Chapter 1: Sufi tale and Rajput heroism in Avadh

Introduction

The first available text of the Padmini story is Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmavat* (composed c. 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 riches, were common to many literary traditions in medieval north India. The *Padmavat* belongs with a range of Sufi mystical adaptations of this formula, written in Avadhi between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This discussion of the story explores the evolution of the genre, as it appropriates and reconstitutes elements from contiguous genres and literary traditions. The form and content of the poem must be contextualized within larger literary formations. Such an exploration uncovers not only the aesthetic but also social and historical functions of literary genre. Equally, this analysis of the *Padmavat* traces the ideology of gender it articulates, and its relationship with the poem’s specific patriarchal contexts. These patriarchies are in turn implicated in wider historical contexts, as they uphold the specific caste and class relations defining a given political formation in sixteenth-century north India.

The history of the *Padmavat*'s manuscripts and their transmission indicates the generic horizons within which the poem was read in the medieval period. The manuscript traditions indicate that the *Padmavat* is clearly a Sufi poem, as has been apparent in one consistent strand in the history of its reception. As a Sufi ‘tale of love,’ it is deeply embedded and implicated in contemporary history and politics. The continuities between mystical theology and political and patriarchal practices can be seen in terms of the overlay between the two sets of codes. These codes are articulated, both within the poem and in its historical context, through a process of intricate, mutual negotiations. Continuities between these two sets of codes, as also between the poem’s Sufi initiate and lay elite audiences, are established by means of the continuities in mystical doctrines, political practice and patriarchal relations, between the various groups patronizing the production and transmission of such poems. The continued success of the poem,
as it was copied, performed, translated and transformed, can perhaps be explained in the last instance, in terms of its success in weaving these diverse codes and interests together.

The plot

The plot of the Padmavat in recounted here in some detail, because it differs substantially from the story of Padmini commonly known today.

Padmavati is the daughter of Gandharvsen, the king of Singhal. At the age of twelve, she is given a palace of her own and starts living there with her sakhiyan. She becomes staunch friends with the parrot Hiraman, learned in the shastras and shrewd. Padmavati and he read the Vedas together. The king resents the parrot’s proximity to his daughter and orders the bird killed. A terrified Hiraman bids farewell to Padmavati and flies away, leaving her in tears. In the forest, the parrot is trapped by a bird catcher (baheliya) and sold to a brahman, who takes him to Chitaur. Ratansen, the king of Chitaur, is impressed with Hiraman’s learning and buys him from the brahman.

The parrot praises Padmavati, the most beautiful of women, to his new master Ratansen. At the mere mention of her, the king burns with longing and the anguish of separation from her (viraha). In spite of the dissuasion of his mother and his first wife Nagmati, he becomes an ascetic and embarks on a quest to win this ideal woman for his wife. Word spreads that the king is setting off for Singhal to win a wife. His vassals and princes, sixteen thousand of them, also decide to accompany Ratansen. With Hiraman as his guide, he reaches the coast, crosses the seven seas, and arrives in Singhal with his associates. There, he begins penance in a Shiva temple in order to win Padmavati. Informed by the parrot of Ratansen’s coming, the princess goes to the temple, but the meditating king is unaware of her presence. She is offended and returns to the

Jayasi provides an allegorical gloss for the fortress kingdom by punning on its name, Chita-ur (the domain of the mind, chita and heart, ura). I use this spelling, closer phonetically to the Avadhi word, to distress in Mevar, I use its conventional name and spelling, Chitor.
palace, but begins to reciprocate his desire. Ratansen is desolate when he finds out that he has missed an opportunity to meet her. He builds a pyre and sets out to immolate himself "like a sati."

Shiva and Parvati intervene to quench this fire of 'desire' (kama) that threatens to burn down the entire world in its intensity. Ratansen is tested and found true by Parvati. On Shiva's advice, he then launches an attack on the fortress. He and his associates, still in the guise of ascetics, are captured and imprisoned by Gandharvsen. He is about to be crucified for being a mere ascetic and beggar and yet daring to love the princess, when his bard intervenes. His true identity as king of Chitaur is revealed. Gandharvsen marries his daughter to Ratansen. Further, his sixteen thousand associates also obtain sixteen thousand 'Padmini' women of Singhal as reward. Ratansen and Padmavati consummate their desire.

Meanwhile Nagmati burns in viraha for her missing husband, and laments her lot. The fire of her viraha threatens to burn down the world once again. At this point, a bird agrees to take her message to Singhal. Ratansen is reminded of home by the bird's message, and sets out on the return journey with new wife, her companions (sakhiyan) and his associates. Guilty of the sin of pride at his success in having obtained the most beautiful woman on earth, Ratansen is promptly punished by a storm on the seas. All their associates are killed and Padmavati is marooned on the island of Lacchmi the daughter of the ocean. Meanwhile, Ratansen floats elsewhere on a log in the ocean. Lacchmi takes pity on Padmavati's plight and sends her father the Ocean in search of Ratansen. When the drowning Ratansen is rescued by the Ocean, Lacchmi decides to test his love for Padmavati. She appears in front of him in the guise of Padmavati, but Ratansen is not fooled. The king and queen are reunited. The Ocean and his daughter reward them for their constancy, with fabulous gifts and safe return to the mainland. With the help of these gifts, Ratansen finances a new entourage at Puri, and they make the journey back to Chitaur. He has returned triumphant with a new wife as well as fabulous gifts.

On Ratansen's return, Nagmati complains bitterly to him about his having brought back a rival wife (saut). The king placates her by spending the night with her. This angers Padmavati,
who complains in turn. Ratansen now has to placate her in the same way. The two wives come to blows quite literally, and some degree of peace is established in the household only when Ratansen reprimands both his queens.

The brahman Raghav Chetan is granted a privileged position at the king’s court because of his special magical powers. Challenged by the other brahmans and scholars at the court, he wins the contest by using his magic to deceive the king. When his deception is found out the next day, he is banished by an angry king. Padmavati hears of the matter and summons him, as she wishes to give him her priceless bangle as a placatory gift. The brahman is stunned at her beauty and accepts the bangle before leaving Chitaur. He still plans vengeance against Ratansen, however. He goes to Delhi to try and gain an audience with Alauddin Khalji. Summoned to the sultan’s court, he is asked about the bangle he wears. He describes the incomparable beauty of Padmavati, a ‘Padmini’ woman. Such a woman is supreme amongst the four categories of women, and found only in Singhal. However, she is now present in the nearby kingdom of Chitaur.

Alauddin lays siege to Chitaur and demands the surrender of Padmavati. The king refuses, but offers to pay tribute to the sultan. The siege continues, and Alauddin finally suggests fresh terms to end the stalemate. Ratansen allows the Sultan to enter the fort and entertains him as a favoured guest. In doing so, he disregards the express warnings of his vassals Gora and Badal. Alauddin catches a glimpse of Padmavati by subterfuge. He then traps Ratansen into accompanying him to the foot of the fort, captures him and takes him back to Delhi. Padmavati approaches Gora and Badal, the two pillars of the kingdom, for help. They plan an expedition to Delhi to rescue their king who is being tortured in the sultan’s prison. Disguised as Padmavati and her sakhiyan, they manage to trick their way into the fortress and prison in Delhi, and free the king. On the journey back however, they are discovered. Gora is killed fighting like Abhimanyu as he holds the sultan’s army at bay, while Badal reaches Chitaur safely with the king.
Meanwhile Devpal, ruler of neighbouring Kumbhalner, takes advantage of Ratansen’s absence and sends a brahman woman as emissary to Padmavati. This Rajput king suggests that she give up Chitaur and become his queen instead. Padmavati rebuffs the emissary, and narrates the insult to Ratansen on his return. Ratansen sets off again to punish Devpal, promising to return before Alauddin’s forces reach Chitaur. Devpal and Ratansen kill each other in single combat. Nagmati and Padmavati commit Sati. When Alauddin’s army arrives, the Chitaur forces go out for their last battle, as their women commit jauhar. Alauddin acquires an empty fortress, cheated of victory even as Chitaur is conquered by Islam.

**Manuscripts of the Padmavat and issues of transmission**

Any analysis of a narrative composed before the advent of print must begin by examining the nature of manuscript traditions in which the work has been circulated and transmitted. This section begins by describing the major kinds of manuscript material for the *Padmavat*. Such material illuminates the modes of transmission and contexts of reception for the poem, in the three centuries before it made its way into print.² The section concludes with examining the kind of authorship the manuscript material points to.

The numerous manuscripts of the *Padmavat* display considerable variety in their script, size and appearance. In this diversity, they are comparable with the early manuscript traditions for the other Avadhi Sufi poems, notably the *Candrāyan* and the *Mīrgāvati*.³ In the case of the *Padmavat*, Mataprasad Gupta selects five primary manuscripts as the basis for his critical edition.⁴ All these manuscripts date from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. The earliest available source for the *Padmavat* is the Rampur manuscript, which was discovered shortly after Gupta published his critical edition. This manuscript is in Persian script, with Persian translations

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written under the Hindi words. It was copied in 1675 A.D in Amroha by Muhammad Shakir, pupil in the khanqah of 'Abdul Qadir Jilani. Even in the earliest stages of the textual tradition which can be reconstructed now, there are manuscripts in Persian (nasta'liq), nagari and kaithi scripts. Nasta'liq manuscripts form the main part of the oldest layer of the textual tradition. Numerous manuscripts have been found in the shorthand kaithi script (known for its use in Mughal administrative circles). However, these are mostly incomplete and written in a careless and fast hand. Some of these kaithi manuscripts seem to have been copied from nasta'liq originals. The kaithi manuscripts are not among the shortest copies. Even early manuscripts in this script contain large numbers of additional verses. Such variety in the manuscripts is not necessarily related to their age or distance from an original text. Rather, it suggests the loose structure of textual transmission, making it very difficult to trace a unified line of descent for the Padmavat manuscripts.

The first question to be asked is whether all the manuscripts were made with the purpose of rendering and copying an original text exactly. From stray references available in medieval sources (discussed below), it is clear that the works of the Sufi poets were transmitted not only by means of copied manuscripts, but also through performance by recitation. Attending a recitation was a common mode of access to such texts. Transmission through such performance would have introduced elements of interpretation, reception and other contextual influences into the textual corpus. This kind of oral transmission can also exist alongside a literary manuscript tradition and interfere with it in various ways.

The nature of the available Padmavat manuscripts indicates that both these processes were at work simultaneously. On the one hand the scrupulous attention to detail obvious in some manuscripts suggests literate and text-oriented contexts that emphasized accurate transmission of the text of the poem. On the other hand, the abundance of variants and spurious material accumulated in other manuscripts indicates a gradual accretion of interpretations that have shaped the present image of the text.

5 De Bruijn p.14
The variant material identified by Gupta in his critical edition is of two kinds mainly—
explanatory gloss, and additions elaborating on key descriptive passages already present in the
poem as it was recited or copied. The most striking instance of the first kind of interpretation is
the stanza providing an interpretive key to the poem and its characters. In this gloss, Chitaur
stands for the body, and Singhala for the heart. Padmini symbolizes wisdom, and the parrot
represents the guru who shows the way. Nagmati symbolizes the concerns of this world, the
messenger Raghava represents the devil and Alauddin stands for illusion (maya). This key stanza
occurs at different points in different manuscripts. In a manuscript dating to 1696 A.D., it occurs
just after the description of Ratansen’s departure from Chitaur on his quest for Padmavati (after
stanza 133). In another manuscript published in 1323 A.H., this allegorical key occurs twice, with
minor variations. It first appears after stanza 274 describing the marriage between Ratansen and
Padmavati, which concludes the first part of the story. The stanza then reappears at the end of the
narrative as a bridge to the epilogue, where the poet presents the moral lessons of the story. Each
of these junctures offers a performer reciting the poem a suitable opportunity to communicate
with his audience and interpret the story he is telling. One of the variants of the allegorical stanza
refers explicitly to the tale being recited in this fashion. Similar explanatory remarks can also be
found in colophons of various manuscripts. In these dual modes of transmission through
performance by recitation as well as through the production of manuscripts, the remarks added at
strategic places in the text could have merged with it. Later scribes could then have copied such
annotations as if they were intrinsic parts of the poem.

Variants of the second kind, namely insertions of material within the story, are much
harder to detect. The form of the Padmavat however determines in its own way the nature of such
additions. The relative coherence of the poem with its cogent plot limits the scope for deviation.
However, the caupai-doha metrical scheme of the poem is flexible enough to allow insertions of
new material, since stanzas are not linked in a formal or metrical way to preceding or following
units. Therefore, additions often take the form of completely new units within the thematic and
narrative structure of the poem. Thus Gupta identifies four interpolated stanzas that extend the description of the battle between Gora and Alauddin’s warriors. Such addition to a popular motif or a favourite scene in the story is again a technique typical of oral performance. In this respect, the extensions of the Padmavat are similar to the construction and elaboration of oral stories in performance traditions.

To sum up, the existence of numerous manuscripts of the Padmavat points to the popularity of the poem. The various scripts employed in these manuscripts point to specific contexts of reception. The nature of the manuscripts suggests that faithful transmission of ‘accurate’ texts by scribes coexisted with transmission through performance by recitation. The scribal transmission was very likely to have been affected by the recited performances.

Transmission by performance also has implications for the nature of additions to the poem. These features of the manuscript material make it impossible to reconstruct an authentic original text, composed entirely by a single author.

And yet, the Padmavat differs significantly in its composition from two other major kinds of medieval Hindi ‘literary’ traditions. In the case of medieval devotional verse, there are instances where the number of stanzas and even poems under the name of a certain poet such as Kabir or Suradasa, proliferated, both in recitation and in manuscripts, well after the poet’s death. It is therefore appropriate to consider these collections as multiply authored. On the other hand, oral performance traditions from largely ‘folk’ contexts often flourished without written texts for long periods. Such performance traditions were composed and transmitted from one teller to the next, from one generation to the next, even from one region to another. These oral traditions imply a different kind of multiple authorship where every performance situation generates a fresh instance of authorship.

