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Sacred Biography, Translation, and Conversion; The Nabīvaṃśa of Saiyad Sultān and the Making of Bengali Islam, 1600-Present

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Abstract
The present dissertation is a study of the Nabīvaṃśa, “The Prophet’s Lineage,” the first biography of the Prophet Muḥammad to be composed in Bangla, in the first half of the seventeenth century. A literary milestone in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural history of Islam, it marks a significant contribution to Bangla’s rich literary corpus, and became a canonical work for the late-medieval Islamic Bangla literary tradition. This hitherto little-studied text is used to examine the nature of Islamic expansion on Bengal’s eastern frontier, addressing issues of religious competition, identity formation, and conversion. These were central concerns of the author, Saiyad Sultān (fl. 1615–1646), who was an important Sufi pīr. By situating the Nabīvaṃśa, on the one hand, in the literary traditions of medieval Islam—historiographies, tales of the prophets, biographies and ascension narratives of the Prophet Muḥammad—and in local Bangla epic, purāṇic, and hagiographical traditions, on the other, the dissertation studies the processes of translation by which local cultural figures and Bangla literary forms are used to legitimate and root the Arabian Prophet of Islam in Bengal. In examining the life of a text across the subject-author-text-community continuum over a time-span of nearly four hundred years, the dissertation traces the Nabīvaṃśa’s trajectory from its manuscript circulation in southeast Bengal into the print era, investigating the author’s legacy and the text’s meaning in various publics of memory.

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SACRED BIOGRAPHY, TRANSLATION, AND CONVERSION:
THE NABĪVĀMŚA OF SAIYAD SULTĀN AND
THE MAKING OF BENGALI ISLAM, 1600–PRESENT

Ayesha A. Irani

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SACRED BIOGRAPHY, TRANSLATION, AND CONVERSION:
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Ayesha A. Irani
To the memory of

Muhammad Mithumiya Shaikh
(d. 1996)

Aspandiar Ardeshir Irani
(1933–2010)

Aditya Behl
(1966–2009)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The long road to completing this dissertation has been so beset with obstacles that I have often felt like a novice stumbling through a hazardous Sufi quest-romance. Had it not been for the companionship and guidance of many this journey would perhaps never have reached its end.

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ABSTRACT

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Ayesha A. Irani
Dissertation Supervisor: Jamal J. Elias

The present dissertation is a study of the Nabīvamśa, “The Prophet's Lineage,” the first biography of the Prophet Muḥammad to be composed in Bangla, in the first half of the seventeenth century. A literary milestone in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural history of Islam, it marks a significant contribution to Bangla’s rich literary corpus, and became a canonical work for the late-medieval Islamic Bangla literary tradition. This hitherto little-studied text is used to examine the nature of Islamic expansion on Bengal’s eastern frontier, addressing issues of religious competition, identity formation, and conversion. These were central concerns of the author, Saiyad Sultān (fl. 1615–1646), who was an important Sufi pīr. By situating the Nabīvamśa, on the one hand, in the literary traditions of medieval Islam—historiographies, tales of the prophets, biographies and ascension narratives of the Prophet Muḥammad—and in local Bangla epic, purāṇic, and hagiographical traditions, on the other, the dissertation studies the processes of translation by which local cultural figures and Bangla literary forms are used to legitimate and root the Arabian Prophet of Islam in Bengal. In examining the life of a text across the subject-author-text-community continuum over a time-span of nearly four hundred years, the dissertation traces the Nabīvamśa’s trajectory from its manuscript circulation in southeast Bengal into the print era, investigating the author’s legacy and the text’s meaning in various publics of memory.
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A Note on Transliteration
and Other Conventions

This dissertation employs three systems of transliteration, all of which are based upon the Library of Congress (LOC) romanization tables: for Bangla and Avadhi, the LOC’s romanization system for “Sanskrit and Prakrit” has been used, while for Persian and Arabic the separate LOC tables provided for each of these languages have been employed.¹

To honor the Bangla vernacular while respecting its dynamic connection to the two cosmopolitan languages of premodern Bengal—Sanskrit and Persian—certain conventions have been adopted in transliterating Bangla. First, for purposes of easier identification, the Sanskrit romanization system has been used for the transliteration of Bangla. Orthographic distinction between va and ba follows the etymology of the Bangla word in question. Being a noun of Sanskritic origin, avatāra, for example, is romanized with a va, while nabī and karībā, being an Arabic noun and a Bangla/Prakrit verb respectively, are both romanized with a ba. Keeping in mind Bengali sensibilities, exceptions have been made in the case of Baṅga, which is romanized as such, rather than as Vaṅga; and with the modern Bengali proper names Bandyopādhyāya, Banerjee, Basu, and so on, which are commonly spelt with a “b” rather than a “v.” Second, I use Islamic Bangla forms of Arabo-Persian words which occur in Islamic Bangla texts in discussions pertaining to this literature. Wherever there lies the possibility of confusion, Islamic Bangla terms are provided with their Arabic or Persian equivalent in parenthesis in the first occurrence of the term. In sections where I discuss pan-Islamic contexts and traditions, Arabic and Persian proper nouns and terms are provided in their romanized forms true to the transliteration systems of each of these languages. The reader is requested to overlook inconsistencies arising from preferring Islamic Bangla forms over Arabo-Persian ones, or vice versa, particularly in those sections wherein I discuss Islamic Bangla texts within the Arabo-Persian literary context.

Place names are provided in their standard modern forms. The exceptions to this rule are Bangladeshi village names, particularly found in Chapter Eight, where I have chosen to provide

¹ See “ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts.”
these in transliteration. Wherever relevant, premodern forms of place names are also supplied in transliteration.

All proper names are provided in transliteration, except for those of the well-known figures Muhammad Enamul Haq, Sukumar Sen, Ahmad Sharif, and Rabindranath Tagore. For those Bengali authors who have also authored works in English, I have favored the use of their spellings of their names in English, rather than transliterate these. In the case of Islamic Bangla proper names and terms of Perso-Arabic origin, I drop the final inherent (and depending on the pronunciation, occasionally the medial inherent or epenthetic) \( a \). For instance, the title Rasul Vijaya, and the name Saiyad Sultān are transliterated thus, instead of Rasula Vijaya and Saiyada Sulatāna. However, all such epenthetic vowels are retained in the citation of textual passages.

Transliteration of Bangla vowels follows the regular pattern, but with the addition of three symbols drawn from conventions for Prakrit—\( ā \), \( ī \) and \( ĩ \)—to accommodate the orthographic peculiarities of Middle Bangla. Verbs such as hao or haila, spelt with diphthongs in modern Bangla, are in Middle Bangla often spelt with two vowels, which I transliterate as ha\( ā \) or ha\( ĩ \)la, respectively. Similarly, the verb form ācha\( ā \)ka, for instance, is spelt with the medial vowels \( a \) and \( u \) rather than a diphthong, and is transliterated as such.

All titles of articles in Persian and Arabic are standardized to the LOC system. This is particularly applicable to articles from the Encyclopedia of Islam (Second Edition).
A Note on Dating Systems and Calculations

The following dating systems, commonly used in the areas of pre-modern Bengal under study in this dissertation, use the respective formulae for deriving Common Era dates:

 sacrificia: the Arabic abjad dating system used by Muslim Bengali authors. ³
A.H.: After Hijra, Islamic system of dating.
   a) Hijrī date × 970203
   b) Drop the last six digits
   c) Add the remaining digits to 622.54 = C.E. date ⁴
C.E.: Common Era

Bangābda or Bāṅgāla Ṣaka (B.Ś.): B.Ś. date + 593 = C.E. date
Maghī date: prevalent in Arakan, Chittagong, and Sylhet during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Maghī year + 639 = C.E. date
Ṣakābda: Ṣaka date + 78 = C.E. date
Saṃvat: Saṃvat date – 57 = C.E. date
Tripurābda: prevalent in Tripurā. Tripurābda + 590 = C.E. date

² This note is derived from Dimock and Stewart 1999, xxxv.
³ A brief summary of methods of calculating via the ābjad system are provided in Kāium 2000, 126–127. More helpful details can be found in Lewis 1999. It is important to note that in South Asia, the Persianized forms of Arabic words are used in calculating these chronograms. Thus, the Persian 'ibādat is accepted, and not the Arabic 'ibāda with a ta marbūta.
⁴ All formulae in this chart, except the hijrī calculations, have been cited from CCBM, Pariśiṣṭa Ga. For converting hijrī dates into C.E. dates, I have provided the calculations supplied in Kāium 2000, 131. Alternatively, for hijrī-C.E. calculations, one could use a ready-reckoner such as Birashk 1983.
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Abbreviations

BAPP  Bāṃlā Ekāḍemī Puṇṭhi Paricaya, edited by Sukumāra Viśvāsa
BKPV  Bāṃlā Kalamī Puṭhira Vīvaraṇa, edited by Ālī Āḥmad.
BPPV  Bāṅgālā Prācīna Puṇṭhira Vīvaraṇa, compiled by Munšī Ābdul Karim
CBM   Catalogue of the Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Pashtu, and Sindhi Manuscripts in
      the Library of the British Museum, edited by J. F. Blumhardt
CCBM  Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts, edited by Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee
CV    “Caṭṭagrāma Viśvavidyālaya Granthāgāre Rakṣita Bāṅglā Puṭhira Tālikā,” edited by
      Māhubbubul Hak
DCBM  A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim’s Collection, edited by
      Ahmad Sharif
NV    Nabīvaṃśa, critical edition of Ahmad Sharif
OR    Ophāte Rasul of Saiyad Sultān’s Nabīvaṃśa, edited by Ālī Āḥmad
PP    Ābdul Karīm Sāhityaviśārad Saṃkalita Puṭhi-Paricitī, edited by Ahmad Sharif
Introduction

0.1 Introduction

The Nabīvaṃśa, “The Prophet’s Lineage,” is the first epic biography on the Prophet Muhammad composed in Bangla, in the first half of the seventeenth century. Its author, Saiyad Sultān (fl. 1615–1646), was a Bengali ālim (learned man, theologian) and Sufi pīr living on the easternmost frontier of pre-modern Bengal, in what today is part of the nation-state of Bangladesh. Sultān’s little-studied text is a literary milestone in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural history of Islam, and marks a significant contribution not only to Bangla’s rich literary corpus, but to our understanding of Islam’s contact with Indic culture.

That Sufis played a central role in Islamic expansion in Bengal has been established by Richard Eaton through examination of medieval Persian literary, ethnographic, and historical sources, as well as colonial data.¹ However, studies of the Islamic Bangla texts which emerged from the sixteenth century during the period of Islamic expansion are critically undeveloped. The texts themselves remain largely untranslated from the original Bangla, and understudied outside the Bangladeshi academy. These works, which express Islamic ideas in the regional language, represent a literary watershed and underscore the efforts of rebel writers across

¹ Eaton 1993.
South Asia, many of whom were Sufis, to defy the linguistic cordon of the Muslim elite and the
hegemony of Arabic and Persian as languages of Islamic discourse. Furthermore, they reflect
the complex religious, cultural, and literary processes of Islam’s expansion in Bengal, and
foreground the role that pīr-authors, such as Sultan, played in Bengal’s Islamization. This
dissertation contributes to redressing this lacuna, and bears rich implications for the trans-
regional history of religious change, showing how religions undergoing expansion necessarily
adapt to the local conditions of target areas in order to successfully root themselves in the
region.

This dissertation explores how an Arabian prophet and his religion came to inhabit the
seventeenth-century Bengali landscape, and the role that pīr-authors, such as Saiyad Sultān,
played in the rooting of Islam in Bengal’s easternmost regions. In addressing issues of religious
competition, Islamic identity formation, and conversion, central concerns of the author, my
research uncovers the challenges faced by a Bengali Muslim writer in articulating the
preeminence of the Prophet Muḥammad. This study of the Nabhīvaṃśa delineates what I call a
“frontier genre.” The term highlights the nature of the Nabhīvaṃśa’s socio-textual community,
which is located on a geographic and Islamic frontier, and constituted by non-Muslims3 and
Muslim neophytes alike, all of whom the text seeks to draw into its universal embrace. It is also
used in recognition of the text’s successful slippage across neat boundaries of genre into a
literary frontier zone, a condition of literary being perforce effected by the very contingencies
of its social context. Depending on the auditor’s vantage point, the Nabhīvaṃśa could be enjoyed
either as a Bengali sīra, a sacred biography of the Prophet Muḥammad written as a universal
history, or as an Islamic purāṇa, a mythological narrative of Sanskritic pedigree. Expanding upon

2 For a sampler of verses which show the premodern Muslim Bengali poets’ fears and affirmations of
using Bangla for the expression of Islamic ideas, see Sharif 1972, 272–273; and Roy 1983, 76–78.
3 By “non-Muslims” I refer to the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavas, followers of other Vaiṣṇava sects, Sāktas, and Nātha
practitioners, and others who inhabited the seventeenth-century Bengali landscape.
this problem of genre, a significant site of inquiry becomes the author’s negotiation of the
dialectic of various dislocations, relocations, and collocations—lexical, linguistic, and literary—
engendered by mediating Islamic ideas to Bengali auditors: the unseating of cosmopolitan
languages by the vernacular while nonetheless drawing upon cosmopolitan genres; the
collocation of the text in two separate narrative and hagiographic traditions, pan-Islamic and
Bengali; the straddling of multiple linguistic and cultural worlds, Turco-Persian and Indic; the
simultaneous authorial distancing from and immersion in the literary imaginaire of the target
audience; the subtle supplanting, by Islamic counterparts, of old orders of charismatic
authority, whether textual, human, or supra-human; and the relocation of Bengali peoples
within new frameworks of imagined communities (ummat). In other words, I argue that Sultān
deploys the relatively new Bengali medium of hagiography not only as the choice tool for
Islamic theological discourse, but, as the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas had recently pioneered, the
preferred medium of political discourse4—a genre for mediating alterity.

My analysis of Saiyad Sultān’s Nabīvaṃśa (NV) is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One
provides historical notes on the author, garnered from his writings and from the premodern
Bangla literary tradition. The first half of the chapter discusses the preoccupation of
Bangladeshi scholars with issues surrounding his birthplace and time, showing how such
scholarship tends to divide the author’s legacy along regional lines. Having determined Saiyad
Sultān’s floruit and the probable geography of his life, the second part of the chapter provides
an historical overview of religious life and the politics of late-sixteenth to early seventeenth-
century Mughal East Bengal.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the issue of the authorship of various texts ascribed to Saiyad
Sultān—the Jñāna Pradīpa; the Jñāna Cautīśā; an untitled narrative poem on the Prophet

4 Stewart 2010a, 6.
Muhammad’s battle with the infidel king, Jaykum; and some thirteen padāvalī—and their respective places in Bangla literary history. The main focus of the chapter, however, is a review of the contents of the Nabīvaṃśa, and a detailed analysis of the relationship of the critical edition to the manuscript tradition.

The theoretical framework for studying the NV, laid out in Chapter Three, places the text in the context of contemporary processes of vernacularization in South Asia, in general, the region- and religion-specific context of Mughal Bengal, and the cross-regional interactions of Bangla with other vernaculars. The NV is discussed in the context of Bengali pāncālī performance traditions, and also as sacred biography. Beyond such preliminary contextualizations, the crux of this chapter is a preoccupation with the question of how Sultān creates a new “prior” text for Bengal, and the delineation of an hermeneutic model that explains the workings of translation as conversion in a missionary text such as the NV. The next four chapters take up this central argument of the thesis for further investigation and illustration.

Chapters Four through Seven follow the broad sectional divisions of the NV: cosmogony, prophetology (two chapters), and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Chapter Four studies the specific strategies of translation Sultān uses to present Islamic cosmogony to Bengalis. Sultān’s Nūr Muhammad, the primordial principle of the light of Muhammad, which, on the one hand, draws upon a range of medieval Islamic sources, is refracted through the lens of various Bengali cosmogonical conceptions, such as the cosmic syllable aum, the principles and locutions of Sāmkhya philosophy and of the Dharma cult, and the Vaiṣṇava theory of incarnation, to provide a universal conception of Islamic cosmogony which acknowledges the prior knowledge of Islam among local peoples, regardless of their sectarian backgrounds, while providing them with a new and better reconceptualization of their own cosmogonies. As I demonstrate through the application of Richard Eaton’s paradigm of conversion to Christianity
among the Nagas, the presentation of cosmogony and conceptions of divinity as being continuous with local traditions is a key element in the rooting of Islam in East Bengal.

Sultān reconstitutes Islamic prophetology to include Hindu divinities and sacred texts, tacitly enlarging the Qurʾānic category of People of the Book to uniquely embrace the Hindus of Bengal. Specific Hindu deities, identifiable as Śiva and various avatāras of Viṣṇu, including Rāma, make their advent to eradicate evil from the earth. Their abysmal failure brings forth the creation of Ādam, and after him a line of prophets, including Śiś, Idrīs, Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Musā, Dāud, Solemān, and Īsā, whose stories are told in some detail, culminating with the Prophet of Islam. Sultan’s narratological treatment of the Hindu prehistory of the traditional Islamic prophets is examined in the first part of Chapter Five. The second part demonstrates Sultān’s reliance upon al-Kisāʾī’s Qiṣṣa al-Anbiyāʾ, through a close analysis of Sultān’s translation of the tale-cycle of Ādam. Key narratological features and themes of Sultān’s translation are then drawn out from the Ādam cycle, and applied, by extension, to the remaining tale-cycles of the pre-Muḥammadan prophets, which also rely upon al-Kisāʾī’s account. The prohibition of idolatry as being the most important task of the prophetic mission is a significant feature of the tale-cycles of Śiś, Nūh, and Ibrāhīm, in the NV, all of which lead up to the advent of the prophet Hari.

A prophet born of the degenerate and idolatrous line of Kābil, Hari (Kṛṣṇa) is the only Hindu god who punctuates the line of traditional Islamic prophets after Ādam. This narrative unit on Hari, the singular focus of Chapter Six, exemplifies Sultan’s effort to minimize local competition to the Prophet of Islam: the inclusion of this “failed” prophet—one of the most popular deities of medieval Bengal—appropriates and marginalizes a native rival through his conversion to Islamic practice. He is upheld as a warning to the people of Bengal to forfeit their idolatrous ways, as these could only lead to their incurring divine wrath and the punishments of Hell.
In Chapter Seven, which focuses upon the Prophet’s ascension, I argue that Sultan’s palimpsestic narrative of the ascension serves three inter-linked purposes: first, to supply an effective narrative platform by which to further enhance the sacredness of the Prophet; second, to provide an ethical template for individual and communal Islamic practice, serving to construct a community identity aligned around the axis of pīr, Prophet, and God; and third, to invite others to the faith by presenting the Prophet as intercessor, an attractive figure of compassion and power. This chapter also investigates Sultan’s treatment of Islamic eschatology and cosmology.⁵

In examining the legacy of Saiyad Sultān, in the final chapter, I trace the life of a text—the Nabīvaṃśa’s trajectory from its manuscript circulation in southeast Bengal into the print era. Placed in the context of late nineteenth-century Calcutta’s popular Baṭatalā press productions of tales of the Islamic prophets, the Nabīvaṃśa’s colonial-era decline can be attributed to changing conceptions of Islam and its Prophet that had now arisen among the Bengali Muslims, emerging from the combustible colonial crucible of Christian evangelism, Islamic reform, and nationalism. While recognizing the diminished status of the Nabīvaṃśa in the print era, I also unearth how its author and his memory have come to be contested by two present-day Bangladeshi groups of scholars and the faithful who favour either Sylhet or Chittagong as his birthplace. Sultān’s charisma, caught in the trammels of regional historiographic processes, literary and religious, is variously drawn upon to support competing agendas. This is a testament not only to the Sufi author’s enduring appeal to various publics of memory in eastern Bangladesh, but the pervasive mechanisms by which figures from the past are continuously relocated in new structures of memory and meaning that are both constituted by and constitutive of the present. In these and other ways I argue that the appropriation of Sultān’s

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⁵ This chapter extends and updates an earlier article I had written on the merāj narrative in the NV. Irani 2010, 225–251.
authority by Bangladeshi historiographers and communities of the faithful follows the larger arc of charismatic appropriation exemplified by Sultān’s treatment of his biographical subject and religious ideal—the Prophet Muḥammad—by those who, like Sultān himself, seek to make Islam meaningful to new communities of believers.

0.2 Representations of Islamic Bangla literature in literary historiography

The Hindu bhadraloka intellectuals of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Calcutta who produced the first literary histories of Bangla, themselves products and victims of colonial education, completely overlooked the contributions made to Bangla literature by the premodern Muslim literati.6 As Sudipta Kaviraj has observed, “while Vidyāpati (who wrote in Sanskrit, Maithili, and Avahattha) and Jayadeva (who wrote in Sanskrit) were seen to be firmly part of the basic definition of Bangla literary history, Islamic texts were often silently excluded.”7 These inclusions, as Kaviraj has explained, could be seen as providing the putative beginnings of this “narrative of continuity”8 which most literary histories of Bangla aspire to create, while Islamic Bangla texts were excluded, “by suggesting either that they belonged to a separate cultural strand (called Musalmānī Bāmlā) or that these texts were not of sufficient literary quality to find a place in an exalted history of literary art.”9 Thus, the very cultural snobbery of the bhadralok historiographers that deemed the popular Hindu devotional narratives (maṅgalakāvya literature) too unrefined to be included in Bangla’s literary history on account of their being produced in village environments was responsible for the exclusion of

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7 Kaviraj 2003, 507.
8 Ibid., 503.
9 Ibid., 504. Concerning “Musalmānī Bengali” literature, see Chapter Eight and also A. Ghosh 2006, Chapter Seven.
Islamic Bangla literature. Dinesh Chandra Sen’s foundational *History of Bengali Language and Literature* rejects the censorship motivated by such cultural pretensions; much of his history is based upon new materials he discovered in manuscripts which he personally gathered from the villages of Bengal. Yet even this history—a collection of lectures delivered at Calcutta University in 1909—ignores the entire corpus of Islamic Bangla literature, while including Vidyাপati. Indeed, if Saiyad Ālāol, the Bangla poet at the Arakanese court, who negotiated through Bangla the hyperglossic languages of Sanskrit and Persian with equal versatility, merits any mention, it is only because of his use of “a high flown Sanskritic Bengali,” which Sen considers altogether astonishing for “a Moslem writer.” Though credited with “heralding an age of classical revival,” he is treated as a curiosity among the literateurs of his community.

This exclusion of Islamic Bangla literature in the early phase of Bangla literary historiographical writing, which constituted “the project of literary modernity,” was furthered and abetted by early twentieth-century trends in manuscript collection by elite Hindus. Such collectors were mostly interested in gathering and preserving Sanskrit manuscripts, and those Bangla manuscripts which pertained to Hindu themes. As Muhammad Enamul Haq records about such early efforts, “a few books written by Muslims were also accidentally discovered but there was no deliberate attempt to collect them and quite a considerable number of them have been lost.” It was only through the pioneering efforts of the far-sighted collector Munşī Ābdul Karim Sāhibyaviśārad (1871–1953) that the first major collection of Islamic Bangla manuscripts

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10 Sengupta 1995, 60.
11 Ibid., 61–62.
13 Kaviraj 2003, 504.
14 Haq 1957, 53.
was assembled.15 Such was his legendary devotion to the cause of the preservation of Bengal's literary heritage that in the days when most Hindu collectors of manuscripts refrained from collecting manuscripts of Islamic Bangla texts, often present in the very households in which they found manuscripts of Sanskrit and Hindu Bangla texts, Karim would collect every possible manuscript he could lay his hands on, whether pertaining to Islamic Bangla literature or not. At a time when social prejudice against Muslims ran high in Hindu society, when Muslims were considered “untouchables,” he would suffer insult and injury in the single-minded pursuit of his cause. Many Hindu owners of manuscripts, as Vyomakesha Mustaphī records, would not receive him into their homes, forcing him to stand outside the threshold as he made his notes. Others would not allow him to handle their sacred manuscripts; yet moved by his entreaties, they would turn the pages themselves for him to record the relevant details of the concerned manuscript.16 In these ways, and by using his position as assistant in the office of the Inspector of Schools,17 over a sixty-year period, Sāhityaviśāradā Ābdul Karim collected over 2000 manuscripts mainly from Chittagong, but also from Tripura, Noakhali, Rangpur, Pabna, and Bakharganj, thus preserving for posterity the fast-vanishing artifacts of East Bengali material culture and heritage.18 Assiduously, he cataloged his personal collection of Bangla manuscripts,19 which he ultimately bequeathed to public collections in Bangladesh,20 while he published

15 There is some discrepancy over Munshi Abdul Karim’s birthdate, which was recorded as 1869 until the discovery of his horoscope. Ābul Āhsan Caudhurī 1997, “nai.” For the published horoscope, see a recent biography, Berā 2005, 15. See Haq’s (1972, xxxviii–xxxix) views on his birthdate.
16 Mustaphī 1914, ix. See also Haq 1972, xx.
17 Highly respected as an incorruptible office assistant, his “legal gratifications” were manuscripts, which he encouraged any applicant to the office to bring back to him from their villages to preserve these from destruction by “illiterates, white ants, moths, fire, flood, cyclone,” and to prove their dedication to the spread of education. Haq 1972, xix. He even refused promotions at the risk of losing his leverage in collecting manuscripts through such applicants. Ibid., xxvi.
18 Sharif 1958, “t” and “u.”
19 BPPV, two volumes.
20 338 Bangla manuscripts pertaining to Hindu literature in his collection were bequeathed to the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, while the manuscripts pertaining to Islamic Bangla texts were his
articles numbering in the hundreds in local literary journals about every new text he discovered.\(^1\) Munšī Ābdul Karim’s labor of love provided the invaluable basic materials—the “māla masalā” as Sharif puts it—for the future study of Islamic Bangla literature.\(^2\) He also inspired other Muslims of East Bengal and Bangladesh to scour the East Bengali countryside for more such national treasures.

The second decade of the twentieth century has been heralded, by some observers, as the era of the literary renaissance of Muslim Bengal; the Vaṅgīya Musalmāna Sāhitya Samiti was established, in 1912, to rival the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat.\(^3\) Dinesh Candra Sen was perhaps the first to write in any detail about East Bengali literary traditions, to which Muslim poets also contributed. His translations of East Bengali ballads, particularly collected from the Mymensingh area, were published in 1923.\(^4\) These attest to a growing interest on the part of Sen in Muslim contributions to Bangla “village literature” (pallī-sāhitya), an issue he took up for more serious study, towards the end of his life, in Prācīna Bāmlā sāhitye Musalmānera avadāna (1940), wherein he extols the trivenī saṅgama (“the [sacred] confluence of three rivers”) of Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist contributions in the making of Bangla literature.\(^5\)

Also beginning in 1940, Sukumar Sen began to publish his encyclopedic survey of Bangla literature in five volumes. Though Islamic Bangla literature was not entirely excluded, it was almost so: a mere 58 pages of 544 were allotted to it, in the second, and relevant volume.

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\(^{1}\) Many of his published articles can be found in the following collections: Ābdul Karim 2003; Ābul Āhsān Caudhurī 1997; and Ikbal 1994. Haq (1972, pp. XXIII–XXV) lists 114 periodicals and journals in which he published his articles, while mentioning that many of these journals were ephemeral, resulting in the irretrievable loss of many of Ābdul Karim’s articles. An incomplete list of 409 of his articles is supplied by Sharif 1958, 681–699.

\(^{2}\) Ibid., “kha.”

\(^{3}\) Haq 1972, p. XXII.

\(^{4}\) Dinesh Chandra Sen 1923–32. Concerning the authenticity of these ballads, see Zbavitel 1963.

\(^{5}\) Dinesh Chandra Sen 1940, 32.
covering the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. To remedy this neglect on his part, he published, in 1951, his *Islāmī Bāṅglā Sāhitya*;\textsuperscript{26} in his introduction to the volume, Sen specifies that it should be considered as an appendix to the first volume of his *Bāmlā Sāhityera Itihāsā*, where he was regretfully unable to give full treatment to this literature.\textsuperscript{27} Thus even in Sukumar Sen’s formative historiography of Bangla literature, Muslim contributions remained an afterthought, a dispensable appendix, not integral to an appreciation of the whole.

Based upon the manuscripts in Munī Ābdul Karim’s collection, Muhammad Enamul Haq wrote, in 1957, his *Muslim Bāṅglā Sāhitya*, simultaneously published in English translation as *Muslim Bengali Literature*.\textsuperscript{28} This was followed in 1960 by Muhammad Mansur Uddīn’s *Bāmlā sāhitye Muslim sādhana*.\textsuperscript{29} Muhammad Šahīdullāh’s *Bāmlā sāhityera kathā: Madhyayuga*,\textsuperscript{30} written in 1965, but whose first volume was published in 1953, was the first attempt made by a Muslim Bengali to produce a comprehensive history of Bangla literature, which attempted to give sufficient weight to the contributions of the Muslim literati. While Sukumar Sen’s voluminous history of Bangla literature emphasized the age of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya as a pivotal turning point in Bangla literary history, allotting a vast amount of space to this literature,\textsuperscript{31} Šahīdullāh, on the other hand, devotes a mere thirteen pages to this voluminous literature, expanding instead at length upon the *maṅgala* literature and the Muslim contributions. By doing so, he attempts,
perhaps, to reclaim the very subaltern streams which had earlier been deemed unworthy of inclusion in Bangla’s literary history.32

Starting in the late fifties, Munshi Abdur Karim’s nephew and literary historian, the indefatigable Ahmad Sharif, began to produce critical editions of Islamic Bangla texts from manuscripts in his uncle’s collection; one of these is none other than Saiyad Sultān’s Nabīvamsa (1978), upon which the present study is based. Bangladeshi scholars, such as Muhammad Enamul Haq, Mohammad Abdul Kāium, Rājiyā Sultānā, Mazharul Islam, Saiyad Āli Āhsān, Muhammad Sāhjāhān Miyā and others, have also produced critical editions of various middle Bangla Islamic texts.33 Unfortunately, often the critical apparatus for such “critical” editions is flimsy, and marred, as has been specifically noted in the case of Ahmad Sharif’s critical editions of Saiyad Sultān’s works,34 by an utter lack of transparency, often leaving unstated the relation between critical edition and the manuscript tradition. Little effort, moreover, is made to trace all available manuscripts in public collections both inside and outside Bangladesh; starting with manuscript catalogs, which rarely mention specific manuscript provenance, editors make no special effort to trace manuscript histories, recensions, and circulation—a matter, among others, which has been detailed in the Introductory Notes to premodern Islamic Bangla manuscripts in Appendix One. In this sense, these editions leave much to be desired and offer little more than a tentative starting-point, however ill-defined, for work on a large body of otherwise inaccessible manuscripts, housed in scattered and sequestered Bangladeshi archives, whose trustees and administrators often lack the will, the vision, or the funding to aid the growth of scholarship in the field. Critical studies in the Bangladeshi academy of individual premodern Islamic Bangla literary texts, by and large, remain inadequate and undeveloped:

32 See Rajnarayan Basu’s comment on Kṣemānanda’s Manasāmaṅgala and the exclusions of maṅgala literature from his and other earlier literary histories. Sengupta 1995, 60.
33 For a comprehensive bibliography, see Kāium 2000, Pariśiṣṭa Ka.
34 See Appendix One of this dissertation.
discussions typically revolve around plot summaries, and, more often than not, regurgitate extracts from historical surveys of Bangla literature.

Despite this critique, it was these and other preliminary efforts of East Bengali and Bangladeshi Muslim scholars, writing in their native tongue, that finally put this long-neglected corpus of literature on Bangla’s literary map. By 1978, when Ahmad Sharif wrote his own extensive literary history of Bangla, entitled Bāṅgālī o Bāṅgalā Sāhitya, he was able to provide an historical narrative that gave the Muslim literati due recognition for their contributions, while placing appropriate emphasis on other streams of Bangla literature, presenting, thereby, a more balanced overview of these various literary traditions.35 This reclamation of Muslim literary heritage undoubtedly fed the post-partition project of nation-building for East Pakistanis, especially at a time when the Bangla language movement in East Pakistan was gathering momentum. Thus, Saiyad Sultān’s Nabīvaṃśā was heralded in 1960 by at least one scholar as “a kind of national religious epic.”36 Simultaneously, regional claims to cultural superiority via literary legitimation began to surface in scholarship on premodern Islamic Bangla literature. Thus, for instance, Chittagong, the region from which most of Munšī Ābdul Karim’s manuscripts had been gathered, his own region of birth, and likewise that of the East Bengali historians, Muhammad Enamul Haq and Ahmad Sharif, was represented in these histories as the fertile ground of East Bengal’s literary production. While these may not be altogether empty or misplaced claims, since a great number of poets did emerge from the Chittagong region, the question arises as to whether the regional literary map is somehow skewed in favor of Chittagong because of the early twentieth-century accumulation of Islamic Bangla manuscripts from this region, at a time when similar efforts were not made coevally in other regions of East

35 Sharif 2008. Concerning the history of Bengali culture and literature as it was shaped in the colonial period, see Anisujjāmān [1964] 2001. For another such study, but in English, which focuses upon the colonial period but touches upon premodern Bangla literature, see Uddin 2006.
36 Husain 1960, xxiv.
Bengal. Thus, many unknown texts produced in other regions may have disappeared altogether due to the lack of such early interventions in securing this heritage. To dispute the perceived claims to superiority by the Chittagonian historians, modern literary historians of other regions, such as Sylhet, soon began to make their own counter-claims. As elaborated upon in Chapters One and Eight, it is such a regional tug-of-war in which Saiyad Sultān and his Nabīvamśa have also become embroiled.

Four other forms of representation, equally damaging to a full appreciation of this literature, remain to be introduced. The first is the representation of this literature as syncretistic, an approach whose basic metaphors have been deconstructed by Tony K. Stewart, who convincingly demonstrates the deleterious effects of the application of such metaphors to Islamic Bangla literature.37 Instead of viewing this literature as a static, syncretistic product, Stewart recommends studying it through processes of translation.38 In his elucidation of the Bengali Sufi adaptations of the technologies of yoga for Sufi soteriological purposes, Shaman Hatley too turns away from the syncretism rubric through which such practices have usually been viewed, placing these historically within the wider contexts of similar adaptations by various other sects of Bengal and South Asia.39 The second form of representation of Muslim Bangla authors is their glorification as models of secularism (dharmanirapekṣatā). This, for instance, is a feature attributed to the Muslim authors who compose padāvalī literature on the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme, an issue taken up in Chapter Two. The third is the representation of Islamic Bangla literature as “translation literature” (anuvāda sāhitya), framed in opposition to “original literature” (maulika sāhitya). This matter is taken up for discussion in Chapter Three. The fourth

37 Stewart 2001. For a more recent critique of the concept, in the context of the Punjabi qīṣṣa literature, see Mir 2006, 730–734.
38 For details on the application of his principles of translation to the Nabīvamśa, see Chapter Three.
is the representation of Islamic Bangla literature as dobhsī (“bilingual”) literature, a subject discussed in detail in Chapter Eight.

Whether Islamic Bangla literature is portrayed through the lens of communal, nationalist, or regional chauvinisms, or through the various other simplistic approaches mentioned above, what is lost in the welter of rhetoric and (mis)representations is that premodern societies and the processual formation of regional identities were far more linguistically, ethnically, and culturally complex than these approaches allow. After three centuries of interaction with Bengali culture, Islam in seventeenth-century Bengal can no longer be described as “alien” or “foreign,” as it has often been characterized in such scholarship, but as one of the more significant forms of religiosity available to Bengalis. In early seventeenth-century Mughal East Bengal, the Islamic frontier was pressing further and further into the easternmost reaches of East Bengal, while constantly negotiating the geographical frontiers of the Hindu kings of Tripura and the Buddhist kings of Arakan. For late medieval Muslims, such as Saiyad Sultān, born and brought up in East Bengal, Bangla, a language primordially tied to Sanskrit, was his mother tongue and language of literary choice, while Arabic and Persian remained the hyperglossic languages of religious and political power. As mentioned earlier, such was also the linguistic constituency of authors such as Saiyad Ālāol.41 My earlier critique of Dinesh Chandra Sen’s remarks about Ālāol was not intended to diminish the value of the learned literature produced by this remarkably erudite premodern poet, but rather to make the point that Ālāol was not the curiosity of his age that Sen makes him out to be; he was but one among many Muslim literati, whether patronized by courtly circles or not, who inhabited multiple linguistic and cultural worlds, Arabo-Persian and Bangla. Through their writings such authors cultivated

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40 Francesca Orsini points out how Hindi literary criticism has viewed the presence of Islam as “monolithically ‘foreign’.” Orsini forthcoming b.
41 Concerning Ālāol’s literature, see d’Hubert 2010.
audiences and readerships already exposed and predisposed to this “both/and,” multicultural, multiethnic universe, audiences which over time began to appreciate the transtextual resonances of the learned literatures they produced. How else is one to explain the popularity of Ālāol’s Padmāvatī among the Muslim villagers of East Bengal? Dinesh Chandra Sen’s incredulous report of the Padmāvatī’s circulation, quoted below, seems completely anachronistic, in the light of the foregoing discussion:

The manuscripts of Padmāvatī hitherto obtained, all belong to the border-lands of Ārācān in the back-woods of Chittagong, copied in Persian characters and preserved by the rural Mahomedan folk of those localities. No Hindu has ever yet cared to read them. This goes to prove how far the taste of the Mahomedans was imbued with Hindu culture. This book, that we should have thought, could be interesting only to Hindu readers, on account of its lengthy disquisitions on theology and Sanskrit rhetoric, has been strangely preserved, ever since Aurungjeb’s time, by Moslems, for whom it could apparently have no attraction, nay to whom it might even seem positively repellent. From the time of Māgana Thākura, the Mahomedan minister, till the time of Shaik Hāmidullā of Chittagong who published it in 1893—covering a period of nearly 250 years, this book was copied, read, and admired by the Mahomedans of Chittagong exclusively. What surprises us most is the interest taken by the rustic folk in its high-flown Sanskrit Bengali. The Province of Chittagong must have been once a nucleus of Sanskrit-learning to have disseminated so deep a liking for the classic tongue of the Hindus among the lowest strata of society, and specially amongst Mahomedans who might have been expected to have the least aptitude for this.43

Moreover, as Sudipta Kaviraj shows through examples from Mukundarām Chakravarti’s Canḍīmaṅgala, Bharatcandra’s Mānasimha Kāvyā, and the biographies of Caitanya, the late medieval literature produced by non-Muslim authors also carried the “obvious marks of a lively transaction between the Hindu and Islamic parts of late medieval Bengali civilization.”44 In his elaborations upon the mythical figure of Satya Pīr, Tony Stewart also shows the world of religiosity that Hindus and Muslims of Bengal shared.45 It is these complex patterns of interaction in the premodern period between Bangla and other vernaculars, and the

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42 This term is Aditya Behl’s. See Chapter Three for more details.
44 Kaviraj 2003, 530.
cosmopolitan languages of Sanskrit and Persian, between Islam and other Bengali sects, and the role of these interactions in the formation of regional identity, that are taken up for discussion and elaboration in Chapter Three, while Chapter One presents an historical overview of Chittagong in the early Mughal period.

Monographs on Islamic Bangla literature are limited in English, and scarce in European languages. Despite its numerous theoretical problems, Asim Roy’s *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (1983) remains the most comprehensive survey of this literature available in English. Making extensive use of Islamic manuscripts in Bangla from Munshi Abdul Karim’s collection in the Dhaka University archives, Roy maps the various genres of pre-modern Islamic Bangla literature based on theme and content, broadly dividing this corpus into the “great” and the “little” or “folk” traditions. The former consists of texts which engage with myth-historical, cosmogonical-cosmological, and esoteric-mystical themes, while the latter encompasses the literature that grew around the pir cults of Bengal. Roy’s study superseded Muhammad Enamul Haq’s preliminary *Muslim Bāṃlā Sāhitya*, mentioned earlier, as also the 1966 survey of premodern Islamic Bangla literature written by Qazi Abdul Mannan, entitled rather misleadingly *The Emergence and Development of Dobhāṣī Literature in Bengal (Upto 1855 A.D.)*.

In *The Ocean of Love* (1995), David Cashin adopts an historical and text-critical approach to the study of middle Bangla Sufi literature. Rather than representing a mixed philosophical tradition, this is a literature, Cashin argues, that can be divided into two strata: the earliest, according to him, exhibit a Nāṭhīst orientation, while from the seventeenth century onwards a greater assimilation of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā doctrine is discerned. Cashin provides translations of

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46 As the title suggests Roy’s study is premised upon syncretism, one of the approaches to Bangla literature discussed above.
47 Mannan 1966. For more details on the meaning and scope of dobhāṣī literature, see Chapter Eight.
several of the short esoteric texts he discusses in the aforementioned monograph and in one other, on Ālī Rajā’s Āgama or Jñāna Sāgara (1993).48

In the realm of Islamic Bangla song literature, Mary Frances Dunham’s ethno-musicological study of jārīgān (1997) is unique.49 Though still performed in Bangladesh today during Muharram, these songs have grown beyond the confines of Shīʿī discourse to be adapted by folk-singers for secular purposes. Her monograph highlights the continuing salience of orality and performance in present-day Bangladeshi communities for the transmission of religious, political, and social discourse as well as cultural values.

Two recent doctoral dissertations have also been written on the Bangla romance literature: Abu Musa Mohammad Aref Billah’s study of Ālāol and Śāh Muhammad Sagīr,50 and Thibaut d’Hubert’s extensive study, in French, on Ālāol.51

0.3 Saiyad Sultān and the Nabīvaṃśa in scholarship

It is Munṣī Ābdul Karim who is credited with the modern rediscovery of Saiyad Sultān. Nabīvaṃśa manuscripts were first brought to the attention of scholars through his article on Saiyad Sultān’s Jñāna Pradīpa52 and in his Bāṅglāra Prācīna Punṭhīra Vivaraṇā, a catalog of manuscripts in his private collection.53 Scholarly interest in the author, however, was spurred by Muhammad Enamul Haq’s preliminary essay on Sultān and his works, published, twenty

48 Cashin 1993. Other translations into European languages of Islamic Bangla texts include, in English, the Sekaśubhodaya attributed to Halāyudha Miśra; and in French, Bhattacharya 2003-2004.
49 Dunham 1997.
50 Billah 2009. Max Stille (2011) has also recently written, in German, a master’s thesis on Śāh Muhammad Sagīr’s Iusuph-Jolekhā.
51 Concerning d’Hubert, see above.
52 Here Munṣī Ābdul Karim credits the editor (name not provided) of the periodical “Ālo” to have discovered a huge manuscript on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Karim mentions that while the bhanītā provides the name of Saiyad Sultān, the manuscript does not supply the name of the text. Munṣī Ābdul Karim [1900] 1997, 380.
53 Sharif [1972] 2006, 11. For further details of these manuscripts, see Appendix One.
years later in 1934, in the Bāṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad Patrika.⁵⁴ In the interim between the publication of Haq’s article and Ahmad Sharif’s doctoral dissertation on Saiyad Sultān, later published in 1972 as the first monograph on our author and his works, many local historians of Bengali literature took avid interest in the debates surrounding Sultān’s birthplace and time. Chief among these were Muhammad Šahīdullāh, Sukumar Sen, Dīneśa Candra Bhaṭṭācārya, Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Ālī Ahmad, and Āśrāph Hosen Sāhityaratna.⁵⁵ After the publication of Sharif’s monograph, the Sylheti author, Āsāddar Ālī, published another monograph, entitled Mahākavi Saiyad Sultān. Mazharul Islam, Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hochen Čištī, D. N. A. H. Caudhurī, and Saiyad Abdrullāh have augmented the lively chorus of voices that sought to divide the author’s legacy along regional lines. Sukhamaya Mukhopādhyāya’s seems to be the only balanced appraisal of the problems associated with dating Saiyad Sultān. When I met with him in July 2009, Saiyad Abdullāh was also in the process of publishing his own monograph on our author.⁵⁶ A detailed appraisal of the views of each of these authors on Saiyad Sultān’s birthplace and time can be found in Chapter One of this dissertation.

Ahmad Sharif’s monograph, Saiyad Sultān: Tānṭrā Granthāvalī o Tānṭrā Yuga (“Saiyad Sultān: His Texts and Times”) presents Saiyad Sultān as a pīr-author and kāvīguru of Chittagong. His dissertation is rich in historical detail and literary background, providing important information on Sultān’s canonical place in the Islamic Bangla tradition. However, as shown in Chapters One and Two, many of Sharif’s arguments, such as those about the author’s floruit, his family networks, or the authorship of the various texts ascribed to him, are flawed by a lack of proper evidence or the making of overly simplistic assumptions about the materials. Chapters concerning the Nabīvāṃśa are largely descriptive, often providing samplers of quotations culled

⁵⁶ For bibliographic details for these authors, see Chapter One.
from the text on various subjects, such as on contemporary society and culture, critical analysis of the text is scarce. Muhammad Āsāddar Ālī’s monograph is written primarily as a rebuttal of Ahmad Sharif’s arguments for claiming Sultān as a Chittagonian author. Ālī puts forward some perspicacious arguments for dating Sultān. However, the evidence he provides as proof of Sultān’s Sylhettee roots is not convincing.

The only interpretive essays to be produced on distinct narrative sections of the *Nabīvaṃśa* are written in English: France Bhattacharya has one on the account of Hari, while I have written one on the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension. A useful survey of the biographies of the Prophet Muhammad in Bangla literature, which also includes the *Nabīvaṃśa*, can be found in Muhammad Majiruddīn Miyā’s *Bāmlā Sāhitye Rasul Carita*. Moving forwards in time beyond the *NV*, a single monograph exists on texts that relate to the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants. Mazharul Islam has produced a two part study on the life and times of the eighteenth-century poet Heyāt Māmud and a critical edition of his works, which include the *Jaṅgānāmā* on the battle of Karbalā, and *Anbiyā Vāṇī Kāvyā*, in the *Qiṣṣā al-anbiyā* genre.

This introduction to the literature on Saiyad Sultān and the *Nabīvaṃśa*, situated in the larger context of the scholarship on Islamic Bangla literature and the representation of this literature in Bangla literary historiography, sets the stage for the debates within Bengali/Bangladeshi

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58 France Bhattacharya 1999; and Irani, see below.
59 Miyā 1993. A monograph on the poet Šekh Cānda is useful for comparative purposes with the *NV*, Haq 1993. A study on a similar theme, in English, but pertaining more to the literature of the colonial period is Amit Dey 2006.
60 Islam 1961. Muhammad Śāhjāhān Miyā has produced a critical edition of *Samgrāmahusān* by the Sylhettee poet, Hāmid. *Samgrāmahusān* of Hāmid. More relevant to my work, he has also critically edited the *Maktul Hosen* of Sultān’s chief disciple, Mohāmmad Khān, a manuscript of which he has submitted for publication to the Bangla Academy, Dhaka. He submitted this as his D. Litt. thesis to the Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, in 1996. Personal conversation, July 2009. *Maktul Hosen* of Mohāmmad Khān. When contacted to provide me with a copy of the thesis, the librarian of Rabindrabharati University was completely unhelpful. Hence, I have not been able to read this thesis. The library has an absurd policy of disallowing researchers even to make notes on reference works within the library precincts.
scholarship on our author's birthplace and time, a matter which is taken up for discussion in the chapter that follows.
Chapter One

Locating Saiyad Sultān in Time and Place

1.1 Introduction

A study of the NV’s manuscript tradition, which Chapter Two will elucidate and as Appendix Three demonstrates, reveals that the text had a remarkably stable written tradition. It has, therefore, been accepted in the present study that the NV was composed by a single author, whose name, Saiyad Sultān, periodically punctuates the narrative through authorial colophons (bhanitā). While issues of orality and writing, in the context of the NV, are reserved for Chapter Three, the present chapter studies Sultān and his NV as framed by three layers of processing and reception along the author-text-community continuum—the autobiographical, the hagiographical, and modern scholarship. We locate the incipient beginnings of an hagiographical tradition on Sultān, which finds literary embodiment in the eulogies of his chief disciple, Mohāmmad Khān, and then move to the autobiographical, the author’s literary self-portrait. These, then, become the starting points for an extensive discussion on modern Bangla scholarship, the predominant concern of which has been to locate our author in time and place. As outlined in the Introduction and elucidated also in Chapter Eight, this is a matter not wholly
divorced from the regional agendas of Bangladeshi historiographers, who have attempted to lay claim to Sultān’s legacy. Yet their convoluted arguments often hang by a thread, and reveal more about the personal agendas of the concerned writers than they illuminate their chosen subject of scholarship. A discussion of Sultān’s memory, as preserved within the premodern Bangla literary tradition, and by various publics of faith, is reserved for Chapter Eight, which discusses his literary and spiritual legacy and its East Bengali and Bangladeshi regional claimants.

The debates surrounding Saiyad Sultān’s dates and birthplace are evaluated in the light of new textual and historical evidence. Concerning the geography of Saiyad Sultān’s life, our investigation of all the pieces of evidence provided by authors who have chosen to prove Saiyad Sultān’s connection with either Chittagong or Sylhet shows that the weight of available evidence favors the author’s association with the medieval Parāgalpur and Cakrasālā of Chittagong, a view initially put forth by M. E. Haq, and later reinforced by Ahmad Sharif. The last section of this chapter attempts to locate Saiyad Sultān within the religious landscape of East Bengal and the larger historical context of the Mughal conquest of Bengal, a turbulent period in Chittagong’s history, when the region was caught between the rival regional polities of Bengal (Gauṇa), Arakan, and Tripura.

1.2 Literary Portraits of the Author

1.2.1 Through a disciple’s eyes

Mohāmmad Khān, Saiyad Sultān’s chief disciple, was a descendant, seven generations removed, of Rāstī Khān, an administrator of Chittagong or a portion thereof. Mohāmmad

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61 It is Muhammad Šahīdullāh who is credited with determining the master-disciple relationship between Saiyad Sultān and Mohāmmad Khān. Haq [1957a] 1991, 295.
Khān wrote, among other works, *Maktul Hosen*,63 “The Slaying of Ḥusayn,” the first work in Bangla on the battle of Karbalā, which Munṣī Ābdul Karim calls “the prototype of all Bengali poems on the Karbalā stories.”64 Of significant social standing and a prominent poet in his own right, this man has left us the following tribute to his master:

In Āmir Hocan’s line [is] born a fount of virtue:
an expert in all the scriptures, an ocean of the nine rasas.65
[His] beautiful body is like the dark new raincloud;
in munificence, [he is] the wishing tree;
in steadiness, like the earth.
[His] face is more [radiant] than the full moon; his eyes like lotus[-petals];
his smile, honeyed and gentle, is like nectar.
*Pīr* Śāhā Sultān is an ocean of grace:
affectionate lord to his servants; in virtue, a jewel-mine.
Placing upon his head the garland of his [master’s] instructions,
Mohāmmad Khān says, having composed the *pāṅcālī*:
“I plead [forgiveness], for my crimes, at the feet of the virtuous.
Overlooking [my] faults, ever contemplate my virtues.”66

Here couched in the *topoi* of classical Sanskrit literature, this eulogy, germane to Perso-Arabic encomia to God, the Prophet, kings, and pīrs, and to South Asian hagiographies of the saints,67 shows how Mohāmmad Khān chooses to enshrine Saiyad Sultān in memory. A few historical tidbits on how Sultān was remembered by his chief disciple can be gleaned: Sultān was considered to be a Saiyad by his disciples, and a *pīr*; he was considered to possess vast

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62 For Mohāmmad Khān’s family tree, and other information concerning his ancestors, see the discussion that follows in the present chapter.
63 The title has many variants in the scribal tradition: *Muktul Hocaen, Maktul Hocen, Muktāla Hochana*, etc. Manuscripts of *Maktul Hosen, DCBM*, 344–360.
64 Ibid., 345.
65 Cf. later discussion in this chapter of the dissertation on Saiyad Sultān’s delineation of the nine rasas in his *Jñāna Pradīpa*.
67 Such descriptions are germane to South Asian hagiographies of saintly figures. W. L. Smith 2000, Chapter Six.
scriptural knowledge; he was dark-skinned, hence, most likely a native of Bengal; and we are
told that Mohammad Khān composed his work at the behest of his master.

Another similar passage, which M. E. Haq quotes from a manuscript of the Kiyāmatnāmā (the last section of the Maktul Hosen), informs us:

The Nabīvāṃśa was composed by a prominent man (puruṣa pradhāna).
He narrated all that arose in the beginning.
No sooner did he finish composing “The Prophet’s Death”
than he ordered me to compose the conclusion.
To respect his command, I thought
to compose a padāvalī on the tales of the four companions.
Having completed the description of the two brothers,
I proclaimed all the accounts of doomsday.
Finally, then, I composed [a section] on the vision of the Lord.
Beyond this, there can be no more to say.
If one were to put the two pāncālikās together,
one could join the accounts of the beginning and the end.68

Khān wrote a voluminous work in eleven cantos concerning the tales of the first four caliphs,
the story of the two brothers, Hasan and Hosen at Karbalā, and the eschaton, thus taking upon
himself to bring his master's work to what he considered to be its logical conclusion.69

Based upon the above passage, Munshi ‘Abdul Karim and Sharif speculate that Sultān had
intended the NV to begin with creation and conclude with the eschaton; when old age and
infirmity prevented him from completing his project, he ordered his chief disciple, Mohammad
Khān, to bring it to completion.70 To my mind, however, Sultān’s Nabīvāṃśa is a complete work

68 nabīvāṃśa racichilā puruṣa pradhāna adyera utpanna yata kariśā bākhāna || rasulera ophāt raciyā nā racīla ||
avaseṣe racibāre mokā ajñā dilā || tāna ajñā šire dhari maneta ākali || cārī āchabāra kathā kailu padāvali ||
dui bhāi vivarāna samāpta kariyā || pralayera kathā saba dilu pracāriyā || ante tabe viracilu prabhu daraśana ||
69 The chapter outline that Mohammad Khān provides for his Maktul Hosen is as follows: Chapter One, The Marriage of Fātimā and the Birth of the Two Brothers; Chapter Two, The Account of the Four Companions (āśahābā’/āsahāb); Chapter Three, Hāsān’s Words; Chapter Four, The Muslims; Chapter Five, The End of the Battle; Chapter Six, Hosen; Chapter Seven, The Women; Chapter Eight, The Messenger; Chapter Nine, The Alids (Ālids?); Chapter Ten, Ejid (Yazīd); and Chapter Eleven, The Eschaton. Haq [1957] 1991, 326. See also Maktul Hosen, quoted in Sharif [1972] 2006, 71-72. For further details on Khān’s work, see DCBM, 344-67; and Haq [1957] 1991, 321-328.
70 DCBM, 225.
for two reasons. First, the title itself, “The Prophet’s Lineage,” is appropriate to the author’s chosen subject, a universal history of the Prophet Muhammad. Second, in his conclusion to the NV, Sultān appears to allude to future projects, specifically mentioning the possibility of composing “another book” (bhinna eka pustaka) when the opportunity arises. While this suggests that he considered the NV to be complete, it does not negate the possibility that Sultān later asked his disciple, Khān, to carry forward his literary legacy by taking up the projects he himself was either unable or unwilling to work on.

In Muhammad Khān’s eulogies of his master, we see the well-spring of an hagiographic tradition surrounding Sultān, which, as we will see in Chapter Eight, gathers further significance in the premodern Bangla literary tradition. Khān immortalizes his master not merely for his erudition, but for his spiritual authority as pīr. He legitimates his own writings, thus, by placing them within the literary and spiritual genealogy of a local pīr-author, who provides his stamp of authority for Khān’s literary endeavors. By ostensibly providing instruction to his student to carry forward his literary project, Sultān too ensures that his legacy is extended and carried forward, at least into the succeeding generation.

1.2.2 A Self-Portrait

The only self-description Saiyad Sultān himself has ostensibly left behind is embedded in the opening lines of a manuscript of the Nabīvāṃśa. This crucial passage, taken from a manuscript of the Nabīvāṃśa. This crucial passage, taken from a
manuscript in an unknown private collection, becomes the basis for all scholarly debates on his dates and birthplace. What follows is my translation of these couplets in their textual context:

Bicamillāhīra rahamānīra rahīma.
Know that Āllā’s glories are too boundless to speak of.
First, I salute the formless Prabhu.
I shall proclaim all that was in the beginning.
Second, shall I speak of Khodā’s messenger,
widely known in the world as Nūr Muhammad.
Third, I salute the companions all.
Fourth, the pīrs and messengers.
I shall now attempt to speak about this book,
not capable of bearing in mind all that is to be relayed.
Obeying the Commander (laškar) Parāgala Khān’s orders,
Kavīndra thoughtfully narrated the tales of the Mahābhārata.
Hindus and Muslims, thus, read it in every household.
None listen to the tales of Khodā and the messenger.
A number of [years (abda), calculated via the addition (yoga)
of graha śāta and rasa, have passed.
[Yet] no one has told these tales in the local language.
In Arabic and Persian, there are many books.
The learned understand these, not the fools.
Feeling pained, I internally resolved
to speak a great deal about the tales of the messenger.
In the settlement of learned men of the Commander’s town (laškarera pura),
I am but a fool, a descendant of a saiyyad.
I ask for forgiveness at the feet of the learned.
If they find fault, let them forgive me, and not complain.
Says Saiyad Sultān, why do you worry yourself to death?
Those who have the messenger for assistance will cross the ocean.\(^{73}\)

tarībe sāgara are erroneously ascribed to this manuscript. While Sharif also quotes this passage in his introductions to volumes one and two of the NV, the passage is nowhere to be found in the critical edition itself. Sharif, introduction, NV 1: 9, and introduction, NV 2: 7.

From two random, but crucial, statements about this manuscript, provided by Munshi Ābdul Karim and Sharif in Punthi Pariciti, it is highly probable that this manuscript is in the private collection of Muhammad Enamul Haq. For details of these statements and other background information, see the ms. cataloged under “Śab-i Merū” in Appendix One of this dissertation.

\(^{73}\) vicamillāhāra rahamānīra rahīma | ālārā mahimā jāna kahite asima || prathame pranāma kari prabhu nirākāra | ādyeta āchīla yāhā karimu pračāra || dvitīye pranāma kari rachula khodāra | nūra muhammadān ḫalījate pračāra || tṛtīye pranāma kari āchabā sabāre | caturthe pranāma kari piṇa pegāṃbāre || ebe pustakera kathā kahite juyāya | prakāśya sakala kathā mane nāhī laya || laškara parāgala khāna ajnā šīre dhari | kavīndra bhāratakathā kahīa vicāri || hindu musalamāna tāe ghare ghare pāre | khodā rachuler kathā kheha na soñare || graha śāta rasa yoge abda gōrīla | deśī bhāṣe ehi kathā keha na kahīla | ārābī phāṛchī bāhē kītaṃ bahun | ālimāne būjhe nā būjhe murkhasuta || dukṣa bāvī mane mane kariṇān ḥīka | rachuler kathā yathā kahimu adhika || laškara purakhānī ālimā vasati | mūri mūrka āchī eka chaiyada santati || ālimāna pade āṃhī māgi parihāra | khemībā pāile doṣa na kari gohāra || chaiyada chulatāne kahe kene bhāvī mara | sahāya rachula yāra tarībe sāgara || Haq [1957] 1991, 294–95.
This passage reveals several details about the author, some of which buttress snippets of information supplied by Mohāmmed Khān’s portrait, mentioned earlier, and by the Nabīvamsa itself. First, he is impressed by the author, Kavīndra Parameśvara’s Bangla abridgement of the Mahābhārata, which, according to him, is popular even among Muslims. Second, unlike Kavīndra, who wrote the Mahābhārata under the patronage of Commander Parāgal Khān—the son of Rāstī Khān74 and the governor of Caṭṭagrām (Chittagong), appointed by ʿAlā al-Dīn Ḥusayn Shāh, ruler of Bengal between 1493 and 1519—Sultān does not mention any patron of the Nv.75 It is to be noted that this is the same Rāstī Khān in whose line Sultān’s disciple Muhammad Khān is born. Third, he resolves to create a rival text in Bangla to popularize the stories of “Āllā” and his messenger, among native Bengalis, to whom Arabic and Persian texts are linguistically inaccessible. Fourth, he came from a line of Saiyads; and fifth, he lived in the Commander’s town in a settlement of ālims, men learned in the Islamic sciences. From the last four points we could probably infer that he came from a politically powerful family, who were socially well-regarded and economically well-to-do.

The literature concerning Saiyad Sultān’s birthplace and time has generated more heat than light on the subject. As I examine in Chapter Eight, competing groups of Bangladeshi scholars with strong regional affiliations have laid claim to Saiyad Sultān as either a Sylhettee or a Chittagonian. In order that any new scholarship on the subject not be co-opted into the very processes of contestation that it attempts to lay bare, it is with careful, meticulous empiricism that we need to examine the various pieces of evidence.

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74 Mahābhārata of Kavīndra, 1: 5.
75 Ibid.,12. For dates of Ḥusayn Shāh’s rule, see Eaton 1993, 325.
1.3 Saiyad Sultān’s floruit

In modern Bangla scholarship, Sultān is remembered as a real figure, whose historicity has to be proved and laid claim to. Most scholars, moreover, have taken his authorship of the NV for granted, without examining the possibility of communal authorship. Furthermore, all these debates center upon the evidence of a single, elusive, manuscript, which Muhammad Enamul Haq and Ahmad Sharif have personally scrutinized, but few other scholars have had any access to. I suspect that this manuscript is in Muhammad Enamul Haq’s private collection, but this has still to be verified.

Confusion reigns in this scholarship on the date embedded in the chronogram supplied in the controversial NV passage quoted in its literary context above. The relevant couplet reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
graha śata rasa yoge abda goñāila & \\
deśī bhāse ehi kathā keha nā kahila & 
\end{align*}
\]

[A number of] years (abda), calculated via the addition (yoga) of graha śata and rasa, have passed. [Yet] no one has told these tales in the local language.

Since number is not specified in Bangla this verse could also be translated as:

The year (abda), calculated via the addition (yoga) of graha śata and rasa, has passed.\(^{76}\) [Yet] no one has told these tales in the local language.

Scholarly debates concerning this chronogram focus on three issues: first, the textual soundness of the term yoge and the related ambiguities of the proposed emendation, yuge; second, the equivocality of the alphanumerical term, rasa; and third, the ambivalence of the term abda. Concerning the first issue, M. E. Haq, in one of the first articles ever to be written on Saiyad Sultān, in 1934, took the chronogram to be constructed “via the addition (yoge) of graha śata and rasa.” He thus read the chronogram as 906 A.H. or 1500 C.E., thus, making Saiyad Sultān

\(^{76}\) My translation takes into account Muhammad Šahīdullāh’s emendation of yoge to yuge, detailed below.
a junior contemporary of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement.77 It is Muhammad Śahīdullāh who is credited with the emendation of the term yoṛe to yuge.78 Haq later modified his view, having accepted Śahīdullāh’s emendation. With this emendation, the text would now read:

The year graha śata rasa yuga has passed....

