The Social History of a Genre:
Kathas across Languages in Early Modern North India

Francesca Orsini (SOAS)

SOAS, University of London
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square,
London WC1H 0XG UK
email: fo@soas.ac.uk

Abstract:

Tales are ubiquitous in the literary culture of premodern North India, as elsewhere, and they come in all shapes, languages, and inflections. For this reason, tracking them allows us to travel into and across most of the milieux of this multilingual literary culture. But precisely because of their ubiquity, when we move from the microlevel of individual texts to the macrolevel of literary culture and historical processes it becomes difficult to say anything more than – they were there, they circulated, they usually retold the same stories in new ways, or mixed familiar elements to produce new narratives. Yet if we pay attention to precisely their articulation and rearticulation of cultural and social imaginaries, in the particular linguistic textures and aesthetic emphasis, material form and evidence of patronage, the shifting extent of circulation and popularity, we can use the longue-durée history of the katha genre to illuminate the historical dynamics of cultural and aesthetic change in the region in ways that intersect, connect, and question macro-historical narratives of dynastic and epochal change.

The Social History of a Genre:
Kathas across Languages in Early Modern North India

Francesca Orsini (SOAS) [1]

माल भाँड नट नाटक नाचहिं

पंडित बैठि सासतर बाँचहिं

गीत नाद रस कथा भल होई बिसराम

गढ़कै लोग भएउ सुखी, दान देहिं भल दाम

Wrestlers, mimes, actors dance and perform,
pandits sit and read out the scriptures.
Songs, sounds, tales of *rasa*—it's a good pastime,
People from the fort are happy, they give good rewards.
Malik Muhammad Jayasi, *Kanhāvat*, ed. Gupta: 146 (24.7 and *doha*)

Introduction

The title of this essay is best framed as a question—Can we do a social history of *kathas* (Hindavi: tales) as a genre in early modern North India? And why should we even try? As Samira Sheikh and I wrote in the Introduction to the volume *After Timur Left* on fifteenth-century North India, 'literary texts are often the only way we have to write social history, to write individuals and groups, their self-representation and worldview into the picture, which is otherwise a largely empty and dichotomous one of court and people, rulers and dynasties, Muslims and Hindus, men and of course, hardly any women at all. To study [literary] voices and texts, and to study them in relation to each other and within a wider comparative framework, means attempting to write a thicker and more comprehensive history than that usually available in textbooks.'[2] Within the premodern literary culture of north India, *kathas* are ubiquitous and come in all shapes and languages. Religious sobriquets like

---

[1] Translations are mine unless stated otherwise.
[2] F. Orsini and S. Sheikh, 'Introduction', *After Timur Left*: 3.

'Sufi' or 'bhakti' have obscured how they 'arose from a common aspirational landscape.'[3] *Kathas* were a highly dialogic genre—in dialogue with each other and with other existing discourses, so much so that some can be called 'sites of religious interchange', so open they were to intertextual references, re-accenting, and re-contextualisation. Following their internal transformations and social locations over a *longue durée*, then, allows us to enter most levels of this multilingual literary culture and understand its dynamics.

But precisely because of their ubiquity—even within the tales themselves, story-telling, *rasa kathā,* is typically mentioned in descriptions of forts or cities (see epigraph above)—when we move from the microlevel of individual texts to the macrolevel of literary culture it becomes difficult to say anything more than 'they were always there, they circulated, they often retold the same stories in new ways, or mixed familiar elements to produce new texts.' So while overall the picture is one of generic continuity and stability—as the long list in **Table 1** shows, *kathas* continued to be written well into the twentieth century—they show enough variation for us to be able to pick out details of texture (plain narrative vs figurative description), social characterization (soldiers or kings?), intertextual references, and geographical imagination. So the question becomes—How can we do a social history of the *katha*?

Table 1. Kathas in Awadh[4]

Daud, *Cāndāyan* (1379), Dalmau
> 15c: lost Persian translation by 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi

Ishvardas, *Satyavatī kathā* (1501, mentions Sikandar Shah), born. in Kashi, settled in
> Ghazipur; also wrote *Ekādasī kathā, Svargārohaṇ*; *Bharata milāp, Aṅgadpair, Sītā vanvās*

Sadhan, *Maināsat* (early 1500s?), ms together with Maner *Chandāyan*
> Persian: Hamid Kalanauri (d. 1619), *'Iṣmatnāma* (long praise of Jahangir, turns Indian
> months into Persian zodiac signs)

Qutban, *Mirigāvatī* (1503), Husain Shah Sharqi, Kahalgaon (Bhagalpur dist., Bihar)
> Persian: *Anon. Rājkunvar* (1604), ill. prose version of Qutban's *Mirigavati* at Salim's
> Allahabad court

Lalach Kavi, *Haricarit* (1530), incomplete but popular, Hathgaon (near Rae Barelli),
> kayasth/*halwai*

Jayasi, *Padmāvat* (started 1540), *Kanhāvat* (finished 1540), *Ākhirī kalām, Akahrāvaṭ, Citrarekhā,*
> *Kahrānāmā, Maslānāma*, Jais

---

[3] *Ibid.*: 6.

[4] Sources: S.M. Pandey, *Madhyayugīn premākhyān*, R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature,* N. Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature*, Perso-Indica (last accessed 24 November 2016), R. Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen.*

   Persian: Mulla 'Abdul Shakur Bazmi (1590-1662), Deccan, *Rat Padam* (1618), *masnavi*
   (*hazaj* metre)
   Tuḥfa al-qulūb (1651) dedicated to Shah Jahan
   'Aqil Khan Razi (d. 1696), *Sham' wa parwāna* (1658-9, *masnavi*)
   Lachman Ram, Ghazipur, *Farah-bakhsh* (completed 1723), mixed prose and poetry
   Anandram Mukhlis, *Hangāma-yi 'ishq* (1739-40, *masnavi*)
    'Imaduddin Khan, Rampur, *Bustān i sukhan* (1808)
   Khwaja Muhammad Zakir, Banaras, *Padmāvat-i ẕakīr* (1807, several mss)
   Anon. prose *Padmāwat* (1894)
     Urdu: Mir Ziauddin 'Ibrat, *Padmāwat wa ratan sen* (1838)
     Maẕnawī sham'o parwāna qiṣṣa ratan o padam

Manjhan, *Madhumālatī* (1545), Sarangpur.
   Persian: S. Ahmad Muh. Husaini Kashifi (d. 1648), *Gulshan-i ma'ānī*, Kalpi
    'Aqil Khan Razi (d. 1696), *Manohar wa madhūmāltī* (date?)

Tulsidas, *Rāmcaritmānas* (begun 1574), Ayodhya -> Banaras.

Alam, *Mādhavānal kāmakandalā* (1584), mentions Todar Mall;
   Persian: Haqiri, *Maḥż-i ijāz (*1680), place?

Usman, *Citrāvalī* (1613) and *Indrāvatī* (?), Ghazipur.

Puhakar, *Rasaratan* (1618), from Bhumigaon (Doab)

Shaikh Nabi, *Gyāndīpak* (1617). Baldemau village, near Dospur, dist. Jaunpur.

Dharnidas (fl. 1656?), from Saran dist. in Bihar, *Prem-pragās*

Surdas, *Nal daman* (1657), father settled in Lucknow from Gurdaspur region.

Dukhharandas, *Puhupāvatī* (1669), Ghazipur, a follower of Malukdas.

Newaj (Tivari Brahmin from the Doab), *Śakuntalā* (1680) for Aurangzeb's son Azam Shah;
   also wrote *riti* verses.

Husain Ali, *Puhupāvatī* (1731), 'Harigaon', disciple of poet Keshavlal of Kannauj.

Qasim Shah, *Haṃsa jawāhara* (H1149/1736, Muhammad Shah's reigh), Daryabad, Bara Banki
   dist.

Kunwar Mukund Sing, *Naladamayantī* (1741) [only mentioned by Ramashankar Sukla
   Rasal]

Nur Muhammad 'Kamyab', *Indrāvatī* (1754)*, Anurāga bānsurī* (1764), Azamgarh region;
   also wrote in Persian.

Ghulam Ashraf, known as **Shaykh Nisar**, *Yūsuf zuleikhā* (1790), Rudauli, uses
   chaupai, kavitt and *savaiya*.

Shahnawaz 'Ali 'Saloni', *Prem cingārī* (1833)**,** Rai Bareilli-> Rewa, patronized by Raja
   Vishwanath Singh.

'Ali Muras, *Kunwarāvat Kathā* (date?); description/praise of Banaras at the beginning.

Khwaja Ahmad (1830-1904), *Nūr Jahān* (of Khutan, 1904), Babuganj, dist.
   Pratapgarh.

Shaikh Rahim Ansari (d. 1921), *Bhāṣā prema rasa* (1903-1915), worked in govt service in
    Bahraich; also wrote in Urdu and Persian

Kavi Nasir, *Prem darpaṇ* (1917), b. village Jamaniyan near Ghazipur -> Calcutta

   But here is the first challenge: although we know that *katha* texts, like songbooks, were meant to be read aloud, recited or expounded orally, how can we know how this happened if all we usually have are the bare texts, which tell us nothing about where they were written or copied, by whom and for whom? Yet, the material aspect of *kathas*—format, script, the quality

of paper and calligraphy, whether they are illustrated or not—does tell us something. Moreover, although the script of a *katha* manuscript gives us a clue to patronage and transmission, it was no obstacle to the aural transmission and understanding. Most available *katha* manuscripts from Awadh, the focus of this essay, are incomplete or without a colophon, and turned up in manuscript searches in private homes rather than courtly collections. This suggests that they were popular but makes them difficult to trace. The material evidence throws up several puzzles and unanswered questions, as we shall see, but they are interesting ones that would not even arise if we considered *katha*s simply as texts, independent of their material form.

The emergence of a genre

Within the landscape of early vernacular *kathas*, mostly versions of episodes from the epics and Puranas, the *Cāndāyan* (1379) definitely stands out. Da'ud wrote it in Dalmau, a brick and mud fortress and military checkpost on the Ganges commanded by his patron Malik Mubarak at the time of Firuz Shah Tughluq, and while one manuscript depicts the author as a pious, bare-breasted shaykh sitting cross-legged before a ledger with his book, Simon Digby has argued that he was rather a soldier or garrison officer.[5]

The location is important. Ramya Sreenivasan suggests that local chiefs who controlled strategically important towns like Dalmau (or Sarangpur, or Chanderi) would have aspired to be part of the north Indian political elite but lacked the resources to do so through lavish construction of temples, palaces, or fortresses. One thing they could do and did was to patronise poets and performers and to commission

---

[5] See Adamjee, 'Strategies of Visual Narration', Pl. 2.35; Digby, 'Before Timur Came': 345, also Sreenivasan, 'Warrior-Tales at Hinterland Courts': 249-50.

vernacular martial/courtly narratives. Indispensable for these chiefs was the ability to gather and control military manpower among local agriculturalists and pastoralists.[6] Unsurprisingly, then, it is local 'Rajas' and their agriculturalist/pastoralist soldiers (*bīra*) who are the protagonists of *Cāndāyan*. Lorik, the hero, is a brave warrior of undistinguished lineage with only 'fifty-two unnamed followers'.[7] Chanda, the heroine, is of higher status, and it is her father's city of Govar—as indeed Padmavati's father's Singhaldvip—that is described in lavish term as a splendid city with and abundance of groves, bazaars, and tanks.

