Padmini, the Ideal Queen: Sufi and Rajput Codes in Malik Muhammad Jayasi's 'Padmavat'

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This paper will examine the interplay between Sufi ethics and emerging Rajput codes in the definition of an ideal woman, in Malik Muhammad Jayasi's 'Padmavat' (1540). The 'Padmavat,' the first available narrative about Padmini, is a sufi tale belonging to a distinct genre of romances composed by sufi poets in the North and in the Deccan, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. While the norm of the ideal 'Padmini' woman was prevalent in medieval narratives as a generic category inherited from medieval texts on erotics, I argue that the Sufi frame shapes Jayasi's representation of a Rajput queen. The conventions of the genre to which the narrative belongs, determine the elements of the story, making Padmini the object of various kinds of quests. And the operation of a Sufi frame of reference reshapes the figure of the Rajput king whose wife she becomes—a reshaping significant in the context of the dominant Rajput ethic being defined in sixteenth century Central and North India.

The overlap between Sufi and Rajput tropes can be seen most clearly in the resolution of this narrative. A Sufi metaphysic of love, which determines that the relationship between king and his beloved queen be under constant threat, coincides with the design of contemporary Rajput heroic narratives which establish a normative and gendered code of conduct through the defence of threatened queen and territory. The specific denouement created by Jayasi, of the death of the king and the self-immolation of his queens, is seen as normative by both frames of reference operative in the poem, the Sufi and the Rajput.

This paper is part of work in progress, and is a tentative initial hypothesis about the dynamics governing the shape and message of the first available narrative about Padmini, the queen of Chitor. I recount the story of the *Padmavat* in some detail, because it differs

substantially from the story of Padmini commonly known today. The plot is as follows:

Padmavati is the daughter of Gandharv sen, the king of Singhal. At the age of twelve, she is given a palace of her own and starts living with her *sakhiyan*. There is a parrot Hiraman in the palace, learned in the shastras and shrewd. Padmavati and he develop great affection for each other. They read the Vedas together. The king resents the parrot and orders his killing. The bird, terrified for its life, bids farewell to Padmavati and flies away, leaving her in tears. In the forest, the parrot is trapped by a *baheliya*, a bird catcher, and sold to a brahman, who takes him to Chitaur.[1] Ratansen, the king of Chitaur, sees that the bird is scholarly, 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, in *viraha*. In spite of the dissuasions of his mother and his first wife Nagmati, he becomes an ascetic and embarks on his quest to win this ideal woman for his wife. When 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 him. Guided by the parrot, he reaches the coast, crosses the seven seas, and arrives in Singhal with his associates. There, he begins penance in a Shiv temple, 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 coming. She is offended and returns to the 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*.'

Shiv and Parvati intervene to quench this fire of 'desire' (*kama*) which threatens to burn the entire world down in its intensity. Tested and found true by Parvati, Ratansen then launches an attack on the fortress, on the advice of Shiv. 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 this time, and reveals his true identity as king of Chitaur. Gandharvsen marries his daughter to Ratansen, and 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. Finding that the fire of her *viraha* threatens to burn everything down, 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 *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, while 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. As the drowning Ratansen is brought in 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 and rewarded by the Ocean and his daughter 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, not only with a new wife but also with 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, but this angers Padmavati, who complains in turn. Ratansen now has to placate her in the same way. The two wives confront each other in physical conflict, and some degree of peace in the household is established only when Ratansen reprimands both 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 in order 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, and 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 the 'Padmini' woman, supreme amongst the four categories of women, and found only in Singhal, but now also present in the nearby kingdom of Chitaur.

Alauddin lays siege to Chitaur and demands that Padmavati be handed over to him. The king refuses, although he 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 favoured guest, disregarding the express warnings of his vassals Gora and Badal. Alauddin catches a glimpse of Padmavati by subterfuge, and then traps Ratansen into accompanying him to the foot of the fort, from where he is taken prisoner and taken away 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 the prison in Delhi, and free the king. On the journey back however, they are discovered, and 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, suggesting that she give up Chitaur and become his queen instead. Padmavati rebuffs her, and narrates the insult to Ratansen on his return. Ratansen sets off again to punish Devpal, promising to return before Khalji's forces reach Chitaur. Devpal and Ratansen kill each other in single combat. Nagmati and Padmavati commit Sati before Khalji's forces arrive. The Chitaur forces go out for their last battle, as their women commit jauhar. Khalji acquires an empty fortress, cheated of victory even as Chitaur is conquered by Islam.