The manuscripts of the Padmavat point to a process different from either of these major ‘literary’ traditions. As suggested above, the existence of a tradition of recited performances may have introduced specific elements of interpretation and elaboration in specific contexts. But the

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6 Mataprasad Gupta, Jayasi Granthavali, p.632, 637a-ee
idea of an original poem attributed to a specific poet at a given point in the past has also always survived. This can be seen from the numerous manuscripts that are carefully copied and profusely illustrated, with their attention to detail and accuracy.

**The poet in history**

This section presents the information available about the author of the *Padmavat*, and suggests a connection between the construction of this author-figure and the reception of the poem. The stories available about the life of Malik Muhammad Jayasi retrospectively construct the writer as a Sufi *pir*. The section concludes by identifying the distinct traditions of Sufi practices implied by the spiritual lineages in which Jayasi locates himself.

There has been much debate about the dates of the poet’s birth and death. However, the dates of composition Jayasi provides within his poems seem more reliable. In the *Akhiri Kalam* Jayasi states that he wrote it in 936 A.H. (1529-30), and that Babur was the current ruler. Similarly in the *Padmavat*, he provides the date of 947 A.H. (1540-41), and begins the poem with a eulogy to Sher Shah the Sultan of Delhi. Although some manuscripts of the *Padmavat* transcribe 947 A.H., *nau sai sain‘aša*, as *nau sai sattäša*, 927 A.H. (1520), the reference to Sher Shah as the ruler of Delhi would rule out this earlier date of composition.

Ghulam Mu‘inuddin Abdullah Khweshgi’s *Ma‘arīju’l-Wilayat*, a collection of biographies of Indian Sufis written in 1682-83, is the earliest *taźkira* to refer to Jayasi, and list various works ascribed to him. Referring especially to his knowledge of the traditions of al-Hind, the *Ma‘arīju’l-Wilayat* calls Jayasi *muhaqqiq-i hindī*, ‘knower of the truth of al-Hind’. Oral stories collected by twentieth-century scholars of medieval Hindi literature, indicate how the poet is now remembered. The poet’s given name was Muhammad, and Malik was the family name. According to S.A.M.M. Jayasi, many of the first Maliks in India were employed by Alauddin Khalji in the late thirteenth century. The name Jayasi simply means ‘of Jayas’. In the fifteenth

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and sixteenth centuries, Jayas was an important town in the Sharqi sultanate of Jaunpur, as well as a Sufi centre. There is some debate about whether the poet was born in Jayas, or arrived there to complete his religious education.

All the legends concur that he lost his father when he was very young, and his mother just a few years later. It is believed that he was looked after by groups of wandering ascetics. He may have lost one eye, and had a disfigured face, because of a smallpox attack. According to the legends, he married and lived as a peasant. He was blessed with seven sons and lived a simple and pious life. It is said that he mocked one of his pirs’ addiction to opium in a work called the Posti-nama, and as punishment lost all his sons when the roof of his house collapsed. After this loss he devoted himself completely to the religious life, first at Jayas and then at nearby Amethi. Some legends narrate that the local Raja Ramsingh invited him to Amethi town. The king had heard a begging ascetic recite the bārahmāsā from the Padmavat and was curious about the creator of the verses. Another legend claims that Jayasi’s blessings helped the king beget two sons. Other modern editors have claimed that he attended the court of Jagat Deva, an ally of Sher Shah. However, it has not been possible to substantiate either of these courtly affiliations. Nor is proof available for yet another tradition that he recited his poetry in the court of Sher Shah.

According to the legends, he spent the last years of his life in meditation in the forests near Amethi. He died when he had turned himself into a tiger, as he was wont to do, and was shot accidentally by the king’s hunters. The king ordained that his memory should be kept alive by burning a lamp at the tomb and by recitations of the Koran.

These legends about the life of Malik Muhammad Jayasi have gradually constructed the stock figure of a Sufi pir. The legendary figure of the poet is endowed with all the conventional attributes of such 'saintliness' in the hagiographical tradition. Such attributes include the practice

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of meditation, the power to change form and the power to bestow blessings such as children. It must be recollected here that the earliest tazkirat mentioning Jayasi dates back to the late seventeenth century. In other words, the figure of Jayasi enters the hagiographical tradition a full century and a half after his death. That this 'sanctification' was a later phenomenon is also borne out by the absence of the poet from any of the Sufi literature or historical chronicles of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Chandrabali Pandey mentions a small fair held near the poet's grave every Thursday in the 1930s. In the late twentieth century, Sanjay Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi visited the grave of the famous Sufi poet in the family's election constituency. Subsequently, permanent structures have been constructed around the grave. These events suggest that this process of sanctification continues to the present day, and the grave has become a local pilgrimage centre.\textsuperscript{14}

The proliferation of legends about Jayasi's life may have been triggered partly by the paucity of biographical information. The poet offers more information, however, about his spiritual lineage. Both the Akharāvat (stanzas 26-27) and the Padmavat (stanzas 18-20) mention two distinct lines of Sufi saints through whom he has received instruction or inspiration. The first is the line of Saiyad Asraph, better known as Mir Saiyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani, one of the most prominent saints of the Chishti silsilah in the Jaunpur sultanate. As Millis points out, Simnani died in 840 A.H. (1436-37), several decades before Jayasi was born. He is thus clearly invoked as an inspirational figure. Jayasi goes on to mention three other Shaikhs in the 'house' of Simnani (unha ghar). There is no concrete information available about these three figures, Shaikh Haji or Shaikh Ahmad, Shaikh Mubarak and Shaikh Kamal. Local tradition in Jayas holds that Jayasi's instructor was Shaikh Mubarak Shah Bodale.\textsuperscript{15} De Bruijn also points out that the dargah

\textsuperscript{13} John Millis surveys all the available evidence at greater length, and sums up the scholarly consensus on the poet. See Millis 1984, 16-40. Also see de Bruijn 1986, 35-43.
\textsuperscript{14} I am indebted to Dr. Mohammad Arif, Department of History, Banaras Hindu University, for this information.
\textsuperscript{15} Millis 1984, 36.
of Simnani had branched out to Rasulpur, Jayas and Basorhi after his death. Each of these centres was now headed by a different descendant. It is thus more than likely that Jayasi’s pir was one of Simnani’s descendants at Jayas, in this sense literally from Simnani’s ‘house’.\textsuperscript{16}

The other lineage Jayasi mentions is that of Saiyid Muhammad of Jaunpur (1443-1505), who proclaimed himself mahdi in 1495-96. The line of descent Jayasi traces in this Mahdawi tradition, from Saiyid Muhammad through Alahhadad and Shaikh Burhan, is corroborated by several tazkirat in the hagiographic tradition.\textsuperscript{17} The Shaikh Burhan whom Jayasi acknowledges as his immediate preceptor, was better known in history as Shaikh Burhanuddin Ansari of Kalpi. The Shaikh is mentioned in both Badayuni and in Abu’l Fazl’s \textit{A‘in-i-Akbari}, as well as in Ghausi Shattari’s \textit{Gulzar-i-Abrar}. He was well known both for the eloquence of his discourses and the power of his mystical poetry, composed in Hindi. “His speech was heart-ravishing and his discourses excited profound emotional passions. He mostly recited Hindi verses.” According to another Sufi commentator, “His Hindi \textit{dohras} are very popular and are not lacking in ecstatic emotion and inspiration.”\textsuperscript{18} Thus Jayasi’s invocation of this Mahdawi Sufi preceptor suggests a combination of spiritual instruction and poetic precedent for his own writings.

To sum up, there is very little concrete information available about the life of Jayasi, other than the stray details that he provides in his poems. The spiritual lineages he mentions locate him firmly in a historical tradition of Sufi practices. The question of his two lineages is dealt with later in this chapter. More than a century after his death, the poet enters the Sufi hagiographic literature and is constructed as a Sufi \textit{pir}. This process has continued until present

\textsuperscript{16} De Bruijn 1996, 54.
times. The retrospective canonization points to one context of continuing reception for the
Padmavat, within Sufi traditions.

Reception and questions of genre

This section begins by considering the language of the Padmavat. The information
available about the transmission and reception of the Padmavat is then recounted. Translations
and adaptations of Jayasi's poem also offer information about other poems perceived by medieval
audiences to belong to the same genre. Accounts of the reception of other such poems in Avadhi
point to the definition of this genre as 'tales of love,' which were also read as Sufi mystical
narratives. The available evidence further points to three specific social contexts of reception and
transmission, courtly, mercantile, and the medieval Sufi institutional network. This section
concludes by exploring the kinds of interpretation generated by these social contexts of reception.

Modern linguists classify the language of these Sufi romances as Avadhi, the dialect
spoken around Allahabad, Ayodhya and Jaunpur. As Vasudha Dalmia points out, however, in the
Sultanate and Mughal periods the terms used to distinguish the entire indigenous group of
northern languages from Persian were Hindi, Hindui and Hindavi. Further, "when its distinction
from Sanskrit was to be emphasized, the poets who composed in the language spoke of it as
bhāya / bhākha (the spoken tongue)."¹⁹ This three-tier nomenclature for the language of the
Padmavat points to a regional affiliation with modern east Uttar Pradesh, as well as a
simultaneous differentiation from two classical languages and their literary traditions – Persian
and Sanskrit. For Sufi poets such as Jayasi, therefore, the choice of linguistic medium already
presented issues of regional and cultural affiliations.

Information about the scribes, patrons or dates of composition is not available for many
of the Padmavat manuscripts, as for other ancient and medieval narratives. This is often because
such information is conventionally provided either at the beginning of the manuscript or at the

¹⁹ Vasudha Dalmia, The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Hariscandra and Nineteenth-
century Banaras (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 152.
end, on the folios most likely to be damaged or lost in the physical transmission of manuscripts.

Manuscripts such as the ones in Persian made by Rahimdad Khan of Shahjahanpur (in 1109 A.H.) and by Ishwarprasad, resident of Ganga Gauroni (in 1195 A.H.) are written carefully, but indicate interventions and emendations in the text. Manuscripts such as the one in Persian made by Abdullah Ahmad Khan Muhammad of Gorakhpur, for one Dinanath (in 1107 A.H.), or in kaitthi by Jhabbulal Kayasth, resident of Sultanganj, Bihar (in 1785) display fewer scribal interventions in the text. These four manuscripts do not seem to have been produced within Sufi institutional networks of transmission. They indicate that the poem continued to circulate in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, in a variety of literate, text-oriented, and apparently lay contexts, in the three centuries before its entry into print.

On the other hand, the Rampur manuscript, made in 1675 by Muhammad Shakir, a Sufi Shaikh from Amroha, takes great care in transcribing the Avadhi text into Persian script. It also provides Persian translations inserted between the lines of Avadhi text. Shakir adds a prefatory paragraph to the manuscript, about an incident from the life of Nizamuddin Auliya. He cites as his source for this incident the Akbār al-Akhyār, the well-known seventeenth century compendium of the lives of Sufi shaikhs (by Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dehlavi). Shakir’s manuscript indicates that the Sufi institutional context was significant not only in the transmission of the poem, but also in its interpretation. In such a reading, for instance, the proposed impalement of the jogi Ratansen by the king Gandharvsen would be one of the climactic points in the narrative. Such a reading inserts the Padmavat within a hagiographic tradition going back to the martyrdom of Al-Hallaj, the famous ninth-century Sufi of Baghdad.

21 As distinct from 'mystical' and 'religious'. This is the sense in which the term is used throughout this chapter.
22 Shantanu Phukan's comments on the Shakir manuscript, in "None Mad as a Hindu Woman: Contesting Communal Readings of Padmavat," in Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East XVI (1996), 1:41-54.
The process of interpretation and reinterpretation indicated by the manuscripts of the Padmavat, is extended by the translations and adaptations of the poem in various languages. The first known adaptation is the Pema Nama in Dakhkini, composed by Hansa in 999 A.H. (1592) at the court of Ibrahim Shah in Bijapur. Both text and illustrations in the manuscript indicate that Hansa retains the perceived mystical symbolism of Jayasi’s poem. Modern scholars have been able to trace twelve versions in Persian, the best known of which are Mulla Abdul Shakur or Shaikh Shukrullah (Bazmi’s) Rat-Padam, composed in Gujarat in 1028 A.H. (1618-19), and ‘Aqil Khan Razi’s Sham wa Parwânah, composed in Delhi in 1658. These two adaptations indicate the range of possible readings for Jayasi’s poem. Bazmi’s poem follows the plot of the Padmavat closely enough, but does not seem to ascribe any deeper symbolism to the characters and events. By contrast, Razi rose to become the governor of the Red Fort in Delhi under Aurangzeb, and was remembered by his biographers for his erudition in Sufi doctrine and his association with the contemporary Shattari Sufi Shaikh Burhanuddin Raz-i Ilahi. In his adaptation he re-inserts the Padmavat into the context of Sufi mystical symbolism. These adaptations indicate that like the manuscripts of the Padmavat, its translations and adaptations also display the possibility of interpreting the poem in both mystical as well as lay contexts.

The contexts of translation and adaptation also suggest a larger genre of medieval narratives within which Jayasi’s poem was often read. For instance, the Padmavat was not the only Avadhi poem to be translated into Dakhkini. Nusrati’s Gulshan-i Ishq (composed in 1657) adapted the Madhumalati of Shaikh Manjhan Shattari (composed around 1545 in Chunar), another Avadhi romance produced and read within Sufi contexts. ‘Aqil Khan Razi also

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26 Phukan 1996, 47-51.
translated the Madhumalati into Persian in 1655, under the title Mihr u Māh. These are not the only Avadhi poems that were read as deploying, overtly or covertly, schemes of Sufi mystical symbolism.

Another medieval reader’s extension of the genre is recorded in the autobiography of an early seventeenth-century Jain merchant of Agra and Jaunpur, Banarsidas, who spoke in the same breath of the Madhumalati and Qutban’s Mīrgāvati (composed around 1503 in Jaunpur):

Meanwhile at Agra I was trying to squeeze a living out of the little I had left. I sold my silver and gold and every little thing I still had, and was finally left with no more than a few coins. I stopped visiting the market-place; in fact, I stopped moving out of my room at all.