At significant moments the rather fast narrative pace slows down and 'thickens', as Aditya Behl put it, as when the wandering musician's (*bājir*) describes Chanda's beauty to the neighbouring king Rupchand. The stock item of the description of the heroine's beauty from the tip of her hair to her toes is turned into effective narrative as each stanza increases Rupchand's desire.[8] Rupchand swoons and is ready to give the musician all his wealth. He loses blood hearing of Chanda's red lips; when he hears of her lovely tongue he can only scream 'catch her, catch her', and upon hearing of her beautiful mole (*tila*) he burns to ashes (*tila tila jarai bujhāi*).[9] Persian authors remarked again and again upon this ability of Hindi verses describing the heroine's beauty to ignite desire and the imagination.[10]

Apart from inaugurating the genre of Hindavi romances by adapting a local oral narrative to the stanzaic *chaupai-doha* format with Persian *masnavi* features (the prologue, the exaltation of the heroine), *Cāndāyan* is remarkable for two other reasons. First, its popularity,

---

[6] As Dirk Kolff has shown so well in *Naukar, Rajput, Sepoy.*
[7] Sreenivasan, 'Warrior Tales': 264. '"Knowledge of 'Lorik dances' … is documented in Mithila c. 1325 in Jyotirisvar's *Varṇaratnākara*"; McGregor, 'The Progress of Hindi': 915n3, quoted *ibid.*: 243n2.
[8] The description runs from stanza 58 to 85, and in the *Cāndāyan* manuscript in the John Rylands Library, the illustrator gives up after a few folios.
[9] Da'ud, *Cāndāyan*: 72.
[10] Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*, Phukan, 'Through a Persian Prism.'

which does not seem to have abated in the following centuries.[11] Second, it was the first vernacular tale to be copied in codex format in a form of Persian *naskh* and copiously illustrated. In fact the earliest manuscripts of the *Cāndāyan* are all illustrated and form a large enough corpus that can be divided into two distinct groups. No manuscript is complete or carries a colophon, but iconographic and codicological analysis has assigned the first group (mss in Berlin and Lahore-Chandigarh) to the Jaunpur-Bihar region and the second group to Central India – Malwa, Ahmadnagar or Khandesh.[12] Even if we frustratingly don't know who the patrons or copyists of these manuscripts were, the fact that *Cāndāyan* became a valued object—that it inaugurated a tradition of illustrated books in Hindavi and that it travelled so far without translation or local rewriting is deeply significant.

Who, among the Sultanate elites, were the mobile carriers and patrons of these vernacular books in Persian script?[13] Perhaps again those chieftains and military governors who could not invest in buildings but could and did invest in new symbols of conspicuous consumption—lavish clothes, perfumes, poets and bards… and now illustrated books. The compulsion to move, for war or because displaced by a stronger claimant, recurs in the genealogies and narratives of these military groups, both Dirk Kolff and Simon Digby have shown, and it is not surprising that their prized *katha, Cāndāyan*, should have travelled with them.

There is one puzzle about *Cāndāyan*, though. If it was so popular for so long, why do the next, and truly dazzling, set of Sufi Awadhi "love tales" or romances (*pemkathas*) date from more than a century later? To answer this question we need to step back and look at the

---

[11] As witnesses like Badauni report; see Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic:* 314.

[12] Brac de la Perrière, *L'Art du livre*: 335 and Adamjee, 'Strategies': 172-3.

[13] Both Adamjee and Brac de la Perrière note that other groups also commissioned illustrated manuscripts in north India in this period, notably the Jains (e.g. Jaunpur and Medinipura *Kalpasūtras*), not in the vernacular but in Prakrit.

wider picture: other non-Sufi *kathas* were in fact written, and survive, from the long fifteenth century, and most of them come from comparable milieus.[14] Meanwhile, for much of the fifteenth century Awadh was a battleground between the sultans of Delhi and Jaunpur. In one of these raids 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi's complete Persian rendering of *Cāndāyan* was destroyed.[15]

Scholars have tended to underline the continuities between *Cāndāyan* and the early-sixteenth century *katha*s of Qutban, Jayasi, and Manjhan—but what happens when we pay attention to their discontinuities?

The early-16c moment

Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* (1503), Jayasi's *Padmāvat* and his lesser known *Kanhāvat* (both 1540), and Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* (1545) form a coherent group of romances that, despite individual specificities, share a similar expansiveness, a similar plot and narrative arc with the princely hero's quest, obstacles and trials, and a similar set of main characters—the hero, his first wife, the heroine/second wife, a nurse/helper. They are all original stories that however draw extensively upon Indic motifs. With *Cāndāyan* they share the elaborate opening section with the praise of God, the Prophet and his four companions, the current ruler, and the Sufi master, but their narratives are more complex than *Cāndāyan,* they delight in intertextual references to an unprecedented degree, and they are punctuated with more symbolism and enigmatic references in the form of key terms, speeches, and dialogues. The socio-political configuration of characters and courtly scenes also slightly differs, as does the manuscript evidence. In

---

[14] E.g. Vishnudas's versions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Tomar Gwalior; Damo's *Lakṣmansen-padmāvatī kathā* (1459); Bhima Kavi's *Ḍaṅgvai Kathā* (1493), which tells the story of a small chieftain and his beautiful mare-woman pursued by Krishna the 'great Sultan'; and *Satyavatī kathā* (1501), which follows the trials of a virtuous wife by the poet Isardas, who tells us he was born in Kashi and settled in Ghazipur; for the last two see Orsini, 'Texts and Tellings.'
[15] Ruknuddin, *Laṭā'if-i quddūṣī*: 99–100, quoted in Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*: 62, with a translation of the only surviving stanza.

terms of social characterization, the protagonists of these romances, Ratansen, Manohar, Rajkunvar, are all royal princes. Gora and Badal, the social equivalents of Lorik and of Alha and Udal, the warrior heroes of the oral epic *Ālhā* and, are subordinates in *Padmāvat*.

What had happened in the meantime? The Sharqi sultanate of Jaunpur, for one thing. Beside the grand architectural remains and the hefty manual of Persian poetry called *Dastūr al-shuʻarā'* (1400-1), little textual evidence remains of what was, by all accounts, a wealthy and cultured capital, but Aditya Behl and Katherine Schofield have argued that the Sharqi Sultans of Jaunpur played a key role in cultivating music, poetry, perfumes, and other elite pursuits, pursuits which Sufis *pirs* and poets shared. This is how Qutban praises Sultan Husain Shah Sharqi's literary connoisseurship and presents himself as a sophisticated *bhasha* poet:

He reads the scriptures, difficult of access,
and speaks the meanings aloud and explains them.
A single word can have ten meanings:
pandits are struck dumb with amazement.
…
In his reign I composed this poem,
when it was the year nine hundred and nine.
In the month of Muharram by the Hujri moon,
the tale was finished and I read it out loud!
I have used the meters *gāthā, dohā, arill,* and *arajā,*
and the *soraṭhā* and *caupā'ī* to adorn my poem.
Many classical letters and words came into it,
and I also chose all kinds of *desī* words.
It's beautiful to recite, listen with care!
When you hear this, you will not like any other.
Two months and ten days it took me to put it together and to finish it.
Each word is a pearl I have strung. I speak with heart and mind.

<div align="right">(Mirigāvatī, tr. Behl: 20, 21)</div>

As Behl points out, Qutban did *not* actually use all these metres, but his knowledge *of* them sets him up as a sophisticated and learned poet. Whereas food was the centrepiece of celebrations in the *Cāndāyan*, Qutban includes an early complete *ragamala* as part of a courtly concert.[16]

These romances share several elements with non-Sufi tales.[17] But they have also so much more: talking parrots, adventures with monsters, fairies, and almost fatal shipwrecks; philosophical musings, and the difficult path to reintegration, narrativised through a quarrel between the two wives. These early-sixteenth century texts also weave wider intertextual nets. As Aditya Behl has shown, the prince's ordeals in Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* are modelled on Attar's Persian *Conference on Birds*, while the episode of the cannibal in the cave blinded by the hero trying to escape echoes Sindbad's travels.[18] Qutban, Jayasi, and Manjhan display an intimate knowledge of epic-puranic stories and characters:

The prince set out, disguised as a yogi.
When the king [his father] heard, his breast was on fire.
Just as **Daśaratha** died, separated from his son,
he also wished to leave his life that instant.
As **Arjuna** cried when **Abhimanyu** was killed,
just so the king began to weep and wail. …
'As the blind parents of **Śravana**, agitated without him, died screaming,
if I die without meeting him alive again, even in heavens will I regret it!'

(Behl, *The Magic Doe:* 81).

Their romances also mention each other as part of an ever-expanding repertoire of stories, as when Padmavati warns Ratansen in a letter about the perils of love:

---

[16] For a historical discussion of this *ragamala* see Miner, '*Raga* in the Early Sixteenth Century.'

[17] E.g. the tension between chieftain and Sultan over one's woman, the motif of the seven-coloured mare, performance scenes at court, and the grand battles.

[18] Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic*: 120 ff.

bahutanha aisa jīu para khelā, tūṃ jogī kehi māṃha akelā
bikrama *dhaṃsā pema ke bārāṃ,* **sapanāvatī** *kahaṃ gaeu patārāṃ*
sudaibaccha mugudhāvatī *lāgī, kaṃkana pūri hoi gā bairāgī*
rājkuṃvar *kañcanpura gaeu,* **mirigāvatī** *kahaṃ jogī bhaeu*
sādhā kuṃvar **manohara** *jogū,* **madhumālatī** *kahaṃ kīnha biyogū*
pemāvati *kahaṃ* **sarasura** *sādhā,* **ukhā** *lāgi* **anirudha** *bara bāṃdhā*

<div align="right">(Jayasi, Padmāvat 233.2-7: 223)</div>

Many have risked their lives, you are not the only one, yogi!
For the sake of love **Vikrama** travelled down to fetch **Sapnavati** from the underworld.
For **Mugdhavati**, **Sudaivaccha** [Sadavriksha] travelled as a renouncer to Kankanpuri.
Rajkunwar went to Kanchanpur and became a yogi for **Mirigavati**'s sake.
Manohar practiced yoga and renounced the world for **Madhumalati**'s sake.
Sarasura practised austerities for **Premavati**'s sake, and **Aniruddha** waged war for **Usha**'s sake.