The poet, Malik Muhammad Jayasi, states his objective in telling this story at the outset: 'Of jewels and precious stones[2] I spake; sweet, with the wine of love, priceless' [23].[3] The poem is thus about the love of Ratansen and Padmavati, of the obstacles that love is confronted by, and of its outcome. As the story of an especially significant love, the *Padmavat,* composed around 1540, belongs to a distinct genre of love stories, the Sufi 'tale of love,'[4] narratives composed between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries in northern India as well as the Deccan. The first of these was Maulana Dawud's *Chandayan* in Avadhi, believed to have been composed between 1370 and 1380, in Dalmau (Rae Bareli). Qutban's *Mrigavati* (c. 1503, around Jaunpur) and Manjhan's *Madhumalati* (c. 1545, in Chunar), also in Avadhi, are the other works of the genre closest to the *Padmavat* in time and context.

Borrowing from the tradition of the Persian *masnawi,* these poems begin with the praise of Allah, His Creation, Muhammad and the first four caliphs and the ruler of the land. They also then trace the spiritual/theological ancestry of the poet, which culminates with his *pir.*[5] In other words, the specific Sufi context is clearly stated, before

beginning the main story. The audience is thus instructed to keep that Sufi frame of reference in mind, while listening to or reading the poem.[6] 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:

> Muhammad,[7] 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].

The available evidence about the medieval reception of these poems suggest that they were successful in achieving this avowed intention. Thus Badauni speaks of a Makhdum Shaikh Taqiu'd-Din Waiz Rabbani, 'a godly preacher,' who

> . . . used to read some occasional poems of his [Maulana Da'ud's *Chandayan*] 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.[8]

In all four 'tales of love,' the hero hears of the exceptional beauty of a princess in a distant land, is 'possessed'[9] 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 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:[10] 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].

The sustained similarities between the poems suggest that they can be read as sharing a common repertoire of Sufi symbols and allegories. 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;[11] 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].[12]

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;[13] 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 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 is widely recognized that the Sufi writers of these 'tales of love' were drawing upon a tradition of pantheistic mysticism elaborated in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in India, under the spreading influence of Ibn Arabi, the fourteenth century Andalusian mystic philosopher.[14] 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. Hence, the pursuit of knowledge/Love/Beauty first demanded the renunciation of the appetitive soul. In the Sufi *masnawis*, the lover loses his sense of himself 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' [*Chandayan* 154]. 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 hive has both the honey and the bee' [*Padmavat* 166]. The seeker can search for the Truth only as long as he is separated from it. Hence, *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 realise this without having acquired the merit of good deeds?' [*Madhumalati* 29]. And since Truth can be arrived at only through renunciation and penance, the suffering in *viraha* of the lover 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. Bikram and Raja Bhoja may have found Mahesh the lord of the hills through their ascetic discipline of *tantu–mantu*, 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 Padumavati, 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 self-lessness, 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.[15]

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 *Chandayan* and the *Madhumalati* conclude with the hero obtaining his beloved and re-entering the social world he had renounced with added prestige, the *Mrigavati* 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 *Mrigavati,* 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 *Mrigavati* 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' [*Mrigavati* 418]. These two explanations together suggest that the return of crisis in the poems is not inconsistent with their Sufi metaphysic. If Truth is an absolute, transcendental principle, and the seeker after it is a mortal, then by the definition of his mortality he can achieve access to it only in brief, ecstatic moments; permanent, continuous access to it cannot be guaranteed. 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 can finally be resolved only through the actual death of the hero. Both the *Padmavat* and the *Mrigavati* follow up the death of the hero with the *sati* of the wives. Sufi tradition, from Amir Khusrau onwards, 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.'[16] 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 metaphysic of love as 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 Hamid u'd-Din Nagauri 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 AD) identified Sufi beliefs based on Ibn Arabi's pantheistic mysticism, with the philosophy and practices of Gorakhnath, and found Nath ascetic exercises to be compatible with Chishti practices.[17] 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. For example, in describing Ratansen's assault on the fort of Singhal in order to gain access to Padmavati, he adopts the Nath esoteric theory of the body as a fort, in order to indicate allegorically, the 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 which prevent yogis from gaining control over the *cakras*, and so on.[18] 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, who also renounced their kingdoms and became ascetics in pursuit of a religious goal, in one crucial aspect. As Thomas 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.[19]

