of nineteenth-century Bengal and
Rajasthan also reveal how such historical change was always contested, partial, uneven and
incomplete. Such a nuanced understanding avoids the double pitfalls of over-aggrandizing
colonial power on the one hand, and, on the other, valorizing the resistance articulated by
indigenisms. Such indigenisms were themselves shaped in turn by the uneven reception of
various forms of the colonial intervention that they opposed.

In other words, the evolution of the Padmini legend in the nineteenth-century does not fit
into a neat pre-colonial / colonial / nationalist paradigm. In this instance, colonial intervention
cannot be seen as constituting a decisive rupture. Instead, the changes in political economy
introduced by colonialism brought about changes in social and discursive formations. The re-
formation of social groups and of literature in this period reveals negotiations, continuities as well as breaks, with pre-colonial histories.  

In terms of the re-formation of literature, the instance of nineteenth-century Bengal reveals the re-constitution of Bengali literary tradition, catalysed by the introduction of print and new classificatory practices borrowed from European precedents. The language and its literary tradition were mapped in terms of growing "print archives, authorial oeuvres and reading publics." This represented a transformation of the practice of authorship as well, from the pre-modern context in which texts were distributed between word and performance, and authorship was layered and sedimented. The new dominance of print led to a privileging of the printed form as decisively constitutive of 'literary' value, in a society that was predominantly non-literate. In colonial Bengal, one particular consequence of this reform of language and literary tradition was the exclusion of the oral forms and narratives circulating among a predominantly Muslim peasantry. The establishment of print capitalism also coincided with the spread of anti-colonial nationalism. The re-forming of literature in the nineteenth century must be understood, therefore, as inextricably linked with the nature and degree of its explicit politicisation.

The boundaries of religious identity

Much modern history of medieval India compartmentalizes its political history and cultural practices into watertight categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim.' Further, these two unified and homogenous communities are assumed to have been in perennial conflict with each other. As is well known by now, colonial historiography of the subcontinent has been one source for these modes of categorization. Thus Henry Elliott’s widely cited Preface to The History of India as Told by its Own Historians characterizes "the present Muhammadan kingdoms of India, and ... the character of the princes, and the condition of the people subject to their sway":

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33 I am indebted to Svati Joshi for helping me sharpen this formulation.
34 I am indebted here to Aijaz Ahmad’s powerful formulation of the history of transitions from pre-modern to modern ‘literatures.’ Ahmad 1993, 251-54.
The common people must have been plunged into the lowest depths of wretchedness and despondency. The few glimpses we have... 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...

It is a similar model of antagonistic cultures defined by unified religious communities of origin, that drives Aziz Ahmad's characterization of medieval narratives of the Turkish conquest of north India:

Muslim impact and rule in India generated two literary growths: a Muslim epic of conquest, and a Hindu epic of resistance and of psychological rejection. The two literary growths were planted in two different cultures; in two different languages, Persian and Hindi; in two mutually exclusive religious, cultural and historical attitudes confronting the other in aggressive hostility. Each of these two literary growths developed in mutual ignorance of the other...

The opposition to this view of two warring nations and cultures defined by primordial religious identities has come from secular historians who have insisted on the subcontinent's traditions of religious harmony. In such a view, elaborated in the writings of Tara Chand, for instance, texts like Jayasi's Padmavat and Kabir's Bijak are characterized as 'syncretist,' as fusing together elements from the dual disparate religious and cultural traditions of Hinduism and Islam. As Aditya Behl points out, such a notion of "religious syncretism" is inadequate, since it seeks to "explain overlaps between the retrospectively defined categories of 'Hindu' and...

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‘Muslim’ in premodern India” (Behl 2001, 17). Such a model of “religious syncretism” is often premised on static and ‘pure’ religious traditions, brought together in a populist hybrid, often for a ‘greater love.’ This has broadly been the modern context for the reception of Jayasi’s Padmavat with its Sufi (‘Muslim’) character, its largely ‘Hindu’ subject matter and its hostility to the Muslim Sultan of Delhi.

In his influential article, Aziz Ahmad is unable to fit Jayasi into his scheme of Muslim epic and Hindu counter-epic. Instead, he argues that Jayasi’s sympathies and his choice of Avadhi as literary medium are the result of his local context and affiliations, and his ignorance of the sophisticated narratives and traditions circulating in the urban elite culture. However, Ahmad’s analysis simply fails to explain the far more complex series of appropriations that Jayasi and other medieval Sufi poets writing in Avadhi, were engaged in. These poets demonstrate an easy mastery over Persian, Sanskrit and Apabhramsa narratives ranging from the courtly to popular folk traditions. In the sophistication of their own narratives and aesthetics, Jayasi and the other medieval Sufi poets also belie Ahmad’s assumption of rural ignorance of the Islamic high tradition. Again, the Avadhi Sufi poets demonstrate a similar mastery over multiple religious traditions, from Chishti or Shattari Sufi, to orthodox Sunni Islam, and from Vaishnavite and Nirgun bhakti to heterodox sects such as the Nathpanth.

Jayasi’s Sufi poem engages in a series of negotiations between diverse religious as well as political traditions. Tropes from these traditions are transformed when inserted into a Sufi tale of the triumph of ascetic and mystical love. Exploring these articulations helps to explain the structures of accommodation between two traditions that are now invariably thought of as unconnected and mutually hostile.