What about the material evidence of manuscripts, script, format? First, tangible evidence that these tales became part of a common repertoire, confirming the internal intertextual evidence, is they were often held together with non-Sufi tales.[19] Second, the early-sixteenth century *kathas* circulated in *both* Persian and Kaithi (occasionally Devanagari) scripts, thus along different networks of transmission. As **Table 2** shows, manuscripts were held in Sufi hospices or copied for individuals in towns like Gorakhpur, Amroha, Mirzapur, Ekadla, Ghazipur, and later Banaras, without a break up to the late nineteenth-century.

---

[19] E.g. that old manuscripts of *Padmāvat, Mirigāvatī*, and *Madhumālatī* were held alongside Isardas's *Satyavatī kathā* and Alam's *Mādhavānal kāmakandalā* by the same individual in Ekadla village of Fatehpur district (UP); R. Misra's Introduction to Alam, *Mādhavānal kāmakandalā*

Table 2: Manuscript history[20]

Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* (1505)

1520-1570?	K	handmade paper, full illustration with each leaf, Thakur Omprakash Singh's house in Ekadla in 1950s, Bharat Kala Bhavan
end 17c/early 18c?	P	found at *khanqah* of Hakim Ajmal Khan
early 18c?	P	*khanqah*, Maner sharif
nd	K	colophon missing, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras
1771	K	no colophon, National Archives, Nepal

Jayasi's *Padmāvat* (1540)

17c?	P	Maner Sharif library, with texts by Burhan, Sadhan, etc.
1675	P	Amroha, copied by Mulla 'Abdul Shakir, with P interlinear glosses
1685	K	Leiden University library
ca.1696	P	British Library
1696	P	Gorakhpur, copied 'Ibadullah Khan, ill. British Library
1697	P	copied Rahimdad Khan, British Library
1701	K	Baitalgarh, copied *Krishna Brahman Baruva ke Dube Hariram putra* [NPS Khoj]
1702	P	British Library
early 18c?	P	British Library
1710	K	folios in Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras
1719	??	Bibliotheque Nationale, Fonds Gentil 32
1724	P	*khanqah* Bihar Sharif
ca. 1729	??	Edinburgh University Library
1734	K	selected scenes, ill. for Muh. Sultan Khan, at Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras
1747	K/D	with Babu Krishna Baldev Varma, Kaiserbagh, Lucknow [NPS Khoj]
1764?	D	library of Maharajas of Banaras [NPS Khoj]
ca 1780	P	Kartarpur, Bijnor
1785	K	Manje Shahr, Salempur dist., copied Dayalal Kayasth Basondi
1786	K	Royal Asiatic Society Calcutta
early 19c?	D	Mirzapur, illustrated, copied by Than Kayastha, British Library

Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* (1545)

1587	D?	copied by Madhodas Kohli in Kashi; Bharat Kala Bhavan
1687	K	copied Rammalu Sahay; from Ekadala, in the house of Rawat Om Prakash Singh in 1955
1719	P	copied by Miyan Abdul Rahman in Agra during the reign Muhammad Shah; 'faux Chinese paper with wide brush strokes of gold', Rampur Raza Library
nd	P	Banaras

A couple of striking things. First, the earliest extant manuscript of

---

[20] Sources: Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives*, NPS *Khoj Reports*, Plukker, *The Mirigāvatī of Kutuban*.

Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* is in Kaithi, and it is the first vernacular north Indian text not in Persian language and script to be illustrated.[21] Once again, this material trace raises significant socio-historical questions. What milieu was this manuscript created for? Does it signal that some of the local chieftains—like the Raja of Amethi who Jayasi is linked to—began cultivating a taste for illustrated books to be recited and displayed in their *sabhas*, too? The early Kaithi copy of *Madhumālatī* also suggests that the tale was copied in a non-Sufi, non-Sharqi milieu barely forty years after its composition, another striking evidence of parallel circulation. There are no early manuscripts of the *Padmāvat*, yet the tale travelled quickly: only fifty years later we have the first retelling, in Dakkini, by Hans Kabi at the court of Ibrahim Adil Shah in the Deccan. And as Ramya Sreenivasan and Thibaut d'Hubert have shown, Jayasi's tale went both westward to Rajasthan (where it became the standard 'historical' narrative to Padmini of Chittor) and eastward to Arakan on the Bay of Bengal.[22]

Two more puzzles: the first dated *Padmāvat* manuscript, copied in Amroha (western UP) by the Sufi Shaikh Muhammad Shakir, who respectfully calls Jayasi *malik al-shu'arā*, the 'king of poets', the not only vocalizes the text very carefully but also glosses each and every Hindavi word, even the most common, with a Persian equivalent (**Ill. 1**), showing evidence of editorial attention towards Jayasi's text.[23] However, Shakir is not interested in the rich epic-puranic and floral references of Jayasi's text: every mountain, Meru, Sumeru becomes a generic *kūh* ('mountain'); detailed lists of fruit, flowers, and musical instruments become 'name of fruit', 'name of flower', 'name of instrument'; cities like Ayodhya are glossed as *nām-i jā-st* ('toponym') and even a key character like Nagmati is glossed as 'woman' (*'aurat*), while Parbati is *'aurat-i mahādev* or *'auratī bud*.

---

[21] See P. Khosla, 'The visual language of the north Indian styles of painting' for illustrations.

[22] Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives*, Th. d'Hubert, 'Histoire Culturelle et Poétique de la Traduction'.

[23] MS Hindi 6, Rampur Raza Library; I am indebted to Thibaut d'Hubert for this suggestion.

Ill. 1: Rampur *Padmāvat*, MS Hindi 6, fol. 1v. Image courtesy Rampur Raza Library.

The next puzzle is provided by a few folios of a *Padmāvat* manuscript (**Ill. 2**, no colophon, no date) in the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Banaras, which show the only example that I have seen of *calligraphic Kaithi* with paintings in Rajput style and Mughal-style cartouches. Normally *Padmāvat* Kaithi manuscripts are neither illustrated nor calligraphed. This manuscript suggests an upwardly mobile patron who participates in the elite art of the book but is comfortable in Kaithi rather than Persian or Devanagari scripts.[24]

---

[24] By contrast, the large and illustrated MS Hindi C 1 in the British Library, copied in Devanagari script by Thana Kayasth in Mirzapur, was probably for a British patron.

Ill. 2: *Padmāvat* folio, Acc. N. 10862.
Image courtesy Bharat Kala Bhavan,
Banaras

We also have one precious piece of evidence of oral circulation
thanks to the Jain merchant and spiritual reformer Banarsidas, who
recalled reading these tales of love (*āsikhī*) in his youth (ca. 1600) in
Jaunpur. He himself wrote a fictional book (*mithyā granth*) on the nine
rasas but especially on *āsikhī* which he then destroyed in a fit of shame
and repentance.[25] Was this perhaps a *pemkatha* of his own? Ten years
later he recited *Madhumālatī* and *Mirigāvatī* over a few months to a small
but appreciative private audience when he was down and out in Agra.[26]
Much later evidence from the Persian-educated Delhi *littérateur*
Anandram Mukhlis, who in 1738 heard the *Padmāvat* recited by his
'eastern' (Purbi) servant and composed a Persian version of his own, is
more ambivalent. As Shantanu Phukan has noted, Mukhlis's account
suggests that the tale was new to him and that the *purbi* language

---

[25] In a thousand *chaupai doha*—the metre of the *pemkathas* and of
Banarsidas's autobiography; Banarsidas, *Ardhakathānak*, tr. Lath: 237
(vv. 178-9).
[26] 'I stayed at home and did not go to the bazaar. I would recite
(*bāṃcahiṃ,* also to expound, read out) the two broad books (*pothī
udār*), *Madhumālatī* and *Mirigāvatī,* at night and 10-20 people came',
among them a kachauri seller; *Ibid.:* 249 (vv. 225-6).

sounded exotic:

My servant told the colorful tale that Jayasi, the author of the Hindi *Padmāvat*,
had written entirely in the eastern dialect – as though it were an eastern melody brimming
over with pain. Jayasi had based its wording on uncommon ideas and rare metaphors;
however, since the work contains the bewitchments and marvels of love, it compels the heart
to feel pain. And I said to myself: 'if this Hindi beloved (*maʿshuq*) were to be displayed in the
robes of a Persian writer then it is possible that this work of art might appear elegant and
permissible in the estimation of those who possess taste (*dar naẕar-i ahl-i ẕauq īn fan
mustaḥasan numāyad*). Therefore, my pen laid the foundations of this literary project and,
having completed it within the span of a week, called it *Hangāmah-ye ʿIshq* [The Clamour of
Love].[27]

Mukhlis seems unaware of the wider popularity of the tale or of the
earlier Persian versions such as Bazmi's or Razi's (Table 2 above). We
are caught between evidence that suggests that these tales remained
very popular and continued to be copied (see **Ill. 3**), and other evidence
that suggests a patchier circulation.

---

[27] Anand Ram Mukhlis, *Hangāma-ye ʿishq*, in Phukan, "Through Throats
Where Many Rivers Meet": 34.

Ill. 3 Two folios from a Jayasi *Padmāvat* copied in Gorakhpur in 1697; British Library MS Hindi B 11. Image courtesy of the British Library Board © 2015

Awadhi *kathas* in the Mughal world

At this point, two important questions arise. Should we consider the *pemkathas* mainly as a Sultanate genre, which waned as the cultural tastes of the Mughal elites shifted towards Persian poetry and Brajbhasha courtly poetry?[28] And should we consider them a regional, eastern (*purbi*) genre?

There is only one Hindavi *pemkatha* that we can link directly to the Mughal courtly milieu: Alam's *Mādhavānal kāmakandalā* of 1582, which after praising Akbar refers directly to his minister Todar Mall.[29] Central to this love story between the Brahmin musician Madhavanal and the courtesan dancer-singer Kamkandala is musical connoisseurship (*guna*)—a polysemic term referring generically to 'talent' or specifically to aesthetic and musical connoisseurship. Both

---

[28] See Busch, *Poetry of Kings,* Ch. 4; S. Sharma, 'Reading the Acts and Lives'.
[29] Alam, *Mādhavānal Kāmakandhalā*: 3-5 (stanzas 4-5). Todar Mal was from Laharpur, in today's Sitapur district, and had worked for Sher Shah Suri, i.e. he was an Awadhi who had moved into the Mughal court.