How much of this allegory would have been available to the medieval audience of the Sufi 'tales of love'? Badauni's reference to the Mahdum Shaikh Taqiu'd Din's sermons, cited above, suggests one tradition of transmission at least, in which these 'tales of love' were disseminated precisely as elucidating an allegorical metaphysic of 'divine love.' Another Persian translation of the *Padmavat* in 1674 by Muhammad Shakir, a Sufi Shaikh from Amroha, subtly foregrounds the proposed impalement of Ratansen the *jogi* by Gandharvsen the king, in re-reading the *Padmavat* within a hagiographic tradition going back to the martyrdom of Al-Hallaj, the famous ninth-century Sufi of Baghdad.[20] Within this Sufi tradition of transmission, the mystical symbolism of the poem clearly had continuing relevance.

As has been stated earlier, Sufi 'tales of love' were composed in the northern and central parts of the subcontinent over four centuries. The four 'tales of love' referred to in this paper, belong to a larger group and genre of works, which includes Usman's *Chitravali* (1613)

and Sheikh Nabi's *Gyandeep* (1619); poems in Dakhini include Mulla Wajihi's *Qutb-Mushtari* (1610) and *Sabras* (1636), Gawwasi's *Saif-ul-Mulk wa Wadi-ul-Jamal* (1619) and Mukimi's *Chandarbadan wa Mahiyar* (1627).

In these 'tales of love' the Sufi frame seems to impose attributes and demands upon the protagonist, which were conventionally associated with women in the non-Sufi love-stories circulating in medieval India. Thus, as Shyam Manohar Pande points out, in the non-Sufi tales love is first 'kindled' in the woman, and therefore *viraha* is also sharper in her, to the point where the heroines of these poems are defined by and valued for these attributes. In the Avadhi Sufi 'tales of love' in contrast, both the experience of love and *viraha* with their metaphysical underpinnings, are the domain of the man. The *Padmavat* actually seems to be aware of this inversion of gender-roles, as it were: Ratansen as the lover in *viraha* explicitly likens his situation to those of Sakuntala, Damavati (Damayanti) and Kamakandala (from another medieval love-story told and retold, the *Madhavanal-Kamakandala*) [*Padmavat* 200]. The symbolic fire of *viraha* in which Ratansen burns, also threatens to become a pyre literally, in the narrative mode of allegory—unable to bear the *biyog* anymore, he 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. The deliberate confusion of gender stereotypes continues in Parvati's and later Lacchmi's testing of Ratansen's *sat bhav*. The hero's integrity, his *sat*, is measured in terms of his exclusive fidelity to Padmavati. The *Mrigavati* applies a similar test of sat to its protagonist Rajkunwar. In the 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 an irrelevant consideration.

This is not to suggest that the Avadhi Sufi 'tales of love' 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, may be the object of the seeker's quest; but she is also merely the pretext for the elucidation of a specific system of *sadhana* or *tariqat* (spiritual discipline) which privileges the emotional and spiritual progress of a male protagonist. In other words, the heroine's response to the wooing of the protagonist, or her emotional and spiritual journey if any, are not articulated to the same elaborate degree, as that of the hero. The masculine gender of this protagonist is not accidental. On two occasions in the *Padmavat*, the queen is also

afflicted by *viraha*, wants to become an ascetic and set off in pursuit of her lover: Nagmati, Ratansen's first wife, when the king is about to set off for Singhaldvip on his quest, and Padmavati 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 Bhartrhari, 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 implicitly argues, it would seem that mystical revelation of the Truth through the indispensable ascetic renunciation, is a privilege available only to men.