Most other scholars, who follow Śahīdullāh, think his emendation both appropriate and helpful. I accept Śahīdullāh’s refutation of Sukumar Sen’s unwarranted emendation of graha to daśa, but discuss his emendation of yoṛe to yuge below.79 In the case of yuga, some scholars have justifiably pointed out that the alphanumerical term yuga is ambivalent: from its association with the four yugas, the term usually signifies “four,” but in rare cases, since yuga, in Sanskrit, can also mean “a pair,” the term could additionally indicate the numeral “two.”80

Concerning the term rasa, some scholars, most prominently M. E. Haq (in his later scholarship) and Ahmad Sharif, neither of whom provides suitable attestation from Sanskrit or Bangla literature, argue that the term is ambivalent and can connote either the numeral “six” or “nine,” the former value being associated with the six rasendriyas or flavors, while the latter being associated with the nine rasas, or aesthetic moods.81 Preferring the latter, Sharif reads the chronogram as 992 or 994.82 In most Sanskrit texts the term is not ambivalent: based on attestations in Sanskrit texts and epigraphs, D. C. Sircar, in his Indian Epigraphy, provides a

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81 Among scholars of Islamic Bangla literature, Haq and Sharif, as we will see, subscribe to this view. Cf. Bhaumika 1993, 278.
single value, “six,” for *rasa*. Sukumar Sen was of the opinion that the term *rasa* is never used to signify “nine” in the *saka* dating system. While Kalpanā Bhowmika, in her *Saṃskṛta o Bāṅglā Bhāṣā-Sāhitye Saṃkhyaśācaka Šabdera Vyavahāra*, provides two numerical values for the term, all the examples she supplies, from Sanskrit or Bangla texts, such as *Stavamālā, Jyotisatattva*, Kālidāsa’s *Manasāmāṅgala*, Bhāratcandra’s *Annadāmāṅgala*, and Giridhara’s *Gītagovinda* attest *rasa*’s unequivocal association with “six.” Moreover, even when she cites authors such as M. E. Haq, who tend to favor “nine” over “six,” she reads the chronogram based on the numerical value of “six” for *rasa*. Thus, it seems that as a Sanskritist and scholar of medieval Bangla literature, she tacitly favors “six” as the numerical value of *rasa*. Following Ādamuddin’s dating, Śahīdullāh too, based on the lack of literary attestations for reading *rasa* as “nine” in Sanskrit and Bangla texts, favors reading the chronogram as 964.90

In the light of the evidence that *rasa* unequivocally indicates “six,” it would be expedient to accept this reading alone, if it were not for two significant contraindications, the first provided by Yatindramohan Bhattacharjee, and the other provided by Sultān himself. Yatindramohan Bhattacharjee, the compiler and editor of the *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts*, specifically mentions the problems of deciphering chronograms in Bangla texts when the ambiguous alphanumerical term *rasa* is used, as it can be read as both “six” and “nine.” Given his extensive experience in cataloguing Bangla manuscripts, his view has considerable weight

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85 Bhaumika 1993, 278.
86 Ibid., 110, 114, 118–9.
87 For instance, cf. K. Bhaumika’s (Ibid., 109–110) and Haq’s ([1957] 1991, 290) dating of Shaikh Faijullāh’s text.
89 Śahīdullāh’s rhetorical question—“Bāṅglā sāhitye *rasa* = 9 āche ki?”—seems to suggest a lack of attestation of “nine” for *rasa* in Bangla texts. Ibid.
90 CCBM, 376.
in this regard. Also, while the NV makes no mention of the navarasas, the Jñāna Pradīpa, a text which has been ascribed to Sultān, speaks of the navarasas, the “nine rasas.” The authorial ascription of this text to Sultān is tentative, as shown in Chapter Two, but the possibility, nonetheless, remains that our author understood “rasa” as “nine.” Mohāmmad Khān’s eulogy quoted above also describes Sultān as the navaraśa ‘dadhi, “the ocean of the nine rasas.” For all these reasons, five readings for the chronogram have emerged thus far: 906, 962, 964, 992, and 994.

The next question that has absorbed scholars concerns the interpretation of the term abda in the couplet and the importance of establishing an appropriate dating system. 91 Without providing any thoughtful analysis, Ādamuddīn, 92 Muhammad Šahīdullāh, 93 M. E. Haq, Ahmad Sharif, and Saiyād Ābdullāh 94 all perfunctorily assume that abda signifies the hijrī calendar. Ādamuddīn and Šahīdullāh thus read the date as 964 A. H. (1557 C.E.), and Haq, 95 and Sharif following him, read it as 992 or 994 A.H. (1584 or 1586 C.E.). 96 Concerning abda, however, Mazharul Islam opines, “this is not the usual term for the Hijri era, which is as a rule denoted by the term hijrī.” 97 According to him, the term indicates the author’s reference to “some common era known to him and accepted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike in Bengal.” 98 M. Islam points out that Muhammad Āsāddar Ālī makes a case for the maghī calendar. Ālī, who

91 Concerning various dating systems and their calculations, see the prefatory notes of this dissertation.
93 Ibid.
94 Saiyād Ābdullāh (forthcoming, 24) finds it convenient to accept the hijrī dating, as he operates on the presumption that the Saiyād Sultān of Taraph (see below) is the poet of the NV.
98 Ibid.
favors 992/994 as possible readings of the chronogram, estimates the *maghī* date to be equivalent to 1630-32 C.E..\(^{99}\) Islam, furthermore, argues:

*Abda* does not as a rule refer to the Maghi era either. Actually it simply means “era,” and this makes it possible that Saiyad Sultān has referred to some common mode of reckoning known to all. When one examines the various eras in use in Bengal of those times and considers the fact that what is referred to must be some year in the latter part of the sixteenth century or the earlier part of the seventeenth century, then the only era which remains is the Bengali era. Does 994 refer to this era, which would then correspond to 1587-1588 A.D.? ... However, in this case we would also have to take into account that, though the year from which the Bengali era is counted is 1556, the order of Akbar promulgating it is dated 1585. Did it nevertheless gain such rapid and common acceptance that Saiyad Sultān used it without further comment just two years later?\(^{100}\)

Finally, even though Islām accepts that the *abda* issue remains ambivalent, he ultimately favors the use of the *maghī* calendrical system, preferring 964 (corresponding to 1602 C.E.) over 994 as a more suitable reading for the chronogram because of the wider attestation of *rasa* as “six” in the sources.\(^{101}\) Furthermore, he adds: “it is peculiar that two different terms, namely *graha* and *ras*, should have been used to denote the same number 9.”\(^{102}\) Though medieval Bangla texts occasionally flout Sanskritic dating conventions,\(^{103}\) the latter, in fact, considered it a lack of poetic finesse to repeat a particular alphanumerical term in a chronogram to denote the same numeral twice over.\(^{104}\) Even if Islām considers the author’s indication of *rasa* as “nine” to be unconventional, with regard to his second concern, the author is clearly beyond reproach.

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\(^{99}\) Ālī 1979, 128, quoted in Islam 1999, 154. Islam cites an inaccurate page number; it should be corrected to 127.

\(^{100}\) Islam 1999, 154.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 155.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.

\(^{103}\) In at least three instances, the repetition of a specific term to indicate the recurrent use of the same numerical value is attested. Muhammad Khān, Sultān’s own disciple, supplies the chronogram for his *Satya-Kali Vivāda Samvāda* as *daśa śata vāṇa śata vāṇa daśa ‘dadhi* and *vāṇa bāhu sama abda āra vāṇa śata* as the chronogram for the completion of his *Maktul Hosen*. In each case, the term *vāṇa* is repeated twice to connote the numerical value of “five” each time. Haq [1957] 1991, 296; Śahidullāh [1965] 2002, 99. The chronogram *aṅka *mrīgāṅka* *rasa* *mrīgāṅka* of Kālidāsa’s *Manasāmaṅgala* also follows a similar convention, whereby *mrīgāṅka* is repeated twice to indicate the numeral “one.” Bhaumika 1993, 118. From these instances, it seems that some medieval Bengali writers repeated a single alphanumerical term to indicate the repetition of the same numerical value.

Let us set aside this unresolved issue of calendrical systems for the moment, to turn to other important pieces of evidence that may help us in dating Sultān’s floruit. First, as Āsāddar Ālī rightly emphasizes, it is a manuscript of the Maktul Hosen of Mohāmmad Khān, Sultān’s chief disciple, which provides the most unequivocal evidence available to determine Sultān’s floruit. The manuscript provides a chronogram, which supplies both the śaka date and the hijrī date, a doubly-verifiable, definitive date for the completion of the Maktul Hosen: 1567 Śaka (1646 C.E.) and 1056 A.H. (1646 C.E.). It is also important to note that Muhammad Khān perhaps only came into contact with Saiyad Sultān sometime between 1635 and 1645, as suggested by his lack of mention of any master in his earlier work, Satya Kali Vivāda Saṃvāda, “The Debate between Satya and Kali,” completed in 1635.

Āsāddar Ālī provides a second piece of internal evidence from Mohāmmad Khān’s writings to determine the earliest possible date for Sultān’s birth. He highlights Khān’s description of Sultān as śyāma nava jaladhara sundara śarīra... pūrṇa candra dhika mukha kamala locana, quoted earlier. Based on this portrayal of a handsome man, “dark as a new raincloud, of beautiful body... whose face is more [radiant] than the full moon, and who has lotus-eyes,” Ālī considers Sultān to have been between 25 to 35 years of age when Khān wrote his description. Even if one were to take into account the hyperbole characteristic of such eulogistic utterance, one could push the age-limit to a maximum of sixty-five years before 1646, as Ālī suggests, making the earliest possible date for Sultan’s birth to be 1581, a circa 1580 date for our author. The erudition required of a project like the NV supports the author’s age being between thirty-five

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105 Ālī 1990, 122.
106 Haq [1957] 1991, 326–327. Concerning the manuscript from which this colophon is taken, see BPPV, Ms. 241, 161. This manuscript, according to Eaton (1993, 294), is preserved in the National Museum Dhaka, Ms. No. 2826, Acc. No. 6634.
107 This has been pointed out, for instance, by scholars such as Ālī (1990, 122).
108 Ālī 1990, 124. On this basis, Ālī rejects Sahīdullāh’s dating of Sultān’s birth as c. 1537, and also considers Haq’s and Sharif’s dating of Sultān’s birth of c. 1550 as incompatible with Mohāmmad Khān’s description. Ibid., 125–126.
and sixty-five years of age when he wrote the NV. The author's avid interest in composing what Ālī calls “rasātmaka” passages, referring especially to those “juicy” passages of a racy and overtly sensual nature, suggest to Ālī that he was at the younger end of this spectrum when he composed the work.\textsuperscript{109} It is important to note at this point in our discussion that this analysis already mitigates against the hijrī calendar as a suitable option for dating the NV, thereby refuting the opinions of scholars such as Muhammad Enamul Haq, Ahmad Sharif, Ādamuddin, Ālī Ahmd, and Muhammad Śahīdullāh.

Finally, I would like to put forth the view of Sukhamaya Mukhopādhya, who to my mind provides the most thoughtful and plausible treatment of the translation of these lines and the chronogram set therein.\textsuperscript{110} Rejecting the more dubious value of rasa as 9, and also preferring not to emend yoge to yuge, he makes an argument that supports the following translation of the verse in question:

\begin{quote}
[A number of] years (abda), calculated via the addition (yoga)
of graha šata and rasa, have passed.
[Yet] no one has told these tales in the local language.
\end{quote}

This brings us back to Muhammad Enamul Haq’s original reading of the chronogram as 906, but with a difference. In Mukhopādhya’s opinion, Saiyad Sultān is suggesting that the NV is based upon an Arabic text on the Prophet Muḥammad composed 906 years ago, which had not been translated into the desi up until Sultān’s time. Mukhopādhya supports his argument via a citation from Ālāol’s Tohpā, in which the poet uses a similar construction, suggesting that 278 years had passed since the learned (ālims) had grasped the Tohpā’s essence, whereas it had remained obscure to the public:

\begin{quote}
duiśata asṭottara sattara rahila |
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{109} Based upon the rasātmaka passages in the NV, Ālī suggests that it is likely that the poet was between his mid-thirties and late forties when he composed the text. Ibid., 124.

\textsuperscript{110} This summary of his arguments is based on Mukhopādhya 1974, 191–193.
For two hundred and seventy-eight years
the theologians grasped its essence, but the masses did not.

Of all the arguments presented thus far, Mukhopāḍhya’s seems to be the most credible for a variety of reasons. First, the author does not mention any calendrical system, thereby implying that he is not intending to provide a chronogram for dating the completion of his text, but simply indicating the number of years that passed before the tale of the Prophet was told in Bangla. Indeed, it is most curious that historians have interpreted this as a chronogram intended by the author for dating the text. Second, this reading is more sound, since it does not require an emendation of yoge to yuge. Third, though Mukhopāḍhya does not trace the Arabic text Sultān is referring to, it raises an interesting possibility.

It is possible from the calculations I provide below to show that the text this NV manuscript refers to is none other than Muḥammad ibn Iṣḥāq’s renowned Sīrat Rasūl Allāh. Iṣḥāq was born c. 85/704, and according to tradition, died in 150/767.\textsuperscript{112} The earliest extant manuscript (riwāya) of the sīra was written in Medina by Ibrāhīm ibn Sa’d (110–184 A.H.).\textsuperscript{113} The manuscript would probably have been referring, however, to Iṣḥāq’s death date, if any. We know that Mohāammad Khān completed his Maktul Hosen in 1056/1646 and began composing this text at some point in time after 1635, the date of completion of his earlier text, Satya-Kali Vivāda-Samvāda. He probably met with Saiyad Sultān at some point after this. On completion of the NV, Sultān purportedly instructed Khān to write Maktul Hosen. If Sultān completed composing the NV in 1055/1645 (leaving a year for Mohāammad Khān to compose his lengthy work), via the calculation 1055 – 906 = 149 A.H., we arrive at the year preceding Iṣḥāq’s death. Thus it

\textsuperscript{111} Tohphā of Ālāol, 412.
\textsuperscript{112} Several dates have been suggested for his death, ranging from 144 A.H. to 153 A.H., but the majority of the sources provide this date. Jones 2011.
makes it possible that Saiyad Sultān was referring to Ibn Iṣḥāq’s sīra. This would also suggest that Sultān’s text was completed fairly close to 1645.

Though there were authors of sīra and maghāzī who preceded Ibn Iṣḥāq, most notably ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and his pupil al-Zuhri,¹¹⁴ according to Alfred Guillaume, “no book known to the Arabs or to us can compare in comprehensiveness, arrangement, or systematic treatment, with Ibn Iṣḥāq’s work.”¹¹⁵ And it is to this work, particularly with regard to arrangement, structure, and its place in the political history of Islam, that the NV has been compared by Richard Eaton, as we will later see. Indeed, as I will show in this dissertation, the NV draws more from al-Kisāʾi ʿQīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, and less from the Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, as we have it in Ibn Hishām’s recension, though it does cover many of the broad themes and episodes provided therein.

Another piece of crucial evidence in dating Sultān is provided by the family tree of Mohāmmad Khān, Saiyad Sultān’s chief disciple. While Saiyad Sultān gives away little about his forebears, Muhammad Khān, in his introduction to Maktul Hosen, provides an extensive description of his ancestors. This has been reconstructed by Ābdul Karim, following Ahmad Sharif, into two charts of his male predecessors on his maternal and paternal side.¹¹⁶ In Karim’s chart, reproduced below, we also see how the two sides were linked by marriage:

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**Maternal line**
1. Šekh Šārīḥ Uddīn
2. Kāji Ālām
3. Mīr Kāji
4. Khān Kāji

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¹¹⁶ Karim 1964, 154. Sharif 1962, 211. Also see Satya-Kali Vivāda Samvāda of Mohāmmad Khān, 101–110. Information provided in square brackets in the chart above are my own insertions, following the dates and other information provided by Karim in the article above, who frequently and justifiably refutes the dates proposed by Sharif. For details of the ms. of the Maktul Hosen which contains this description of Mohāmmad Khān’s ancestors, see Ms. 241, BPPV, 1 (1): 157–161, and No. 356, Ms. 643, DCBM, 357–360.
5. Šekh Hāmid
6. Bābā Phārid
7. Hāmid Ālām
8. Šāh Nāṣiruddīn
9. Pīr Mokārram --- Šāh Aḥdul Ohāb (sadar-i jāhāna, šāh bhikhārī, pīr-i muluk) + Daughter of 8* below
   10. Šāh Aḥmad
      Daughter + Mobārij Khān (10** below)

**Paternal line**
1. Māḥī Āsoyāra [contemporary of Pīr Badaruddīn Badar-i-Ālām, d. 1440]
2. Hātim
3. Siddik
4. Rāstī Khān (cāṭigrāma deśa pati) [Hāthahāzārī inscription, dated 1474]
5. Minā Khān
6. Gābhūra Khān (yāra kīrti gauḍadeśā bharī)
7. Hāmājā Khān Machalanda (tripurā o pāṭhāna vijetā) [alive in 1550]
8.* Nasrat Khān (cāṭigrāma pati) [contemporary of Isā Khān (Bengal), Amarmāṇikya (Tripurā), and Man Phalaung (Arakan)]
   Daughter ---- 9. Jālāl Khān (cāṭigrāma deśa kānta) [probably a contemporary of Saiyad Sultān]
   10.** Mobārij Khān ------ Birāhim Khān
   11. Mohāmmad Khān

Abdul Karim and Ahmad Sharif independently show that this family tree links Mohāmmad Khān to several important historical personages of Chittagong. His legendary forefather, Māḥī Āsoyāra, the Fish-Rider, was probably a sea-faring Arabian trader, who settled in Bengal possibly during the lifetime of the well-known Pīr Badr al-Dīn Badr-i Ālām (d. 1440). Most significant for our discussion, Karim and Sharif are in agreement that the Rāstī Khān of Mohāmmad Khān’s family tree, described therein as cāṭigrāma deśa pati, the ruler of Cāṭigrāma, is identical with both the Rāstī Khān of the Hāthahāzārī mosque inscription (dated to 1474),

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117 Evidence, at least from the eighth century, exists of Bengal’s contact with Arab traders. Satya-Kali Vivāda Samvāda of Mohāmmad Khān, 105.
118 Karim 1964, 155–156 and 159.
Chittagong, and that of Kavinda Prameśvara’s Mahābhārata. According to the inscription found in the Jobra mosque of Hāthahāzari, just north of present-day Chittagong city, Rāstī Khān bears the title “Majlis-ī A’la,” which suggests that he was an important official during the rule of Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh (1459-74). Kavinda states that Parāgal Khān, his patron and the son of Rāstī Khān, was honored by Ḫusayn Shāh (1493-1519), the Sultān of Gauḍa, with the responsibility of the management of Tripurā. Furthermore, the poet Śrīkara Nandī wrote the Aśvamedha Parva of the Mahābhārata in Bangla under the patronage of Chuṭī Khān (Nasrat Khān), the son of Parāgal Khān; both father and son were administrators of Chittagong or some part thereof. Abdul Karim and Ahmad Sharif independently propose the view that Rāstī Khān had two sons: Minā Khān, noted by Mohammad Khān, and Parāgal Khān of the Bengali Mahābhāratas. Karim further suggests that the Parāgalī branch administered the Parāgalpur area on the banks of the Feni river, while Minā Khān’s branch settled in southern Chittagong, present day Patiya. Suniti Bhushan Qanungo adds that one possible reason for Mohammad Khān’s omission of the Parāgalī branch was perhaps because it perished in an attack by the Tripurā king, Devamāṇikya, around 1532. Karim has further identified Hamzā Khān of

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120 Concerning details of this inscription, see Karim 1992a, 173–174.
121 rāstikhaṇa tanaya bahula gunanidhi | pṛthivite kalpataru niramila vidhi | ṣrpati husenasāh haya mahāmati | pañcamā gaurete yāra parama sukhyāti | astraśastra viśarada mahimā apāra | kaliyuge hari yena kṛṣṇa avatāra || sulatana āhuṣena pañcamā gauṛa nātha | tripurera bhāra samarpila yāra hāta || sonāra pālaṅga dila ekaśata ghoṛā | saṅjoga sahive dila vividha kāpaṛa || daridra varana kare anāthera gati | laskara parāgala khāna ati se sumati || tāhāna ādeśa tabe śireta dhariyā | kavinda kahila kathā pāṅcālī racyā || Mahābhārata of Kavinda, 1: 331-332. Concerning citations of other such passages concerning the relationship between Rāstī Khān, Parāgal Khān, and Husain Shāh, see also Satya-Kali Vivāda Samvāda of Mohammad Khān, 108–109; and Karim 1964, 162.
124 Ibid., 165. It is not clear on what basis Karim establishes Patiya as the area of settlement for Minā Khān’s/Mohammad Khān’s line. Note that both these regions are discussed below in connection with the geography of Saiyad Sultān’s life.
125 Qanungo 1988, 173.
Mohammad Khan’s family tree as Amirzā Khan, mentioned in Portuguese accounts, who defeated Sher Shāh’s Paṭhān general.126 From Karim’s reconstruction, Hamzā Khan, who repulsed the attack of Chittagong by Sher Shāh’s general with the help of the Portuguese, was probably a military general under Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Māhmūd Shāh (1532-38),127 while his son Nuṣrat Khān was a contemporary of Īsā Khān (d. 1599), the leader of the Bengal chiefs (bhuiyān); the Tripurā king, Amaramāṇikya (1577-1586); and the Arakanese ruler, Man Phalaung (1571-1593), all of whom are discussed below in the history of the period that follows.128

On the one hand, working upwards from Mohammad Khan in the chart of his paternal ancestors, it is conceivable for Saiyad Sultān, as Mohammad Khan’s pīr, to be a contemporary of the latter’s grandfather, Jālāl Khān. On the other hand, working down the same family tree, with the help of the historical reconstruction of the dates of important figures in Khān’s paternal line discussed above, it is possible that Nasrat Khān could have lived at least up to the 1600s. Hence, our projected birth date of c. 1580 for Saiyad Sultān, who was probably born in the next generation, would not be inconceivable.

To better understand this dating of Sultān’s floruit, we now turn to a noteworthy passage from the NV’s tale-cycle of Hari. The passage in question are words put in the mouth of Iblis, who wishes to bring about the young prophet Hari’s moral downfall. He searches for a seductive, philosophical argument to cajole the hesitant, young Prophet to stoop to adultery:

\[
tumhi paramātmādeva tomhāra ki bhae ///
āpane purusa tumhi āpane yuvati /
dui ghāte haīcha tumhi bhūnjite sūrati ///
tāre kena sandeha vāsīte ācha mane /
kisake nā bhūjja rati yuvati rārā mane ///\]

You are the venerable Supreme Self; what fear need you have?

126 Karim 1964, 167.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid., 169-170.
129 Ibid., 477.
Yourself man, you yourself are a young woman. You have become into two bodies, to enjoy sexual pleasure. Why then does doubt plague your mind? For what reason do you not enjoy sex with these young women?

In the particular textual context of the tale of Hari in the NV, the message is straightforward, though based upon circular reasoning: Hari (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) as Supreme Being (paramātmādeva) has cleaved himself into gendered human pairs, and, hence, need not shy away from contact with the female sex, who, like his male component, is but a part of himself. However, precisely because the key verse, āpane puruṣa... sūrati, plays upon the ambiguities and circularities between the cosmic and human dimensions of Hari, Hari as Supreme Being and human incarnation, and those of number, “one-in-two” and “two-in-one,” it can simultaneously be read as the single body of Kṛṣṇa, in human form, which contains twin bodies—male and female. In the context of Sultān’s larger argument against the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, this verse, as recognized by France Bhattacharya,130 could be read as a subtle allusion to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya’s biographical image as androgynous avatāra, here retrospectively superimposed on the god Kṛṣṇa. This particular androgynous construction of Caitanya’s divinity had barely emerged around 1580 in Kavikarṇapura’s Caitanyacandrodaya nāṭaka,131 and was further developed, as Tony K. Stewart demonstrates, by Locana Dāsa in his Caitanyamāṅgala (1600). However, the concept was doctrinally consolidated in Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s Caitanyacaritāmṛta, completed in 1615 C.E..132 Through the efforts of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya and his companions the text came to be copied under the patronage of the newly converted Malla king, Vīra Hamvīra, the Rājā of Viṣṇupur.133 As argued by Stewart, it was the Kheturi festival134

131 Concerning this approximate date, see Manring 2005, 30.
132 Concerning the development of this doctrine in the hagiographical literature, see Stewart 2010a, 163–188. 1615 C.E. is the date of the oldest extant manuscript of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta. See ibid., 297.
133 While scholars have debated the exact dates of Vīra Hamvīra’s rule, the general consensus seems to be that he reigned between 1590 to 1620. See Pika Ghosh 2005, n. 19, 205.
organized by Śrīnivāsa, well after he had ensured the copying and distribution of the text under Malla patronage, that helped to finally consolidate the various Vaiṣṇava sects of Bengal into a unified community, which accepted the theology of the Vṛndāvana Gosvāmīs as the doctrinal basis for their ideology. Significantly for our discussion, the festival brought about the widespread community acceptance of Kṛṣṇadāsa’s doctrine of Caitanya as the androgynous incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, displacing “the various strains of nādiyā nāgarī bhāva, the gauragadādhāra līlā, the gauraviṣṇupriyā līlā, and related beliefs and practices of Narahari Sarakāra’s community in Śrīkhanḍa,... which substituted a different figure for Rādhā–Gadādhara or Viṣṇupriyā.” Hence, this particular reading of the passage also bolsters a post-1600 date for the NV, and more probably, one that went beyond 1615, the date of composition of the Caitanyacaritāmṛta. An even later date, beyond the first two decades after 1615, by which time the Kheturī festival should have taken place, would also explain the NV’s strong polemic against the Vaiṣṇavas. For it was this festival that consolidated the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava community in Bengal, making it a potent missionizing force across the breadth of Bengal.

Another piece of evidence that bolsters a post-1615 dating of the text is based upon its linguistic and other internal evidence. In discussing the issue of dating Shāh Muhammad Sagīr’s Yusuph-Zulekhā, Asim Roy suggests a later dating for the text than suggested by M. E. Haq, based upon, among other issues, its linguistic usage of Urduized Bangla words, such as bāt and nikalila, which was, according to him, “a literary practice that was not quite in vogue in Bangla

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135 Stewart 2010a, Chapter Seven.
136 Ibid., 195–196; see also ibid., 296 and 339, and Chakravarti 1985, 237.
137 The importance of this issue cannot be underestimated in our analysis of Saiyad Sultān’s polemic against the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavas, discussed in Chapter Two below.
literature even in the sixteenth century."¹³⁸ Such Urduized Bangla words are found ubiquitously in the NV; Roy suggests, whether for this or other reasons, an early seventeenth-century dating for the NV. However, he argues, “if Saiyad Sultān’s reference… to an already existing punthi on the theme of Yusuph–Zulekhā was to Saghir’s work, his Yusuf-Zulaikha cannot be placed at least later than this.”¹³⁹ Thus, he suggests an early seventeenth-century dating for Sagīr’s text, yet a date that precedes the NV.

Thus the weight of the evidence favors a later date for the composition of the NV, definitely after 1600, but closer to 1646, the most recent date possible.¹⁴⁰ The earliest possible date for Sultan’s birth would have been c. 1580. The erudition and maturity required to write such a text suggests that it was written by a person between the age of thirty-five and sixty-five, and taking into account Āsāddar Ālī’s views on the age of the author when his disciple wrote his eulogy, it was perhaps more likely to have been written by a forty-year old. But this borders on

¹³⁹ Ibid., 14. Cf. eka chāoyālera rahila iusupha nāma | sarvagūne viśārada rupe anupāma | kаниṣṭhāra nāma ibana āmīna rākhilā | yatna kari vrddha nabī dohāna pāllā | ahi daśa sahadara e dui bhāire | bāpera gaurava dekhi dekhibāre nāre | śunica e sāba parastāva sarvājane | padabandhe muṣī nā kahilun tekārene | NV 1: 697. The last couplet states: “Everyone has heard of all these subjects. Hence, I did not state these in verse.” Sultān’s statement, as provided in the critical edition of the NV, is vague, and makes no direct reference to “a punthi” on Iusuph-Julekhā; it is possible that Roy had access to a particular manuscript which specifically mentions “punthi.”
¹⁴⁰ Sharif puts forward an argument that may have some potential in dating our author; however extensive research would be required to verify his speculations. Sharif points out that Śekh Mutṭālib, who refers to the NV and the Śab-i Merāj in his Kiphāyatul Musallin, speaks of being the son of Śekh Parāṇa of Sīrākūnda. He also points out that Śekh Parāṇa, the author of the Nūrnāmā, refers to the NV. Furthermore, following Haq ([1957] 1991, 332–333), Sharif ([1972] 2006, 54) supplies 1049–49 A.H./1638–39 C.E. to be the date of completion of Kiphāyatul Musallin. Cf. PP, 58, and Kiphāyatul Musallin o Kāydaṁi Kitāb of Śekh Mutṭālib, “Na”–“Dha.” Based on this date, and Mutṭālib’s statement that he lost his father at a young age, Sharif then approximates Mutṭālib’s birth-date to be c. 1603 C.E, and Śekh Parāṇa’s dates to be 1575–1615 C.E. Thus, according to Sharif’s calculations, Saiyad Sultān is a senior contemporary of Śekh Parāṇa. Sharif [1972] 2006, 53–55. The crux of Sharif’s argument rests upon his presumption that Mutṭālib’s father is none other than the Śekh Parāṇa who composed the Nūrnāmā, wherein Parāṇa also cites the NV. Without any other evidence to confirm the father-son relationship between these two poets, such a statement is entirely speculative. Second, there is debate about the dating of the Kiphāyatul Musallin according to the Arabic abjad system: there is controversy as to the precise Arabic terms to be used in the calculation. See, for instance, the alternative reading provided in the DCBM (62): 958 A.H./1551–52 C.E. One could also consider including the Arabic terms in the couplet immediately preceding that used by Sharif in his calculations: isalāma ebādata nāṃja samāpta | sei anubandhe kahi śuna diyā citta | Sharif [1972] 2006, 54.
speculation. It seems most likely from the evidence of Gauriya Vaisnava praxis, and Sultān’s strong polemic against the Vaisnavas, that the text was written in the post-Kheturi period, situating it sometime between 1630 and 1645.

1.4 Contested geographies

While recognizing the diminished status of the Nabīvanśa in the print era, Chapter Eight will unearth how its author and his memory have come to be contested by two present-day Bangladeshi groups of scholars and the faithful who favour either Sylhet (Śrīhaṭṭa) or Chittagong (Caṭṭagrāma) as his birthplace. An effort is made in the following section to examine the empirical basis of these claims in determining the geography of Sultān’s life.

1.4.1 The View from Chittagong

Muhammad Enamul Haq, Ādamuddīn, Āli Āḥmad, Āḥmad Śarīph, and Muhammad Shahīdullāh are the scholars who have supported Sultān’s association with Chittagong. We will discuss the evidence that Ahmad Sharif, as the strongest proponent of this view, provides, bringing in the opinions of these others, when necessary. The first piece of evidence scholars on both sides of the divide turn to is Sultān’s sketchy autobiographical portrait, cited earlier. The relevant lines that animate this discussion are repeated here:

Obeying Commander (laśkar) Parāgala Khān’s orders,
Kavinda thoughtfully narrated the tales of the Mahābhārata...

... In the settlement of learned men of the Commander’s town (laśkarera pura),

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141 From the DCBM it would seem that Munshi Abdul Karim also supported this thesis; however, his confessions to Yatindramohana Bhattacharya in a personal letter approve of the Sylhetee argument. See below.

142 Lashkar is Persian for “army,” while lashkar-kash refers, in Persian, to “a commander, general.” Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “lashkar” and “lashkar-kash,” 1122. In Bangla, laśkar is primarily used in the sense of “army.” However, it is also used, as this passage suggests (see next note), as a title: Laśkar Parāgāl Khān, “Commander Parāgāl Khān.” Hence, laśkarera pura could refer, in this case, both to the
I am but a fool, a descendant of a saiyad.

Ahmad Sharif, following M. E. Haq,143 Ādamuddīn,144 and Āli Āhmad,145 takes laškar in laškarera pura to refer to Parāgal Khān, since he is mentioned a few lines earlier.146 Sharif thus identifies the Commander’s town as Parāgalpur, established by Parāgal Khān, who was appointed as the governor of Chittagong during the reign of ‘Alā al-Dīn Ḥusayn Shāh. Sharif’s view is logical, and supplies context to Sultān’s statement that he lived in a settlement of learned people.147 Being an active premodern town, it is reasonable to expect that a number of scholars and influential families must have settled there, Sultān being one among these.

Though Parāgalpur is no more than a sleepy village today, its status as a significant premodern center is demonstrated by the presence of two Mughal-period tanks, dīghis, one named after Parāgal Khān. The town continued to be of significance into the colonial period as evidenced by the present-day village’s location on what was once the Nawāb Sirāj al-Daulā Road, the old Dhaka-Chittagong highway and the first arterial road built by the British in these parts, which also connected Parāgalpur directly with the Chittagong port.148

Additionally, Ahmad Sharif supported the thesis originally put forward by his fellow-Chittagonian, Haq, who claimed that Saiyad Sultān was born in the village of Cakraśālā, which

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144 Since I have not been able to trace the article that Sharif ([1972] 2006, n. 27, 64) cites, I have personally not been able to read Ādamuddīn’s views. However, the concerned article (title not provided) can be found in Māsīka Mohāmmadī, 1352 B.Ś. (Baiśākha).
145 Ophāte Rasūl of Saiyad Sultān’s Nabīvāṃśā, 1.
147 Sharif ([1972] 2006, 63) also mentions that Sultān’s use of laškarera pura in the sense of Parāgalpur suggests that, first, in 1585–86 (when Sharif supposed Sultān composed his NV) Parāgalpur was still a regional administrative center, and second, Parāgal Khān was still well-known in local memory.
148 The village is off the modern Dhaka-Chittagong highway. Coming down this highway, one passes the village of Chāgalnāiyā until one reaches the intersection that leads to Khāgrāchāri, Korerhāṭa, and Jorārgaṇja. One takes the road that leads to Jorārgaṇja to find the village of Parāgalpur. Fieldwork conducted in July 2009. Bhattacharjee (1944–45, 96) identifies the location of Parāgalpur in Mirasarāi Thānā, Mahājanahāṭa Post Office, Chittagong subdivision.
falls under the present-day Patiya district of Chittagong. I highlight here the two most significant pieces of evidence which Sharif, following Haq, uses to buttress his argument. First, Muzaphphar, the copyist of a manuscript of Mohâmmad Khân’s Mohâmmad Hânîphâr Lârâ, and the author of Iunân Deśera Punîthi, mentions that he is “the son of Sultân’s daughter, and resides in Cakraśâlā.” As Mazharul Islam has pointed out, we should note that Muzapphar merely states that he is a certain Sultân’s daughter’s son, and himself resides in Cakraśâlā.

Furthermore, Āsâddar Ālî refutes this statement as proof of the residence of Sultân himself in Cakraśâlā since “he is unaware of any universal rule” that states that the maternal grandfather’s home is the same as his grandson’s. However, Muzapphar’s statement should be read in the context of the second piece of evidence which Sharif provides, related to Muhammad Mukîm, the author of Phâyedula Mukatadî (composed in 1773 C.E.) and Gulebakâuli, and a resident of Nayâpârâ, Chittagong. This author mentions that Saiyad Sultân, the pîr-author of the NV, is from Cakraśâlā. He also mentions that Mukîm’s pîr, Saiyad Mohâmmad Saiyad, is

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150 Śahîdullâh also follows Haq in this respect. Śahîdullâh ([1965] 2002, 101) opines that the Cakraśâlâ of Muzapphar and Mukîm’s texts is none other than the laškârera pura mentioned by Sultân. He insists that Sultân’s village was neither Laškarpur, Sylhet, nor Parâgalpur, Chittagong, on the basis of the following speculation: during Sultân’s time (which he considers to be 1537–1637 C.E.), Cakraśâlâ, along with Râmu and Deyânga, was one of three subdivisions of Chittagong, each of which were governed by their own Magha [Arakanese] representative, who was “probably” addressed as Laškar. For Śahîdullâh’s dating of Sultân, see ibid., 103.

151 sulatâna dauhitra hîna cakraśâlā gharma | kahe hîna mujaphhare ejida uttara || Sharif [1972] 2006, 55. Sharif does not mention which manuscript he refers to, nor is there any such relevant mention in any of the manuscripts of the text listed in DCBM. Cf. Śahîdullâh [1965] 2002, 99.


153 Ālî 1990, 52.

154 Sharif ([1972] 2006, 57) provides this assessment of the chronogram in Mukîm’s text. On the basis of the internal evidence of Mukîm’s Gulebakâuli, Islam (1999, 137) suggests a mid-nineteenth century date for this text.

155 ebe prânâmiba âmi pîrva kavi jâna | pîrva mîra cakraśâlâ chaîda cholatâna || I have corrected here and in the other notes below, Sharif’s ([1972] 2006, 57) hyper-editing of the text, following instead the version provided in DCBM (88–89). Cf. Śahîdullâh [1965] 2002, 100.
Saiyad Sultān’s daughter’s son.\textsuperscript{156} Another important reference, from the same manuscript of the \textit{Gulebakāli} which Sharif cites, provides further evidence that Saiyad Sultān and his descendants were associated with Cakraśālā, “the \textit{pīrjādā ṭhāma},” “the place of the \textit{pīr}’s progeny,” \textit{pīr}, here, most probably referring to Saiyad Sultān and his male descendants, some of whom, like Saiyad Mohāmmad Saiyad, were acclaimed \textit{pīrs} in their own right.\textsuperscript{157} Though there is debate about Mukīm’s dates, some scholars such as Mazharul Islam suggesting that he could have flourished as late as the mid-nineteenth century, it is evident that Mukīm’s text demonstrates the association in local memory of Saiyad Sultān, the \textit{pīr}-poet of the \textit{NV}, and his descendants, with Cakraśālā.

As Sharif demonstrates, numerous other poets, some of whom are Chittagonian, refer to Saiyad Sultān and/or his \textit{NV}.\textsuperscript{158} In this context it is important to note that the various genealogies of ancestral and spiritual descent between Saiyad Sultān, Saiyad Hāsān, Mīr Muhammad Saphī, and Šekh Mutālīb that Sharif maps in order to root Sultān more firmly in Chittagong are entirely speculative: as Mazharul Islam has shown, it is impossible to conclude from the evidence Sharif provides that Saiyad Sultān had a son by the name of Saiyad Hāsān, or that our Saiyad Sultān is identical with Śāh Saiyad, whom the poet Mīr Muhammad Šaphī

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156} \textit{Cakraśālā} bhūmi mauddhe \textit{pīra jādā ṭhāma} \mid chaida cholatāna vanśe sāhādallā nāma \mid eke tāna bhrāṛputra dutīye jāmātā \mid sarva śāstra viśārada śāriyata jhāta \mid tāna putra śrī chaida mohāmmada chaīda \mid nijapīra sthāne dui haīla murīda \mid Satya-Kali Vivāda-Saṃvāda of Mohāmmad Khān, 112. Cf. DCBM, 85; and See Sharif [1972] 2006, 57.
\item Mukīm also mentions that the city of Cāṭigrama is blessed by the tombs of \textit{phakirs} (\textit{phakira āstāna}), among whom he lists Śāh Jāhid, Śāhā Panthī, Śāhā Pīra, Hāḍī Bādaśā, Śāhā Sondara Phakira, Śāhā Sulatāna, Śāhā Śehka Pharida, and Burā Badar. Sharif asks whether the Śāhā Sultāna mentioned in this case is Sulatāna Bāyejīd Bistāmī. \textit{Cāṭigrama dhanya 2 mohotta vākhāna} \mid dhārmika athitaśālā \textit{phakira āstāna} \mid sā jāhida sāhā panti āra sāhā pīra \mid hāḍī bādaśā āra sāhā sonorda phakira \mid sāhā cholatāna āra sāhā śekha pharida \mid sāharera maidhye burā badarera sthīta \mid Satya-Kali Vivāda Saṃvāda of Mohāmmad Khān, 112. Indeed, Sharif notes yet another descendant of a certain Sultān, Kānti Śāh Tājuddīn, whom Śekh Mansur (1703), the author of the \textit{Sirrānāmā}, claims as his \textit{pīr}. cholatāna vanśera kānti śāhā tājuddīna \mid bhāgyaphale hāilaṁ āmi tāhāra adhīna \mid tānapada pādukāra reṇu bhurudeśa \mid diyā mane āśā kari ācche viśēṣa \mid Sharif [1972] 2006, 57. Cf. PP, 519. In this case, however, it is noteworthy that there is no mention of Cakraśālā, or of Saiyad Sultān, the poet of the \textit{NV}.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Sharif [1972] 2006, 60–61. For further details, see Chapter Eight of this dissertation.
\end{itemize}
claims to be his grandfather. The references to Saiyad Sultān made by various Chittagonian poets do not present any proof per se of Saiyad Sultān’s residence in Chittagong, as Sharif unjustifiably seeks to establish, but can only corroborate our knowledge of his wide renown and the extensive circulation of his texts in south-east Bangladesh. As pointed out in Chapter Two and in the Introduction to Appendix One, given that manuscript collection in Bangladesh has been an haphazard and incomplete endeavour, it is impossible to determine in the present state of the field whether the circulation of Sultān’s manuscripts was circumscribed to the south-east corner of Bangladesh or whether these circulated farther afield. At least one manuscript of the NV, for instance, has been found by a private collector in Barisal.

Another piece of evidence that Sharif cites is from Śekh Manohar’s Šamsera Gājīnāmā. In this text, Śekh Manohar euglogizes a military adventurer by the name of Šamser Gājī, who had established his kingdom in the Feni region of Chittagong. The text makes reference to Gadā Hosen Khondakāra, a pīr in the line of Saiyad Sultān, who was Šamser Gājī’s spiritual master. Being pleased with the Ghazī, who had sought his guidance, the pīr bestowed him with a horse and a sword. The pīr states that the sword and the ancestor of this horse were both gifted to his forefather, Saiyad Sultān, by the ruler of Arakan. From Sharif’s calculations of the date embedded in the Gājīnāmā textual passage he cites, it seems that Šamser Gājī met with Gadā Hosen before 1726 C.E. Sharif also mentions that Manohar, the poet, heard this story from his

161 See Appendix One.
162 Sharif ([1972] 2006, 278) lists this manuscript, in his bibliography, as being located in his private collection. Since this collection has been donated by his family to the Dhaka University archives in 2009, it is hoped that this valuable manuscript will soon be cataloged by this archive. For further details of his private collection, see Appendix One.
father, Tāhir Ukil, who was a follower of Śamser Gājī, and identified him to the Nawābī government as one who de facto ruled over the area, thereby, winning him the official award of a land deed, sanad.165

This piece of evidence jeopardized Sharif’s argument in ways in which he had perhaps never anticipated: it opens up a pandora’s box of contentious issues, which his Sylhettee opponents have readily seized upon to further their own argument—a matter we will turn to in the next section.166

1.4.2 The View from Sylhet

The view that Saiyad Sultān hailed from Bangladesh’s northeastern region of Sylhet (Śrīhaṭṭa) has been put forward by the scholars Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Mohāmmad Āsrap Hosen, Mazharul Islam, Saiyad Asāddar Ālī, Deoān Nūrul Ānöyāra Hosen Caudhuri, and Saiyad Ābdullāh. Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosseinī Chishti, who has also written on the subject, claims to be his eldest living descendant.167 Though Munṣī Ābdul Karim originally put forward the view that Saiyad Sultān’s birthplace was Chittagong,168 he later came to accept Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee’s view.

Saiyad Āsāddar Ālī, the strongest proponent of this view, initially builds his arguments upon those first put forward by Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, who states, while commenting on Sultān’s laśkarera purakhāni ālim basati / mui murkha āchi eka saiyyada santati:

From the poet’s specific reference to his village as laśkarera pura, one can infer that this village was well-known as laśkarera pura. From the second statement the poet makes about his place of residence, the poet informs us that he is born of Saiyad-lineage. Not a

165 Ibid., 59.
166 For more details of the connection between Saiyad Sultān of Taraph and Gadā Hosen/Hāsān Khondkāra, whose legacy, like Sultān’s, has also been contested by different groups of believers in Chittagong and Sylhet, see Chapter Eight.
167 For more details, see Chapter Eight.
single person from any well-known Muslim landlord families of present-day Chittagong’s Parāgalpur claims to be of Saiyad lineage.169

Next, Bhattacharjee points to Acyutacarāṇa Caudhuri’s early twentieth-century local history of Sylhet, Śrīhāṭṭera Itivṛttta, wherein reference is made to the reputed Saiyad family of Laśkarpur village of Taraph parānanā, in the present-day Habiganj district of Greater Sylhet.170 Though Caudhuri does not cite all his sources, he evidently gleans some of his information about the Saiyad family of Taraph from Taraphera Itihāsa, an history of Taraph published in 1887,171 written by Saiyad Ābdul Āghār, a descendant of the Saiyads of Taraph, and from personal communication with a certain Saiyad Emdādul Hak.172 Following Caudhuri, Bhattacharjee traces in Ābdul Āghār’s text the latter’s family tree; relevant to our discussion, among his ancestors he names two sons of a Saiyad Mikāil—Saiyad Musā, the elder, and Saiyad Minā, also known as Sultān.173 It is noteworthy that Āghār’s text, which we will quote in greater detail below, makes no mention of Sultān as the poet of the NV.174 Finally, in support of the Sylhettee case,
Bhattacharjee quotes a couplet from one of Sultān’s esoteric padāvalīs, in which Sultān makes a reference to “the city of Śrīhaṭṭa”:

\[
\text{ajapā pañca śābda kari bhāle} / \\
\text{śrīhaṭṭa nagare bājāe ekatāle ///}^{175}
\]

Meditate upon the unuttered five syllables;
in the city of Śrīhaṭṭa, [these] resound to a single beat.

By demonstrating that geographic place names were routinely used by padakāras to locate specific centers within the microcosmic bodily landscape, Muhammad Şahīdullāh dismisses a similar argument made by Mohāmmad Āśrāph Hosen.\(^{176}\) While this is a sound observation, the fact that Sultān mentions śrīhaṭṭa nagara, nonetheless, suggests his familiarity with this important Nātha center of north-east Bengal.

The crux of Āsāddar Ālī’s argument, which we will now consider in detail, rests upon medieval sources and later scholarship, not the least being Ahmad Sharīf’s own arguments, which provide triangulated connections between three key Sylhetī figures: Saiyad Sultān, Saiyad Musā, and Saiyad Gadā Hāsān Khondkāra. First, he emphasizes that Saiyad Musā of the afore-mentioned Saiyad family of Taraph, Sylhet, was accepted by Munṣī Ābdul Karim, and Muhammad Şahīdullāh, following him, as the minister at the Arakanese court under whose patronage Saiyad Ālāol completed his Sayphulmuluk Badiujjamāl around 1670.\(^{177}\) It is important to note that Karim simply mentions that Saiyad Musā is the brother of Saiyad Sultān of the NV. He does not specify a link to the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph. While Karim does not cite his sources, it is likely that he accepted the position that Acyutacarana Caudhūrī first put forth, since, to the best of our knowledge, he seems to be the first historian to correlate Saiyad Musā, Ālāol’s

\(^{175}\) Bhattacharjee 1944–45, 98.

\(^{176}\) Şahīdullāh [1965] 2002, 102. Muhammad Şahīdullāh points out many flaws in Mohāmmad Āśrāph Hosen’s arguments. I have not been able to trace the relevant article, which should be found in Māṣika Mohāmmadī, 24 Varsa, 1 Samkhya, cited in Şahīdullāh [1965] 2002, 100.

patron, with the Saiyad Musā of Taraph.¹⁷⁸ Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī, in turn, does not provide any evidence, and it is unclear how he arrives at such a conclusion.

Second, Ālī points to the evidence of the Śamśera Gājināma, discussed earlier. Ālī clearly recognizes that by citing this text, Ahmad Sharif has provided the Sylhettee group with the perfect segue into their argument.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Sharif’s use of this piece of evidence suggests his acceptance of the identity of the Saiyad Sultān of the Gājināma with Saiyad Sultān, the poet of the NV, which is the crucial missing link in the Sylhettee argument. Once this has been established by Sharif, for the Sylhettees, it would seem to them that it is but a small step away to demonstrate that the Gājināma’s Saiyad Sultān and his descendant, Gadā Hāsān, are indeed the same pair linked by their ancestry to the identical Saiyad family of Taraph, Sylhet.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, this text furthers the Sylhettee case by establishing a parallel connection between Saiyad Sultān and the Arakanese court, aligning his inter-regional movements between Sylhet and Arakan with those of our poet’s so-called elder brother, Saiyad Musā of Taraph, discussed earlier.¹⁸¹ Āsāddar Ālī does not refute the possibility that Sultān may have lived in the Chittagong region during his lifetime. He explains away the evidence that Sharif provides about Sultān and his grandsons by suggesting that Sultān may have taken another wife, while living in the

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¹⁷⁸ Cf. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī [1910] 2009, 1: 284. In this context, it is relevant to note Munšī Abdul Karim’s private letter to Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee in which he accepts his argument that Saiyad Sultān was a native of Laškarpur, Sylhet. The letter has been published by Ālī (1990, Pariśīṣṭa 1, 101–103) in support of the Sylhettee case.

¹⁷⁹ “Pramāṇe saiyada sulatāner vanśadhara hisebe saiyada gadā hāchana khondakārera nāma yoga kare nijera janye abāra ārekaṭā mahāvīpada ḍeke enechena!!” Ālī 1990, 51.

¹⁸⁰ Ālī 1990, 44. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī [1910] 2009, 1: Pariśīṣṭa Kha, 592-93. See also the mention made by Ālī (1990, 44) following Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī ([1910] 2009, 1: 288), of Gadā Hāsān receiving a land grant from the emperor of Delhi; the area is known as Gadāhāsānnagar pargana situated in greater Sylhet.

¹⁸¹ In this context, Ālī quotes the following padāvalī ascribed to Sultān, taking these philosophical padas, in an entirely literal sense: “I am a foreigner; I come from afar. I have remained in this place. For a day or two, I have stayed, residing [here]. I know not where I go.” (Translation mine.) hāma paravāsī, dāra honte āṣi | raḥi gelun ehi ṭhāi || dina dua cāri raichī vāsā kari | nā jānī kon khāne jāi || Ālī 1990, 50.
Ālī, following Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, argues that the Chittagonian case is weakened because of the inability of scholars to trace a single respectable family of Saiyads in the modern-day Cakraśālā area. This argument has to be rejected, however, as entirely unjustifiable in itself. Moreover, the results of ethnographic fieldwork in the Cakraśālā area, presented in Chapter Eight below, show that a certain present-day family of Saiyads links their family tree to Saiyad Śāh Gāḍī (the local name for Śāh Gāḍī Hāsān Khondakār of Narapati, Taraph), and, through him, to the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph.

As for the issue of the inability of Sylhettee scholars to trace a single manuscript of Saiyad Sultān’s works in the greater Sylhet region, Ālī suggests several different scenarios. First, he proposes that while traveling to Arakan, Sultān may have met with Muhammad Khān, his chief disciple, leaving behind the manuscripts of his work with him when he returned to Sylhet. Two other possible reasons he provides for the lack of circulation of his manuscripts in Sylhet are: first, his untimely death, before which he had not made arrangements for the copying of his manuscripts in Taraph; second, Saiyad Sultān’s manuscripts being written in Bāṅgalī script may have prevented their circulation in Sylhet, where the Sylhettee nāgarī script was prevalent.

Āsāddar Ālī also discusses the question of the identity of Saiyad Sultān’s guru, stated in his writings to be a certain Śāh Hosen. Following Nijām Uddin Ahmad, Ālī identifies Sultān’s master with Śāh Husen Ālam, the author of the Richālat (Pers. Risālat) and Bhedasāra, who was a resident of Pīrera Gāmo, Jagannāthpur sub-district, Sunāmgānj district, greater Sylhet. The strongest pieces of evidence he adduces for this are the following. First, two medieval authors

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182 Ālī 1990, 52.
183 See Chapter Eight for details of the current descendants of Saiyad Śāh Gāḍī Hāsān in the Cakraśālā area. For their family tree, see Appendix Seven. See also the discussion in Chapter Eight of the connections made in local memory with Saiyad Sultān and Saiyad Śāh Gāḍī, and Appendix Seven.
185 Ālī 1990, 50–51.
187 Ibid., 94.
with similar names, who are predecessors of Saiyad Sultān, are Gulām Hosan and Saiyad Śāh Hosen Ālam. Of the two, Ālí rejects the former because he is not a Saiyad, and hence, probably considered unsuitable to be accepted as the spiritual master of a Saiyad. 188 Second, there is a close correspondence between the Sufi writings of Saiyad Sultān and that of Śāh Hosen Ālam. One verse, in particular, from Saiyad Sultān’s NV, paraphrases a verse from the Bhedasāra, while closely imitating its syntax:

\[
\text{dudata nabani yena āchae mīsā} \\
\text{temate rahicē parabhu bhuvana yuriā} || \text{Bhedasāra}^{189}
\]

Just as butter remains merged in milk 
so also does the Lord pervade the world.

\[
\text{yehena āchae nanī gorasa sahita} \\
\text{tenamata āchae prabhū jagata vyāpita} || \text{NV}^{190}
\]

Just as butter exists with[in] [cow’s] milk 
so also does the Lord pervade the world.

Since Śāh Hosen Ālam was a Sylhettee, and since no pīr-poet in the relevant time-period has been found in the greater Chittagong region who matches the name of Sultān’s master, Ālí believes that this buttresses his argument for Sultān being a Sylhettee. While this is a promising line of argument, more research is required on the Bhedasāra to determine whether other internal connections can be made between the works of these two poet-pīrs. 191

188 Ibid., 97–98. It is likely that this is a modern concern in the choice of a spiritual master, rather than a significant medieval concern.
190 Ibid., 100. NV I: 2. Translation mine. For other esoteric songs from the Bhedasāra, see Phajlur Rahmān 1993, 14–15. The author mentions that a manuscript of the Bhedasāra is preserved in the Muslim Sāhitya Samsad, Sylhet.
191 I am indebted to Mohāmmad Sādik, a scholar of Sylhettee Nāgarī, for kindly providing me with a copy of a rare manuscript of the Bhedasāra of Śāh Hosen Ālam; he himself has a photocopy of the original manuscript available in D. N. A. H. Caudhuri’s private collection. For a facsimile of page 57 of this manuscript, see Sādik 2008, 107. Dr. Sādik also graciously provided me with a copy of a rare early twentieth-century publication of this text. Future research plans include a careful study of these rare documents.
Finally, Ālī argues that it is possible to prove that the NV is written by a native of Sylhet based upon linguistic evidence alone. While this is indeed a promising line of inquiry, my own limitations in the study of historical linguistics and the very nature of the state of research in the field of East Bengali linguistics make me wary of evaluating such arguments. In 1900, Munṣī Ṭabdul Karim wrote about the linguistic features of Saiyad Sultān’s Jñāna Pradīpa:

There is no way to evaluate from the perspective of language as to which region he was a native of. This is because there exists such a beautiful similitude between the various regional languages of old Bengali literature, that unless otherwise stated [in the text], to ascertain which text comes from which region is somewhat difficult. However, it would not be extremely inappropriate to state that Saiyad Sultān, at the very least, was an East Bengali. Numerous manuscripts of this text have been discovered in this area. Is it not natural for the greatest circulation of a text to be in and around the region of which the author himself was a native?

The study of the linguistic features of various modern regional dialects of East Bengal has advanced since the early 1900s: research on the regional peculiarities of Chittagonian and Sylhettee dialects has been conducted by scholars such as Muhammad Enamul Haq, and Šivaprasanna Lāhiṛī and Muhammad Āsāddar Ālī, respectively. Nonetheless, such research is still in its formative stage. Even less has been produced on the peculiarities of premodern Bangla and its dialectal variations.

While Ālī is unable to conclusively link the Saiyad Sultān of the Saiyad family of Taraph to the poet of the Nabīvamsā based upon independent evidence, he justifiably and successfully queries Sharif’s sloppy mapping of evidence on logical, philological, and other grounds, exposing the ambiguity of some of his claims, discussed earlier. Nonetheless, I believe Sharif makes a strong case for Parāgalpur as the place of residence of Saiyad Sultān, and Cakraśālā as

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192 Ālī 1990, 62–89.
196 Ālī 1998.
197 A few medieval works have been analyzed for language. With the exception of Dimock (1999, 41–47), these are mostly rudimentary and haphazardly treated.
being associated with Saiyad Sultān, the pīr-poet, and his descendants. This textual evidence has also been independently corroborated by the uncovering of local memories associated with Saiyad Sultān in the Patiya district by local historians such as Muhammad Ishāq Caudhurī, as elaborated upon in Chapter Eight. By introducing extraneous and weak evidence from the Šamsīr Ghāzīnāmā, Sharif has unwittingly weakened his own argument.

In this battle of regional affiliations, the Sylhetees feel particularly vindicated by the private testimony of Sharif’s own uncle, Sāhityaviśārad Abdul Karim, the revered collector of Islamic Bangla manuscripts. Āsāddar Ālī, and following him, Saiyad Ābdullāh, publishes the latter’s private letter to Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, in which he approves of Bhattacharjee’s proposal that Saiyad Sultān was from Laśkarpur, Sylhet.198 Ālī thus accuses Sharif of thrusting “his own views [about Saiyad Sultān’s birthplace] upon the shoulders of Sāhityaviśārad Sāheb”199 through his Puthi Pariciti, the descriptive catalog of Bangla manuscripts in the Dhaka University archive, which he co-edited with Munṣī Ābdul Karim, and which was published four to five years after his uncle’s demise. Another valid issue that Saiyad Ābdullāh raises also concerns Munṣī Ābdul Karim. He highlights the curious fact that a respected and untiring scholar like Karim, who was himself a resident of Patiya district, could not find any trace of Saiyad Sultān and his descendants in the area.200 Even in light of the fact that Munṣī Ābdul Karim was primarily a text scholar, not an ethnographer,201 this statement is justifiable considering the prevalence of the afore-mentioned local tales of Saiyad Sultān, uncovered by Muhammad Ishāq Caudhurī from the Patiya area.

198 See, for instance, Ālī 1990, Pariśiṣṭa 1, 101–103. Ābdullāh forthcoming, 11–12.
199 Ālī 1990, Pariśiṣṭa 1, 103.
200 Ābdullāh forthcoming, 12.
201 In the case of the poet, Alāol, on whom Munṣī Ābdul Karim published numerous articles, he had made an attempt to collect local lore from Chittagong about the poet, and writes about his attempt to trace his descendants in Myanmar. See, for instance, Munṣī Ābdul Karim [1952] 1997. It is clear from his writings that Munṣī Ābdul Karim did not invest his scholarly energies in studying Saiyad Sultān; however, it is indeed curious that despite being a resident of Patiya, he did not hear of any local lore related to Sultān.
In evaluating the strength of the Sylhettee case, I would like to highlight the following significant concerns, the first having already been put forward by Muhammad Šahīdullāh in his refutation of Mohāmmad Āshrāph Hosen, a scholar who supports the Sylhettee case. In an attempt to determine the dates of Saiyad Sultān of Taraph, Šahīdullāh points to the date of composition of the *Maʿdan al-Fawāʾid*, a Persian work written in 941 A.H. by Shāh Isrāil, the uncle of this Saiyad Sultān. This date corresponds to 1534 C.E. and makes the earliest possible date for the birth of Shāh Isrāil to be 1505. His brother, Shāh Mikāil, could have been born at the latest by the year 1520. This would bring the birth dates of Saiyad Musā and his younger brother, Saiyad Sultān, to 1540-50 at the latest. Only if one were to speculate that Musā and Sultān and/or Saiyad Isrāil and his brother, Saiyad Mikāil, had different mothers, would it be possible to push Saiyad Sultān’s dates to 1575, the dates we have suggested as the earliest possible birth date of the poet of the *NV*. However, from the most natural reconstruction of the dates, it should be evident that being Saiyad Sultān’s elder, the Saiyad Musā of Taraph (even if one were to take into consideration his long life-span as presented in Šrīhaṭṭera *Itivṛtta*) could not be the same figure as his namesake, Ālāol’s patron, at whose request Ālāol completed *Sayphulmuluk Badiujjamāl* in 1668-69.

What becomes evident is that authors such as Saiyad Ābdullāh and Āsāddar Āli, who both support the Sylhettee cause, have not been able to reasonably accommodate Sultān’s dates within the following two historical parameters: 1668-69, the date of composition of Ālāol’s

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203 Šahīdullāh (ibid.) wrongly calculates the corresponding Christian era date as 1514 A.D. For a facsimile of this text, especially reproducing its *hijrī* date, see D. N. A. H. Caudhurī 1983, last few unnumbered pages, and especially the last page for the date. I am grateful to the author for kindly allowing me to personally verify this date by viewing this treasured manuscript, which he inherited through the family line, and is in his private collection. This is purportedly the first Persian text to be composed in east Bengal. Concerning details about this text, see Bākī 2005, 334. I am grateful to D. N. A. H. Caudhurī for providing me with this reference.
204 By similar calculations, Ābdullāh (forthcoming, 24) determines Sultān’s birthdate as c. 1544.
Sayphulmuluk Badiujjamāl, under the patronage of the Ārākānī minister, Saiyad Musā;\textsuperscript{206} and 941 A.H./1534 C.E., the date of composition of the Madāʾin, and the consequent calculations this date presents for the dating of Saiyad Sultān and Saiyad Musā of Taraph. Āsāddar Ālī is able to accommodate the former, but unable to encompass the latter; in the case of Saiyad Ābdullāh’s argument, the reverse prevails. Either approach makes it impossible to associate the Saiyad Musā of Taraph with the Saiyad Musā of Arakan. Saiyad Ābdullāh’s dating has the further disadvantage of completely overlooking the evidence of Muhammad Khān’s Maktul Hosen. This strongly suggests that, despite speculation about the identity of these two Musās in literature, they are entirely different people. This issue significantly weakens the Sylhettee argument, and reveals how regional groups, with not a little help from a long tradition of writings produced by modern historiographers and literary historians in Bengal, have conflated homonymous figures to enhance local prestige.\textsuperscript{207}

My second observation concerns a feature of the evidence presented in Taraphera Itiḥāsa: as stated earlier, the text makes no mention of Saiyad Sultān as a poet and Sufi. Rather than depicting a venerable, scholarly figure, Saiyad Ābdul Āghphār, who is a direct descendant of Saiyad Musā of Taraph,\textsuperscript{208} portrays Musā’s brother, Sultān, as a jealous and crafty man, who usurped the inheritance of his nephew—Saiyad Musā’s son—Saiyad Ādam. What follows is Saiyad Āghphār’s description of the two brothers:

Having inherited the responsibility of the administration of the region, Saiyad Musā governed for thirty years. He departed to the next world leaving behind a son by the name of Saiyad Ādam. Saiyad Musā was an extremely capable individual; it goes without saying that, even though he was not a Nawāb, of course, he demonstrated the ability to be as capable in such [administrative] tasks as a Nawāb.