Madhavanal and Kamkandala are *gunis,* performers and connoisseurs.[30] *Guna* is also key for the king and patron: in order to insult King Kamasena and his assembly, Madhavanal calls them stupid and lacking *guna*: 'You king are undiscerning, you do not distinguish talent from the talentless' (37). Musical performances at court (including another complete *ragamala*) occupy a crucial part of the story and allow Alam to display his own musical knowledge.[31] Reading *kathas* like *Mirigāvatī* and *Mādhavanal kāmakandalā* together helps us trace a direct continuity of musical tastes and connoisseurship between Sultanate and Mughal culture—though this was not a debt that the Mughals themselves necessarily acknowledged.[32]

Interestingly, most of the scholarship has focused on the Sultanate *kathas*, merely mentioning the later texts and the continuing tradition. But a closer look (see **Table 1** above) reveals some interesting changes, within the genre as well as in their social location. For one thing, the new *kathas* were composed by a wider range of poets: some

---

[30] The term *catura* (clever) is used as a synonym, while its antonym *mūrkha/mūṛha* (stupid, also *abibekī*) means clueless, devoid of musical understanding.

[31] 'No one questions high or lowly status,
if you have *guna* you sit elevated.
The talented man who goes abroad
sells his wares at greater price.
Just as a mother rears her son,
guna always bestows happiness.
Without talent ones ancestors fall from heaven,
without talent one's mouth utters lowly words,
Without talent one is like a man blind in his eyes,
without talent one is a bird without wings
Doha: If you fall into bad times and lose your wealth, if you're talented your talent stays with you. If you have talent in your body then wealth will come and you will get it again.' Alam, *Mādhavānal*: 25. Alam does not praise either Akbar or Todar Mal for their *guna*, which is surprising. Rather, the second half of the story revolves around the celebrated King Vikrama's (initially misguided) help in bringing together the two lovers, and Alam compares Todar Mal to Vikrama's minister. I thank Richard Williams and the London-Oxford Brajbhasha reading group for the collective translation; see also Orsini, 'Texts and Tellings.'

[32] Alam's *katha* became popular and there are many manuscripts of it available in a longer and a shorter version; the editor Ramkumari Mishra lists 18 manuscripts in the Nagari Pracharini Sabha Search Reports (see below) alone; Alam, *Mādhavānal*, 'Introduction': 7. For a Persian version, *Maḥẓ-i 'ijāz* by Haqiri Kashani, see Ahuja, *Haqīriya's Masnavī*, and Keshavmurti, 'Ḫaqīrī Kāšānī'.

were still sophisticated provincial Sufis like Usman, others were
followers of local Sants (Dharnidas, Dukhharandas); some were urban
literati (Surdas of Lucknow), others lived in villages or were in the
entourage of Mughal governors (Newaj) or local Rajas (Puhakar?).

Nor were the Mughal *kathas* merely new versions of older ones.
Quite a few original titles in Hindavi and Persian were composed in
Jahangir's reign and specifically mention him as 'king of the age'—
Usman's *Citrāvalī* (1613), Puhakar's *Rasaratan* (1618), Shaikh Nabi's
Gyāndīpak, as well as Hamid Kalanauri's Persian *'Iṣmatnāma*, Bazmi's
Rat padam, and *Rājkunvar*. What do these texts tell us about the Mughal
life of the *katha* genre? What happened to the Awadhi *kathas*, which had
mediated *local* social and political relations and religious idioms, when
they moved into the new cultural climate, and from Hindavi into
Persian? Do we see any significant shifts in plot, characterisation, or
geographical imagination? Do they 'register' the turn to *riti* poetry and
poetics? Do Persian versions transcodify the tales according to generic
Persian literary conventions or do they retain Hindavi characteristics?[33]
Let us consider two Hindavi *kathas* from Jahangir's reign—*Citrāvalī* and
Rasaratan[34]—before moving on to the question of Persian 'translations.'

Citrāvalī surprises by its originality and sophistication—why did
it not circulate more?[35] In the prologue Usman praises god as the
supreme *citerā* (painter), then cleverly develops the metaphor: God
created the world as a picture of himself (*yaha jaga citra kīnha jehi kerā*,
1.1), he painted a picture of Man and Woman, he created all the colours,
he created form (*rūpa*) and colour (*barana*) though he himself has

---

[33] Persian retellings and translations have become a rich and growing
field in the past few years. But more individual texts from this
large archive need to be considered before we can get a complete
picture that is not overly stilted towards imperial patronage.
[34] Interestingly, both carry dual Vikrami and Hijri dating.
[35] Only one manuscript has been found, in *Kaithi*, dated 1745 and
illustrated, in the library of the Maharaja of Banaras, which I have
been unable to see; it was copied by Fakirchand, a Srivastava
kayastha of Kara Manikpur for Hazari Ajabsingh of Chunar fort during
the reign of Muhammad Shah; see Varma, *Usmān kavi kṛt citrāvalī*,
Introduction: 6. At 614 stanzas, *Citrāvalī* is a substantial text
(*Padmāvat* has 653, *Mirigāvatī* has 427, and *Madhumālatī* has 539).

neither, and so on.[36] In fact both *Citrāvalī* and Puhakar's *Rasaratan* add a
focus on painting to the familiar motifs of the earlier romances.[37]

When praising Jahangir, Usman combines Mughal
cosmopolitanism—Arab, Iraqi, Egyptian, Khotanese, and Chinese
visitors bring gifts, Nawruz is celebrated at court—with Indic motifs
like that of the six seasons.[38] Inscribing one's family and place was a

---

[36] Later in his section on *rūpa*, love, and *viraha* he mentions
Mirigavati and Rajkunwar, Padmini and Ratansen, Madhumalati and
Manohar—thus clear placing himself in the tradition of Avadhi Sufi
romances; Varma, *Usmān kavi kr̥t*: 8.

[37] The plot: The Nepali prince Sujan chances upon a small forest
temple (*maṛhī*) while hunting, and while he sleeps the temple deity
takes him to the picture gallery of Princess Chitravali (cf.
Madhumālatī). When Sujan wakes up he admires her portrait and paints
his own picture before the deity takes him back. Smitten by love, he
returns to the *maṛhī* and undertakes austerities. Meanwhile,
Chitravali has found his picture and, herself in love, sends out
eunuchs in yogi garb to look for him. Her mother's maid (*kuṭīcar*)
finds Sujan's portrait, informs the mother, and is told to wash it
away. For that, the Princess shaves the maid's head and dismisses
her, making an enemy of her. One of the yogis finds Sujan, takes him
to Chitravali's city, and arranges a meeting at Shiva's temple. But
the *kuṭīcar* also finds Sujan, blinds him and throws him into a cave,
where he is eaten by a giant snake, who however spits him out because
Sujan's unhappy love makes him incandescent. Sujan's sight is
restored by a collirium given by a 'forest man' (*banmānus*). Still
wandering in the forest, Sujan is then picked up by an elephant,
which in turn is picked by a flying *pakṣīrāja.* Dropped on an ocean
shore, he reaches the town of Sagargarh and is found resting in the
garden of the daughter of the local king. Sujan helps defeat a nearby
king who wanted to abduct her and is rewarded with her hand.
Together, they undertake a pilgrimage to Girnar—there is a whole
section about it (stanzas 409-413)—where one of Chitravali's yogis
finds him. Meanwhile, Chitravali's father decides to get her married
and sends painters to take the portrait of all the available princes
(a motif that appears in *Rasaratan* as well). The yogi informs
Chitravali, who gives him a letter for Sujan to come to her
svayamvar. Her mother learns about it and Sujan finds himself in jail
until one of the painters returns with his portrait, vouchsafing for
his standing and lineage, so that Chitravali and Sujan can finally
get married. Echoing earlier *kathas*, the first wife's lament
eventually reaches Sujan and convinces him to return home. After a
shipwreck (as in the *Padmāvat*), Sujan and Chitravali manage to reach
Jagannath Puri.

[38] Varma, *Usmān kavi kr̥t:* 5 (stanza 16). Usman praises Shah Nizam
Chishti and his *pir* Baba Haji for their transformative look of love
(*mayā diṣṭi*) and the churning they produced in him; in the tradition
of earlier Sufi *kathas*, he uses Indic vocabulary for spiritual truths
and concepts: '*nija so mathanī eka dina, mathata mathata gā phūṭi.
tatvamasī puni tatva soṃ, jāya naraka saba chūṭi*' (as I churned and
churned, one day the churning stick broke. Then from the matter
tatvamasi came, and hell fell away, *Ibid.*: 6, stanza 23 *doha*). He
also uses *rasa* (e.g. *gyāna rasana*, *ibid.*: 8, stanza 29.2) in the Sufi
understanding; see Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic.*

new feature of Hindi literature in the Mughal period, and Usman describes Ghazipur, his home town, himself and his four brothers.[39] And while he follows Jayasi in inscribing Ghazipur in the four yugas and the ideal paradigm of a city-description (*nagara-śobhā*), he also includes contemporary markers of caste and community:

Ghazipur is an excellent place, famous from the start as a place of the gods.
The Yamuna and Ganga touch it together, lovely Gomti in between.
There is a fine bank by the river, in the Dvapara age a godly ascetic (*devatana*) came to practice.
It was resettled in Kaliyuga, like a second Amarpuri.
The fort on top, the god's river below—seeing it washes sins away.
People of great learning live here—Sayyids and Shaikhs of wisdom,
who speak nothing but *gyāna*; you long to see them and are happy to hear them.

> Godly in knowledge and meditation, heroes in battle,
> Silent in contemplation, clever in assemblies, lions to their enemies.
>
> (*Usmān kavi kṛt*: 7, stanza 24)

Sayyids and Shaikhs first, then. But then dagger-carrying *mogals* and Pathans, warlike Rajputs and *gunījan* (musicians), Bhats who expound on prosody (*piṅgala*) and musical specialists (*kalāvants*). 'Everyone is a king in his own house', and people ride Taji and Turki horses 'as if they were *umrā* and *mīrs*'.[40] Dance and performance take place everywhere and people walk with dainty steps (*ṭhumukata*). Usman moves between a standard social picture of the ideal city and a more realistic one of Hindu and Muslim groups.[41]

---

[39] For this trend, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*.
[40] Varma, *Usmān kavi kṛt*: 7.
[41] In the same line: '*hindū turaka sarāhauṃ kahā, cārihu barana nagara bhari rahā*' (*ibid.*: 7, stanza 26.1). While Brahmins are predictably intent on reciting the Vedas and performing sacrifices ablutions, and Kshatriya (*khatrī*) and Vaishyas are rich, Shudras 'spread out trade in every house and practice religion day and night. They hold discourses about knowledge, while young women (? *taruni*) sit and recite all the *rasas*'; *ibid.*, stanza 26.4—perhaps a reference to upwardly mobile devotees of the Sants, who were active in the Ghazipur region?