Masculine gender is not an indispensable attribute for protagonists of 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 *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) belong to the same tradition.[21]

This indicates that the reasons for the masculine gender of the protagonist in the group of love-stories the *Padmavat* belongs to, are not intrinsic to the Sufi frame of reference, but must be sought elsewhere. I would suggest that they 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.

As I have indicated earlier, the characteristic structure of these 'tales of love' involves the hero encountering several obstacles or adventures before he can obtain his beloved. These obstacles not only correspond to his spiritual penance within the Sufi metaphysic, they also place 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.'[22] Such stories are hero-centred; 'women have a less active role . . . and 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.'[23] Elements of this structure can be seen in the *Padmavat*, but it is the *Mrigavati* that is closest to the form of the dastan. In his pursuit of Mrigavati the protagonist Rajkunwar rescues another maiden Rupmani from a demon's clutches and marries her; escapes from the clutches of a cannibalistic goatherd by blinding him; and nearly has another adventure with a demon. In Jayasi's appropriation of dastan tropes, the Sufi allegory of spiritual quest controls the number and nature of adventures Ratansen faces, more tightly. But the example of the *Mrigavati*, with its potentially endless number of adventures, shows how these Avadhi 'tales of love' successfully combined the horizons and attributes of the *dastan* with those of their own Sufi metaphysic. For example, the Sufi exaltation of the heroine to almost transcendent status—in the *Mrigavati* 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, which involved tests of skill, strength and intelligence, is now allegorized into a spiritual journey, testing spiritual assets.

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 . . . .'[24] While this reading might account adequately for the aesthetic of the *dastan*'s potentially endless narrative proliferation, 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 particular world-view in which kings and queens, the 'battlefield and the elegant courtly life,' define a certain normative social order.[25]

The Avadhi Sufi 'tales of love' referred to above, point to the fact that literary borrowing is not merely a matter of narrative imitations but also a process of negotiation with the social horizons of the 'original,' in this case, those of the *dastan*. I would suggest that these poets use the tropes of the *dastan* avowedly, with an eye to the nature of their specific audience: Sufi khanqahs and dargahs in medieval India, as well as the feudal elite that provided patronage for both those religious centres and literary production. This paper has already examined the ways in which these 'tales of love' are addressed to the concerns of the Sufi initiate audience. For poets aspiring to find patronage outside

the khanqah and dargah as well, the court of the local ruler or even zamindar, was an obvious alternative. Poems appropriating and re-negotiating the courtly ethic of the *dastan* provided a convenient vehicle. And this is what these four specific Avadhi 'tales of love' especially, have in common: as de Bruijn argues, they 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.'[26]

That local court need not necessarily have been only a Rajput court. Two factors enabled the writers of these Sufi masnawis to address themselves to the wide variety of ethnic groups which 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. More fundamentally however, the character of that particular ethnic group was not as unified as later chroniclers and genealogists have assumed. As Dirk Kolff proves, rather than denote a fixed ethnic identity, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries at least, the term *Rajput* 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 . . .'[27] (the region where these Avadhi 'tales of love' were composed). I would suggest 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, who by the fifteenth century, were already consolidating their political gains through the evolution of other literary genres which defined heroism as the continuing heritage and tradition of hereditary lineage.

One index of the *Padmavat* being located sharply in its immediate context, is that many of the events it refers to, belong to the early sixteenth century, which are re-cast as having occurred in the early fourteenth century. Instead of the historical opponent of Alauddin at the siege of Chitor in 1303, Jayasi has probably modelled his Ratansen on the actual Ratanasena who ruled Chitor between 1527 and 1532. The trick of hiding soldiers in palanquins to get them inside a fortress is reported in Badayuni's account of Sher Shah's siege of a Rohtas fortress in 1537. And six years before the composition of the *Padmavat*, Rajput noblewomen had carried out *jauhar* when Chitor was conquered by Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat.[28] I would also suggest that the proliferation of narratives about Alauddin Khalji's conquests in the early sixteenth century (for example the *Hammir Raso*, the

Chitai-varta and the *Padmavat*) is a response to the phenomenon of renewed attempts at imperial expansion and consolidation by the ruler of Delhi in this period. The expeditions of the Khalji ruler proved a convenient vehicle for articulating contemporary local anxieties about the new series of rulers in Delhi with imperial ambitions.