\textsuperscript{206} Thibaut d’Hubert suggests that the date of composition of this text is 1668–69. Personal correspondence, July 24, 2009. Cf. also d’Hubert 2010, Part One, Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{207} The specific instance of Ahmad Sharif’s enlisting the weak evidence of the Šamšera Ghāżīnāmā, thereby providing fuel to the Sylhettee argument, has already been highlighted. Innumerable such examples in secondary literature, in his and other’s writings, exist. See discussion below.
\textsuperscript{208} Āghphār [1887] 2008, 96.
Immediately after Saiyad Musā inherited the responsibility of the administration, Rājā Kamṣa Nārāyaṇa killed Nawāb Samchuddīn, and took over the throne of Bengal. However, under the Pathans, all of Bengal came under their governance. Neither were his [Rājā Kamṣa Nārāyaṇa] son or grandsons able to bring all of Bengal under their control. At this time, various Muslim states were losing their territorial sovereignty. Even though the ruler of Tripurā and various other uncivilized kings had managed to separate the region beyond the Meghanā from Muslim sovereignty, no one was able to touch the regions under Saiyad Musā’s control. The only exception were the uncivilized peoples who lived near the mountains, and who accepted the control of the Tripurā ruler; Saiyad Musā lost his grip over a part of this area. Even though no agreement had been officially made between them, there was no mutual opposition [either.] At this time, a terrible revolt arose around the Delhi throne. Various regions in Bengal, in separatist fashion, also acquired independence. Until Akbar, the greatest of the Moghuls, none who ascended the Delhi throne could conquer the regions east of the Gangā. Hence, for this extended period of time, Saiyad Musā and his descendants were able to maintain their independent governance [of the region.] This worldly well-being, good fortune, fame, respect and influence, and the matter of Saiyad Musā’s acquiring happiness through all forms of mundane comforts reached the allured heart of Saiyad Minā, Saiyad Musā’s younger brother, who resided in the city of Delhi, and set alight the blazing fire of the affliction [of envy] for another’s wealth. Enticed (?), thus, he spread a crafty net. First, he endeavored to assist various eminent officials of the city of Delhi. Over time, as he came to befriend them, he expressed his mental unease and pleaded for their help; however, no one was able to supply him with a suitable mantra to attain accomplishment in this endeavour. In point of fact, many created obstacles in his path. However, this blazing temptation remained in his heart; it was not extinguished. He then tried another means. Saiyad Minā had not the least want of all those ingredients germane to the human heart, which are necessary for selfish endeavour. He was extremely crafty, resourceful, and honey-tongued. Hence, the way to his desired goal gradually began to clear.

He began to declare to the [Delhi] emperor that Saiyad Musā had departed for the next world without an heir. “Hence, [said he,] “let the flourishing kingdom that he left behind be given to me. According to the Muslim dāyabhāga system, I am his natural heir. I am no less suitable than Saiyad Musā in the task of administration. Hence, there can be no doubt that [my] subjects will be very fond of me.” Since there was no disputant, there was no hindrance to the fulfillment of Minā’s plea. Significantly, before making his entreaty, he had ensured that none would support the opposite party, by bringing under his influence courtly officials through the handing out of numerous bribes. Thus, the king, as per his entreaty, presented him with the sananda of the administration of Taraph. On the other hand, Saiyad Minā remained especially cautious, planting spies at various places, so that news of the existence of Saiyad Musā’s son would by no means reach the ears of the Delhi emperor. Hence, even though many made several attempts to convey the news of the existence of Saiyad Musā’s son to the emperor, they were unsuccessful.

Bringing with him the sanand from the emperor, Saiyad Minā abandoned Laṣkarpur, and established his residence not more than three miles north. Because Minā’s other name was Sultān, the place where he settled became known as Sultānanišī. In this disagreeable manner, six years passed. During these six years, even though Saiyad Minā was not able to bring the entire region under his control, he did not make the mistake
of not sending the specified revenue to the royal treasury. Sadly enough, even after perpetrating all kinds of machinations he was not able to enjoy the contentment of his kingdom. The sun of his life proceeded towards the setting mountain. Leaving behind two sons, he abandoned this human play.209

From this description of Saiyad Sultān, it is clear that he was inscribed in family memory as an administrator, whose “evil machinations (ṣadyantra)” sowed the seeds of discontent and rivalry between two generations of the Saiyad family.210 It could be argued that Saiyad Ābdul Āgaphār, the author, being a direct descendant of Saiyad Musā, is the aggrieved party and rival faction to Saiyad Minā; hence, he retells a family tradition sympathetic to the case of Saiyad Musā and his son, Saiyad Ādam. Nonetheless, this portrait of Saiyad Sultān does not readily accommodate the image of the venerable learned man and guru whom Muhammad Khān describes, nor the various images of Sultān as ālim and Sufi that emerge from his own writings, and provides no evidence for Sultān, the poet of the NV.

Saiyad Ābdullāh and Acyutacarāṇa Caudhurī respectively argue that Saiyad Āgaphār’s 1885 family history is not a comprehensive, systematic document on the Taraph family, nor are its dates always reliable.211 Saiyad Ābdullāh defends Saiyad Sultān’s actions highlighted in the passage above by calling attention to a significant moment in the history of the Saiyad family of Taraph, omitted in Saiyad Āgaphār’s history, which links the history of Taraph with that of Tripura, as chronicled in the Tripurā Rājamālā. Rājā Amar Māṇikya is reported in the Rājamālā to have ordered the construction of a tank, for which he commanded local administrators, such as Saiyad Musā of Taraph, to despatch a contingent of labourers.212 When Musā declined, the

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209 Translation mine. Ibid., 48–50.
210 Ibid., 50.
212 Kāliprasanna Sen ([1931] 2003, 155) reports that Amar Māṇikya’s conquest of Śrīhaṭṭa was celebrated by the minting of a silver coin in the year 1503 Śaka (1581). The Tripura war with Taraph, according to his reading of the Rājamālā, should have taken place soon after this, between 1503 and 1504. For the photograph of the coin’s recto and verso (both erroneously printed upside down), and its decipherment, see ibid., 154, and the facing photograph respectively.
affronted Rājā marched upon Taraph with a vast army, completely overwhelming Taraph’s small standing army. Musā and his son, Saiyad Ādam, were captured by the Tripurā king and taken to Udayapur, the Rājā’s capital.\(^{213}\) Saiyad Ābdullāh speculates that Saiyad Sultān, who was probably then at the Delhi court, having heard of this terrible war, feared the worst – the death of Saiyad Musā and, Ādam, his only son – and entreated the Delhi king to transfer the sananda of Taraph onto his name.\(^{214}\) While this is, indeed, a possible scenario, it does not help us prove that the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph is anything but an administrator, and in the absence of any other evidence that directly proves his identity with the poet of the NV, cannot be admitted as evidence that could bolster the Sylhettee case.

The importance of the 1581 C.E. date of the Tripura-Taraph war lies in the independent evidence it provides in dating the Saiyad Musā of Taraph. In 1581, Saiyad Ādam, as a youth who fought in the battle, would have been around 18 years of age, making the age of his father, Saiyad Musā, between 35 and 40 years of age, at the least. This assessment of the age of Saiyad Musā corroborates the dating of Saiyad Musā’s birth (1540-50) arrived at through the evidence of the Ma’dan al-Fawā’id mentioned earlier. It also independently buttresses the argument that the Saiyad Musā of Taraph cannot be the same figure as the Saiyad Musā of the Arakanese court, since in c. 1670 he would have been 129 years of age.

It is noteworthy that a trend is observed in the writings of many Bengali literary historians, particularly, in this case, the apologetic writings of scholars on the Sylhettee side of this debate, though scholars who have supported the Chittagonian case are not altogether exempt. In the absence of concrete evidence to prove their argument, these scholars tend to indulge in two

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\(^{214}\) Ābdullāh forthcoming, 16.
kinds of rhetoric: first, padding their argument with an extensive selection of quotations from or invocations of (since these are often made without proper citation) various speculative historiographic writings in Bangla, as though by dint of citing a partial truth often enough it could become true; and second, the cumulative juxtaposition of weak evidence, often without proper citation, to make what the author considers to be a “strong” case. These exemplify two deeply entrenched problems within Bangla scholarship, which have plagued the systematic study of Bangla literature: speculative historiographic writing, and sloppiness in documentation. As should be evident from the above discussion, modern scholars who are carefully empirical face the frustrating experience of having to strip away the layers of pseudo-scholarship, the diachronic strata of imitative, repetitious, speculative writings, in order to arrive at the original vacant core of absent evidence they are often built around.

In conclusion, in the absence of any definitive evidence that links the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph with the poet of the NV, all such arguments remain speculative. The cross-regional movement of peoples between Sylhet, Chittagong, and Arakan is indeed plausible, especially in light of our discussion below of the interconnected histories of these regions. As D. N. A. H. Caudhurī has suggested, it is indeed likely that after the 1581 Tripurā aggression, the elite of Taraph took shelter with the Arakanese king. One important piece of evidence for this inter-regional movement is that of a coin, minted during the reign of the Arakanese king, Salīm Sāh I (1593-1612), which Sharif and Caudhurī independently claim figured three scripts, Arabic,

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216 See, for instance, the independent arguments put forth by Bhattacharjee and Ālī (though the latter is systematic about citation) discussed above. See also Sharīf’s flawed arguments discussed earlier.
217 The vast numbers of books on literature published by various academic and non-academic presses in West Bengal and Bangladesh each year is a measure of the enduring interest in sāhītya carsā, the discussion on literature, among the Bengali middle-class.
218 D. N. A. H. Caudhurī 2001, 44.
Burmese, and Nāgarī.\footnote{D. N. A. H. Caudhurī 2001, 49 and 67. Cf. Sharif [1972] 2006, 24. Neither of the two authors provide their source. Concerning similar coins of Selim Shah, struck in Arabic, Bangla, and Arakani, see Vasant Chowdhury 1997.} Additionally, authors such as Āsāddar Ālī, D. N. A. H. Caudhurī, and Deoyāna Muhāmmad Ākhtūrijāmān Caudhurī have independently suggested that Māgan Ṭhākur, the first patron of Ālāol’s Sayphulmuluk Badiujjamāl, was a Sylhettee Muslim known as Koreśī Māgan;\footnote{Citations provided in D. N. A. H. Caudhurī 2001, 46.} as Saiyad Ālāol himself puts it, he was also a friend of Saiyad Musā, the later Arakanese minister, who sponsored the completion of the same text.\footnote{Sayphul Muluk Badiujjamāl of Ālāol, 538.} All this certainly bolsters the historical possibility of the fluidity of inter-regional movement between Sylhet, Chittagong, and Arakan during the premodern period. This tantalizing historical possibility, as recognized by literary historians such as Thibaut d’Hubert,\footnote{Thibaut d’Hubert 2010.} Ahmad Sharif,\footnote{Candrāvatī of Koreśī Māgan, “ai” and “o.”} and others, could well account for the literary production of Bengali Muslims at the Arakanese court. However, more research is required to prove all of this. Without unequivocal empirical evidence it is impossible to conclude that the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph is identical with the Saiyad Sultān of Cakraśālā, the poet of the NV.

In the final analysis, I agree with Haq and Sharif’s identification of laśkarera pura with Parāgalpur. Though Haq and Sharif have proved that Cakraśālā and Parāgalpur have both been associated with Sultān’s life, the evidence does not help us determine his precise birthplace. The evidence that Sharif cites from the poet, Mukīm, is perhaps the single unequivocal piece of evidence that links Saiyad Sultān, the pīr, with Saiyad Sultān, the poet of the NV, at least in local memory to Cakraśālā. As will be explored in Chapter Eight below, local legends associated with Saiyad Sultān as a holy man, collected from two villages in modern-day Patiya district

(medieval Cakraśālā), also corroborate his enduring connection to this place in community memory.

The oral tales and local memories discussed later draw two significant connections: the first, between Sultān as pīr (not poet) and the Arakanese court, and the second, between Saiyad Sultān and Saiyad Gādā Hāsan Khondakār; this remains an enigmatic piece of the puzzle, and could raise the hopes of some scholars supporting the Sylhettee case in identifying, through the evidence of the Śamśera Gājīnāmā, the Saiyad Sultān of Cakraśālā with the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph. However, this would also involve the acceptance on their part of two separate family trees of Saiyad Gādā Hāsan Khondakār, and several such contentious issues, explored in detail in Chapter Eight.

1.5 The Religious Landscape

Before we turn to a brief history of East Bengal during Sultān’s time, I present my reflections on the place of contemporary religious sects in Sultān’s writings and their intersection with the geography of his life. I argue in Chapter Six below that Sultān’s carefully crafted polemical treatise against the Kṛṣṇa cult of the Vaiṣṇavas suggests that the author was not merely targeting Bengali Vaiṣṇava cults in general, but rather specifically targeting the sect of Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavism as founded by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. As delineated by Tony Stewart,224 the missionizing activities of the Gaurīyas had reached their high-point during Sultān’s time and was perceived, by Sufis such as he, as a serious threat to Islamic expansion.

It seems logical, therefore, that Sultān passed some period of his adult life in a milieu which was under the sway of the Gaurīyas. However, the period evidence on the comparative geographical spread of Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavism in the northern versus southern parts of East

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224 Stewart 2010a.
Bengal is scanty. The limited material evidence, whether art-historical (the geographical spread of Vaiṣṇava temples)\textsuperscript{225} or textual (Vaiṣṇava authors and their socio-textual communities; the provenance of and relative circulation of Vaiṣṇava texts; references to the geographical spread of the movement or the areas of operation of key Caitanya devotees; etc.),\textsuperscript{226} suggests no more than the fact that the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava faith was propagated widely all over the East. Of its relative regional spread no assertions can be made.

With regard to Caṭṭagrāma, Vṛṇḍāvanadāsa’s Caitanyabhāgavata documents the names of a few members of Caitanya’s entourage who came from the region: Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi and the brothers, Mukunda and Vāsudeva Datta.\textsuperscript{227} Ahmad Sharif also records the efflorescence of Vaiṣṇava padāvalī literature in the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{228} Śrīhaṭṭa perhaps bears greater distinction with regard to its connection to the history of the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava faith. Caitanya himself had close family ties that bound him to the region, which he is said to have visited during his youth: the paternal and maternal homes of his parents, Jagannātha Miśra and Śacīdevī, were respectively nestled in Jaipur village, Taraph, and Ḍhākā Dakṣiṇa of Śrīhaṭṭa.\textsuperscript{229} Several prominent members of his entourage had also migrated to Nadiyā from Śrīhaṭṭa: Advaitācārya, himself a prominent guru of the faith; Candraśekhara Ācārya; Murāri Gupta, a childhood friend of Caitanya and the author of his first hagiography, Kṛṣṇacaitanyacaritāṁṛta;\textsuperscript{230} and the Paṇḍits, Śrīrāma and Śrīvāsa.\textsuperscript{231} The first and the last named, in fact, constituted the older two members of what the hagiographer Kavi Karṇapūra had called the pañcatattva, the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Chakravarti 1985, 274–277.
\item Ibid., Chapter Seventeen.
\item Caitanyabhāgavata of Vṛṇḍāvanadāsa, Chapter Two, 6–7.
\item Wakil Ahmed 1999, 571–72.
\item Stewart 2010a, 367, 368, and 373. Concerning Advaitācārya’s role in Sylhet, see ibid., 284.
\item Caitanyabhāgavata of Vṛṇḍāvanadāsa, Chapter Two, 6.
\end{itemize}
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five pillars of the faith, the other three being Nityānanda, Gadādhara Paṇḍita, and Caitanya himself.\textsuperscript{232}

Writing in 1874, Shumbhoo Chunder Dey, the “Moonsiff of Russoolganj,” Sylhet, provides an account of the extent to which Sylhet continued to be a stronghold well into the late nineteenth-century for Vaiṣṇavism and its various cults:

I believe there are few countries in Bengal in which there are so many Boisnubs as in this. The Census Returns of 1872 number them near 8000 souls and I have been given to understand that as a matter of fact their number is much greater. The people seem to live under a kind of mania of becoming Boisnubs. If a person quarrels with his kinsman, it is ten to one he goes to an Akra [ākharā] or monastery and turns a Bosnub. If a person loses his wife and does not have means to marry another, or if he sustains great loss in certain undertakings, it is more probable than not that he becomes a proselyte to Boisnubism. Thus it appears to me that the people of this country turn Boisnubs when their feelings are somewhat severely wounded for some cause or other. In the majority of cases they do not abandon their family and all for the sake of religion or for any spiritual purpose. I dare say that there are here good many so-called Boisnubs who do not know who Bishnu is. They are Boisnubs in name and not in fact: They certainly injure the cause of Boisnubism to a considerable extent. Genuine Boisnubs are not plentiful as blackberries: They are as rare as Kalidas and Shakespeare. All climes do not produce them, for they are extraordinary births. The most that call themselves Boisnubs do ill deserve that name. I have come across some of these villains in saintly show, and this I say without diffidence that their character is reprehensible in the extreme. They are not only a disgrace to the religion they profess, but also a regular nuisance to it. Most of these so-called Boisnubs live by what would be positively shocking to a true follower of Bishnu.

As there are many Boisnubs in this country, so there are good many Akras here for their accommodation. I have been told that there is not a single Bastee but it contains at least one Akra. These Akras are presided over by Mohunts who are viewed by the bigoted Hindus in the light of apostles of Boisnubism, though I am very sorry to say that most of them do not at all deserve that high epithet. Some of these Akras are of great note and are possessed of great affluence. The well-known Akra at Joogul Tilla is the richest and most conspicuous of them all.

While on the subject of Akras and Boisnubs, I deem it advisable to take a passing notice of that heinous practice which in the peculiar phraseology of this country is called Kissori Bhajan. It somewhat resembles the Korta Bhojan of our country which took its origin at Ghosepara, but its rites and ceremonies are far more accursed and execrable. A fair young lady is made the Kissori and is worshipped in due form both by males and females. Then after the worship is over, the men and women exchange garlands and run riot in singing and dancing and many other things to boot which for decency’s sake I refrain from noticing in detail. These abominable practices are observed in the dead of night and at a very secluded retreat. Sometimes men of rank

\textsuperscript{232} Manring 2005, 31.
and position mix in these devilish doings. To crown all these devilish revels and rank proceedings even the beautiful young lady who is worshipped something like a Goddess is not allowed to go undesecrated and undefiled.233

Indeed, unlike Chittagong, Sylhet (Śrīhaṭṭa) had traditionally provided fertile ground for Vaiṣṇavism long before Caitanya’s time, and witnessed the springing forth of other Vaiṣṇava sects, such as the Jaganmohini, founded in the 16th century by Jaganmohan, and the Kiṣorībhäjan.234 Likewise, it also saw the flourishing of the Bāul sampradāya,235 a sect that did not spread in Chittagong.236 In the light of the likely possibility that the NV could have been written in the post-Kheturi period, a time when Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava efforts to consolidate community identity and increase mass support was at its zenith, this concern for material evidence for the movement’s relative spread in Sylhet versus Chittagong may have become irrelevant; the reverberations of the festival at Kheturi must surely have been perceived even in Bengal’s easternmost hinterland.

A final concern remains. Without elaborating here upon the history of Chittagong (Caṭṭagrāma), a subject treated in some detail below, it is relevant to our discussion to note that Chittagong has seen a long history of Buddhism, particularly of the Mahāyāna branch, at least since the Pāla period, while Vajrayāna also flourished under the Candras.237 Buddhism, in the NV, however, is conspicuous by its complete absence. For an author who probably lived in Cakrāśālā, Chittagong, at some point in his life, an area which to this day is an important seat of Theravāda Buddhism,238 the author’s total disregard for what should have been an important

234 As recorded in Chapter Eight, the Taraph Saiyad family had provided a land grant to Rāmakrṣṇa gosālī of the Jaganmohini sect to build an ākhārā.
235 Concerning information about these sects, see Wakil Ahmed 2006.
237 Qanungo 1988, 86.
238 Of decidedly Buddhist nomenclature, local tradition considers the principality to be an important Buddhist center, where the Buddha allegedly established Dharmacakras. Ibid., 81. Chapter Eight of this dissertation documents local histories of Saiyad Sultān associated with the Baṭaliyā village in the Patiya
religious rival to Islam is curious. While this could suggest the relative ascendancy of Islam in Chittagong over a declining Buddhism and the contemporary more aggressive competition presented by Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavism to Islam, it does not explain why an author keen to present the preeminence of the Prophet to the peoples of Chittagong would exclude the Buddha entirely from his otherwise distinctly indigenous Islamic prophetology. If Sultan operated in an area where he wished to proselytize among the Buddhists, he could indeed have taken his cue from none other than the Vaiṣṇava purāṇas, which had earlier sought to subvert Buddhism via including the Buddha into their avatāric genealogies. Lastly, Sultan’s Sufi practice draws heavily upon Nātha esoteric practices. Again, our knowledge of the relative spread of the cult in Sylhet vis à vis Chittagong is minimal: while Nātha practices were certainly not unknown in the greater Sylhet region, Chittagong perhaps holds greater distinction in this regard, being the home of numerous important centers of Nātha gurus.

Thus, the text itself raises certain fundamental questions about the author’s geographic location, for which no conclusive answers are available in the current state of the field. More research on the history and geographic distribution of these various religious sects in the premodern period is required to better understand the geography of Saiyad Sultan’s life.

1.6 An Historical Overview of East Bengal

Saiyad Sultan lived during a particularly turbulent period in Bengal’s history. Akbar’s military general, Khān Jahān, trounced Dāud Khān Karrānī, the last Afghan sultan of Bengal, at

region of Chittagong (erstwhile Cakraśālā). It is relevant to note here that Unainpurā, Baraliyā’s neighbouring village, houses a Theravāda temple and is the seat of the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhists of Bangladesh, H. H. Samgharāja Dharmaśīla Mahāthera.

239 Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 1:3:24.
240 Concerning the Nātha cult in Chittagong, see Qanungo 1988, 92–95. Concerning Taraph as a Nātha center, see a verse from Bhavānī Dās’ Maynāmatira Gāna (publication details not provided), 12, cited in Qanungo 1988, n. 2, p. 93
the battle of Ṭaṇḍā in 1576; yet for the next forty years the Mughals fought to subjugate the rebellious Afghan military chieftains, who attracted to their dissident cause “Muslim and Hindu zamīndārs, Portuguese renegades, and tribal chieftains.” From 1583 onwards, the Mughals shifted the focus of their military attentions from what they called Bangāla, essentially northwest Bengal, the site of Islamic rule since the beginning of the thirteenth century, to what was known as the Bhāṭī, the vast low-lying territories of East Bengal, a region approximating the land mass of today’s Bangladesh, then a hotbed of local resistance struggles against Mughal imperial authority. An indefinite number of native chieftains, who came to be metaphorically called the bāra bhuiyān, “twelve chiefs,” rallied around the intrepid Ṭsā Khān, the most powerful of them, who himself controlled vast lands that included half of modern Comilla, half of Dhaka, the whole of Mymensingh, except for Susang, and probably portions of Rangpur, Bogra, and Pabna. Adopting a strategy of alternate conciliation with and resistance to the Mughals, Ṭsā Khān asserted his power over the region through his naval prowess. Only after his death in 1599 was Rājā Mān Singh, Akbar’s distinguished Rājpūt general, able to defeat the Afghans now regathered under the leadership of Dāud, one of Ṭsā’s sons, thereby significantly dissipating local resistance. However, it was eventually during Jahāngīr’s reign (1605-27) that the Bhāṭī, under the rigorous governorship of Islām Khān Chishti (1608-13), came to be consolidated under Mughal rule. Mainly on account of Islām Khān’s remarkable powers of negotiation with local chieftains, by the time of Ibrāhīm Khān’s governorship (1617-24), Mūsā Khān, another of Ṭsā Khān’s sons, and other bhuiyāns had all been effectively integrated into

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242 Eaton 1993, 142.
243 Ibid., 145-146.
244 Concerning the term, bāra bhuiyān, and its Assamese antecedents, see Bhattasali 1928, 30-33.
245 Ibid., 33-34.
the Mughal imperial service, being placated with leadership roles in major Mughal expeditions, such as that against the Tripura king.²⁴⁶

Nearly three centuries before the Mughals established control over the Bhāṭī, Chittagong had been under the control of the Delhi sultanate. First captured during the reign of Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (1338-49), it was continuously held thus first by the Firūzshāhi sultāns of Delhi, and later by the sultāns of Bengal up to the time of Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh (1459-74).²⁴⁷

From the rise to power of Rājā Gaṇesh (c.1418-1433), the region, however, became increasingly embroiled with the territorial claims of the regional polities of Gauḍa, Tripurā, and the newly emerging kingdom of Arakan (c. 1404). From this time on begins a history of power struggles and shifting allegiances between these regional polities, particularly on account of the coveted control of the port-city of Chittagong, which opened access to the Bay of Bengal’s bustling international maritime trade. Rājā Gaṇesh, alias Jalāl al-Dīn, the Sultān of Gauḍa, then controlled the Chittagong region, and had conquered parts of Tripurā; he also sheltered the early Arakanese ruler, Naramitlha, in exile.²⁴⁸ With the military support of his Muslim or Rohiṅga troops, Nāṣir al-Dīn Māḥmūd (r. 1433-1459) later reinstated Naramitlha, establishing this shaky dynasty on a firmer footing at Mrauk U, the Arakanese capital on the banks of the Kaladan river. From the time of Naramitlha’s brother’s rule the kings of Arakan adopted Muslim names in addition to their Pali titles. What this dual titulature suggests about Arakanese political power vis à vis Bengal is not entirely clear, though Jacques Leider asserts that there seems to be no indication that Arakan was dependent on Bengal.²⁴⁹ After 1439, Man Khari alias ‘Alī Khān founded Rāmu, extending Arakanese control into the Chittagong region;²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Eaton 1993, 155–156.
²⁴⁹ Ibid., 129.
²⁵⁰ Ibid.
he also conducted wars with the Rājās of Tripurā.\textsuperscript{251} While the Arakanese held most of southern Chittagong during the restored Ilyās Shāhī dynasty (1437–1487), numismatic evidence suggests that sultān Nāšir al-Dīn controlled the Chittagong port.\textsuperscript{252}

The history of Arakan between the years 1481, the death of Man Khari’s son, King Bha Co Phru or Kalima Shāh, and 1530, the accession to the throne of Man Pa, remains obscure.\textsuperscript{253} Likewise, little is known about the history of Chittagong between 1481 and 1493, the year Sultān Ḫusayn Shāh acceded to the throne of Gauṛa. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the polities of Gauṛa, Arakan, and Tripura, each caught in the trammels of internal political strife, were not able to stake an undisputed claim over Chittagong. It was the remarkable Arakanese ruler Man Pa (1531–53) who set about consolidating his kingdom. He warded off a major Burmese invasion; beat off the Portuguese armada at Mrauk Ū in 1534; and in 1539–40, while East Bengal was still being newly consolidated under the Delhi sultanate by Sher Shāh Sūr, he established control over the Chittagong port, probably until its capture in 1556 by the Tripurā king, Vijayamāṇikya (c. 1536–1563), who then controlled the thriving port for the next ten years.\textsuperscript{254} Arakanese sources boast of Man Pa’s establishment of a military outpost in Dhaka, and his appointment of one of his sons as the governor of Sylhet.\textsuperscript{255} He also built some of the most famous temples and pagodas of Mrauk Ū and fortified the city with an impressive system of defences.\textsuperscript{256}

The reign of the warrior king, Man Phalauṅg (1571–1593), finally brought an end to Tripura’s contestation of the Chittagong region; in 1586, they fought off an attack by Amaramāṇikya, the Tripurā King, who had earlier consortéd with Chittagonian Muslims and

\textsuperscript{251} Subrahmanyam 2002, 111.
\textsuperscript{252} Qanungo 1988, 149–150.
\textsuperscript{253} Leider 2002, 130.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 131.
the Portuguese who had sought his help. The Tripurā ruler was punished by the Arakanese who beat him back and pillaged his capital city, Udaipur; the rājā fled and ultimately committed suicide. As the powers of the Tripura rulers ebbed, Bengal was captured by the Mughals, who consolidated their sovereignty over Bengal over the course of four decades. During these years, when Ṭsā Khān and his allies resisted the Mughals, it was the Arakanese who gained gradual control over Chittagong. Man Phalaung appointed one of his sons as the first Arakanese governor of Chittagong. As Jacques Leider points out,

upto 1610, the governors of Chittagong bore the title of ‘king of the West’ (anauk-bhuran), underscoring an expansionist vision that clearly went beyond Chittagong. The Arakanese governors had the remarkable privilege of minting their own coins. While their power seemed slightly diminished after 1612, they kept on adopting Indian titles (alongside their Arakanese titles), long after the Arakanese kings abandoned this custom.

In the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese were courted by Arakanese rulers for their trade; and by the early seventeenth, Portuguese missionaries, who had by 1567 established a firm presence at Bengal’s trading centres of Sātgāon, Chittagong, and Pīplī, began to now erect churches in Arakan. From missionary accounts we also learn how Portuguese mercenaries fought along side the Arakanese ‘Maghs’ in raids against the Mughals. However, Portuguese meddling in the politics of the region was to the detriment not only of Arakanese expansionism, but to their own interests; they were punished first by the Arakanese, resulting in a loss of their settlements at Arakan, Chittagong, the island of Sandvip, and Jessore

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257 This paragraph is summarized from ibid., 133-134.
258 Ibid., 134.
259 Ibid., 131.
260 Luard 1927, 1: xxiv-xxv.
261 See, for instance, the accounts of Fray Sebastien Manrique, the Portuguese missionary deputed to Arakan between 1629–37. He describes raids against the Mughals during the rule of Xalamixa (Salim Shah II/Thirithudhamma) (1622–39), Luard 1927, 1: 89.
262 Leider 2002, 131.
During the reign of the controversial king Candasuddhamaraja (1652–84), Mrauk U reached the height of its expansionist ambitions and imperial splendour. At the apogee of territorial expansionism, the kingdom of Arakan, before 1666, extended nearly up to Dhaka in the west; well into the second half of the seventeenth century, by fighting off the Portuguese and the Mughals, they managed to retain their hold over the region up to the Feni river in the north to Cap Negrais in the south. European travelers to Mrauk U before 1666 liken it in prosperity and beauty to contemporaneous Lisbon and Amsterdam. Architectural historians of Arakan from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries comment upon Mrauk U’s remarkable fortification and the grand scale of its building projects, making it a world city. At Candasudhammaraja’s glittering court, Saiyad Ālāl, Saiyad Sultān’s junior contemporary, a Bengali migrant from Faridpur, composed, among other works, his masterful Bangla renditions of Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī’s *Padumāvat*, and Niẓāmī’s *Iskandarnāma* and *Haft Paykar*. In his description, Rosāṅga (the Bangla version of Mrohaung, the later name for Mrauk U), drawing peoples from near and far, was marked by its cosmopolitan character:

Having heard of Rosāṅga’s enjoyments, various people of various lands flocked ‘neath the king’s [protective] shade: Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians, Turks, Abyssinians, Rumīs, Khorāsānīs, and Uzbekīs all; Lāhorīs, Multānīs, Hindīs, Kashmirīs, Dakśinīs, Sindhīs, Kāmarūpīs, and Bengalis; Bhūpālis, Kudāṃsarīs, Kānnāi Manalas, Ābāris,

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263 Luard 1927, 1: xxv-xxvii.
264 Raymond 2002, 177.
265 Leider 2002, 134.
266 Raymond 2002, 177.
268 Ālāl Racināvalī, “satera.”
269 Arakan’s capital, Mrauk U, was later known as Mrohaung, and to the Bengalis as Rosāṅga. Ālāl Racināvalī, “panera.” Concerning the various names of the city, cf. Gutman 2002, n. 2, 163.
Ācis, Kucis, and residents of Karṇāṭaka; numerous descendants of Shaykhs and Saiyads, Mughal and Pāthān fighters, Hindu Rājputs and various [other] races; peoples of Ava, Burma, and Siam (Śāma), the Kukis of Tripurā: how many types of races should I list? Armenians, the Dutch, the Danes, the English, Catalonians, and French; Spanish, Germans, coladāra Christians, the Portuguese and various races. All the armies of the Magas are in the forefront of all battles; innumerable, army-camps [stretch] endlessly. Temple priests (mahanta) and ministers, each one bearing royal umbrellas, serve the king in an honorable manner.271

“In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,” as Sanjay Subrahmanyan points out,

the polity [of Arakan] is the locus of highly complex cultural flows and eddies, where the diplomatic correspondence was often conducted in Persian or Portuguese, where the normal language of the court and countryside was Arakanese (Magh), where a highly sophisticated literature was also produced in Bengali, and where titulature and some chronicles reflected a late efflorescence of Pali.272

In 1666, the kingdom of Arakan, which had until then presented a challenge to its two larger neighbouring states, Bengal and Burma, saw a sudden turn in its fortunes. With the Mughal governor’s recapture in that year of the entrepot of Chittagong, which for centuries had been alternately held by the Arakanese and the Bengalis, Arakan, heavily dependent on its maritime trade, especially in slaves, fell into decline.273 By 1784 the kingdom was captured by the Burmese, never to recover its sovereignty again.

As this historical overview demonstrates, during Sultān’s youth, Chittagong was under the sway of the bārā bhuiyān, local chieftains who were courted by the Arakanese kings for their resistance to the Mughals. The ancestors of Sultān’s chief disciple, Muhammad Khān, as earlier seen, were important figures in the history of Chittagong: Rāstī Khān and his sons administered

270 Ābdul Hak Caudhurī 1994, 15.
271 Translation mine. Ālāol Racaṇāvali, 7.
272 Subrahmanyan 2002, 111.
the two regions of Chittagong, Parāgalpūr, and Cakraśālā (present-day Patiya) associated with the life of Saiyad Sultān. Though these regions were past their heyday by Sultān’s time, they retained, even as he mentions of Parāgalpur, a population of Muslim elite.

Islām Khān Chishtī, the governor who finally consolidated Bengal under Mughal sovereignty, was a contemporary of Saiyad Sultān. After he took over governorship in 1608, Dhaka became the new provincial capital, and to the city flocked migrants mainly of Iranian descent, bringing with them the Shīṭī traditions of their ancestors. 274 This new immigrant elite (ashrāf) of the Mughal period sought to preserve their Persianate cultural distinction, looking with condescension upon local culture, “effectively reversing,” as Richard Eaton has observed, “the long-term pre-Mughal trend whereby a Muslim ruling class had progressively accommodated itself to the Bengali environment owing to generations of intermarriage with Bengali women and centuries of isolation from the north.” 275 Perhaps the most obvious marks of this attitudinal shift is the diametrically contrasting approaches to architectural design in the two periods, Dhaka, in the later period, being especially lavished with the elaborate building schemes of the Mughal elite. Where the architecture of the Sultāns of Bengal was unostentatious, seeking to blend into the landscape by deploying building and decorational techniques which incorporated numerous elements of indigenous design, that of the Mughals, though distinctly Indo-Islamic in design, stood out as “foreign” in Bengal—emphatic statements of imperial power and cultural dominance. 276 If the “conceptual separation of religion and state,” among the Mughal ruling class, was “a corollary... to their disinclination to convert Bengalis to Islam” 277—a policy as much criticized by the Sufis and mullahs of Bengal as those in other regions of Mughal power—their pretensions of cultural superiority kept them insulated

275 Ibid., 167. Cf. also Chatterjee 2009, Chapter Seven.
276 Ibid., 171–173.
277 Ibid., 174–175.
from local culture as much as peoples, precluding any possibility of meaningful socio-religious interaction, what to speak of prosyletization. And it is precisely within the context of this aesthetic, cultural, and socio-religious discourse, in which one can grasp the concerns of Bengali literary pioneers such as Saiyad Sultān, a matter we turn to in the next chapter.
Chapter Two

Texts, Authorship, and Manuscript Transmission

2.1 Introduction

Saiyad Sultān is celebrated in the premodern Islamic Bangla poetic tradition as the pīr-author who wrote the Nabīvaṁśa (NV), a metrical epic on the tales of the prophets culminating in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Also extant are manuscripts of a few other works and some thirteen padāvalī, short lyrical poems, attributed to him. Among these are the Jñāna Cautiśā, “The Thirty-Four Consonants of Knowledge,” a short yogic treatise on esoteric knowledge; the Jñāna Pradīpa, “The Lamp of Knowledge,” a Sufi practice manual; and an untitled narrative poem in the maghāzi-maṅgala genre on the Prophet Muhammad’s victory over an infidel king, Jaikum. In the present chapter, my treatment of these lesser-known works attributed to Saiyad Sultān elaborates upon their content, their place in the literary history of Bangla, and the issue of authorship. However, similar issues are addressed first in the case of
the NV, with special efforts being made to analyze the relationship between the critical edition and the manuscript tradition.278

### 2.2. The Nabīvamśa

#### 2.2.1 The title

*Nabīvamśa*, “The Prophet’s Lineage,” Sultān’s major work, composed in the traditional payār and *tripadi* metres,279 is the first biography of the Prophet Muhammad written in Bangla. As grammatical number is ambiguous in such a construction, “The Line of the Prophets” is the alternative translation that Asim Roy suggests.280 I prefer the use of the singular number in the translation of the title for several reasons. At the grammatical level, titles of other works, such as Sekh Čānda’s *Rasul Vijaya*, “The Messenger’s Triumph;” the section of the NV provisionally subtitled, by Ahmad Sharif, as *Rasul Carita*, “The Messenger’s Deeds;” and the *Harivamśa*, “Hari’s Lineage,” make a case for accepting the singular number in such a construction. While it can be argued that *rasul* is the term preferentially used over *nabī* in reference to the Prophet Muhammad in texts such as the NV, numerous instances of the Prophet Muhammad being addressed as *nabī* are also to be found therein, making it plausible to construe *nabī* in the title as “the Prophet Muhammad.” Further, at the aesthetic level, the alliterative consonance of nasals in our title advocates for the preferable poetic use of *nabī* over *rasul.*

There are significant conceptual reasons why the singular number is preferable in translation. First, it is clear that the author intends the Prophet of Islam to be the teleological and theological fulfillment of the line of the prophets. Second, given the text’s displacement of

278 For the purpose of this dissertation, I rely on Ahmad Sharif’s critical edition of Saiyad Sultān’s works: *Nabīvamśa* of Saiyad Sultān, in two volumes. Volume Two also contains Sharif’s critical editions of shorter works ascribed to Sultān, which are discussed in this chapter.

279 Payār is a couplet, while *tripadi* is a six-line stanza in the rhyme-scheme *aabccb*.

280 Roy 1983, 12.
Hari, the supreme deity of the Gauśīya Vaiśṇavas, by the Prophet Muhammad, the title was not merely modeled upon the *Harivamśa*, “Hari’s Lineage,” as Sukumar Sen suggests, but provides parodic comment upon it. The deceptively simple substitution of the name of the Vaiśṇava deity with the designation of the Prophet Muhammad makes the title linguistically and epistemologically embody the transformational processes of theological displacement which the text performs. The title itself, thus, can be read at the level of translation as conversion, a key component of the *NV*’s self-conception discussed in Chapter Three. What happens at the linguistic level also anticipates the changes in the linguistic structure of Bangla as it develops in the middle period. For here, *harivamśa*, a Sanskrit genitive *tatpurusa* compound, is treated as a Bangla *tatsama* word, while creating a linguistically hybrid form: *hari*, the genitive half of the Sanskrit compound, is replaced by *nabī*, a Perso-Arabic word. The title epitomizes how the linguistic matrix of Bangla expands to accommodate new Islamic ideas, a subject that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

### 2.2.2 The Narrative Outline

The *NV*’s epic scale and ambitions make it the first major work to introduce Islamic doctrine to Bengalis in the vernacular. The *NV* draws into its wide narrative sweep the sacred beginnings of the cosmos and its unfolding through sacred history to meet its apogee in the Prophet of Islam. The author thus depicts cosmogony; the formation of the primordial pair, Mārij and Mārija, from whom were born two classes of jinn, whom Sultān styles the gods (*sura*) and the demons (*asura*); the eventual destruction of both parties by sin; and the futile

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281 Concerning the *Nabīvamśa* being modeled on the title “*Harivamśa*,” see Sukumar Sen 1979, 143. See also my comments on Bhavānanda’s *Harivamśa* in Chapter Six (6.2).

282 Sharif’s edition reads “Mārica” and “Mārijāta.” These are the Bangla forms of “Mārij” the Perso-Arabic terms for the primordial *jam*, and his mate, Mārija. *NV* 1: 7. From Mārij and Mārija, according to popular Islamic *qisas al-anbiyā’,* tales of the prophets, were born two clans of *jinn*, whom Sultān styles the *sura*, gods, and the *asura*, demons. For more details, see discussion in Chapter Four (4.5).
creation of the four Vedas in order to reform humankind. These divinely revealed Hindu texts, as detailed in Chapters Five (5.2) and Six (6.5.4), acknowledge the future manifestation of the Prophet of Islam. Then follows the descent of various prophets identifiable as specific Hindu deities, such as Śiva, and various avatāras of Viṣṇu, including Rāma, all of whom failed to eradicate evil from the earth. This leads to the eventual creation of Ādam, and after him a line of prophets including Hābil (Abel), Śiś (Seth), Idris (Enoch), Nūh (Noah), Ibrāhim (Abraham), Musā (Moses), Dāud (David), Solemān (Solomon), Jākāriyā (Zachariah), and Īsā (Jesus), whose stories are told in some detail, culminating with the Prophet of Islam. A prophet born of the line of Kābila (Cain), Hari (i.e. Kṛṣṇa), is the only Hindu god who punctuates the line of Judeo-Islamic prophets after Ādam. With the inclusion of this Muslim Kṛṣṇa, and the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava ‘apostles’ who preceded Ādam, the Prophet Muhammad’s monotheistic genealogy is augmented by a unique heritage of Hindu gods.

The section of the Nabīvamśa on the Prophet’s life, for which Ahmad Sharif provides the sub-title, Rasul Carita, “The Prophet’s Deeds,” is divided into three parts. Part one begins with a recapitulation and further elaboration of cosmogony, with distinctly Sufi themes; the essential principles delineated in the beginning of the text are here fleshed out, providing an extensive description of the role of the Nūr Muhammad, the Muhammadan Light, in creation. Then follows Muhammad’s birth and his early life as a Prophet. Part two, Īb-i Merāj, “The Night of the Ascension,” begins with the ascension narrative (which alone constitutes 814 couplets), and continues beyond it to present, among other events, the emigration to Medina, various battles of the Prophet, and his triumphant return to Mecca. The section ends with the death of Khadijā.283 In this dissertation, when I refer to Sultān’s mirāj, I address the section which

specifically deals with the Prophet’s ascent (the first 854 couplets). Though I take into account the reactions of the Prophet’s community to his ascent—a 40-verse section that immediately follows the sectional colophon of the Šab-i Merāj—I do not consider the other narratives about the Prophet’s mid-life to be a part of the ascension narrative, even though they fall under the editorial/ scribal subtitle Šab-i Merāj.

Part three, Ophāt-i Rasul, “The Prophet’s Death,” concerns his last days and death, ending with a brief description of the conquests of the first three caliphs.

An outline of the contents of the NV is provided here:

1.1 Invocation, NV 1: 1–3  
1.2 Cosmogony  
   1.2.1 Prabhu Naraṇjana and Nūr Muhammad, NV 1: 4–6  
   1.2.2 Mārica and Mārijāt, NV 1: 7–12  
   1.2.3 The gods (suras) and the demons (asuras), NV 1: 13–22  
1.3 The earth’s tale of woe: the descent of the Vedas and the failure of the mahājana (Viṣṇu’s avatāras) to eradicate sin, NV 1: 23–41  
1.4 Ādam and his Sons, Ḥābil, Kābil, and Śiś, NV 1: 42–247  
1.5 Minor Prophets in Śiś’s line and Sufis  
   1.5.1 Mayāil, NV 1: 248–249  
   1.5.2 Vārad, NV 1: 250–252  
   1.5.3 Hāsān of Basra and Varasiyā, NV 1: 256–288  
1.6 Idris, NV 1: 289–305  
1.7 Nūh, NV 1: 306–325  
1.8 Ibrāhim, NV 1: 326–466  
1.9 Hari, NV 1: 468–500  
1.10 Mūsā, NV 1: 501–695  
1.11 Dāud, NV 1: 697–729  
1.12 Solemān, NV 1: 730–833  
1.13 Hārut and Mārūt, NV 1: 834–846  
1.14 Īsā, NV 1: 847–935  
2.1 Recapitulation and further elaboration upon cosmogony, NV 2: 3–15  
2.2 Muhammad  
   2.2.1 Parents: Ābdullāh and Āminā, NV 2: 16–27  
   2.2.2 Early life, NV 2: 28–93

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284 For my reasons for this, see Chapter Seven.  
285 NV 2: 280.  
286 Scribes are inconsistent in determining where to end this section, and I have decided to follow the format of medieval Islamic authors, provided by Vuckovic (2005), to facilitate ease of comparison.  
287 For my translation of the provisional sub-titles supplied by Sharif for each of the various subsections of the NV, see Appendix Four of this dissertation.
2.2.3 Prophethood, NV 2: 97–112
2.2.4 Conflict with enemies, and miracles performed, NV 2: 113–184
2.2.5 Ābutālib’s death, NV 2: 185–195
2.2.6 The ascension, NV 2: 199–284
2.2.7 Mid-life
   2.2.7.1 Khadījā’s death, NV 2: 285–286
   2.2.7.2 Emigration to Madīnā, NV 2: 287–309
   2.2.7.3 Battle with Ābu’jahel, NV 2: 310–332
   2.2.7.4 Phātemā and other children, NV 2: 333–344
   2.2.7.5 Āyashā, NV 2: 345–349
   2.2.7.6 War and Diplomacy, NV 2: 350–437
   2.2.7.7 Conquest of Makkā, NV 2: 438–461
   2.2.7.8 Conquest of Various Lands, NV 2: 462–475
   2.2.7.9 The Farewell Haj, NV 2: 483–494
2.2.8 Last days and death, NV 2: 497–547

2.2.3 The Printed Critical Edition vis-à-vis the Manuscript Tradition

2.2.3.1 One text or multiple texts?

   The question arises as to whether the NV was in point of fact composed as a single text, for there is no single manuscript that transmits the entirety of what Ahmad Sharif publishes as the critical edition. Having personally assessed manuscripts from various archives in Bangladesh,288 including those in the Dhaka University archives, some of which Sharif uses in his edition, it is clear that division of the critical edition into two volumes has some basis in the scribal tradition. The Nabīvamśa manuscripts corresponding to Sharif’s volume one begin with the story of creation (1.2–1.3)289 and present the tales of the prophets up to Jesus (1.4–1.14). Many NV manuscripts end with the tale-cycle of Solomon (upto 1.13), leaving out the tale-cycle of Jesus (1.14), a feature which Sharif attributes to the antipathy of colonial-period scribes to the British and to Christian missionizing activities.290 The so-called Rasul Carita manuscripts,291 corresponding to Sharif’s second volume, usually begin with a cosmogonical section (2.1)

288 For a complete list of manuscripts of the NV, see Appendix One of this dissertation.
289 The numbers in parentheses refer to the NV outline provided above.
290 NV 2: Pariśiśṭa Kha, 692.
291 See discussion below about this designation provided by Sharif.
followed by the biography of the Prophet Muhammad from birth to death (2.2), which generally includes the ascension narrative (2.2.6).

Since Ahmad Sharif’s critical apparatus is not particularly transparent, two charts have been provided in Appendix Two, one identifying the manuscripts utilized by Sharif for volume one of the critical edition, and the other for those used for volume two. These charts visually map the correspondences between the manuscript folios and page numbers of the text of the critical edition. Sharif makes no attempt to explain his considerations in manuscript selection or hierarchization; nor is an effort made to create a stemma or explain what the historical or textual relationship is of one manuscript to another. Though Sharif claims to consult other manuscripts beyond the principal ones (each designated with a number), his critical edition does not specify where and in what manner these additional manuscripts are utilized.

The circulation of independent manuscripts of subsections of the NV initially led scholars such as Muhammad Enamul Haq, and others following him, to represent these as separate texts. On the basis of a passage in a particular manuscript, which describes the Šab-i Merāj and the NV as dui pustaka, “two books,” M. E. Haq considers the two to be separate texts. However, based on the variant reading provided in another manuscript, Sharif considers this to be a scribal error. There are several reasons why I support Ahmad Sharif’s editorial decision to consider these to be separate sections of a single text, the NV. First, authorial remarks even in the so-called Rasul Carita section identify it as the NV. Second, in the Bangla literary tradition, too, Saiyad Sultān is remembered as the author of the NV, rather than multiple, related texts. Mohāmmad Khān, Sultān’s chief disciple, refers to the NV as a single pāṅcālikā, a performed

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294 NV 2: 477, 480, 481, 482
295 Concerning how Saiyad Sultān and his NV are remembered in the Bangla literary tradition, see Chapter Eight.
metrical narrative. Third, the last lines of the critical edition of volume one of the NV intimate the contents of volume two: “Now listen to how Muhammad shall be born. Listening to these tales, adversity dissipates.” Picking up on this, the opening lines of the critical edition of volume two mention Sultan’s desire to “make known tales he has left half-told,” and recapitulate the author’s supplying a brief account of how Adam was created. On the one hand, this suggests narrative continuity from one book to the next, but it also suggests a certain degree of separation between the two texts, gesturing towards the possibility that the first book was circulated for a while, before the author continued composing his narrative for book two.

Related to this latter issue is the matter of the text’s structure and its relationship to manuscript transmission. Akin to manuscripts pertaining to volume one, those transmitting text corresponding to volume two also begin with invocatory verses to God and the Prophet, approximating compressed versions of the classical Persian hamd and na’t respectively, a tradition of vandana, salutations to the deity, familiar to the Bangla panchali. Though this invocation elaborates upon the cosmogony first laid out in part one, showing thematic and doctrinal continuity, it nonetheless creates for part two a discrete structural identity of its own, effectively bifurcating the NV into two books. In addition, volume one roughly parallels the medieval Islamic qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ genre, and volume two the sīra genre; these form discrete structural units pertaining to distinct genres, which also left their mark on the manner in which the NV came to be transcribed. These genres are outlined in Chapter Three.

297 ebe śuna yerāpe janmibā muhammadā | šunile se saba kathā khandibā āpada || NV 1: 935.
298 ardheka ye āchila kathā karimu pracāra | NV 2: 3.
299 Explain hamd and na’t.
300 See detailed discussion of these genres later in this chapter.
Beyond formal concerns, there may have been pragmatic ones that dictated such independent transmissions: one, the sheer convenience of copying, reading, performing, and handling smaller units of a lengthy, bulky text such as the NV; and second, the manner in which demotic sensibilities affected scribal production. It is possible, for example, that the pious and emotive nature of the subject matter and the relative brevity of the section on the Prophet’s last days and death led to the independent transmission of the Ophāt-i Rasul, the section of the NV of which the largest number of separate extant manuscripts are available. It is perhaps these very concerns that prompted Ālī Āhmad to critically edit the Ophāt-i Rasul, making it, in 1949, the first published edition of a section of the NV. Scribes who copied this section separately supplied their own invocations, two to four couplets in length, thereby providing it with a separate identity. Independent transmissions of sections of a single text are not unknown to the Bengali manuscript tradition: numerous manuscripts of discrete sections (khaṇḍa) or chapters (parva) of large popular works such as, for instance, Kṛttivāsa’s Rāmāyaṇa, Kāśīrāmadāsa’s Mahābhārata, Vṛndāvana Dāsa’s Caitanya Bhāgavata, and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s Caitanyacaritāmṛta were in wide circulation in Bengal.  

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302 This edition, though entitled Ophāt-i Rasul, begins with the lines yanukrame callisa sahara māri laila | eke 2 callisa sahara jurddha kaila || OR, 1, corresponding to NV 2: 473. This shows that some mss. designated by scribes as mss. of the Ophāt-i Rasul bore as many as 222 couplets before the lines, rasulera maneta hailā hābilāsa | šāhīda haiyā yāte ilāhira pāsal, which have come to be associated with the opening lines of the section on the Prophet’s death in the critical edition, itself probably based upon the emerging consensus arising from such manuscripts. NV 2: 497. OR, 24. This lack of consensus, in the manuscript tradition, of a defined beginning, within the corpus of manuscripts of the Ophāt-e Rasul, shows that there was textual continuity and overlap between various independent transmissions of sections of the Nabīvaṃśa, another argument that bolsters the fundamental unity of the text.
303 For instance, from the Ophāt-i Rasul, in the DCBM, 45, 46, 47 and NV 2, Pariśiṣṭa Ka, 928.
304 See, for instance, such mss. in Kumāra Šāratkumāra Rāya Bāhādura’s collection in Manīndra Mohana Caudhurī 1956, 5–19, and 38–41.
2.2.3.2 Sections and their designations

Related to the issues discussed above, some clarification with regard to editorial sub-titles is necessary. It is not readily transparent, for instance, how the designation “Rasul Carita” for volume two of the NV emerged. Early cataloguing attempts present a number of different designations for the section on the life of Muhammad. In its appendix, which lists names of authors and the titles of their works, one catalog, Puthi Paricititi, lists “Hajrat Muhammad Parva” as one of the volumes that constitutes the NV.305 In his introduction to the second volume of the NV, Sharif states that volume two is “Rasul Muhammad Carita.” In Sharif’s own private collection, at least one manuscript related to this section bore the designation Rasul Vijaya.306 Also, Ms. no. 55 of Kalamī Puthira Vivaraṇa, ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, and marked as a text that concerns the Prophet, has been categorized by Ālī Āhmād as “title unknown.”307 The single manuscript attributed to Saiyad Sultān in the library of the British Museum has been cataloged simply under the designation, “The Life of Muhammad;” no Bangla title has been provided. No consensus on naming this section emerges from these early cataloguing attempts, showing that the scribal tradition itself did not have a separate, stable designation for this section.

As noted above, it is rare to find complete and intact manuscripts of either of the two volumes of the NV. When otherwise complete, the first and the last folios are usually missing. Islamic Bangla manuscripts generally begin with an invocatory bismillāh (Beng. bichamillāhira rahamānira rahīma) and end with iti [title of text/section] samāpta, immediately followed by the scribal colophon or puspikā, which bears the scribe’s name, occasionally that of his patron, often the date and time of the completion of the act of copying, and the place where the scribe copied the text. No manuscript I have examined thus far, nor any of the manuscripts Sharif

305 PP, Pariśiṣṭa Ka, 658.
306 For further details of similar designations provided by other catalogers, see Appendix One.
307 BKPV, p. 7.
uses to critically edit this so-called Rasul Carita section,\footnote{NV 2, Pariśiṣṭa Ka, 692–696.} end with iti rasul carita samāpta. It has not been possible to scrutinize all extant manuscripts of the second volume of the NV. Sharif, however, mentions that after examining all manuscripts of the NV, he found that “other than the part on the carita-tale of Hazrat Muhammad, no other section of the NV bears an initial statement that alerts the reader to the beginning of a new volume [or section].”\footnote{Sharif [1972] 2006, 65. He also specifies that the beginning of the Śab-i Merāj section is not signaled by the introduction of a subtitle or heading. A change in metre is all that marks a change in the subject-matter. Ibid., 67-68. This is somewhat misleading as a few mss. of the Rasul Carita that I have examined bear a sub-heading to signal the opening of the Śab-i Merāj.} Thus it seems that he may have had access to a rare manuscript which bore an opening statement informing the reader of the beginning of book two of the NV. Based on this manuscript, and the lack of concordance between early designations provided by catalogers, it appears likely that Sharif himself supplied the generic designation Rasul Carita for the second volume of the NV without explicitly stating this to be the case, possibly for the purpose of streamlining the cataloguing of such manuscripts. He seems to have rejected the provisional title of Rasul Vijaya, perhaps to distinguish manuscripts ascribed to Sultān from those ascribed to Śekh Cānda, whose principal work is known as the Rasul Vijaya. For ease of identification in Appendix One, I continue to use Sharif’s designation of Rasul Carita when referring to manuscripts relating to volume two of the NV. However, structurally, the Nabīvaṃśa is treated in this dissertation as a unitary composition.

The titles of sub-sections in the critical edition are entirely editorial, Sharif’s paratextual attempts for the ease of the modern reader; the manuscripts very rarely contain any subtitles, but instead have sectional divisions demarcated by changes in meter, chanda, and musical modes, rāga (also indicated in the critical edition), which, in turn, signal a change in theme or
Like most medieval Bangla texts, the NV was written as a performative text. Chosen on account of their suitability to the mood appropriate to the theme, rāgas and chandas are specified for various sections of the NV.

2.2.3.3 Authorship

In this section, I argue that the NV was composed by Saiyad Sultān, a single author, in whose name authorial colophons are regularly spaced throughout the NV. What is presented here is only a preliminary foray into study of the manuscript tradition, as I have not been able to personally scrutinize all of the near 100 extant manuscripts of the NV. The large numbers of manuscripts I have examined thus far all point toward a general structural unity of organization, and transmit text with a shared doctrinal vision. Barring the issue of the occasional omission of the tale-cycle of Īsā, discussed above, Ahmad Sharif, in his capacity as critical editor, also does not report any significant disruption or major instabilities in the manuscript tradition. Further, the authorial voice that runs through the text, with its particular didactic and pedagogical concerns, is coherent: themes of identity formation, the marking of community boundaries, religious competition, conversion, proscription of idol worship, and the prescription of yoga are threads that run through the text, presenting a preacherly vision that is consistent. As will also be seen in the following chapter, the text maintains a consistent approach to translation as conversion.

Several attempts seem to have been made by the author to preempt interpolation. Short preludes that list upcoming narrative events as well as recapitulations of those that went before are provided at regular intervals throughout the text. These often occur at the end of

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310 Appendix Four provides a list of Sharif’s editorial subsections, with their translations, also noting the changes in meter and rāga.
311 NV 2: 481.
one narrative segment, such as the end of one tale-cycle of the prophets and the beginning of
another. Further, as will be seen below, the author simultaneously assumes a tradition of oral
performance and listening, but also a literate tradition of reading, transmission, and
preservation, which appears to be firmly in place by his time. One proleptic passage, best read
in the context of the discussion on literacy and Islamization in Chapter Three, specifically
anticipates scribal interpolation of the text and warns against it:

When one listens to these Qur’ānic matters,
all people should purify themselves by performing ablutions.
If you do not perform your ablutions, do not read/recite (paṛibā) the Nabī Vamśa.
Listen carefully to the tales of all the messengers.
While listening to these, do not talk of other matters.
If someone speaks, you shall tell him not to.
If you read/recite (paṛ) the hindi Nabī Vamśa without [performing] ablutions,
it will not be my fault if you drown in sin.
In writing [it] (lekhite), neither augment the syllables nor break them.
If an error is made in writing (lekhite), take pains to correct it.
Such that Allāh’s words may not become inaccurate,
write (lekhībā) with care, feeling fear at heart.
To the messenger Mohammad did the Lord tell
all the tales of the prophets who went before.
If you all should write (lekhile) such tales inaccurately,
it shall not be my fault if you fall into hell.
If you write (lekha) and read/recite (para) it accurately, you shall earn great virtue.
All sin shall be shattered; you shall proceed to paradise.\textsuperscript{312}

God told all the tales of the prophets to Muhammad, and Sultān presents himself as the
conveyor of these tales to the people of Bengal. It is impossible to reconstruct the exact maner
in which Sultān’s pāṅcālī was first recorded. It could have been written down by the author
himself, or sung or dictated, as this passage suggests, to one or more assiduous disciple-scribes.

In either case, it was composed with the idea of reaching a mostly illiterate rural population

\textsuperscript{312} ehi korānera kathā śune yei kṣaṇa | pavitra karibā oju kari sarvajana || aju nā kariyā nabī vamśa nā paṇībā |
rasula sabera kathā yattane śunibā || īna kathā nā kahibā ekathā śunite | keha kahile kathā kahibā nā kahite || vini
aju hindi vamśa paṛe yabe | mora doṣa nāhi pāpe majībeke tabe || lekhite aksara bārā-ṭūṭā nā lekhibā | lekhite
aśuddha halie yattane śudhibā || āḷārā vacana yena aśuddha nā hae | yatna kari lekhibā mane kari bhae || rasula
sabera kathā āṇeta gaṇiche | mohāmmada rasulerle prabhu jāṇīche || hena kathā tumhi sabe aśuddha lekhile | tāṭa
mora doṣa nāhi narake paṇīle || śuddha yadi lekha paṇa bahu punya pāḥbā | khaṇḍibā yathaka pāpa bhiste yāibā ||
NV I: 696.
through oral recitation and singing, very likely accompanied by instrumental music, performativ e features of texts still performed by Sufis and other Muslim groups of Bangladesh today. Without discounting the significance of such concerns to the author, or the specific performative features that imbue its literization, we also find that the privileging of writing as the choice means of textual preservation and transmission is noticeable.

Since Ahmad Sharif says little about the relationship of the manuscript tradition with the published text, some effort is made to explain this through three appendices to the present dissertation. Appendix Two, as mentioned earlier, provides a visual map of the manuscripts used by Sharif for the critical edition and their relationships to specific segments of the published text. Even though entire manuscripts of the two books are rare, based on the attempt made in Appendix One to match manuscript content with relevant portions of the text in the critical edition, the impression that emerges is that the text is fairly stable: the ability to locate specific verses from manuscripts within the published text, whether or not the concerned manuscript was used for the critical edition, makes a strong case for a more or less fixed text. This observation is further corroborated by the exercise carried out in Appendix Three to collate a sample from various manuscripts of the first fifty verses of volume two of the Nabīvaṃśa’s critical edition. These manuscripts were selected purely on the basis of their availability in digital format to this researcher. Two of these were used by Ahmad Sharif for the critical edition, while five others were not. The latter five have not been arranged in any preconceived hierarchy. At the risk of generalization from so small a sample size as this, some

313 Literature on Islamic song and performance traditions of East Bengal and Bangladesh is rare. A few exceptions are Dunham 1997; Jamil Ahmed 2001, and ibid., 2000.
314 The term is coined by Pollock (2006, 4) for “the breakthrough to writing.” See Chapter Three of this dissertation.
315 Pollock (1998a, 8–9) has argued that middle period texts are distinguished by their intimate connection with writing. These statements have to be read in the context of Pollock’s delineation of processes of vernacularization discussed in Chapter Three.
tentative observations can be made, which undoubtedly await future verification through a more extensive project of manuscript collation and editing, a project beyond the scope of the present dissertation. Despite the esoteric nature of the content of the first fifty verses, the text shows great stability throughout the seven manuscripts collated. Differences between manuscripts arise, not from bardic interpolation, but via scribal agency, much of which relates directly to the developing nature of the Bangla language, script, and grammar; its dialectal variations in the premodern period, especially associated with the aspiration of deaspirated consonants and vice versa; and the influence of pronunciation on orthography, as seen, for instance, in the conflation of ya with a, ya with ja, na with ṇa, ri with ṛ, or sa with śa. Ahmad Sharif’s critical edition elides these differences, standardizing orthography according to the conventions of modern Bangla, without recording the differences in their transmission. Other differences in transmission relate to scribal errors of omission and repetition, both resulting in metrical problems, or scribal creativity (perhaps inadvertent) in the case, for instance, of the substitution of synonyms.