His description of his family (only the men, of course) provides a nice sketch of career differentiation among Shaikhs: his father, Shaikh Husain, was famous (*jaga nāūṃ*). His eldest brother, Shaikh Aziz, is well educated, an ocean of good conduct and very generous. Manullah took the path of God (*vidhi*), practiced yoga and keeps a vow of silence. Shaikh Faizullah is a great *pir*.[42] Shaikh Hasan sings well and acknowledged as versed in music theory by the connoisseurs (*ibid.*: 7). About himself, Usman tells us that he studied a little bit (*acchara cāri*) and then realised that poetry is the only thing immortal in the world, and since 'those who sing *kathas* full of *rasa* savour that nectar (*amirita*) and make others savour it' (*Ibid.*: 8, stanza 28.6-7), he decided to compose a *katha* himself. The prologue ends nicely gesturing to the polysemy of the *katha* and the mystery of oneness and multiplicity:

I created a *katha* in my heart, sweet to tell and happy to hear.
I crafted it the way it came to my mind, but each will understand their your own way.
A child will find *rasa* for his ears, young men will increase the desire in their bodies.
An old man will find the knowledge that this world is a transaction.
A jogi will find the path of yoga, a *bhogi* will find pleasure and joy.
It is a happy wish-fulfilling tree, you find the fruit you wish for.
I wrote a lovely, spotless mirror – if you look you'll find yourself.

> Everyone tells and listen of worldly honour and manners;
> Sweetness is found in what one prefers.
>
> (*Usmān kavi kṛt Citrāvalī*: 9, stanza 32)

A striking novelty in *Citrāvalī* is its geographical imagination. The servants Chitravali sends to look for Sujan travel to what amounts to a detailed map of the Mughal world. One servant travels to Multan, Sindh ('where they all worship *mahirāvana*, 101), the city of Thattha full of Baluchis, Ghakkhar, and Peshawar – where 'he saw the whole world'

---

[42] Who '*ganai na kāhu gahe hathiyārā*', either 'does not respect anyone who takes arms' or 'does not consider anyone when he takes up arms'; *ibid.* stanza 27.5.

(*ibid.*). He then travels to Kabul, 'the country of the *mogals'*, Badakhshan, Khurasan, Alexander's Rus 'where everything is dark', Mecca 'God's place' (*vidhi asthānā*, *ibid.*), Medina with the pilgrims on *haj*, then Baghdad, Istanbul, and Ladakh. The one travelling South goes all the way to Lanka and Sarandip passing through 'happy and rich' Gujarat, Jamnagar in Kacch, Ceylon ('*bābā ādama kā asthānā'*, *ibid.*:102) crossing the bridge from Rameshwaran. He then goes to Balandip [?] and sees the *angrejā*; then to Karnatak, Kukhar (?), Odisa and Tailanga.[43] He sees black Habshis and *jangis*, Tamils and *firangīs*. From Orissa he travels to the port of Hooghly, then turns around to go to Berar and the Deccan. The servant going East first visits Mathura, then Vrindaban— where he looks fo the *jogi* like the *gopis* look for Krishna (418.2). He visits Delhi with the imperial throne, and then Agra, Prayag and its Tribeni. He worships Shiva in Kashi and undertakes the *panchkosi* pilgrimage, then leaves disappointed for Rohtas. After Magadha (Maggaha) he travels to Tirhut where he hears of Vidyapati. Finally, one travels to Bengal, beyond the Brahmaputra to Sonargaon, where he visits the *tirtha* of the *panchpir*. From there he goes to Malwa, Sondip, Pigu (Pegu) and Manipur, Makharhanga… until he turns back to Girnar, where he finally finds Sujan (*ibid*: 103). The largely imaginary geography of the earlier *kathas* remains in the diegetic toponyms, but is compounded by a new real geography of truly imperial proportions.

If Usman's *Citrāvalī* largely continues the tradition of early-sixteenth century Sufi romances, albeit with innovative touches, by contrast Puhakar's *Rasaratan* bears the imprint of the new Mughal culture of courtly Hindi—so much so that we can call it a *riti katha*.[44] *Riti* poetry employed a literary *koine* of Brajbhasha, was informed by Sanskrit poetics, and focused systematically on the many types of heroine (*nayika-bheda*)— all elements we find in Puhakar's *katha*. Hindi

---

[43] 1613 seems rather too early for registering the *aṅgrejā (jahāṃ jāi nahiṃ kaṭhina karejā,* 'where the heart hardly dares to go'?); *ibid.*, 417.1. Could it be a later interpolation?

[44] Though we do not know which patron (if any) Puhakar composed *Rasaratan* for; Singh, *Rasaratana*.

literary historians from Ramchandra Shukla onwards have saluted it as a 'completely Indian' romance, unlike the 'foreign' ones by Sufi poets,[45] but in fact it makes better sense to see *Rasaratan* as part of the same tradition, though Puhakar does not acknowledge it.

Puhakar writes proudly of his *kayastha* family which served the local king, and of his father and uncle who earned respect at Akbar's court.[46] About himself he tells us that he studied the scribal principles (*vṛtti kāistha*), 'strolled through Persian poetry', and studied Hindi prosody and poetics more thoroughly.[47] Elsewhere he adds that he first learnt from the Sanskrit poets and from Chandbardai.[48] *Rasaratana* tells a similar story to *Citrāvalī,* and involves a similar emphasis on painting. It tells of the love between Princess Rambhavati and Prince Surasena, this time orchestrated by Kama and his wife Rati who want to bring

---

[45] Its editor quotes Shukla: 'We find very few Hindi poets writing narrative poems on imaginary tales. Jayasi and other poets of the Sufi branch (*śākhā*) wrote works of this kind, but their manner was not fully Indian. From this perspective, *Rasaratan* should be given a special place within Hindi literature', *Rasaratana*: 2. Singh calls it a 'Hindu *premākhyān*' (*ibid.,* Introduction: 2-3).

[46] If the Bhumiganv he mentions (*ibid.*: 13) is present-day Bhogaon in Mainpuri district, not far from Kannauj, this makes him more West than East UP. Puhakar does not set his hometown within the framework of the 'four *yugas*' but rather speaks of a 'secret/hidden pilgrimage place' (*tīratha gupta*, *ibid.*: 12) established after a wandering king from the West was healed at a local pond.

[47] '*prathama vṛtti kāistha likhana lekhana avagāhana*
vikhama karama nṛpa seva turata āyasu niravāhana
dvādasa vidhi avadāna sunata navaguna avarādhana
chanda vanda piṅgala prabandha vahu rūpa vicārana.
pārasīya kāvya puni saira vidhi najamana sara aviyāta kahiya
paraticcha devī sāradā bhaī ura nivās mukha vasi rahiya. (*ibid.*: 15)
A kayastha's first rule is (or: First I learnt the kayastha rule) to write, document, and understand
the difficult task of serving a king and of carrying out orders immediately
the twelve rules, listening to *avadānas*, and worship of the nine virtues.
I reflected on metres, prosody, and the many forms of *prabandha*
Then I walked through Persian poetry and recited various kinds of poems and couplets.
Sarasvati herself came to dwell in my heart and in my mouth.'
Singh glosses the nine virtues as patience, forgiveness, self-control, *asteya*?, purity, control of the senses, knowledge, learning, and truth. He is puzzled by *avadāna*; *ibid.* Introduction: 9.

[48] The Sanskrit poets include Valmiki, Sriharsha and Kalidasa, Bana, Jaydeva, Dandi, Bhanudatta, Udayana; *ibid.*: 5.

together the most beautiful man and woman on earth.[49] What makes *Rasaratana* a Mughal *'riti katha'*? For one thing, instead of the simple *chaupai-doha* stanza structure, Puhakar displays his knowledge of prosody and alliteration by using a dazzling array of metres, including *savaiyas* and *chhappais*.[50] Even his initial invocation to Shiva and praise of Jahangir resemble free-standing *praśasti* (praise) verses by other courtly Hindi poets:

> *timira vaṃsa avataṃsa sāhi akabara kula nandana|*
> *jagata gurū jagapāla jagata nāik jagavandana ||*
> *sahinasāha ālamapanāha naranāha dhurandharai|*
> *tega vṛtti dillī nareśa triya cāri jāsu ghara||*
> *ardhaṅga aṅga pañcama gharani tarani teja mahi cakkavai |*
> *nara rāja manahuṃ pañcama sahita supañca mili mahi bhuggavai ||(Rasaratan: 7)*

> Crest of Timur's lineage
> a child of king Akbar's family.
> Lord and protector of the world,
> world hero praised by the world.
> *Shahanshah, alampanah,*

---

[49] Rati takes Sura's semblance and appears to Rambha in a dream, causing her to fall in love though she does not know with whom. Here Puhakar narrates nine of the ten states of love with definitions and examples (*lakṣaṇa*). In order to save Rambha, her clever and 'mature' (*prauṛha*) maid Mudita, who has guessed her illness must be due to love, arranges for the queen to send painters (*citrakāra*) to take portraits of all the princes (as in *Citrāvalī*)—one must be the mystery man. Meanwhile, a *svayamvar* for Rambha is arranged. One painter reaches Surasena, realises this must be the man since he has also been pining for an unknown beloved, and makes him fall in love by painting Rambha's picture for him. Surasena takes leave from his parents to take part in the *svayamvar.* But bored apsaras see him asleep and decide to make him marry (in a *gandharva* marriage) Champavati, an *apsara* banished from Indra's heaven. In a scene strongly reminiscent of Manjhan's *Madhumālatī*, they bring their two beds together while they sleep, and Champavati becomes Surasena's first wife. Surasena nevertheless leaves with a group of yogis and manages to reach Rambha's *svayamvar* on time, and after further trials the Surasena and Rambha marry.

[50] He first heard it as an oral tale and then thought of metres to cover it (*tihi para chanda vanda hama gunī, ibid.*: 19). As Singh points out, some are new names for Sanskrit metres. Even *dohas* and *chaupais* he does not use in the typical stanzaic form, but as separate verses, sometimes long lists of them.

lord of men and hero.

You rule Delhi by sword,

with four wives at home.

The fifth, his precious half, bedazzles the earth with her radiance;

The lord of men with his fifth wife enjoys the earth with all five.**51**

Shastric systems underwrite this *katha*: there are three types of encounter (*darasana*): dream, picture, and face to face (*ibid.:* 30); Rambha's *sakhis* are modelled on types of *nayikas,* and Rambha's own experience of *viraha* follows step by step the classification of love states, from desire (*abhilāṣa*) to memory, restlessness, incoherent speech, the inability to move… Puhakar stops just before death.[52] Each description of hero and heroine becomes an elaborate head-to-toe (*nakh-śikh*), and the portraits of Rambha and Sura are also treated as *nakh-śikh citra* (*ibid*.: 80). Music and dance feature often, as courtly performance but mostly as accompaniment to royal processions.[53] Systems of knowledge valued in Mughal culture—music, astrology, palmistry, and erotics—are all given due space.[54]

Puhakar also subtly diverges from the tradition of Sufi romances. He mentions the 'difficult path of love' *(kaṭhina pema-panthu)*[55] once, but by and large he disregards the Sufi conceptual vocabulary of love. So *Rasa* for him is not *prema-rasa*, the *rasa* of love (Behl), but only the nine

---

[51] A clever reference to Nurjahan's name, 'light of the world.' For very similar examples, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*.