But I spent my evening singing and reciting poems. A small group of about ten people used to visit me regularly and to them I sang Madhumalati and Mīrgāvati, two books of love. As I would read in the evening, ten or twenty men would come and visit me. I would sing and talk, and my visitors would bless me on arising.

Incidentally, this account also confirms that poems like the Padmavat were simultaneously read from manuscripts and recited with commentary, as de Bruijn deduces from the nature of the manuscript material. Banarsidas does not refer, however, to any mystical import the poems may have had for him, he only calls them pothi udār, books of love in a very broad sense.

Badaoni indicates that a fourth Avadhi poem, Maulana Dawud’s Cindavan, composed between 1370 and 1380 in Dalmau, was received by some medieval audiences within similar interpretative parameters:

In the year 772 A.H. (1370), Khan-i-Jahan the Vazir died, and his son Juna Shah obtained that title; and the book Candaban which is a Masnavi in the Hindi language relating the loves

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28 Cited in de Bruijn 1996, 318.
29 Mukund Lath translates the original word, pothi, as ‘narrative ballads’. I prefer the term ‘books’, although pothi would also suggest manuscript leaves bound together. See Banarsidas, Ardha-kathānaka, trans. and ed. Mukund Lath (Jaipur: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan, 1981), 49.
30 I have again chosen to translate the Hindi original directly, instead of Lath’s version, “My visitors greatly enjoyed my singing and conversation.” Lath 1981, 49.
of Lurak and Canda, a lover and his mistress, a very graphic work, was put into verse in his honour by Maulana Da'ud. There is no need for me to praise it because of its great fame in that country, and Makhduum Shaikh Taqiu'd-Din Waiz Rabbani, used to read some occasional poems of his from the pulpit, and the people used to be strangely influenced by hearing them, and when certain learned men of that time asked the Shaikh saying, what is the reason for this Hindi Masnavi being selected? He answered, the whole of it is divine truth and pleasing in subject, worthy of the ecstatic contemplation of devout lovers, and conformable to the interpretation of some of the Ayats of the Qur'an, and the sweet singers of Hindustan. Moreover by its public recitation human hearts are taken captive.  

Between them Badaoni and Banarsidas, writing at roughly the same time (in 1615 and 1641 respectively) point out yet again the dual contexts of interpretation for poems such as these. They could be read for lay entertainment, but also for mystical instruction and appreciation. What is common to all of these medieval perceptions, however, is the understanding that these poems are tales of love.

These parameters of meaning are suggested in broad outline by Jayasi at the outset of his story: "Of jewels and precious stones I spake; sweet, with the wine of love, priceless" [23].

The poem is thus about the love of Ratansen and Padmavati, of the obstacles confronting that love, and of its outcome. The above evidence indicates that as the story of a special love, the Padmavat is recognized by at least some medieval readers as belonging to a distinct genre of love.

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32 The Avadhi original, *ratan padarath*, literally gems and the precious metals in which they are encased, is also used by Jayasi throughout the poem, as a pun on the names of Ratansen and Padmavati.
33 Square brackets refer to stanza numbers. The only complete translation available in English is by A. G. Shirreff, *Padmavati* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1944). This is a prose rendering in antiquated English. It is also inaccurate in places, on account of its outdated understanding of the poem's historical context. I have therefore found it necessary to resort to my own rough translations at places, although I remain indebted to Shirreff at many places. This dissertation also uses translations of select stanzas by de Bruijn (1996) and Behl (2001), acknowledged at the appropriate places.
stories, the Sufi 'tale of love.' These verse narratives were composed between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries in northern India and the Deccan. Other works in this generic tradition include Usman’s Chitravali (1613) and Sheikh Nabi’s Gyandeep (1619) in Avadhi; and Mulla Wajihi’s Quth-Mushtari (1610) and Sabras (1636), Gawwasi’s Saif-ul-Mulk wa Wadi-ul-Jamal (1619) and Mukimi’s Candarbadan wa Māhiyar (1627) in Dakhkini.

The medieval evidence cited here also indicates the contexts in which these poems were produced, as well as received. Badaoni refers to the patronage of Maulana Da’ud by Firoz Shah Tughlaq’s vazir, Juna Shah. Patronage of poets was not restricted to the aristocracy alone, royal courts represented higher avenues of promotion. Thus, the Afsana-i-Shahan, a chronicle of the Afghan kings, refers to similar patronage of poets.

Wherever he [Islam Shah] happened to be, he kept himself surrounded by accomplished scholars and poets . . . . Men like Mir Sayyid Manjhan the author of Madhumalati, Shah Muhammad Farmuli and his younger brother, Moosan, Surdas and many other learned scholars and poets assembled there and poems in Arabic, Persian and Hindi were recited. Banarsidas’s autobiography further points to a widespread mercantile culture of patronage for music and poetry:

Every day, unfailingly, I visited him at his house but never found the Sahu in a mood to discuss accounts. He was a spoil, rich man, revelling in his possessions. Whenever I went to him I saw him surrounded by musicians. Famous singers sang before him with wonderful art . . . poets, bards, and minstrels stood before him reciting eulogies in his praise. From morning till evening he was in the midst of a dazzling exhibition of affluence . . .

34 A literal translation of the term the poems use to describe themselves, piram kahani. For instances, see Mataprasad Gupta, ed. Cândāyan: Dādā krt Pratham Hindi Sufi Prem Kāvyā, ? (Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 1996), stanza 172 and Padmavat, stanza 23.
36 Lath 1981, 79.
In addition to these contexts of patronage, reception and transmission by the laity, these poems were also transmitted through the Sufi institutional network, within which they were read consistently as exemplary mystical narratives. Badaoni’s Shaikh Rabbani, preaching with the help of the Candavan, was a respected Sufi. Further, Jayasi and his poems were known across a substantial region of the subcontinent. The seventeenth-century Ma’ariju’l-Wilayat was written at Qasur (near Lahore). The Bengali Sufi poet Alaol produced a translation around 1660 at the Arakan court in the east (near modern Chittagong). As indicated above, adaptations also emerged in the Dakhini sultanates in the south. Such evidence confirms the extensive dissemination of these ‘tales of love’ through the Sufi institutional network.

To sum up, the manuscripts and the spate of translations and adaptations indicate that poems like the Padmavat were read both for their recognizable mystical content and as lay romances without any spiritual symbolism. The medieval accounts of Badaoni and Banarsidas also point to these parallel and often alternative systems of interpretation, lay and mystical, for poems in the genre. However, these two contexts of reception, social and literary, lay and mystical, were not mutually exclusive.

It is to be expected that the Sufi institutional network invariably generated mystical interpretations, and transmitted these poems as the bearers of a spiritual message. But the lay contexts of patronage and transmission did not always imply exclusively non-mystical interpretations. Thus, it was in their capacity as Sufi poets that Maulana Da’ud and Shaikh Manjhan were patronized by Juna Shah and Islam Shah respectively. Similarly, one of the most influential Sufi adaptations of Jayasi’s poem was produced by a Mughal courtier under Aurangzeb, ‘Aqil Khan Razi. In other words, Sufi modes of transmission implied Sufi modes of interpretation, but lay contexts of transmission certainly did not generate only non-mystical interpretations.
A ‘tale of love’

This section deals with the reception of the Padmavat as a love-story without perceived mystical content. As indicated above, such a reading is suggested by Banarsidas’s comments on the Madhumalati and Mirgavati. Such secular love stories are mentioned at various points within the Padmavat itself. For example, Ratansen invokes a whole list of characters from such medieval narratives in describing his viraha as a pining lover. These stories are conspicuous in their non-Sufi moorings and go back to story-collections such as the Kathasaritsagara. The Avadhi ‘tales of love’ also appropriate the conventions of other medieval genres as well, such as the Persian dastan tradition. The section concludes by exploring the social constituencies that the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ tapped into, by invoking and appropriating the generic conventions of these diverse genres of medieval north Indian narrative.

As de Bruijn points out, the motif of a king from Northern India making the journey to Sinhaladvipa in order to marry a southern princess, appears in various forms of ancient and medieval Indian narrative. In the epic traditions, such marriage clearly has a special meaning. It completes the warrior / king / hero’s domination over the subcontinent and fulfils the ideal of the cakravartin. The motif is repeated in the Udayana story in Harsha’s Ratnavali, in which the king desires to become the ideal cakravartin by marrying a princess from the south. The Kathasaritsagara also features a princess Padmavati from Magadha, in connection with the same narrative and political trope of ideal kingship.37

Other narrative tropes from the Kathasaritsagara figure in a number of medieval love-stories. For example, the hero and heroine often fall in love through encountering each other in a dream, or on hearing of each other. The heroine is often located on an island (Malayadvip, Sinhaladvip, Ratnadvip, and so on). In these instances the hero’s journey to obtain her involves a sea voyage, shipwreck and the escape of the hero. The hero frequently dons the guise of a

37 de Bruijn 1996, 80.
brahman, mendicant or ascetic, as he sets out from his kingdom in pursuit of the princess. The first meeting between the hero and heroine often occurs in a temple, or in a garden of flowers. As the hero sets out on his journey to obtain the heroine, he often meets more beautiful princesses, who are captives of a demon or tyrant. The hero frees such beauties, and often marries them en route to the main object of his quest. Final success often comes with the help of a siddha, or a god, or a vetala.

It is clear that the Avadhi 'tales of love' including the Padmavat appropriate a series of tropes from these narrative traditions, prevalent on the subcontinent from late ancient times. The production of similar narratives in medieval India, such as the Mādhavānī Kāmakandolī or stories about Usha and Aniruddha or Nala and Damayanti, indicates that they continued to circulate in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the Avadhi 'tales of love' were being composed. The Padmavat clearly indicates that it is to be read against the background of these narratives, when Ratansen the pining lover compares his suffering to that of the lovers in these three stories. The specific reference to this narrative tradition allows Jayasi to address an audience larger than a Sufi initiate audience. The choice of Avadhi as language also indicates a more direct address to an audience larger than that for the Persian courtly tradition. So does Jayasi's invocation of systems of classification from medieval Sanskrit texts. Thus, Raghav Chetan the brahman educates Alauddin with a lengthy description of the four kinds of women, among whom the padmini woman is the most exalted. This system of classification was widespread in medieval Sanskrit texts on erotics. The enjoyment of Banarsidas and his twenty friends proves that the Avadhi 'tales of love' were successful in achieving their intention of addressing this larger, lay medieval audience.

Ganpati Chandra Gupta argues that the presence of these narrative conventions in the Avadhi 'tales of love' proves that they owe very little to 'foreign' forms and traditions. Gupta

holds that these poems are therefore to be regarded as entirely indigenous, even Sanskritic and Hindu, in their moorings. For Gupta, the overt Islamic content of the poems is thus incidental, rather than a definitive attribute of these poems. A reading such as this, which enjoys some currency among scholars of Hindi literature, wilfully ignores the evidence of the Sufi affiliations of these poets, and the reception of their poems in Sufi institutional contexts. It is also blind to the poems' appropriations of tropes from other medieval narrative traditions.

The testimony from Badaoni's Shaikh Rabbani indicates that at least some medieval readers recognized these other generic horizons. Rabbani calls the Candayan a masnavi. The Persian verse form of the masnavi would invariably have suggested the genres of narrative in which it was used, the love-story and the heroic dastan. Examples of love stories that would have been very familiar to subcontinental readers familiar with Sultanate courtly culture and its Persian literary traditions, are the masnavis of Amir Khusrau, including the Ashiga (about the love of Khizr Khan and Dewal Rani), the Shirin-wa-Khusraw and the Majnun-wa-Leyla. The most famous example of the dastan known to this medieval audience, is Firdausi's Shah-nameh, completed in Persia around 1000 A.D., and known in India from at least the thirteenth century onwards. The medieval chronicles mention various princes and kings as having been familiar with the Shahnameh and the Iskandarnameh, as well as with love stories such as Nizami's Khamseh. Shaikh Rabbani thus places the Candayan in these narrative traditions, even as he is concerned to emphasize their mystical import.

I wish to suggest that medieval readers like Shaikh Rabbani and Badaoni, who were familiar with the Persian literary tradition, would recognize similar generic horizons in the

39 Couplets with internal rhyme, but with changes in rhyme between one couplet and the next, thus offering the metrical possibility of any number of couplets in narratives of varying lengths. See "Masnavi-Urdh" in The Encyclopedia of Indian Literature, vol. III, Chief Editor Amaresh Datta (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, n.d.), 2625-28.
40 This is not to suggest any direct connection of borrowing or imitation between Amir Khusrau and the Avadhí poets.
41 See Elliott and Dowson 1996, 3:110 for Balban's son, and 3:236 for Muhammad bin Tughlaq; see 4:311 for Farid Khan, later Sher Shah.
Avadhi 'tales of love' as well. Thus the characteristic structure of these 'tales of love,' which involves the hero encountering several obstacles or adventures before he can obtain his beloved, would also locate works like the Padmavat in the tradition of the Persian dastans. Frances Pritchett defines the dastans as tales of heroic romance and adventure – stories about gallant princes and their encounters with evil kings, enemy champions, demons, magicians, Jinns, divine emissaries, tricky secret agents and beautiful princesses who might be human or of the Pari ('fairy') race. Such stories are hero-centred; "women ... are often only the focus for the adventures of the male characters. They are the princesses who make the hero go to faraway lands to capture them." Elements of this structure can be seen in the Padmavat, but it is the Mirgavati that is closest to the form of the dastan. In his pursuit of Mirgavati the protagonist Rajkunwar rescues another maiden Rupmani from a demon's clutches and marries her. He then escapes from the clutches of a cannibalistic goatherd by blinding him. And he nearly has another adventure with a demon. In Jayasi's appropriation of dastan tropes, a Sufi allegory of spiritual quest controls more tightly the number and nature of adventures Ratansen faces. But the example of the Mirgavati, with its potentially endless number of adventures, shows how these Avadhi 'tales of love' successfully combined the horizons and attributes of several narrative traditions.

Pritchett argues that "dastans had no official religious or social purpose within their culture, and therefore no externally prescribed form. They existed for the sheer pleasure of the storytelling experience ... This reading accounts for the aesthetic of the dastan's potentially endless narrative proliferation. However, it is not entirely accurate about the dastan's social function. The dastans may not have had any official purpose. They do nevertheless articulate a

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43 de Bruijn 1996, 113.
particular world-view in which kings and queens, the “battlefield and the elegant courtly life,” define certain normative, courtly values.