The sample points to the following observable differences in the seven manuscripts:

a) Dialectal and orthographic variation, associated with regional differences in dialect and the developing nature of Bangla orthography (at the present stage of research, these are sometimes difficult to distinguish from corruptions): for instance, ādama saphi of the critical edition, v. 2, is yādama chaphi (E2), ādama saphi (D); muhammadera of the critical edition, v. 3, is mohāmadare (E2), muhammadera (B), mohāmmādera (C), muhammadera (D); agreta of v. 25 is yagreta (E2), agreta (A), ārgreta (B), agrate (D); prthivī of v. 33 is prthimi (E1), prthivi (E2), prirthivi (A), prthi (B), prthimvi (D), pritimvi (E); bhakṣaṇa of v. 33 is bhaikṣyaṇa (E1), bharkṣana (E2 and A), bhaikṣaṇa (B and E), bhaksyaṇa (E); parimāṇa of v. 34 is paramāṇa (E1 and D), parimāṇa (E2 and B),

316 Concerning the linguistic make-up of Chittagong’s dialect, see Haq [1935] 1991.
317 Concerning similar issues in the orthography of Brajabhāṣā manuscripts, see Bangha 2011, 149–150.
pramāṇa (A), paramāna (E); vrksera of v. 37 is vrksyera (E1), virksāra (E2), vrarkṣera (A), vrksera (B), vrksera (D); avirsāma of v. 40 is avisrāma (E1, E2, and D), abhisrāma (A), avisrāma (B); and sattara in v. 40 is sattera (E1), saittahara (E2), sarttara (A), and sattaura (D); srjyā in v. 50 manifests as a different verbal form, with the following variations: srjlā (E1), srjilā (E2), srjilā (A), srjilā (B), and srjila (D). Though these are all examples from separate manuscripts, a single manuscript may also exhibit variation in the spelling of a single word.

b) Changes in verbal forms, which occasionally change the tense: for example, kahila of v. 2 is kahiba (E2), kahibama (B and D), kahima (E); rahilenta of v. 38 is rahilenta (E1 and E2), rahileka (A, D, and E); rahiyyā in v. 39 is rahileka (E1 and E), rahiyyā (E2), and rahi (A).

c) Substitution of synonyms or near-equivalents: for instance, bhāvilā of v. 40 is sevilā (E1, E2, sivilā in B, and D), sevae (A); rahilenta of v. 38 is āchilenta (B); srjyā in v. 50 is rucilā (E).

d) Ellipsis of pādas between contiguous verses: the second pāda of the second of two contiguous verses replaces the second pāda of the verse before it, with loss of the intervening text and other modifications, especially to the end-rhyme and metre. For instance, take the following verse from the critical edition:

āhāda āhamada makāra bhina | ehi makāra madhye tribhuvana cina || 14
āhamada honte nūra kailā makāra | āhāda āhamada dui eka kalevara || 15

While stable in the other manuscripts, in B this becomes āhāda āhāmmada chila ekattara | na yāchila bhirṇa bhirṇa eka kalevara ||

E) copying errors, which result in unmetrical verses: for example, duplication (sarva rūpe ekarūpa ekarūpa chila śunya ṭhāma || v. 6, Ms. B; or tabe prabhu prabhu niraṅjana anādi nidhana || v. 25, B) or omission (jivārttamā paramārttamā hai ati | sei gharme srijana karila dui chuti || v. 22, B).

Of all seven manuscripts used for this sample, Ms. B exhibits the most scribal errors, resulting in unmetrical verses and other minor variations, while the other six are largely similar to the text of the critical edition.
Based on the apparent stability of the text in the manuscript tradition, along with other reasons delineated above, the author of the NV has been treated, for the purposes of this dissertation, as a single individual named Saiyad Sultān.

2.2.3.4 Manuscript distribution

That the Nabīvaṃśa was a popular text in the Chittagong and Comilla region is attested by the large numbers of manuscripts of its various sections collected from these regions.\(^{318}\) With a total of 46 manuscripts of various sections of the NV, the Munṣī Ābdul Karim collection of the Dhaka University Library contains the largest number of manuscripts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān in a single collection. The table below, excerpted from the comprehensive table of manuscripts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān provided in Appendix One below, draws attention to the distribution of his manuscripts in the most important archives of Islamic Bangla literature in Bangladesh, whose catalogs have been published:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE GIVEN BY CATALOGERS</th>
<th>AHMAD SHARIF COLLECTION IN THE DHAKA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES(^{319})</th>
<th>MUNṢĪ ĀBDUL KARIM COLLECTION IN THE DHAKA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES</th>
<th>BANGLA ACADEMY ARCHIVES</th>
<th>CHITTAGONG UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nabīvaṃśa(^{320})</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasul Carita</td>
<td>9 (including one cataloged under the designation Rasul Vijaya)</td>
<td>7 (at least)</td>
<td>9 (at least)</td>
<td>(\ldots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šab-i Merāj</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5(^{321})</td>
<td>7 (at least)</td>
<td>(\ldots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ophāt-i Rasul</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{318}\) See Appendix One for details of these manuscripts, and their provenance.

\(^{319}\) Since this collection was donated to the Dhaka University archives in January 2009, preliminary cataloging has been done, but no published catalog of this collection is yet available. I suspect that a few more manuscripts of works ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, which were not brought to my notice by the Dhaka University archives in summer 2009, may still be found in this collection.

\(^{320}\) At least three of these manuscripts in various collections have been wrongly cataloged. See Appendix One for details. To avoid confusion, however, the figures in the table above reflect the existing catalogs.

\(^{321}\) At least three of these have been misleadingly cataloged as Šab-i Merāj, based upon scribal designations. However, they should be re-cataloged, as suggested in Appendix One below, as Rasul Carita manuscripts. See Appendix One for details of these manuscripts listed under the title Šab-i Merāj.
To put these figures into context, manuscripts of Saiyad Sultān’s NV alone constitute roughly eight and one-half per cent of Munshi Ābdul Karim’s significant collection of Islamic Bangla manuscripts. Additionally, these constitute the highest number of manuscripts available of any single text in this collection, a close second being those of Ālāol’s Padmāvatī. Munshi Ābdul Karim’s collection also has the distinction of possessing the earliest dated manuscript of the NV. Currently cataloged as No. 487 Ms. 297, under the scribal title Šab-i Merāj, it bears the date 1122 maghī, equivalent to 1761 C.E. As mentioned in Appendix One below, it is advisable to re-catalog it, based upon its contents, as a manuscript of the Rasul Carita. A close second, also belonging to the same collection, is a manuscript of the Ophāt-i Rasul (DCBM No. 489, Ms. 299) dated to 1123 maghī or 1682 hijrī (corresponding to 1762 C.E.). The earliest dated manuscript (BAPP Bā. Bo. Puṃ. Naṃ. 210) which corresponds to volume one of the critical edition is 1207 B.Ś. (corresponding to 1800 C.E.). The most recent dated manuscript of any section of the NV (CV No. 60, Sam. 317) is one that contains the section of the Šab-i Merāj, and is dated to 1248 maghī (1887 C.E.), showing that manuscripts of the NV were copied well into the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Only three complete manuscripts of the lengthy first book of the NV are known. The first (Bā. Bo. Mu. Puṃ. Naṃ. 210), dated 1207 san/bānglā (1800 C.E.), albeit missing two intervening folios, has 213 folios in total, and is an example of a manuscript which omits the tale-cycle of Jesus. It is likely that this manuscript was collected from Comilla and donated to the Bangla Academy by ĀlīĀhmad.322 The second (Bā. Bo. Mu. Puṃ. Naṃ. 527), dated 1213 sāla (1806 C.E.), copied in Šākapurā, Patiya, Chittagong, is also in the possession of the Bangla Academy; it was

322 Concerning this manuscript, see Appendix One below.
gifted to this collection by Muhammad Enamul Haq. The manuscript contains 248 folios. The third complete manuscript is in the relatively unknown private collection of Muhammad Ishāq Caudhurī, son of a well-known manuscript collector of Chittagong, Ābdus Sāttār Caudhurī.

This beautifully copied, pristine manuscript, dated between 1204 and 1210 maghī (1843-1849 C.E.), contains 633 folios (with approximately 36 couplets per folio) and even includes a complete table of contents. The manuscript ends with the tale-cycle of Jesus.

The Ahmad Sharif collection of the Dhaka University Archives holds two complete Rasul Carita manuscripts, Ā.Ša. 71, dated 1169 maghī (1808 C.E.), and Ā.Ša. 287 Ka (designated as Rasul Vijaya), dated 1212 maghī (1851 C.E.), containing 165 and 271 folios respectively. The Bangla Academy archives has a third (Bā. E. Sa. Puṛi. Naṃ. 115/Sula 17/Rachul 5), dated 1231 maghī (1870 C.E.), with 172 folios.

It is certain that the Nabīvaṃśa enjoyed immense popularity in the Chittagong region, and to a lesser extent in the Comilla region, where, as attested by the presence of larger numbers of manuscripts of Śekh Cānda’s Rasul Vijaya, the latter text was in greater demand. Nonetheless, it would be premature in the current state of the field to state with any confidence that manuscripts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān did not circulate farther afield. At least one, as mentioned in Appendix One below, has been found by a collector in Barisāl. Manuscript collection in Bengal has been an unsystematic, idiosyncratic endeavour, with Islamic Bangla

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323 I have been unable to examine these two manuscripts in the Bangla Academy archives. As for the second, while the catalog states that it is a complete manuscript, it is necessary to verify whether there are sections omitted by the scribe.

324 Concerning Ābdus Sāttār Caudhurī, who also cataloged the manuscripts in the Chittagong University Library, see Prācīna Pumthi-Pāṇḍalipi-Saṃgrāhaka o Gaveśaka Ābdus Sāttār Caudhurī: Smārakagrantha.

325 I am grateful to Muhammad Ishāq Caudhurī for allowing me to personally examine this manuscript and to take digital photographs of a few pages, enabling me to thus catalog this previously unknown manuscript. See Appendix One.

326 Appendix One below shows that three manuscripts in the Ahmad Sharif collection have been cataloged as “complete.” One of these (Ā.Ša. 87/Ka), however, seems to be wrongly cataloged as such. See Appendix One for details.

327 This manuscript awaits personal examination.

328 See BKPV.
manuscripts being often ignored by short-sighted Hindu collectors with firm sectarian affiliations. Furthermore, though the history of manuscript collection has gone largely unrecorded, at least one major collection is known to have been entirely lost during the Partition of Bengal. Solely dependent on the personal funds and zeal of a few enthusiastic private collectors, who eventually donated to Bangladesh’s public institutions their priceless collections—gathered, as in the case of Munšī Ābdul Karim, at the cost of great financial and personal hardship—it is important to note that their devoted efforts, immense and commendable as they are, were, of necessity, region-specific: for instance, Ālī Āḥmad collected most of his manuscripts from the Comilla region where he lived, while Munšī Ābdul Karim focused upon his region of Chittagong. As the editor of the Bangla Academy manuscript catalog, Sukumār Viśvās, admits, little systematic effort so far has been made by Bangladeshi public institutions to carry out a nation-wide search for manuscripts. The Islamic Bangla manuscripts in the Bangla Academy archives, which number some 852, have been mostly collected from the Comilla district (most of these manuscripts being donated by Ālī Āḥmad), and to a lesser extent from the Rangpur district, with some representation of manuscripts from Chittagong, Dhaka, Bagura, Rajshahi, and Noakhali. Thus, it is not possible to make any definitive statements about the precise geographical distribution of Saiyad Sultān’s manuscripts, other than to emphasize the text’s wide circulation in Chittagong, and to a lesser degree in Comilla.

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329 Hindu collectors tended to focus on collecting manuscripts of Sanskrit and Bangla texts pertaining to “Hindu” themes, and would avoid collecting Islamic Bangla manuscripts, though these were probably available in the same geographic area.

330 In an important article, Ālī Āḥmad (1980, 9–10), the then supervisor of the Manuscript Section of the Dhaka University Library, records the history of numerous manuscript collections in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Herein he documents the tragic dissolution, after the partition of Bengal, of the entire collection of manuscripts and ancient sculptures of the Đhākā Sāhitya Pariṣad. Apart from the lone sculpture of the Naṭēśvara of Cāndinā, now housed in the Đhākā Museum, none of the other national treasures that once constituted this collection can be traced.

331 It is unfortunate that no mention is made in the Bangla Academy catalog of Ālī Āḥmad’s generous gift, an issue that would have gone completely unrecorded but for his own humble documentation of the fact in the above article. Ibid. 1980, 10.

332 Sukumāra Viśvāsa 1995, “fourteen.”
We now turn to a discussion of the lesser-known texts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān.

2.3 Jñāna Cautiśā, “The Thirty-Four Consonants of Knowledge”

Originally a rhetorical device used in Sanskrit literature, the Bangla cautriśā/cautiśā, deriving from the Sanskrit catuṣṭriṅsatikā or cautiśā, is an alphabetical acrostic based on the 34 (cautiśa) consonants of the Sanskrit/Bangla alphabet, beginning with ka and ending with kṣa, which sequentially order couplets on the particular poetic theme under consideration. Though a couple of examples of the acrostic are to be found in Sanskrit literature, the cautiśās, like the bāramāsā, became a major genre of Apabhramṣa poetry. Though technically pertaining to the thirty-four consonants, in middle Bangla cautiśās the specific alphabets which constitute the sequence vary, sometimes including vowels. Additionally, due to the developing nature of orthography witnessed in premodern Islamic Bangla manuscripts, letters bearing phonetic similarity, such as ſa-sa, are often substituted for each other. While Saiyad Sultān’s Jñāna Cautiśā, “The Thirty-Four Consonants of Knowledge,” as my translation of the title suggests, employs consonants alone, the first line beginning with ka, and the last with kṣa, more than one couplet is dedicated to a particular consonant, making Saiyad Sultān’s Jñāna

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333 For a complete list of mss. of the Jñāna Cautiśā, see Appendix One.
334 Alphabetical acrostics are found in many ancient and medieval literary traditions. For the use of such a device in Hebrew literature, see Noegel and Wheeler 2002, 9. For Manichaean hymns in Parthian and Middle Persian based on the Semitic alphabet, see McLachlan et al. 2011. See also Brogan 1993, 8.
335 The twelfth-century poet Govardhana, Jayadeva’s colleague at the court of Lakṣmanasena, wrote his Āryasaptasati, seven hundred verses on the theme of love, as an akṣaramālākāvya, alphabetically arranging the verses, into groups by their initial phonemes, from a to kṣa. I am grateful to Harunaga Isaacson for providing me with this reference. Personal correspondence, August 25, 2010. See also Janki 1987, 234. A Sanskrit cautiśā or catuṣṭriṅsatikā is also found in the 13th-century Bhaddharmā Purāṇa of Bengal. Āśutoṣa Bhaṭṭācārya 1958, 77.
336 Dimock et al. 1974, 20–21. Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī, the author of the Paḍmāvar, among other works, also composed an acrostic, the Akhrāvat, on the beliefs of the Maḥdavī of Jaunpur. Behl and Weightman 2000, xvii.
337 Orientalist scholars such as J. F. Blumhardt have suggested that this was a feature of Islamic Bangla texts, CBM Or. 5349.
Cautīśā 78 couplets in length.\footnote{Cf. Sharif 2008, 2: 328.} Also extant is a text of the same name written by Bālaka Phakir, the disciple of Āli Rajā, a well-known eighteenth-century Sufi author.\footnote{BAPP, Jñāna Cautīśā, Bā. E. Sa. Puṃ. Nam: 263/Bālaka Phakira/Jñāna Cautīśā, 224.}

Serving as a mnemonic aid in a strongly oral tradition, whether bardic or esoteric, the cautīśā has been adapted by medieval Bengali writers to various regional genres. In maṅgala literature, the cautīśā can take the form of an encomium (stutikāvya) recited by the imperiled hero to the goddess whose protection he seeks.\footnote{Āśutoṣa Bhaṭṭācārya 1958, 76.} Daulat Ujīr Bahrām Khān in Laylī-Majnu\footnote{Sharif 2008, 2: 194.} and Śekh Phayjullāh in Jaynabera Cautīśā\footnote{Ibid., 284.} have both employed it for the bāramāṣī, a lyrical pāṅcālī genre\footnote{For a description of the pāṅcālī, see below.} which laments the twelve months (bāramāṣa) of separation of the nāyikā, the classical heroine, from her lover. In the hands of our purported author, the cautīśā is essentially a stotra, a paean, to esoteric knowledge.

The invocatory verses of the Jñāna Cautīśā propitiate the purāṇa puruṣa, the primordial being, one who is purportedly beyond the powers of perception of Brahmā, Indra, and even Śiva. Having made obeisance to the guru, who bequeathed him the “treasure of knowledge” (jñānera sampada), and to his parents, the author proceeds to pronounce the thirty-four consonants of knowledge. The first three couplets begin with the word āñji, thereby continuing his invocation of the divine. Āñji has two important meanings, both of which are used conjointly in this text. As an adjective, it means “primordial, primeval, first.” As a noun, it means an auspicious sign representing God’s name, in appearance identical with the Bangla numeral 7, by which copyists in the medieval period would begin the enterprise of transcribing
By citing the āñji, Sultān thus mirrors scribal practice within the literary structure of the cautiśā itself. Furthermore, when one considers the traditional interconnections, whether in Sanskrit grammatical treatises, tantric cosmogonical literature, or even in the NV between the transcendent word and creation, between the varṇamālā, (“the garland of letters”) or akṣaramālā (“the garland of imperishable phonemes”), cosmogony, and epistemology (specifically scriptural revelation), use of the cautiśā for a short treatise on mystical knowledge makes the text itself a literary embodiment of the cosmic order it seeks to convey. It is this context that also gives meaning to the lines:

This supreme principle is āñji, of shape formless.
From the seeds of the āñji tree spread the imperishable letters of the alphabet. [ā]|... 7
Through the āñji, the letters of the cautiśā exist. [ā]|... 8

The cautiśā’s mnemonic form inscribes memory through orality, the word-of-mouth transmission of a text from master to disciple. It is composed of pithy couplets on the following subjects: the body and its spiritual purification, śuddhi (vv. 10-12, 32, 36, 38-39, 66); the supreme principle as characterized by coincidentia oppositorum (vv. 13, 15, 63, 64, 73); the glories of the unkāra, the letter u, (vv. 18-19, 31, 32); unification of the Self with the supreme principle (vv. 20, 59-60, 75); recognition of the signs of the supreme principle (v. 21a); the importance of mental concentration (vv. 21b, 35, 42, 60, 75); the inseparability of the body, kāyā, from its shadow, chāyā (vv. 22-23); the existence of the formless lord in the microcosm (vv. 24-25, 40-41, 43, 49, 61, 70); the presence of the self, āttamā, within the body (v. 33); action, inertia, and inaction (vv. 26-27, 35, 74); Dharma as the goal of dhyāna, meditation (vv. 47-48); a Nāthist cosmogony (vv. 344 Cf. Appendix One of this dissertation. Concerning the meanings of āñji, see Kāium and Sultānā 2007, s.v. “āñji.
346 See, for instance, such connections traced in the Śaiva tantric treatise, the Ajitāgama. Gonda 1977, 195.
347 āñji se parama tattva nairāpta ākāra āñji vrksa vijā honte akṣara pracāra āñji honte cautiśā ye akṣara vidita Jñāna Cautiśā attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 661.
50-54); the Nāthist enlightenment experience (vv. 55-56, 70); the relationship of the disciple with the special guru (vv. 57-58, 69, 71); death (v. 62); control of the breath and bodily immortality (vv. 18, 67-68); and, finally, the importance of forbearance, kṣemā, penance, tapa, and constant recitation of the name, japa (vv. 76-77).

Although structured around the central theme of mystical knowledge, the epigrammatic couplets seem to leap abruptly from one idea to the next, familiar ideas often resurfacing in newer forms as the text develops. On a cursory reading, the disjointed nature of the verses gives the appearance that form, i.e. alphabetical ordering, is privileged over thematic development and the development of bhāva, aesthetic pleasure. In this sense, the cautiśā genre has been described by literary historians, such as Ahmad Sharif, as a kṛtrimatāduśta prāṇahīna racanā, “a lifeless composition, marred by artificiality.”348 However, it is difficult to dismiss the Jñāna Cautiśā entirely as such, since its associative concatenation of ideas and deepening, Nāthist inner landscape have the cumulative effect of augmenting the multivalence and subtlety of meaning. As illustration, take the theme of the disciple’s relationship with the special (viśeṣa) guru. Verses 57 and 58, which begin with the letter bha, provide instructions on the disciple’s appropriate behavior towards the guru:

Supplicating and entreatying the special guru, [bhā] ([for] only on worshipping the guru will he give instruction), [bhā] 57

worship the guru’s feet, taking them to be one’s own. [bhā]
He alone is the essential guru whose utterance dispels delusion. [bhā] 58349

Eleven verses later, in verses beginning with the consonant sa and śa (often used interchangeably in middle Bangla texts), this exoteric guru-śiṣya relationship is transmuted

349 Verse numbering here and below mine. bhakati minati kariguruta viśeṣa | bhakti kaile guru tabe kahiba uddeśa || bhajaha guruura pada bujhi āpanāra | bhrama bhāṅgi yei kahe sei guru sāra || Jñāna Cautiśā attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 665.
onto an esoteric inner landscape where disciple and master are assigned specific cakras in the
Nāthist body cosmology. We are told:

The guru dwells in the thousand-petalled [one], the disciple in the hundred-petalled. | sa |
Piercing the six cakras, search within this. | sa | 69

In the verses beginning with sa, two verses down, the practitioner is instructed in further
technicalities concerning the regulation of the sense organs, which are disciples of the disciple,
all of whose functions are ultimately controlled by the perfect guru:

Know that the ears, the nose, and sight (diṭha) are the three disciples. | sa |
Energy (sakti), semen (bindu), volition (icchā), and speech (vākyā) are controlled by the
guru. | sa | 71

Thus, threading through the text for multiple verses on a single theme, one observes that each
new verse unfolds a deeper dimension of the theme, expressed in a vocabulary that often
becomes increasingly technical. It is this multidimensional crisscrossing of thematic skeins, not
always transparent to the understanding, that creates layered veils of meaning in the Jñāna
Cautiśā.

2.4 Jñāna Pradīpa, “The Lamp of Knowledge” 353

As a Sufi practice manual, the Jñāna Pradīpa, “Lamp of Knowledge,” provides a window into
the doctrines and practices of premodern Sufis of Bengal. It stands alongside Šekh Cānda’s twin
texts, Haragaurīśamvāda and Talīnbmā, Ābdūl Hākim’s Čārī Mokāmera Bheda, the anonymous

350 Šiṣa I have construed as šīṣya.
351 sahasra daleta guru šatadale šiṣa | śaṭacakra bhediyā tāte karaha uddeśa || Jñāna Cautiśā attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 666.
352 śruti nāśā diṭhe jāna šiṣya haye tina | sakti bindu icchā vākyā gurura adhīna || Ibid., 666.
353 For a comprehensive list of all mss. of the Jñāna Pradīpa, see Appendix One.
Yogakalandara, and Šekh Jāhid’s Ādya Paricaya, among others. A text of the same name written by Ḥājī Mohāmmad also exists. David Cashin situates historically texts such as the Jñāna Pradīpa and the Jñāna Cautiśā, which emphasize markedly Nāthist practices, within an early stratum of Sufi yoga texts, while he argues that a Sahajīyā Vaishnava orientation is discernible in texts more regularly from the eighteenth-century onwards. The invocatory verses of the Jñāna Pradīpa, as distinct from the Jñāna Cautiśā, are unmistakably Islamic. These pay tribute to the lord (prabhu) who created the 18,000 worlds (ālam), addressing him as paravādīgar (Pers. parvardagār), one who nourishes and protects the world, “who, without hands, bears the entire material world (saṃsāra).” He then pays obeisance to the Prophet Muhammad (Mustaphā Paygāmbar) by whose grace “one could eventually evade culpability on the Day of Reckoning.”

The text sets out to describe the characteristics of the nine rasas of the path of the darveśa, who is described as “one who serves the lord (prabhu), who [in turn] bestows grace (raham, Ar. raham) upon his servant (bāndā; Pers. banda).” After providing an outline of conceptions (vicāra) of darveśī (the path of the darveša), the nine rasas are delineated as follows: first, the worship of God (khodāra ebādat, from Pers. khvudā and Ar. ‘ibāda); second, conceptions of the body (tana); third, the philosophical principles (tattva); fourth, conceptions of religion (dīn); fifth, the repetition (jikir, Pers. zikr) of the syllable om (oṃkāra); sixth, the locus of procreative

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537 prathame prabhura nāma kari kare smaraṇa | āṭhāra hājāra ālam yāhāra sṛjana || kseme aparādha diyā paravardīgarā | vini haste dhari āche sakala saṃsāra || Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 673.

538 yatana kari dhari rasula dui pāe | ākhere erāibā yadi hisābēra ḍāe || Ibīd., 673. In imitation of classical Persian poetical works, Islamic Bangla texts begin with distilled forms of the Persian hamd and na‘t, encomiums to God and the Prophet respectively, which in these texts can often be condensed to a couplet each in their praise.

539 Cf. Cashin 1995, Chapter Six, on rasa in premodern Bangla Sufi texts.

540 darveśī jānae yebā prabhuka sevāe | se bāndāra prati prabhu rahama karāe || Ibīd., 673.
fluid (bindu); seventh, the recognition of the self (ātmā); eighth, the philosophical principle of Brahma; and ninth, the process. 361

The four stages of the Sufi path, mañjils (Ar. manzil)—śarīyat (Ar. sharīʿa), tarikat (Ar. ṭariqa), hakikat (Ar. haqīqa), and māraphat (Ar. maʿrifa)—and their corresponding stations, mokāms (Ar. mukām)—nāsūt, malakuta, jabarut, and lāhut—are next laid out. 362 The śarīyat mañjil is the basis of the spiritual path, enjoining strict adherence to Islamic orthopraxy: practising the five pillars of the faith; distinguishing between hālāl (Ar. ḥalāl) and hārām (Ar. ḥarām), and between jāta (literally “caste,” probably referring to Muslim) and ajāta (non-Muslim); discrimination between the things that belong to self and those which belong to others; keeping chaste and pure (pākijā, Pers. pākīza); and finally, maintaining belief in the superiority of one’s religion. The aspirant must turn away from the worldly web of māyā in tarikat mañjil; lust (kāma), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), and infatuation (moha) are to be brought under control. Hunger (kṣudhā), thirst (trṣṇā), sleep (nidrā), and lethargy (ālasya) are to be destroyed in the next stage, hakikat mañjil. 363 The practitioner is taught, in the final stage of māraphat mañjil, to carefully cleave the lao pharāmuha, “the tablet of oblivion.” 364 Having understood these philosophical principles, the

361 Ibid., 574.
362 Ibid., 575. Concerning a similar delineation of the four stages of the Sufi path in Javanese literature, see Ricci 2006, 289.
363 Cf. thelā mārī paṅca vairī māraha satvara | thānjita haib haibatva naib naocara || Jīnā Cauṭiṣā attributed to Saiyad Sultān, v. 32: 663, and lobha moha kāma krodha niidrāe vaariyā | lokācāra madhye raha adharmā tejiyā || v. 66: 665. “Shoving aside the five enemies, 363 slay them swiftly. [thā] In [its proper] place, the principle will emerge in plain view. [thā]” 32; and “Abandoning greed, infatuation (moha), sensuality (kāma), anger, and drowsiness (niidrā) [la]/lā/ Remain within worldly transactions, lokācāra, giving up unrighteousness. [lā]” 66. Translation mine.
364 Lao pharāmuha is obscure. I propose, below, that it is probably the Bangla form of the Arabic, lawḥ, meaning “tablet” (Hans Wehr, p. 1035), though it also phonetically resembles the Persian lau’ (from the Arabic lau’), which can be translated as “the ardour, or burning pain of love” (Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “lau’”). Pharāmuha does not have a direct Persian or Arabic equivalent. The closest linguistic possibility is farāmūsh/farāmush in Persian, which means “forgotten; forgetfulness” (Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “farāmush”). The term could then be translated as “the tablet of oblivion.” The word, farāmush, or some variant thereof, was not unfamiliar to Muslim Bengali authors. An Islamic Bangla cosmogonical treatise, for instance, by the eighteenth-century poet Ābdul Karim Khondkāra is entitled Nūr Pharāmiṣā Nāmā, “The Chronicle of the Light of Oblivion.” DCBM, 236–237. A variant reading in one of the manuscripts of
Jñāna Pradīpa promises that the aspirant would “surely encounter his own self,” for Allāh’s grace (raham) lies within the appropriate service of these four mañjils.365

The text is, henceforth, framed as a colloquy on the attainment of immortality between two interlocutors, whose identities transform as the exposition proceeds. In keeping with the standard prologues of Śaiva tantric literature, both in Sanskrit366 and Bangla,367 the questions are first put forth by Pārvatī to Jñānī Rāe, Wise King, most likely referring here to Śiva, her consort and traditional partner in conversation.368 This dialogic pair abruptly transforms into Ālī and the Prophet; the latter is first referred to as guru,369 and later nabī,370 these designations providing the only transition to this narrative non sequitur. Like the NV, the text is a good example of Eaton’s phase of displacement, and is consistent with the NV’s entextualization of translation as conversion, discussed in Chapter Three (3.5).

365 This section is summarized from Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 576–577.
366 See, for instance, the Netra Tantra, the Śiva Saṁhitā, or in stotra literature, Gonda 1977, 207, 223, and 250.
368 Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 589–590.
369 Ibid., 592.
370 Ibid., 593.
The preliminary outline set forth by the author now opens up in accordionlike fashion into a range of topics that do not necessarily strictly adhere to the initial “table of contents.” Further manuscript research is needed to verify whether such discrete topics were interpolated as the text passed from one practitioner to another or whether the text was fairly stable in its various manuscript versions. To provide a sense of the range of the text’s concerns, what follows is a sequential list of topics as these appear in the critical edition: the 18 mokāms (literally “stations,” interpreted in this context as “elements”) that comprise the human body;\(^{371}\) the changing positions of the mind in the body and their psycho-physiological effects;\(^{372}\) the characteristics and functions of the five nāḍīs, subtle energy channels (इंगला, पिंगला, सुषम्ना, सीत्रा, and त्रिकोणा);\(^{373}\) the philosophical principle of śūnya;\(^{374}\) the glories of the ancient puruṣa;\(^{375}\) a theory of procreation and the development of the foetus;\(^{376}\) propitious times during the female menstrual cycle for sexual intercourse, signs of pregnancy, and the methods to ensure the specific gender of a child;\(^{377}\) the method of prognostication of the character of an infant based upon the date of birth in the lunar calendar;\(^{378}\) how to avoid the spontaneous abortion of the foetus;\(^{379}\) mapping of the astrological signs (यासी) onto the cakras,\(^{380}\) cosmic

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\(^{371}\) Ibid., 579.
\(^{372}\) Ibid., 584–586.
\(^{373}\) Ibid., 590–91. See also ibid., 622, for a complete list of the standard set of 10 nāḍīs.
\(^{374}\) Ibid., 600.
\(^{375}\) Ibid., 606. Cf. प्राधान प्राणामि तत्त्व पुरुष राना / ब्रह्म इत्यं यायं कालां सांहाणी / माहेश ब्रह्मियां आन्तः न पाला यार।
\(^{376}\) Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 607–8.
\(^{377}\) Ibid., 609–11.
\(^{378}\) Ibid., 612–614.
\(^{379}\) Ibid., 614–16.
geographies and seasonal time-cycles onto the body; the nature of the vital airs (vāyu) and their relation to the position of the bodily moons (candra), nāḍīs, and cakras; esoteric formulae; prognostication (śubhāśubha laksana) based on a study of the activity of specific vāyus in the body, “bound”/held yogic postures (bandhas) and yogic gestures (mudrās) and their specific benefits; the backbone (merudanḍa) and the specific effects of piercing, through spiritual effort, each of the thirty vertebrae; meditation on the omkāra and its Sufi visualizations; the dimensions of the body; the visualization of Nirañjana in the heart-lotus (hrdāe kamala); signs of imminent death; methods of prognosticating the future; and finally, the principle of kāma and the position of the four bodily moons throughout the lunar cycle. This list highlights the importance placed within this doctrinal and ritual system on theories of birth and procreation, demonstrating these to be at least as significant as the various yogic processes that lead the male practitioner, the darveṣa, to immortality, the conquest of death.

Three sections, which shed light on premodern Bengali Sufi devotional traditions and specific visualizations of the deity, are of particular interest. Reminiscent of Bangla verses on the greatness of the guru as conduit to liberation, Ālī (Ar. 'Alī) is represented, in the section Śūnya Tattva, “The Principles of the Void,” as beseeching the Prophet to lead him across the sea.
of transmigratory existence (bhava sāgarā). This sentiment anticipates the later confident recasting of the figure of the Prophet as well as the Bengali Sufi pīr, in popular Islamic Bangla devotional poetry and song, composed to this day in Bangladesh, in the mould of the tantric guru, and the deployment of traditional tropes, such as that of a boat’s helmsman (kaṇḍahāra), to describe the spiritually adept and compassionate figures of the Prophet of Islam and his pīrs, who steer their disciples across the choppy waters of existence. The Prophet is further beseeched by Ālī to teach him the secrets of incinerating his internal enemies (ripus) such that his deathless body should never require cremation. The climactic moment is reached when, on Ālī’s entreaty, the Prophet gives him a glimpse of the Untainted Lord (Prabhu Nirañjana)—a moment of truth that echoes Kṛṣṇa’s theophany in the Bhagavad-Gītā: Ālī is bedazzled by a supernal effulgence that resembles “crores and crores of suns.” Having thus understood the philosophical principle of the messenger (rasul tattva), Ālī seats himself in order to perform meditation, dheyāna. Through this rare, devotional passage, the Prophet is represented not only as the perfect master capable of bestowing enlightenment on his disciples at will, but is transtextually cast in Kṛṣṇa’s likeness, as one who reveals his cosmic form to his beloved protégé.

The unique visualization techniques taught in each of the next two sequential sections, Dhyāna Tattva, “The Principles of Ideation,” and Caurāśī Āṅgula Parimita Deha, “The Body, Eighty-Four Finger-Widths in Measure,” make these the distinctive Sufi core of the text. The first unit presents a process of incantation of the tripartite mantric form of the oṅkāra, whose ā evokes

394 Ibid., 601–2. See also Padāvalī 10 ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, discussed below.
395 Concerning a similar trope of the helmsman (kaṇḍārī) being employed for the murshid in the poems written by Dīnhīna, a modern Sylhetee pīr, see, for instance, Dīnhīna Racanāvalī, Song no. 64, 100. Concerning the Prophet as perfect faqīr in the NV, see Chapter Seven of this dissertation.
396 Jñāna Pradīpa ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, 601–2.
397 Ibid., 602.
398 Cf. the treatment of Kṛṣṇa in the Account of Hari of the NV, discussed in Chapter Six.
the visualization of the white-colored Father Ādam (Adam), that of Nirañjana, who “dwells in the breath,” and Muhammad’s white form, all of which conjointly produce a visualization of the supreme light (parama juti). The following section shows how special yogic processes of incantation and visualization working together with the control of the breath in specific energy channels (nāḍī) are enjoined to invoke each deity:

Sixteen times, fill the idā energy channel with wind.
In the process of filling it, meditate upon Ādam.
In the process of meditating, Ādam takes embodied shape.
Bees appear when the heavens break into rain.
Proceed then to squeeze the piṇgalā thirty-two times.
In the process of exhaling, compress it into the spinal column.
In a state of kumbhaka, hold the breath for sixty-four counts.
In the process of meditating, focus the mind on meditation upon the messenger.
In the process of incanting and ideating, the messenger will take shape.
The letters of the Yajurveda emerge in cosmic space (antarikṣa).
Exhale into the piṇgalā thirty-two times.
In the process of exhalation, focus the mind on the spinal column.
On piercing the sun, the moon, and so forth, letters emerge to provide proof of all these various forms (prakāra).
Cogitating [thus] in the three watches does yoga attain fulfillment.
Gradually, in this manner, should one make spiritual effort.
In order to carefully [evoke] the three forms of the oṃkāra, once again focus on the piṇgalā while filling it with air.

A treatise on esoteric knowledge, the Jñāna Pradīpa teaches in distinctly Nāthist vocabulary that the supreme knowledge (parama jñāna) of the lord can be achieved through the realization of the supreme void (parama śūnya) within the supremely radiant ādyāśakti in the sahasra dala, thousand-petalled one. Despite this doctrinal position, the following visualization technique will show, as did our earlier analysis of the lao pharāmuha, that it is the center of the heart, in

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399 Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 641. Concerning transtextuality, see below.
400 jala ākāše bhramara udae || battisa piṅgalāre kaśibāre cala || recite recite se merute dība mala || kumbhake causeṭṭi bāra kariba dhāraṇa || dhyāīte dhyāite rasula dhyāine dība mana || dharite dharite rasula ākāra pāiba lae || antarikṣe yajurveda aksara udae || battisa bāra piṅgalāre kariba recana || recite recite merudandē dība mana || candra sārya ādi bhede aksara udae || pramāṇa karate sei esaba prakārāe || tina kāle vicārile hae yoga sāra || krame krame ei rāpe sādhana karibārā || tina prakāre oṃkāra karite yatana || punarapi pūri bāu piṅgalāta mana || Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 641–42.
401 Ibid., 627.
contrast to the *sahasrāra cakra*, which is elevated to the highest biocosmological level of Sufi meditation (*dhyāna*). The section subtitled Caurāśī Āṅgula Parimita Deha, “The Body, Eighty-Four Finger-Widths in Measure,” prescribes a visualization of Nirañjana in the locus of the heart:

Within the heart-lotus is the Lord Nirañjana.  
Ever know that he is lotus-eyed.\(^402\)  
He wears a garment of the moon adorned with the constellations.  
Sandals (*pādukā*) adorn both feet.  
His waist is decorated with a beautiful loin-cloth.  
On his head, a diadem bedecked with a peacock feather.  
A lotus and jasmine garland adorns [him] down to the knees.\(^403\)  
The lustre of new clouds, the dazzle of lightning.  
Upon his neck a garland like lightning, as though Sureśvarī’s waters had fallen from Niīla.\(^404\)  
Both ears are adorned with female vultures.\(^405\)  
His face is as beautiful as the full moon.  
In this manner, meditate (*dhyāna karā*) [upon him] in the heart-lotus.  
Mental confusion shall be dispelled; pure knowledge shall be born.\(^406\)

Whereas Nirañjana’s description bears some resemblance to the iconography of Kr̥ṣṇa, who is traditionally described as possessing the color of new clouds, as wearing a garland of lotuses and the *dhaś-cūra*, the loin-cloth and the peacock-feather-adorned diadem,\(^407\) other unique iconographic elements combine to create a visualization of Nirañjana quite distinct from any

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\(^402\) *Kamala-locana* or *padma-āṇīkhi* is an epithet for Kr̥ṣṇa and Rāma. Bandyopādhyāya 1996, s.v. *padma-āṇīkhi*.

\(^403\) *Lambita* in the phrase *ājānulambita* suggests it is probably a garland.

\(^404\) While Sureśvarī is usually an epithet for Pārvati (Gaurī), there seems to be a conflation in Bengali folk literature between Gaurī and Gaṅgā. See, for instance, such a conflation in Dāneśā Kāji’s myth of the descent of the musical modes from the realm of the gods to that of mortals. Madhyayugera Rāga Tālanāmā, 11. While Niīla is here an epithet for Śiva, Sureśvarī is an epithet for Gaṅgā, who, in the iconography of Śiva, is represented as falling from his matted locks.

\(^405\) His ears were probably adorned with earrings in the form of female vultures.

\(^406\) *hrdāe-kamala madhye prabhu nirañjana | anuksaṇa prabhujäna kamala locana || naksatra śobhita śaśi vastra paridhāna | dui pāo śobhae pādukā nirmāṇa || kati bhāge śobhā kare vicitra dhārā | māthāe mayura puccha khacita cūra || ājānulambita śobhae padma mālāi || navīna meghera teja vidyutera jyoti || kaṃṭhe śobhā kare yena vijalīra hāra || niīla prapāta yena sureśvarī dhāra || dui karnā śobhā kare grdhinī ākāra || mukha śobhākāra yena pūrna śaśadāra || ehimate hṛda padme karibha dhyāna || dūra haiba mana dhāndhā jambīra siddha jñāna || jñāna Pradīpa* attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 645–46.

\(^407\) *Dhāra-cūra*, loin-cloth and diadem, are part of the iconography of Kr̥ṣṇa. Bandyopādhyāya 1996, s.v. “*dharā-cūra*."

other known forms of Hindu deities.

Throughout the latter half of the Jñāna Pradīpa, Sultān pays homage to his guru, Śāh Hosen.408 The repeated invocation of the guru through the bhanitās (authorial colophons) is accompanied by a simultaneous fading out, in the latter half of the text, of the mention of Ālī and the Prophet as interlocutors. Thus, the archetypal relationship between master and disciple first expressed in the Jñāna Pradīpa in the Śiva-Pārватī relationship, then in that of Muhammad and Ālī, now acquires a familiar chronotopic dimension in the Sultān-Śāh Hosen alliance, while underscoring the dual Sufi-Nātha genealogy of this association. In this context, it is also relevant to note that the tantric term, guru, continues to be used as an appellation for the Sufi master in the medieval Bangla Islamic tradition.

The literary historians Muhammad Enamul Haq and Ahmad Sharif have both attributed the Jñāna Cautiśā and the Jñāna Pradīpa to the author of the NV. While I argue for the NV being written by a single author, various possibilities exist for the authorship of these and other works ascribed to Sultān. Internal evidence from the NV, and evidence from within the Islamic Bangla literary tradition, as we have seen, support the idea that Sultān was a pīr; additionally, the NV emphasizes the practice of yoga for distinctly Islamic ends. This lends credence to the possibility of the original author of the NV having composed texts such as the Jñāna Cautiśā and/or the Jñāna Pradīpa, which are both treatises based upon Nātha conceptions of the microcosmic body. Furthermore, the NV emphasizes Saiyad Sultān’s relationship with his master, Śāh Hosen. Whereas the Jñāna Cautiśā pays obeisance to the guru, but makes no specific mention of Śāh Hosen, the Jñāna Pradīpa makes a point to perpetuate the Saiyad Sultān-Śāh Hosen relationship through its authorial signature-lines, bhaṇitās.

408 Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 622, 624, 628, 639, 642, 645, 647, 654, and 657–58.
Certain other continuities between the NV and these Nāthist texts ascribed to Sultān are also noteworthy. Like the NV, the Jñāna Pradīpa exhibits an authorial anxiety to create a charismatic axis of pīr, Prophet, and God, about which the author aligns his textual community. Like the NV, it too entextualizes processes of translation as conversion, discussed in the case of the NV in Chapter Three. If the NV characterizes, for Richard Eaton, the displacement phase of Islamization (see Chapter Three), this phase, as we have seen, also distinguishes the Jñāna Pradīpa. Similarities between cosmogonical concepts in the NV and the Jñāna Cautiśā are also noticeable, though these, being generic to Islamic Bangla expositions of cosmogony, do not provide evidence per se of doctrinal corroboration between these two texts. Interestingly enough, however, a study of the NV’s two cosmogonical sections—the first that opens the text and the second which begins the tale-cycle of Muhammad—shows that the NV shares in the Jñāna Cautiśā’s pattern of doctrinal “deepening,” the vocabulary becoming increasingly Sufi in the second iteration.

The final bhaṇītā, the authorial colophon, of the Jñāna Cautiśā suggests that it was written by a man named Saiyad Sultān (kṣīna ati sīsumati saiyada sutatāna, “very feeble is the child-like intelligence of Saiyad Sultān); he begs pardon for his precocious attempt to compose a piece on the subtle subject of esoteric knowledge. Based upon the reference in this passage to “child-like intelligence,” M. E. Haq argues that the Jñāna Cautiśā was an early composition of Sultān. Ahmad Sharif dismisses the Jñāna Cautiśā as being a part of the Jñāna Pradīpa, suggesting that the former text was probably composed as a key to memorizing the core ideas of the latter.  

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409 Cf. nava yauvana tula puruṣa purāṇa | nava raṅga pracārīte karīla sandhīna || punyavāṇa dhyāṇa kaila ati anupāmā || parama sānanda haila parama āttamā || pāyā parama priyā prabhu nairākāra || prema rase magna hai kare nīrīkṣana || phūṭīla vividha puspa mahātaruvara || phalaphula sōbhita sāmarthya manohara || ... bindu bindu sahasrāka bindu bindu juti || vyūha kari rahīyāche yatheka murati || bindu bindu nātha bindu nahe bhinna bhina || vimarsiyā vraleta cāha anudina || Jñāna Cautiśā attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 664.
The critical edition of the Jñāna Pradīpa contains an entire passage of fourteen couplets on the ancient puruṣa which is also to be found in the Jñāna Cautiśā.412 Despite the apparent interpolation of a section of the Jñāna Cautiśā into the Jñāna Pradīpa, the two stand as separate texts with distinct theological orientations and differing emphases on praxis. While the Jñāna Cautiśā is a Nātha treatise, providing little intimation either through vocabulary or content of a Sufi world-view,413 the Jñāna Pradīpa is written as a Sufi practise manual that reconfigures the technology of Nātha yoga within a decidedly Sufi framework, albeit including among its Sufi goals the distinctively Nātha objective of gaining immortality.414 The Jñāna Pradīpa is more guarded in advocating ontological union than the Jñāna Cautiśā: the former guarantees “an encounter with the self” through Āllāh’s grace by appropriate service in the four stages,415 while the latter enjoins “merg[ing] being, jīva, into being, jīva, abandoning your own.”416

According to the principles of classical Islam the desire for immortality (and ontological union, ittiḥād) is heretical, as it constitutes shirk. Yet it was indeed the common esoteric goal of many Bengali Sufi tarīqas.417 If seen as companion texts composed by a single author, the Jñāna Pradīpa could be read as the composition of a mature Sufi practitioner who develops, in the Jñāna Pradīpa, Nātha concepts first seeded in the Jñāna Cautiśā within distinctly Sufi theological understandings.

For all the reasons discussed above, as well as the evidence of local memory, as discussed in the case of the poet Mukīm’s evidence in Chapter One, and of the Patiya villagers in Chapter

413 Perhaps the cosmogonical passages of the Jñāna Cautiśā, mentioned earlier, are the only exception to this general observation.
414 See, for instance, the poet’s plea to the Prophet: tomhāra prasāde nabī haiba amara | bhava māyā tejiyā sādhīnu kalevara || bhāvīmu tomhāra pada eka mana bhāve | nā purība pīṇḍa mora saṃsāreta tabe || Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 601.
415 Ibid., 577.
416 mīlā jīveta jīva teji āpanāra | Jñāna Cautiśā attributed to Saiyad Sultān, v. 59, 665.
Eight, the idea that the author of the NV is also the author of the Jñāna Pradīpa is a tantalizing possibility. Yet the evidence is inconclusive, and the possibility of multiple authors bearing the same popular east Bengali name of Saiyad Sultān certainly needs to be accounted for. Given the NV's renown in Chittagong, it is plausible that other lesser-known Chittagonian authors were tempted to compose their texts in the name of the author of the NV. Depending on the author in question, this is as much a process of authorial amnesia as “authorial amnesia,”\(^\text{418}\) to borrow Christian Lee Novetzke’s term, not unknown to the medieval bhakti literary corpora of South Asia. Such a process would serve in this context to perpetuate the works of unknown Bengali authors by allowing them to share in the NV’s canonical authority.\(^\text{419}\) “This strange form of plagiarism in reverse, of people claiming not someone else’s work as their own, but their own as someone else’s,” as Sudipta Kaviraj memorably characterizes such a feature of Indian literary culture, is an opportunity for “nameless poets... to savour the ironical taste of an unnamed immortality,”\(^\text{420}\) while simultaneously, in this case, encoding Saiyad Sultān’s memory within the Islamic Bangla tradition in new ways.

2.5 Padāvalī, Lyric Songs

Thirteen Bangla padāvalī, short lyrical poems, attributed to Saiyad Sultān, are to be found in Ahmad Sharif’s critical edition of Saiyad Sultān’s works. These have been culled from various Rāgamālās or Rāganāmās, anthologies compiled by Muslims of verses set to rāgas and tālas, written by both Hindu and Muslim authors.\(^\text{421}\) The general themes these hermetic verses ascribed to Sultān encompass are: the impermanence of worldly existence and the consequent

\(^{418}\) Novetzke 2008, xiv.
\(^{419}\) For a discussion on authorship and authority in the medieval bhakti tradition, see Hawley 1988, 269–290.
\(^{420}\) Kaviraj 1992, 36.
\(^{421}\) Concerning the Rāganāmās from which Sultān’s padāvalīs have been extracted for the critical edition, see NV, Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 2: 701. Concerning the Rāganāmā literature, see PP, 399.
importance of the aspirant’s establishment in his spiritual life;\textsuperscript{422} the significance of the guru\textsuperscript{423} and the Name\textsuperscript{424}; dehatattva, the principles of the esoteric body;\textsuperscript{425} multifarious spiritual paths and the futility of philosophical debate (vivāda);\textsuperscript{426} and finally, spiritual yearning\textsuperscript{427} and union.\textsuperscript{428}

Of the three padāvalīs which concern matters of the dehatattva, nos. 6 and 9 use distinctively nātha vocabulary, and draw upon the rich stock of images used in Bāul poetry.\textsuperscript{429} No. 10, translated below, is unique among these thirteen in using specifically Sufi vocabulary to describe a traditional theme common to murūdā gāna of the Bāuls, the catastrophic ocean of human life upon which the frail tradeship of the body is wrecked without the guru-helmsman’s skilled navigation.\textsuperscript{430}

For what fault [of mine] will he leave me—
my life’s wealth?
I took birth in human form but did not worship the guru’s feet.
For this fault, I did not recognize you. (Refrain).
By calling fire water, I experienced mental anguish.
It does not always flow through my vital airs.\textsuperscript{431}
Storms would not reach the house, [yet] once built it would fall to dust.
I saw that the ways of the body are contrary.
I plunged into lāhut, and discovered the plaintain’s spathe.
Know that its name is Māhmudā.
Placing a padlock upon deceit, clinging to the lump of the liver,
the Creator Lord (prabhū karatāra) dwells.
Nāsūt is the house of fire; in lāhut the waves are enormous.
The boat moves along haltingly.
In malakut’s bazaar is trade; in the station of jabarut, bullion.
The blue river flows on four sides.
The severity of hemanta began; the buds of spring [then] appeared.
The fire died as time passed.

\textsuperscript{422}Padāvalī attributed to Saiyad Sultān, Nos. 5, 8, and 12: 671, 673, and 678 respectively.
\textsuperscript{423}Ibid., No. 7, 673.
\textsuperscript{424}Ibid., Nos. 7 and 12: 673 and 678 respectively.
\textsuperscript{425}Ibid., Nos. 6, 9, and 10: 672, 675, and 676 respectively.
\textsuperscript{426}Ibid., No. 11: 677.
\textsuperscript{427}Ibid., Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 13: 668–670 and 679.
\textsuperscript{428}Ibid., No. 3: 669.
\textsuperscript{429}Concerning the Bāul sect of Bengal, see, for instance, Dasgupta [1946] 1969, Chapter Seven; and Sharif, [1973] 2003.
\textsuperscript{430}Concerning this image in murūdā gāna, see Dasgupta [1946] 1969, 170–171.
\textsuperscript{431}Vāte nā phuke more nita – this line and the one that precedes it are difficult to interpret.
Four people were with me; all abandoned me.  
The boat was marooned on the sandbank.  
Having drifted [from its course], says Saiyad Sultān, the boat was wrecked.  
None of the merchants (sādhū) turned back to glance.  
I hadn’t resolved to serve the murshid, the guru-pīr.  
I worry what I shall now do.432

Dehatattva verses such as this one, rich in metaphor, are enigmatic, their esoteric meanings reserved for the initiate. These are best understood in the light of the foregoing discussion of body cosmologies mapped in texts such as the Jñāna Pradīpa.

The Vaiṣṇava padāvalī attributed to Sultān are situated within a long literary tradition dedicated to the paradigmatic lovers, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Out of its foggy doctrinal beginnings in the early Vaiṣṇavite mahāpurāṇas, this relationship was first confirmed and inaugurated in Sanskrit kāvya by Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda (twelfth century), wherein Rādhā bursts upon the literary scene in full erotic splendour. If Jayadeva’s memorable verses provided the cosmopolitan literary template for the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme, it was the popularity of the vernacular love songs composed by the great Maithili poet, Vidyāpatī Ṭhākur (late 14th-early 15th century), which inspired wide imitation in Bengal, eventually resulting in the manufacture of a poetic jargon called Vrajabuli. This artificial language, not to be confused with Vrajabhākhā—the “Western Hindi” dialect spoken in the Mathurā region—was a mix of Maithili, Bangla, and a few “Western Hindi” forms.433 Attested by the Vaiṣṇava Gosvāmī duo Rūpa and Sanātana, Baru Caṇḍidāsa’s Śrīkṛṣṇakirtana is purportedly the first pre-Caitanya work on this theme in Bangla.434

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432 Padāvalī ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, No. 10: 676.  
434 Klaiman 1984, 11–13. Linguists of Bangla have proposed various possibilities for its dating, ranging from the 14th to the 18th centuries. Concerning these controversies, see ibid., 18–20, and for more recent additions, Bhaumika [1992] 2007, 288–304. Within these pages, Bhaumika makes a paleographical argument for a 17th century dating of the single extant manuscript of this work.
Kunal Chakrabarti argues that “the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement which contributed most to the popularization of Rādhā, found the prototype of their Rādhā in the Rādhā of the Bengal Purāṇas,” the final redactions of which predate the movement. If in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Rādhā is described as “the presiding goddess of the soul of Śrīkṛṣṇa, the paramātmā, and the dearest to him among all women,” “wherever Kṛṣṇa’s Vṛndāvana-līlā is mentioned,” in the other Bengal purāṇas, “Rādhā is overwhelmingly present.” Thus, the purāṇas of Bengal are, according to Chakrabarti, “tantalizingly close to the mood of the Gītagovinda and the medieval vernacular poems,” such as the Śrīkṛṣṇakirtana. For though Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are somewhat anachronistically married to each other in these purāṇas, their līlās themselves are imbued, as in the case of the Gītagovinda and the Śrīkṛṣṇakirtana, with all the features of a forbidden relationship. It is noteworthy that the first translation of a part of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa into Bangla by Mālādhara Vasu introduces Rādhā as the lover of Kṛṣṇa.

In the post-Caitanya period, over the course of the 16th century Bengali padāvalī writers increasingly adopted Bangla as the medium of composition, though experiments with the more archaic vrajabuli continued into the late 19th century, as attested by Rabindranath Tagore’s early work, Bhānusimha Ṭhākurera Padāvalī. As Sudipta Kaviraj delineates, the post-Caitanya phase of padāvalī literature bifurcates into two strands. One carries forward the bold sexuality of the earlier Rādhā, the Rādhā of Vidyāpati, Bāru Caṇḍīdāsa, and Jayadeva, through the lines of padakāras such as Govindadāsa. A second strand meanwhile distinguishes itself in the writings

436 Ibid., n. 52, 329–331 at 330.
437 I quote here Chakrabarti’s (ibid., 200) translation of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, I.30.18.
438 Ibid., 304.
440 Ibid., n. 55, 331.
of the likes of Caṇḍīḍāsa and Jñānadās, wherein Rādhā’s inner landscape comes into focus. It is within this second strand that the verses ascribed to Saiyad Sultān and many other Bengali Sufis can be situated.

Whether they use Nātha, Vaiṣṇava, or Sufi vocabulary, the padāvalīs attributed to Saiyad Sultān introduce yet another layer of corporate authorship, adding new, even contrary, dimensions to the public memory of the authorial persona of the Saiyad Sultān of the NV. Of the thirteen padāvalīs in the critical edition, the five which use Vaiṣṇava tropes to express the poet’s longing for the divine highlight the inconsistencies in the ways in which Sultān came to be inscribed in public memory. The padāvalīs attributed to Sultān are but a drop in the ocean of padāvalī literature, a notable number of which were composed by Bengali Muslim authors. Yatindramohana Bhattacharjee has collected the Vaiṣṇava padāvalīs of no fewer than 121 Muslim Bengali poets. As the currency of Bangla translations of Persian and Avadhi Sufi romances suggest, many Muslim Bengalis undoubtedly resonated with the particular expressions of mystical longing found in such Vaiṣṇava poems. In Rādhā’s love for Kṛṣṇa, Bengali Sufis found the yearnings of the Sufi lover for God, the Beloved. In Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and their devotional world, authors such as Śāh Muhammad Sagīr found familiar archetypes and a parallel mystical universe for translating for local consumption the love, for instance, of the Arabian pair, Yūsuf and Zulekhā. The cross-denominational appeal of the padāvalī in Bengal also suggests that by the eighteenth-century, if not earlier, the trope of the paradigmatic lovers, Rādhā-Kānāi (Kṛṣṇa), embedded in the lush landscape of Gokul, had become a

443 Concerning the controversy surrounding the identity of this Caṇḍīḍāsa, see Padāvalī attributed to Caṇḍīḍāsa, “Bhūmikā,” 1–83.
444 Kaviraj 2003, 522–524.
445 For a succinct summary of the six categories into which Bhattacharjee (Padāvalī attributed to various Muslim authors, 9–37) classifies the Vaiṣṇava poetry written by Muslims, see Dimock 1974, 4.
446 Padāvalī attributed to various Muslim authors.
447 Iusupha-Jolekhā of Śāh Muhammad Sagīr.
naturalized component of the most minor poet’s stock-in-trade,”

Ahmad Sharif uncritically accepts the Sultān of the NV to have authored these thirteen padāvalīs. In his introduction to “Muslim Kavira Pada-Sāhitya,” Sharif reads into Saiyad Sultān’s Jñāna Pradīpa and Šekh Cānda’s Hara Gauri Samvāda the romance of a forgotten era, a time when Bengali Muslim “mystics” (maramiyārā) shared a camaraderie of spirit with their fellow-Hindus.

“For time immemorial,” says Sharif, “they followed their spiritual practices, walking hand-in-hand, mixing mind with mind.” Sharif then immediately proceeds to extend this analysis to the impact of Vaiśṇavism on Hindus and Muslims: by appealing to the “secular” (dharma-nirapekṣa) aspects at the heart of all religious discourse, Vaiśṇavism, according to Sharif, succeeds in drawing both communities into “a single field of spiritual practice,” a phenomenology of experience in which “time-place-person and the differences in faith are obliterated.” “Thus,” continues Sharif, alluding to the Vaiśṇava poems composed by Muslim authors, “just as Saiyad Sultān, Šekh Cānda, and others related the stories of Islam and the Prophet, they were also able to propagate such mysticism.”

Such a reading is another problematic instance of “secular” frameworks of modern historians being “forced upon medieval man,” an approach which Muzaffar Alam, in his examination of scholarship on medieval Sufis of North India, has warned against. While it

448 This cross-denominational appeal of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme was not unique to Bengal alone. In Awadh, for instance, Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī wrote the Kanṭhāvata.

449 The saying is cited here with Edward Dimock’s (1974, 9) translation.


452 Muzaffar Alam 1996, 164.
may certainly be the case that some Bengali Muslim authors were more ecumenical in matters of religious doctrine than others, rather than presuming this to be the general case, following Muzaffar Alam’s plea for studying “the specificity of the situation,” the religious attitudes of individual writers need examination on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, as the Persian and Avadhi sources of North India show, premodern Muslims and Sufis exhibited varied levels of interest in Kṛṣṇa bhakti and its theology. At one end of this spectrum there was blatant antagonism: those who objected to listening to bishnupadas (the Avadhi version of the Bangla Vaiṣṇava padāvatī) on account of having to hear “the coarse names of kāfirs.” There were others, such as the Qādirī Sufi, Hazrat Shāh 'Abd al-Razzāq Bansavī, who could savor the aesthetics and spiritual appeal of Kṛṣṇa bhakti. He could be transported into ecstasy through a vision of the Lord he had while watching a Kṛṣṇalīlā performance; he could grant Bairāgīs a vision of Kṛṣṇa, while himself remaining a steadfastly orthodox Sufi, untouched by the theology of Kṛṣṇa—what Alam calls “assimilation from a distance.” Other Sufis, such as Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī in his Kanhāvata, accept the theology of Kṛṣṇa and his līlās as a perfect metaphor for their wujūdī doctrine, opening out the Kṛṣṇa story to various interpretive communities, who are invited to take away from it what they see fit. He also reveals that spirituality (the realm of “secret knowledge,” kapaṭa gyān) is open to all, and lies beyond the divisive boundaries of race, country, and religion. Here there is “no Turk, no Hindu.” Similarly, Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān Chishtī wrote the Mirāṭ al-Ḥaqāʾīq (“The Mirror of Realities”), a translation of the Bhagavat Gītā into Persian, “presenting it as an ideal exposition of the

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453 Ibid., 165.
454 I refer here to the proleptic argument put forth by 'Abd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī in his Haqāʾīq al-Hindi to any objections that may be made to the audition of bishnupad in Sufi assemblies. He is also supposed to have written a letter in defense of the bishnupad to a certain Mufti Ilāhdād Dānishmand of Lucknow. Orsini forthcoming b.
456 Orsini forthcoming a.
457 Ibid.
doctrine of Hama Üst” (“All is He”).\textsuperscript{458} ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī’s Ḥaqāʾiq al-Hindi is also noteworthy in its opening up of the multivocal valences of “Krṣṇa” and other significant characters of the Krṣṇa story to the Sufis, adding a new register to the Indo-Islamic treatises on philology and philosophy, while demonstrating no interest in Vaiṣṇava theology itself. The historical evidence thus shows a wide spectrum of Muslim and Sufi involvement with Krṣṇa bhakti, where Muslim and Sufi actors adopted different stances to the aesthetics and theology surrounding the figure of Krṣṇa: at one end, stark opposition, at the other, a desire to bridge worlds, whether at a purely formal level (Bilgrāmī) or through the unifying vision encouraged by spiritual realization (Jāyasī).