[52] 'Setting his mind to it, the poet Puhakar described the nine states. The tenth state is unbearable, it cannot be done. One cannot speak of it, so I have kept it hidden (*goi*). To speak of it makes one's tongue freeze, no poet should describe it!'; *ibid.:* 51. Puhakar was also the author of a short *nāyikā-bhed* text, *Rasaveli*; *ibid.:* 271-278.

[53] See Busch, 'Listening for Context'.

[54] Puhakar's classical bent emerges in his inclusion of conventional episodes of Sanskrit narrative poetry, as when the townswomen seek a glimpse of Surasena as he leaves on parade on his elephant; Singh, *Rasaratana*: 82, 3.247-252.

[55] '*khaḍgu dhāra māraga jahāṃ, gaṅga jamuna duhuṃ ora. prema pantha ati agamu hai, nibahata hai nara thora. Puhakara sāgara prema ko, nipaṭa gahita gambhīra, ihi samudra jo nara parai, bahuri na lāgahiṃ tīra.*' (It's a path on a swords' edge, with the Ganges and Yamuna on either side. The path of love is extremely tough, few men can manage it. The ocean of love, Puhakar, is deep and unfathomable, those who fall into it hardly reach the shore); *ibid*.:39, 1.102-103.

rasas,[56] and *viraha* is one form of *śṛṅgāra rasa* rather than the path of self-purification and self-transformation as in Sufi romances. When Surasena becomes a yogi, it is less to divest himself of his worldly attachments and more to reach Rambha's town with a group of yogis. Intertextual references include none of the famous Sufi romances but only epic-puranic characters. Rambha herself plays no transformative role for the hero, as in the Sufi romances, but is simply a courtly princess. And unlike the heroines of Sufi *kathas*, she gets no education as a child but only lengthy patriarchal instruction from her attendants before her wedding. This includes serving her husband, always speaking softly, and the basics of erotic science, something that Puhakar prudishly refrains from detailing.[57]

Bedecked—or rather beladen—with the ornaments of *riti* poetry, *Rasaratana* moves at a stately pace, with comparatively little dialogue and action and few trials and adventures, unlike the other Hindavi *kathas*. Its language mirrors Puhakar's attempt to transform the Awadhi *katha* into a recognizable Brajbhasha courtly genre—perhaps closer to the Rajasthani tradition of Chandbardai's *Rāsau*.[58] Was Puhakar trying to impress a local Raja?[59]

These generic characteristics and the continued level of textual sophistication show that, at least in the 'Eastern region' (Purab), Hindavi *kathas* did remain a popular genre. Yet even when they were

---

[56] He calls his story '*rasa racita kathā rasikina rucita rucira nāma rasaratan*' (*ibid.*: 9, 1.20) and lists its nine rasas.

[57] 'I have described many secrets, eighty-four of them (*cāri bīsa aru cāri*), Puhakar cannot speak of them explicitly, *rasikas* can think about them (*laiheṃ rasika vicāri*)'; *ibid.*: 94.

[58] Singh (*ibid.,* Introduction: 149) describes the language in detail and calls it an admixture of *chāraṇ* (i.e. *piṅgala* Brajbhasha), spoken Brajbhasha ('*mādhurya* style'), and Brajbhasha influenced by Khari Boli: e.g. future in *–ba*, possessive *kera,* perfective in *–eu, euṃ,* copula *āhi*, local Kannuaji (future in *–go, –igo*), and several expressive features of Apabhramsha phonology.

[59] All the five manuscript copies extant are in Devanagari, and while the individuals cannot be identified, their names suggest the urban and rural courtly milieus of Brajbhasha poetry that local *rasika* literati, landords, and merchants in Awadh inhabited well into the early twentieth century; *ibid.*, Introduction: 30-33.

elite objects (**Ill. 3** above, or the 1755 illustrated *Citrāvalī* [60]), they do seem to have been largely confined to the region. Moreover, apart from the *Padmāvat,* which had multiple Persian, Dakkini and Bengali, versions from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries in the Deccan, the South, and Bengal, the other Awadhi *katha*s do not seem to have found as much favour among Mughal Persian literati and only had one or two retellings each (Table 2 above).

Hindi into Persian

The trend took off in the early seventeenth century during Jahangir's reign—Hamid's *'Iṣmatnāma* (1616) and Bazmi's *Rat Padam* (1618) praise Jahangir at length in their prologues, while *Rājkunvar* was actually produced at Prince Salim's *karkhana* in Allahabad—and continued up to the nineteenth century. Different components came into it: first, imperial patronage and the desire to 'know' and 'incorporate' Indian lore as an imperial strategy; second, the curiosity of Iranian and Central Asian literati about Indian themes and tales; and third, particularly for Persian literati with Awadhi roots or Sufi affiliation (Bazmi, Razi), the desire to validate one's regional and/or spiritual tradition within the cosmopolitan idiom of Persian literature. This range of possibilities found expression in different textual strategies, which we can visualise as poles of genre localisation and genre cosmopolitism, with several intermediate positions:

translation–mention of source author/text–retelling–significant changes–transcodification

At one end, in rarer cases, we have a more or less iconic translation and an attitude of admiration and respect for the vernacular source text and author; the Persian author/translator is part 'local informant' knowledgeable about Indian lore and cultural details, and part Persian

---

[60] The only available manuscript of Usman's *Citrāvalī* cost Rs 101 for illustration, copying, paper, illumination, and binding ('*musavvar, likhāī o kāgaz rosnāī o jildsāz*'); Varma, *Usmān kavi kṛt*: 7.

littérateur displaying his mastery of Persian codes and ability to set up poetic equivalences between Hindi and Persian tropes. We then slide into the mere mention of the original author/text and an abridged retelling of the story. At the other end we have a more or less drastic transcodification that uses a few details of the Hindavi tale to produce a variation on the Persian romance *masnavi*. In this case the balance shifts decidedly towards the display of Persian literary codes, which already contained a long-standing repertoire of Indian tropes.[61] Yet to read a historical trajectory in the variation from one pole to the other is difficult. Rather, these appear to have been different possible positions within the Indo-Persian literary field. Let us briefly consider a few examples.

I have written elsewhere about the anonymous translation of Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* written and profusely illustrated at Prince Salim's *karkhana* in Allahabad.[62] In contrast to all the other Persian adaptations of Hindavi texts that I have seen, it actually is a translation. Not literal or complete, but a translation nonetheless, which struggles bravely to reproduce the Hindavi even when it 'thickens' into dense allusive language as in the description of Mirigavati and Rajkunwar's love-making coded as a battle.[63]

---

[61] See Stefano Pellò, 'Provincialising Persian'.

[62] *Rājkunwar,* MS CBL In 05, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; see my forthcoming 'Translation, circulation, inflection: a Hindavi tale in Persian garb'.

[63] 'The Rani attacked with the help of her elephant and horse and with her own fancy she arranged her hair, and in place of an armour she wore a **kanchukī, which is a piece of clothing of Indian women,** and made a *dastāna* out of her bracelets, and she tied her **sari, which is a dress of Indian women,** tightly around her waist. And with the force of her glance, which was like **Raja Karna**'s arrow, and of her eyebrows, which were like **Arjun**'s bow, and her breasts, which you'd think were **Kishan**'s discus, she gained the upper hand in the battle of pleasure. Rajkunvar, despite the sword of his *qashqa [tilaka]*, was defeated by the Rani. He scattered her hair like deadly snakes, and with the spears of his nails he tore the armour of her blouse to shreds and the threads of her sari were torn in the battle of the two elephants. The two armies showed their mettle in the battlefield of pleasure. When the sun, the great light, rose again, he did not attempt a truce. He knew what would happen when the two *mast* elephants met, streams would gush forth'; CBL In 05, fol. 80r. See Qutban: 'The whole night passed in the battle of love, till the sun rose to negotiate a truce between them. When the sun had made peace, both acquiesced.

After 'Abdul Quddus's lost translation of the *Cāndāyan,* this is the first time a vernacular tale was rendered into Persian and accorded the status of a literary work rather than treated as raw material. Arguably, this recognition of vernacular textuality and authorship is offset by the absence of Qutban's prologue and the signature verses that round off many stanzas. Yet we have one significant trace when the Persian author translates, in prose, a couplet with Qutban's signature:

> *kutubana tavana tẽ gābhīrā ati sara sukkai ativaṃta*
> *subhara naina nahi sukkahĩ jala bhari āvaṃta.* (276 *doha*)[64]
> Quṭban says, 'Far deeper streams have evaporated quite completely. But eyes that well up do not dry up, for water continues to flow from them'. (Behl, *Mirigāvatī*: 141)

> *Ai Quṭb **ke nām-i shāʿir ast**, tālhā-yi āb az tābash-i āftāb khushk mīshawad, ammā chashmahā-yī ke bisyār pur-ast hargiz khushk namīshawad o sāʿat ba-sāʿat pur shuda.*

```
When dawn came, the battle broke up.
The night's struggle had been incomparable.
She had set elephants [her breasts] in battle array,
and ranged against him Tocharian horses [long of neck].
Her curling locks she arranged on the crown of her head,
and in place of armor she wore her blouse.
She wore bracelets and armbands and bangles on her wrists.
Her sari was wound tight at the line of battle.
Her eyes shot the arrows of [Death,] the sun's son, from the bows of
her eyebrows.
Her breasts were circular battle formations—with their strength she'd
conquered her lord [239].
The tilaka of our hero, his sword,
struck the crown of her head. Her curling locks
were scattered, her parting disordered.
With his nails, sharp spears, he assailed her armor.
Her blouse, ripped to tatters, fled from the scene.
Her bracelets broke when her lord took her hand.
Her armbands snapped, slipping off her arms.
The sari she'd wound tight around the line of battle
was torn to shreds, attacked by a mad elephant.
They came to the encounter and stayed locked in combat,
till the sun rose to intervene and caught them.
If the sun had not risen to make peace, who knows what would have
happened?
Trampled in this battle of two mad elephants, the earth gushed forth
in a stream. [240]
Behl, The Magic Doe: 128.
```

> Oh Quṭb, **which is the name of the poet**, ponds of water dry up from the heat of the sun, but eyes that are overfull never get dry, since with every hour they fill up. (*Rājkunwar*, fol. 92r)

By contrast, in his rendering of the *Padmāvat* 'Abd ush-Shakur Bazmi talks of 'copying' from a 'Hindavi manuscript' and follows the story pretty faithfully but does not mention Jayasi's name.[65] Haqiri mentions Alam's name at the end, despite claiming that 'I told a story no one had told before,'[66] and so does Anandram Mukhlis, as we saw above.