The Avadhi Sufi ‘tales of love’ point to the fact that literary borrowing is not merely a matter of narrative appropriations. It is also a process of negotiation with the social horizons of the ‘original’ – in this case, with those of the dastan. It is possible to suggest that these poets use the tropes of the dastan avowedly, with an eye to the composition of their audience. This audience included, besides Sufi initiates and devotees at khanqahs and dargahs. It also extended to readers familiar with Indic as well as Persianate narrative traditions, who made up the composite feudal elite that provided patronage for literary production.

Poets like Jayasi with avowed Sufi affiliations, tailored these lay genres to the requirements of their own Sufi metaphysic. For example, the Sufi exaltation of the heroine to almost transcendent status – in the Mirgavati she actually is an achari (apsara) with magical powers – coincides with the dastan’s frequent location of its beautiful women in the realm of the supernatural. The progress of the hero through several adventures involved tests of skill, strength and intelligence in both Indic and Persianate genres of heroic romance. This heroic quest is made symbolic for a spiritual journey, testing spiritual assets, within a Sufi frame of reference.

This section has already examined the ways in which these ‘tales of love’ are addressed to the narrative horizons of the feudal elite that patronized literary production. To sum up, the poems in the genre negotiated and re-appropriated the ethic of the inherited forms associated with these social groups, such as the Persian dastan and the Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsa romances.

A Sufi ‘tale of love’

The next section explores the ways in which the Padmavat and its companion poems communicate their Sufi content and message. Internal evidence from these poems is used to reconstruct this message. The sustained similarities between the poems suggest that they can be

45Pritchett 1991, 1.
read as sharing a common repertoire of Sufi symbols and symbolisms. As just indicated, the reception of the poems indicates that medieval audiences did in fact consider these poems to belong to the same genre. This section concludes by critiquing the premises underlying the dominant modern trend in interpreting the Sufi content of the poem.

All four Avadhi poems begin with the praise of Allah, His Creation, Muhammad and the first four caliphs and the ruler of the land. The first stanza in the Padmavat praises the Creator thus:

In the beginning I remember the sole Creator,
Who gave us life and made the universe.
He made manifest the very first light.
For love of the Prophet, he made the heavens.
He made fire, air, water and earth.
He made all the colours that are.
He made earth, heaven, and the nether world.
He made all the kinds of living beings.
He made the seven continents and Brahma's cosmos.
He made the fourteen levels of creation.
He made the day and the sun, the night and the moon.
He made the constellations and their lines of stars.
He made the sunshine, the cold, and the shade.
He made the clouds and the lightning in them.

He is the One who made this entire creation, and nothing compares with him:
Such a Name do I first invoke, and then I start my fathomless tale. [Padmavat 1].

The indebtedness of these Sufi poems for their prefaces to the Persian masnavis, has been widely recognized. See for example Shyam Manohar Pandey, Madhyayagin Premakhyan (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1982).

Behl's translation, (2001), Chapter 1, 15.
As Aditya Behl points out, Jayasi forges "a set of terms within Hindavi to express the theology of Allah, who is formless and unqualified, existing in a space outside this visible world" (Behl 2001, Chapter 1, 16).

The Avadhi poems then trace the spiritual ancestry of the poet that culminates with his *pir*. In other words, the specific Sufi context is clearly stated before beginning the story. The audience is thus instructed to keep a particular Sufi frame of reference in mind, while comprehending the poem. Again, as Behl points out, the first poets of these Avadhi romances were Sufis owing allegiance to the Chishti order, that stood for a particular kind of theology and spiritual discipline:

At the core of their mystical activity and contemplation was the transcendental monotheism of belief in Allah, the invisible center, cause, and creator of the visible world. In order to achieve closeness to Allah, the Chishtis aimed at transforming themselves through ascetic practice, which involved a hard regimen of spiritual exercises, fasting, and extra prayers performed at night. The goal of this ascetic self-mortification was to view ordinary physical reality as imbued with divine presence and subject to manipulation by figures that were close to Allah, watched over by his invisible agents (Behl 2001, Chapter 1, 1).

The purpose of the poem implied by this Sufi context, is to arouse the same ecstasy in the audience that the telling generates in the poet. As the *Padmavat* states:

Muhammad⁴⁸, the poet of love has neither body nor blood nor flesh.

He who sees such a face laughs, but he who hears has tears in his eyes [23].

In all four 'tales of love,' the hero hears of the exceptional beauty of princess in a distant land, is 'possessed'⁴⁹ by desire, and sets off on a journey to obtain her. This journey involves his becoming an ascetic, finding a guide to help him on to the right path, facing several adventures

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⁴⁸The name by which the poet refers to himself in the poem, Malik Muhammad of Jayas. My translation.
⁴⁹The lover is described as *ba-ur*, literally 'insane'.
along the way, and undertaking penance before he can win the heroine. Jayasi’s prefatory statement highlights precisely these elements as definitive of Ratansen’s quest for Padmavati:

He who is wounded by words of desire\textsuperscript{50}: what is hunger or sleep or shade to him?

He changes guise, becomes a hermit; a jewel covered, hidden in the dust.

the island of Singhal and Padmavati; whom Ratansen brought to Chitaur . . . [24].

Heroines of exceptional beauty figure in a vast range of ancient and medieval texts across cultures; but this exceptional beauty becomes symbolic of a specific moral and aesthetic principle in these Sufi ‘tales of love.’ The Madhumalati explains what the beauty of the heroine stands for:

This beauty is manifested in many forms\textsuperscript{51}; this beauty, expressed in many emotions.

This beauty is the light in all eyes; this beauty is all the pearls in the ocean.

This beauty resides in all flowers; this beauty that all the bees delight in.

This beauty is the sun and the moon; this beauty completes the incomplete world.

This beauty is the beginning and the end . . . [120] \textsuperscript{52}

That is, it is in this ideal beauty, a beauty that also permeates all creation, that the light of God, the ‘light in all eyes,’ is manifested.

As the heroine is a reflection of Eternal Beauty, the hero’s journey in pursuit of her is also invested with spiritual significance. The hero’s love becomes, again, symbolic of a metaphysical principle:

First there was the entry of love\textsuperscript{53}, after that all creation happened.

It was from love that creation emerged; love filled all form in creation. [Madhumalati 27].

Through the experience of such love, man becomes worthy of heaven; without such love, he is merely a handful of dust [Padmavat 166]. The experience of such love is virtually definitive of

\textsuperscript{50}The Avadhi original is \textit{biraha}, literally the pain/desire brought about by separation (of a lover).

\textsuperscript{51}The Avadhi original is \textit{ihai roop pargat bahu roopa}, where \textit{roop} stands for both ‘form’ and ‘beauty,’ an equivalence that is convenient for the Sufi exaltation of such beauty into a metaphysical principle.

\textsuperscript{52}Mataprasad Gupt ed. \textit{Manjhan krit Madhumalati} (Allahabad: Mitra Prakashan, 1961).

\textsuperscript{53}According to Sufi theology, it was love for Muhammad in the mind of God that caused the world to be created. S.A.A. Rizvi 1978, 1:366.
man’s existence on earth: “He who does not risk his head upon the path of love, why did he come upon the earth at all?” [Padmavat 98]. And to attain the beloved is to achieve knowledge of the ‘divine love’.

It has been pointed out that the mystical aesthetics of the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ is derived from Ibn ‘Arabi, the fourteenth century Andalusian Sufi philosopher. This tradition not only defined the final Truth, haqiqat, as Divine Beauty itself, it also asserted repeatedly that such Truth could be sought only through renunciation of the world, culminating finally in renunciation of even the self. The first and biggest obstacle to the pursuit of this Truth was held to be the nafs, the lower or appetitive soul.

As Aditya Behl demonstrates, the notion of the reciprocal relationship of desire between God and the world is also adapted from Ibn ‘Arabi’s theology of divine manifestation. In this account God is transcendent and invisible (a ‘hidden treasure’) and cannot be apprehended except through the divine manifestation (jaltah or mazhar) in the created beings of the world. The forms in which God appears are linked in a relationship of love-in-separation with their divine source. The moving force for both the manifestation and the return is desire or shauq, translated into Avadhi as kama. The aesthetics of the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ are centered around the transformation of this desire into divine love, into the realization of the creature’s passionate relationship with God. Just as the Sufi seeker’s goal is the transformation of desire into ‘ishq or divine love, the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ show us the transformation into love of the desire which arises between lover and beloved.

Since this theology posits a radical difference between the divine absolute and the phenomenal world, the poet represents that which is theoretically impossible to represent, through poetic imagery. In this formulation, language is ultimately unable to represent divinity, which is the highest mystery and is radically other from the phenomenal world. This is the theological

sanction for the Sufi use of narrative, poetry, specifically symbolic poetry, to represent God who cannot be represented because the Sufi divine essence is beyond human categories. The Avadhi poets thus imply a view of language in which language is not a straightforward representation of reality, but rather a surface that needs to be read for hidden signs. To quote from the Mīrgavatī.

First this was a Hindavi story,

Then some poets told it in Turki.

Then I opened up its multiple meanings:

Asceticism, love, and valor are its essence . . .

There are many meanings in this tale; use your wit and you’ll understand. [Mīrgavatī 426].

Since in this theology the pursuit of knowledge / Love / Beauty demands as a first step the renunciation of the appetitive soul, the lover in the Sufi ‘tales of love’ faints as soon as he first hears of or encounters the ideal beauty: “No light on his face, no life in his frame . . . They carried him away, he was beside himself, insensate” [Cāndāyan 154]. The fainting of the hero represents, quite literally, his taking leave of his appetitive soul. Once this happens, the only course of action left to the hero is to renounce the world, become an ascetic, and set off in search of the beloved: “He gave up his kingdom, the king became a jogi, fiddle in hand and bereaved from love” [Padmavat 126].

In the context of this metaphysical ethic, it is appropriate that Love, defined as the quest for Truth-as-Beauty, should have a symbiotic relationship with viraha, separation from the beloved: “Love itself has both the experience of it and separation from it; the bee hive has both the honey and the wasp” [Padmavat 166]. Since the Divine Essence of Truth-as-Beauty can never be ultimately attained, the seeker is cast into a permanent state of longing-in-separation from the object of his desire. Therefore viraha is once again not only an attribute definitive of the lover, but also a principle definitive of human existence: “Viraha came into the world at the beginning

of creation; but who can realize this without having acquired the merit of good deeds?"

[Madhumalati 29]. Further, because the journey towards Truth involves purification through penance, the lover’s suffering in *viraha* purifies him: “Parvati laughed and said to Mahesh, It is certain that he is burning in the fire of *viraha* . . . It is certain that he is awakened by the suffering that is in love; tested on such a touchstone, he seems to have emerged true as gold” [Padmavat 211].

The spiritual journey of the hero / seeker in quest of his beloved, necessarily requires a spiritual guide. All the Sufi ‘tales of love’ insist that the beloved and the Truth that she reflects, cannot be attained without the guidance of a guru. As the *Padmavat* argues, Bikram and Raja Bhoja may have found Mahesh the lord of the hills through their ascetic discipline of *tantra – mantu*, (*tantra-mantra*) but then He disappeared again. “Without a guru the path cannot be found . . . The *jogi* becomes wise (*siddha*) only when he has met guru Gorakh” [Padmavat 212]. The seeker in these ‘tales of love’ acknowledges as guru, the figure who can lead him to the beloved. In the *Padmavat* this is the parrot Hiraman, who like any good guru knows the Vedas and is as learned as any Brahman: “mark on forehead, thread on shoulder, a poet like Vyas and learned like Sahadev” [79].

The hero / seeker renounces not only the world, but also his ego, anger and fear. Just as he is about to be impaled by Gandharvsen, the ascetic Ratansen answers the Singhal king’s questions: “What do you ask now of my caste? I am a *jogi*, a beggar and an ascetic . . . without anger at an insult, without shame at a beating . . .”. At the sight of the stake on which he is to be impaled, he laughs: “Now I will be free of the bonds of affection; now the lover will be united with his love” [Padmavat 261].

The lover must also contemplate the principle of Truth that he pursues, with single-mindedness: “I contemplate that beautiful woman Padmavati; this life of mine is given up to her name. Every drop of blood that there is in this body, chants Padmavati, Padumavati” [262]. Once the seeker has achieved this single-minded contemplation of the Truth, and renounced the
instincts of his nafs, his appetitive existence, he arrives at a kind of selflessness, a kind of 
'death', and paradoxically, freedom from mortality: "He who has died and then found life, what is 
death to him? He has become immortal, and drinks of honey with his beloved" [Padmavat 305]. 
The seeker can now arrive at Truth by achieving union with his beloved.56

As has been pointed out by several modern scholars, the Padmavat could have ended at 
this point. It continues, however, by throwing the seeker into a fresh series of crises, a fresh series 
of separations with his beloved. Jayasi’s poem is not alone in following this narrative path. While 
the Cândëyan and the Madhumalati conclude with the hero obtaining his beloved and re-entering 
the social world he had renounced with added prestige, the Mirgavati follows up the union of 
hero and heroine with the death of the hero in a random hunting accident, and the Sati of his 
wives. Both Jayasi and Qutban (the author of the Mirgavati) provide explanations for the 
recurrence of crisis after the achievement of bliss. The Padmavat refers to the 'pride' of Ratansen 
as he prepares to return to Chitaur with his newly acquired wife: "When I cross the seas, who in 
the world can equal me ...." The poet is swift to warn of the dangers of such 'sin', as the sea 
promptly exacts retribution by sinking their ships [Padmavat 386]. The Mirgavati on the other 
hand explains its hero Rajkunwar’s death in terms of the logic of mortality: "He who was born 
has to die; he cannot escape the bounds of Time" [Mirgavati 418]. Such explanations suggest that 
the return of crisis in the poems is not inconsistent with their Sufi metaphysic. If Truth is an 
absolute, transcendent principle, and the seeker after it is a mortal, then by virtue of his 
mortality he can glimpse it only in brief, ecstatic moments; continued or permanent access to it 
cannot be achieved. The return of Ratansen to the mortal world after he has won his beloved is 
signalled by his return to the attributes of that world, such as pride.