For all these historical reasons, in addition to the NV’s attempts to subvert the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas and Krṣṇa, a subject discussed at length in Chapter Six, it is difficult to reconcile Sharif’s irenic notions with Sultān’s. Even more difficult is to reconcile the authors of certain padāvalī attributed to Sultān with the author of the NV. It is indeed ironic that one who sought to castigate Krṣṇa as a charlatan, to rebuke him for his immoral love-affairs with the married cowherd women of Vraja, should write a poem such as this:

\begin{quote}
My Śyāma, have mercy:
never abandon māyā, the net of illusion,
o black moon (kālcānda), stranger from another land (paradeśī)!
Plunged in the ocean of love (premasāgara),
I serve you every moment.
You have tied your mind with a thread of stone
and have forgotten me!
All know that loving you
has its twists and turns.
By fate, I have become a tarnished woman.
I did not [have the chance to] fill up my eyes with gazing upon you.
When the virtuous love,
they never leave:
in birth after birth they abide,
remaining together [even] at the time of death.
Through the gift of a vision, says Saiyad Sultān,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{458} Muzaffar Alam 1996, 175.
preserve my life.\footnote{Padāvalī attributed to Saiyad Sultān, No. 13, 679.}

Attribution of such compositions to Sultān speak less of the ecumenism of Muslim authors than of the irrevocable impact of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism on the Bengali poetic imagination. In an ironic twist that perhaps realizes some of the worst fears of the NV’s author, even an inveterate critic of the Vaiṣṇavas such as he could not thwart the attribution of such padāvalī to his name. Through such poignant padāvalī, Sultān is thus remembered within the Islamic Bangla literary tradition as one who upheld the Vaiṣṇava doctrine of mystical love, suggesting that even a stern ideologue such as Sultān could not resist a certain softening of his public image. This particular anamnestic treatment of the author in the padāvalī tradition is reminiscent of how the tradition treated other Muslim ideologues. Cānda Kājī, to whom is ascribed a single padāvalī on Kṛṣṇa’s infuriatingly infatuating flute, is remembered within the tradition as the qāẓī of the Caitanya Caritāmṛta who prevented Caitanya from leading a nāgara-kīrtana. Tradition suggests that the qāẓī was ultimately converted to Vaiṣṇavism through this interaction with Caitanya.\footnote{Dimock 1974, 6. See also Haq 1957, 61.}

While the acceptance of anamnestic authorship of such padāvalīs would alleviate the problem of reconciling this literature’s advocacy of Vaiṣṇava bhakti with the NV’s vehement polemic against the Gauḍīyas, Sultān may perhaps have also been remembered in some quarters as one who professed orthodox ideas in public, but held heterodox views in private, views reserved for an intimate circle of disciples, as these rare padāvalī vignettes and works such as the Jñāna Pradīpa and the Jñāna Cautiśā gesture towards. Moreover, literary historians, such as Haq and Sharif, have also participated in continuing, within scholarship, such trends encoded in local memory by local actors.
2.6 Other Works

Jaykum Rājāra Laṛā, “King Jaykum’s Battle,” is the provisional title provided by Ābdul Karim and Ahmad Sharif to an untitled manuscript attributed to Saiyad Sultān,\(^{461}\) concerning the tale of Muhammad and Ālī’s victory over the ruler, Jaykum, an infidel king of Iraq.\(^{462}\) The critical edition of this text is based upon two manuscripts written in Arabic script, both missing their respective beginning and concluding sections; one of these collected by Ābdul Karim is now lost, while the other was a part of Ahmad Sharif’s private collection, now donated to the Dhaka University library.\(^{463}\) Based on the fact that no manuscript of the NV’s Rasul Carita section contains any part thereof, Ahmad Sharif regards this work to be an independent composition. However, he is guarded in his assertion, since both manuscripts were missing their first few pages.\(^{464}\) Karim and Sharif suggest that this text was composed by the Sultān of the NV; however, there are problems with this ascription. The critical edition contains a single bhanitā in the name of Saiyad Sultān; this is present only in the now missing ms. once in the Ābdul Karim collection. The other manuscript in Sharif’s collection bears a bhanitā in the name of Cheyānat Ullāh. While Sharif proposes that this is the name of a scribe, the ascription of authorship to a Saiyad Sultān remains, at best, tentative.\(^{465}\)

\(^{461}\) DCBM, 155.
\(^{462}\) Sharif notes that many texts on this subject are found in Urdu, and that King Jaykum was an historical figure—a king of Armenia. He ([1972] 2006, 125) cites Blumhardt (1886), page numbers not provided. Haq (1957, 57) mistakenly assumes that Jaykum refers to the place rather than the name of the king. The first sub-continental author of an Arabic kitāb al-maghāzī was the Sindhi author, Abū Ma’shar (d. 786). Schimmel 1973, 2.
\(^{463}\) See Appendix One for details. Three manuscripts, entitled Jakhamāra Yuddha, in the Bangla Academy’s manuscript archive also need to be tallied with the work ascribed to Saiyad Sultān. Concerning details of these manuscripts, see ibid.
\(^{464}\) Sharif [1972] 2006, 72–73. This is a revised view; earlier Munṣī Ābdul Karim and Sharif had stated that it was a part of the NV. DCBM, 155.
\(^{465}\) Three manuscripts of unknown authorship of a work on a similar theme, cataloged as Jakhamāra Yuddha, are to be found in the Bangla Academy archives. For further details, see Appendix One.
Sharif suggests this text belongs to a popular genre of Islamic Bangla literature, which he designates kāphir vijaya kāvya, literary works on the theme of trouncing the infidel.\textsuperscript{466} In theme and content, the work closely follows Jainuddin’s Rasul Vijaya and Šābārid Khān’s work by the same title,\textsuperscript{467} purported to be some of the earliest Bangla works written on the Prophet Muhammad.\textsuperscript{468} Muhammad Ākil also later wrote on the same theme.\textsuperscript{469} These compositions appropriate the local idiom of the maṅgala (or vijaya) kāvya, ordinarily dedicated to purāṇic and regional folk (laukika) deities, to produce a glorious narrative in Bangla on the Prophet Muhammad’s battle with the infidel, well-known in the medieval Islamic literary tradition as the maghāzī genre. In the hands of the premodern Bengali Muslim poets, the maghāzī became a ballad on the chivalric glory of the Prophet who fought “with the sword in one hand, and the Qur’ān in the other,”\textsuperscript{470} for the sole purpose of bringing Islam to new lands.\textsuperscript{471} It is important to note here that the introduction of elements of the legendary was not the innovation of the Bengali Muslim authors of such vijaya kāvya, for, as M. Hinds clarifies,

\begin{quote}
the term al-maghāzī came to be rooted in the Islamic reflective tradition at an early stage and was perpetuated in later [Arabic] works both for the more serious purposes of ‘ilm,... and on a popular level, particularly with poetic embellishments reminiscent of chansons de geste.\textsuperscript{472}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{466} NV 2: xix.
\textsuperscript{467} See Šābārid Khānera granthāvalī and Rasul Vijaya of Jainuddin. For a detailed description of these two texts, see Mīyā 1993, Chapter Two. For other Islamic Bangla works in this genre, see ibid., 63–64.
\textsuperscript{468} A similar text, Cakkun Ṛaṭippor, composed by Variccai Muhīyyidin Pulavar in 1686 is also to be found in Islamic Tamil literature. Uwise 1990, 28–32. “Cakkun” seems to be the Tamil form of the Bangla “Jaykum.” As is seen in the case of the Tamil Cirappurāṇam, discussed below, and in Chapter Four, the Tamil region seems to have shared with Bengal, not only trade networks via the Bay of Bengal, but what Ronit Ricci in her study of Tamil, Javanese, and Malay Islamic literature, calls “literary networks.” Ricci 2011, 1–4. Sharif ([1972] 2006, 125) notes that many texts on this subject are found in Urdu.
\textsuperscript{469} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{470} Sharif 1983, 2: 563.
\textsuperscript{471} Introducing elements of the legendary were not the sole innovation of the Bengali Muslim author of such vijaya kāvya.
\textsuperscript{472} Hinds 2011.
There is some debate on whether a work, entitled *Iblisnāmā*, “The Chronicle of Iblis,” should also be ascribed to Saiyad Sultān. On the basis of the existence of a manuscript of Saiyad Sultān’s *Ophāt-e Rasul*, which contains the interpolated *Ibliserā Kecchā*, “The Tale of Iblis” (designated *Iblisnāmā* by Sharif), Muhammad Enamul Haq and Munṣī Ābdul Karim suggest that the latter work could also be ascribed to our author. On three grounds, Sharif justifiably argues against this ascription: first, the interpolated section lacks a *bhaṇītā* (authorial colophon); second, its narrative content—a lengthy conversation between Iblis and the Prophet—is not connected to the subject-matter of the *Rasul Carita*; and third, it is not found in any other manuscript concerning the *Rasul Carita* section of the *NV*. Perhaps referring to the afore-mentioned interpolated section, Sharif also mentions that its opening lines are almost identical to those of an anonymous *Iblisnāmā* manuscript in the Munṣī Ābdul Karim collection of the Dhaka University archive (No. 35, Ms. 666). As editor of *Pum̐thi Pariciti*, Sharif suggests that this anonymous manuscript could probably be ascribed to Nānāgājī. Indeed, its opening lines are similar to an *Iblisnāmā* manuscript in the same collection ascribed to Nānā Gājī (No. 34, Ms. 652).

The Rare Books division of the Chittagong University library possesses a single manuscript of an *Iblisnāmā* attributed to Saiyad Sultān. Though the manuscript has a colophon bearing

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473 Haq suggests the prevalence of the alternative title *Nūr-e Pharāmāša-Nāmā*. It is impossible, however, to verify any of Haq’s ([1957] 1991, 304–305) statements about the *Iblisnāmā* because we do not know which manuscripts he is referring to or citing from.
474 *NV* 2, Pariṣiṣṭa Kha, 696–97.
477 Ibid.
478 *NV* 2, Pariṣiṣṭa Kha, 696–97. *PP*, 38–39. Sharif [1972] 2006, 68–69. Since Sharif provides no proper citation, it is difficult to be certain of this, but placing his statement in the intertextual context of his writings, it most likely refers to the same passage.
479 *PP*, 39.
480 *DCBM*, 31. No. 36, Ms. 269 (*DCBM*, 33) has been “presumably” designated as *Iblisnāmā*; the manuscript contains no *bhaṇītā*. The cataloger mentions that it could “probably” be ascribed to Saiyad Sultān.
the name of Saiyad Sultān, close scrutiny of the manuscript raises some doubt about its authorship. Written in Arabic script, the manuscript, after the opening bismillāh, begins thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
kahe saiyadu sulatāni śuno naragaṇa | 
iblisera vivarana śuna diyā mana ||
eka dina sainya śaba lai paygāmbara | 
melā kari baśisanta āyiśāra ghara ||
??\ī ādama saph ĥaṭika utapana |...
\end{align*}
\]

The opening bhanītā (authorial colophon) strikes one as odd, as it is not characteristic of other manuscripts attributed to Sultān, in which authorial colophons uniformly occur at the end of a section or work. Moreover, few Islamic Bangla works begin with a colophon: in his Muslim Bengali Literature, Muhammad Enamul Haq singles out the poems of the eighteenth-century author, Muhammad Raza, for their peculiar distinction of containing a terse invocatory couplet, and their tendency to “alter the usual method of putting the colophon verse at the end of a stanza and insert it either at the beginning or about the middle.”\textsuperscript{482} It thus seems that this colophon in the Chittagong University Iblisnāmā is very likely a scribal interpolation, following a later trend inspired, perhaps, by authors such as Muhammad Raza. Furthermore, the next three lines are identical to the opening lines of the anonymous Iblisnāmā manuscript (No. 35, Ms. 666) in the Dhaka University archives mentioned above, which is likely to be Nanāgājī’s.\textsuperscript{483}

Placing this analysis of the Chittagong University Iblisnāmā along side Sharif’s arguments, it seems plausible that the work should not be attributed to Saiyad Sultān. However, two more manuscripts of the Iblisnāmā in the Bāṅglā Academy collection, ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, would also need assessment to entirely rule out the possibility of such ascription.\textsuperscript{484}

\textsuperscript{482} Haq, 1957, 177.
\textsuperscript{483} I am grateful to Muhammad Ishāk Caudhurī, the Head Librarian of the Rare Books Division of the Chittagong University Library, for reading the opening section of this manuscript with me. By offering his life-long expertise with such manuscripts, he was able to confirm my view about the peculiar placement of the colophon, doubly corroborated by Haq’s writings, quoted above.
\textsuperscript{484} Concerning these manuscripts, see Appendix One.
2.7 Conclusion

Through a study of manuscripts and internal textual evidence contextualized within a premodern culture of literization, the context of which is discussed in Chapter Three, it has been argued that the Nabīvamśa was composed by a single individual, who is inscribed in the text and the Islamic Bangla literary tradition as Saiyad Sultān. Based upon continuities in conceptual frameworks in the NV and the Jñāna Pradīpa, and also upon shared attestation of the Šāh Hosen–Saiyad Sultān relationship, the tantalizing possibility exists that the Saiyad Sultān of the NV also composed the Jñāna Pradīpa. Mukīm’s text discussed in Chapter One corroborates these textual links between Sultān the author of the NV and Sultān the pīr. Sultān is also enshrined in the local memory of present-day Patiya villagers of Chittagong as a pīr (see Chapter Eight—8.4.1), even though local memory, as far as is known, does not associate him with the author of the NV. Yet the evidence that the author of the NV was identical with the writer of the Jñāna Pradīpa remains inconclusive.

No evidence whatsoever exists to prove that the Jñāna Cautiśā and the padāvalīs attributed to Saiyad Sultān constitute a part of the collected works of a single individual or that the author of any one of these compositions is identical to the author of the NV. Even the ascription to a Saiyad Sultān of the so-called Jaykum Rājāra Lārāi remains at best tentative. The issue of anamnetic authorship, especially of the Vaiṣṇava padāvalīs ascribed to Sultān, raises the issues of how and why Sultān came to be inscribed in public memory in ways often inconsistent with the public persona of the author of the NV. Albeit through a tiny corpus of five short padāvalīs, this tentative attempt to soften Sultān’s public image as a Vaiṣṇava-hating ideologue, or even to ascribe to his remembered persona dichotomous public-private beliefs, gestures towards the irrepressible appeal of Vaiṣṇavism and the eidetic power of its devotional imaginaire.
Finally, this chapter and the related appendices have attempted to elucidate Ahmad Sharif’s opaque critical apparatus, so as to provide a clearer understanding of the manuscript tradition as it relates to the critical edition of the \textit{NV}. The initial findings presented here suggest a reasonably stable manuscript tradition. Yet further archival and philological research is necessary to complete this picture and to confirm these preliminary investigations into the manuscript tradition. The task is enormous: as shown in Appendix One and the table above, as many as 93 manuscripts of the \textit{Nabīvaṃśa} exist in Bangladeshi public collections alone, while more remain in private hands.

The \textit{Nabīvaṃśa} is an early text that achieved canonical status within the tradition. Yet it is but one in a vast corpus, many of which have been critically edited by Ahmad Sharif. Though much research is often required to demystify his critical apparatus, his editions, as this dissertation attests, are indispensable and useful beginnings in the study of this material. Other Bangladeshi scholars, notably Muhammad Ābdul Kāium, Rājiyā Sultānā, Mazharul Islam, Muhammad Śāhjāhān Miyā, and others, have followed Sharif’s lead in producing critical editions of Islamic Bangla texts.\footnote{For a list of critical editions of Islamic Bangla texts, see Kāium 2000, \textit{Pariśīṭa Ka}, 191–201.} Thus more critical editions have appeared in the intervening years between Asim Roy’s assessment of the state of the field in his landmark \textit{The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal}. Nonetheless, these efforts have been piece-meal, unsystematic, uncoordinated, and to a considerable degree lacking in critical rigour. Many of the issues Roy raised then, such as dating of texts, and so on, still remain to be resolved nearly two decades later. In the current state of the field, the task then is vast, and the text-critical issues numerous. These await the coordinated efforts of many minds to bring about any substantial advancement in the field.
Chapter Three

Framing the Nabīvaṃśa

3.1 Introduction

Islamic Bangla literature has usually been categorized by Bengali literary historians as “anuvāda sāhitya,” “translation literature,” as opposed to “maulika sāhitya,” “original literature.” Through an extensive examination of the Nabīvaṃśa’s interventions, I will argue that such categories are artificial and misrepresentative; despite the necessary continuities with older literary traditions, Arabo-Persian and Bangla, which the Nabīvaṃśa (NV) displays, the category “translation literature” does not adequately recognize the originality and unprecedented newness of Islamic Bangla literature when it broke upon Bengal’s literary horizon, particularly when considered in the context of its rural East Bengali socio-textual community. In its production, processing, and reception, I argue in this chapter that the NV epitomizes what I call “frontier literature.”

The chapter begins with the placement of the NV within wider processes of vernacularization that developed in South Asia in the second millennium as well as in the region-specific conditions of vernacularization within Mughal Bengal. We also explore the self-
definition of the NV as a pāñcāli, an epic-song, on the Prophet and its continuities with Bengali performance traditions before reflecting upon a definition of sacred biography, germane to my treatment of the NV as sacred literature. Such preliminary contextualizations prepare the ground for the central focus of this chapter, the development of an hermeneutic model to understand the workings of translation as conversion in a missionary text such as the NV.

Based upon an analysis of authorial motives and interventions and an extensive examination of how translation operates as conversion within the biographic process, I propose that the main purpose of Sultān’s biographic enterprise is to produce a new ‘prior text’ for the people of Bengal. The challenges he faced in doing so, and the interpretive procedures he mastered to create such a tour de force of evangelical writing, are aspects this chapter details. I begin this survey with emic considerations: Sultān’s definition of translation, his affirmations of the vernacular in his missionizing project, and his translational anxieties. Next I examine his preacherly role and its impingement upon translation practice, along with the related consideration of the semiotics of identity/alterity within the biographic process and the author’s mastery of its dialectic. From the discussion of the tensions inherent in Sultān’s dual role as preacher and as translator, and its commensurate effect upon the biographic process, emerges an understanding of how translation as embodying conversion operates at the level of form. The numerous genres, Arabo-Persian and Bangla, which the NV co-opts and references are surveyed in an appreciation of the tissue of polyglot transtextuality that constitutes the text’s fabric. What follows next is a study of the workings of the separate processes of translation and religious conversion in Bangla literature and culture, wherein I take recourse to the theories on translation put forward by Tony K. Stewart and George Steiner, and Richard M. Eaton’s theory of Islamization. These theories are then modified to create a hermeneutic model
that explains how precisely translation operates as conversion within the space of our text, creating thereby a new prior text for a rapidly expanding East Bengali Islamic society.

3.2 Vernacularization in Islamic Bengal

Through numerous thought-provoking articles, which culminate in a monograph, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Sheldon Pollock has expanded upon the cosmopolitan-vernacular theme as it applies to South Asian literary production. A common thread that runs through this corpus is the argument that Sanskrit, as a transregional cosmopolitan language, enjoyed a “hyperglossic” status vis à vis the vernacular especially in what Pollock calls “the vernacular millennium,” the second millennium of the Common Era.\(^{486}\) Vernacularization, in his understanding, is “the historical process of choosing to create a written literature, along with its complement, a political discourse, in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture.”\(^{487}\) Thus Pollock distinguishes three components of this process: literization, the turn from orality to literacy; literarization, the process by which such production is canonized as “literature,” itself defined by cosmopolitan models;\(^{488}\) and superposition, the dominance of a certain language and its literature over others. These definitions have wide application to the processes of vernacularization observed in Bengal.

In tandem with their contemporaries beginning to write in other vernaculars of South Asia, when Bengali authors in the latter half of the 15th century first “chose” to write in Bangla, already “the language in universal use” by the early part of that century,\(^{489}\) they were making

\(^{486}\) Particularly for the definition, see Pollock 2006, 50; 1998b, 41–74; and 1996, 197–247.
\(^{487}\) Ibid. 2006, 23.
\(^{488}\) Ibid. 1998b, 41.
\(^{489}\) These words of the Chinese traveler, Ma Huan, suggest the pre-literate cosmopolitan nature of the vernacular. Rockhill 1915, 437. Ma Huan also mentions, “There are also those who speak in Farsi.” Ibid.
several choices. Politically speaking, they were choosing to align themselves with the Sultanate rulers of Bengal, for here too, as everywhere else in South Asia, as Pollock notes, vernacular production was inaugurated at the royal court.\textsuperscript{490} Mālādhara Basu’s Śrī Kṛṣṇa Viḍīya, a version of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, was composed at the court of Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak (r. 1459–74). Vipradāsa’s Manasā Viḍīya, Yaśorāja’s Kṛṣṇa Maṅgala, and translations of sections of the Mahābhārata written by Viḍīya Paṇḍita and Kaṅdra Parameśvara were produced at the courts of ‘Ālā al-Dīn Ḥusayn Shāh (1493–1519) and Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh (1519–32), a period generally referred to as “the golden age” of Bengal’s premodern epoch.\textsuperscript{491} While differentiating itself from Sanskrit, Bangla was beginning to appropriate Sanskrit space.\textsuperscript{492} While vying for courtly patronage with Persian—the other significant cosmopolitan language of precolonial India and the official language at the court of the independent sultanate of Ḥusayn Shāhī Bengal\textsuperscript{493}—Bangla was paradoxically preparing to expand Persian space within its own linguistic and literary universe.\textsuperscript{494}

At the social level, these Bengali authors were choosing a language that would circulate only locally, not transregionally. In doing so, as Pollock argues, they were refusing communication with other actors spread across the vast Sanskrit cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia, while simultaneously affirming the role of literature in identity construction within bounded geopolitical formations.\textsuperscript{495} As we will see in our discussion of the NV, Sultān’s

\textsuperscript{490} Pollock 1998b, 46.

\textsuperscript{491} Concerning these literary productions, see Eaton 1993, 66.

\textsuperscript{492} This expression is used by Allison Busch in her discussion of the contemporaneous relational dynamics between Braja Bhāṣā and Sanskrit. Busch 2003, 20.

\textsuperscript{493} Tarafdar 1965, 279. Before this period, since Bengal was a part of the Delhi sultanate from the 13th century onwards, here too, as in other regions of the sultanate, Persian was instated as the official language. Under the Ilyās Shāhī, in the mid-fourteenth century, when the Bengal sultanate first acquired independence from Delhi, Persian probably continued to be the language of the Bengal courts. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{494} This argument put forward by Tony Stewart will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{495} Pollock 1998b, 45–46.
construction of an Islamic identity for his rural socio-textual community is deeply entwined with the vernacular character of his literary enterprise. However, the book of the NV develops not only within pan-South Asian processes of literization that mark the vernacular millennium, but also within pan-Islamic and Bengali Muslim understandings of literization and its role in community solidarity. Islam in Bengal, as Richard Eaton has shown, spread as much through agrarian development as through the growth of literacy and its technologies, the impetus behind both being the efforts of pioneering Sufi pirs.496 By the first half of the fifteenth century, papermaking technology had reached Bengal, and Muslim artisans dominated all aspects of this new technology at least up until the early nineteenth century.497 Thus, Sultān’s emphasis on literacy and community building is to be read within these processes of literization at work in Islamic Bengal.

Bangla literature that is composed by Muslims from the late-sixteenth century onwards further complexifies the relationship of the vernacular with the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Forms of Bangla literary production that were so far entwined with imperial power become imbricated with religious power, which, in the case of the literary production of Sufis, displaces the former.498 In her impressive study of an Arabic conversion narrative, The Book of One Thousand Questions, as it traverses South and Southeast Asia through Tamil, Javanese, and Malay translation, Ronit Ricci applies Pollock’s thesis to argue for such texts being drawn into what she terms “an Arabic cosmopolis.”499 Whereas Ricci’s argument is valid for South India,500 and especially so in regard to the Indonesian Archipelago, where Islamization brought a reciprocal

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496 Eaton 1993.
497 For a reference to kāgājs, Muslim papermakers, see Cāṇḍīmāṅgalā of Mukundarāma Cakravartī, 346. Reverend William Ward observed in the early nineteenth century, “There are no Hindoos in Bengal who make paper, though there are in other parts of Hindoosthān; no booksellers, nor bookbinders; the Musulmans make paper and bind books.” Ward 1818, vol. 1, 151.
500 Concerning the spread of Arabic in South India, especially in the Deccan, see Schimmel 1973, 7–8.
Arabicization of language, literature, and local culture (as much as the vernacularization of Arabic), her argument cannot be as readily applied to Islamic Bengal for several reasons. Consider, for instance, the case Ricci cites of Kampong Jawah, the neighborhood in which Southeast Asian Muslims resided during the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, a neighborhood wherein, we are told, Arabic alongside Malay was the most widely understood language.\(^{501}\) This level of Arabicization of the culture is inconceivable even among modern Bangladeshis, what to speak of the premodern period. Bengali Muslims have historically resisted the pan-Islamic impetus to Arabicize the language, script, and culture of the target region. Bangladesh’s 1971 war of independence, the first seeds of which were sown early in the newly-formed Pakistan’s language revolts of 1952, was a cataclysmic manifestation of the strong ethno-linguistic sentiments that vivify a Bengali Muslim’s identity.\(^{502}\) While participating in the “literary networks” that Ricci articulates for the Arabic cosmopolis,\(^{503}\) Sultān and his contemporary Bengali co-religionists considered Bangla an incalculable treasure in the spread of Islam. The vernacular, at least in Sultān’s time (and arguably so long after), was exercised within the conceptual sphere of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, even while Persian and Arabic literary traditions were appropriating some of this space. Though attempts were made by dobhāṣī writers in the colonial period to expunge Bangla of Sanskrit words, forcibly injecting it with Persian and Arabic vocabulary, these efforts strained against the language’s primordial ties to Sanskrit and its semantic hold over Bangla. No sooner did the divisive ideologies that played a crucial role in the manufacture of dobhāṣī dissolve than these impulses to “purify” Bangla also perished.\(^{504}\)

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\(^{501}\) Ricci 2011, 18.

\(^{502}\) For an account of the struggle of Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan for liberation, and the bonds of language and ethnicity that fuelled the movement towards independence, see Uddin 2006, Chapter Four.

\(^{503}\) Ricci 2011, 1–4.

\(^{504}\) See discussion on dobhāṣī literature in Chapter Eight.
What we have today is a vigorous “polyphonic” vernacular enriched by multiple linguistic streams, but one that ultimately refused absorption into a wholly Arabic cosmopolis. Script too remained remarkably resilient to Arabicization: though some attempts to transliterate Bangla into Arabic script began in the seventeenth century, these never took hold within the local culture of literization.

Ricci’s Arabic cosmopolis, unlike its Sanskrit (and, I may add, Persian) counterparts, was primarily founded upon the spread of a single scripture-based religion. It was a cosmopolis sustained by the ocean, its trade routes and trade winds of change: just as commercial contacts between Arabia, South India, and the Indonesian Archipelago were forged via the seas, so too were literary and religious networks. Bengal, especially Chittagong (and Arakan too), undoubtedly participated in such trade, literary, and Islamic networks that fanned out from the Bay of Bengal into international waters: parallel literary forms between the Tamil country and Bengal exist, as seen in the case of the so-called *Jaykum Rājāra Laṛāi* and the *Cakkun Paṭṭai por*, or even the *Nabīnaṃśa* and the *Cīrappurāṇam*. But Islamization of Bengal, as Richard Eaton has shown via his study of the spread of legal schools in South and Southeast Asia, did not occur by way of the seas, as in the case of southern India, but rather via inland riverine and land routes, extending through the Gangetic plains to Iran and Central Asia. By the 1500s, whereas the Malabar coast and the Southeast Asian islands adhered to the Shafīī school, Bengali Muslims were Ḥanafī. This relationship with the Indian northwest and beyond complicates the dynamic relationships which Bangla negotiated with various linguistic cosmopoleis.

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505 Stewart applies Bakhtin to describe Bangla’s polyphonic relationship to other languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Stewart 2001, 275.
507 Ricci 2011, 14.
508 Ibid., 8–11.
Late precolonial Islamic Bangla literature, while remaining rooted within a Sanskrit cosmopolis, stands at the intersection of at least one other cosmopolis, better designated as Persian or Arabo-Persian, rather than Arabic. For in relation to Islamic Bengal, the privileging of Ricci’s Arabic cosmopolis, in which Persian is treated as an Arabic-derived language, obscures the premodern relational dynamics between Persian, Arabic, and Bangla and the deepening relationship of middle Bangla to Persian; the cosmopolitan status of Persian in Mughal India; and the function of Persian as the primary vehicle via which Arabic reached Bangla. It also elides the fraught historical relationship between Arabic and Persian, a story of the linguistic contestation of Islamic discourse, which began many centuries before Persian became the *lingua franca* of Mughal India.510

Though Persian spread in unprecedented ways during the Mughal period, becoming the court language from 1500 to 1843,511 it had already come to occupy a significant position as the language of the pre-Mughal elite.512 Judging by the oft-quoted remark of Ḥāfīz of Shiraz (d. 1398)—“All the parrots of India will become sugar-crunchers on account of this Persian sugar-candy that goes [all the way] to Bengal”—by the fourteenth century, Persian extended across North India into Bengal.513 From this century onwards, both Persian and Bangla were used by the Muslim elite and Hindu officers at the royal courts of Gauḍa.514 Mention is found in Bangla literature of the appreciation of Persian poetry among the brahminical elite. For instance,

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510 Concerning these negotiations, see Alam 2004, 7. This emphasis I place on Persian over Arabic should not suggest that Arabic had no role to play in Bengal; its role, however, should be understood as of secondary significance. Concerning Arabic and Persian literature in Bengal, see Subhan 1997, 393–417. Chapters Four and Five demonstrate that Sultan’s NV seems to rely directly on al-Kisāʾī’s original Arabic *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, unmediated by any Persian translation of the tales.
511 Schimmel 1963, 225.
512 Concerning this development, see Ghani [1941] 1994.
514 Sukumar Sen [1940] 1970, 85. See also Ma Huan’s observation about Persian usage noted above. See also Chatterjee 2009, Chapter Seven.
Jayānanda’s *Caitanyakamaigala* (c. 1558–1570) describes how even “the holy Brahmin will recite the Mathnavi [Maṣnavī]” of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. And Persian continued to play, as Sudipta Kaviraj has observed, an important role in the polyglot lives of the Hindu elite up until Rājā Ram Mohan Roy’s heyday, to fade into oblivion on account of the disruptive processes of colonialism by the time Rabindranath Tagore embarked upon his literary career.

The later Persian cosmopolis of Mughal India, unlike both its Sanskrit and Arabic counterparts, was primarily diffused by a single imperium, the Mughal imperial and sub-imperial courts, and like Arabic, but unlike Sanskrit, operated as a link language. Yet Muzaffar Alam points to the temporary hiatus in Persian literary production in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when Hindavi (in the specific sense of Avadhi) rose to prominence at the Sultanate courts, and Indian Sufi romance literature, in the hands of the eminent poets Qutban, Malik Muhammad Jāyasī, and Shaykh Mañjhan Shatīrī, came into its own. Through the alliances fostered between the Sharqī court of Jaunpur and the court of Gauḍa, there was much literary and intellectual exchange between the Mithilā/Tīrhuta regions and Gauḍa. Between 1540–55, during the reign of the Afghan Sur Sultāns over all of North India from Bengal to Delhi, Avadhi became the semi-official language of the state. The Bangla Sufi romance tradition, in which Śāh Muhammad Sagīr and Saiyad Ālāol wrote, stands within those regions of the Sanskrit cosmopolis which overlapped with the Persian, while intersecting

516 Haq 1957, 42.
517 Kaviraj 2003, 531.
518 Pollock 1998a, 12. In the case of a Sanskrit cosmopolis, Pollock argues for an alternative imperial system that consisted, synchronically, of peer polities, and diachronically of a process of historical memory. Pollock 2006, 251–252. See also his discussion of the Roman imperium vis à vis the Sanskrit cosmopolis, ibid., 274–80.
519 Muzaffar Alam 2004, 123. The Cândāyana (1379) of Maulānā Dāūd is the earliest extant romance.
522 Concerning Ālāol’s works, see d’Hubert 2010.
with the various cosmopolitan vernacular literary formations in Avadhi within these cosmopoleis.

The process of Islamization in Bengal then is better seen as an encounter, negotiated via the vernacular, between two cosmopoleis, Sanskrit and Persian, an encounter complicated by at least two processes. First, each cosmopolis during the premodern period is variously differentiated by local and transregional actors of differing ethnic, literary, and religious groups, who define the putative “high” and “low” forms and forms of cosmopolitanism in disparate ways. Thus, for instance, Islam was the cosmopolitan religion of the Persian cosmopolis during the Mughal period, while the Sanskrit cosmopolis did not have a single cosmopolitan religion that unified it. In Bengal, during Sultan’s time, one might argue that Gaurīya Vaishnavism was competing with Islam for cosmopolitan status within the region. Additionally, Muzaffar Alam has shown how the Persian cosmopolis in the Mughal and pre-Mughal periods was marked by the relationships that language bore to three institutions of power: the sharī’a, the Sufis, and the court. Second, Bangla, which does the labour of negotiation between two hyperglossic languages, Sanskrit and Persian, bears an unequal relationship with their corresponding cosmopoleis. Furthermore, the relationship of Bangla was tipped in favor of one or the other language, depending upon the religious allegiances of the authors who wielded it. For non-Muslim Bengali authors functioning within these cosmopoleis, Sanskrit remained the language of authority, while Arabo-Persian became the language of political power, whereas for Muslim Bengalis, Arabo-Persian became the language of authority and political power, while there was an appropriate acknowledgement of

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523 For Pollock’s definition of the cosmopolitan vernacular, see Pollock 2006, 26.
524 I use Avadhi to refer to the specific vernacular of Avadh, as distinct from Hindavi, which is used to refer to “Indic” vernaculars, in general.
526 Kaviraj 1992, 32–33.
the prevailing authority of Sanskrit over the minds of auditors. Thus premodern local actors, like Saiyad Sultān, were imbuing Bangla with the authority of Arabo-Persian literary forms while acknowledging Sanskrit's authority over his audience, within a pre-existing situation wherein Bangla had already begun to appropriate Sanskrit space.

The explicit value Saiyad Sultān places on the vernacular in the NV as the appropriate medium for translating Islam's cosmopolitan message and the implicit authorial value placed on an Arabo-Persian literary cosmopolitanism result in a text replete with cosmopolitan-vernacular negotiations that produce at once unprecedented, even conflicting, continuities and discontinuities at the levels of language, form, and doctrine. Where Vaiṣṇava deities, doctrine, and texts are replaced by new Islamic ones, where Bangla literary genres and tropes are included within Arabo-Persian literary frames, there is a simultaneous tendency to Bengalicize Islamic doctrine, to draw Arabic literary forms into comparison with those of Bangla and Sanskrit, to domesticate Arabic figures to the Bengali landscape and culture. Particularly in the context of rural outreach, the vernacular, itself developing against a robust Sanskrit cosmopolitanism, gives meaning to otherwise meaningless, even irrelevant, Arabo-Persian literary cosmopolitanisms, thereby preparing fertile ground for the successful transplanting and flourishing of a cosmopolitan Islam in rural East Bengal.

An additional way to analyze the vernacularization process in Bengal is to understand the literary formations of linguistic identity in terms of their subalternity and the development of these forms within a politics of translation. Thus, in delineating the process by which Sanskrit epics, such as the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, came to be translated into Bangla, Sudipta Kaviraj refers to it as “attempts to stretch the riches of this high culture towards the lower, 

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527 What “translation” means in the Bengali context is discussed later in this chapter.
culturally deprived orders.”  

The vernacular, itself linguistically subaltern to Sanskrit, and, by self-definition, deficient and corrupted (apabhraṣṭa) compared with the divine origins of Sanskrit (devavāṇī), now does the work of making Sanskrit texts accessible to a subaltern audience through “a whole new semiotic of nearness and informality.” Yet as we have seen, translation into Bangla, the subaltern vernacular, was inaugurated by Brahmin or elite Hindu authors patronized by the Muslim rulers of Gauḍa. There is no documentation on how exactly this literature initially produced for the courtly elite seeped into subaltern circles. One can only imagine that over time it moved from imperial to sub-imperial circles, and was later brought closer to rural audiences through the patronage of such performances by local elites, mahājana. While courtly patronage of Bengali translator-literati continued into the seventeenth century in Bengal and Arakan, a subaltern translation literature (still produced by the non-Muslim elite), but now for subaltern audiences, began to be simultaneously produced.

Kaviraj argues that such vernacularization constituted “an undeclared revolution,” since though the linguistic medium had changed, it was apparently continuing Sanskrit literary traditions while quietly subverting their modes of operation. At the level of language, this silent revolution produced a literature in the vernacular, a vernacular which mobilized the familiar vocabulary and registers of everyday speech. This new vernacular literature in Bangla was inspired by a preexisting subaltern avahaṭṭha literature of folk songs (gāna), rhymes (charā), and narratives (ākhyāna) that related to women’s rites (meyeli vrata), seasonal and

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528 Kaviraj 1992, 34.
530 Kaviraj 1992, 38.
531 This is an instance of the subaltern having no voice, an argument put forth by Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 271–313).
532 Kaviraj 1992, 35.
533 Ibid., 38–39.
household festivals, and the worship of folk deities. The Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana, padāvali literature, and later maṅgalakāvya preserved the subaltern character of avahattha folk song and performance in the Bangla vernacular. The later Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava bhakti tradition, which was further constitutive of and constituted by processes of vernacularization, effected a revolution in theology by emphasizing the nearness of the great gods, such as Viṣṇu, through a process of theological softening. Whereas these traditions fostered a “pedagogy of the oppressed,” in their differentiation from Sanskrit, Kaviraj also shows how the Bangla vaiṣṇava padāvali tradition and the hagiographical literature that surrounds Caitanya exhibit an ambivalence towards high culture in their treatment of Sanskrit.

In their encroachment upon Sanskrit’s cultural domain, those particular forms of vernacular production in Bangla which translated theological and literary aspects of Sanskrit culture were seen to destabilize traditional structures of brahminical power, threatening to diminish brahminical circles of influence. The anxiety on the part of the brahminical institution over translation of sacred texts into the vernacular was twofold. First, it is related to the subaltern, hypoglossic status of the vernacular vis à vis Sanskrit, discussed earlier. Second, it is related to the strong impulse towards literization that accompanied vernacularization and the centuries-old ambivalence to writing exhibited by the brahminical class, for whom orality continued, long after writing practices were well-established, to be a complementary and even

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535 Ibid., 259.
537 The obvious reference here is to the title of Paulo Freire’s widely influential Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which Kaviraj does not feel the need to cite. Ibid., 39. Freire [1970] 1986. For a detailed discussion of the dynamics between Sanskrit and Bangla in the hagiographies of Caitanya, see Stewart 2010a, 18–23.
538 Concerning such shared premodern anxieties over vernacular production in other regions of South Asia, for Marathi literature, see Pollock 2006, 310–312; for Brajabhāṣā, see Busch 1999, 46–49.
privileged medium for the transmission and codification of knowledge. Such attitudes contributed to the structure of what Sudipta Kaviraj calls “the internal economy of language,” defined by him as “a conception of the gradations of competence in language and its political effect.” Two oft-quoted couplets, the first in Sanskrit, the next in Bangla, reveal the perceived links between translation, vernacularization, and blasphemy, where Brahmins implicated both translators and their auditors in acts of sedition.

\[\text{āṣṭādaśa purāṇāni rāmasya caritāni ca | bhāṣāyāṃ mānavaḥ śrutvā rauravaḥ narakāṃ vrajet |} \]

Upon hearing the eighteen Purāṇas and the deeds of Rāma in the bhāṣā, a man shall go to the raurava hell.

If auditors of such Bangla renditions were banished to the worst of hell-worlds, the fate of the authors themselves was doubly damned; as the next verse reveals, Kṛttivāsa and Kāśīrāmadāsa, as authors of the Bangla Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata respectively, are implicated in such blasphemy. The verse also suggests that brahminical status was threatened by fears that the dissemination of scriptural literacy through the vernacular would facilitate the process of the Sanskritization of lower castes.

\[\text{kṛttiveśe kāśīdeśe āra vāmunaghṛnḥe ei tina sarvveneśe |} \]

Kṛttivāsa, Kāśidāsa, and others who feign being Brahmins, these three are ruinous.

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, when Sufi authors choose to write in the vernacular, they perpetuate the subaltern trends initiated by previous generations of non-Muslim writers, but their emphasis shifts. They now attempt to make Islamic discourse

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539 Concerning the complex attitudes to orality and literacy within brahminical society, see Kaviraj 1992, 27–32.
540 Ibid., 27.
541 Dinesh Chandra Sen 1909, 1: 7.
542 This process was first described by Srinivas (1952, 30).
543 Dinesh Chandra Sen 1909, 1: 7. Such brahminical anxieties, as Dinesh Chandra Sen has shown, persisted into the early part of the nineteenth century, when Raja Rammohan Roy’s translations of Sanskrit sacred texts were considered equally sacrilegious. Ibid., 7–8.
accessible to ordinary Bengalis, and in doing so engage not merely with the Sanskrit cosmopolis, but a whole new one, the Persian/Arabic cosmopolis. With this new negotiation, their translational anxieties related to vernacularization, and its subaltern character, are reshaped within the context of ashrāf snobbery and orthodoxy. They now battle with a new dogma, as old as Islam’s first expansion into new territories: the unease surrounding the translation of the Qur’ānic word. This is a subject that will be elaborated upon below in the context of Saiyad Sultān’s anxieties over translation in his affirmations of the vernacular. Yet in choosing Bangla as the most suitable linguistic medium for disseminating the teachings of Islam, Saiyad Sultān joined the ranks of Sufis across South Asia who privileged the vernacular over Arabic and Persian, a phenomenon that particularly gathered momentum from the sixteenth century onwards with the establishment of Mughal rule. Like his co-religionists who played a crucial role in the development of the vernacular in various parts of India, Sultān was one of the early Muslims who enriched Bangla with Arabo-Persian linguistic and literary traditions. Sultān’s named addressees, as we shall see, are the “Musalmāns of Bangadeśa.” Considering, however, that his was a competitive missionary text, his socio-textual community would have included all those Muslims and non-Muslims whom he could attract to the figure of the Prophet via his pāncālī, epic song, the NV. While the NV’s audience could certainly have included the generous ashrāf Muslim who might be capable of absorbing Sultān’s criticism of

544 Schimmel 1999, 418 and 422. With regard to Chishtī Sufi texts from Khuldabad written in the local language, Ernst (1992, 155 and 168) suggests that it is “wrong to regard such texts as the vehicles for the dissemination of Islam to non-Muslims,” and argues that the choice of the vernacular was perhaps quite simply an “esthetic” consideration, a question of choosing “attractive materials” from the Indian environment in which these Sufis lived. The case of the NV, however, is quite different, and I argue below that it was a text self-consciously constructed for missionizing purposes.

his class, the text is aimed at the East Bengali villager not acquainted with Persian or Arabic, one who had no linguistic access to Islamic scripture.

We now turn to an exploration of the NV’s self-conception as “nabīra pāncālī” and then delve into the author’s intentions in composing this text and the particular preacherly “interventions” he seeks to make through writing it.

3.3 Nabīra Pāncālī: Performing Sacred Biography

\[\text{kahe saiyada sulatāna sabe kara avadhāna nabīra pāncālī eka mane /} \]
\[\text{hariba (haribe ?) janmera pāpa khaṇḍība (khaṇḍībe ?) manera tāpa eka mane śunile śravaṇe }\] ⁵⁴⁶

“Listen carefully, all,” says Saiyad Sultān, “with one-pointed mind, to the Prophet’s pāncālī. If you listen to it aurally, with one-pointed mind, it shall steal the sins of human births, and destroy mental affliction.”

As these lines show, the NV has been reflexively characterized as a pāncālī (or pāncālī), an epic song on the Prophet Muhammad. As an epic, it exhibits three main features widely acknowledged to be characteristics of the genre: it is narrative, poetic, and heroic.⁵⁴⁷ As a pāncālī, which was sung and recited, it stands within a pan-Indian epic literature and performance tradition of song-recitation.⁵⁴⁸ And as an epic tale on the Prophet and his predecessors, which incorporates folk traditions into well-established (Islamic) narrative

⁵⁴⁶ NV 2: 112. Several other references to the NV as pāncālī can be found throughout the NV. See ibid., 1: 888 and 927; and ibid., 2: 60, 195, and 732.

⁵⁴⁷ Concerning these features, see Blackburn and Flueckiger 1989, 2–3. In his discussion of the designation “epic” to the Homeric oral epic song tradition, Albert Lord declaims narrative length as being a distinguishing criterion of the “epic;” so too does he find the qualification “heroic” to be narrow since such songs could also bear romantic and historical elements. These remarks can be instructively applied to the pāncālī tradition as well. Like the Greek epic song tradition, the pāncālī tradition, notwithstanding its subalternity discussed earlier, would be misrepresented by the qualifications “folk” or “popular.” For a discussion of the problems related to such qualifications with regard to the Greek tradition, see Lord 1964, 6–7.

⁵⁴⁸ Blackburn and Flueckiger (1989, 9) opine that the Indian oral epic falls into two broad performance styles: song-recitation and dance-drama, the latter being secondary to the former. For epic performance traditions that extend beyond South Asia into Southeast Asia, see, for instance, Flueckiger and Sears 1991.
frameworks, in its tales of prophetic heroism, romance, and adventure, the NV participates in the Perso-Arabic oral narrative tradition of the dāstān (P. “story”) and the qiṣṣa (A.; P. qiṣṣah meaning “story”), and in its offshoot, the Indo-Persian romance. The most popular of these romances in North India (and to a lesser extent in Bengal) were the pseudo-biographical adventures of the Prophet’s uncle, Hamzah, and those of the legendary conqueror, Alexander.549

Within Bengal, the NV is situated within a long and rich Bengali tradition of song and performance that extends back in time to the earliest beginnings of Bangla song literature in the Caryāgīti.550 Sukumar Sen divides old Bangla literature into three streams: song-poems (gītikavītā); purāṇic narratives (ākhyāyikā) which are to be sung (geya) or recited (pāṭhya); and non-purāṇic poetic narratives (kavītā-ākhyāyikā) which are sung. The latter two streams, according to him, have a single compositional structure or form called the pāncālī.551 Thus, the Bangla Rāmāyaṇa—Kṛttivāsa’s Śrīrāma Pāncālī—Mālādhara Basu’s Śrīkṛṣṇavijaya, and the maṅgala-vijaya literature celebrating various folk deities (loka-devatā), were all written in this performative pāncālī genre.552 Whereas the Rāmāyaṇa was composed by Brahmins to be sung on festive occasions, the Bangla Mahābhārata, albeit designated as a pāncālī, was never sung at religious or cultural festivals, but solely recited by readers (pāṭhakas) at the Muslim courts or other elite private gatherings. Since there was no liturgical function attached to the recitation of the

549 Pritchett 1991, 1–2. Concerning the Ḥamzah romance in India, see ibid.; with regard to Amīrhmajāra Puthi composed in dobhaṣī Bangla by Fakīr Gharībullāh and his disciple, Salīyād Hāmjā, see Mannan 1966, 105–133. For the Alexander romance in Avadhī and Dakhani literature, see Gaefke 1989. For Ālāl’s Sikāndarnāmā, a translation of Nizāmī’s Iskāndarnāmah into Bangla, see Sikāndarnāmā of Ālāl; and d’Hubert 2010.

550 Concerning the various rāgas that the siddhācāryas composed their padas in, see Mojumder [1967] 1973, 8. See also Kvaerne 2010, 8.


Mahābhārata, translations of the latter text were often composed by non-Brahmins, such as the kāyasthas and other scribal castes.\textsuperscript{553}

As a performance tradition the pāṅcālī or pāṅcālikā is believed to have been originally associated with puppets (pāṅcāla).\textsuperscript{554} Puppet-dance (putula nāca), accompanied by song, dance, and drama, were integral components of the pāṅcālī performance tradition.\textsuperscript{555} Though puppet-dance disappeared from the pāṅcālī performance by the eighteenth century, the designation continued to be applied to epic songs composed around deities.\textsuperscript{556} Pāṅcālis such as the Rāmāyana came to be sung, declaimed, and enacted by one lead singer (mūla-gāyana) as he brandished a fly-whisk (cāmara), while he danced, wearing ankle bells (nupūra) on one or both feet. A chorus of singers (dohāra or pāli) who also played accompanying instruments, such as various kinds of drums like the mṛdaṅga or pā khoiyāja and the dhola, and the kānsī (gong), would also participate in the performance.\textsuperscript{557} Kṛttivāsa’s Rāmāyana continues to inspire the modern-day Bangladeshi performance genres of Rāmāyana gāna (variously known as Rāma kārtana, Rāmalīlā or Rāmamaṅgalā) in the Mymensing, Comilla, Dhaka, Jessore, Khulna, and Faridpur districts; kusāna gāna of Rangpur (which also contains elements of Kāśidāsa’s Mahābhārata); lakṣmīra gāna of Rajshahi; rāma yātrā of Khulna, Faridpur and Jessore; and maheśa khelā of Durgapur and Taherpur in the Rajshahi district.\textsuperscript{558}

Pāṅcālī performances, as they evolved over time, came to exchange many performance conventions with other genres, including the pālā-kārtana, the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava performance tradition surrounding the līlās of Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya, which had its earliest beginnings in Baṛu

\textsuperscript{554} Mohanta 2006.
\textsuperscript{556} Putula nāca continues to be an extremely popular performance genre in Bangladesh, while putula yāträ is performed in the greater Faridpur region. Concerning these genres, see Jamil Ahmed 2000, 320–326.
\textsuperscript{558} Jamil Ahmed 2000, Chapter Two.
Caṇḍdīsa’s Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana.\textsuperscript{559} Pāncāli performances also developed into the more fully theatrical yātrā tradition still prevalent in West Bengal and Bangladesh, wherein several male actors are cast as characters in a drama of the gods.\textsuperscript{560} In Bangladesh today, the pāncāli genre has acquired a narrow association with performances generally related to folk deities, such as Manasā, Caṇḍī, Lakṣmī, Bhagavatī, Śaṇi, and Satyanārayana.\textsuperscript{561} However, it seems to have other specific meanings in other performance texts and contexts. Mary Frances Dunham, for instance, describes a typical jārigāna recital in which the “pāncāli” is one short element of the performance, specifically associated with the invocation or vandanā.\textsuperscript{562}

Pāncālis, such as the NV and Muhammad Khān’s Maktul Hosen, as Dunham has shown, are the literary and bardic precursors of the jārigāna, Islamic Bangla epic songs, also inspired by the Urdu marsiya tradition, and the gājīgān, a form of the maṅgala-vijaya genre dedicated to Sufi gājis (P. ghāzi).\textsuperscript{563} Hence it is entirely possible that the NV was performed in seventeenth-century East Bengali villages, participating in a performance tradition that had at its core some elements still associated with the modern-day jārigāna performance by Muslim bayārīs (the Islamic Bangla term for the lead-singer, deriving from the Arabic bayt, couplet) and dohrārs, the singers who constituted the chorus.\textsuperscript{564}

\textsuperscript{559} For a description of the common performance conventions observed across various present-day Bangladeshi performance genres, see ibid.: 337–347. For a detailed description of the pālā-kīrtana, līlā-kīrtana, and other Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava performance genres as they are performed today in Bangladesh, see ibid., Chapter One. Concerning the view that the Gīta Govinda and the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana were possibly produced with puppets, see Sukumar Sen 1965, 97–99.

\textsuperscript{560} Concerning the yātrā tradition, see Khatun 2006. For a description of the Kṛṣṇayātrā performances prevalent in the early nineteenth century, see Ward 1818, 1: 189–192. For a complete catalog of the over seventy different forms of performance genres found in Bangladesh today centered upon Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya; folk deities, such as Manasa; Śiva and Kāli; the Nātha cult; Rāmacandra; and Islam, see Jamil Ahmed 2000.

\textsuperscript{561} Ibid., 125–128, 156–157 and 311–313.

\textsuperscript{562} Dunham 1997, 63.

\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., 42–43, 45–46. Concerning the performance in Bangladesh today of gājī gān and other related forms of gājīra yātrā, gājīra pāṭa, and pīr gānā, see Jamil Ahmed 2001, Chapter Three.

\textsuperscript{564} Concerning the performance of the jārigāna, see Dunham 1997, especially Chapter Four.
As an epic song on the Prophet Muhammad, which self-confessedly competes with the pāncālīs on Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the NV follows the pāncālī performance tradition. Rāgas, selected on account of their suitability to the mood appropriate to the theme, are specified for individual sections of the NV. Among these are Āsāvari, Bhāṭiyāla, Bhūpālī, Veloyāra, Deśāvarāri, Dhānaśī or Dhānaśrī, Dīpaka, Duhkhita Bhāṭiyāla, Gāndhāra, Guṇjarī, Hillola, Kānaṟ, Kedāra, Mallāra, Pāhāri, Pahāriyāla, Paṅcama, Paṭamaṇjarī, Rāmagaṟa, Sindhurā, Śrī, Śrī Gāndhāra, Sūhi, Tuṟi, Uttarī, Varāri, and Vasanta. Among the chandas, meters, payāra and tripadi are the most prominent and easily identifiable, though candrāvalī, dīrgha, jamaka, kharva, and sahelāra also occur.565 The sections in payāra are narrative, the quick pace of the meter’s rhyming couplets being well-suited to maintaining the buoyancy of the narrative. Tripadi, the more languid of the two metres, marks descriptive, lyrical passages, of a melancholy or romantic nature.566 Applying Dunham’s observations on the close links between poetry and music in Bengali culture to the pāncālī, we see how

one medium suggests the other. The sound of a particular tune infers a particular text, whereas the text of a poem infers a particular tune to express it. This is, of course, characteristic of all song repertoires, but in the case of Bengali songs, there are song tunes that belong traditionally to certain kinds of poetry. In reverse, certain kinds of poetry suggest certain kinds of tunes.567

Given the close relationship between poetry, metre, and melody as well as the ancestral relationship of the NV to the jārigāna, the four singing styles delineated by Dunham for the jārigāna—“the expected narrative style, the exceptional lyrical style and two styles which combine the first ones in different proportions”—may well have been used in the performance of the NV.

565 Appendix Four lists the various rāgas and chandas as these occur in the text.
566 For tripadi, see for instance, the love-sport of Kābil and Ākimā, NV 1: 154–157); or Sārī’s svayamvara (NV 1: 392–397); or the lament of the woman who pined for Ābdullā, ibid. 2: 26–27.
567 Dunham 1997, 134.
568 Ibid., 137.
Just as music and song in the NV’s performance enhanced aesthetic savor for its auditors, vibrant elements of plot and dialogue augmented what Muhammad Āsāddar Āli has called its rasātmaka (sensual) dimension. Indeed, if the NV was making a bid to oust the competition presented by Rāma and Kṛṣṇa kathās, in addition to being a meritorious religious pastime, it had to rival these as equally entertaining. And from what we know of the widespread popularity of the Kṛṣṇa kathās in premodern Bengal and North India, these made for stiff competition indeed.

This brings us to the issue of the manner in which Sultān, as a Sufi and Bangla poet, engages with the aesthetics of rasa. Beginning with Maulānā Dāud’s Candāyana (1379), the Sufis who wrote the Avadhi premākhyanas, as Aditya Behl shows, were the first to appropriate the Sanskrit aesthetics of rasa for distinctly Sufi ends, “recast[ing] the Perso-Arabic ʿishq into the prema-rasa which they called the rāja-rasa, the king of rasas.” What the North Indian Sufis accomplished for the new Indo-Aryan languages via Avadhi—a canon of literature that endeavored to achieve, through the aesthetics of “rasa and romance,” the sublimation of desire (kāma) into ʿishq, passionate love for the divine—Rūpa Gosvāmī accomplished, two centuries later, for Bangla, through the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava aesthetics of bhakti rasa. Enlarging upon pre-existing strands among the Rasasiddhāntins to grant bhakti and prīti bhāva the status of rasa, Rūpa Gosvāmī, in the Sanskrit works Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu and the Ujjvalanīlamaṇi, promoted bhakti as the preeminent rasa under which he subsumed the traditional nine rasas of the Sanskrit aesthetic schools.

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569 Āli 1990, 124.
571 This is Aditya Behl’s phrase. Ibid., 28.
572 These nine were constituted by the original eight of Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra—śṛṅgāra (amorous), hāsyā (humorous), karuṇā (pathetic or compassionate), raudra (furious), vīra (heroic), bhayānaka (terrible), vibhatsa (revolting), and abhuta (marvelous)—to which the Sanskrit aestheticians after Dhanañjaya and Abhinavagupta added śānta (tranquil). Krishna Sharma 2002, 283–295.
prīti or dāsyā (servitude); preyāna, preyas or sākhya (friendship); and vātsalya (parental affection)—while recasting the original śrīgāra into madhura bhakti-rasa. In exalting madhura bhakti-rasa to the absolute position of bhakti-rasa-rāja, the king of bhakti-rasa,573 Rūpa echoes the exalted terminology used earlier by the Sufis of Avadh for prema-rasa, while reifying a trend already prevalent among the rasa aestheticians to single out one among the traditional nine to be the supreme rasa: for Abhinavagupta, it was sānta rasa, for Bhoja, śrīgāra or prema.574

While Sufi Bangla literary texts are heir to both these regional traditions, the response of each Muslim Bengali author to the theology of the Gauḍīyas varies, each author inflecting the aesthetics of rasa and romance differently. As we will see in the following chapters, Sultān appropriates prīti rasa to enhance the status of the Prophet as God’s beloved, coloring it variously with shades of dāsyā, sākhya, and madhura bhakti-rasa. On the other hand, Sultān recasts the divine līlās of Krṣṇa, the focus of Rūpa’s metaphysics of aesthetics, as wretched and adulterous, invoking a śrīgāra rasa which quickly turns to vībhatsa through Sultān’s tone of moral condemnation. We have too, as Chapter Five will show, the keen sensitivity of the entertainer: the maintenance of audience interest through the occasional sensual love-play between Arab nāyakas, prophets and ancestors of Muhammad, and their nāyikās; or wistful scenes of viraha (separation) of the Muslim nāyikā, presented through the popular sub-genre of new Indo-Aryan literatures, the bārāṁsā, the twelve seasons of separation of the heroine from her beloved.575

As an epic work on the Prophet Muhammad, the NV is also a “sacred biography” of the Prophet Muhammad. The designation is employed here as Reynolds and Capps have defined it: “those accounts written by followers or devotees of a founder or religious savior.” It has,

573 This has been summarized from ibid., 283–295.
moreover, been used in the specific sense in which it has been further qualified by these authors: “an extraordinary form of biography... [that] recount[s] the process through which a new religious ideal is established and, at the same time, participate[s] in that process.”576 To declare the NV “sacred biography” is to designate loosely a super-genre, reifying thereby the larger religious purpose that motivates the author’s literary endeavor, and to which end are put to work several literary genres/models.

Reynolds and Capps have pointed out an important difference between “sacred biography” and “hagiography”:

Whereas sacred biographies of founders and saviors primarily intend to depict a distinctively new religious image or ideal, those which chronicle lives of lesser religious figures present their subject as one who has realized, perhaps in a distinctive way, an image, ideal, or attainment already recognized by his religious community.577

Following the distinctions between these two terms provided by Reynolds and Capps, Tony Stewart has argued that Ibn Isḥāq’s original sīra, as reconstructed by Gordon Darnell Newby,578 better reflects these scholars’ definition of “hagiography,” in its continuation of older monotheistic traditions, whereas in its later Ibn Hishām recension, it is more properly a “sacred biography.”579 Now the NV, as Richard Eaton has shown,580 demonstrates many parallels with Ibn Isḥāq’s original version of the sīra, and arguably fits this definition of hagiography. Yet the line between “sacred biography” and “hagiography” is a fine one581: the extraordinary newness of the “hagiography” of the Prophet for Bengal, a hagiography through which “a new religious ideal is established” for Bengalis makes the NV, from such a perspective, a “sacred biography.” Its retrospective orientation, which Stewart considers to be one of the marks of its

577 Ibid., 4.
578 Newby 1989.
581 Stewart (2010b: 233) himself puts forth this point.
“hagiographic” character, serves to valorize the Prophet for a new Islamic epoch and new peoples, providing thus, through retrospect, a prospective view for Islam’s new dispensation for Bengal. Hence, for all practical purposes I shall consider the NV to be a sacred biography.

3.4 Authorial Intention and Intervention in the Mirror of the Nabīvaṃśa

The post-structuralist critique of literature has effectively circumscribed a literary work within its own discursive world, divorcing an author from his/her written production to such a degree that the idea of authorial intent becomes a dubious concern for the historian of religion. Yet in writing his own “secondary history” of the histories of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya produced by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, Tony Stewart cautions against applying such a post-structuralist approach to hagiographic writing. While accepting that hagiographies are literary works insofar as they are “narrative fictions,” he draws a crucial distinction between texts which are “purely literary” and works of a religious nature. This distinction is made not merely on grounds of genre, but because genre “constitutes them differently as a social reality, the genre dictating an implicit contract between author and reader or auditor.” From this perspective, then,

These texts do more than interact with other texts, but also depend on and interact with the cultural texts that constitute the rules of social conduct, logical argument, systematic theology, ritual practice. Writing a sacred biography or hagiography is a religious act, so that when the author tells us that he has written about Caitanya at the behest of his guru, ... we can, within certain limits, accept that statement as reflective of the author’s experience, or at least something of what he hopes to convey of his experience (or perhaps even what he hopes his experience was or what he would like people to believe of it). His is most definitely a motivated discourse, but it is not just fictional; it is devotional and theological, and must because of that commitment be accepted as somehow reflective of a personal world. This writing is a public religious act connected to a definable social community. The authors, without exception, write at the behest of their gurus, and in so doing inevitably convey something of what the

583 Stewart 2010a, 15. See also his (2001: 265–266) remarks elsewhere on authorial intentionality in the premodern context.
guru deemed important... So, as public religious acts, the biographies of Caitanya do not completely sacrifice that link between what is written and what the author heard or understood or was made to understand for the sake of the group. As truth documents, they set a theological standard for the community and do not behave as purely literary works, no matter the co-opting of several literary genres...\(^{584}\)

My discussion of Sultān’s motives in writing the NV follows Stewart’s approach to reading such texts, which are both constitutive of and constituted by a socio-religious context, within which the author and his socio-textual community are bound.