Beginning with Malik Muhammad Jayasi’s Padmavat, the multiple versions of the Padmavati narrative have always been implicated in mobilizing specific notions of religious identities. By the eighteenth century, Rajasthani narratives of the queen of Chitor articulated an emergent demonization of the conquering enemy in terms of his religious identity. Such
narratives were produced under royal patronage, or under chiefly clients of the king of Mevar. As such, these Rajasthani narratives echoed the strategies of Sisodia ideology in Mevar, as it sought to legitimize and glorify the local lineage and its opposition to Mughal imperialism.

Subsequently, Tod's account reads the story as exemplifying the general pattern of medieval Indian history, in which chivalrous Hindus defended their land against deceitful, idol-breaking Muslim invaders. In its depiction of the rulers of Delhi and their imperial designs on the Rajput kingdoms of Rajasthan, the Annals demonstrates continuities with its sources in regional Rajput traditions. At the same time, such a depiction also fed into and reinforced English reconstructions of medieval Indian history in particular, apparent for instance in Henry's Elliot’s Preface cited above.

Colonial Bengali narratives of Padmini invoke the same master-narrative of medieval Indian history as Tod. They read the story as exemplifying Rajput, 'Hindu' patriotism and valour in the face of 'Muslim' conquest. In colonial Bengal, an alternative tradition of narratives about Padmini was excluded in this refashioning. The Persian chronicle tradition was known to Bengali scholars at the turn of the nineteenth century. Equally, Saiyid Alaol's seventeenth-century Sufi adaptation of the Padmavat continued to be transmitted through the commissioning of manuscript copies, into the second half of the nineteenth century. Further, as K.R. Qanungo records, "In East Bengal every villager Hindu or Muslim, knows much more about Alauddin, Padmini and Hiraman (parrot) than his counterpart anywhere in India... This was... picked up from the highly popular Padyabati Pothi of the Bengali poet Alawal of the Arakan court." And yet, the dominant tradition of Padmini narratives as it evolved in colonial Bengal marginalized this earlier Bengali narrative tradition. The reformulation of new national identities along tacitly communal lines, was thus accomplished through selective appropriations from earlier traditions.

Such an examination of the multiple traditions of Padmini narratives as they were constituted at these distinct historical conjunctures, contradicts any assumption of primordial
religious affiliations. Instead, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the particular forms of political (and religious) mobilization at specific historical moments in specific regions.

The chapters

The four chapters in this dissertation explore the multiple versions of the Padmini story, as they emerged at four distinct historical conjunctures. Chapter 1 discusses Malik Muhammad Jayasi’s *Padmavat* (composed c. 1540) in Avadhi. The poem is seen as shaped by multiple determining contexts: Chishti Sufism, the emergent genre of the Sufi heroic romance as it appropriated from a range of contiguous medieval genres of narrative, and the patronage of a composite, upwardly mobile military elite, both Afghan and Rajput. Chapter 2 analyzes the shape of the Padmini narratives that emerged in late medieval Rajasthan. These narratives were produced both by bardic authors under royal patronage and Jain monks under Osval patronage. The dual contexts of patronage are explored, as articulated in divergent perspectives on the significance of chiefly heroism and kingly stature in the Padmini story. At the same time, both sets of narratives converged around the heroism of the virtuous queen that upheld the Rajput kingdom and moral order. Chapter 3 traces the role of James Tod in recasting the Chitor queen’s story. East India Company policy in the princely states of Rajasthan strengthened the Rajput kings at the expense of their chiefs. Tod’s account of the Padmini story in the *Annals* reflects these political premises clearly. As he recast the Padmini story from collating the Rajasthani sources available to him, his own premises and prejudices, shaped in the context of the European Enlightenment, Romanticism and Orientalism, were equally significant. Local Rajput elites and the Resident Agent of the East India Company thus collaborated to reconstruct the Rajput traditions of the past, including the Padmini story, to signify an uninterrupted succession of heroic kings. Chapter 4 tracks the transformations effected in the story as it emerged in colonial Bengali writers’ appropriations of Tod’s version. This process involved the forgetting of other traditions emerging from a context of Sultanate and Mughal rule in medieval Bengal, and the resultant cultural contiguities with north Indian cultures. The colonial Bengali versions of the Padmini
story emerged in the context of the comprehensive re-forming of social and cultural institutions and literary practices. The story of a heroic Rajput queen immolating herself rather than surrendering her honour to a lustful Muslim conqueror gained new significance in the context of emergent nationalism's construction of heroic traditions. At the same time, such recasting of literary language, practices and narratives further widened the schism in colonial Bengal between a largely Hindu elite and middle classes, and an overwhelmingly Muslim peasantry.

An examination of the story of Padmini that most modern Indians believe to have actually occurred reveals that this was the version that emerged in colonial Bengal. This dissertation traces the literary and historical genealogy of this modern story of Padmini. In doing so, it tracks only those stages in the evolution of the legend that are significant in mapping this particular trajectory. Thus, this dissertation does not consider other traditions of transmission for the Padmini legend that were equally significant for their audiences, but have been subsequently marginalized in history. These include Persian and later Urdu adaptations of the Padmavat until the early twentieth century, and largely faithful retellings of Tod in modern Rajasthani and English. The dominance of the modern Bengali version of the legend is as much a story of the historical and cultural retreat of alternative versions, especially the Urdu adaptations of the Padmavat. However, that is a story beyond the scope of this dissertation.