I would therefore argue that the values defined as constituting a normative 'Rajput' ethic in these Avadhi Sufi 'tales of love,' articulate sharply the situation of the Rajputs in their local context of central and northern India, rather than in Rajasthan. (For the remaining part of this paper, by the term 'Rajput' I mean this Central and North Indian context.) Thus Ratansen's ascetic 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. That this service entails an attack upon the fort of Singhala, and capture and imprisonment with their lord, is indicative of the poem's Rajput moorings. The companions are also rewarded by Gandharvsen with sixteen thousand Padmini women, when Ratansen finally wins Padmavati. The trajectory would be familiar in a region from which large numbers of Rajputs as well as other pastoral and semi-tribal groups left home and travelled long distances in service of a warlord or military commander, for personal honour but more materially for the economic rewards of military success, loot. Thus the Sufi journey with a metaphysical aim also doubles as journey for material advancement through an avenue familiar to the Rajputs of central and north India.[29]

The gearing of the journey to the winning of Padmavati in marriage is also a trope resonant in both the Sufi and Rajput world-views. That marriage was a central mechanism of Rajput society in fifteenth and sixteenth century Rajasthan, for the building of alliances and the settlement of *vair* (hostilities), is well established by now.[30] But 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 *saga* . . . their alliance network . . . [which was] the result of negotiation, not ascription.'[31] Finding the ideal woman is thus as vital for the king/warrior in this Rajput ethic, 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), by which he has not only won the object of his desire and sealed an alliance through marriage, but has also fulfilled all the 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.[32] The 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.

The description of the beloved is another instance of such negotiation between Sufi and Rajput codes. Starting with the *Chandayan,* these Sufi 'tales of love' appropriate a convention from the Sanskrit classical tradition, that of the *nakha-shikha varnan,* to describe the transcendent beauty of the beloved. The nakha-shikha varnan customarily involved a description of the woman's entire anatomy organ by organ, starting from her hair and moving steadily downwards till it reached the soles of her feet. This catalogue traditionally involved a fair bit of erotic detail. For example, an itinerant singer passing by could catch sight of Chanda, the Ahir *gowari* (cowherdess), and describe her in detail to an enemy king. The *Padmavat* in contrast, articulates Rajput concerns for the shielding of their women from the public gaze, by imposing its own protocol upon the *nakha-shikha varnan.* Padmavati is described on three different occasions through the use of this catalogue. The parrot Hiraman lists her assets to Ratansen, persuading him to set off in quest of her. The poet provides a second description of her as she waits for Ratansen on their wedding night. Then Raghav Chetan describes her to Alauddin Khalji. While the first two catalogues, made with relation to Ratansen, are complete, the third description by Raghav Chetan stops with describing her waist. Clearly an enemy king cannot be allowed the same free access to a Rajput queen that he may enjoy with an Ahir woman.

The negotiation in these poems between Sufi and Rajput ethics is not always so successful, however. The clearest instance of a disjunction is in the polygamous status of the hero. Polygamy for the hero in medieval romances, and the upper-caste patriarchy it articulated, always implied monogamy for the woman. Once again, the prior marriage of the heroine Chanda in the *Chandayan* is a deviation from this norm indicative of the poem's Ahir moorings.

A sixteenth-century Sufi treatise on Hindi poetry, the *Haqa'iq-e Hindi* of Abdul Vahid Bilgrami, provides a Sufi allegorical gloss for the two wives of the hero. 'In a Sufi sense, the two wives of the heroes . . . signify the *ruh* or immortal soul's link with the next world and the connection of the *nafs-e ammarah* or lower or carnal soul with this world.'[33] As Aditya Behl demonstrates, Bilgrami's work sheds much light on the interpretive practices of Sufi communities reading Braj and Avadhi poetry. In this context, I would argue that the creation of

a Sufi allegorical equivalence for the polygamous status of the hero, points to the sustained negotiation between Sufi mystical poetics and the practices of the elite social groups (such as polygamy) which patronized both Sufi communities as well as literary production in medieval India.