What the Persian writers (and in this case the master in charge of illustrations) include and leave out offer important clues about shifts in taste: in this case the Persian translator included the *ragamala* (which is not illustrated, however), but omitted the plaintive 'song of the twelve months' (*barahamasa*). Prince Rajkunwar's temporary transformation into a yogi, trials (*mihnathā*) and encounters matched Salim's interest in ascetics and wonders, and Rajkunwar's journey as a yogi and his encounters with other ascetics are the most intensely illustrated sections. By contrast, the elaborate musical performance, Rupmini's separation, and the fight between the two wives are not illustrated at all. The Sufi code is greatly simplified into *tawakkul*, trust in God.

As for Qutban's many epic-puranic references, the Persian translation, like many Indo-Persian texts, envisages Persian readers as both cosmopolitan and local, both potentially ignorant of anything Indian and familiar with Indian words and things. So many Hindavi words are left untranslated and unexplained (in no particular order, *ekādasī, shagun, jangam, rakkas, chakkar, sakī/sakhī, sahelī, sukhpāl, pyāla*, etc.), while an equal number that would have been equally familiar, including epic-puranic characters, episodes, and details, are glossed.

All in all, the Persian *Rājkunwar* remains a richly intertextual text

---

[65] '*az nuskha-yi hindavī kunad naqal*', Bazmi, *Dāstān-i padmāwat*: 211.

[66] '*īn qiṣṣa ki kas naguft guftam*'… and then, '*ān shaykh-i ki būd 'ālamash nām, chūn khāma ba kaf bigiraft az gham, īn qiṣṣa ba hindavī zada dam*'; the copyist writes its name as *Mādhonal*, as it would be later rendered in Urdu; Ahuja, *Haqīriyā's masnavī*: 125, 126, 128.

that presumes and increases familiarity with the vast epic-puranic lore. By comparison, 'Abd-ush Shakur Bazmi's *Dāstān-i padmāwat* (1618) occupies the middle ground between the poles of genre localisation and genre cosmopolitism. Probably an Indian poet, he presents himself as someone versed in Persian poetry and used to composing *ghazals* and *qasidas* who is asked by his father, also a connoisseur of Persian and Hindi poetry, to compose a 'fresh *masnavi*' on the love of Ratan(sen) and Padam(vati).[67] Bazmi declares himself be unequal to the task, but in a filial spirit sets himself to it.

In fact, although Bazmi never mentions Jayasi's name, he retells the *Padmāvat* story quite faithfully, streamlining it and removing much of its enigmatic code or transforming it into magic (*saḥr, fusūn)*.[68] Thus Hiraman the parrot is largely narrated through references to magic (he is called *barahman-i fusūn-sāz*, v. 446: 58), and magic is what he mostly teaches Padmavati (e.g. vv. 372, 378: 54). As with Muhammad Shakir's glosses mentioned above, the detailed lists of birds, trees, flowers, scents, etc. which evoke a sensuous presence, are flattened into generic 'birds' or 'flowers.'[69] Intertextual references are not to epic-puranic characters but to Qur'anic ones.[70] And though Padmavati is first introduced as 'the light of rulership' (*cirāgh-i pādshāhī*, v. 339, 54), she is then described in the typical Persian poetic terms of an (unbored) pearl

---

[67] Bazmi, *Dāstān-i padmāwat*: 49, vv. 291-292. He decides to call his work *Rat padam* because *rat* in Hindi means lover (*ibid.:* 50, v. 304).
[68] For example, while Jayasi's description of Singhaldip begins with a full stanza comparing it with the seven island-continents (*jambudīa,* with a pun on *dīpa* as *dvīpa*/island and as *dīpaka*/light, Agrawal, *Padmāwat:* 25) and much detail about the king's fort made of seven precious metals with seven gates, etc., Bazmi only says, 'There is an island in the ocean called Singal, with a fort and jutting battlement (*kingra)*' (v. 317); Bazmi, *Dāstān-i padmāwat*: 51.
[69] E.g. *cuhcuhī, pāṃḍuka, sarau, suvā, papīhā, guḍurū, koila, bhiṅgrāja*, each with a specific call, (Agrawal, *Padmāwat:* 29) become 'birds in the garden all sing and recite delightful poems. If one bird begins to speak, a hundred spells tweak from their beaks'; Bazmi, *Dāstān-i padmāwat*: 51, vv. 322-3.
[70] E.g. references to the angel Harut, as in '*amūkht ba ghamza saḥr-i hārūt, vaz khanda gushād durj- yāqūt*' (she learnt in a blink Harut's magic and her laughter opened the casket of ruby' = she spoke well, *ibid*.: 54, v. 387); Harut and Marut were sent down to earth in human form and are considered the teachers of magic to man (Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*: 1485).

rather than in the extended metaphors of light of Jayasi's work.[71] Bazmi's most sweeping change is that he does away with Ratansen's first wife Nagmati, her *viraha (*instead of her *barahmasa* the crow deliver a similar call from his mother), and her fight between the two wives, all crucial to the Sufi *kathas*. Gora and Badal, the two valiant warriors, here become clever ministers[72]—clearly, the political mediation that Jayasi's *Padmāvat* and its Rajasthani versions performed by including these Alha- and Lorik-style fighters had become irrelevant for this Persian Mughal version.

It seems fair to say that most retellings of the great sixteenth-century Awadhi *kathas* follow Bazmi's model rather than *Rājkunwar*'s. The 'translations' into Persian largely transcodified what became generic tales about 'Indian beauty', exemplary love and smouldering suffering. The poets did stress in some way the 'Indian' peculiarity of the story or the characters ('Indian beauty', 'Indian sweetness'), but typically did away with the elements that pertained to the complex aesthetic, religious, social, and political mediations that we saw Awadhi *kathas* enacted. Is this the price of becoming more cosmopolitan?

Kathas in the world of print and in literary history

Kathas continued to be written and copied in Awadh until the early twentieth century, yet they entered the print market and Hindi literary history with some difficulty. In fact, apart from a few exceptions (Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*, Jayasi's *Padmāvat*), *kathas* have remained strangely peripheral to the narrative of Hindi literary histories, which focuses on devotional and courtly poetic traditions.

While Tulsidas was acknowledged as a master poet already in the early modern period and by the earliest Hindi literary histories, Jayasi and his *Padmāvat,* though mentioned by Bharatendu Harishchandra, were properly introduced into the Hindi literature by George Grierson

---

[71] For light as the key metaphor for Padmavati, see de Bruijn, *The Ruby in the Dust.*

[72] Bazmi, *Dāstān-i padmāwat:* 209.

and Sudhakar Dvivedi in one of the few *Bibliotheca Indica* volumes devoted to a vernacular text (1896). And although Jayasi was enthusiastically championed by the key Hindi scholar Ramchandra Shukla, who edited his collected works, Sufi *premakhyans*—as they are known in Hindi criticism, while *pemkatha* is the term that the texts themselves use and that I have used—remained suspect on account of their 'foreignness', i.e. their Sufi orientation. Most of the *kathas* mentioned in this essay surfaced only during the searches for Hindi manuscripts conducted by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha (NPS) from 1900 onwards.[73] This is how Qutban's *Mirigāvatī,* Usman's *Citrāvalī,* Puhakar's *Rasaratan* and so on came to notice—in short, the whole tradition. And although several were found in the libraries of local Rajas and prominent literati, so they had been there all along, they had not formed part of the burgeoning literary historical consciousness expressed by Shiv Singh Sengar's compilation *Śivsiṃh saroj* (1878). 'This unprecedented ancient text (*prācīn granth*) lay idle for a long time (*bahut dinoṃ se nirarthak paṛā thā*), Babu Avinash Lal has unearthed with great effort and had it printed at Babu Gopinath Pathak's wish at the Benares Light Press', reads the frontispiece of Newaj's *kathā Śakuntalā nāṭak* (1864), to my knowledge the only Hindavi *katha* printed in the nineteenth century before Grierson 'discovered' and printed Jayasi's *Padmāvavat.* Babu Ramkrishna Verma's Bharat Jiwan Press in Banaras, for example, published hundreds of Brajbhasha *riti* poetry collections—contemporary as well as classics—but no *katha.*[74]

The Hindi literary histories informed by the NPS search reports, like those by the Mishra brothers or Ramchandra Shukla, began to insert the Hindavi *kathas* into the general narrative of Hindi literary history, and a number of scholarly editions and studies were undertaken by the next generation of great Hindi scholars in the 1950s

---

[73] The manuscripts in private collections were listed and described in the Search Reports but not collected, so they are mostly unavailable to us now, a hundred years later.

[74] 'out of 256 titles published between 1884 and 1900 by the Bharat Jiwan Press, 119 (46%) were collections of poems or songs in Braj Bhasa, mostly of *śṛṅgāra rasa';* Orsini, 'Pandits, Printers and Others': 119.

and 1960s, particularly Mataprasad Gupta, Kishorilal Gupta, Shivprasad Singh, Vasudev Sharan Agrawal, Shivsahay Pathak, and Shyam Manohar Pandey, while Agarchand Nahta brought to light the connections with Jain and Rajasthani traditions and manuscripts. Yet though these scholars' introductions and monographs drew up a more and more complete picture of the tradition, the *historical* development and ramifications of the genre did not go further than generic categories of Sufi and '*bharatiy'* (Indian). With the studies of S.M. Pandey, and particularly Aditya Behl and Thomas de Bruijn, the richness and depth of the early, Sultanate Sufi *kathas* has come into sharp focus, though not the later tradition or the non-Sufi tales.[75]

What are the advantages of a historical overview of the genre and—where possible—of the lives of individual texts like the one attempted here? For one, if we move away from Sufi and non-Sufi, Hindavi/Awadhi and Persian as separate traditions, we become more sensitive to the dialogic and intertextual character of the *katha* genre. We can also trace the dynamics and changing fashions of this multilingual literary culture, and its multiple co-existing publics. We stop thinking of imperial and royal court culture as synonyms of "Mughal culture" and become sensitive to other domains, to local histories and articulations. We also notice the many mediations the genre and texts are called upon to perform: between oral epics and songs and codified aesthetic and prosodic systems; between heterogeneous audiences and patrons; between local and cosmopolitan, 'Indian' and Persian tastes and imaginaries. If in the period of the north Indian Sultanates of Delhi and Jaunpur, Hindavi *pemkathas* emerged the premier genre of vernacular literary expression and sophistication and travelled to the Deccan and to Arakan as models for further *vernacular* courtly texts, in the Mughal period the effort to transport some of that mediation and sophistication into Persian (*Rājkunwar*) failed before simpler attempts at inserting them as 'Indian stories' within Persian