This series of crises is finally resolved through the actual death of the hero. Both the 
Padmavat and the Mirgavati follow up the death of the hero with the sati of the wives. From Amir

56 For this analysis of the symbolism of the Sufi 'tales of love,' I am indebted to Behl 1995, and to Shyam 
Khusrau onwards, Sufi tradition had admired *sati* as the supreme example of love: "Khusrau, in
love rival the Hindu wife, / For the dead's sake she burns herself in life." Thus in terms of a Sufi
metaphysic, the Padmavat ends with this final triumphant assertion of the principle of love, as
befitting a tale of "deep love," so deep that it produces the "suffering of love" in anyone who
listens [Padmavat 652].

The Sufi content of a 'tale of love' like the Padmavat is made explicit in the allegorical
gloss attached to a 1696 manuscript. This gloss was then handed down as an intrinsic part of the
poem in many later manuscripts. Twentieth-century editors and scholars of the Padmavat have
continued to regard this allegorical key as authentic, and have sought to explain the Padmavat as
a Sufi 'allegory' in terms of the equivalences mentioned in this scribal annotation:

I asked the pandits its meanings,
And they said, "We do not know more than this:
The fourteen worlds, above and below,
Are all within the human body.
The body of Chitaur, the spirit its King.
The heart is Singhala, the mind is Padmini.
The parrot is the guru who shows the way.
Without the guru, who in the world
Can find his way to the formless absolute?
Nagmati is the world and its affairs.
Whoever ties his mind to her cannot be saved.
Raghava, the messenger, is Satan,
And Sultan Alauddin is illusion.
Reflect on the love-story like this,
And learn from it whatever you can.

S.A.A. Rizvi 1978, 1:363.
Turkish, Arabic and Hindavi, all the languages that exist,

All praise the story, which tells of the path of love.\textsuperscript{58}

Even though the stanza is first found in a 1696 manuscript and is thus regarded by Mataprasad Gupta as spurious, it points to interpretations of the \textit{Padmavat} current among the community of readers. Based on this gloss, John Millis deduces a Sufi ‘allegory’ underlying the \textit{Padmavat}. In Millis’s reading, “the body (\textit{tana}) is Citaur; its soul (\textit{mana}) is the king; the heart (\textit{hiyā}) is Simhal-dvip; and the \textit{padmini} is wisdom or intelligence (\textit{budhi}). Also, Hiraman is the ‘guru,’ Nagmati is ‘worldly concerns’ (\textit{duniyā dhandhā}), Raghav Cetan is Satan, and Alauddin is \textit{maya}.\textsuperscript{59} However, as many readers of the poem have noted, no such gloss fits the poem perfectly.\textsuperscript{60} Instead, Behl argues persuasively that Jayasi’s poetics of \textit{rasa} are better understood as pointing to a poetic strategy that uses “words that have multiple valences and can thus be used to suggest multiple meanings.” In the prologue, Jayasi speaks of “the centrality of the hidden meanings of his poem and the \textit{rasa} of love in graphic imagery”:

\begin{quote}
My heart is a treasury full of gems.
I have unlocked it with my tongue, the key.
My tongue sings the matter of the jewel and essence,
Full of \textit{rasa} and the priceless honey of love.
Whoever speaks of the wounds of separation,
What is hunger to him, or shade from the sun?
He changes his guise, becomes an ascetic.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} In Ramchandra Shukla’s edition (1995), this stanza is numbered 270. Behl’s translation, (2001), Chapter 1, 48.


\textsuperscript{60} See for instance A.G. Shirreff’s comment: “I doubt very much whether he had any definite allegory present to his mind throughout: the key which he gives in the first verse of the Envoy does not by any means fit the lock.” Shirreff, “Introduction,” \textit{Padmavati} (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1944), viii.
He is a ruby hidden in the dust. [Padmavat 23].

De Bruijn points out that the verse also resonates with a tradition of the Prophet that reads, “By God, under the heavenly throne is a treasure, the keys to which are the tongues of the poets.”

As Behl argues, for Jayasi “the skill of the poet lies in using this key to open the locks on the hearts of the listeners.” The task of the reader then is “the recovery of the shining yet hidden meanings that are not apparent to the eye that sees only the dirty surface.” The symbolic method of the Padmavat is thus better understood as the use of “words and imagery with multiple resonances, all in the service of expressing the rasa of his story” (Behl 2001, Chapter 1, 68-69).

To return to the gloss, though, it points to another trend in the reception of the Padmavat. It represents an attempt by the original scribe at the end of the seventeenth century, to contain the range of the poem’s meanings by fitting it into this particular, ostensibly Sufi, system of equivalences. Modern scholars who have perceived the gloss as authentic, replicate this attempt at containment. They then confine their reading of the poem to the first half, up to the marriage of Ratansen and Padmavati and the return to Chitaur. A corollary assumption widely current in modern readings of the poem, is that the Padmavat is actually a stitching together of two distinct halves, the first dealing with a spiritual quest, and the second reconstructing the past, an exercise in which the allegorical or symbolic mode recedes. The underlying premise here is that Sufi symbolic narratives exist in an ahistorical context, and cannot therefore be read historically. Equally, that it is not useful to read poems about historical personages in terms of their mystical symbolism. The rest of this chapter engages in precisely the opposite maneuver. It explores the sustained involvement, collusions and contestations of a Sufi symbolic narrative with other contemporary religio-mystical systems, and with sixteenth-century politics and history.

Competitive mystical transactions

The Sufi metaphysic of love elucidated in these 'tales of love,' especially in the *Padmavat*, appropriates elements from other systems of spiritual discipline such as the Hatha-yoga of the Nathpanthis. There had been exchange of ideas between the Naths and Sufis like Hamiduddin Nagauri and Baba Farid as early as the thirteenth century. By the early sixteenth century Sufi interest in Nath doctrines had reached a point where Shaikh Abdul-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537) identified Sufi beliefs based on Ibn Arabi’s pantheistic mysticism, with the philosophy and practices of Gorakhnath. Gangohi also found Nath ascetic exercises to be compatible with Chishti practices.63

The heroes in these 'tales of love' routinely invoke the name and blessings of Gorakhnath in their quest. Jayasi’s appropriation of Nath doctrine goes further, however. In depicting the fabled island and lofty fortress of Singhal, he also describes the yogic body as defined in the texts of the Nathpanth.

The sun and the moon cannot fly over it.
They hold themselves back and circle that high fort,
Else their chariots would crash into dust.
Nine gates it has, made of adamant,
With a thousand soldiers at each.
Five captains of the guard make their circuit,
And the gates shake at the tread of their feet.
... Golden slabs inlaid with blue lapis
are set as the stairways of the sparkling fort.

The nine stories have nine gates, each with its own doors of adamant.

Four days it takes to climb to the top, if one climbs on the path of truth [*Padmavat* 41].64

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64Behl’s translation, 2001, Chapter 4, 10-11.
As Behl argues, the four days in this description suggest obliquely the four stages of the Sufi path, *shari‘at* (following the law), *tariqat* (the Sufi way), *ma‘arifat* (gnosis) and *haqiqat* (realizing the truth). Alternatively, they could be a reference to the four states of existence, *nasi‘ut* (the human world), *malakut* (the angelic world), *jabarut* (the heavenly realm), and *lahut* (absolute divinity) (2001, Chapter 4, 11).

Singhal is thus described in terms of the Nath esoteric theory of the body as a fort. This description enables Ratansen’s assault on the fort of Singhal in order to gain access to Padmavati, to also stand for the ascetic-hero’s spiritual ascent towards his beloved. Thus the seven gateways of the fort correspond to the seven *cakras* (subtle psychic centres) of the body. The five captains of the guard at each gateway are equivalent to the five calamities that prevent yogis from gaining control over the *cakras*, and so on.65

While Nath physiology and cosmology prove suitable for the poet’s allegorical purposes, the Sufi frame of reference also demands that Nath tropes be significantly modified. The Sufi ‘tales of love’ differed from Nathpanthi stories of kings like Gopichand, Bhartrhari and Vikrama. The latter protagonists also renounced their kingdoms and became ascetics in pursuit of a religious goal. The Sufi ‘tales of love’ differed in one crucial aspect. As de Bruijn points out, the renunciation of the king in the Nath stories, is a step towards overcoming attachments. The love for the queens in these stories is an impediment to religious fulfilment. Only by conquering this passion can the king achieve spiritual success. In sharp contrast, in these Sufi tales love (*ishq*) is the final goal of the yogi-king Ratansen who achieves mystical union through the consummation of his love for Padmavati.66

Further, Jayasi’s sustained appropriation of Nathpanthi physiology and ascetic practices must not be understood as a ‘syncretistic’ exercise in fusing disparate religious and ascetic

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65 A.A. Rizvi 1978, 1:368-69. Behl suggests instead that the five captains stand for the five senses that guard the body. (2001) Chapter 4, 11.
66 de Bruijn 1996, 80-81.
traditions. As Behl argues incisively, "Ratansen does not become a yogi, he only adopts the guise of a yogi." His austerities can be understood as yogic exercises, familiar to the north Indian audiences among whom Nathpanthi narratives circulated. However, they are actually Sufi ascetic exercises, designed to "awaken the consciousness of the seeker to spiritual reality." Ratansen, and "by implication, the Sufis, are not exactly yogis. They are like yogis, only better, as they can use yogic practices and language" to establish their own "claim to superiority within a local [competitive] religious landscape" (Behl 2001, Chapter 4, 31-32).

Jayasi's deployment of Nathpanthi imagery and its ascetic exercises can thus be read as a complex exercise in competitive assimilation. On the one hand, it belongs within Chishti Sufi traditions that appropriated Nath yogic exercises and ascetic practices, in evolving their own system of spiritual discipline. On the other hand, the triumph of the seeker-protagonist within such poems can be read as articulating Sufi claims of superiority. In the political and religious landscape of north India in the Sultanate period, Sufis did indeed advance their sphere of influence under the patronage of the expanding Sultanate. This process of Sufi expansion involved competing with other religious and ascetic groups. In such a historical context, the triumph of the seeker in the Avadhi 'tales of love' can be seen as encoding Sufi assertions of proprietorship over the religious and spiritual landscape of the subcontinent. The traffic of ideas between competing religious systems and traditions could be used towards establishing hierarchies between those competitors as well.67

**Gender in the Sufi 'tale of love'**

Evidence from medieval India suggests that Sufi groups clearly recognized the degree to which the reception of these 'tales of love' involved a negotiation with the patriarchal norms of the composite laity. This section examines the Sufi response to the potential that existed in their context, for alternative modes of interpretation. The issue of control over interpretation is

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67 This understanding of Jayasi's engagement with Nath practices and symbols is argued persuasively by Aditya Behl (2001, especially Chapter 4).
complicated by the specific nature of these ‘tales of love.’ As has been indicated above, the Sufi symbolic narrative emerges through a grafting of several narrative genres and traditions. Each of these genres is also defined by distinctive conventions for representing gendered conduct. The grafting that produces the Sufi symbolism of the Avadhi ‘tales of love’, also involves therefore a negotiation with and selective re-appropriation of, these distinct conventions for the representation of gender.

There is evidence that Sufis recognized the need to come to terms with the distinctive qualities of Hindavi (as opposed to Persian) poetry. One of the earliest accounts of audience response at a Sufi khanqah to Hindavi poetry comes from the discourses of Sharafuddin Maneri, the Firdausiyya Shaikh who is buried in Bihar Sharif. The Shaikh emphasizes that the ability to listen receptively and to respond to the poem was part of the Sufi training of the self. After the noon prayers, the assembly in the shrine listened to the singing of Persian verses first, and then Hindavi ones. The Shaikh commented on the quality of response the Hindavi verses elicited:

Hindavi verses are very forthright and frank in expression. In purely Persian verses, there is a judicious blend of allusions and what can be fittingly expressed whereas Hindavi employs so very very frank expressions. There is no limit to what it explicitly reveals. It is very disturbing. It is extremely difficult for young men to bear such things. Without any delay they would be upset...  