The Sufi ethic of love, however, privileges the exclusive relationship between the seeker and his beloved, implying and demanding monogamous fidelity from both the man and the woman. Ratansen can win Padmavati only after he has successfully passed this test. 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. According to Bilgrami's allegorical gloss, this maneouvre marks the return of the seeker/hero to the world, after the Truth has been revealed to him in his union with his beloved. The first wife re-enters the narrative lamenting the absence of her husband, and her lament is articulated in a *barah-masa,* the form traditionally employed to articulate the *viraha* of the heroine. The terms used to describe this *viraha* are identical with the terms used to describe the *viraha* of seeker and his beloved formerly [*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. I would suggest that the inexorable fact of Rajput polygamy co-exists uneasily here with a Sufi monogamous ethic. As Rajput values take precedence here, the heroine now has to contend with a rival for her husband's affection. Ratansen simply re-enters into 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 *Mrigavati* and the *Chandayan.* The unease is never resolved in the Mrigavati 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.

Sufi and Rajput tropes overlap once again, however, in the resolution of this narrative. A Sufi metaphysic of love, which determines that the relationship between king and his beloved queen be under constant threat, coincides with the design of contemporary Rajput heroic narratives which establish a normative 'masculine' code of conduct through the defence of threatened queen and territory. The *Padmavat* itself refers to the siege of Devagiri and of Ranthambhor and the death of its ruler Hammir in this context, 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 Central India, explicitly links the conquests of Ranthambhor, Chitor and Devagiri by Khalji, and ascribes them all to the Sultan's desire for the queens of the respective kingdoms. The linkage between queen and territory is not peculiar, therefore, to the *Padmavat.* Such a linkage is also especially significant in the immediate contemporary context of the poem. Dattu Sarvani, a mercenary Afghan soldier of the sixteenth century, describes in his anecdotes attached to the *Latai'if-I-Quddusi* (compiled around 1537), describes the flight of Afghan nobles following the battle of Panipat, with their entire households—possessions, flocks and families.[34] Kolff refers to the Purbiya warlords taking women from the harem of the defeated Malwa Sultan into their households. The status of these captured women became a political issue in the prolonged conflict and negotiations between Silhadi and Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. And 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]. It may perhaps be in the context of this increased vulnerability in the turbulent years of the mid-sixteenth century, of women associated with the households of the elite, that the fictional narratives of the period 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 [491], who represents his net-work of political alliances. His status and prestige within that network and therefore his *dharma* depend upon his ability to offer protection to his women. The lure that Khalji offers him in return for Padmavati, added control of Chanderi, would be meaningless if his status within his own network of alliances were undermined. Ratansen has no option but to refuse. Khalji also cannot obtain Padmavati, because she in turn is committed to the monogamous fidelity enjoined upon her by both Sufi and Rajput codes. Interestingly, the *Chitai-varta* presents an alternative resolution to such conflict: Khalji is successful in capturing Devagiri and abducting its already married princess, but her *sat* and his imperial status are both protected as he becomes a 'father' to her. The Rajput *veerta* of her husband Saunrsi the Rajput prince of Dvarasamudra who sets off to win her back, can also then be suitably rewarded by the paternalistic Sultan with additional revenues from Gujarat!