Part of the project of interpreting Sultān’s intention in writing the NV is also to uncover the intended illocutionary force of his biographical enterprise, to understand, in other words, the nature of what Quentin Skinner, the historian of political thought, would call his “intervention.”\(^{585}\) This, according to Skinner, can only be fully understood via situating the act of writing in context, which would include an understanding of the life and times of the author,\(^{586}\) a context that Chapter One sought to explore. In his application of the Skinnerian “text in context” method to premodern Sanskrit literary and intellectual traditions, which provide a paucity of information especially about biographical context, Jonardon Ganeri argues for the importance of situating texts within their “intertextual” context to uncover the nature of authorial “intervention.”\(^{587}\) It is in this light then that we turn to Sultān’s motives—explicit and implicit—for composing this sacred biography.

### 3.4.1 Marking Community Boundaries

Saiyad Sultān addresses “the Musalmāns of Baṅgadesa”\(^{588}\) with the following words:

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\(^{584}\) Stewart 2010a, 15-16.
\(^{586}\) Ganeri 2008, 552.
\(^{587}\) Ibid., 553–554.
\(^{588}\) Baṅgadesa referred to east Bengal, the eastern part of the delta and the region beyond the Brahmaputra, i.e. Śrīhaṭṭa (Sylhet) and Caṭṭala (Chittagong). It was distinct from Gauṛa, which meant the
May all your minds be inclined to virtuous deeds.  
May the Lord Nirañjana be pleased with you.  
Sultān says, addressing everyone:  
“If possible, reflect upon this within your minds.  
If there is in the land a learned man who does not teach others,  
he will surely go to hell.  
Seizing the learned man if they sinned,  
men would thrash him with a staff in the presence of Āllā.  
You have all gathered in my presence;  
this is why I expound the teachings of the scriptures (śāstra).  
Āllā will say, ‘You were a learned man!  
[Yet] you did not prohibit human beings from committing sin.’  
The learned man demolishes one’s sins.  
Because of other’s sins he will be humiliated.  
You serve me on a daily basis.  
There is no difference between you and me.  
When Elāhi asks you for  
an account of the good and the bad you’ve done  
then you’ll say to Āllā,  
‘I found a guru but he did not teach me  
[how to discriminate between good and evil].’  
More than you, Āllā will flog me:  
in my mind I constantly bear this fear.  
Thus, I thought to speak of the significance of the Prophet,  
hearing which humankind will not be drunk with sin.  
Brooding on this fear I composed the Nabīvamśa,  
listening to which sinful people will not be destroyed by sin.” 589

What emerges is a picture of a Sufi guru for whom writing a salvation history for his community becomes the perceived means of his personal salvation. Even if ostensibly motivated by pious fear of God, Sultān is actively engaged as a pīr-author with the issue of Islamic identity and its construction in the Bengali socio-cultural milieu. He desires to strengthen his community’s understanding of Islam and invite others to the faith in a complex regions of north central Bengal, west Bengal, and the western part of the delta. Chatterji [1926] 1970, 1: 146 and 148.

religious world, wherein those with Islamic affiliations, and certainly those who self-identified as “Musalmān,” were presumably still a minority group. In this precolonial world, as Sudipta Kaviraj delineates, religious as much as linguistic groups are “fuzzily conceived:” group boundaries are not precisely defined, but transmute gradually. Geopolitical regions, too, before colonial cartographers first calibrated them through maps, were conceived as radiating outwards from the space of the village, one village shading off into another.590 Syed Jamil Ahmed documents the cross-denominational appeal in today’s rural Bangladesh of performances related to Manasā, Muslim pīrs, and the Nātha cult. He also notes that both Muslim and Hindu performers perform laksīra gāna, and genres associated with Muslim pīrs and the Nātha cult.591 In 1876, Maulvi Abdul Majid, the author of the Chhohi Emamsagar, confesses to taking up the pen because of what he considered to be the corrupt practices of Muslims he saw around him, their religious practice being characterized by little more than their dress and food-habits—practices of wearing caps and consuming beef; they did not so much as recite the kalemā, and participated in the ‘un-Islamic’ practices of worshipping pīrs, Viṣaharī [Manasā], and Kāli.592 Until 1914, Muslims continued to visit non-Muslim households “to watch yatras and hear panchali songs,” even providing subscriptions to local non-Muslims who organized public entertainment programs during (non-Muslim) religious celebrations.593 Hence, it is not surprising that Sultān, writing two and a half centuries earlier, when “the forested hinterland

591 Jamil Ahmed 2000, 337. Ahmed also acknowledges that certain genres, such as those focusing upon Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya or Islamic jārīgāna, do not have a cross-denominational appeal in the modern period. Ibid.
of the southeastern delta was only beginning to be touched by plow agriculture and intense exposure to the Qurʾān,” complains thus about his co-religionists:

By the fault of their past actions (karma), they are born as Bengalis in Baṅga. None of the Bengalis understand Arabic utterance; they did not understand a word of their religion, dīna. They remain possessed of animal-nature. They always read stories of Rāma and Krṣṇa, hearing which my mind feels great anguish. They did not understand a word of religion. They had no knowledge of “self” and “other;” they were submerged in sin.

The NV seeks to mark community boundaries by classifying peoples into three categories: kāpher (the unbeliever), mumin (the believer), and munāphek (the hypocrite). According to Qurʾānic justice, the hypocrites suffer the same fate as the unbelievers, both burning in hell. Yet Muslim theologians were prepared to accord hypocrites a status equivalent to believers as long as they kept their views to themselves. However, if discovered, and unrepentant of their stance, they could be given the death penalty. In using the term munāphek, Sultān resorts to a “technique of Qurʾānic polemical discourse typical of the Medinan era, corresponding to conflict situations in which the religious argument often comes to the aid of the political.”

Over the course of Islamic history, the term munāfiq has been used pejoratively by Sunnī authors against the Shiīṣ, and vice versa, both groups using it as “a convenient way of denouncing one’s opponents and discrediting them.” In the following homiletic passage, Sultān specifies the characteristics of each of the three groups:

I shall now describe those we call the hypocrites,

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595 In order to compare this categorization with traditional Qurʾānic categories, see Denny 2011.
596 Adang 2011b.
597 Adang 2011b.
listening to which the believers shall not perform such action.
Prabhu, the Lord, has told all to communicate in various languages
with all the peoples he has created upon the earth.
According to the actions [performed] by all these peoples
these three chief designations have taken true form, svārāpa:
the first is the designation mumīn, the believers, of pure behaviour;
know that the second is the conduct of the munāpheka, the hypocrite;
the third, by the designation kāpher, the unbeliever, is of animal nature,
[who] ever worships idols, not contemplating upon Nīrañjana, the Stainless One.600

Sultān then provides a detailed description of each, most notably of the hypocrite:

Knowing the essence of the Islamic faith, the believers
determined, in their minds, the one Karatāra, Doer.
The unbelievers do not know the essence of the Islamic faith.
Worshipping idols, they ever perform various irreligious acts.
The hypocrites did not remain firm in one kind of action:
these sinners neither become the believers nor do they become unbelievers.
They ever remain bearing the guise of a Muslim;
but at heart, these bad people do not perform Islamic deeds.
All hypocrites bear twin sentiments in mind;
they are unable to decide between loss and gain.
Before other men, they manifest in one way;
in secret, they commit other acts of despicable behavior.
On their lips, is “Karatāra,” but in their hearts, nothing.
They ever speak in solemn affirmation of Āllā.
“Allā is with all” is their empty rhetoric,
for they do not believe it in their minds.
Going to the assembly of men, they perform the nāmāja.
Coming home, the sinner abandons nāmāja.
On his lips he utters the kalimā, to inform others [of his faith].
He ever squabbles with his neighbors;
the sinner dissipates himself in various ways.601

600 ebe buli munāpheka bolae kāhāre | mumīṇa śuniyā yei karma nāhi kare || prthivīta prabhu yatha nara srjīyāche |
nānā bhāse kathā kahibārā sabe diche || se sakala manusye karma anūpāpa | pradhāna e tīna nāma dhariche 
svārāpa || eka mumīṇa nāma śuddha vyavahāra | dvīte jānia munāphekera ācāra || tṛṭī kāpherā nāme paśura 
caṅta | nīrañjana nā bhāvyā sebe mūrti nīta || NV 2: 47.
601 mumīne imā isalāma marma jāni || eka karatāra mane laiḷā parimāṇi || kāphire nā jāne emā isalāmera marma |
mūrti sebe kare nitya nānāna adharma || munāpheke eka karime nā rahila sthīra | nā hae mumīṇa pāpi nā hae 
kāphīra || musalamāna veśa dhari thākāe anukṣaṇa | marmē musalamāṇi karma nā kare dūrjana || munāpheka 
sabera maneta dui bhāva || nīrṇaya karite nāre apacaya lābha || manusyeśa samukhe karae eka rīta || gopṭe ānā 
karma kare ācāra kuscitā | mukhe bolē karatāra īrade kiccha nāi || kathā kae sadāe āllāra divya khāi || kahibāre kahe 
kathā āllā sabhāna saṅgati | mane tāra allāka patyāe nāhi ati || manusya sabhāta gīyā nāmāja gujāre || ghare āśi 
pāpiśtha nāmāja parihare || mukheta kalimā kahe loke jānibāre || parāśīra sāne nitya kondala karae | nānāna 
Sultān then goes on to list in further detail the characteristics of the hypocrite (munāphēkera lākṣaṇa) who is, on his scale of morality, more lowly than even the idolator.602 If the believers throughout their lifetime are considered to be aruġī, “untouched by disease,” idolators are the living dead, “a corpse” (marā deha), while the hypocrite ever “afflicted by disease” (vyāḍhie pūḍita) lives in limbo, neither finding release from this life through death nor enjoying a happy existence.603 Sultān’s black description of the munāphereka is perhaps indexical to the backsliding into idolatory he fears for his community of neophytes.

### 3.4.2 Partaking in the Qur’ān’s Authority

Sultān offers an assessment of the value of his “intervention”:

You all know me to be your well-wisher.
I made known matters of the Islamic faith:
how the three worlds were created;
how the gods and demons were known to be created;
how Adam and Eve were created;
how all the prophets arose.
Nobody in Baṅga knew of all these matters.
I narrated all in the Nabī Vamśa pāṅcālī.
Mother and father gave birth to you.
Divine eyes, however, did I bequeath you.
Having given you birth, [your] mother and father released you into a dark pit.
By giving you knowledge, the guru rescued you from it.
Know that the guru is more special than one’s father and mother.
From him did you receive directions for the way.
I am the sinner who communicated all of this [to you].
For all your sakes, I created a mirror.
Looking into this mirror, all confusion shall be dispelled.
Examining the mirror, you shall know good and evil.
Becoming compassionate of heart, all the believers shall attempt to preserve the book of the Nabī Vamśa.
If they are able to preserve this book, Āllā’s glory shall befall them.604

602 NV 2: 48–49.
603 mumīn yehena aruġī jīvavanta | nītya marā deha jāna kāphira duranta || munāphereka nītya jāna vyāḍhie pūṛita || nahe marā ehe jītā vyathita kutsita || NV 2: 50.
604 ye rūpe sṛjīla jāna surāsurasrāgaṇa || ye rūpe ādama hāyōṛ sṛjana hāila || ye rūpe yathetra payagāmbara upajīla || vāṅgeta e saba kathā keha nā jānīla || nabī vaṃśa pāṅcālīta sakala kahīla || māe bāpe tomhāre jānāma diyā geche ||
Through his NV, Sultān attempts to strengthen the belief (ʿīmān) of the believer. In addition to strengthening belief in the shahāda, the Muslim profession of faith, based upon the beliefs in monotheism and in Muhammad as God’s messenger, Sultān is also interested in elucidating the other significant objects of the belief of the true believer: “God’s earlier messengers, his revealed books, his angels, and the hereafter.”

In Sultān’s own words, the NV is likened to a mirror, looking into which one can discriminate between good and evil. We are invited to draw the text into comparison with the Qurʾān, among whose proper names is Furqān, “the Criterion,” “that which sets apart or distinguishes,” an appellation that Sultān too uses elsewhere when referring to the Qurʾān. “Furqān” alludes to the holy book’s ability to unequivocally set the parameters of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood, the lawful and the unlawful. Additionally, the NV as mirror is a metaphor that recalls the heart-mirror of the Sufi practitioner, preserved and shone by the daily practice of dhikr, the continual remembrance of God. The NV is likened to the aspirant’s finely polished consciousness, which enables discrimination between good and evil; but the NV is better in one important respect. Like the Qurʾān, it is a readymade mirror for humankind: by bestowing the NV upon his community, Sultān perhaps hopes to reduce the need for supererogatory contemplative practice for the layperson and the guesswork out of the pragmatic business of everyday moral choices. The mirror-conscience metaphor, then,

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605 Adang 2011a.
606 Mustansir 2011a.
607 Mustansir 2011a.
608 Nor should his approach lead us to believe that contemplative practice is not important to Sultān, for, indeed, if we accept our Sultān’s authorship of the Jñāna Pradīpa, we see how he provides detailed instructions for such esoteric endeavor. However, the two books target entirely different audiences: the
through its allusion to the concept of dhikr, reifies the NV-Qurʾān parallel, for Dhikr is another proper name for the Qurʾān, “a remembrance for the entire world” (Q 68:52).609 When read in these textured ways, Sultān’s statement perhaps makes a bolder claim than any pious Muslim might wish to put forth; yet even a more conservative reading reveals this passage to be a self-confident assertion of the author’s recognition of the NV’s role in filling the Qurʾānic void, and his role in “representing” the Qurʾān.610 Indeed, Bengali Muslims in Sultān’s time generally had no linguistic access to the Qurʾān, and would not until 1881, when Girish Chandra Sen wrote the first Bangla translation and commentary on the holy book.611

As a book that transmits Qurʾānic matters, the NV is also touched by its aura of holiness, and urges similar ritual treatment: the performance of ablutions by its reader and auditors, failing which sin accrues. We note in this passage, cited here once more, the emphasis Sultān places on the observance of ritual purification for any form of interaction with the book of the NV:

When one listens to these Qurʾānic matters, all people should purify themselves by performing ablutions. If you do not perform your ablutions, do not read the Nabī Vamśa. Listen carefully to the tales of all the messengers. While listening to these, do not speak of other matters. If someone speaks, you shall tell him not to. If you read the hindi Nabī Vamśa without ablutions, it will not be my fault if you drown in sin.612

Sultān then pleads with his community to preserve the Nabī Vamśa, through writing it accurately, for any inaccuracy would distort Allah’s own words:

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Jñāna Pradīpa clearly addresses the Sufi practitioner, Sultān’s most intimate circle of initiates, whereas the NV is for a wider audience.

609 Mustansir 2011a.


611 Uddin 2006, 87.

612 ehi korānera kathā śune yei kṣaṇa | pavitra karibā oju kari sarvajana || aju nā kariyā nabī vamśa nā paribā | rasula sabera kathā yattane śunib | śunib || āna kathā nā kahibā ekathā śunīte | keha kahile kathā kahibā nā kahite || vini aju hindi nabī vamśa pare yabe | mora dosa nāhi pāpe majjibeka tabe || NV 1: 696.
In writing [it], neither augment the syllables nor break them. If an error is made in writing, take pains to correct it. Such that Allā’s words may not become inaccurate, write with care, feeling fear at heart. To the messenger Mohammād did the Lord tell all the tales of the prophets who went before. If you all should write such tales inaccurately, it shall not be my fault if you fall into hell. If you write it accurately, you shall earn great virtue. All sin will be shattered; you shall proceed to paradise.

In these ways, Sultān’s exhortation to his community to preserve the NV powerfully connects them to processes of sacred memory, exoteric and esoteric, and the preservation of the Word specifically through written transmission, processes which have been central to Islamic identity since the earliest formations of the Islamic umma. It is unclear whether the first books of the NV, like that of Muhammad Khān’s Maktul Hosen, were written in Arabic script. If this was the case, these would have acquired an additional sacrality associated with the holy script, as in the case of Javanese, Tamil, and Malay texts written in Arabic script which were accorded the ritual purity due the Qur’ān, even when these books dealt with secular themes. Yet through Sultān’s plea to preserve the NV, he organizes his new community around Islam as the “religion of the Book,” in ways that parallel the social organization of the early Islamic community around the Qur’ān, a process of building social solidarity, which was later replicated in every new geographic region touched by Islam. Reinforcing this traditional

613 lekhite aṃṣara bāṛa-tuṭā nā lekhībā | lekhite aśuddha haile yattane śudhībā || āllāra vacana yena aśuddha nā hae | yatna kari lekhībā mane kari bhae || rasula sabera kathā āgeta gaṅiche | mohāmmada rasulere prabhu jānāiche || hena kathā tumhi sabe aśuddha lekhile | tāta mora doṣa nāhi narake paṛile || śuddha yadi lekha para bahu punya pāibā | khaṇḍibha yatheka pāpa bihiste yāibā || NV 1: 696.

614 Concerning the earliest dated manuscript of the Maktul Hosen in Arabic script, see Eaton 1993, 294.
615 Ricci 2011, 175. Books written in arwi script were known as kitāb, rather than the Tamil pustakam, equating such books, via such a designation, to the Qur’ān. Ibid.
616 The sacrality of the book of the NV is distinct from the Javanese, Tamil, and Malay texts that acquired such status, being accorded the ritual purity associated with the Qur’ān, because of their adoption of the Arabic script.
Islamic connection between “literacy and divine power,” he urges this partially literate society to band around the book of the NV.617

3.4.3 Strengthening the Axis of Charismatic Authority

Other reasons for composing this sacred biography remain implicit, chief among these being the valorization of the pre-existing structure of charismatic authority in which the author places himself, and its further strengthening through the biographic process. It is evident that Sultān, himself a Sufi master, invested considerable authority in the institution of the guru.618 Sultān occasionally glorifies the virtues of his own master, Sāh Hosen, in the NV.619 In the passage above, we have seen his claims for the superior position of the guru to that of parents, for the former rescues the seeker from “the dark pit” of the world into which he finds himself abandoned by his parents. In the Nabīvaṃśa, the author further explains the distinguishing characteristics of the true guru, which become indexical of the values he perhaps strove to emulate in his own role as guru: the true guru is one who is pained by the suffering of his neighbor, and constantly reflects upon how he could alleviate such pain; he perpetually remembers the Lord; he chastises his neighbor for committing sinful acts and teaches him the ethical code, nītī śāstra, of proper conduct; he emphasizes the importance of freeing the mind from the tangle of the world; he reiterates the necessity of being involved in the yoga of action night and day; he remains awake day and night, living a disciplined life away from worldly entanglements; and ever chants the great mantra, ajapa.620 Having listed these characteristics,

617 Eaton 1993, 291. Concerning how Islam spread in the Bengal countryside as much through the plow as through the authority of the book, see ibid., 291–297.
618 It is noteworthy that Sultān prefers to use the Indic term guru when referring to the Sufi pīr in the role of preceptor. Concerning such usage in rural Bengal, see Nicholas 1974, 11. For the use of this term in Islamic Bangla literature, see Roy 1999, 188.
619 Concerning Sultān’s master, see Chapter One.
620 NV 1: 287-88.
he pays obeisance to his own master, rather bluntly emphasizing the self-serving nature of performing such an act should a guru desire similar devotion from his own disciples. Such candid passages document the importance Sultān places on modeling behavior for the sake of emulation by his disciples, and is also one of the numerous ways by which he perpetuates through the biographic process the authority invested in him through his guru-śisya pīr-murīd lineage.

Other homiletic tales provide further opportunities for our pīr-author to strengthen his own authority within his community. A tale in the Nabīvaṃśa, which recounts an encounter of Hāsān Basorī (Hasan of Basrā, d. 110/728) with Iblis, attests to Sultān’s belief that it is through the guru’s guidance alone that one learns the process of meditation through which God-realization is possible. Hence, he cautions against Iblis who endeavors to turn a disciple away from his master. He also warns his audience of Iblis’ role in publicizing the false guru, his henchman in leading humankind astray. Elsewhere he tells the tale of a certain Varasiyā, a great sage who meets his physical and spiritual downfall on account of his growing sense of arrogance which prevented him from acknowledging his own guru.

While the biographic process serves to reinforce Sultān’s authority within his community, another candid remark in the NV demonstrates that Sultān recognized that his authority as guru invested his role as biographer with credibility. Sultān tells a story in which the baby Muhammad is exchanged with another child in order to save him from being killed by the evil ruler Ābu Jehel, known in the Islamic tradition as the Prophet’s arch-enemy. Echoing the tale of Kṛṣṇa’s birth, this narrative represents the complex interplay of appropriation and competition characteristic of the Nabīvaṃśa. The author explains that he read this story in

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{621:\text{Ibid.}, 289.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{622:\text{Ibid.}, 258-263.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{623:\text{Ibid.}, 263-289.}}\]
a/the book (kitāb), and insists that if people hear these words from the guru’s mouth, they become credible.

As we have seen thus far, the composition of the NV puts a seal on the authority of the pīr-author within the pre-existing institution of the Śāh Hosen–Saiyad Sultān, master-disciple lineage. However, in other rhetorical ways, Sultān’s writings, as we shall now see, provide further genealogical depth to this axis of charismatic power, extending it to include Āli, the Prophet, other prophets, and God. A recurring device is the intermittent insertion of the authorial voice within the narrative on the Prophet’s life, whether through colophons or direct didacticism. In such colophons, by occasionally saluting the Prophet’s feet, and at other times his own guru’s, Sultān in his role as both šiṣya and guru, models for his disciples humility and servitude to his own person as their Sufi master. These authorial colophons embedded in the biography serve as constant reminders of the spiraling relationship of power between Sultān as pīr and the figure of the Prophet.

A section in Sultān’s miʿrāj further deepens the pīr-murīd relationship in the context of the God-Muhammad encounter. When Muhammad comes into God’s presence, we are told that the latter imparts to the Prophet knowledge of ninety thousand matters (kathā): thirty thousand of these were knowledge of the scriptures (sāstra), thirty thousand were knowledge of Brahman, and the remaining third were secret expressions the author does not consider appropriate to

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624 Ibid. 2: 52. It is impossible to determine from the language of the text whether the book in question is “the Book,” or merely “a book.” It is likely as in the case of Islamic Javanese, Malay, or Tamil text that such references point to an Arabic or Arabic-derived text. Ricci 2011, 175.

625 For the Prophet, see, for instance, rasulera pade kahe saiyada sulatāna | tumhi vine pātkāra gati nāhi āna || āmhi pātkāra mane āra nā āśā | pāpa honte uddhārite tumhi se bharasā || NV 2: 52; rasulera padayuga šireta vandiyā | saiyada sulatāne bhanē pāṅcāli raciyyā || Ibid., 60. For his pīr, see, for instance, Śāhā hosenera dāsa saida sulatāna | raciūni korāna kathā esabā bayāna || NV 1: 422; Śāhā hosenera dāsa saida sulatāna | eta śuni bhāvite lāgilā mane mana || Ibid., 829; and Śāhā hosenera dāsa saida sulatāna | eke eke kahiūchī nabīra bayāna || Ibid., 896. It is noteworthy that in Book Two of the NV, the Prophet completely replaces Sultān’s pīr. Concerning similar patterns of inscribing authority through the padas ascribed to Ravidās and other bhakti poets, see Hawley 1988, 269–290, especially 271–273.
The God-Muhammad master-disciple relationship presented here establishes the paradigmatic model for the murshīd-murīd (or, in Sultān’s language, guru-śisya) relationship that Sultān and his disciples carry forward.

If the Jñāna Pradīpa is viewed as the composition of the NV’s author, we see how the author traces the Sufi spiritual lineage back to Ālī’s apprenticeship to the Prophet, a lineage which can be traced back even further, as the mīrāj passage discussed above suggests, to the Prophet’s own supreme discipleship to God. Moreover, while a primary concern of the Nabīvamśa is the genealogy of the Prophet Muhammad, who is placed in a long line of Hindu gods, prophets, and cultural heroes, Sultān, through these numerous rhetorical ways, invites us to affix his spiritual lineage to that of the Prophet; the Prophet of Islam brings God’s latest revelation to the people of Arabia, while Sultān presents himself as its interpreter to the people of Banγa. Given his anxiety over detractors who deride him for corrupting the Islamic faith by writing about it in Bangla, a subject examined below, this preoccupation with genealogies can perhaps be seen as a discursive move to allay such criticism by presenting the “purity” of his spiritual ancestry, credentials fortified by the title of “Saiyad” and his powerful social standing within a community of ālims, learned men.

From this discussion, it is clear that Sultān’s motives in composing his sacred biography are manifold: first, to construct a sacred biography of the Prophet that would compete with Hindu

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626 NV 2: 270. See also 283. For the idea of God granting secret knowledge to Muḥammad as depicted in Sufi sayings on the Prophet’s ascent, see Colby 2006, 64-65 and 82-83. Concerning God’s revelation of “three times thirty thousand mysteries” to Muḥammad, as presented in ‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of the Prophet’s ascent in the Ilāhīnāma, see Schimmel 1985, 168.

627 bangeta e saba kathā keha nā jānila | nabī vamśa pāncālīta sakala kahila || NV 2: 481.

628 Concerning the title of Saiyad, the Imperial Gazetteer of India (1907-09) provides a proverb that has many variations in different parts of North India: “Last year I was a Jolāhā (weaver); now I am a Sheikh; next year if prices rise, I shall become a Saiyid.” The Ethnology, Languages Literature and Religions of India, 329.
narrative texts such as the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata,629 and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, widely available in Bangla translation by Sultān’s time.630 In more contemporary terms, he proposes to provide an alternative to what A. L. Becker calls “prior texts,” which Sultān seeks to ultimately displace, creating in the process a new “prior text” for his community which fills, at least temporarily, the vacuum of the Qurʾān;631 a discussion of this process is elaborated upon below.

His second aim was to establish a moral code for Islamic practice in Bengal’s rural provinces where Qurʾānic law and the shāriʿa were still relatively unknown. In this regard, the NV’s account of the deeds of the prophets (Chapter Five), and particularly the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension (Chapter Seven), provide model templates for ethical practice, defining how a true Muslim can emulate prophetic models.

A discussion of authorial motives in the context of the biographic enterprise demonstrates how the biographer and his subject are entwined in an escalating relationship of power. If the institution of the guru within Bengali culture invests the author with the initial authority required to root the Prophet of Islam in Bengal, the biography ipso facto extends the guru-śīṣya lineage to one that reaches back through Ālī and Muhammad, through the prophets, to God himself. It is around this axis of charismatic power, extended and strengthened through the biographic process, that the pīr-author seeks to establish his community.

It is widely recognized that identity, whether ethnic, religious, or national, is constructed via processes of boundary formation—the exclusion of the Other—as much as

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629 As we have seen in Chapter One, Haq and Sharif refer to a passage in which Sultān states that he draws inspiration from the first Bangla Mahābhārata, composed by Kavīndra Parameśvara Dās. Haq [1957] 1991, 294–95. NV 1: 9 and NV 2: 7.
630 I specifically use the word “translation” over “rendition” or “adaptation,” as the issue and definition of translation is discussed below.
631 Becker 1995, 287. I follow Ricci (2011, 245–260) in the application of this concept to the literary process by which religiously motivated authors create new sacred texts for their communities, usually via translation. In time these texts displace older “prior texts” eventually themselves becoming the new “prior texts” for the community. For a more detailed discussion of the application of this concept to the NV, see the discussion that follows in this chapter.
through shared experience, inclusive processes that build upon communal solidarity. These mutually reinforcing aspects of identity formation have been termed “us-hood” and “we-hood” by Thomas Hylland Eriksen.\footnote{Eriksen 1994, 566–7.} In his didactic and narratalogical construction of identity for Bengal’s Muslims, Sultān utilizes both these complementary processes of exclusion and inclusion. Having discussed such authorial motives and interventions, we now turn to processes of translation and conversion, processes which are ordinarily independent but come together in the NV’s biographic process.

3.5 Translation as Conversion in the Biographic Process

3.5.1 Definitions

The framing of the NV’s biographic process as one in which translation operates as conversion is much indebted to the methodological model put forward by Ronit Ricci in her monograph, Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia, wherein the intertwining of these two otherwise separate processes are elaborated upon in her study of Tamil, Javanese, and Malay translations of the Arabic conversion narrative, The Book of One Thousand Questions.\footnote{Ricci 2011.} Additionally, this analytical rubric also draws upon Tony K. Stewart’s examination of translation as religious encounter,\footnote{Stewart 2001.} and Richard M. Eaton’s theory of Islamization in Bengal.\footnote{Eaton 1993, 269–290.}

“The English word ‘translation,’ ” as Ronit Ricci reminds us,

possesses no synonyms and... is not easily translated or correlated with ‘equivalent’ terminology in other languages. Many cultures exhibit diverse ways of addressing and defining the meanings of rewording or rewriting a text from another language, ways that only partly overlap with “translation” or defy its meaning altogether.\footnote{Ricci 2011, 31.}
Because a universal definition of “translation” does not exist, but rather “translation” is formulated and practiced differently in various socio-historical contexts, we will here examine it in the region-specific context of translation from Persian, Persian-mediated Arabic, and Arabic sources into Bangla. This discussion will be framed in the context of vernacularization, discussed earlier, but also within the historical context of what it meant to translate the Qurʾān as Islam travelled into the Persian cosmopolis.

Since the NV is not a translation per se of any single text, the question may well be asked whether the term “translation” is pertinent for our purposes. Several factors support the employment of the term, paramount among these being Sultān’s self-conception of his preacherly intervention as that of a translator of the Qurʾānic word. I use “translation,” then, to refer to the multiple ways in which Sultān devises and practices translation, all of which work together to produce the NV. First, I use the term in the restricted sense as a search for word-for-word “equivalence” from the source language into the target language, however “deficient” or “exuberant” these “equivalences” may be. At significant moments in the text where Islamic doctrine is being introduced, Sultān provides the translations of key Arabo-Persian words into Bangla. The second sense in which translation is practised by Sultān is a search for equivalence in form and genre, and the third broadest application of the term is in the author’s conveyance of the culture and religion of the Persian cosmopolis into Bangla, itself located within a Sanskrit cosmopolis. Thus, the NV translates the world religion of Islam into a Bengali context, while linking Bengalis to a religion which has a global identity.

637 Cf. ibid., 33. This opening section on translation within the context of Bengal has benefited greatly from Ronit Ricci’s framing of the terms “translation” and “conversion” for her analysis of these processes within the South and Southeast Asian literary contexts of the Arabic cosmopolis. Ibid., 21 and 31–34.

638 Cf. ibid., 33.

My use of the term “conversion” can likewise be called into question. The term has been privileged over “Islamization” because of prevailing emic conceptions that support such usage. While Islamization, as the gradual process of conversion of an entire society to Islam is discussed and employed in implicit and explicit ways throughout this analysis, Sultān’s concerns as a Sufi pīr and preacher were more immediate. As we have seen, Sultān’s explicit agenda is to develop the Islamic identity of neophyte communities, and to expand Islam’s reach through the composition of a missionary text in Bangla which would compete with older Vaiṣṇava scriptures. Conversion is never explicitly mentioned but implicit in the interventions the text seeks to make. His representation of the Prophet Muhammad is that of a crusader who conquers new lands via the Book and the sword; he thus emphasizes a rapid process of religious conversion, rather than gradual religious change that occurs over the longue durée. The author, as we shall see, also frames conversion to Islam as the swift and direct outcome of the translation of the Qur’an, while simultaneously inserting his own interventions as translator into a long intertextual genealogy of Islamic translation practices necessitated by Islam’s rapid expansion over new geo-political and ethno-linguistic frontiers. Further, through its narrative strategies, the NV performs several acts of the “conversion” of Vaiṣṇava gods to Muslim prophets and correspondingly aspires to “convert” Vaiṣṇava “prior texts” to Islamic ones. I develop these and other emic conceptions of conversion into reflections upon how various forms and elements of translation manifest as conversion within the space of the text.

Within the figure of Saiyad Sultān as biographer thus coalesce his dual roles of translator and preacher. But what are Sultān’s immediate concerns as a preacher-translator? What does translation mean to him, and what does he purport to translate? What was his modus operandi for translation? How does he, if at all, connect translation to conversion? How can we situate

his statements within Islamic understandings of translation and conversion, and how do they relate to processes of Islamization that occurred in other regions? It is to these matters that we now turn.

3.5.2 Saiyad Sultān’s Conception of Translation as Conversion

Immediately following the section on Sultān’s motives for composing the NV, provided in translation above, the author supplies us with a detailed translation statement. He explains:

“Listen, people!” says Saiyad Sultān,  
“listen attentively to this hindī Nabī Vamsā!  
It was in Arabic, and I made it into hindī;  
I publicized it such that it could be understood in the land of Baṅga.  
Not understanding the Persian language, they remained fools.  
Listening to the hinduān language they came to know [proper] conduct.”

Here Sultān uses the verb hindī karā, “to make hindī,” for “translation,” emphasizing the linguistic component of the target culture. Elsewhere he also uses hinduyānī/hinduānī karā, “to make Hindu/Indian,” for “translation,” literally, “making Hindu/Indian,” emphasizing the geographical region and culture of his target audience and the process by which an Arabo-Persian idiom is enculturated to a Sanskritic/Indic one. Hinduyānī comes from the Persian hinduwān, which as an adjective means “Indian,” and as a noun is the Persian plural of Hindu, the inhabitant of Hind/Hindustān. It is noteworthy that even though local people are referred to in the NV as baṅgālīs, who inhabit baṅga deśa, the NV’s language, elsewhere reflexively described as desī bhāṣā, is here named as hindī. The nomenclature, Hindī (alternatively known in medieval sources as the generic Hindavi), suggests that the Bāṅglā

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641 kahe saida sualtāna śuna naragaṇa | ehi hindī nabī vaṃśa śuna diyā mana || āchīlā ārabī bhāṣā hindī karilun | baṅgadeśe bujhe mata pracāriyā dilun || nā bujhi phārasī bhāṣā murakha āchīlā | hinduānī bhāṣā śuni ācāra jānilā || NV 1: 696.  
642 NV 2: 477 and 480.  
vernacular is here categorized in broad terms as a language of Hind or Hindustān, what we may call “Indic.”644 Such an understanding was prevalent at least since the early fourteenth-century among the Muslim elite, as can be seen in the writings of Amīr Khusrū Dihlavī (b. 651/1253). His contested lines, provided here in the authoritative translation of the noted scholar of Urdu literature, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, show that Khusrū saw the various languages of separate regions of India, including Bengal, as constituting hindavī, Indic languages:

In every territory, there is  
A language specific, and not so  
By chance either. There are  
Sindhī, Lāhori, Kashmīrī, Kībar,  
Dhaur Samandarī, Tilangī, Gujar,  
Ma’barī, Gaurī, and the languages  
Of Bengal, Avadh, Delhi  
And its environs, all within  
Their own frontiers.  
All these are Indic [hindvī], and  
Are in common use  
For all purposes since antiquity.645

Thus, Suniti Kumar Chatterji observes that:

a new style or form of this Common Indo-Aryan, as it was spoken around Delhi, as ‘Hindustani’ or ‘Urdu’,... (or the Indo-Aryan speeches) of North India, in their ensemble or totality, came to be known to non-Indians from the West, simply as the Hindu or the Indian Speech (Hindawī, Hindūī, or Hindī). Even this Indian (Hindwi, Hindi) Speech at first did not have a specialised sense; and when taken by the Muslim conquering troops from North India, who established a number of Muslim-ruled states in the Deccan and South India..., the name Dakni or Deccani, or the Southern Speech, was used by the Muslim rulers and sojourners among Marathi, Konkani, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil speakers. From the name of a North Indian tribe from the Panjab and Rajasthan and Gujarat, it also received another name—Gujari. A common sobriquet for it was also Bhakha or Bhasha, just “Speech of the People” by which all kinds of Spoken Aryan from

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644 Premodern Bengali brahmins termed Bangla simply as bhāṣā, the Muslim elite called it hinduyānī bhāṣā; other terms used by premodern authors were prākṛta bhāṣā, loka-bhāṣā, and laukika bhāṣā. Occasionally it was termed baṅgabhāṣā, but it was mostly called deśībhāṣā. Sharif 1972, 273.
645 az maḥal-e khwīsh bar ārād nafṣī. hast darīn ‘arsah bahar nāḥatī | muṣṭalḥā-e khāṣah nāh az ‘ārītī. sindī o lāhaurī o kashmīrī o kībar | dhaur samundarī o telangī o gujar. m’abarī o gaurī o baṅgāl o avad | dehlī o pīrāmanash andar hamah-e ḫād. īn hamah hindavīst kah ze ayyām-e kohn | ‘āmah bakār ast bahar ġūnah-e sukhan. Since the text of these lines is problematic, and has been variously interpreted by scholars of Persian, I have retained here the translation of Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, while providing in this note the original lines from the Nūḥ Sipihr of Āmir Khusrū Dihlavī, 179–80, which is cited and translated by Faruqi (2001, 66).
c. 1000 A.D. came to be known in a general way—Assamese, Maithil, Bengali, Oriya, Kosali, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Brajbhasha, Đingal or Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi, Konkani, Panjabi, Sindhi and everything else in the way of the spoken forms which Indo-Aryan included.646

Though in the passage above, Khusrū uses “Hindvī” in the sense of “Indic” or “Indian,” Muslim authors, as Christopher Shackle clarifies, tended to be rather indiscriminate in their application of the term not merely to “varieties of language which would now be described as early forms of Urdū or Hindī, but also for others which are clearly different, e.g. Panjābī or Rājasthānī,” or in our case, Bangla.

To return now to Sultān’s argument for translation:
Āllā said, “I have sent messengers in accord with the needs of each land and its language.”
If the messenger speaks one language, and the people another, it would be impossible [for the two] to understand each other’s conversation.
Every prophet and messenger that ever existed was created [to speak] in the language of the community, ummat.648

Sultān iterates the Qur’ānic affirmation that ‘each nation has its own prophets sent to it (Q 10:47; 16:36) and that every apostle was only sent “with the language (lisān) of his people” (qawmihi, Q 14:4).”649 Thus, as Uri Rubin explains, “Muḥammad the Arabian prophet… has brought to his nation an Arabic Qur’ān (e.g. Q 12:2). His Arabic Qur’ān was revealed to him that he may warn “the mother of cities” (umm al-qurā, Q 42:7…), which is Mecca, according to the exegetes.”650 Thus Sultān too continues:

Their intellects befuddled, all the Arabs who lived in the land of Mecca had completely forgotten the scriptures.
Then, Prabhu Nirañjana, the primeval repository, created a messenger from that lineage.
Muḥammad, the messenger, Āllā’s dear friend, who had met with Āllā, upon his throne,

646 The italics are Chatterji’s (1973, 36).
647 Shackle 2006.
648 Ḏālā buliche muñi ye deśe ye bhāṣa | se deśe se bhāṣe kailunī rasula prakāṣā || eka bhāṣe payagāmba ra bhāṣe nara | nāpāriba bujhite uttara paduttara || yatheka rasula nabī payagāmba haiche | ummatera ye bhāṣa se bhāṣe srijāyeche || NV 2: 477.
649 Rubin 2011.
650 Ibid.
spoke in Arabic, to the Arabs,
proclaiming to them all matters of religion.
The Arabs found their faith via the Arabic language:
hearing the teachings of the Qurʾān, they became Muslims.\textsuperscript{651}

Muhammad is here represented as the “translator” into the language of humans, in his case, Arabic, of the word of Allāh, whom he met upon his throne.\textsuperscript{652} In keeping with traditional Islamic discourse, the Qurʾān is portrayed as an axial text that ends the age of ignorance (jāhiliyya), the bhora buddhi, “befuddled intellects” of the pre-Islamic Arabs, and marks a new epoch.\textsuperscript{653} Sultān emphasizes the connection between hearing the Qurʾān and conversion. Alluded to here is the wondrous nature of the miracle of the Qurʾān; Islamic tradition records conversion stories of the Prophet’s early companions which centre upon the role that hearing (samāʾ) the divine revelation played in their acceptance of the new faith.\textsuperscript{654}

In a rhetorical move that links conversion directly to the process of translation, Sultān then tells of how the natives of Khurasan became Muslim:

Now, the natives of Khorasan were not accustomed to speaking in Arabic with the Arabs.
The Arabs did not understand the words of the Khorasanians, while the Khorasanians did not follow the Arabs.
When the Prophet began to recite the Qurʾān, before the Khorasanians, none of those who came into his presence could understand his speech (bāta).
Then, one who knew both languages came up.
Sitting before the two parties, he made each side comprehend [the other].
He, who knew both Persian and Arabic, came between them, and spoke.
The Khorasanians asked the Arabs about all matters pertaining to Arabic in the language of the Khorasanians.

\textsuperscript{651} makkādeśe āchilenta yatheka āraba | bhora buddhi haiyā śāstra pāsarilā saba || tabe prabhu nirañjana anādi nidhāna | se vamaseta payagāmbara karilā śjana || muhammadad rasula állāra priya sakha | ārē állāra sane haiche yāra dekhā || ārabeta ārabi bhāse payagāmbara | kahilā dīnera kathā sabāra gocara || ārabe ārabi bhāse pāila imāna | korānera kathā śuni haila musalamāna || NV 2: 477–478.
\textsuperscript{652} Concerning the topic of God’s speech (kalām Allāh) and the debates it generated in early Islamic theology, see Zadeh 2007, 348–375.
\textsuperscript{653} Khalidi 1994, 7.
\textsuperscript{654} Zadeh 2007, 376.
When they heard the words of the Qur’ān in Persian, all the Khorasanians accepted the faith.\textsuperscript{655}

Sultān was perhaps alluding to the well-known incident recorded by Ibn Sa’d in his \textit{al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā} of the Prophet sending in the year 7\slash 628 diplomatic missions to various kings of the world instructing them to accept Islam. The emissaries were specifically chosen for their ability to communicate the meaning of the Qur’ān in the language of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{656} The question of the particular form of historicality Sultān’s fictional representation of the Prophet in Khurasan produces is less relevant to us here than his choice to elicit the Prophet’s personal role in Islamization beyond Arabia, invoking prophetic deed to underline the significance of translation: one who had earlier “translated” the divine word for his people, now calls for the services of a translator to spread his prophetic message beyond the frontiers of Arabia. The translator is here described as a mediator between cultures and languages, as one who “knew both languages” and “came between them [both parties], and spoke.” The translatorial powers of one such early preacher-translator, Mūsā b. Sayyār al-Aswārī (fl. second\slash eighth century), whose Arabic was at par with his Persian, is noted by al-Jāḥiẓ in his \textit{al-Bayān wa’l-Tabyīn}. He was famed for his ability to explain, in Arabic, a verse from the Qur’ān to the Arabs, sitting to his right, and then, in Persian, to the Persians, to his left.\textsuperscript{657} Though speaking ostensibly of second\slash eighth century Khurasan, Sultān’s portrayal of the oral nature of this early act of Qur’ānic translation, as we shall see, reverberates across time and linguistic frontiers to be situated eventually in preliterate, rural Bengal, where translatorial activity continued to have a

\textsuperscript{655} \textit{NV} 2: 478.  
\textsuperscript{656} Zadeh 2007, 479.  
\textsuperscript{657} Ibid., 472.
strong oral component. For Sultān then conversion is concomitant to translation, one that naturally and swiftly follows in the wake of explaining (vākhāniyā bujhāno) the Qurʾānic word in the target language. As in Khurasan, Sultān portrays the Islamization of Java, Byzantium, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places, as the direct outcome of “the hermeneutic engagement with the Qurʾān and the epistemological process of transmission across languages”.

Into Javanese from Arabic words, all the Javanese traced the Book’s teachings. Becoming well-acquainted with the Islamic faith, they were able to assess that there is one creator, karatā. All the Coliyās [Colas], through Coliyā words, were able to narrate the teachings of the Qurʾān. The Byzantines (rūmī) made arrangements for people to write down the teachings of the Qurʾān in the language of Rūm. In Turkistān, they wrote in Turkish, the import of the Qurʾān. Listening to the Qurʾān’s import in Syriac, the Syrians (sāmī) began to practice Muslim ethics. 659 Listening to the Qurʾān’s principles in the Emrānī language, the Emrānis became established in the Islamic faith. 660 [Hearing about] the Islamic faith in Irākī, the Irākīs began to practise the unparalleled Muslim ethical code. Listening to the Qurʾān’s teachings in Paśtu, the Pāṭhāns understood the practices. In many lands, in many tongues, arrangements have been made to teach the Muhammadan religion [through] the teachings of the Qurʾān. 661

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658 Ibid., 473. Concerning early anecdotal evidence in Islamic sources on how conversion was linked to translation, see ibid., 472–479.
659 The first and second line of this couplet have been interchanged, and need to be emended.
660 It is unclear which peoples the Bangla emrānī refers to. It could possibly be a corruption of the Arabo-Persian armanī or irmanī, meaning “Armenian.” Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “armanī.”
661 yāvā sabe yāvā bhāṣe ardāḥ vacana | kīṭābā kathā saba kaila uddeśāna || imā islāmāra kathā bhāla mate jānī | eka karatāra hena laīla parimāṇī || coliyā [cola] sakala yathā coliyā kathāe | korānera kathā saba vākhāna karae || rumi sabe ruma bhāṣe korānera kathā || loka sabe likhi lai karenta vyavasthā || turakṣṭāne turakī bhāṣe āpanāra || korānera kathā saba likhi laīlā sārā || sūnyā karite āche musalamāna karma || sāmī sabe sāmī bhāṣe korānera marma || emrāni emrāni bhāṣe korānera tattva || sūnyā imā islāmāta hūila samarthā || erākī erāka bhāṣe imā islāmā || musalamāni karma sabe kare anupāma || pāṭhāna sakale pastu bhāṣe āpanāra || korānera kathā śuni bhujila ṅcāra || katha ṇe katha bhāṣe korānera kathā || dīna muhammadī bujhī deyanta vyavasthā || NV 2: 478–479.
Having thus framed the transnational spread of Islam and its praxis as a genealogy of local translation movements, Sultān segues into his argument for “Indianizing” the teachings of the Qur‘ān:

Having read the Book, when the learned man tries to explain it, how could he explain it to all the people of the land of Baṅga if he were not to Indianize it (hinduyānī kari)? He would [surely] not be able to explain it to them in Arabic! The language in which the Lord has created one is one’s invaluable treasure.

The sinners all declare that Saiyad Sultān publicized Āllā by expressing a distorted view of him.

Hearing this I began to ask myself: how did I communicate a distorted view of Āllā? [In fact,] I proclaimed his glories, dwelling upon the words [most suitable] for his praise.662

I proclaimed the glories of all the messengers. I exposed the sinful Iblis’ disrepute. Why, then, do they claim that I put forth a distorted view? Those sinners did not give this due thought.

Then was I struck by the issue of Iblis. I feel anguish at heart to express this: Iblis is the hypocrites’ own friend.

[And] I have broadcast all the descriptions of Iblis. This is why the hypocrites all feel dissatisfied: they are incensed, seeing that I exposed all Iblis’ deeds.

The Creator, Karatā, [after all] knows all the emotions that run through my mind: to whom [else] shall I confide all my mental matters?

All those who listen single-mindedly to the Nabī Vaṃśa, shall entreat Āllā, for my sake.

With my heart and my lips, I ask Āllā to ever forgive all the sins I may have committed.663

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662 I have accepted here the alternate reading put forth by manuscript “gha.” NV 2: n. 19, 480.
663 ālime kitāba pari vākhāne ye kāle | hinduyānī kari yadi nā vākhāni bole || bangadeśī sakalare kirūpe bujhāība | vākhānī ārabī bhāse bujhāīte nārība || yāre yēi bhāse prabhu kariche srjana || sei bhāṣa tāhāra amālya sei dhana || pāpī sabe bole chidri állāra pracāri || saida sulatāne kahi dīla vyakta kari || eta śuni nīja mane bhāvīte lāgīlūnī | állāra kemata chidri pracāra kalīlūnī || mahimā se állāra dilūnī pracārīyā || mahimā chidra bole mane nā bhāvīyā || payagāmbara sakalera mahimā pracārīlūnī || pāpamati iblisera ayaśa ghusīlūnī || tabe kene chidra pracārīlūnī hena bole || mane bhāvī nā cāhīla pāpīṣṭha sakale || tabe mora mane haila iblisera kathā || pracāra kalīlūnī dekhi mane pāe vyathā || iblisera nīja sakhā munāphekagana || pracārīlūnī iblisera yathā vivaranā || te kārāne yathā munāpheka asantoṣa || iblisera saba kathā kalīlūnī dekhi roṣa || mohora manera bhāva jāne karatāre || yathēka manera kathā kahimu kāhare || ye sakale nabī vaṃśa śune eka mane || māgība állāra thāṃī mohora kārāne || ye kichu karichi pāpa kṣemite állāe || āle mukhe állāta māgība sarvathāe || Ibid., 480–481.
In this lengthy, proleptic, translation statement, Sultān appeals to the transnational and universal claims of the Islamic da’wa, invitation to the faith. For all the ethno-linguistic claims of the Arabic Qurʾān, the Book also represents Muḥammad, unlike any other prophet, as a universal messiah, sent “to mankind (lil-nās) as an apostle,” (Q 4:79) and as a mercy “to the worlds (lil-ʿālamīn)” (Q 21:107). Thus, Sultān affirms that “the sublime object of [his] religious world,” to invoke Tony Stewart here, “is transportable across all national and cultural boundaries, and its tenets can be conveyed in any language (in spite of the caveat that the Holy Qurʾān can only be in Arabic).” He simultaneously calls for the embrace of the mother tongue as “invaluable treasure,” amūlya dhana, for the translation of religious ideals:

\[
yāre yei bhāse prabhu kariche srjana /
sei bhāsa tāhāra amūlya sei dhana \]

To each, the language within which God has created him is his invaluable treasure.

### 3.5.3 The Anxiety of Vernacularizing the Qurʾān

Yet writing about Islamic matters in Bangla, a language of Hind, was widely perceived by the Islamic elite of Sultān’s time to be a corruption of their faith. Sultān, being one of the first Bengalis to rebel against such convention, blazes a trail for later Bengali Muslim writers to follow. His proleptic statements, however, suggest the anxiety of innovation.

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664 Rubin 2011.
665 Stewart 2001, 269. Put another way, the universality of Islam can be explained in terms of the central principle of unicity that lies at its core: “Islam, as a religion, is a way of unity and totality. Its fundamental dogma is called al-Tawḥīd, that is to say unity or the action of uniting…. The formula of al-Tawḥīd or Monotheism is a Sharaite commonplace. The import that a man gives to this formula is his personal affair, since it depends upon his Sufism. Every deduction that one can make from this formula is more or less valid, provided always that it does not destroy the literal meaning; for in that case one destroys the unity of Islam, that is to say its universality, its faculty of adapting and fitting itself to all mentalities, circumstances and epochs.” In Abdul Hadi’s “L’Universalité en l’Islam,” Le Voile d’Isis, January 1934, quoted in Nasr 1964, n. 7, 5.
666 NV 2: 480.
667 Cf. Roy 1983, 58 and 67–69. See also Roy 1999, 183. See also Mohammad Khān’s words, obviously inspired by his master, Saiyad Sultān: “In Hindustān, people do not understand the Book. Not
Allah has told me that he shall punish those who, though knowing the essence of the Book’s teachings, do not convey it to others. He has declared that they shall certainly fall into hell. Having composed a pañcālī, I am condemned by those who do not understand my words.  

Caught between God’s commandments and the condemnation of “hypocrites,” he defends himself against allegations of “plagiarizing the Book” (“kitābetu kārāṇo”), for “fragmenting the Book” (“kitāb bhāṅgana”), and for “hinduizing”/“indianizing” (hinduyāṇi/hinduāṇi karā) the teachings of the Qurān—an anxiety that reflects the wider perception of Islam becoming “impure” in local contexts.  

Well into the eighteenth century, Muslim Bengali writers speak of suppressing their translational anxieties in order to disseminate the teachings of Islam.  

Translating the Qurān itself, whether into Bangla or any other tongue, as Stewart points out, has historically been considered a transgressive act that trespasses against the doctrine of Qurānic inimitability (iʿjāz). The Qurān, according to tradition, is the earthly repository (or at

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668 The phrase is taken from Busch 2004, 45-59.
669 NV 2: 477.
670 munāphike bole āṁhī kitābetu kārī | kitābera kathā dīlunā hinduāṇi kari || NV 2: 477.
671 tekārāṇe kathā kathā paśūbuddhi nare | kitāba bhāṅgila kari dāṅṣae āṁhāre || NV 2: 480.
672 On the tongues of his slanderers, the words hinduāṇi karā, take on the double-edged ethnic and religious connotation of Hindu; whereas it is clear that when Sultān uses it as an equivalent for translation, he is using it in its ethnic sense of “making into a language of Hind.” Cf. also the condemnation of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya by the kājī, in the Caitanyabhāṅgavata of Vṛndāvanaḍāsa—kājī bole hinduyāṇi hāila nadiyā | karimu ihāra sāsti nāgālī pāyā—cited in Sanyal 1989, 55.
673 See also pāpī sabe bole chidri allāra pracārī | saida sulatāne kahi dīla vyakta kari || etā sūnī ni jā mane bhāvīte lāgilunā | allāra kemata chidri pracārā karilunā || NV 2: 480.
674 Concerning such examples from premodern Islamic Bangla literature, see Hak 2002, 227-229; and Roy 1983, 67-70.
least a part) of the heavenly book, the *Umm al-Kitāb*, the Mother of Books, also known as the *lawḥ al-mahfūẓ*, the Preserved Tablet, which according to most interpretations, “sits either to the right of or underneath God’s throne, above the seventh heaven.” Despite its divine source, the Qur’ān reflexively emphasizes its Arabic nature (Q 12:1–2; 13:37; 41:2), and distinguishes the superiority of the language of the Arabs (*al-ʿArab*, interpreted by Arabic lexicographers to mean “eloquent expression”) from the language of the non-Arabs, *al-ʿAjam* (related to ‘ajm, “dumbness”). Translation of the Qur’ān has historically been rejected in Muslim scholarship on these and other logocentric grounds that argue for Qur’ānic meaning and charisma, via rhetoric and syntax, to be inexorably wedded to its particular linguistic expression in Arabic. “By such a line of thought,” as Travis Zadeh explains, in his study of Persian translations of the Qur’ān from the fourth/tenth to the sixth/twelfth centuries, “the rhetorical and figurative dimensions of Arabic are beyond the reach of all other languages, and thus any attempt at translation can only fall short of the unique Arabic character of the Qur’ān.”

Yet this logocentric argument, as Zadeh has shown in the case of Persian, was displaced by the pragmatic needs of Islamic preachers. Starting in the third/ninth centuries, as Islam expanded beyond the frontiers of the Arab-speaking world, Islamic jurists became increasingly concerned with accommodating converts from other ethnic and linguistic groups. Islamic law stipulates that Muslims are only required to recite from memory a small portion of the Qur’ān for ritual prayer, the most important being the *fātiha* and the final *sūras*. Of all the major Sunnī legal schools, moreover, the Ḥanafī *maddhab*, which gained wide currency in Eastern Iran

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675 Wisnovsky 2011.
677 Zadeh 2007, 375.
678 Ibid., 375.
679 Zadeh, 448.
and Central Asia, and later in the Indian subcontinent, provided the greatest leniency to the performance of ritual prayer in a non-Arabic language.\textsuperscript{681} Ḥanafī scholars argued that Qur’ānic inimitability is wedded as much to meaning (\textit{ma’na}) as to form; the Ḥanafiyya privileging of the communicability of the Qur’ānic message, when placed in the context of the opinions of jurists across Islamic legal traditions who also argued for the mediation of scripture through other languages, opened up the possibilities for the Qur’ān to appear in translation.\textsuperscript{682}

In these and other ways, the weight of early Islamic evidence suggests that as the centres of Islamic power shifted eastward away from Abbāsid Baghdad, Persian, by the fourth/tenth century, became institutionally authorized as a legitimate vehicle for conveying, first, Qur’ānic exegesis, and later interlinear translation of the Qur’ān itself.\textsuperscript{683} Zadeh explains how this crucial early shift in translation practice took place within the Persian-speaking world:

By force of semantic usage, the concept of exegesis (\textit{tafsīr}) is coupled with the concept of translation (\textit{tarjama}), due in part to the notion that the Qur’ān is \textit{sui generis} and ultimately untranslatable, such that any translation can itself only be an interpretation and not stand in as a full simulacrum. Thus in our categorization, we must highlight the interpretive dimension of translation. The semantic slippage from translation to exegesis allows for an opening up of the Arabic Qur’ān into other languages.\textsuperscript{684}

In the Indian subcontinent, Shihāb al-Dīn Daulatābādī (d. 1445) wrote the first Persian commentary on the Qur’ān,\textsuperscript{685} entitled \textit{Bahṛ-i mawwāj}; however, this, according to K. A. Nizami, was “an essay in rhetoric.”\textsuperscript{686} In general, \textit{tafsīr} studies in India was targeted to specific groups such as the Sufis or the ‘ulamā’ and did not help to bring the meaning of the Qur’ān closer to the common man.\textsuperscript{687} One exception may have been the lost \textit{Laṭā’if al-tafsīr} written by Khwāja Qāsim,

\textsuperscript{681} Concerning the rulings of the Ḥanafī school with regards to this issue, see Zadeh 2007, 449–455. Concerning the development of Ḥanafī law in India, see Guenther 2003, 209-230.
\textsuperscript{682} Zadeh 2007, 452 and 520.
\textsuperscript{683} Ibid., 493.
\textsuperscript{684} Ibid., 492–493.
\textsuperscript{685} Schimmel 1973, 6.
\textsuperscript{686} Nizami 2006.
\textsuperscript{687} Ibid.
a disciple of Shaykh Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā, reported to have been specifically written for such purposes.688 However, manuscripts of Persian tafsīr produced in Iran circulated widely in premodern India, filling the void in local production. Of these, Mawāhib-i ʿaliyyah, popularly known as Tafsīr husaynī, of Ḥusayn al-Wāʿiz al-Kāshīfī (d. 1504-05) was widely read in South Asia.689 Yet it was not until the eighteenth-century that local Muslims produced the first Persian translation of the Qurʾān. Credit for this pioneering work rests with Shāh Wālī Allāh, his sons, Shāh Raḥī al-Dīn and Shāh ʿAbd Qādīr, later producing translations into Urdu.690

While evidence of scholarly writings in Arabic and Persian from Sultanate Bengal exists in the fields of mysticism, theology, hagiography, and fiqh, the only evidence of tafsīr in Bengal before the nineteenth century is that of Mīr Abūʾl Maʿālī’s Persian exegesis of the Sūrat al-Ikhlās.691 Moreover, even if manuscripts of Persian tafsīr produced in Iran circulated in Bengal, these would have been restricted to circles of the Muslim elite. Thus it was only through the efforts of pioneering Bengali Sufi writers such as Sultān that the Qurʾān was brought into the sphere of comprehension of the average Bengali Muslim.

Since Ḥanafī law was well-established among Bengal’s Muslims by 1500,692 it is possible to place Sultān’s arguments for translation within the context of the Ḥanafī discourse on the translatability of the Qurʾān. Furthermore, given the slippage in Islamic discourse on the Qurʾān between translation and explanation/interpretation, the question arises as to whether (notwithstanding the NV’s co-option of numerous genres), Sultān himself considered the NV as a translation/interpretation, a Bangla exegesis of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān is the only text that the NV refers to as source: in the case of specific anecdotes, Sultān occasionally mentions

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688 Ibid.
690 Nizami 2006.
691 Uddin 2006, 30, 39.
“a/the kitāba,” as his source; in more general ways, he speaks of the NV as explaining kitābera kathā, “Quʾānic matters/tales.” To return to Sultān’s emphasis on translation as exegesis, we reiterate his words quoted above:

Having read the Book, when the learned man tries to explain it, how could he explain it to all the people of the land of Baṅga if he were not to Indianize it? He would [surely] not be able to explain it to them in Arabic.

The verb used here is vākhāni balā, short for vākhāniyā balā, “to speak via explaining.” Middle Bangla “vākhāno” is a verb constructed from the Sanskrit noun, vyākhyāna, “commentary” (Apabhramśa vakhāna), and would be equivalent to the modern Bangla “vyākhyā karā.”

Furthermore, the NV makes not-so-subtle claims to substitute for the Quʾān in Bengal, allowing it to share, thereby, in the Quʾānic mantle of holiness and charisma, even arrogating to itself rituals of purity reserved for the Holy Book. All this seems to point to the NV as being viewed as a text that mediates the Quʾānic word into Bangla. However, unlike Persian translations of the Quʾān, which never attempted to replace it, Sultān’s NV arrogates to itself something more: there is a clear-eyed recognition of its temporarily substituting for the Quʾān in rural Bengal, and it hence demands a fealty from the faithful equivalent to the holy book.

While the NV’s daring assertion of proxying for the Quʾān could hardly go unheeded by the Muslim ashrāf, Sultān attempts to thwart any obstacle to his project by branding his detractors

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693 The author’s emphasis is not on the act of reading but rather that a written version of the text was consulted.
694 NV 2: 477.
695 For original text, see details provided above.
697 What remains unclear is Sultān’s precise modus operandi for “translation.” The controversial manuscript discussed in Chapter One suggests that Sultān was intending to retell Ibn Ishaq’s sīra. Sultān also claims to be explaining the Quʾān, a statement not inaccurate when we consider that the qisas al-anbiyā’ genre has been treated in the Islamic tradition as expanding upon and explaining the cryptic tales of the prophets in the Quʾān. Chapters Four and Five show the extent of his reliance upon al-Kisā’ī’s Qisas al-anbiyā’, which is in all likelihood the kitāb he claims to have consulted. Furthermore, my study shows that he was relying upon the original Arabic version, rather than any intermediate Persian translation of these tales.
as “hypocrites,” befriended by Iblis, who turn against the author because he has exposed their mental weaknesses. Such proleptic speech-acts highlight the anxiety of translators, no doubt, but also of the Bengali Muslim elite to such projects, where the translation of sacred texts was considered an act of sedition that presumably destabilized the nexus between traditional institutions of knowledge and power.