The allusive character of Hindavi verse and its explicit imagery was recognized to have a powerful effect on the listener by arousing his desire. Thus, careful control had to be exercised over the experience. Sufi silsilahs therefore formulated strict guidelines for ritual and spiritual purity during audition, so that disciples would not be misled into sensuality. As Richard Eaton

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points out, there were sometimes wider, non-Sufi audiences for the singing or recitation of verse. However, it is significant that only disciples were initiated into the small sama' sessions.\(^6\)

This picture is further complicated by the occasional presence of women in such audiences at the dargahs. There seems to be only indirect evidence available for this phenomenon and the anxieties it may have caused. In the late fourteenth century, Firuz Shah Tughlaq refers to "a custom and practice unauthorized by the Law of Islam [which] had sprung up in Musulman cities":

On holy days women riding in palankins [sic], or carts, or litters, or mounted on horses or mules, or in large parties on foot, went out of the city to the tombs. Rakes and wild fellows of unbridled passions and loose habits, took the opportunity which this practice afforded for improper riotous actions. I commanded that no woman should go out to the tombs under pain of exemplary punishment. Now, thanks to the great God, no lady or respectable Musulman woman can go out on pilgrimage to the tombs. The practice has been entirely stopped.\(^7\)

Bans such as this indicate attempts to control the exposure of Muslim women to public spaces. But the very need for such an edict would suggest that women did in fact constitute one element of the audience at Sufi dargahs. On the other hand, the letter of Sharafuddin Maneri cited above points to the probability of such audiences in fourteenth-century Bihar being predominantly male. In any case, Sufi groups seem to have used the differentiation and selection of audiences as a strategy of control over the textual and oral transmission of Sufi thought. The same strategy could also be used to impose Sufi interpretations over a wide range of narrative traditions.\(^7\)

The nature of the generic selections and appropriations these Sufi compositions engaged in, are apparent for instance in the characterization of the protagonist. At first sight, the Sufi

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6\(^{Richard Eaton, Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India, 1978 (New Delhi: OUP 1996), 142 ff.\)

7\(^{Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Futuhat-i Firoz Shahi, trans. H.M. Elliot, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:380.}\)

71\(^{Behl 1995, 42.}\)
perspective in these ‘tales of love’ imposes attributes and demands upon the protagonist, that were conventionally associated with women in the non-Sufi love-stories circulating in medieval India. Thus, as Shyam Manohar Pandey points out, in the non-Sufi tales love is first ‘kindled’ in the woman, and therefore viraha is also sharper in her. In fact, the heroines of these poems are defined by and valued for these attributes. In the Avadhi Sufi ‘tales of love’ in contrast, the experience of both love and viraha with their metaphysical underpinnings, are the domain of the man. The Padmavat is actually conscious of this inversion of gender-roles. As the lover in viraha, Ratansen explicitly compares himself to Sakuntala, Damāvati (Damayanti) and Kāmakandalā (from another medieval love-story told and retold several times, the Mādhavanāl-Kāmakandālā) [Padmavat 200]. The symbolic fire of viraha in which Ratansen burns, also threatens to become a pyre literally, in the typical narrative mode of the poem where the symbolic threatens to become the real. Unable to bear the biyog anymore, Ratansen sets out to immolate himself [204]. It is at this point that Siva and Parvati are forced to intervene, since such a fire, reflecting as it does the intensity of a lover’s viraha, would burn down the entire world. It is noteworthy that no such divine intervention is forthcoming when Padmavati and Nagmati burn themselves on their husband’s funeral pyre. This, even though the queens obliterate themselves out of the intensity of their viraha, and as the triumphant culmination of their Ḭishq, their ideal love. The deliberate confusion of gender stereotypes continues in Parvati’s and later Lacchmi’s testing of Ratansen’s sat bhōv. The hero’s integrity, his sat, is measured in terms of his exclusive fidelity to Padmavati. The Mirgavati applies a similar test of sat to its protagonist Rajkunwar. In this particular Sufi frame therefore, the same index of fidelity or ‘single-mindedness’ is used to measure the sat of both lover and beloved: gender seems to be irrelevant.

However, the Avadhi Sufi ‘tales of love’ do not invert or reject stereotypes of gendered conduct consistently. In all of the poems referred to above, the mystic-seeker after revelation of Truth, is a man. The idealized heroine, representing a transcendental norm of Beauty and Truth, is the object of the seeker’s quest. She is thus merely the pretext for the elucidation of a specific
system of *sadhana* or *tariqat* (spiritual discipline) that privileges the spiritual and emotional progress of a male protagonist. In other words, the heroine’s response to the wooing of the protagonist, and her spiritual journey if any, are not elaborated to the same degree as those of the hero.

The masculine gender of this protagonist is not accidental. On two occasions in the *Padmavat*, the queen is afflicted by *viraha*. She wishes to become an ascetic and set off in pursuit of her lover: Nagmati, Ratansen’s first wife, wishes to renounce the world and follow her husband when he is about to set off for Singhalvip on his quest. Padmavati wishes to do the same when Ratansen has been captured by Alauddin Khalji and taken to Delhi. Both women are explicitly dissuaded from doing so: “You are a woman, of inferior mind . . . Raja Bhartthari, O ignorant one, in whose house there were sixteen hundred queens . . . became a jogi and took none with him” [*Padmavat* 132]. Or, as Padmavati is told later, donning the robes of an ascetic will not bring back her husband. The mode of *sadhana* appropriate to her is silent grief for her husband within her own home [*Padmavat* 606]. The poem thus locates mystical revelation of the Truth through the indispensable ascetic renunciation, in the masculine domain. In doing so, it echoes and reinforces lay conventions of appropriate gendered conduct. For women, it would seem, the experience of separation and longing, *viraha*, is an end in itself, and not the route to higher revelation.

Masculine gender is not an indispensable attribute for protagonists of all Sufi love-stories, however. Annemarie Schimmel points out how Indo-Muslim folk tradition “developed another peculiar facet . . . the symbol of the woman soul.” In this tradition, Sufis reworked older folk tales “in which the female is the seeking, longing hero [sic] who undergoes terrible hardships in the hope of being united with her Divine Beloved, who experiences the Divine Friend’s various moods as did Radha and the gopis in their relation with Lord Krishna.” Schimmel points out how the *Hir Ranjha* is the “best known example of the complete spiritualization of a medieval folk tale in which the woman Hir is identified with the soul, and her beloved Ranjha with the longed-for
Divine Beloved.” The stories of Sohni and Mahiwal, Sassui and Punhun and Nuri and Jam Tamachi (in Sind) are seen as belonging to the same tradition.72

In comparing the Avadhi Sufi ‘tales of love’ with the love stories told by Sufis in Punjab and Sind, I do not wish to suggest that there might be an overarching set of narrative conventions common to all Sufi poetry over the subcontinent. A detailed analysis of the Punjabi and Sindhi love stories is also beyond the scope of this work. However, Schimmel does establish that feminine gender is a typical attribute of the seeking soul in another set of Sufi stories. This suggests that the reasons for the masculine gender of the protagonist in the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ are not intrinsic to the Sufi frame of reference, but must be sought elsewhere. This dissertation suggests that the reasons for this representation lie in two interrelated features of ‘tales of love’ like the Padmavat: the genres of medieval narrative it chooses to appropriate elements from, and the audience, both lay and initiate, that it chooses to address itself to.

Sufis offered distinct resolutions to their engagement with patriarchal forms and conventions in the historical context and literary traditions they were confronted with. The Sufi symbolic narrative encodes the mystical love between hero and heroine as a reflection of the normative love between man and God. This symbolism privileges the exclusive relationship between the seeker and his beloved. Such a code implies and demands monogamous fidelity from both the hero and the heroine. Ratansen can win Padmavati only after he has successfully passed this test. The founding condition for his quest is his rejection of his first wife, Nagmati. Even after he has obtained Padmavati, he must continue to demonstrate the same faithfulness to her. Thus he recognizes and rejects Lacchmi, the daughter of the ocean, who appears to him in the form of his wife. Pleased with his constancy, Lacchmi reunites him with Padmavati. It is therefore significant that in these Sufi ‘tales of love’ however, with the exception of the Madhumalati, the first wife of the hero returns immediately after the seeker is united with his beloved.

72 Schimmel 1982, 150-55.
A sixteenth-century Sufi treatise on Hindi poetry, the *Haqa’iq-i Hindi* of Abdul Wahid Bilgrami (1566), provides a Sufi allegorical gloss for Vaishnava symbols and the terms and ideas used in the songs of medieval devotional traditions. Bilgrami’s text sheds valuable light on the interpretive practices of Sufi communities reading Braj and Avadhi poetry in the sixteenth century. According to Bilgrami, the hero’s two wives in Hindavi poetry signify the immortal soul’s link with the next world and the connection of the lower or carnal soul with this world. Bilgrami’s allegorical gloss indicates that Sufi interpretive communities read the return of the first wife into the ‘tale of love’ as signifying the return of the seeker / hero to the world, after the Truth has been revealed to him in his union with his beloved. Once again, the creation of such a symbolism for the hero’s polygamy is a pointer to the sustained engagement of Sufi mystical poetics with the social and aesthetic conventions of its contemporary historical context.

The first wife Nagmati re-enters the narrative lamenting the absence of her husband. Her lament is articulated in a *barah-māsā*, the form traditionally employed to articulate the *viraha* of the heroine. The terms used to describe this *viraha* are identical with the terms used earlier to describe the *viraha* of seeker and his beloved [*Padmavat* 341]. With the re-entry of the first wife into the narrative, the relationship between mystical seeker / hero and Truth-as-Beauty / his beloved thus loses some of the unique distinguishing features which defined it as normative.

It would seem that the inexorable fact of elite polygamy co-exists uneasily at this point, with a Sufi monogamous ethic. As the values of elite patriarchy take precedence at this point, the heroine now has to contend with a rival for her husband’s affection. In the *Padmavat* Ratansen simply re-enters his old relationship with Nagmati, and the two wives are left confronting each other. Their hostility actually degenerates into physical conflict at which point Ratansen intervenes and reminds them that they are united by a common duty (*seva*) to him [*Padmavat* 445]. The pattern is identical in the *Mirgavati* and the *Candayan*.

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Bilgrami’s gloss on the *saut*, by which he denotes not ‘the other woman’ but the ‘co-wife,’ recognizes the tension latent in this relationship. He suggests that pursuing the two worlds, divine and mortal, mystical and corporal, at the same time, is as impossible as simultaneously keeping two wives happy. The disjunction between these two sets of practices, Sufi-mystical and elite-patriarchal, is never resolved in the *Mirgavati* and the *Padmavat*, since the hero’s death is followed by the *sati* of both his wives. Nagmati displays the same supreme love and virtue as Padmavati does.

To sum up, the process of negotiation with diverse narrative and social conventions generated its own anxieties amongst medieval Sufi groups. Sufi reading communities thus developed guidelines for the reading of various kinds of poetry, that were tailored to the specific demands of their systems of spiritual discipline. The selective appropriation of tropes from the different narrative traditions also reveals the sustained negotiation between Sufi mystical precepts and the practices of the elite social groups that patronized both Sufi communities as well as literary production in medieval India.

**Historicizing the Padmavat’s audiences**

This section of the chapter begins by discussing the dominant readings of the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ in the twentieth century. The dominant modern reading of the *Padmavat*, that sees the poem as stitching together two kinds of stories, has already been described. In this reading, the first half of the poem is regarded as Sufi allegory, and the second as historical reconstruction, and faulty, because fantastical reconstruction. This presumption of the mutual exclusiveness of the two halves of the poem is based upon a dominant twentieth-century understanding of the irrelevance of politics and history to Sufism. If Sufism has a history, then it is generally understood only in terms of its theological development, and if it has a politics, then it is understood only in terms of the engagement between various Sufi Shaikhs and kings.

In contrast, some recent analyses of the Avadhi ‘tales of love’ have formulated a different relationship between the multiple layers of signification in these poems and their multiple
audience constituencies. Thomas de Bruijn argues that the Avadhi 'tales of love' were meant to function both in the surroundings of the local Sufi centres and in the circuit of patronage from regional rulers and nobles. He argues that this is why these poems illustrate both devotion and sacrifice to God and the heroic bravery of the prince, "thus connect[ing] the two spheres of the poet's allegiance: the Sufi centre and the local court." Aditya Behl extends this argument by further clarifying two contexts for these poems, Islamic-courtly and Sufi.

It is important to recognize that the secular elite patronage network for these poems came from heterogeneous religious backgrounds. The ethos of regional and local courts under the Delhi Sultanate may have been broadly Islamic. However, the local elite that patronized the production of literature in the regional languages, was by no means either exclusively Muslim or exclusively Hindu. In fact, as this section goes on to argue, such overarching categorizations by religious community may not even be useful in understanding the nature of these poems' patronage contexts. Further, as argued above, medieval Sufi practices did not constitute an autonomous terrain, but were constantly negotiating with the many social practices and cultural forms of the historical world in which they were carving out a space for themselves.

It is possible to conceptualize the relationship between these poems and the specific contexts in which they are produced, much more sharply than has been attempted so far. I propose to do this in two ways. First, by considering the possible implications of the Padmavat's transformation of historical personages into fictional characters. And secondly, by considering the degree to which the model political and patriarchal order represented in the poem, re-articulates the political and patriarchal practices of the specific social groups which constituted the target audience for such poems.

Some information is available about the composition of that lay target audience in medieval Avadh. As Muzaffar Alam shows, in the early seventeenth century a very large portion

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74 de Bruijn 1996, 63. Aditya Behl makes a similar point about the Avadhi poems in his discussion of the Madhumalati.
of land in the Mughal province of Avadh was in the control of Hindu Rajputs. The districts in their control frequently formed a contiguous block. This added to their power and strength in the countryside. Thus, in Gorakhpur the various Rajput clans together had control over land accounting for almost 70 per cent of the revenue of the district. The Muslims, namely the Afghans, Shaikhzadas (Saiyids and Shaikhs) and some local Rajput converts also occupied a high position in the province. In terms of influence and strength, the Muslims in Avadh were next only to the Rajputs. Even though the Muslims were not numerically so strong and their zamindaris not so large and widespread, they had enough power in the villages and towns to be able to promise and provide substantial political patronage at the local level.

Sufi centres were, in fact, involved in the relations between these communities themselves and their relationship with the state. This is indicated even in the history of Jayas itself. In 1714, a revenue grant for the maintenance of the khangah of Saiyid Jahangir Ashraf Simnani, one of Jayasi’s pirs, had to be shifted to a safe area from a village where the keepers of the khangah had begun to encounter serious trouble from ‘the infidels’ of the surrounding habitats. The apocryphal stories of Jayasi’s encounters with several local Hindu rulers, Rajput or otherwise, suggest that Sufi institutions in the region were engaged in this process of negotiation with local Hindu elites from before Mughal times, under the Jaunpur sultanate.

The politics of recasting contemporary history

The implications of the Padmavat’s use of historical events becomes clearer when placed against the background of this specific target audience, that was likely to provide patronage to poets such as Jayasi. One index of the Padmavat being located sharply in its immediate context, is its recasting of contemporary events from the early sixteenth century, as having occurred in the early fourteenth century. Aziz Ahmad points out that

\[76\] Alam 1996, 167.
Ratan Sen (1527-32) the Rana of Chitore, was a contemporary not of 'Ala al-din Khalji, but of Jaisi himself and of Sher Shah Suri. The ruse of warriors entering an enemy fort in women’s palanquins, though a motif paralleled in epic and romance, had also some historical basis as it was used by Sher Shah to capture the fort of Rohtas. In 1531, nine years before the composition of Padmavat, a case of mass sati had occurred in a Rajput fort sacked by Sultan Bahadur of Gujarat to avenge the dishonour of two hundred and fifty Muslim women held captive in that fort. There might have been a conscious or unconscious confounding in Jaisi’s mind of ‘Ala al-din Khalji with Ghiyasuddin Khalji of Malwa (1469-1500) who had a roving eye, and is reported to have undertaken the quest of Padmini, not a particular Rajput princess, but the ideal type of women according to Hindu erotology. Ghiyasuddin Khalji, according to a Hindu inscription in the Udaipur area, was defeated in battle in 1488 by a Rajput chieftain Badal-Gora, multiplied by Jaisi into twins. 77

Ahmad’s reading is significant in pointing to Jayasi’s sophisticated engagement with contemporary events. However, it risks reading the Padmavat’s references to these events too literally. Other historical parallels can also be found for the Padmavat’s account of the siege of Chitor. Babur’s memoirs mention Padmavati, the queen of Rana Sanga and the mother of his second son Bikramajit. 78 Nine years before the composition of the Padmavat, it was at Chitor that Rajput noblewomen had carried out jauhar at Chitor when it was conquered by Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. 79 And the trick of disguising soldiers as women and hiding them in palanquins to get them inside a fortress is reported in some detail by at least two Afghan accounts of Sher Shah’s siege of Rohtas in 1537. Translations of these accounts are quoted here at some length. They indicate the kind of common knowledge of the event that may have been available to a poet writing in 1540. Further, the parallels with the Padmavat are revealing.