The *Padmavat* works by a different logic, however. The defeat of Khalji 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 the mid-sixteenth century in northern India, caught in the transition between three dynasties, and ever changing political alignments and alliances, danger must return. Not only will Khalji's army return to lay siege all over again to the fort, a neighbouring ruler can also threaten this mystical/political/patriarchal order. Thus Ratansen falls not to Khalji's attack but to another Rajput ruler's poisoned sword in single combat. Significantly though, he dies avenging the insult to his queen, settling his *vair* [*Padmavat*, 646]. The moorings of the *Padmavat* in its immediate context are clear once again: a Sufi love-story which is also a Rajput heroic romance, could articulate the fact of fratricidal strife within the Rajputs. Heroic romances 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, and 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 hero or heroine as a generic convention. Both the *Padmavat* and the *Mrigavati* clearly show the impact of Rajput patriarchy upon this Sufi formula: the hero must now necessarily precede the heroine so that the latter can bring the poem to its culmination by providing one last proof of her supreme virtue and supreme love, through immolating herself on the pyre of her dead husband.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 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 distinguish Jayasi's usage. For the fortress in Mewar, I use its conventional name and spelling, Chitor.
2. 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.
3. 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,

although I remain indebted to Shirreff at many places.

4. A literal translation of the term the poems use to describe themselves, *piram kahani*. See *Chandayan* 172 and *Padmavat* 23, for example.
5. The indebtedness of these Sufi poems for their prefaces to the Persian *masnawis*, has been widely recognized. See for example Shyam Manohar Pandey, *Madhyayugin Premakhyan* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1982).
6. Like many other genres of narrative in medieval India, the Sufi 'tales of love' of love straddled the oral and written domains. They were recited, in part or in full, in pulpits, khanqahs and dargahs as well as in the courts and homes of secular patrons. They were also transmitted as written texts, in khanqahs as well as in secular contexts. I use the term 'audience' to refer to both listeners as well as readers.
7. The name of the poet, Malik Muhammad of Jayas.
8. Al-Badayuni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, trans. George S. Ranking, 1898, rpt. Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1990), vol. 1, p.333
9. The lover is described as *ba-ur*, literally 'insane'.
10. The Avadhi original is *biraha*, literally the pain/desire brought about by separation (of a lover).
11. The Avadhi original is *Ihai roop pargat bahu roopa*, where *roop* stands for both 'form' and 'beauty,' an equivalence that is convenient for the Sufi exaltation of such beauty into a metaphysical principle.
12. Mataprasad Gupt ed. *Manjhan krit Madhumalati*, Allahabad: Mitra Prakashan, 1961.
13. 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, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978-83), vol. 1, p. 366.
14. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the Sixteenth Century*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1965), pp. 1-67.
15. For this analysis of the allegory of the Sufi 'tales of love,' I am indebted to Shyam Manohar Pandey, *Madhyayugin Premakhyan*, 2nd rev. ed. (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1982).
16. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* vol. 1, p. 363.
17. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* vol. 1, pp. 336-49.
18. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* vol. 1, pp. 368-369.
19. Thomas de Bruijn, *The Ruby Hidden in the Dust: A Study of the Poetics of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's Padmavat*, unpubl. diss. University of Leiden, 1996, pp.80-81
20. Shantanu Phukan, 'None Mad as a Hindu Woman: Contesting Communal Readings of *Padmavat*,' in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* vol. XVI no. 1 (1996), pp. 41-54.
21. Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), pp. 150-155.
22. Frances Pritchett trans., ed. & introd. *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastan of Amir Hamza* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), Introduction.
23. De Bruijn, p. 113.
24. Ibid., p.1.
25. Ibid., p.1.
26. De Bruijn, p. 63.
27. Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), p.73.

28. Aziz Ahmad, 'Epic and Counter-Epic in Medieval India,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society 1963*, pp. 470-6
29. Kolff, pp. 71-82.
30. Norman Ziegler, *Action, Power and Service in Rajasthani Culture: A Social History of the Rajputs of Middle Period Rajasthan*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California 1973; also Parita Mukta, *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai*, 1994 (Delhi: OUP 1997) and Kumkum Sangari, 'Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of Bhakti', *EPW* July 7 & 15, 1990.
31. Kolff, pp. 100-1.
32. Kumkum Sangari, ibid., p. 1466.
33. Abdul Vahid Bilgrami, cited in Aditya Behl, *Rasa and Romance: The Madhumalati of Shaikh Manjhan Shattari*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Chicago, 1995, p. 74.
34. Simon Digby, 'Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani A Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier,' *IESHR*, 1965, pp. 52-80, 178-94