There were other factors that exacerbated existing tensions between the *ashrāf* and Sufi preachers in contemporaneous Bengali Muslim society. One such factor is closely linked to Sultān’s role as propagator of the faith. In his capacity as *pīr*-author writing primarily for rural folk, Sultān carries forward into seventeenth-century Bengal the legacy of the Arabian *qāṣṣ*, and, with it the old hazards associated with the profession. Indeed from the earliest Islamic centuries the office of the *qāṣṣ* (Ar. “narrator”) came to be embroiled in juridical wrangling over its controversial role as story-teller and preacher. The duties of the *qāṣṣ* initially overlapped with those of religious functionaries, such as the *imām*, the leader of congregational prayer; the *qāri‘*, a reader of the Qurʾān; and the *khaṭīb*, one who delivers the official sermon. As the Abbāsid jurist and historian Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200) notes, while there was recognition that “a jurist, or a traditionist, or a reciter of the Koran is not capable of bringing to God a hundredth of the people the preacher is capable of bringing,” there were concerns about the liberties the *quṣṣāṣ al-ʿāmm* (“narrators for the common folk”) were prone to take with “tradition.” Like al-Jawzī, al-Jāḥiz in his *al-Bayān wa’l-Tabyīn*, speaks of how the *quṣṣāṣ* would bring together in their sermons the Qurʾān with accounts of the Prophet and sayings of the Companions. “Yet,” as Travis Zadeh eloquently explains, “the edifying accounts of uplifting nature became ever more the stuff of popular tales, as the stories of the prophets (*qiṣṣaṣ al-anbiyā‘*), so connected to

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698 See discussion above on “hypocrites” and their characteristics.
699 Thackston 1997, xviii.
701 Thackston, xviii-xix.
the office of the qāṣṣ, gives way to their wondrous and fabulous character and the potentially negative semantic charge of 'storyteller' begins to sink in.”

While translation and conversion share in their tendency to relocate the unknown and the unfamiliar (i.e. difference) within frameworks of the known and the familiar (i.e. identity), Sultān’s preacherly role, his need to persuade colors his role as a translator, in paradoxical ways: preacherly fidelity to his religious ideal and its establishment in Bengal is inversely proportional to his translatorial fidelity to the received discourse within which his religious ideal had been previously articulated. If, as Gideon Toury states, “a translated text can be located on an axis between the two hypothetical poles of adequacy (source text oriented) or acceptability (target language oriented),” the translator in Sultān is subordinated to his role as a preacher, making him privilege “acceptability” to his target audience over “adequacy” vis à vis received discourse. Expressed in terms of identity/alterity, the greater the identity of the preacher with his religious ideal and the exigencies of its establishment within a new context the greater is his translatorial need for othering the received religious discourse.

### 3.5.4 The Semiotics of Identity/Alterity in the Biographic Process

This paradox introduces us to the complex dialectical tensions showcased by the NV’s biographic process, between constructions of identity/alterity germane to both translation and conversion. As Finbarr Flood argues, difference is not opposed to identity, but rather “central

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701 Zadeh 2007, 471-472. For other critics of the office of the qāṣṣ in medieval Islamic scholarship, see ibid., 472.
702 Ricci 2011, 239.
703 I am drawing upon Ronit Ricci’s identification of such a characteristic in the case of Tamil, Javanese, and Malay texts; see Ricci 2011, 171.
to its construction.” Additionally, we are here speaking of a relative identity/alterity wherein “identity,” and its contrary, “alterity,” are not absolutes, but “non-definable” concepts which can be “inter-defined by relations of reciprocal presupposition.” In addition to various patterns of crisscrossing between processes of translation and conversion on the identity/alterity spectrum, discussed above, the identity/alterity dialectic within each of these processes is complex.

To understand the complexity of this dialectic, it is instructive here to apply Peter Haidu’s semiotic square of alterity to the NV’s biographic process. The square is set up as a quadrature of the binaries, ipseity-nonipseity and alterity-nonalterity. As relative “undefinables” these binaries are not fixed. I see these on a spectrum, a sliding scale of value, constructed in the real world by all partners in a relationship with the writer, but, in literature, always mediated by the writerly “I.” Following the linguist Émile Benveniste, who considers the French je and tu to be true personal pronouns, while il, “he” (along with “she” and “it”), to be nonpersonal, representing those who are absent, Haidu argues that the euphoric axis, the axis that registers Sameness, is located on the ipseity-nonalterity pole, while that which registers Otherness on the alterity-nonipseity pole. The table below reproduces a simplified form of the square:

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706 Flood 2009, 4.
707 Greimas and Courtés 1982, s.v. “Alterity.”
708 Haidu (1990: 680) replaces the more common “identity” by the term “ipseity.”
709 Ibid., 681.
710 Ibid.
Haidu further explains the nature of this quadrature:

The euphoric axis... contains those relations which Benveniste considered properly “personal.” The real, concrete speech act constitutes an immediate and inclusive community of presence, insofar as the interlocutors share the same linguistic codes. Simultaneously, the same speech act institutionalizes this community: it is the community’s act of incorporation.

The dysphoric axis is that of nonpersonality, represented in Benveniste’s discussion only by *il*. The position of alterity is that of the pronouns representing beings absent from immediate interlocution, from this small intersubjective community I have indicated as euphoric. But a fourth position is possible, which consists of treating a person in the mode of nonpersonality in spite of the person’s immediate, corporeal presence without granting it the full and recognized presence of the “thou.” Politeness is a formula for recognizing nonintimate presence, a logical position which, in reference to the euphoric axis, is that of a present alterity. The “he” is the representation, within an intersubjective and interlocutory relation, of an excluded third; the “you”—the dominant form in English, but secondary and subordinate to the intimate “thou” in French, where it holds interlocutors at a distance—the polite “you” represents the inclusion of alterity, and the fact of being interlocuted in a communicative situation which is not that of “full intersubjectivity.” In such a communicative situation, it is not full subjectivities that are deployed by the formalized language, but “roles” in the sociological and semiotic senses.\footnote{Ibid., 681–682.}
In modern Bangla sādhubhāṣā and standard colloquial, three forms of the second person pronoun are found: the polite, āpanī; the familiar, tumī; and the very familiar, tui. Suniti Kumar Chatterji explains that it is only since the eighteenth century that the reflexive, āpanī, was extended to the honorific.\(^7\) Thus, premodern Bangla, like French, exhibits two forms of the second person pronoun, which in the NV take the forms tumhi and tuñi. From Sultān’s preacherly point of view, the intimate “you” may refer to his closest circle of disciples, those who may have been the specific addressees of a text like the Jīnāna Pradīpa, though not excluded from the NV’s socio-textual community. The polite tumhi form is used to address the “Musalmāns of Baṅgadeśa.” Among these addressees are undoubtedly located the mumīn, the faithful, but also the kāphir, the idolator, who represents the extreme form of this nonipseity. Yet, as Haidu points out, the “you” is a potential “thou,” Sultān’s tumhi has the potential to become the tuñi of his most intimate circle.\(^1\) Sultān’s “se” similarly refers to the munāphēk, the fake Muslims, the minions of Iblis, among whom the Muslim ashrāf also implicitly feature. From the perspective of the translatorial I, however, Sultān’s se can refer to the Arab. This is seen particularly where Sultān is establishing word-for-word equivalence between an Arabic term and a Bangla one.\(^4\)

Providing further commentary on the semiotic square, Haidu articulates the need to speak of “*alterities in the plural*, which acknowledge the multiplicity and differences of others, and the attendant multiplicity of criteria of difference, in relation to the one, concrete interlocutor.”\(^5\) In the context of sacred biography as a socio-historical entity, the task of the preacher-translator then is to negotiate, through the I-thou, I-you, I-he/she relationships institutionalized through the biographic process, these multiple “criteria of difference.” While

\(^1\) Haidu 1990, 682.
\(^4\) Take, for instance, yāhāka bulie śuṇa mahājutirmāe | nura muhammadā hena ārabe bolae // NV 1: 6
\(^5\) Haidu 1990, 684.
each of these criteria is constructed by separate partners (Sultān-intimate disciples; Sultān-preacherly community; Sultān-“hypocrites”) in their real-world relationships around a series of socio-historical markers, such as religion, ethnicity, class, world-view, and literary discourse, it is Sultān’s writerly task to mediate these various constructions of alterity through the biographic process. The case of frontier literature, which we will explore below in some detail, uniquely exacerbates these tensions between competing constructions of meaning between the writer and his community, since these constructions are rarely synchronous in meaning and value and are continuously negotiated by the writerly “I” alone. The table below provides a snapshot of the dizzying complexity Sultān might have had to negotiate between the writerly “I” and the “you/tumhi” of his addressees—multiple interpretive communities, since real-life constructions of ipseity and nonipseity by Sultān and his audience were rarely synchronous in meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-historical Markers</th>
<th>Writerly “I”</th>
<th>Nonipseity (“You”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>Primarily Bengali</td>
<td>Primarily Bengali, but also non-Bengali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Bangla and Persian/Arabic</td>
<td>Bangla for most, and Persian/Arabic for a few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
<td>Elite, though not necessarily urban</td>
<td>Lower class, rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Primarily non-Islamic traditions, especially Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>World-view</strong></td>
<td>Turko-Persian and Indic</td>
<td>Primarily Indic and for a few Turko-Persian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This complex dialectic spawns an astonishing array of dislocations, relocations, and collocations—lexical, linguistic, literary, and doctrinal—met with in the NV: the unseating of
cosmopolitan languages by the vernacular while partly drawing upon cosmopolitan genres; the
ostensible collocation of the text into two separate narrative and hagiographic traditions, pan-
Islamic and Bangla; the straddling of multiple linguistic and cultural worlds, Arabo-Persian and
Indic; the simultaneous authorial distancing from and immersion in the literary imaginaire of
the target audience; the subtle supplanting, by Islamic counterparts, of old orders of
charismatic authority, whether textual, human, or supra-human; and the relocation of Bengali
peoples within new frameworks of imagined communities (ummat).

Sultān has a virtuosic command over this unwieldy dialectic, regulating it through the
ideological manipulation of language and form. To comprehend the manner in which Sultān
forces this dialectic architextually at the linguistic and formal levels, we must first discuss
Sultān’s model of structural translation.

3.5.5 The Makings of a New Prior Text for Bengal

In discussing “the silences across languages” as one of the key challenges of translation, A.
L. Becker introduces the concept of the “prior text.” According to him,

Everything anyone says has a history and hence is, in part, a quotation. Everything
anyone says is also partly new, too, and part of anyone’s ability in a language is the
ability to tell the difference between the new and the old.\footnote{Becker 1995, 286.}

Because of the lack of such cultural memory of prior texts—knowledge of clichés, quotations,
everyday phrases and expressions, and all such “languaged” aspects of an entire cultural
universe—a foreigner can find him/herself adrift in a new culture.

Ronit Ricci applies this concept of “prior texts” to her study of translation literature and
how it operates within Tamil, Malay, and Javanese communities that converted to Islam. She asks,
How does a society, in the face of such a significant change as the conversion to a new religion, address the absence of prior text and memory, which are both so important in creating and maintaining a shared identity? If prior texts, are, by definition, old and familiar, the challenge of assembling them to fill a void for a society transformed by conversion would seem daunting. How are texts newly created for this purpose, and how are they established so that they, in turn, come to figure as prior texts?  

Ricci’s key questions at the heart of her discussion and her general approach to translation as conversion have significant implications for our understanding of the fundamental intervention Sultān is seeking to make through the text—the creation of a new prior text for his neophyte community—and how he goes about doing so.

Ricci argues that new prior texts are created in two ways, which often overlap: first, “the reformulation of old texts”; and second, “the creation of new ones, often through translation.” The NV combines both techniques: it reformulates old texts to create a new one through translation. The concept of “prior texts” thus is interwoven with the concept of “transtextuality” or “intertextuality,” as Ricci points out. Despite the plethora of reputed Islamic texts at Sultān’s disposal, despite the heavy reliance upon al-Kisāʾī’s Qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ for the tales of the Judeo-Islamic prophets from Ādam to Īsā, the NV, as a whole, does not translate any single Islamic text. I note with Richard Eaton that if there is one specific text that the structure of Sultān’s NV most resembles it is the earliest biography of the Prophet, the Sīrat Rasūl Allāh of Ibn Isḥaq (d. 571/761), a text which at least one manuscript of the NV, as we have seen in Chapter One, alludes to as its source text. Yet the Nabīvaṃśa’s literary distinctiveness lies in its remarkable palimpsestic qualities, its narrative fabric being a tissue of polyglot “transtextuality.” The literary structuralist Gérard Genette who coined the latter term, defines it as “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other

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717 Ricci 2011, 246.
718 Ibid.
719 Ibid., 248.
texts.”

To acknowledge this is to say little about the NV’s novelty, for as some literary theorists have suggested, “intertextuality” (what Genette calls “transtextuality”) at its most abstract level is a universal quality intrinsic to all texts. It is productive, however, to our understanding of the NV to employ the term in a more restrictive sense in order to assess the NV’s co-option of multiple literary genres, for it is these, Arabo-Persian and Indic, along with specifically identifiable pretexts, that it gathers under its broad generic and transtextual umbrella. In the matter of pretexts, we have al-Kisāʾī’s Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ whose relationship with Sultān’s prophetology is detailed in Chapters Three and Four, while “The Account of Hari,” discussed in Chapter Six below, is a parodic metatext of the tenth book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, embedded within the Islamic genre of the Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, tales of the Prophets. In the chapters that follow I elaborate upon the NV’s “architextuality,” “the entire set,” as Genette defines the term, “of general or transcendent categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges each singular text.” Here I sketch in broad strokes the transtextual generic scaffolding of the NV, leaving the filigree of substantial, discursive, and rhetorical detail to be filled in by the relevant chapters which engage with specific genres.

The NV is primarily a sacred biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, written as a universal or ‘world’ history. It stands in a long Islamic tradition of hagiographic-historiographic writings on the Prophet Muḥammad. Already by the second Islamic century, Arabic historiography had moved from its earliest beginnings in ḥadīth literature (which in itself developed from scattered jottings to encyclopedic compilations of Prophetic word and deed that came to have legalistic force), through what Tarif Khalidi identifies as three “historiographical shades of interest”:

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721 Genette 1997, 1.
723 Ibid., 1.
sacred history, tribal history, and ‘world history.’ Two genres focused upon the Prophet emerged under the rubric of sacred history: the sīra, his biography, and the maghāzī, accounts of his military expeditions. The ‘world history’ component gave rise to the qīṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ, tales of the pre-Islamic prophets, which was retrospective in its orientation: these qīṣṣa began with creation, and recounted the tales of the Judeo-Islamic prophets upto but not including the life of Muḥammad. While distinct genres in their own right, the universal history, the sīra, and the qīṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ, shared a literary history wherein occasional overlap between genres occurred, through the nesting of one into another. Thus, for instance, both the latter two were drawn into more ambitious ‘world histories,’ such as the monumental Tāʾrīkh al-rusūl waʾl-mulūk (“History of Prophets and Kings”) of Muḥammad ibn Jaʿrīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), which attempted to provide an account of all Islamic history from creation to the author’s day. The particular entwinings between historiographical works, the Qīṣṣa and sīra traditions as they developed in the Persianate world are discussed in Chapter Four (4.2).

Unlike early biographers of the Prophet, for whom biographical facts were the variables to be determined in their formulations of the biographical image of the Prophet, a process inherently political, the choices Saiyad Sultān as biographer had to make in articulating his vision of Islam and its founder for seventeenth-century Bengal were very different. First, because of the great remove in time between the biographer and his biographical subject, the image of the Prophet (more specifically, the religious ideal—which Tony Stewart identifies as the “‘real’ subject” of such biography) had long been distilled through the Islamic historiographical tradition into an archetype; his bios, distilled through nine centuries of Islamic scholarship, had become an account of a mythic hero, whose charismatic deeds were

724 Khalidi 1994, 30.
725 Ibid.
726 Concerning al-Ṭabarī’s history, see Khalidi 1994, 73-81.
recounted for emulation. Hence, in articulating his ideal, Sultan had to choose from a transtextual palette of mythic patterns and authorial orientations that had emerged in the intervening Islamic centuries.

The second set of variables Sultan needed to determine were pan-Islamic literary models. Third, and as a corollary to the first, the need to make his biography “acceptable” to his target audience compelled him to look beyond pan-Islamic discursive frameworks to what lay in his own literary backyard. It became imperative for him to consider indigenous “prior” texts—literary models, mythic patterns, and orientations to the representation of sacred figures—so as to domesticate to Bengal an Arabian prophet. In this process, intellectuals such as Saiyad Sultan were making deliberate political “interventions,” like his premodern contemporaries in the field of Sanskrit learning, through the choice of specific ‘“intertextual” kinds of illocutionary act[s],’ to provide commentary on an earlier regional tradition.

From the retrospect of the literary historian it is possible to discern in the NV several related Arabo-Persian historiographic-hagiographic forms such as the qiṣas al-anbiyāʾ, the sīra; the maghāzī, and the miʿrāj, the tale of the Prophet Muḥammad’s ascension. The miʿrāj was a genre that originally developed out of the sīra but became, by the fourth/tenth centuries, an independent narrative genre: the kitāb al-miʿrāj in Arabic, and the Persian and Turkish miʿrājnāma. If the current dating of the Bangla Rasul Vijaya texts can be relied upon, the Arabic

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27 Concerning the “real” subject of sacred biography, see Stewart 2010b, 237. For a discussion on how stylization of the bios is directly proportional to the remove in time between biographer and subject, ibid., 238.
28 This conception of A. L. Becker is delineated in detail below.
29 Cf. Stewart’s invocation of Dilthey’s early recognition of the biographer’s reconstruction of the past based upon its relevance to his present, ibid., 229-230.
30 I cite these terms from Jonardon Ganeri, who tests Quentin Skinner’s historical method for the study of Sanskritic intellectual traditions in premodern India, reapplying the Skinnerian concepts of “intervention” and “illocutionary force” to “intertextual” contexts. In Quentin Skinner’s Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding method, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 115 and 143 quoted in Ganeri, 2008, 551–562 and 552. See also ibid., 554.
31 Amir-Moezzi 2011.
maghāzi genre, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, had found a corresponding Bangla form, some time before the NV was written. These were the vijaya kāvyas on the military victories of the Prophet. Albeit smaller in scale than the NV, Jainuddīn and Śābārid Khān had both written independent works entitled Rasul Vijaya. Daulat Ujīr Bahrām Khān’s Imām Vijaya on the battle of Karbalā also features the Prophet Muhammad who appeared in the midst of the grieving congregation to mourn with them over the loss of their beloved leaders, Imām Hosen, and his brother, Hāsān.732 Hence, these provided Saiyad Sultān with readymade vernacular literary models.

With the exception of the maghāzi-maṅgala genre, to which some rural Bengalis may have been exposed, all the other Islamic literary forms mentioned above were altogether new to such auditors. Yet the NV referenced several indigenous forms which might have been more readily detectable. Indeed, as we have seen, Sultān sets up his epic on the Prophet as a rival pāncālī to what he declares to be the popular tales of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.733 Within the transtextual universe of the NV reverberate the purāṇa of Sanskritic pedigree; the Bangla vijaya or maṅgala kāvyā; and the carita or hagiographic literature surrounding the figure of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement.

The carita form, the Bangla counterpart of the Arabic sīra, was pioneered by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to memorialize their founder Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, and developed over the course of the sixteenth century to reach its apogee in Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj’s Caitanyacaritāmṛta, a little over a decade before Sultān probably composed the NV. As Bimanbehari Majumdar points out, no single other historical figure in India became the subject of so vast a body of hagiographic

732 For these Rasul Vijaya, see Chapter Two. Concerning the Imām Vijaya, see Miyā 1993, 29–30.
733 See discussion below.
literature as Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. In the context of the NV’s striking ideological opposition to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, discussed in detail in Chapter Six, I argue that it is the recent popularity of the carita form that provides the immediate impetus for Sultān to produce his own sacred biography of the Prophet. He recognizes the carita’s success as a genre in popularizing the faith, and coopts the groundbreaking attempts of Caitanya’s hagiographers to employ religious biography as “the favored theological, and ultimately political, tool,” swiftly turning this tool, now ideologically sharpened into a weapon, against them. As we shall also see in Chapter Six, Saiyad Sultān ridicules the doctrine and practices of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas through his reinterpretation of the theology of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a formative text for the Gauḍīyas. While castigating the doctrine of avatāra, he subsumes Kṛṣṇa, the supreme deity of the Gauḍīyas, within a hierarchy of Islamic prophets; through a series of complex rhetorical moves that displace Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Sultān presents, in his stead, Muhammad as the yugāvatāra of the Kali age.

This categorization of genre by cultural tradition is not meant to suggest that these were textually structured into some sort of syncretistic literary model. For Sultān’s model of structural translation, from the retrospect of the modern literary historian, indicates a process by which he embeds, within the broader Arabo-Persian frame of the world-historical sīra model, purāṇic heroes, tales, and tropes. Such a model of translation manipulates multiple forms of Vaiṣṇava prior texts—ranging from narrative fragments, allusions, and tropes, to entire purāṇic texts renarrativized and transformed into metatexts—and subsumes these for

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734 Majumdar 1939, 2. By the time the East India Company had established itself in India in 1758, over a hundred authors had written about Kṛṣṇa Caitanya in Sanskrit, Bangla, Assamese, Oriya, and Hindi. Ibid.

735 Stewart 2010a, 6.
obvious polemical ends within a structural framework rather akin to the Sīra Rasul Allāh in its original form, before it was bowdlerized by Ibn Ḥishām.\textsuperscript{736}

While avoiding a syncretic formal structure, Sultān’s persuasive skill lay in his ability to freely reference genres from separate literary traditions to build a literary edifice sustained by a self-conscious effort to seek equivalence. As the table below indicates, these genres indeed shared common characteristics that facilitated such an endeavor. If Bangla possessed many key conceptual structures, as Stewart has argued, that facilitated the articulation of Islamic theology, making it “a potentially malleable medium for the message of Islam,” its formal literary structures offered yet another level of plasticity for moulding a new prior text for a neophyte community.\textsuperscript{737}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARABO-PERSIAN GENRES</th>
<th>SANSKRIT GENRES</th>
<th>BANGLA GENRES</th>
<th>COMMON CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tārikh</td>
<td>Purāṇa/Itihāsa</td>
<td>Itihāsa</td>
<td>Universal history Retrospective in orientation Incorporate cosmogony and cosmology; mythology/hagiography; genealogy; ethical models for emulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qīṣas al-Anbiyāʾ</td>
<td>Purāṇa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Same as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sīra</td>
<td>Carita</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sacred biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghāzī</td>
<td>Vijaya/Maṅgala Kāvya</td>
<td></td>
<td>Celebration of heroic deeds of sacred subject</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Sanskrit purāṇa is drawn into comparison with the Islamic universal history, both genres being flexible and capacious enough to incorporate cosmogony and cosmology, mythology and hagiography, genealogy, ascetic and devotional praxis, and ethics.\textsuperscript{738} The author appropriates both purāṇic deities and various narrative tropes from purāṇic literature into the

\textsuperscript{736} For the reconstruction of the original form of this sīra, see Newby 1989.
\textsuperscript{737} Stewart 2001, 269.
\textsuperscript{738} Concerning the paṅcalakṣāṇi or the daśalakṣāṇi of the mahāpurāṇas, see Rocher 1986, 24–30.
NV's cosmogony and prophetology, subjects we shall examine in detail in Chapters Four and Five respectively. The very title of the work, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, encapsulates the rhetorical and translational strategies that Sultān pursues throughout his text. In several such ways, the NV employs what Aditya Behl calls “a both/and” rhetoric, a feature, he believes, is common to the multivocality of premodern Indo-Islamic literary traditions. As we will see in Sultān’s invocation to the NV, the free referentiality between literary and religious traditions which plays upon the polysemy of word and form (in this case, the Persian ḥamd and the Bangla vandanā) serves initially to invite various interpretive communities to, what Francesca Orsini calls, the “parallel enjoyment” of a single word or text. However, as Sultān’s polemics of conversion thickens as the narrative unfolds, these symmetries, which were built with care, but were always purely formal, begin to dissolve, as the author, instead, solidifies the asymmetries between religious worlds, privileging one over all others.

In framing the NV’s translation processes—linguistic, rhetorical, and formal—as conversion, it is productive to refer to Tony Stewart’s application of translation theory to precolonial Islamic Bangla texts, and Richard Eaton’s theory of conversion as it applies to the Islamization of Bengal. At the heart of this intersection is the proposition that religion and language, as Stewart notes,

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739 Sukumar Sen 1979, 143.
740 In Aditya Behl’s words: ’I would like to propose that, in larger cultural historical terms, we adopt what it seems to me obvious that the cultural forms of the period indicate: that the historical agents who put these forms together thought in at least a “both and” way. That is to say, they produced forms that signified in various ways, both Indic and Islamic and much more besides.’ In Behl (2008) quoted in Orsini forthcoming a.
741 Orsini forthcoming b.
rely heavily on each other in [the] process of articulating what is of value, because language itself structures the conceptual world of any culture to the point where certain thoughts cannot be entertained in a given language, and those structures that prevail in a language will reflect what is significant to its host culture.\textsuperscript{743}

For Stewart, then (a proposition also implicit in Eaton’s argument),

these texts become... historical witnesses to the... attempts to think Islamic thoughts in the local language, which is to say, to think new thoughts for Bengali, ideas that had never previously been explicitly expressed, otherwise there probably would have been an explicit vocabulary to support them, as there now is.\textsuperscript{744}

In distancing himself from syncretism as a model which privileges end-product over process—a model commonly used to characterize Islamic Bangla literature\textsuperscript{745}—Stewart argues, drawing on Eugene Nida, that Muslim Bengali authors seek out “dynamic equivalents” in order to translate Islam for Bengali auditors. By tapping into similarities in the role and function of the equivalent in the target culture, such semantic analogues become the conveyors of an idea from one socio-cultural context to another.\textsuperscript{746} Thus, Saiyad Sultān’s translation of nabī as avatāra, discussed in detail in Chapter Six below, illustrates for Stewart this theory of dynamic equivalence.\textsuperscript{747}

Furthermore, Stewart addresses polysystemic modes of translation, which “extend the processes of translation to the cultural, intersemiotic level, wherein different features of culture participate in increasingly complicated, often disjunctive, systems of discourse.”\textsuperscript{748}

Eaton has delineated the gradual process of Islamization in Bengal as characterized by three heuristic phases: the inclusion of Islamic superhuman agencies into indigenous cosmologies; the identification of these with Bengali agencies; and the final displacement of the

\textsuperscript{743} Stewart 2001, 268.
\textsuperscript{744} Ibid., 273.
\textsuperscript{745} As Stewart has shown, Islamic Bangla literature has been routinely characterized as syncretistic. Ibid., 261–270.
\textsuperscript{746} Ibid., 280–282.
\textsuperscript{747} Ibid., 281–282.
\textsuperscript{748} Ibid., 283.
latter by the former.\textsuperscript{749} The evidence of Bangla texts, as Eaton himself shows, suggests an uneven and complex process of change on the ground. A single phase thus could be observed diachronically over texts that range over several centuries.\textsuperscript{750} Eaton warns that the purification of local cosmologies is not a phenomenon that should be strictly associated with the “modern” period, for in his own analysis, the seventeenth-century NV is a good example of the process of displacement.\textsuperscript{751} Statements such as this are problematic, for Eaton seems to be implicitly making room for varying standards of Islamic normativity, in an ostensibly teleological model of Islamization, where the telos itself does not seem to be well nuanced. For premodern Sufi authors such as Sultān, Islamization meant the sifting out of indigenous deities, while indigenous ritual systems were not perceived as a threat to this process. Thus, Islamic yoga practices were apparently normative for premodern Muslim Bengal, and even persisted among certain groups of Muslims, as Shaman Hatley suggests, well into the colonial period.\textsuperscript{752} Yet in other texts produced by literary circles influenced by Islamic reform movements in the modern period, displacement of indigenous deities was extended to include the systematic ejection of indigenous ritual and doctrinal systems, to such an extent that Sanskrit and indigenous vocabulary, as we will see in Chapter Eight, itself became circumspect.

Despite this criticism, Eaton’s categories are particularly useful when applied not so much as historical markers of religious change that manifest over the longue durée as evidenced by multiple texts, but when telescoped into individual Islamic Bangla texts such as the NV as interpretive procedures. In an attempt to understand Saiyad Sultān’s framing of translation as conversion, I propose to collapse Eaton’s categories with Stewart’s theory of translational

\textsuperscript{749} Eaton 1993, 269.
\textsuperscript{750} This trend is best seen in Sufi yoga texts, with Musalmānī tantra persisting even in the modern period. See, for instance, Ramajān Ālī’s Ādyavyakta, Sihājullāh Khān’s Yugikāca, and Munsī Rahimullāh’s Tanatelāota, all from the 19th–20th centuries. Sharif 1972, 161.
\textsuperscript{751} Eaton 1993, 284.
\textsuperscript{752} Hatley 2007, 361.
equivalence to produce a modified hermeneutic model to understand precisely how Sultān creates a new prior text for his community. While Eaton uses superhuman agencies as the basic markers of religious change, I extend this to include doctrinal and ritual systems that operate within period standards of Islamic normativity, as these are expressed within the text at the linguistic and formal levels.\textsuperscript{753}

An additional hermeneutic model which is useful in developing this model of “translation as conversion” is George Steiner’s model of translation. Describing translation as an act of aggression, Steiner has delineated four hermeneutic moves via which a text passes into translation: an implicit trust on the part of the target culture in the source culture; the invasion of the source culture by the target culture for extraction of linguistic, literary, and cultural elements from the source culture; the incorporation of these source-cultural elements into the target one; and the final phase of reciprocity, an equalization of the two languages/cultures, wherein “order is preserved at both ends of the cycle, source and receptor.”\textsuperscript{754} “The translator,” thus, in this view, “invades, extracts, and brings home.”\textsuperscript{755}

Steiner’s model is meant for universal application, a model for all translated texts, including translations of sacred texts such as Luther’s Bible.\textsuperscript{756} While I agree with the model, in principle, I prefer to understand the dialectic movement as an ever-growing spiral flow rather than a circular one. In addition, the case of a missionary text such as the NV points to the existence of a superordinate, controlling “conversion” hermeneutic, whose directional flow, as is shown in the diagram below, is directly opposed to the Steinerian “translation” hermeneutic. In his essay, Steiner hints at this possibility, but does not explore its ramifications adequately.

\textsuperscript{753} This is a suggestion that has been made by Hatley (2007: 360).
\textsuperscript{754} Steiner 2004, 193–198. For the quotation, see ibid., 197. The four phases that Steiner proposes and discussed above are delineated in this essay.
\textsuperscript{755} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{756} Ibid., 188.
“Though all decipherment,” says he, “is aggressive and, at one level, destructive, there are differences in the motive of appropriation and in the context of ‘the bringing back.’” The sacred ideology of the preacher-translator, when understood in the light of the earlier discussion on identity/alterity, commandeers his translatorial conception of that which is to be invaded, that which is to be extracted, and the meaning of home. In other words, the ideology of conversion modifies the direction of aggression. Thus, while Sultān is translating an Arabo-Persian (source-cultural) universe into a Bengali cultural sphere, the controlling conversion hermeneutic determines precisely which doctrinal terms and literary forms should be translated, the specific target-language words which would be the most appropriate equivalents for such translation, and the precise rhetorical means by which such translational codes are to be established. Moreover, the conversion hermeneutic motion is to invade and colonize the target-culture, Bengal, with source-cultural linguistic forms, while ostensibly extracting and incorporating Bangla’s literary prior texts and Bengal’s religious deities into the Islamic Arabo-Persian source-cultural world order. (See diagram below). Once displacement of target-cultural deities and prior texts is achieved within the space of the text, these opposing forces, finally, equalize and balance each other to create an equilibrium, a cultural reciprocity, observable in the ways in which Bangla expands to include new Islamic ideas while Islam is altered by Bengali culture.  

757 Ibid.  
Based upon the models of translation proposed by Stewart and Steiner, and Eaton’s model of conversion, the modified model of “translation as conversion” which I propose is five-fold, the “conversion” hermeneutic guiding that of “translation” throughout: identification, extraction, incorporation, displacement, and reciprocity. The first phase in the unfolding of this hermeneutic is identification, a procedure which collapses Eaton’s understanding of identification with Stewart’s theory of dynamic and metaphoric equivalence. Implicit within it is the Steinerian hermeneutic of trust, at least on the part of the target culture’s auditor. For Sultān, as preacher-translator, trust is subsumed by an overarching belief in the source-cultural universe, which he considers to be universal, and hence, transportable to any target-culture. At the level of language, form, and doctrine—and all these work together to sustain Sultān’s manipulation of the identity/alterity dialectic—the author sets up dynamic equivalents between the source language/culture and the target language/culture. Translational codes are
established by various innovative means. First, select source-cultural terms, such as nabī and Nūr Muhammad, are provided with translational definitions that supply their respective meanings as *avatāra* or *mahājyutirmaya* in Bangla. Second, Iblis (Ar. Iblīs) is identified with Nārada through the creation of a pair-word, Iblis-Nārada, which refers to Iblis. Third, Prabhu Niraṇjana is identified with Allāh or Khodā through writerly usage: the substitution of one code for another in appropriate contexts, the codes beginning with a familiar term (Prabhu Niraṇjana) and moving seamlessly towards substitution by the foreign term (Allāh/Khodā) as the text unfolds. Such terms are slipped into the narrative: identification is achieved by the writer through the rapid juxtaposition of exchangeable codes within a short didactic or narrative sequence, and by the auditor through the apprehension of the similarity in the theological functions of such terms within the textual context. The conversion hermeneutic dictates the choice of source-language terms which need to be identified with target-language terms.

The NV, moreover, instantiates an approach to identification that is architextually pervasive: Sultān’s “search for equivalence” seeps from language into form, and from form, via a polyglot transtextuality, to transcultural discourse at the broadest polisystemic, intersemiotic level of translation.759 At the level of form, as we have seen, equivalents are sought between genres from separate linguistic traditions, such as the world history model of the Arābo-Persian sīra and the Sanskrit purāṇa, or the sīra (in its more restricted sense) as a biography of the Prophet and the Bangla carita.

Translation via seeking “dynamic equivalence” is the authorial way of resolving cultural tensions for the auditor through a semiotic process of domesticating alterity, a process which

Ricci identifies as localization. At a very basic level this localization, as she points out, is achieved through language: the act of translation produces a new story in language that sounds familiar. Localization is also achieved in the NV through the referencing, in the identification phase, of indigenous literary forms. Once linguistic and doctrinal codes of equivalence are established, the author begins to play with the auditor’s notions of the familiar and the foreign by deliberate acts of code-switching. These result in the creation of various forms of ambiguity, which I shall argue are as important as Stewart’s metaphoric equivalents in the creation of semiotic spaces within the target language and culture. These ambiguities provide the author with a margin for maneuvering, for the ideological manipulation of his auditors. With not a little assistance from the author, the auditor, driven by the dissonance and disconcerting nature of ambiguities, attempts to resolve these tensions through the biographic process. Such linguistic and doctrinal cavorting emerges most sharply into focus in the context of the Muslim-Vaiṣṇava encounter in “The Account of Hari” described in Chapter Six. Having played with his auditors by deftly constructing, in this case, seemingly equivocal and inconsistent theological and doctrinal meanings on the identity-alterity spectrum, Sultan’s mastery of rhetoric lies in the manner in which he makes these cohere within a larger Islamic theological framework.

The establishment of codes via identification flings open the gates that ordinarily guard the frontiers of source and target languages/cultures, facilitating a bidirectional movement of extraction and incorporation. At the level of translation a typical manner in which extraction is

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760 Ricci 2011, 247.
761 Ibid.
763 While Stewart describes such inconsistency as the natural fallout of such acts of translating entire cultural worlds, Sultan, from the deliberate nature of the equivocalities, ambiguities, and inconsistencies he creates, as we shall see in Chapter Four, seems to be self-consciously regulating this process in a highly controlled manner. Stewart 2001, 284.
facilitated is again via localization. At the doctrinal level, the language and idiom of the target-culture facilitates the extraction of doctrinal and theological terms, such as nabi, Iblis, Allāh, Khodā, and rasul, from the source culture into Bangla. Another characteristic technique Ricci describes is the narrative localization of source-cultural figures within target-cultural landscapes.764 At the level of translation, this extraction leads to an incorporation of Perso-Arabic elements, linguistic, literary, and cultural, within Bangla and Bengali culture.

On the other hand, Sultān as preacher-translator raids the pantheon of the Vaiṣṇavas, extracts their deities, and brings them home to incorporate (Eaton's inclusion) them into an Islamic cosmological and prophetological framework. This complete incorporation of indigenous superhuman agencies into an Islamic world order, an effective conversion, sets the stage for their subordination, subversion, and ultimate displacement. This controlling conversion hermeneutic is observed most evidently at the level of doctrine, as we will see in Chapters Four and Five in the delineation of cosmogony and prophetology. Thus indigenous superhuman deities are incorporated within Judeo-Islamic prophetological genealogies, a process which effectively subordinates them to Muḥammad, within Islamic conceptions of world history. At the level of form too, once equivalence is alluded to, indigenous prior texts, whether purānic tropes or metatexts, are embedded within Islamic literary frameworks. However, it cannot be stressed enough that these features are more readily detected retrospectively by a modern readerly audience with a polyglot transtextuality, a second-order level of analysis. For the premodern Bengali auditor who experienced the text as it unfolded through oral performance over a period of several nights perhaps, this process was more opaque. The unprecedented nature of the text, and the manner in which Sultān sets up the opening cosmogonical section, would facilitate the auditor's experiencing it as a text which was ostensibly incorporating

Islamic deities within a purāṇic framework. It is only through the retrospect of literary history that one sees the real process of incorporation at work: the coopting of indigenous gods, sacred tropes, and texts into Islamic doctrinal and literary frameworks as a way of subsuming the target culture within source-cultural frameworks and of augmenting the existing valorization of the religious ideal in the source culture through the doctrinal and linguistic heritage of the target culture. Thus, such processes of incorporation in the NV enrich Muhammad’s existing inheritance of the traditional monotheistic genealogy of prophets with a new Vaiṣṇava genealogy of gods.

As we have seen, one of Sultān’s aims in composing the NV was to provide an Islamic alternative to the epic tales of Rāma and Krṣṇa. Translation as conversion then, recalling Ricci, is also a process by which the preacher-translator creates a new sacred prior text for his community, a new tradition of sacred literature, which attempts to first subsume sacred prior texts of the target culture within source cultural sacred texts, and later displace the former altogether, creating thereby a new sacred literature which would retrospectively acquire canonical status within his community. The process of translation, however, as Stewart demonstrates, triggers a double movement, a final Steinerian reciprocity—not merely between the source culture and the target culture but also between, in this case, the conversion and the translation hermeneutic motions—that changes as much the nature of Islam in the Bengali context as Bangla and its semiotic universe. Sultān’s literary endeavor inscribes thus a significant moment in Bengal’s history: while pushing the frontiers of Bangla to accommodate new Islamic ideas, he is simultaneously creating through the NV one of the earliest comprehensive prior texts for Bengali Islam.
The chart below summarizes the five-stage “translation as conversion” hermeneutic discussed here.\textsuperscript{765}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES</th>
<th>CONVERSION</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Identifies Hindu gods, doctrinal elements, and sacred prior texts with Islamic counterparts. Movement of trust based upon preacher’s belief in the transportability of his faith from SC to TC.</td>
<td>Identifies TL codes with SL codes, and literary prior texts in TL with those in SL. Movement from TL to SL based upon translator’s trust in SL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraction</td>
<td>Hindu gods, doctrinal elements, and sacred prior texts are extracted from TC into SC.</td>
<td>SL codes are extracted into TL, as are literary prior texts. These are determined by the conversion hermeneutic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation</td>
<td>Hindu gods, doctrinal elements, and sacred prior texts are incorporated from TC into SC.</td>
<td>SL codes/literary prior texts are incorporated into TL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>Hindu gods, doctrinal elements, and sacred prior texts are displaced from TC by SC counterparts.</td>
<td>SL codes displace TL codes/literary prior texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity between SC and TC and between the conversion and translation hermeneutic motions</td>
<td>SC expands to incorporate TC.</td>
<td>TL expands to incorporate SL (and, thereby, SC).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{3.6 “Frontier” Literature}

Literary historians of Bangla have often divided premodern Bangla literary production into two main branches, \textit{maulika sāhitya}, “original literature,” and \textit{anuvāda sāhitya}, “translation literature.”\textsuperscript{766} To my mind, however, these categories are artificial, misrepresentative, and not adequately appreciative of the interventions and originality of Islamic Bangla literature, much of which is categorized as “translation literature.”\textsuperscript{767} First, the term “original literature” itself is questionable, since all literature is in some way or other intertextual, and all expression, as A. L.

\textsuperscript{765} SC and TC stand for “source culture” and “target culture” respectively, while SL and TL are abbreviations for “source language” and “target language” respectively.

\textsuperscript{766} See, for instance, Sultānā 2007, 11.

\textsuperscript{767} See, for instance, Ājhār Islām 2000, Table of Contents.
Becker notes, “has a history.” Second, the term “translation literature” is often construed as being somewhat inferior to “original literature” because of the derivative, secondary nature of the translated product. Though the term “translation” has been used in this chapter to describe the processes at work in the NV, a categorization of the NV as “translation literature” as distinct from “original literature” belies the extraordinary originality Bengali authors display in adapting literature from one cosmopolitan language, whether Sanskrit or Persian, into the vernacular. The product of their designs is so transposed from the source text through multiple scales of creativity that “translation literature” becomes a pale appellation for the vibrancy of the new vernacular forms produced. Other problems also arise through such designations. Take, for instance, the issue of the cautišā, a genre that has been categorized by Shāmīmā Sultānā as “original literature.”768 While the Bangla cautišā has its roots in an older Sanskrit literary form, how should one categorize the cautišās produced by Muslim Bengali authors, when they could also have been referencing similar mnemonic forms found in medieval Judeo-Islamic literature?

For all these reasons, I would like to suggest a different nomenclature for the NV, and other works of Islamic Bangla literature that display similar characteristics. As a product of processes of translation and conversion, the NV exemplifies, in terms of its production, processing, and reception, what I would like to call “frontier” literature. First, the term highlights, following Richard Eaton’s exposition of Islamization on the Bengal frontier,769 the nature of the Nabīvaṃśa’s historical sociotextual community, located on a new frontier of the Dūr al-Islām, and constituted by non-Muslims770 and Muslim neophytes alike, all of whom the text seeks to draw into its universal embrace. Second, it is used in recognition of how the text might have

768 Sultānā 2007, 11.
769 Eaton 1993.
770 By “non-Muslims” I refer to the Gauṛiya Vaiṣṇavas, followers of other Vaiṣṇava sects, Śāktas, and Nātha practitioners, and others who inhabited the seventeenth-century Bengali landscape.
been processed by the premodern rural Bengali auditor, whose “horizon of the expectable”
would have been inadequate to apprehend the NV’s polyglot transtextual registers.\textsuperscript{771} Such
auditors might have perceived the text’s ostensible slippage across expected boundaries of
genre, at once familiar and unfamiliar, into an uncharted linguistic and literary terrain, a
literary and linguistic frontier zone. Third, the term acknowledges certain production
processes that recognize the Bakhtinian idea that genres have a socio-historical function
beyond their formal aspects, as “drive belts from the history of society to the history of
language.”\textsuperscript{772} Thus, as Tony Stewart has observed, such literature extends the frontiers of
Bangla, as much through the lexical increase in new vocabulary as the semantic expansion of
existing vocabulary to accommodate new Islamic ideas. Finally, again following Stewart and
Eaton, the “frontier” characteristics of this text challenge the epistemological world of Islam
itself, pushing its boundaries to yet again expand, to yet again receive into itself evernew local
expressions and understandings of faith.

3.7 Conclusion

As a pīr-poet of sacred biography, Saiyad Sultān is concerned with creating a new prior text
for Bengal, an Islamic pāncālī on the Prophet Muhammad, to capture the attention of local
Bengalis enraptured by myths of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, diverting them, instead, to the figure of the
Prophet. In this regard his self-assigned task was similar to that of Islamic scholars throughout
the course of Islamic history who mediated the ever-changing frontiers of the Dār al-Islām.

\textsuperscript{771} This expression coined by Hans Robert Jauss is, by his own definition, “constituted for the reader from
out of a tradition or series of previously known works, and from a specific attitude, mediated by one (or
more) genre and dissolved through new works.” Jauss 2000, 131.

\textsuperscript{772} Bakhtin 2000, 88.
had to wrestle with communal definition and identity construction among a minority Muslim population, surrounded in the Arabian peninsula by Jews and Christians, and outside of it in the Middle East by Christians and Zoroastrians.\footnote{Cf. Vuckovic 2005, 42.} Early sacred biographers of the Prophet, such as Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq, wielded their pens not merely as mediators between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also to counter, as Tarif Khalidi notes, the prevailing Islamic orthodoxy.\footnote{Khalidi 1994, 35.} As a revolutionary author, writing against the orthodox \textit{ashrāf} of his age—a largely Iranian elite, who exerted their superiority over the Bengali native population, not merely by their political power, but via linguistic, cultural, and religious snobbery—Sultān is conscious of his authority as \textit{guru} over local peoples, an authority which he effectively deploys to establish the Prophet’s position within his community. His biography, once written, further consolidates his own status within the community, and facilitates the creation of a community identity, aligned around the spiritual axis of \textit{pīr}, Prophet, and God. Such is the ongoing relationship of power between biographer and subject that each becomes the social reality of the other in varying measures at various points in their history; each partner in their spiralling dance through history reinforces the symbolic cultural capital of the other.\footnote{Cf. Stewart 2010a, x.} Saiyad Sultān’s affirmations of the vernacular, much to the chagrin of the Bengali \textit{ashrāf}, confirm his participation at a pan-South Asian level in the ranks of Sufis who harnessed the vernacular for their literary production. Within Bengal, such affirmations assert his association with a growing group of Muslim literati who were contributing to the ethnogenesis of a pre-colonial linguistic and cultural Bengali identity for local Muslims.\footnote{Concerning similar developments in the pre-colonial Telugu region of Andhra Pradesh, see Talbot 1995, 692–722.}
Additionally, Sultān makes his disciples central to the process of preservation and transmission of the NV by presenting such acts of literary codification and preservation as deeds of piety that invite divine grace, a strategy that bore rich dividends. Not only was the book that Sultān deemed crucial to the construction of Bengali Muslim community identity copied extensively, as the considerable numbers of extant manuscripts from Southeast Bengal attest, we have seen how Muhammad Khān, Sultān’s chief disciple, endeavored to extend its scope.

This chapter outlined the specific challenges faced by Saiyad Sultān as a preacher-translator and the particular hermeneutic processes by which he created a new prior text for East Bengalis. In the next four chapters I elaborate upon Sultān’s conceptions of Islamic cosmogony and prophetology. The localization of Islamic figures within the Bengali cultural universe is delineated, while simultaneously showing how Vaiṣṇava deities and doctrine came to be subsumed within Islam’s new dispensation for Bengal.
Chapter Four

Cosmogony and Conversion

4.1 Introduction

The present chapter studies the manner in which Saiyad Sultān presents Islamic cosmogony to the Bengalis. An attempt is made to trace the multilingual and multicultural origins of his cosmogonic conceptions. On the one hand, I compare and contrast Sultān’s narrative with the cosmogony presented in the medieval Islamic tradition, to understand the particular themes and strands he weaves together for presenting his own account. In determining the range of medieval Islamic texts Sultān draws upon, we gain a picture of the kinds of texts that circulated in premodern India, particularly in Bengal. On the other hand, I trace the meaning and significance of the Bengali cosmological and doctrinal equivalences Sultān establishes, and how these relate to his larger polemical project. On the basis of the paradigm for conversion to Christianity among the Nagas which Richard Eaton proposes, I argue that Sultān’s deliberate interventions as a translator of Islamic cosmogony into Bangla’s linguistic, literary, and cultural sphere promote the image of an astute missionary, who is keenly aware of the profound significance that the representation of Islamic cosmology and
cosmogony as continuous with Indic cosmogonical thought bears for the establishment of Islam in Bengal.

We first turn to a discussion of the development of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* tradition in the Persianate world. This discussion, though perhaps more relevant to Chapter Five on prophetology, is provided in advance because Sultan draws upon this tradition, as one among many, in elucidating cosmogony.

4.2 The *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (“Tales of the Prophets”) Tradition in the Persianate World

In order to understand the prophetic traditions of the Qurʾān, early Muslims turned to the oral interpreters of Judaic and Christian traditions, foremost among whom were ʿAbdullāh ibn Salām (d. 663), Kaʿb ibn Alḥār (d. ca. 652), and Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 730).777 Out of the “religious folklore” on the Islamicized prophetic traditions passed on through such oral interpretations developed the independent literary genre of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (tales of the prophets).778 While early authors undoubtedly drew upon Arab folklore and the Jewish and Christian traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia to elaborate upon the traditions of the Qurʾān, this was filtered through “their own Persian, Arabic and Islamic heritage,” so that the genre soon took on “a life and identity of its own.”779 While an independent genre of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* was taking shape, these tales also “infiltrate[d] into the realm of ḥadīth and tafsīr very early on in the Islamic period,” and also “became an integral part of books of history,” being “duly

777 Thackston 1997, xvii.
778 Ibid. See also Nagel 2011b. Concerning the etymology and semantic range of the Arabic word *qiṣṣa*, and the growth and development of the narrative tradition in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and other languages of the Islamic world, see Pellat, Ch. et al. 2011.
779 Klar 2009, 6.
embedded in the preamble (the *mubtada*, *bad*, or *ibtida*) with which, as a rule, these compilations began.  

Though the earliest Arabic writings in this genre can be traced back to Wahb ibn Munabbih, the most widely circulated accounts across the Islamic world, and especially in the Persianate regions, were the *ʿArāʾis al-majālis* of Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Thaʾlabī (d. 427/1036) and those versions ascribed to a certain Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī. Little is known of al-Kisāʾī, except that his tales were held in high regard by medieval story-tellers (Ar. sing. *qāṣ*); the earliest known manuscript of his *Qīṣaṣ* is dated to 617/1220. If al-Thaʾlabī’s work represented “the learned strain of prophetic literature,” deriving “directly from Qurʾānic commentary,” al-Kisāʾī’s presented the more popular face of this genre, reflecting, according to some scholars, twelfth–thirteenth-century Arabic folk literature.

The monumental *History* (*Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*) of the polymath Muḥammad ibn Jaʿrīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) also covered legends of the pre-Islamic prophets and the *sīra* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Published in forty volumes, only the first four of which belong to the *qīṣaṣ* tradition, Ṭabarī’s work harmonizes the kings and legendary figures of ancient Iran with the prophetic figures of the Islamic *qīṣaṣ* tradition and with the *sīra* accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad.

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781 Concerning the publication of the papyrii of Wahb ibn Munabbih and other early authors, see Kister 1993, 113.
782 Brinner 2002.
783 Thackston 1997. For points of comparison between the NV and al-Kisāʾī’s account, I mainly use this translation. When in doubt, I have referred to *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī.
784 Nagel 2011a.
785 Klar 2009, 11.
786 Thackston 1997, xx.
787 Brinner 2002, xxii. For further points of contrast between al-Thaʾlabī and al-Kisāʾī, see Klar 2009, 11.
789 Ibid., xx. For a synopsis of the prominent works of the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* tradition, see ibid., xviii–xxiv.
Muḥammad. However, as Rachel Milstein remarks, “Ṭabarī’s historical style,” weighed down by the citation of lengthy isnāds (chains of transmission) and the provision of multiple accounts, was “too heavy for even the medieval Muslim literati.” The Sāmānid vizier Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Balʿamī translated al-Ṭabarī’s history into Persian in 963, excising bio-bibliographic details, while adding materials of new historical value. According to Milstein, al-Thaʾlabī created in his Qiṣaṣ “a stylistic equivalent” to al-Balʿamī’s translation, drawing upon “religious literature and historiography.” In Arabic, the qiṣaṣ genre is considered to have reached its zenith with al-Thaʾlabī, who first separated the historiographical aspect of the legends, emphasizing instead their edifying nature.

Later authors added their own inflections to the tale-cycles that were set in place by al-Kisāṭ, al-Ṭabarī (via al-Balʿamī), and al-Thaʾlabī. Thus in their study of 16th-century illustrated Persian manuscripts of the Qiṣaṣ, Milstein, Rührdanz, and Schmitz examine the Persian adaptations of these tales by three authors, the first two of whom flourished between the late tenth and eleventh centuries C.E.: Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Manṣūr ibn Khalaf al-Naysābūrī, Muḥammad Juwayrī/Huwayzī, and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Daydūzamī. The joint research of these scholars shows how the independent Qiṣaṣ produced by this Persian trio “are anchored” in the traditions of al-Kisāṭ, al-Thaʾlabī, and al-Ṭabarī, each author drawing upon these original authors in varying measure to produce their own versions. Some other Persian

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790 For the first four volumes related to the pre-Muhammadan prophets, see Rosenthal 1989; Brinner 1987; ibid. 1991; and Perlmann 1987. For those related to the Prophet Muhammad, see Watt and McDonald 1988; ibid. 1987; Fishbein 1985; and Poonawala 1985.


792 Bosworth 2011.


794 Nagel 2011b.


796 The works of the first two authors have been published. See Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ (Dāstānhā-i payāmbarān) of Abū Ishaq Ibrāhīm bin Manṣūr bin Khalafa Nishābūrī; and Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ of Muḥammad Juwayrī. To the best of my knowledge, al-Daydūzamī’s work has not yet been published.

797 Milstein 1999, 14.
translators of the *Tales* are known, one of whom, al-Dândûrmî or al-Dîrumî, named by Hâjî Khalîfa, in the seventeenth century, is said to have based his version upon that of al-Thal‘abî.\textsuperscript{798}

C. A. Storey records translations into Persian of other Arabic Qiṣṣâ texts and some original works in Persian, a few of which he has identified as circulating in India: the *Maqāṣîd al-auliyâ‘ fî maḥāsin al-anbiyâ‘* of Maḥmûd al-Fârîbî (d. 607/1210), a history of the prophets and the first four caliphs;\textsuperscript{799} the *Anbiyâ‘nâmâ* of Abû Ishâq Ibrâhîm ibn 'Abd Allâh al-Bâlah-Chânî al-Shâbistarî, known as “Iyânî,” whose maṣnâvi on the Prophets and Muḥammad was probably dedicated, according to W. Ivanow, to Maḥmûd of Ghazna;\textsuperscript{800} and the *Khulâṣat al-anbiyâ‘* of which no copies exist, but which was translated into Urdu.\textsuperscript{801} Also in circulation were tales related to Solomon, such as the *maṣnawîs Bîlqîs u Sulaymân* and *Dâstân-i Sulaymân,*\textsuperscript{802} and to Moses.\textsuperscript{803}

Whereas historiographical and biographical works (*ta’rîkh* and *ṭabaqa‘), in line with Turko-Persian sensibilities, found lasting patronage at the Mughal courts, no manuscripts in the Qiṣṣâ *al-anbiyâ‘* genre *per se,* whether illustrated or not, originally produced in India or not, are known to have been copied at the imperial ateliers of Akbar and his successors. The only work of some relevance produced via Mughal patronage, on Akbar’s orders, was the *Mir‘ât al-quds* or *Dâstân-i Masîh,* on the life of Christ.\textsuperscript{804} Indeed, if the group of sixteenth-century Perso-Turkic illustrated manuscripts studied by Milstein, Rührdanz, and Schmitz are any indicator of coeval Indo-Persian trends, and if similar manuscripts were replicated in India at the time, these

\textsuperscript{798} Ibid., 1 and 13.
\textsuperscript{799} Storey 1927 onwards, No. 199, 161.
\textsuperscript{800} Ibid., No. 211 (4), 168. Ivanow 1924, No. 1754, 799.
\textsuperscript{801} Storey, No. 211 (13), 169.
\textsuperscript{802} Ibid., No. 211 (8 and 9), 169.
\textsuperscript{803} See further details below.
\textsuperscript{804} Ibid., No. 205 (1), 163–164.
would most probably have been patronized within non-imperial circles of the rich bourgeoisie, as was the case with the Perso-Turkic manuscripts.\textsuperscript{805}

Noteworthy, however, among Persian manuscripts of Indian provenance listed under the “General Histories” section of the India Office Library catalog, is the expected inclusion of the histories of the prophets and of Muḥammad in most every one of the fifteen universal histories of kings, both those indigenously produced, and those translated or replicated from Arabo-Persian sources.\textsuperscript{806} From this representative catalog we learn that al-Ṭabarī’s History, translated into Persian by al-Balʿamī, was among the more widely circulated works of this genre: twelve manuscripts of this work are to be found in this collection alone.\textsuperscript{807} In Bengal too, al-Balʿamī’s abridged translation of al-Ṭabarī’s history circulated, as is attested by three incomplete manuscripts in the collections of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.\textsuperscript{808} A copy of the first volume of al-Ṭabarī’s original work, moreover, is to be found in the collections of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.\textsuperscript{809} Also of interest among the Arabic histories in this collection is Ibn al-Athīr’s Al-Ḳītāb al-kāmil fīl-taʾrīkh, which provides the history of the world from creation to 628/1230.\textsuperscript{810}

The Rawḍaḥ al-ṣafāʾ fī sīrah al-anbiyāʾ waʾl-mulāk waʾl khulafāʾ, a history of the Persian kings up to Timūr and his successors, written in Persian by Muḥammad ibn Khwāndshāh ibn Maḥmūd Mīrkhwānd (b. 1433), gained immense popularity in the Indo-Persian region.\textsuperscript{811} Produced in six volumes, the first two respectively dealt with the stories of the prophets and the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. The author’s prolific nephew, Ghiyāṣuddīn Muḥammad Khwāndamīr (b. 1475) of Herat, who later migrated to India, finding patronage with the Mughal emperor,

\textsuperscript{805} Milstein and Rührdanz 1999, 98–102.
\textsuperscript{806} Ethé 1903, 1: Mss. 2–130, 1–54.
\textsuperscript{807} Ibid., Nos. 2–13, 1–5.
\textsuperscript{808} Ivanow 1924, Nos. 1–3, 1–2.
\textsuperscript{809} Ivanow 1939–1949, No. 1269, 37.
\textsuperscript{810} Ibid., No. 1270, 38.
\textsuperscript{811} A. Beveridge 2011. For a complete translation into English, see Rehatsek [1891] 1982; for Islamic prehistory, see ibid., vol. I, part 1; for the life of Muḥammad, see vol. I, part 2.
Bābur, and then with Humāyūn, added a seventh volume to his history, bringing it down to the time of Sulṭān Ḥuṣayn Baykarā of Herat.\textsuperscript{812} That 31 manuscripts pertaining to the \textit{Rawḍah al-safā'} are to be found in the India Office collection attests to its wide popularity in the Indian subcontinent.\textsuperscript{813} Based upon his uncle’s history, Khwāndamīr also composed a more concise history, the \textit{Khulāṣāt al-akhbār fī bayān aḥwāl al-akhyār}, of which three manuscripts are available in this collection.\textsuperscript{814} Another popular historical work of Khwāndamīr, which also contained an account of Islamic pre-history and the history of Muḥammad, was the Ḥabīb al-siyar, twenty-two manuscripts of which are present in the India Office collection.\textsuperscript{815} The collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal has 23 manuscripts that pertain to the \textit{Rauḍat al-ṣafāʾ},\textsuperscript{816} one of the \textit{Khulāṣāt},\textsuperscript{817} and eight of the \textit{Habīb al-siyar}, attesting to the popularity of the works of this pair in Bengal.\textsuperscript{818}

The \textit{Lubb al-Tawārīkh} of Yaḥya ibn ʿAbd al-Latīf Qazvīnī, that traces the life of Muḥammad and the Imāms, and provides a history down to the Ṣafavī dyanasty, also commands some circulation in the Indian subcontinent, with one manuscript to be found in the collection of the

\textsuperscript{812} A. Beveridge 2011.
\textsuperscript{813} Ethé 1903, 1: Nos. 24–75, 12–24; and 2: Nos. 3005–3008, 1–3.
\textsuperscript{814} Ethé 1903, 1: Nos. 76–78, 24–25.
\textsuperscript{816} Ivanow 1924, Nos. 10–31, 5–10.
\textsuperscript{817} Ibid., No. 33, 10.
\textsuperscript{818} Ibid., Nos. 34–40, pp. 10–12; and Ivanow 1926, No. 2, 2. As for other works of general histories in this collection which contain the histories of the prophets and Muḥammad, Ivanow (1924, 2–15) lists two manuscripts of the \textit{Hadiqat al-safā'} of Yūsuf ʿAlī ibn Ghulām ʿAlī (Nos. 45 and 46); and single manuscripts of the \textit{Tārīkh-i gūzīda} of Ḥamda Allāh ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ḥusayn Mustāwfi Qazvīnī (No. 6); the \textit{Majma’ al-ansāb} of Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan ibn Abī Bakr Shabāṅgārāī (No. 7); the \textit{Kitāb-i taʿrīkh} of Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad Ḥusaynī (No. 8); the \textit{Mujmal-i faṣiḥī} of Ḥādī al-Dīn Ḥasan ibn Suṭṭān ʿAlī ibn Ḥājjī Muḥammad Ḥusayn Sabzavārī (No. 42); and the \textit{Mujmal-i muṣafṣal} of Muḥammad Barārī Ummī ibn Muḥammad Jamshīd ibn Jabbārī Kẖān ibn Majnūn Kẖān Qāḥshāl (No. 43). From among these manuscripts, cf. Mss. Nos. 6 with Ethé, vol. 1, Mss. 19 and 20, p. 10; Ms. 7 with ibid., Mss. 21 and 22, 10–11. In addition in Ivanow (1926, 3–6), of relevance to our discussion, are also single manuscripts of the \textit{Tuhfāt al-akhbār} of Muḥammad Saʿīd ibn Walī of Qazvīn (No. 5); \textit{Mīrāt al-ʿālam} of Muḥammad Baqā (No. 6); and the anonymous \textit{Āʿīna-i bakht} (No. 7).
Asiatic Society of Bengal.\textsuperscript{819} The Taˈrikh-i alfi, the most prominent universal history commissioned by Akbar and written jointly by a team of scholars, covers the first 997 years after the hijra, and is one of the few exceptions among the general histories featured in the India Office catalog in not containing any elements of Islamic prehistory or of Muḥammad’s life.\textsuperscript{820} While the histories discussed here may have supplied the tales of the prophets and the history of the Prophet of Islam to courtly circles, it is unclear as to how these tales circulated among the middle elite and the Sufis, for surely dynastic histories would not have been as relevant to such groups.