77 Aziz Ahmad 1963, 475-6.  
There existed a friendly connection between Sher Khan and the Raja of the fort of Rohtas, and Churaman, the Raja's naib, was on particular terms of intimate friendship and alliance with Sher Khan. This Churaman was a Brahman and was a person of the highest rank. Churaman came to him [Sher Khan] and said that the Raja had consented to give him the fort of Rohtas, that he might bring his women and children. It is commonly said that Sher Khan took Rohtas by introducing the Afghans in covered litters.

There were 1200 litters, in each of which were two Afghans armed, except in some of the foremost, in which there were old women. After the examination of some of the leading litters, Sher Khan sent a message to the Raja, to represent that the Raja having now satisfied himself there were only women in the litters, the search ought to be discontinued. The Raja readily assented, and when the litters had all been introduced, and discharged their burdens, the Afghans seized possession of the gates, and admitted Sher Shah who was ready with his army outside, awaiting the successful result of his stratagem.81

The parallels between these accounts and the *Padmavat* reveals that the poem does not attempt any simple reconstruction. On the one hand, the poem retains the figure of the Brahman aiding and abetting the attack upon the fortress by a hostile king. It also retains the suggestion that the hostile king practises deception to achieve his aims. But on the other hand, the trick employed by the hostile king is now transferred on to the warriors on the other side, who defend the king and the fortress through ingenuity and physical courage and die heroically. The complicated nature of these appropriations can point as much to a sophisticated and intentional reconstruction of recent history, as to the jumbled nature of the oral accounts that must have travelled through northern India in the decade prior to the composition of the *Padmavat*.

What is more significant than this sustained recasting of recent history, is its projection on to the figure of Alauddin Khalji. Given the degree of specific knowledge Jayasi demonstrates

81 *Tarikh-i Khan Jahan*, Elliot and Dowson 1996, 4:361, footnote.
about the siege of Rohtas, it is unlikely that he confused a fifteenth-century Sultan of Malwa with the earlier Khalji Sultan of Delhi, as suggested by Ahmad. Instead, it is here that Jayasi's local background may have had quite another kind of impact in shaping his perspective on these recent events. The issue is the construction in sixteenth-century historical memory of the figure of Alauddin Khalji, with the hindsight offered by the separation of two centuries.

One can speculate about the compulsions and anxieties of that historical moment in the early sixteenth century, that prompted the remembering of a particular ruler from the past. The proliferation of narratives about Alauddin Khalji's conquests in the early sixteenth century (the Chitaivarta and the Padmavat) may have been a response to the phenomenon of renewed attempts at imperial expansion by the ruler of Delhi in this period. The expeditions of the Khalji ruler may have proved a convenient vehicle for articulating contemporary local anxieties about the new series of rulers in Delhi with imperial ambitions. Before the hypothesis is dismissed as far-fetched, it must also be remembered that Sher Shah, the current Dhilli Sultanu who is the subject of panegyric at the start of the poem, had spent the decade of the 1530s gradually expanding his sphere of influence starting from his father's two parganas in South Bihar, and moving steadily towards the west and north-west, until he finally gained control over Delhi. This gradual expansion towards Delhi would thus have seemed very much closer to a poet in the Avadh region, than the distance (geographical, political and cultural) of the imperial capital otherwise.

Other reasons can be inferred as well, for this recall of Alauddin Khalji. Sher Shah's harsh measures against the recalcitrant zamindars in his father's parganas, accounts of which may again have travelled in the region, could conceivably have recalled the earlier ruler's similar crackdown on the chaudharis, khuts and muqaddams. The more wealthy and powerful of these local zamindars would belong to the poet's constituency of patrons. Alauddin's regulations had been enforced so strictly that "the chaudharis and khuts and muqaddams were not able to ride on horseback, to find weapons, to get fine clothes, or to indulge in betel." And "driven by
destitution, the wives of the khuts and mukaddims went and served for hire in the houses of the Musulmans.\footnote{Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, trans. H.M. Elliot, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:182-83.} Sher Khan’s measures were far more drastic. He attacked the criminal zamindars, and put all the rebels to death, and making all their women and children prisoners, ordered his men to sell them or keep them as slaves; and brought other people to the village and settled them there. When the other rebels heard of the death, imprisonment, and ruin of these, they listened to wisdom, repented of their contumacy \footnote{Sarwani, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:316-17.}.

There may have been yet another reason for a poet with Sufi affiliations to remember Alauddin Khalji as a figure of ruthless power. Barani recounts that among Khalji’s measures to prevent rebellion, was also the resumption of all gifts and even religious endowments, to the state. “So rigorous was the confiscation that, beyond a few thousand tankas all the pensions, grants of land, and endowments in the country were appropriated.”\footnote{Barani, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:179} In other words, there would have been sufficient parallels between the policies of the new ruler in Delhi and those of the earlier ruler that might explain the nature of this reconstruction. The available evidence, however, does not permit anything more than these speculations.

**Patrons, audiences and their norms**

It can equally be argued, that the normative political and patriarchal order defined by the poem, re-articulates the particular concerns of Jayasi’s specific constituency of potential lay patrons, the local court and local landholding elite. At least two factors enabled the writers of these Sufi ‘tales of love’ to address themselves to the wide variety of ethnic groups that constituted the landholding elite in medieval north India. One, the Avadhi term rajput is actually the exact synonym for the ‘son of a king,’ and could thus be used in a wider sense as referring to princes in general, rather than exclusively to a specific ethnic group.

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\footnote{Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, trans. H.M. Elliot, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:182-83.}
\footnote{Sarwani, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:316-17.}
\footnote{Barani, in Elliot and Dowson 1996, 3:179}
More fundamentally however, the character of one particular social group among this range of potential patrons was not as unified as genealogists and later chroniclers have assumed. As Dirk Kolff argues, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries at least, the term *Rajput* did not necessarily denote a fixed ethnic identity. Instead, the label could encompass the entire "continuum between at one end, mainly in Rajasthan, a genealogically defined Rajput aristocracy and... an opposite end occupied by a variety of peasant groups and tribal elites, largely in Hindustan..." (the region where these Avadhi 'tales of love' were composed). It can be demonstrated that these Sufi 'tales of love' are addressed to the specific concerns of the more sociologically fluid Rajput elites of central and northern India, rather than to the Rajputs of Rajasthan.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the latter were already consolidating their emergent political domination through the evolution of other literary genres. In these latter narrative traditions, heroism was defined and celebrated as a continuing tradition transmitted by hereditary lineage (see Chapter 2). Further, the history of 'Hindustan' indicates that the local 'Rajput' and Afghan elites were often at war with each other, as they competed for control over the same economic and political resources. However, their respective modes of political and patriarchal organization did overlap significantly.

The values defined as constituting the normative elite, *rajapoota* (princely) ethic in... Avadhi Sufi 'tales of love,' can be seen as articulating sharply the situation of the Rajputs and Afghans in their local context of central and northern India. For example, Ratansen's ascetic

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86In the rest of this chapter, the term 'Rajput' refers to this relatively more fluid, upwardly mobile, military elite of medieval 'Hindustan' described by Kolff (1990).
87Alf Hiltebeitel claims a similar, lower-status Rajput-Afghan audience for oral epics in the vernacular languages of north India, especially the Alha story. See Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Chapter 10 especially. In the context of Hiltebeitel's description of the audience for the Alha cycle of stories, it is significant that the first Avadhi Sufi heroic romance was Maulana Dawud's *Candayan*, drawing on the same narrative traditions.
journey to acquire Padmavati is not undertaken alone. He is accompanied by sixteen thousand companions who vow to fulfil the obligations of their *sat*, their service to him. This service entails an attack upon the fort of Singhala, and capture and imprisonment with their lord.

The trajectory would be familiar in a region from which large numbers of both Rajputs and Afghans as well as other pastoral and semi-tribal groups left home and travelled long distances in service of a warlord or military commander. The stakes involved were the gain of personal honour as well as the material rewards of military success, loot. This would have been one of the commonest avenues for upward economic, political and social mobility - through military service under the king with whom the local warlord could negotiate favourable terms.

Ratansen's companions are tied to him by *sat*, and therefore cannot change their allegiance. Rajput state formations in the sixteenth century articulated this distinctive ideology of the moral obligation, towards lifelong, loyal service with the same patron (see Chapter 2). Such a service ethic was often underpinned by a network of kinship ties. This emergent ideology of service was in contrast to the relatively more flexible patron-client structure of military obligations earlier. The *Padmavat*'s celebration of such *sat*, the virtue of loyalty, would however, constitute a potential norm as much for the local Rajput elites and Afghan warlords of medieval Hindustan. Both groups would have found such an ethic useful in consolidating their hold over the armies they raised from among the local pastoral, semi-tribal and peasant groups, by offering a share of the plunder following military successes. Even as the poem applauds the *sat* of Ratansen's companions, it also takes care to reward them. Gandharvsen gives the sixteen thousand companions sixteen thousand Padmini women when Ratansen finally wins Padmavati. Thus the Sufi journey with a metaphysical aim also doubles as journey for material advancement through an avenue familiar to the upwardly mobile military elites of central and north India.88

88 Kolff 1990, 71-82.
The gearing of the journey to the winning of Padmavati in marriage is also a trope resonant in both the Sufi and elite world-views. Marriage was a central mechanism among the Rajput elites of medieval Rajasthan, for the building of alliances and the settlement of vair (hostilities). As Kolff points out, the alliances formed by marriages were even more vitally important for the Rajputs of central and north India, since agnatic ties were of minor importance. “Their investment was . . . in their sagā . . . their alliance network . . . [which was] the result of negotiation, not ascription.”

Upward mobility or alternately, consolidation of status and resources by alliances through marriage rather than through agnatic ties, seems to have been as much the structure of patriarchal relations underpinning the political order of the elite Afghans in the region. One has only to think of the ambitious Sher Khan’s marriages with the widows Lad Malika and Guhar Gusain. Each of these weddings was negotiated as a political settlement, surrendering control of the widows’ treasures to their new husband, who undertook to protect their interests in return. Similar political considerations seem to have determined the larger patterns of Afghan marriages in this region, with their intricate structure of clan exogamy and ‘tribe’ endogamy within the larger ethnic group.

Finding the ideal woman is thus as vital for the king/warrior within the shared patriarchal forms and ethics of this composite elite, as it is for the seeker in the Sufi ethic. Ratansen thus defines his manhood, his purukharath, in terms of the fruits of his joga (his penance, also his quest in a wider sense). Through such an endeavour, he has not only won the object of his desire and sealed an alliance through marriage, but has also fulfilled all the

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81 Kolff 1990, 100-01.
expectations of his associates, so that “everybody [has become] a ruler in his own house” [Padmavat 331]. A formulation such as this also clearly makes the linkage between family and state, as the family supplies women for marriage to create a system of political alliances. As just argued, this role of marriage in cementing political ties would also have been common to non-Rajput elites in the period, again allowing the poem to address itself to larger networks of potential patrons.

Sufi tropes and the codes of the elite overlay each other most strikingly in the resolution of this narrative. A Sufi metaphysic of love determines that the relationship between king and his beloved queen be under constant threat. This Sufi symbolic narrative coincides with the design of contemporary heroic narratives of the medieval elite. The latter seek to define a normative ‘masculine’ code of conduct through the defence of threatened queen and tribe or territory. The Padmavat itself refers to Alauddin’s conquests of Devagiri and Ranthambhor. Jayasi invokes the ruler of the latter kingdom, Hammir, who cut off his own head rather than surrender his woman, his gihini (grihani) to Khalji [Padmavat 491]. Another non-Sufi heroic romance, Narayandas’s Chitai-varta – composed around the same time as the Padmavat in the court of Silhadi (the Purbiya Rajput warlord chieftain of Malwa) – explicitly links the conquests of Ranthambhor, Chitor and Devagiri by Alauddin Khalji, and ascribes them all to the Sultan’s desire for the queens of the respective kingdoms. The linkage between surrender of queen and surrender of territory is not peculiar, therefore, to the Padmavat.

Such a linkage is also especially significant in the wider contemporary context of the poem. While the actual stakes at least for the Rajputs involved defence of their control over territory, preservation of a newly emphasized purity of blood, important in constructing the legitimacy of given lineages, emerged as a strong theme in sixteenth-century Rajput heroic narratives. However, the elite’s definition of masculine honour in terms of the protection of their

92 Sangari 1990, 1466
women from unwanted alliances through marriage, is not an ideology peculiar to the Rajputs alone.

Such control of marriage alliances through the ideology of preserving purity of blood is a patriarchal practice that Afghan elites in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seem to have shared as well. In the case of the regional Afghan elites, the stakes involved had to do with political power rather than control over territory. In the service of regional kingdoms in the Sultanate period, such elites were granted transferable revenue assignments rather than hereditary land grants. However, membership in clan and tribe were still the avenues determining access to resources within this Afghan elite. Therefore, in such a context, purity of blood as defining lineage and descent was still important, both materially and symbolically. Thus Sarwani’s Tarikh-i Sher Shahi refers to a particular tribe of Sambhal Afghans in Roh (Rohilkhand), that was pushed into confronting the Afghan Sur monarchy in Delhi over the issue of the imperial governor wanting to marry their chieftain’s daughter. The tribe objected to the match on grounds of purity of blood, since the governor’s mother had been a slave. Prevented from escaping back to Kabul with their resources, women and children, these Sambhal Afghans refused any offers of mediation or conciliation. “It is better to die with our wives and families than to live dishonoured; for it is a well-known proverb, The death of a whole tribe is a solemn feast.”