---

[75] For these, see Orsini, 'Texts and Tellings', and for Vishnudas: Bangha, 'Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior' and McGregor's 'Viṣṇudās and his *Rāmāyan-kathā*' and 'A poet's view of his narrative material'.

cosmopolitan literariness. At the same time, in some Hindavi *kathas* Mughal 'real' geography came to overlay the imaginative one, and painting replaced music as the focal narrative element. Even when elite literary tastes turned to other genres (such as *kabittas* and *riti-granths*), Hindavi *kathas* continued to circulate and indeed be written in Sufi circles and by regional literati—Puhakar's *Rasaratan* being a somewhat awkward attempt at bring the two together. It is ironic that when in in the nineteenth century Padmavati and Ratansen became the epitome of 'Hindu resistance' against 'Muslim aggression' in the eyes of James Tod and the many Indian literati who drew freely and enthusiastically upon him (as Ramya Sreenivasan has brilliantly shown), the fact that the story had been assembled by the Awadhi Sufi Malik Muhammad Jayasi was forgotten. Tod included the story of Padmavati of Chittor in his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* as 'history'; he drew upon Jain and Rajasthani versions and seems to have been unaware of Jayasi's romance. Based on Tod's phenomenally successful book, new nationalist versions of the Padmavati-Ratansen-'Alauddin story began to be composed in Bengali in Calcutta in the form of narrative poems, plays, and historical novels, while manuscripts of Jayasi's and other versions also continued to be copied.[76]

Several copies of the Hindi and Persian versions reached British and European libraries in the nineteenth century. The French Orientalist Théodore-Marie Pavie translated two versions as *La légende de Padmanî, reine de Tchitor* (1856), from manuscripts belonging to Garcin de Tassy.[77] The poet Louis Laloy used it for a poem and a libretto on which Albert Roussel composed the opera *Padmâvatî* (1923).

In parallel, the oral epic of Lorik and Chanda continued to circulate orally through the agency of story-tellers. One performer S.M.

---

[76] Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives*.

[77] Pavie compares Jayasi's version with Jatmal's 1623 one, which is clearly aware of Jayasi's narrative since he briefly mentions Ratansen's transformation as a yogi but focuses on the second part and foregrounds Gora and Badal—more in alignment with the *Alha* oral epic. Despite the fact that Jayasi's text is *earlier* and acknowledged by Jatmal, Pavie begins with Jatmal and insists that his Hindu version is more authentic and 'patriotic'; *La légende de Padmanî*: 86.

Pandey interviewed and recorded in 1966 had travelled extensively along the networks of Purbi migrant labour to Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta, Berar, Rangoon, Sindh, Delhi, Multan, Mathura, Agra, Nagpur, Jabalpur, Bhusaval, Rameshwaran, Puri and many other places—Pandey admits that he 'was the only singer who had travelled so extensively.'[78] From the perspective of multilingual literary history, all these forms of circulation deserve attention: together they produce the texture of literary culture across languages, scripts, written/oral domains, and illuminate multiple histories and divergent trajectories.

References

Manuscripts:

Anon. *Mrigāvatī*, MS CBL In 37, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

Malik Muhammad Jayasi, *Padmāvat*, with glosses by Shaikh Muhammad Shakir, MS Hindi 6, Rampur Raza Library.
—. MS Hindi B 11, British Library.
—. MS Hindi C 1, British Library.
—. Acc. Ns. 1082-1072, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.

Published sources

Ahuja, Yoga Dhyan. 1965. *Haqīriya's Masnavī The True Miracle (Mādhavānal Kāmakandalā)*, Delhi.

Adamjee, Qamar. 2011. 'Strategies for Visual Narration in the Illustrated *Chandayan* Manuscripts', PhD dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

---

[78] Pandey, *The Hindi oral epic Canaini*: 20.

Agrawal, V.D. 1998. *Padmāvat: Malik Muhammad Jāyasī kṛt mahākāvya*, Chirgaon.

Alam. 1982. *Mādhavānal kāmakandhalā*, ed. by Rajkumari Mishra, Allahabad.

Bazmi, 'Abd al-Shakkur. 1971. *Dāstān-i padmāvat*, ed. A.H. Abidi, Tehran.

Bangha, Imre. 2014. 'Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior: Beginnings and Continuities in the *Rāmāyan* of Vishnudas', in F. Orsini and S. Sheikh (eds.), *After Timur Left*: 365-402.

Behl, Aditya. 2012. *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition 1379–1545*, Wendy Doniger (ed.), New York.

—. trans. 2012. *The Magic Doe: Quṭban Suhravardī's* Mirigāvatī, Wendy Doniger (ed.), New York.

Brac de la Perrière, Éloïse. 2008. *L'Art du livre dans l'Inde des sultanats*, Paris.

Busch, Allison. 2011. *Poetry of Kings: the Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, New York.

--2015. 'Listening for the Context: Tuning in to the Reception of 249 *Riti* Poetry', in F. Orsini and K. Butler Schofield (eds), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, Cambridge UK: 249-82.

Das, S. S. 1906. *Annual report on the search for Hindi manuscripts for the year 1902*, Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Benares.

—. 1912. *The first triennial report on the search for Hindi manuscripts: for the years 1906, 1907 and 1908*, Allahabad, vol. 1.

Da'ud, Mawlana. (1967) 1996. *Candāyan: Daūd-virahit pratham hindī sufī prem-kāvya*. Mataprasad Gupta (ed.), Varanasi.

de Bruijn, Thomas. 2012. *The Ruby in the Dust: Poetry and History of the Indian Padmavat by Sufi Poet Muhammad Jayasi*, Amsterdam.

d'Hubert, Thibaut. 2010. 'Histoire Culturelle et Poétique de la Traduction:

Alāol et la tradition littéraire Bengali au xviie siècle à Mrauk-U, capitale du royaume d'Arakan'. PhD, Paris, École Pratique des Hautes Études.

Digby, Simon. 2004. 'Before Timur Came: Provincialization of the Delhi Sultanate through the Fourteenth Century.' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47(3): 298–356.

Hadi, Nabi. 1995. *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature*, New Delhi.

Jayasi, Malik Muhammad. *Kanhāvat*, P.L. Gupta (ed.), Banaras.

—. 1998 (1956). *Padmāvat: Malik Muhammad Jāyasī kṛt mahākāvya*, Vasudev Sharan Agraval (ed.), Chirgaon.

Keshavmurti, Prashant. nd. 'Ḥaqīrī Kāšānī, Maṯnawī-i mādhavānal-kāmakandalā mausūm ba maḥẓ-i iʻjāz', Perso-Indica, http://perso-indica.net/work.faces?idsec=16&idw=122, last accessed 24 November 106.

Khosla, Preeti. 2014. 'The Visual Language of the North Indian Styles of Painting During the Sultanate Period (1414-1525)', PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London.

Kolff, Dirk. 1990. *Naukar, Rajput, Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850*, Cambridge.

McGregor, R.S. 1984. *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*.

—.1999. 'Viṣṇudās and His *Rāmāyan-kathā*.' In A. Entwistle et al. (eds), *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture*, New Delhi: 239–48.

—. 2000. 'A Narrative Poet's View of his Material.' In M. Offredi (ed.), *The Banyan Tree: Essays on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages*, New Delhi: 335–42.

--2003. 'The Progress of Hindi, Part I: The Development of a Transregional Idiom.' In S. Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley: 912–57.

Miner, Allyn. 2015. '*Raga* in the Early Sixteenth Century', in F. Orsini and K. Butler Schofield (eds), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and*

Performance in North India, Cambridge UK: 385-406.

Mishra, Shiv Gopal. 1957. *Madhumālatī,* Banaras.

Misra, Shyam Behari. 1914. *The Second Triennial Report on the Search for Hindi Manuscripts for the Year 1909, 1910 and 1911*, Benares.

Misra, Shyam Behari and Sukhdeo Bihari. 1912. *The first triennial report on the search for Hindi manuscripts: for the years 1906, 1907 and 1908*, Allahabad, vol. 2.

Newaj. 1864. *Śakuntalā nāṭak*, Banaras.

NPS Khoj Reports. See Das and Misra.

Orsini, Francesca. 2004. 'Pandits, printers and others. Publishing in nineteenth-century Benares', in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravarty (eds), *Print Areas: Book History in India*, New Delhi: 103-38.

—. 2015. 'Texts and Tellings: *Kathas* in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', in F. Orsini and K. Butler Schofield (eds), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, Cambridge UK: 327-58.

—forthcoming. 'Translation, circulation, inflection: a Hindavi tale in Persian garb', in F. Orsini (ed.), *Objects, Images, Stories: Simon Digby's historical method*.

Pandey, Shyam Manohar. 1982. *The Hindi oral epic Canaini*, Allahabad.

—. 1982, *Madhyayugīn premākhyān,* Allahabad.

Pavie, Thedore Mavie. 1865. *La légende de Padmanî, reine de Tchitor [par Djaṭmal], d'après les textes hindis et hindouis*, Paris.

Perso-Indica. http://www.perso-indica.net/index.faces, last accessed 24 November 2016.

Phukan, Shantanu. 2000. 'Through a Persian Prism: Hindi and Padmavat in the Mughal Imagination.' PhD dissertation, University of Chicago.

—.2001. "Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet": The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian', *Indian Economic and Social History*

Review, 38, 1: 33-58.

Plukker, D.F. 1981. *The Mirigāvatī of Kutubana: Avadhī text with critical notes*, Amsterdam.

Ruknuddin. (1537) 1894. *Laṭaʾif-e qddusī*, Delhi.

Sharma, Sunil. 2015. 'Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal   Persian Texts', in F. Orsini and K. Butler Schofield (eds), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, Cambridge UK: 283-302.

Singh, Shivaprasad. 1963. *Rasaratan. Kavi Puhakar kṛt*, Kashi.

Sreenivasan, Ramya. 2007. *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic pasts in India, c.1500-1900*, New Delhi.

—2014. 'Warrior-Tales at Hinterland Courts in North India, c. 1370–1550', in F. Orsini and S. Sheikh (eds), *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India,* New Delhi: 242-72.

Steingass, Francis Joseph. 1982. *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, London.

Varma, Jaganmohan. 1981. *Usmān kavi kṛt citrāvalī*, Kashi.

Weightman, Simon C.R. and A. Behl (trans.). 2000. *Madhumālatī: An Indian*

Sufi Romance, Oxford.