The defence of elite women was a significant political issue in another sense as well. We get one indication of the implications in the account of Dattu Sarvani, a mercenary Afghan soldier of the sixteenth century. In his anecdotes attached to the Lata‘i fi-quddusi (compiled around 1537), Sarvani describes the flight of Afghan nobles following the battle of Panipat, with their entire households – possessions, flocks and families. Similarly, Kolff refers to the Purbiya warlords taking women from the harem of the defeated Malwa Sultan into their households. The

93 Elliot and Dowson 1996, 4:428-32.
status of these captured women became a political issue in the prolonged conflict and negotiations between Silhadi and Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. The Padmavat refers to the sixteen hundred dasis of Ratansen who are pressed into the service of Alauddin when he is invited into the fort of Chitor [561].

Thus, polygamy with its attendant forms of household organization such as intrigue and contests over inheritance, was not the only practice common to regional Rajput and Afghan elites. The structure of the extended household was also similar, in which the elite across religious communities maintained harems and female slaves. Thus it may have been that in the turbulent years of the mid-sixteenth century, the real and perceived vulnerability of women in the households of the elite provided the impetus to contemporary fictional narratives – that re-cast the ruler of Delhi’s imperial conquests of territory in terms of his desire for women.

The terms of Ratansen’s negotiations with Alauddin Khalji are clear: he is willing to pay tribute and accept the Sultan of Delhi as his overlord, but he will not cede his wife:

If the lady of the house leaves,

What remains of the house?

What is Chitaur and the realm of Chanderi?

Why should anyone despoil a man’s house

While he is still alive? Only a yogi leaves his house.

Am I Hammira, the lord of Ranthambhor,

Who cut off his head and gave up his body?

I am Ratansen, a man of power!

I pierced the fish and gained Sairandhri, Draupadi as serving girl.

I have borne a mountain, just like Hanumana.

I have bridged the ocean like King Rama . . . .

He can seize my treasure and I would accept it, serve him as his slave.
But if he wants a lotus woman, let him go to Singhaladip himself! [Padmavat 491].

As Kolff points out, for a regional Rajput ruler in medieval Hindustan, his wife represents his network of political alliances. His status and prestige within that network depend upon his ability to offer protection to his women. The defence of the queen is therefore constituted as a vital part of the normative warrior-ethic. Alauddin attempts to lure Ratansen by offering to bestow Chanderi on him in exchange for the surrender of Padmavati. However, for Ratansen this control over additional territory would be meaningless if his status within his own network of alliances were undermined. The Rajput king has no option but to refuse.

Interestingly, the Chitävārtā presents an alternative resolution to such conflict: Khalji is successful in capturing Devagiri and abducting its already married princess. However, her virtue (sat) and his imperial status are both protected, as he becomes a ‘father’ to her. Her husband Saunrsi the prince of Dvarasamudra sets off to win her back. His Rajput virta in doing so is suitably rewarded by the paternalistic Sultan with additional revenues from Gujarat!

**Multi-layered resolutions: Sufis, politics and patriarchy**

The above discussion reveals how this ‘tale of love’ with its structure of mystical symbolism is deeply embedded in contemporary politics. Further indication of such sustained engagement comes from the spiritual lineage Jayasi invokes at the beginning of the poem. Saiyad Ashraf Jahangir Simnani, the early fifteenth-century Chishti Sufi mentioned in the prologue, was one of the most important Sufis in the region under the Sharqi sultanate at Jaunpur. The extent of his influence can be gauged from the nature of the authority he enjoyed with the regional monarchs in the period. For example, he wrote to Ibrahim Shah Sharqi persuading the Sultan to liberate Bengal from the domination of Raja Ganesa. He was also consulted by Hushang Shah of Malwa, to whom he offered advice on matters of government and the duties of a Muslim ruler.
Simnani combined this close involvement in the politics of the regional kingdoms, with a prolific output of commentaries on the mysticism of Ibn 'Arabi for the benefit of novice mystics.96

The Mahdawi ancestry that Jayasi invokes demonstrates the same combination of close involvement in contemporary politics, and the simultaneous pursuit of mysticism. Jayasi’s immediate pir, Shaikh Burhanuddin Ansari of Kalpi, retired early in his life to a small cell, meditating, practising Sufi breathing exercises for control of the self, and reciting God’s praises. On the other hand, armed Mahdawis under the leadership of Shaikh Alai of Bayana sought to compel adherence to their specific norms and ways of life, aided and abetted by their followers among the local administration. Jayasi’s invocation of these dual lineages, Chishti and Mahdawi, thus locates him in a tradition of mystical theology and spiritual discipline, as well as a Sufi tradition of deep involvement with the state, politics and society. It is entirely consistent with these spiritual lineages therefore that such a poet should demonstrate multi-layered concerns about contemporary politics as much as mystical discipline.

The conclusion of the Padmavat articulates resolutions to each of these multiple layers of concerns, mystical, political and patriarchal, that it addresses itself to. The defeat of Khalji by the brave vassals Gora and Badal, does not mean that danger has been repulsed once and for all. Both within a Sufi metaphysic and in the context of the turbulence of contemporary northern India – caught in the transition between three dynasties, with fluid political alliances – danger must return. Alauddin Khalji does not pose the only threat to Chitaur, however. A neighbouring ruler can also threaten the mystical-political-patriarchal order the kingdom of Chitaur embodies.

When Ratansen is a prisoner in Alauddin’s Delhi, Devpal of Kumbhalner sends an emissary to woo Padmavati. Although she rejects his advances, Padmavati tells Ratansen of the insult to her and his honour, when he returns from Delhi. An angry Ratansen characterizes Devpal’s advances:

When has the frog ever looked at the lotus?

The bat never sees the face of the sun.

96 S.A.A. Rizvi 1978, 1:268-70.
The peacock dances in his own colour,

But can the rooster copy him successfully?

Before the Turks come to attack the fort,

I will seize him, else I am not a king! [Padmavat 645].

As Behl points out, Ratansen’s response once again invokes the mystical symbolism of “the fragrance of the lotus that only the true lover or connoisseur, the bee, can grasp.”⁹⁷ Such imagery suggests that Devpal’s wooing of Padmavati exists in the same symbolic continuum as Alauddin’s desire for her. In the political order encoded by the poem, there is no qualitative distinction between the emperor of Delhi and a neighbouring Rajput ruler, as enemies of Chitor.

Ratansen attacks Devpal’s fortress, and successfully avenges the insult to his honour, by engaging Devpal in single combat and beheading him. However, he is mortally wounded by the latter’s poisoned spear. Thus, in the Padmavat, Ratansen falls not to Khalji’s attack but to another Rajput ruler’s poisoned sword in single combat. His death signifies resolutions both at the mystical and political levels. At the mystical-symbolic level, Ratansen has obliterated himself for the love of the lotus, and transcended mortal boundaries between himself and the object of his love. At the political level, he dies avenging the insult to his queen, settling his vaar [Padmavat, 646]. Whether his enmity is with the Sultan of Delhi or with the Rajput ruler of Kumbhalner is immaterial.

The Sufi love-story that is also heroic romance, successfully articulates the concerns not of a genealogically defined Rajput elite but of the more open-ended central Rajput groups of Hindustan. As such, the Padmavat narrativizes the fact of fratricidal strife within the Rajputs, in the conflict of Ratansen and Devpal. Heroic narratives emerging within Rajasthan barely half a century later, obscured this narrative possibility and had Ratansen die in the fight against Khalji instead.

Poems that end with the death of the protagonists are not new in the Sufi tradition. Thus in Nizami’s *Laila Majnun* the heroine dies first, followed by the hero. In the tale of Shirin and Farhad, the sculptor Farhad dies first, followed by Shirin. These two examples indicate that, whatever the specific narrative logic that determines who dies first, there is no larger symbolic investment in Sufi love-stories, in the prior death of either hero or heroine as a generic convention. At the mystical-symbolic level, the immolation of the wives, Padmavati and Nagmati, signifies their obliteration of themselves for love, just like Ratansen. In their own words:

There was one kind of circle at our wedding;
Now there is another as we go with you.
In life, beloved, you embraced us.
We will not leave your embrace in death.
And the knot that you, our lover, tied,
Let it never be untied from beginning to end.
How can you trust this world?
It changes from existence to non-existence in an instant.
We and you, lord, will be together in both worlds. [*Padmavat* 650].

To quote Behl again, “Love consummated, in the generic logic of the *premakhyans*, leads to a final annihilation and a return to the divine realm.” Sufi admiration for the practice of widow-immolation has been noted above (‘A Sufi tale of love’). The *Padmavat* deploys the conventional Sufi interpretation of *sati*, in interpreting the immolation of the widowed queens as the desired Sufi ideal of *fana*. The queens are depicted as willingly annihilating their selves, to transcend the

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58 I cite Nizami not because of his canonical status, and not in order to suggest that his was the definitive rendition of the Sufi love-stories, but merely as one example of the genre, among many others, including subsequent retellings of the same stories.
'Earth is vanity! Until ashes fall on it,
Desire for the world cannot be extinguished!' ... All the women committed jauhar, and all the men died in battle.
The Emperor demolished the fortress, Chitaur became Islam [Padmavat 651].
In this final annihilation, all of Chitaur ('the domain of the heart and mind') is consumed, to realize its identity with the divine through martyrdom. This is the brilliant pun signifying the true meaning of Chitor’s "becom[ing] Islam." Meanwhile, Alauddin is left with ashes, for all his troubles in pursuit of Padmavati.

Aziz Ahmad has offered one reading of this conclusion to the Padmavat:
This allegorical epic of Rajput chivalrty, written with a Muslim, ends with an anti-Islamic finale: "and Chitore became Islam." As the author is a Muslim, the array and might of the Turks is not belittled, though his sympathy lies with the Rajputs . . . Much more remarkable is his complete self-identification with the sense of tragic intent in a Rajput epic-theme, and its own of his own culture and religion; for the outwardly simple phrase 'Chitore became Islam' signifies, in its allegorical equation, the unsubstantial victory of illusion.

Ahmad’s reading is based once again on a primordialist understanding of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ religious communities and their hostilities. What he finds remarkable is the “self-identification” of a “Muslim” poet with the ['Hindu'] “Rajputs.”

As Aditya Behl argues, however, it is much more productive to read Jayasi’s celebration of the Rajputs’ self-annihilation and his scepticism of Alauddin’s triumph, as a conjunction of his Sufi convictions and his local context. As argued above, the anxieties of the latter regional context about imperial expansion from Delhi in the sixteenth century, generated a spate of literary narratives of Alauddin Khalji’s earlier conquests. Jayasi’s sense of tragedy at the defeat of the

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100 Behl’s translation (2001, Chapter 5, 31).
101 I am indebted to Behl (2001, Chapter 5, 32), for this analysis of the multiple significations of Chitor's 'conversion' to Islam and Alauddin's defeat in victory.
102 Ahmad 1963, 475.
Rajputs can be ascribed to this local perspective. At the same time, jauhar, the self-annihilation of the Rajputs by immolation and in battle, is re-encoded as the climactic instance of Sufi fana, obliteration of the self. In this perspective, the Rajputs have triumphed over Alauddin after all, in achieving transcendence. As Behl argues,

Read within the . . . self-avowed spiritual superiority [of the Chishti Sufis] over worldly rulers, the poem can also be read as a critique of political power . . . . In any contest between love rightfully gained and love wrested through violence, true ‘ishq always wins. The poets [of the Avadhi Sufi ‘tales of love’] thus send a clear message to political elites about the symbolic independence of Sufi silsilahs despite their reliance on those same elites for patronage.\(^{103}\)

In its resolution, therefore, the Padmavat is consistent with the same method and purpose deployed throughout the poem. Jayasi appropriates diverse competing perspectives from the spiritual and political realms of his historical context and weaves them into a coherent narrative, symbolic of a Sufi-mystical doctrine. As wielded by Jayasi, such a method establishes the hierarchical superiority of the Sufi perspective over all other, potentially competing perspectives. As demonstrated above, these perspectives include those of the local Rajput-Afghan elite from which such poems drew their patrons; and the political elite of the imperialist Delhi Sultanate, that provided the patronage under which Sufi silsilahs expanded their spiritual territories in north India.

Conclusion

To sum up, the manuscript traditions of the Padmavat indicate dual contexts of circulation and transmission for the poem. The evidence indicates that medieval audiences read the Padmavat both as a Sufi ‘tale of love,’ and as lay, heroic romance. The poem addresses its multiple audiences and multiple contexts of potential patronage, by selectively appropriating from

\(^{103}\) Behl 2001, Chapter 5, 31.
the values of those social groups, and from the literary genres associated with them. The
Padmavat also incorporates in itself elements from the ascetic exercises and imagery of a
competing religious tradition, the Nathpanth. These appropriations are cast into a distinct
hierarchy within the narrative of the poem, by which the doctrinal and spiritual superiority of
Sufism is firmly established.

At the same time, the poem also encodes a distinct perspective on contemporary history.
Further, it articulates the political and patriarchal practices of the particular lay groups that
constituted its potential clientele of patrons. In its engagement with contemporary politics, the
Padmavat displays the same method that it does in its negotiations with rival religious orders and
their spiritual disciplines. The poem successfully weaves together the political and patriarchal
norms of its potential audiences in a Sufi frame of reference. In so doing, once again the narrative
establishes the political superiority of Sufism to its multiple audiences among the political elites
of north India in the Sultanate period. These included the political elites of the Sultanate itself,
who provided the patronage for the spread of Sufi institutions and networks in north India; as well
as the local landholding and military elites, both Rajput and Afghan, who constituted the
immediate network of patronage for the production, circulation and transmission of the Avadhi
'tales of love' in the medieval period.