An exploratory survey of representative manuscript catalogs reveals that indigenous production in premodern India, in Persian (or Arabic), in the qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ genre was scarce. With the exception of the qiṣṣa tales embedded in the universal histories produced in India and Iran which we have discussed above, the Arabo-Persian Qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ texts of known authorship which were copied and circulated in the subcontinent were mostly of exogenous origin. From C. A. Storey’s survey of the literature, a couple of texts in this genre can be identified to have been composed locally in India. One of these was the Manāqib-i anbiyāʾ of Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kashmīrī Hamadānī, who also wrote the Ţabaqāt-i Shāh-Jahānī in 1046/1606. The text provides the legends of the pre-Islamic prophets and “brief notes on Muḥammad and his first successors.”\textsuperscript{821} The Rauḍat al-muttaqīn of Bāqir “Khādim” is another, most probably written in eighteenth-century India; it consists of “a poetical account of the Prophets from

\textsuperscript{820} Munibur Rahman 2011. Ethé 1903, 1: Mss. 110–118. Ethé and Rahman present conflicting views on whether the text begins with the hijra (Rahman) or with Muḥammad’s death (Ethé).
\textsuperscript{821} Storey 1927, No. 207, 166.
Adam to Muḥammad." And the Ḥasan al-qaṣaṣ, an account of Joseph, was written at Lucknow by ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Ḥusainī ʿIṣfahānī.823

In addition to a copy of al-Naysābūrī’s text,824 and two of the Tāj al-qīṣaṣ,825 which is discussed below, the India Office collection of Persian manuscripts holds single manuscripts of other texts in or related to this genre: the Taʿrīḵ-i anbiyāʾ, of unknown authorship, which provides a detailed treatment of the prophets before Muḥammad;826 the ʿAjāʾib al-qīṣṣaṣ of ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Muḥammad Muftī, which supplies the legends of the prophets and the life of Muḥammad;827 the Majmaʿ al-hudā of ʿAlī ibn Ḥasan al-Zavvārī, which provides the histories of the prophets, of Muḥammad, and the Imāms;828 the Tafsīr-i tadhkirat al-anbiyāʾ waʾl-umam, which contains a treatment of the prophets from Adam to Muḥammad based upon the Qur’ān and hadīth traditions;829 and two manuscripts of the Muntakhab al-akhbār by Bahā al-Dīn Saʿd al-Dīn, which provides a concise history of the prophets and the history of Muḥammad and his family along with the martyrdom of ʿAlī and his sons.830

What follows is a preliminary survey of the kinds of qīṣaṣ manuscripts that circulated in Bengal, primarily based upon the representative collections of the University of Dhaka, the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and the erstwhile Būhār Library collection of Burdwan, now housed in the National Library of India, Kolkata.831 We know of at least one manuscript of unknown date

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823 Storey 1927, No. 211 (2), 168. The citation of the manuscript number in under “Ivanow” seems to be erroneous.
824 Ethé 1903, 1: Ms. 590, 238.
825 Ibid., Mss. 591 and 592, 238–239.
826 Ibid., Ms. 596, 241–242. Ivanow points out that it was written after the Raudat al-ṣafīʿ, since it refers to Mīrkhvānd’s text. See details provided below.
827 Ibid., Ms. 597, 242–243.
828 Ibid., Ms. 598, 243–244.
829 Ibid., Ms. 599, 244–245.
830 Ibid., Ms. 166 and 167, 74.
of an abridged version of Ishāq al-Naysābūrī’s Qīṣāṣ collected from the Bengal and Assam regions, and another incomplete version of anonymous authorship, also of unknown date, both in the Dacca University archives.\textsuperscript{832} Three manuscripts of al-Kisā’ī’s Arabic Qīṣāṣ are noticed: one copied in the eighteenth century is found in the collections of the Būhār Library,\textsuperscript{833} while two more are found in the Asiatic Society of Bengal’s collections.\textsuperscript{834} Single copies of the Persian Manāqib-i anbiyā’, the Ta’rikh-i anbiyā’, and the ‘Ajā‘īb al-Qīṣāṣ are also to be found in the collections of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.\textsuperscript{835} The Būhār Library collection also holds a copy of Maḥmūd al-Fariyābī’s Maqāṣid, discussed above.\textsuperscript{836} A single manuscript of the Majma’ al-hudā is also to be found in the Asiatic Society of Bengal.\textsuperscript{837} One copy of the Tāj al-qīṣāṣ compiled at Bīḏāpūr, here entitled Qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā’, is also available in the latter collection.\textsuperscript{838} This work, a copy of which is also attested in the catalog of the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore,\textsuperscript{839} was written by Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn Naṣr al-Bukhārī in Balkh, shortly after al-Naysābūrī’s version of the Qīṣāṣ was completed. The author mentions that his sources are al-Ṭabarī and A’tham Kūfī (c. 314/926),\textsuperscript{840} while the cataloger believes that he frequently cites al-Naysābūrī’s text;\textsuperscript{841} the author also uses the qīṣāṣ-sīra generic configuration followed in the NV. Three other texts, entitled Muntakhab-i Qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā’ and Madīnati al-Anbiyā’, both of anonymous authorship, and the Qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā’ by Allahyār Khān Ghilzay, are also to be found

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\textsuperscript{832} Habibullah 1966, 1: Nos. 19 and 20, 17–18. Not specifically a Qīṣāṣ text, but nonetheless relevant to this study, is a cosmogonical text of unknown authorship written in Arabic, and produced in the 19th century. Ibid., 2: No. 489, 522. Cf. another ms. of the Qīṣāṣ of al-Naysābūrī in the India Office library, Ethé 1903, 1: Ms. 590, 238.
\textsuperscript{833} Radavī and al-Muqtadir 1921, 2: No. 198, 230. The collection is now housed in the National Library of India, Calcutta, see http://www.nationallibrary.gov.in/nat_lib_stat/buhar.html.
\textsuperscript{834} Ivanow 1939–1949, Nos. 1275 and 1276, 43.
\textsuperscript{835} Ibid., 1926, Nos. 101, 102, on 103, and No. 748, on 485.
\textsuperscript{836} Radavī and al-Muqtadir 1921, 1: No. 38, 27–28.
\textsuperscript{837} Ivanow 1924, No. 61, 19.
\textsuperscript{838} Ivanow 1924, No. 326, 140. See also Storey 1927, No. 196, 159.
\textsuperscript{839} Abdul Muqtadir 1918, 6: No. 482, 74–77.
\textsuperscript{840} For more details on this author, see Storey 1927, No. 261, 207–208.
\textsuperscript{841} Abdul Muqtadir 1918, 6: No. 482, 74.
Two copies of the *Taʾrīkh-i Mūsavi* of Muʾīn al-Miskīn (d. 907/1501), who relates the stories of Moses, are to be found, one each in the Asiatic Society of Bengal and in the Būhār. That al-Naysābūrī’s *Qiṣaṣ* continued to remain significant for the Bengal region well into the colonial period is known from the *Kāsāsul Ānbiyā* composed by the *dobhāṣī* poet Muhammad Khāṭer, who wrote his version based upon Golām Nabī ibn-e Ināyatullāh’s Urdu translation of al-Naysābūrī’s text. An extensive *Kāsāsul Anbiyā* was also published at Baṭatalā: a composition in *dobhāṣi* of the Hooghly poet, Rejāullāh Āmīrūddin, it was also a translation into Bangla of an unknown Persian text, mediated through an Urdu translation. On the basis of similarities between this text and Muhammad Khāṭer’s, Ahmad Sharif opines that this too was probably based upon Golām Nabī’s Urdu translation of al-Naysābūrī’s *Qiṣaṣ*.

The Islamic cosmogony presented in the *NV* shows Sultān’s reliance upon numerous legendary traditions that circulated in the Islamic world. More often than not, it is impossible to determine the precise tradition that Sultān chooses to follow. In certain instances, however, close similarities in narrative detail help us identify Sultān’s sources more precisely. Thus, for instance, the tale of Mārica draws heavily upon al-Kisāʾī’s account; and the account, in Book II, of the classes of created beings that derive their status from their specific interactions with the Nūr Muhammad draws upon ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Aḥmad al-Qāḍī’s collection of *ḥadīth* on the garden and the fire (*Daqāʾiq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-jannah waʾl-nār*). However, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, as cosmogony shades into prophetology, we see a strong reliance upon al-Kisāʾī’s tales. A detailed study of the Ādam tale-cycle shows Sultān’s reliance

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842 Ivanow 1924, Nos. 327, 328 and 329 respectively, 140–141.
844 Sharif [1972] 2006, 123. Sharif (ibid.) opines that the *Kāchāchal Anbiyā o Sāhābāgānera Khelāphat* of Munṣī Tājaddin Mahāmnāda is not translated by the purported author, but is, in fact, Muhammad Khāṭer’s translation of Golām Nabī’s Urdu translation of al-Naysābūrī’s *Qiṣaṣ*.
845 Ibid., 123–124.
upon the original Arabic version, rather than any mediating Persian version, such as that of Ibn Ishāq al-Naysābūri. However, this is a matter reserved for in-depth study in the future.

We now turn to Saiyad Sultān’s invocation to the NV, and examine its various literary, rhetorical, and polemical purposes.

4.3 The Invocation (Hāmd)

First I salute the lord, primeval treasury.
Fourteen worlds he fashioned in a flash momentary.
Beginning or end he has not, nor a locus fixed.
Unbroken form is his, pervading all betwixt.
Heaven, earth, and netherworld, he created; then he sports,
adorned in all the myriad forms that he has wrought.
All things are known to him; he grows not manifest.
In unmanifest, manifest is he; in manifest, unmanifest.
Whether or not the word becomes forms multifarious,
there are no emptinesses [here], just a mass amorphous.
Imperceptibly he dwells, unseen in the seen:
doubt-ridden is the discernment of imperceptible signs.
To speak of him there are no letters; to think of him frustrates.
The void’s form emerges from nothingness’ plate.
But for Nirañjana, from here, nothing manifests.
Within form, the form of the formless ever rests.
Form pervades the fire and heat;
as cooling scent through wind it breathes.
In clay, form viscosity takes.
Into water, as tortoise, its descent makes.
Like sunrays that dwell [subtly] in the moon,
so does he, Nirañjana, suffuse his creation.
Like butter in cow’s milk, so does the lord pervade this ever-transitory orb.
Taking the form of Muhammad—his own avatāra—
his own portion he extends to spread himself afar.
The Creator shall create, from time’s beginning to its end,
messengers to guide all peoples well.
By means of rajah guṇa, the lord creates the world;

846 Qīšas al-anbiyāʾ (Dāstān-i payghāmbarān) of Abū Ishaq Ibrāhīm bin Maṣūr bin Khalafa Nīshābūrī.
847 “A mass amorphous” is my translation for ekākāra.
848 Both “void” and “nothingness” are translations of the single term śūnya. Ghaṭa, one of whose meanings is “receptacle,” has here been translated as “plate.”
849 “Tortoise” is a translation for kūrma.
850 “Messengers” is a translation for paygāmbar.
by means of sattva guṇa, he then maintains this world. Through tama guṇa, next, he draws it all within. Boundless is his glory, by these guṇas three.

By nature, he made some content, others digāmbaras; some he made home-dwelling, others [constant] travelers. To cogitate the scriptures, he created the scholar. To pursue evil action, the [sad] fool, however. He created Buddhist monks, who beg that they may eat, and patrons to give them alms in charity. He planted much love for one friend in another: he ignited, in both hearts, love [for the other.]

To spark a dispute between man and his foe, to cause between them strife and woe: he created Rāvana to capture Jānaka, and Rāma, he created, the demons so to kill. In Vṛndāvana, Naraṇjana made Hari thus to savor the art of love-making’s pleasure. Having created man, he then created woman, That they may delight in love’s sheer passion. Having created on earth, good and evil, he himself is the doer of all deeds; ne’er anybody else. Know that all that is done is nothing but his doing: all that you see is naught but Nirañjana.

\[851\] Digāmbaras, literally meaning “sky-clad ones,” is a reference to a sect of Jain monks who chose to discard all forms of clothing, living in a state of nakedness.

\[852\] “The scriptures” translates sāstra.

\[853\] “Buddhist monks” translates bhikṣuka.

\[854\] In an attempt to provide a flavor of the rhymed payāra of the original, this translation is provided here in rhymed verse, thus breaking with all other translations of sections of the NV in this dissertation, which are in free verse. The constraints of end-rhyme have made this translation somewhat free. The constraints of end-rhyme have made this translation somewhat free.
And so begins the *Nabīvaṃśa*. Imitating the Persian *ḥamd* and *naʿt*, the encomiums to God and the Prophet respectively which sequentially open Persian romances, this invocation also continues the equivalent Indic and Bangla literary traditions of the *mangalācaraṇa* and *vandanā* respectively, the invocation to the deity which opens most Bangla narrative texts. The Persian romance tradition, a development of the Arab and Persian story-telling tradition of the *qiṣṣa* and the *dāstān*, crystallized in the eleventh century in the hands of the Persian poets Gurgāṇī and Ansārī, reaching its high-point with the romances of Niẓāmī. In the fourteenth century, Āmir Khusrū is credited with introducing, in his own adaptations, Niẓāmī’s romances to Indo-Persian literary culture. In imitating Niẓāmī, who himself followed the narrative convention of the invocation established by Gurgāṇī, Khusrū thus also introduced the Persian *ḥamd* and *naʿt* into the *maṣnāvīs* of the subcontinent.

While emulating the Persian invocation, the Bangla counterpart, like that of the coeval Punjabi *qīṣsa* tradition, is considerably truncated in form. Yet the tasks it accomplishes are several. In addition to its ritual function of soliciting the blessings of the deity for the auspicious inauguration of the literary enterprise at hand, narratologically, the Bangla *ḥāmd* functions as a prologue, encapsulating key cosmogonical and prophetological themes, while coincidentally supplying a sampler of the *NV*’s distinctive rhetorical strategies. Drawing upon purānic cosmology, the prologue traces the creation by Prabhu Niraṅjana (the Stainless Lord) of the triple world, which consists of the fourteen realms (*bhuvana* or *loka*): the seven heavens

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855 Mir 2006, 734–735.
856 Ibid., 738. The *maṣnāvī* is the poetic form these romances take: a series of rhymed couplets in the metre *aa*, *bb*, *cc*, and so on, a form that parallels the Bangla *payāra*, both in its rhyming distichs as well as in the similarity in use in epic poetry. For a definition of the *maṣnāvī*, see Rypka 1968, 98.
857 Concerning the Punjabi *qīṣsa* tradition that began in the sixteenth century and for examples of invocations peculiar to the Punjabi *qīṣsa*, see Mir 2010, 152–155.
858 Concerning the choice of name for the creator see below.
(ākāśa or svarga), the earth (martya, also known as bhūroka, the lowest heaven), and the seven netherworlds (pātāla).\textsuperscript{859} Creation proceeds through the mysterious crystallization of the form of the void (śūnyākāra) within the primeval, indivisible, formless void (śūnya). Through the words śūnya and its variants, Niraṅjana, and nairākāra, the Dharma cult is also invoked, since Niraṅjana is the immanent form of Dharma Ṭhākur or Dharmarāja, who is also called Nirākāra and is represented as śūnya-rūpa.\textsuperscript{860} These cosmological terms and attributes for the Supreme Being, moreover, had been used in North Indian Sufi circles since the fourteenth century, adapted through their interactions with Nātha yogis.\textsuperscript{861} The form of the formless, according to Sultān, manifests as heat in fire (ānala), coolness and fragrance in wind (pavana), solidity in earth/clay (mṛttikā), and as the kūrma (tortoise) avatāra in water (jala). Whereas the reference to the evolution of the elements is an allusion to a Śāmkhya creationism, the kūrma avatāra presages the purānic descent of the dasāvatāra, the ten manifestations of Viṣṇu, in the prophetology that is to follow. It also provides a segue into the conception that Niraṅjana takes the form of Muhammad, “his own avatāra,” propagating himself via “his own aṃśa,” part or portion.\textsuperscript{862} Indeed, we are told that the creator creates his messengers (paygāmbara) from time to time in order to provide right guidance to all peoples. The Śāmkhya-derived cosmogonic principle of the guṇas is then invoked: creation comes about via rajah guṇa (the active principle); it is

\textsuperscript{859} Rocher 1986, 130–131. While finding an appropriate purānic equivalent in the bhuvanas or lokas, Sultān’s “fourteen worlds” also refer to the traditional fourteen strata of the seven heavens and the seven earths represented in the Qīṣa al-anbiyā’ accounts. Brinner 2002, 10–13, 19–24; Thackston 1997, 8–15.

\textsuperscript{860} Ferrari 2010, 32, 52, 54, 96–97. See ibid., Chapters One and Two for an understanding of the various religious overlays that constitute Dharma religiosity and its conception of cosmogony.

\textsuperscript{861} The language of Kabir, for instance, that of the Sufi romances beginning with Maulānā Dāud in the fourteenth century, and that of the Rushdnāmā of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Quddūs Gangohī (1453-1537) are suffused with such vocabulary.

\textsuperscript{862} For an elaborate discussion of Muhammad as avatāra, see Chapter Six below.
protected and maintained via \textit{sattva guṇa} (the sentient principle); and is involuted via \textit{tama guṇa} (the principle of inertia).

Next follow reflections upon the lord’s creation of various paradigmatic social types, functionally and symbiotically paired (for instance, the householder versus the ascetic, or the scholar and the fool), and mythological heroes, heroines, and anti-heroes (Rāma-Rāvaṇa-Sītā and Hari). References to Rāma and Hari also continue to allude to the \textit{daśāvatāra} tradition invoked earlier, while foreshadowing the tale-cycles of these Muslim prophets (\textit{mahājana}) in the making. As I will later show in Chapter Five, Sultān skillfully sows the seeds of several theological and polemical ideas within the invocation, seeds which will germinate and bear fruit in the tale-cycle of Hari, and further, as the narrative unfolds. Yet by employing purānic, Nātha, and Sāṃkhyā derived-vocabulary, by referring to the Supreme Deity in local terms, by allusion to Vaiṣṇava mythic heroes and deities, Sultān’s invocation serves to draw various interpretive communities into his discourse. On the face of it, the Prophet’s name is probably the only distinctly Islamic word to appear in this opening passage; and this too we encounter furtively, as the poet couches the Prophet’s description in purānic terms, as an \textit{aṃśāvatāra} of Niraṅjana. It would not be too unfair to argue, therefore, that unless the performance context suggested otherwise, premodern auditors beguiled by the formal equivalences Sultān establishes, could well believe that what they were about to listen to was just another purānic tale of Hari.

Whereas Islamic elements in the invocation are not immediately obvious to the auditor, they undergird the \textit{NV}’s system of cosmogonical thought in vital ways, and underscore the poet-pūr’s own religious identity.\footnote{Cf. how the invocations of the Punjabi \textit{qisse} also serve a similar purpose, in Mir 2010, 155.} The sentiment, for instance, that Prabhu Niraṅjana is the sole creator iterates the Qur’ānic emphasis upon Allāh as the lone “creator of the heavens and
the earth” (Q 2:117, 6:101) and all things else. In his omnipotence, he is without partner, without peer; good and evil are both his creation (ehi ye karite āche saba jāna ahi | yatha dekha niraṅjana chāri āra nāhi ||). The traditional Hindu avatāras; the Muhammad avatāra; and other messengers (paygāmbara), like Muhammad, are all “created” by Niraṅjana, an issue which Sultān is careful to clarify at the very outset because of the significant theological and ideological ramifications this has for the Indic prophetological genealogy he endeavors to establish for Muhammad.

We also find echoes here of the philosophy of waḥdat al-wujūd (the unity of being), a concept which found wide acceptance in South Asian Sufi circles, particularly in the region of Avadh. Sultān highlights the transcendence yet immanence of the creator who “sports, adorned in all the myriad forms (nānā rūpa) that he has wrought.” Ever-present within creation, “like butter in cow’s milk,” he simultaneously displays his unmanifest (Ar. bāṭin) and manifest (Ar. dhāḥir) aspects—gopate vekata veṣa vekate gopata. In these and other significant respects, several striking continuities can be traced between the Islamic cosmogony presented in the NV and the Avadhi Sufi romances, the first of which, Maulānā Dāud’s Candāyana (1379), precedes Islamic Bangla literature by two and a half centuries. Within the late medieval cosmopolitan vernacular literature of India, the Sufis who wrote the Avadhi premākhyānas in many ways prepare the way for Bengali pīr-poets such as Sultān, by being the first to inscribe such Islamic cosmogonic themes and Persianate Sufi and poetical traditions into a local idiom and regional language of eastern India. Both literatures share much common vocabulary, common epithets, common themes, and common wordings.

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864 Peterson 2011.
865 Ibid.
866 On the representation, in medieval texts written by South Asian Muslims, on the createdness of Hindu gods, see below.
867 Concerning this philosophy, see Chittick 1994. With regard to Avadh as “a traditional stronghold” of this doctrine, see Muzaffar Alam 1996, 174.
868 Cf. with the Kanhāvata, wherein Kṛṣṇa reveals himself as “ghee in the milk,” and “scent in the flower,” Orsini forthcoming a.
for instance, for Allāh: the Maker (H. and B. karatā/karatāra); the Stainless One (H. and B. niraṅjana); the Formless One (H. nirūpa, nirākāra; B. nirūpa, nairākāra); and the Invisible One (H. alakh; B. alakṣya).869 Though their emphasis, contingent upon the ideology of the author, varies, it is instructive to compare, for instance, the themes and vocabulary used in a few lines from our invocation with a verse from the Kanhāvata of Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pāndīta srjīla sāstra karite vicāra | murkha saba srjīche karite kadācāra ||} \\
\text{bhikṣuṣa srjīche bhikṣā kari khāite | dāta saba srjīche e sabe dāna dite ||} \\
\text{puruṣa srjīyā nārī kariche sṛjana | duhānasurati sukha karite kārana ||} \\
\text{bhāla manda e duī srjīyā prthivīta | āpane karae āna nahe kadācīta ||} \\
\text{ehi ye karite āche saba jāna ahi | yatha dekha niraṅjana chāṛi āra nāhi } & 870
\end{align*}
\]

—NV

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{apane raṅga so rūpa murārī | kitahūnī rājā kitahūnī bhikhārī ||} \\
\text{kitahūnī so pāndīta kitahū mūrakha | kitahu īstrī kitahū pūrakha ||} \\
\text{so āpaneṃ rasa kārana, khela anta saba khela | hoi nānāṃ prakārani, saba rasa lei akela } & 871
\end{align*}
\]

—Kanhāvata

Murārī’s rūpa comes in different shades: sometimes a king, sometimes a beggar. Sometimes a pandit, sometimes a fool, sometimes a woman, sometimes a man. So, for the sake of my rasa, it’s all a game, after all. Many different shades/guises, the only one (akela) takes pleasure in all. (217)872

As in the NV, the Creator (vidhātā) of Maṉjhan’s Madhumālāti (1545), for instance, is also “the King of the three worlds (tīṇī bhūana),” who creates the world through “the one sound Om (ekomkāri).”873 Both literatures, like the Persian traditions they overlay, engage with the word as the wellspring of cosmic and poetic creativity.874 Both share an interest in yogic practices and techniques.875 As we will see, Muḥammad is represented, in both literatures, as “the cosmic

869 See also Dārā Shikhū’s assertions on the various names used for God among Hindus, Majmaʿ al-Bahrain of Dārā Shikhū, 53.
870 NV 1: 2–3.
871 Kanhāvata of Malik Muhammad Jāyasī, 250.
872 This is Francesca Orsini’s translation from her forthcoming article on the Kanhāvata. Orsini forthcoming a.
principle of the Creator within creation, the reason for creation and the light within it.\textsuperscript{876} Both literatures resort to Sufi theories of the Nūr Muḥammad as well as the Sanskrit aesthetics of pr\textit{ēma rasa} (pr\textit{īti rasa} in the NV) in their portraiture of the Prophet as God’s beloved.\textsuperscript{877} Finally, though they provide entirely different Islamic resolutions to the issue of incarnation, both the Madhumālatī and the NV use “the … word r\textit{ūpa} (‘form,’ ‘beauty’) to skirt the language of incarnation dangerously.”\textsuperscript{878} That both traditions share a host of common features—theological, narratological, aesthetic, rhetorical, and linguistic—suggests that they participated in a shared sphere of performance and reception, of Nātha yoga, Sufism, and Kṛṣṇa bhakti,\textsuperscript{879} of orality and textuality, evidence, among other things, of the fluency of the circulation of ideas and peoples in the premodern period, discussed in Chapter Three.

4.4 Cosmogonic Continuations: Nūr Muḥammad and Creation\textsuperscript{880}

4.4.1 Nūr Muḥammad: The Principle of Light and Love

Beyond the initial invocation, the Islamic cosmogonic principles which Sultān further invokes begin to unfold:

At first, the lord held a formless shape.
Within himself, his self, he did not propagate ....
Nor dwelt in the lord these manifold forms.
United with formlessness were all forms.
All forms united, a single form made.
A key self-image within him thus lay.
In unawareness was awareness\textsuperscript{881} [subtly] concealed,
as within a blossom, fragrance is sealed.
When awareness was in unawareness born,
within himself the sense of “I” was found. Within himself, he displayed his very own form. Seeing himself in himself, transformations were born. Unconsciousness was shed, and consciousness dawned. His own self within himself he [then] saw. When he saw himself thus, he was filled with desiring. Into his looking-glass, he gazed without tiring. From the whole came parts, from the parts the whole. In the ardour of absorption various parts became differentiated. To see himself, in himself, when he did begin, he saw emerge therein one chief companion. When he beheld the face of this [dear] friend, he beheld his form. Within himself, he displayed his very own form. Within himself the sense of “I” was found. In the ardour of absorption various parts became differentiated. When lover and beloved gazed in deepest absorption,883 one by the other, pair by pair, they were manifested. Three images exquisite were strung upon a thread: From the three did many, many, more then surge. 885 When three separate within the lover’s form, it stirred [a wondrous] transformation. 884 This line translates from the three did many, many, more then surge. 885 When three separate guṇas from the one did thus emerge; from the three did many, many, more then surge.885

The process of becoming, of taking form, in this view, is the manifestation within the cosmic formlessness or unconsciousness (ajñāna) of the supreme selfhood or “I”-ness. The first vision of this emergent, nascent self transforms Nirañjana, filling this entity with anthropomorphic sentiment. It stirs within him a passionate desire (kāma) to continue to gaze

882 This line translates bhāveta ākūti khaṇḍa khaṇḍa haila daṇḍa. The meaning of daṇḍa elsewhere in the text, as in the line eka aṃśa dui khaṇḍe daṇḍa upajila (NV 2: 4), suggests that daṇḍa haoyā here can mean “to become differentiated,” or “partitioned/segmented along an axis.”

883 “Lover,” “beloved” and “deepest absorption” are translations for bhāvaka, bhāvini, and bhāva respectively.

884 Vikāra has been translated as “transformation.”

885 prathame āchila prabhu nirūpa ākāra | āpanāta āpanāra nā chila pracāra ||... nā āchila sei saba rūpa nirañjana | ākāra āchila nirākāreta milāna || sarvarūpa milyā āchila ekarūpa | tāra madhye mukhyā eka āchila svarūpa || ajñāneta jīāna se āchila lukiāya | puspeta āchila yena gandha chāpāya || tābe ajñāneta jnāna jannileka yabe | āpanāka muṇī hena labhileka tābe || darsāe ēpeta ēpe āpanā kāra | āpanā pekhīyā ēpe jannilekavikāra || acetana chāpāya ca tāna yadi hailā | āpanāta āpanā āpanā dekhā pālā || tābe āpanākā dekh hailā kāmātura | sadāe darsāna kare āpanā mukura || akhāndeta khaṇḍa hae khaṇḍeta akhānda | bhāveta ākūti khaṇḍa khaṇḍa haila daṇḍa || āpanāke ēpe yadi darsīte lāgilā | mukhyā eka sakāh tāra tāra upajilā || sei sakāh mukhyā dṛṣṭi darsīkeya yabe | māṛchāgata haiyā ye rahileka tābe || yei dui darsāna āchila eka thāṁ | anye anye jote jote āchila mīśai || eka dadhi tina aṃśa haila tina nāma | bhānā bhīnna hai tina rahila upāma || eka dore tina mārti ati śobhākāra | anye anye jore jore haila saṅcāra || bhāvaka bhāvini yadi bhāveta dekhila | haiyā bhāvaka rūpa vikāra janila || eka hante tina guṇa bhīnna haila yabe | sei tina honte aneka haila tābe || NV 1: 4–5.
upon his own countenance in the mirror of self. Mesmerized by his reflected self, his mirror image, the creator finds love. The terms bhāvaka (lover) and bhāvinī (beloved),886 usually used in Vaiṣṇava literature for Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā respectively, are here indicative of the lord and his beloved companion (sakhā). And from their love all of creation ensues: the supreme soul (paramāttamā), the individual souls (jīvāttamā), the great mystic formulae (mahāmantra); fire (ānala), water (varuṇa), wind (bābi), and earth (mṛttikā); the moon, the sun, and the heavens (ākāśa); the Throne (khāṭa simhāsana), the Pen (sukāṭhi), and the Tablet (pāṭa); paradise (svarga) and hell (naraka), and all else that ever was or ever will be emerges from the sweat produced when the lord’s entranced gaze falls upon his beloved.887

By this stage in the narrative the auditor’s interest is piqued. Who is this beloved, this singular companion of Prabhu Nirañjana? Sultān explains, slipping into his narrative a key translational definition of a significant Islamic theological term:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{yāra gharme e saba srjila nairākāra} & \\
nūra muhammada nāma thuila tāhāra & \\
yāhāka bulie ṣuna mahājutirmae & \\
nura muhammada hena ārabe bolae \]
\]

888

He, in whose sweat, the formless one created all of this, was named Nūr Muhammad.

Listen, that which is called “full of great light” [in Bangla] is called “Nūr Muhammad” by the Arabs.

In the next eleven couplets we learn of the creation of the angels, the seven heavens and their 36,000 crore and 70 lakh (3,670,000,000) strata; the earth’s creation some 14,077 cosmic years later; and the creation of Ādam another 36 lakh and 5,000 (3,605,000) years later. 8,000

886 Bhāvaka can mean all of the following: thinker, creator, meditator, and connoisseur (rasīka, rasajña). Bandyopādhyāya 1996, s.v. “bhāvaka.” Bhāvinī, its paired term in the feminine gender, used here to describe Muhammad, is often used to describe Rādhā, the lover of Kṛṣṇa. Biswas 1994, s.v. “bhāvinī.”
888 Ibid. 1: 5–6.
years after Adam, when the earth’s burden of sin becomes unbearable, the lord sends forth his own companion (āpanāra niya sakhā):

ādamera vanśeta janama āsi bhela / 
nūra muhammadā nāma gaurava dharila ||

He came to be born in Ādam’s line. 
Proudly he took the name “Nūr Muhammad.”

In key Islamic theological matters, thus, Sultān leaves nothing to the imagination, articulating his position with clarity. By referring to the historical Muḥammad as “Nūr Muhammad,” an epithet usually reserved in Muslim sources for the pre-existent essence of the Prophet, Sultān affirms that his Muhammad is not merely the last prophet, but the first as well, the pre-existent primordial entity, Nūr Muhammad, the light of Muḥammad, whose essence passes from Ādam through the line of prophets, as spermatic substance, down to the historical Muḥammad. It is in this context that we can understand Sultān’s designation for the Prophet, ādi-antera rasul, “the first and the last messenger”—a paradox that has been discussed in Islamic literature.

The motif of light is widely associated, in early Muslim sources, with the legendary figure of Muḥammad, his prophetic stature, his mission and its future expansion. The eighth-century theologian, Muqāṭil, was probably the first to interpret the Qur’ānic Sūra al-Nūr (the Light Verse) as referring to the Prophet: to Muqāṭil, Muḥammad is the miṣbāḥ, “the lamp” of the Light Verse, the universal guiding light for all humankind. Moreover, Qur’ān 33:7, the prophetic covenant which God extracts from the prophets Muḥammad, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, is interpreted (bolstered by a prophetic hadīth, by the early commentator Qatāda [d.

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889 Ibid., 6.
891 These words credited to Muḥammad, “The first thing God created was my spirit,” and “I was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay,” have been much discussed by Islamic scholars. Schimmel 1975, 215. NV 2: 54. See also ibid., 56, 260 and 285.
893 Schimmel 1985, 124.
118 A.H.] to suggest that Muḥammad was the first prophet to be created by God, and the last to be sent in corporeal form. The concept of the first and the last prophet is formulated into an entire salvation history, centered around the principle of the Nūr Muḥammad (the Light of Muḥammad) in pre-eternity, and the qalb Muḥammad, the heart of Muḥammad, in post-eternity, “the goal of man in the psychological order.” “This belief in the preexistence of Muḥammad’s essence,” opines Annemarie Schimmel, “first elaborated by Sahl al-Tustarī and Ḥallāj, praised in eloquent words by authors like al-Tha’labī, and systematized into theory by Ibn ʿArabī, permeates later Sufism.” Indeed, it is after Ibn ʿArabī that the ḥaqīqa muḥammadīya, the Muḥammadan Reality, the primordial quiddity of the Prophet, becomes in Sufi thought “the fountainhead of all prophetic activity.”

In early Muslim sources, the light motif becomes additionally associated with the primordial spirit of Muḥammad, which dwells within the pre-existent spermatic substance passed down through Adam, through the prophetic forefathers of Ismā’īl, and through Ismā’īl via Muḥammad’s Arab ancestors (Ar. sing. waṣīyy) to the corporeal Muḥammad. As Uri Rubin has shown, through a multitude of examples from period literature, this cosmogonic conception of prophetic primordiality in the form of fecund light gains wide currency by the third Islamic century, and is developed particularly by the Shīʿīs in formulating their Imāmate theology. In contrast to this doctrine of the primordial prophetic substance of Muḥammad (transmitted to the first Imām, ʿAlī, through his father Abū Ṭālib), there developed among the Shīʿī a second doctrine of the primordial spirits of Muḥammad and the Imāms, also associated

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894 Rubin 1975, 69.
896 Ibid., 15–16.
899 Rubin 1975, 67.
900 Ibid., 67–102.
with light (Nūr Allāh, “the light of Allāh”), but having an existence independent of the body. “The divine light of which the imāmī spirit consists, transmigrating on the death of each Imām into his successor, is conceived,” as Uri Rubin explains, “as if it had had an existence apart, before it became united with their bodies.”901 Thus, in this view, ‘Alī received his divine light directly from Muḥammad, upon his death. A third doctrine of prophetic primordiality also developed among the Shiī, in which Muḥammad, as well as the Imāms, are presented as the earthly manifestations of Allāh’s word (kalima), or his creative light.902 “Cross-relations between the speculations of Sahl al-Tustari, Hallaj, and Ibn ‘Arabi on the one hand,” explains Schimmel, and Shiite doctrines of the light of the imāms on the other hand are highly probable, but it is difficult to assess their exact articulation. The same is true for the influence of Hellenistic-Gnostic ideas that may lie at the base of the entire mysticism of light as well as of other traditions in which the Prophet was elevated to an almost superhuman rank.903

Thus, while scholars such as Gerhard Böwering have shown, for instance, how Sahl al-Tustarī formulated his concept of the Nūr Muḥammad by integrating “principal ideas of [his] cultural environment (e.g. the Hellenistic logos idea and the gnostic light speculation) into the matrix of Islamic thought,” the full picture of these historical connections, according to Schimmel, has yet to emerge.

Though it is impossible to pinpoint the specific Islamic traditions which inform Saiyad Sultān’s articulation of the principle of the Nūr Muḥammad, these various traditions on prophetic primordiality and light—Qur’ānic, prophetic, hagiographic, Sunnī, Shiī, and Sufi—form a body of prior texts which Sultān dips into, choosing a prophetic ḥadīth or Qur’ānic theme here, a poetical utterance or image there, which he then reformulates into a Bengali idiom. He thus presents Muhammad as an aṃśa of Allāh, drawing upon the Vaiṣṇava theory of

901 Ibid., 104.
902 Ibid., 112.
903 Schimmel 1985, 130.
aṃśa avatāras (“partial incarnations”), discussed in Chapter Five, a theory bound up with the purānic myth of the earth’s burden. In its notion of partaking in the very substance of God, the aṃśāvatāra parallels the concept of the Nūr Muḥammad as laid out in early hadīth literature. Chapter Six (6.5.3) elaborates upon Sultān’s account of how the aṃśa of the Lord passes through Ādam, through Ibrāhim, and Ismāil, through the Arab ancestors of Muḥammad to the Prophet.

As Chapter Seven (7.4) shows, Sultān makes Muḥammad the object of God’s desire; God’s love for him becomes the primordial reason for the creation of the universe. While echoing the sentiment of the divine saying, lawlāka mā khalaqtu’l-aflāka, Sultān, as we will see, simultaneously invokes the Gaṅgāra Vaiṣṇava language and landscape of prema rasa. Yet as mentioned earlier, the Avadhi premākhyānas precede Islamic Bangla literature in bringing together Sufi conceptions of the Nūr Muḥammad, as the Prophet of light and love. Thus, Mīr Sayyid Mañjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī proclaims in his Madhumālatī (1545):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sunahūṁ saba tehi kai bāṭā | paragaṭa bhā jehim biraha vidhātā |} \\
\text{saēhi sarīra siṣṭi jau āvā | āuri siṣṭi sabha ohi kara bhāvā |} \\
\text{uhaī joti praqaṭa sabha ṭhāum | dīpaka siṣṭi muḥammadā nāūm |} \\
\text{ohi laji daiya siṣṭi uparaṛī | tribhuvana pema dundubhī bājī |} \\
\text{nāūm muḥammadā tribhuvana rā | ohi laji bhaeu siṣṭikara cāū |} \\
\text{vākī angurī karikai aγyāṇī cāūda bhaeu dui khanḍā |} \\
\text{vākī dhūrī jo pāyanna lāgī acala bhaeu brahmaṇḍā ||}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mūla muḥammadā sabha jaga sākhā | bidhi nau lākha mukuṭa sira rākhā |} \\
\text{ohi paṭatara dosara koi nāhiṇī | vaha sarīra yaha sabha parichiḥīṇī |} \\
\text{karatā guputa sabhaiṃ pahiṃ nām | praqaṭa muḥammadā kāhuṇ ṇa jānā |} \\
\text{alakha lakhiya jehim pāra na koi | rūpa muḥammadā kācheṃ soī |} \\
\text{rūpa ka nāuṃ muḥammadā dharā | aratha na dosara ekai karā |} \\
\text{ūncaī kahauṇ pukārī kai jagaṭa suanaī sabha koi |} \\
\text{paragaṭa nāuṃ muḥammadā guputa jo jāniya soī ||}
\end{align*}
\]

904 Cf. NV 1: 2. Sultān was probably familiar with this theory from Vaiṣṇava purānic literature, such as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Compare also the Avadhi Sufi romance (premākhyāna), Čitrāvalī, composed by 'Usmān in 1613, wherein Muḥammad is presented as a “portion” of the Supreme Lord. Pandey 1960, 120.
905 Rubin 2011a.
906 Madhumālatī of Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī, vv. 7–8: 8–9.
Listen now while I tell of the man:
separated from him, the Maker became manifest.
When the Lord took on flesh, He entered creation.
The entire universe is of His Essence.
His radiance shone through all things.
This lamp of creation was named Muhammad!
For him, the Deity fashioned the universe,
and love’s trumpet sounded in the triple world.
His name is Muḥammad, king of the three worlds.
He was the inspiration for creation.
The moon split in two at the pointing of his finger;
from the dust of his feet the cosmos became stable.

Muḥammad is the root, the whole world a branch,
the Lord has crowned him with a priceless crown.
He is the foremost, no other is his equal.
He is the substance and the world his shadow.
Everyone knows the Maker, the hidden mover,
but no one recognizes the manifest Muḥammad!
The Invisible One, whom no one can see,
has assumed the form of Muḥammad.
He has named this form Muḥammad,
but it has no meaning other than the One.
I shout it out loud, let the whole world hear:
'Manifest, the name is Muḥammad; secretly, you know it is He!'\(907\)

\begin{quote}
prathamahi ṃdi pema paravisṭī | tau pācheṁ bhai sakala siriṣṭī |
utepati sīṣṭi prema soṁ āī | sīṣṭi rūpa bhaṁ pema sabāī \(908\)
\end{quote}

Love made an entrance at the beginning,
then the world came into existence.
From love all creation sprang:
love filled each created form.\(909\)

Sultān continues Maṇjhan’s poetics in exalting the Prophet as God’s most favored through the
the aesthetic registers of prema rasa adopted by these Sufis, now further fortified by the
elaborations of Rūpa Goswamī, the great aesthetician of the Gauḍīyas.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[907] Behl and Weightman 2000, vv. 7–8: 5. Cf. also Mīragāvatī of Kutuban, v. 4: 3; and Cāndīyana of Maulānā Dāūd, v. 6: 5–6.
\item[908] Madhumālatī of Mīr Sayyid Maṇjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī, v. 27: 23.
\item[909] Behl and Weightman 2000, v. 27: 13.
\end{footnotes}
4.4.2 Creative Discourse

Whereas the cosmogonical section in volume one of the NV introduces the idea that further cosmogonical evolution takes place through the combinations and divisions of the three guṇas, the cosmogony presented in volume two transforms these Śāmkhya-derived guṇas into trifold sonic expressions of the cosmic syllable, om (or aum). Equally, this shift deepens the Islamic landscape, while providing a familiar “identificational” code (aum) to introduce an Islamic cosmogony of the Word to a Bengali auditor.

Then, when its consciousness awakened, the undivided form of the orb (maṇḍala) yearned to cleave ... Within the formless form was born the cosmic syllable u (ukāra). Having found itself within itself the syllable ma (makāra) arose. Seeing the syllable ma within itself, it remained hidden within the syllables a (akāra) and u (ukāra). The syllabic trio a, u, and ma remained coiled together for eternity. Within the syllables a and ma remained the syllable u:

one portion (aṃśa) was segmented into two along an axis (daṇḍa).
Āhād, Āhmād, separated by the syllable ma:
know that within this syllable ma lies the triple world (tribhuvana).
The light (nūr) from Āhmād created the syllable ma.
Āhād and Āhmād are both of one body (kalevara).
When Āhād beheld the sight of Āhmād,
he observed him closely, taking the form of a lover (bhāvaka).
On seeing himself within the form of Āhmād,
he meditated upon the form, becoming a spiritual practitioner (sādhaka).
Absorbed in the juice of love (pirīti rasa),
the formless lord began to gaze upon Nūr Muhammad.
When they beheld each other in visual absorption (dṛṣṭibhāva),
a sweat broke from the emotion generated by the sight (dṛṣṭirasa) of each other.

Playing upon the Upaniṣadic cosmogony of the sacred syllable aum, Sultān develops here an elaborate Islamic cosmogony based upon a well-established tradition of letter mysticism connected to certain venerable names of Allāh and his messenger: Āhād (Ar. Aḥad, meaning “One”) and Āhmād (Ar. Aḥmad, “the most laudable”). Ahmad is the spiritual name of Muḥammad, the name given by God to the Prophet (Qurʾān 61:5), and has a special significance in Islamic theology. When Sultān states “Āhād, Āhmād, separated by the syllable ma,” (āhād āḥammada makāra bhinna), he relies upon the ḥadīth qudsī, “Anā Aḥmad bilā mīm,” (“I am Aḥmad without the mīm”), a tradition extensively elaborated upon in the Persianate world beginning with the twelfth-century Iranian mystical poet, Farīd al-Dīn Ṭṭīrī. In his Muṣībatnāma, Ṭṭīrī portrays the two worlds (ālam) as being created from the two mīms of Muhammad’s name, a sentiment echoed in Sultān’s “within this syllable ma lies the triple world.” According to the poet ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, who took up this theme three centuries after Ṭṭīrī, “alif, the first letter of Ahmad, came into existence... from the ‘dot of Unity’... This alif,” in Schimmel’s words,

912 Schimmel 1985, 108.
913 Ibid., 116. For its extensive use among Sufis and poets of South Asia, see ibid., 117, and n. 66: 289.
914 Ibid., 116.
is upright like the diameter of a circle... and thus split the circle of the hidden Divine Ipseity into two: one half is the world of uncreatedness, of the unknowable Divine Essence, and the other is the world of contingency. The Prophet—or rather the ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya—is the juncture between the two.⁹¹⁵

This Sufi understanding provides meaning to Sultān’s otherwise opaque lines:

Within the syllables a and ma remained the syllable u:
one portion (aṃśa) was segmented into two along an axis (daṇḍa).

Whereas the akāra of Āḥād signifies the uncreated, formless one, from whom all form arises, the makāra of Āḥmad or Muhammad indicates the culmination of all creation.⁹¹⁶ Between these two, at the juncture (daṇḍa) of the formless and the formed, lies the mysterious ukāra, the Muḥammadan reality (ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya), the principle of the Nūr Muḥammad, the principle of light and love that connects the formless one to the world of form. Echoes of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of Muḥammad as the Perfect Man (insān kāmil) are detected here, where Muḥammad becomes “the suture between the Divine and the created world; he is, so to speak, the barzakh, the isthmus between the Necessary and contingent existence.”⁹¹⁷ “This role of the Prophet as intermediate principle,” as Schimmel elucidates of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine,

is found [according to this school] in the very words of the profession of faith, Muhammad rasūl Allāh: Muhammad is the ‘manifested principle,’ rasūl, the messenger, is the ‘manifesting principle,’ and Allah is the ‘Principle in Itself.’ It is the element rasūl

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⁹¹⁵ Ibid. Cf. nuqtah-‘i vaḥdat chād qad afrākhtah / az pay-i ahmad alifī säkhtah. kardah cū qoṭr an alif mustaqīm / dāyarah-‘i ghayb-i huviyat dū nīm. nīmī az ān qaus jahān-i qadam / qaus-i digar mumkin rū dar ‘adam. Maṣḥavī ‘i Haft Awrang of Nūr al-Dīn Ḥabū al-Rāḥmān bin Ṣāḥib Khurāsānī, 376. Though Schimmel does not mention this, Jāmī is also playing upon the Arabic word qaus (the semi-circular arc), which also means “the arc of the bow,” specifically referring in the next verse to “the two bow-lengths,” dū kamān, the Qur’ānic qāba qausain (Ṣūrah 53:9), the approximate distance that remained between the Prophet and Allāh upon his ascent into His presence. bar hadaf andākhtah az dast ā pá / zīn dū kamān tīr zahy shast-i pā. Ibid., 376. The Sufis interpreted this as “two drawn bows, with their chords touching,” making a complete circle of union.” The Qur’ān n. 5089: 1444. Refer to Chapter Seven in which Sultān also elaborates upon this theme.

⁹¹⁶ In explaining the mystery of how the Prophet could be the first of all creation and its culmination, Najm al-Dīn Rāżī Dāyā states: “Since the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the choice essence of all beings and the fruit of the tree of creation... he was also of necessity the origin of all beings. For creation is like a tree, and the Prophet is the fruit of that tree, and the tree originates in truth from the seed contained within its fruit.” Algar 1982, 60.

⁹¹⁷ Schimmel 1985, 134.
that relates the Principle in Itself to the manifested principle. In this position the Prophet exhibits a twofold quality: contemplative and receptive, because he is the vessel for Divine inspiration, yet active in that he implements the Divine will in this world.918

As noted earlier, Sultān maps this Islamic triad onto the dynamic equivalents of the Upaniṣadic triadic cosmogony of the āum as also the Śāṃkhya-derived terminology of the three guṇas. Though the act of translating philosophical terms from one religious system into another produces certain kinds of synchronic transcultural analogues, these, as Tony Stewart points out, by virtue of being mere metaphors, are asymmetrical and imprecise at a philosophical level.919 It is futile therefore to endeavor to develop the philosophical implications of specific analogues diachronically across the systems in the hope of finding parallel, homologous philosophical systems. Thus, though the Islamic triad is here mapped onto the Śāṃkhya-derived guṇa-triad, any effort by the discerning auditor to draw into comparison other related and ostensibly parallel ontological concepts across the systems, such as Allāh with Puruṣa, or Nūr Muḥammad with Prakṛti, results in further asymmetry in the philosophical contours of these superimposed pairs. Yet for the lay auditor with a generic knowledge of Śāṃkhya terminology and imprecise knowledge of its philosophy, a single reference to a Śāṃkhya term can potentially conjure up a concatenation of implied philosophical analogues, rough-and-ready country bridges to unfamiliar religious and philosophical shores.

Other symmetries also come into view. Sultān’s idea that God is one (Āhād), as well as his understanding that Āhād and Āhmad are essentially one but mysteriously separated-yet-connected by the Nūr Muḥammad, bears examination in the light of Stewart’s remarks on the

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918 Ibid., 134.
connections between Islamic cosmogony and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought. Like Āli Rajā, Sultān’s cosmogonic ideas are compatible with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava philosophy of acintya bhedābheda, defined by Stewart as “a simultaneous distinction and non-distinction between the ultimate and the created world that is cognitively unresolvable.” Furthermore, as Stewart points out concerning Āli Rajā, Sultān too “asserts... the unity of the creator before creation, while noting the ineffable connection between this unity and the dualism necessary for all existent things to interact with the divine, the dualism necessary for a relationship of love to exist.”

The idea that Āḥad and Āḥmad are essentially one but separated by the mīm takes on a further mystical charge when read in the light of the numerological significance of the letter mīm in Judeo-Islamic and Sufi thought. In the Arabic numeric system the letter mīm has a value of 40, “the number,” according to Annemarie Schimmel,

of patience, maturing, suffering, preparation. (Israel was for forty years in the desert; Jesus spent forty days in the desert; Muhammad was forty when his calling came; the forty days of Lent; the forty days of complete retirement as practiced by the Sufis, called arba’īn or chilla; these and other similar customs and traditions are expressions of this special role of the number 40.) In Islamic mystical speculations 40 furthermore signifies the forty steps that man must pass on his way back to his origin—a topic elaborated by ‘Attar in his Muṣībatnāma, and later by numerous mystics in the Ibn ‘Arabi tradition. The m of Ahmad points to all these mysteries.

The mīm thus possesses a unique position in prophetic ontology and ascentology, and provides yet another layer of meaning to the NV’s emphasis on the Prophet’s mystical separation from the One via his descent into the world of form and his ascension that reunited him again with the One.

920 The mysteries of God’s oneness and the two-in-oneness of God and Nūr Muḥammad have been discussed by Sahl al-Tustarī. Böwering 1976, 15–16. Regarding the concerns of some Sufis that according Muḥammad too exalted a status might jeopardize the Islamic position on God’s essential Unity, and the later eclipse of such concerns among Sufis, see Schimmel 1985, 130.
921 Stewart 2001, 284.
922 Ibid.
923 Schimmel 1985, 117.
Saiyad Sultān thus stands in this long Persianate mystical tradition wherein poets endeavor to translate the Word of Allāh into the world of men. They elaborate upon the philosophical mysteries of the Word through their own polysemic play with words, boldly reinforcing the controversial linkages between cosmic, prophetic, and artistic creativity. In his own musings upon the āum, Saiyad Sultān draws non-Muslims into the genesis of the cosmos and of discourse, through a beguilingly universal approach that includes such auditors by acknowledging their darśanas of the Word, while yet revealing to them its “‘real’ meaning.”

4.4.3 Creative Hierarchies

The cosmogony which opens Book Two of the NV (“Rasul Carita”) further elaborates upon the Islamic mythology surrounding the Nūr Muhammad. Elaborated here is the idea of creation emanating from the sweat that emerged from Nūr Muhammad when Prabhu Nirañjana’s gaze fell upon him, first presented in Book One. This cosmogonical idea can be traced back to Ibn ‘Arabī and his contemporary Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya, and even further back in time to Tha’labī (d. 1036). In his ‘Arāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, Tha’labī recounts:

He [God] commanded Gabriel to bring him a handful of the white (soil) which is the heart of the Earth, its splendor and its light, to create Muḥammad from it. So Gabriel descended with the favorite angels of Paradise, the Cherubim, and the angels of the highest plane, and took a handful (of soil) from the place the Prophet’s tomb, which, at that time, was white and pure. It was kneaded in the Blessed Water of Paradise, and was so fresh that it became like a white pearl. Then it was immersed in all the rivers of the Garden. When it came forth from the rivers, God looked at this pure pearl and it trembled for fear of God, whereupon one hundred and twenty-four thousand drops fell from it, and from each drop God created a prophet, and all the prophets—may the blessings of God be upon our Prophet and upon them—were created from his light.

924 I cite here Tony Stewart’s (2001, 286) observations on Ālī Rajā, the eighteenth-century Bengali Sufi poet who follows a trend set by Sultān in using the cosmogony of the āum and a Sāṃkhya-derived terminology of the guṇas to translate an Islamic cosmogony. Cf. Cashin 1993, 3–13.

925 Schimmel 1985, 127.
Then the pearl was shown round the Heavens and the Earth, so the angels came to know Muḥammad at that time, before they knew Adam.  

Later Ibn Ḥarbī’s interpreter, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, speaks of the Muḥammadan Reality (ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya) appearing as a white chrysolite in pre-eternity, which dissolves, when God looks at it, into waves of water from which all of creation emerged. “According to certain traditions,” states Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya,

God Almighty looked upon the Mohammadan Light with the gaze of love, so that shame overcame it, and drops of sweat appeared from which He created the spirits of the prophets, upon whom be peace and blessings. Then, from the light of the spirits of the prophets, He created the spirits of the saints; from the light of the spirits of the saints, the spirits of the believers; from the spirits of the believers, those of the sinners; from those of the sinners, those of the hypocrites and the unbelievers. Then, from the light of the spirits of men, He created the spirits of the angels; from the spirits of the angels, those of the jinn; from those of the jinn, those of the devils, rebellious spirits, and demons, in accordance with the different degree and state of each.

Bengali equivalents for this doctrine of creation from sweat or watery substances are to be found in the cosmogony of the Dharma cult. “In the Śūnya Purāṇa and Dharma-pūjā-vidhāna,” explains Fabrizio Ferrari,

the [cosmic] waters are restrained in the bubble on which Dharma is seated. After the collapse of the bubble, Dharma Ṭhākura creates his immanent perceivable form (Nirañjana) and then, ... decides to descend to the ocean with Ullūka, the owl mount. There, Nirañjana shapes the earth (Vasumatī or Pr̥thivī)—from a small speck of dirt on his arm—and wanders across it. His unceasing travels cause him to perspire, and so Ādyāśakti (or Ādyādurgā), the goddess who embodies primordial energy, is born. Of her are born Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, each of them representing sattva, rajah, and tamah guṇa, respectively.

Sultān’s continuing account of creation from the Nūr Muhammad elaborates a detailed mythology associated with the Nūr and its various stations, developing a hierarchy of created

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926 Brinner 2002, 44. Al-Kisāʾī’s account also provides an account of creation wherein a primordial pearl dissolves into water from fear of God. Thackston 1997, 5.
927 See al-Jīlī quoted in Nicholson 1921, 122. A tradition ascribed to Abū Hurayra, says that the Prophet told him that “everything was created out of water.” Al-Alousi 1965, 73.
928 Algar 1982, 61.
929 Ferrari 2010, 54.
930 Ibid.
beings in the vein of medieval authors such as Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, and others. After creating paradise and hell, according to Sultān’s account, Prabhu Nirañjana created the beautiful, luminous Rabbānur tree, perfumed with the fragrance of musk. It bore sweet-smelling flowers whose radiance lit up the seven heavens (sapta svarga), and fruits so enormous that a single one could sate the appetites of all the created beings who filled the earth and the heavens. Having taken, at the lord’s command, the form of a peacock, Nūr Muhammad came to settle upon this tree. For 70,000 years, it performed prostration (paraṇāma kailā). At the lord’s command, Nūr Muhammad dived into the sea of honor (mānya) where he dwelt for the next 70,000 years worshipping the lord with his body and mind (kāyamane). Thus, he successively dwelt worshipping the lord for 70,000 years each in the seas of majesty (mahimā), well-being (khemā, kṣema), valour (vikrama), and others. Gathering the attributes (guṇa) of all these various seas, Nūr Muhammad returned to settle upon the Rabbānur tree.

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931 Sultān’s Rabbānura (“light of God”) tree is probably some version of the Tree of Life that abounds in Islamic cosmoogy, a Tree whose myths have been connected in one way or another to the figure of the Prophet. Cf. also Schimmel 1985, 131. The Qur’ān speaks of Muḥammad’s vision of God at the Lote Tree of the Boundary in the Sūra al-Najm (Qur’ān 52:13–18). See also Najm al-Dīn Rāzī Dāya’s comment on “the tree of creation,” quoted above and its relationship to the figure of the Prophet. Compare also to the discussion below on the Daqāʾiq al-akhbār.

932 This account can be compared with the first few lines of the account of creation provided in Daqāʾiq al-akhbār fi dhikr al-janna waʾl-nār by Imām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Aḥmad al-Qāḍī: “It is related in Tradition that Allāh-ta’ālā created a tree with four branches and called it the Tree of Certainty (shajara al-yaqīn); then He created the Light of Muḥammad in a veil of white pearl like the peacock and placed it on that tree. So the Light said “Subḥānallāh” (glory to Allāh) on it for 70,000 years.” Abd al-Raḥmān 1977, 20.

933 The seas into which Sultān’s Nūr Muḥammad dived can be compared to the veils (sing. ḥijāb) of light called qudra and al-ʿażama in Shiʿī traditions, veils within which the light of the Prophet is purported to have circulated for eighty thousand years each, and from which Muḥammad’s light derived its creative force. Rubin 1975, 113. These veils can be traced further back, as Rubin (ibid., 113–114) points out, to Sahl al-Tustarī. Concerning this tradition, see also Böwering 1976, 16. Al-Khargūshī also records a tradition wherein Allāh placed the light in the veil of the qudra for twelve thousand years and subsequently in the veils of the ʿażama and the minna for eleven and ten thousand years respectively. It passed through twelve such veils while praising Allāh in each. Rubin 1975, 116–117.

The lord then created a bejewelled lantern (kandil) in which he placed Nūr Muhammad; multi-colored light radiated from the lantern, illuminating the ten directions. The lord then commanded all created beings (jīvas) to view Nūr Muhammad within the lantern. Those who prostrated before him upon seeing him were born as believers (mumin); those who prostrated thrice were born as those with good conduct (bhāla vyavahāra). Those who did not prostrate before the Nūr were born as infidels (kāphirs), while those who did not prostrate initially but did so later were first born into a Hindu family (hindukula), and later embraced Islam. Those who paid obeisance at first, but did not do so later were born as Muslims, but later abandoned their faith. Those who prostrated at first and also later, but not during the middle phase became hypocrites (munāphek).

Those who witnessed the entire form of the Nūr were born as messengers (rasul) upon the earth; those who saw his face became saints (auliyā); those who saw his forehead became believers; those who gazed into his eyes became scholars (paṇḍitas); those who saw his back became infidels; those who gazed upon the soles of his feet became hypocrites; and those who gazed upon the back of his hands became fools (murkha). “In this manner,” states Sultān, “when a certain person saw a particular part of the body [of the Nūr], he learnt to perform certain actions (karma) within the world.” Sultān’s account is comparable to various allegories of the anthropomorphized, primordial, cosmic entity that categorizes human beings into moral, socio-religious hierarchies: on the one hand, it recalls the Puruṣa Sūkta of the Ṛgveda in the manner in which the various varṇas, socio-economic classes, emanate from the

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935 Sultān’s mythology of the Nūr Muhammad recalls this verse, by reducing the philosophical principle of the Nūr Muhammad back to the exoteric images of the Light Verse (Qurʾān 24:35), from which a few Sufi thinkers such as the Iraqi Ṣahīl al-Tustarī (d. 896) extrapolated the doctrine of the Nūr Muhammad. Böwering 1976, 16.
936 NV 2: 7–8.
937 Ibid., 8.
938 Ibid.
various parts of the cosmic Puruṣa; on the other, it draws on the Islamic mythology of the consequences of the interaction of created beings (Ar. arwāḥ, Sultān’s jīvas) with the anthropomorphized Nūr, presented in Imām ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Aḥmad al-Qāḍī’s Daqāʾiq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna waʾl-nār.939 Imām ‘Abd al-Raḥīm’s text reads:

Then Allāh created a candlestick of red carnelian, and its outside is seen from its inside. Then He created the form of Muhammad, peace be upon him, as His form in this world. So He placed it in this candlestick, and he stood in it as one stands in prayer. Then the arwāḥ of the prophets did tawāf (circumambulation) around the Light of Muhammad, peace be upon him. Then they said “Subhānallāh” and “Lā ilāh īlla’llāh” for 100,000 years.

Then Allāh taʿalā commanded all the arwāḥ of creation to look at the form of Muhammad, and so they looked at it. Whoever saw his head became a khalīfa (ruler and sultan among creatures; whoever saw his forehead became a just prince. Whoever saw his eyes became one who preserves the Word of Allāh taʿalā; whoever saw his eyebrows became an artist. Whoever saw his ears became one who listens and occupies himself with that. Whosever saw his cheeks became one who is muḥsin (knowing) and has intellect. Whoever saw his lips became a wazīr (ruler). Whosever saw his nose became a doctor and whoever saw his mouth became one who fasts. Whosever saw his teeth became one who is beautiful of face among men and women. Whosever saw his tongue became a messenger among sultans. Whoever saw his throat became one who admonishes, gives good counsel and a mūʿādhhdhin (one who calls the prayer). Whosever saw his beard became one who does Jihād (battle in the Way of Allāh). Whosever saw his neck became a merchant. Whosever saw his arms became a warrior with a sword; whosever saw his right arm became a cupper, whoever saw his left arm became an ignorant one. Whosever saw his hands became generous and dexterous. Whosever saw his left palm became a miser. Whosever saw his back became humble and obedient to the command of the Sharīʿa (the Road, obligations of Islam). Whosever saw his abdomen became one who does rukū (bowing) and sujūd (prostration). Whosever saw his feet became a hunter; whosever saw under his feet became a foot-soldier. Whosever saw his shadow became a singer or one with a tanbūr (mandolin). Whosever saw nothing became a Jew, Christian, Magian or kāfir (one who rejects the Reality). Whosever did not look at him at all became one who lays claim to sovereignty like the pharaohs and other kāfirūn.940

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Though Sultan's text does not follow 'Abd al-Rahim's text in all its details, it draws upon the frame idea, shading it in with his own details adapted for Bengal.

4.5 Primal Partners: Mārica-Mārijāta or Īśvara-Pārvatī

We now return to Book One of the NV to summarize the continuing cosmogonic narrative presented therein. The narrative thus far explains creation emitting from the sweat of Nūr Muhammad, which, as we have seen, is further elaborated upon in Book Two. Once the Lord had created the earth, he desired to populate it with created beings. He creates Mārica, the primal man (purusa pradhāna), from a smokeless fire. Pleased with Mārica's devotions (bhaktibhāva), the Lord decides to create for him, Mārijāta, a woman of supreme beauty (parama sundarī), which the Lord draws out from Mārica's left side. Upon seeing this woman of great virtue (ati sucaritā), Mārica becomes faint with passion. Since this woman had been created from Mārica's very own body an ethereal voice authorizes him to enjoy sexual pleasure with her. Dutifully he obeys, impregnating the woman with his seed (vīrya).

Sultan's Mārica corresponds to the primordial Jann of al-Kisāʾī's Qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ, Mārij, and his Mārijāta to Mārij's mate, Mārijā. At this point in the narrative, the author provides his auditors knowledge of how his Mārica and Mārijāta are known among the Hindus:

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ehī nārī puruṣaka yatha hindugane |
iśvara-pārvatī buli kahe sarvajane ||
iśvara-pārvatī honte haila due suta |
eke brahmā āre viṣṇu rūpe adbhuta ||
āmhāra kitābe kahe māricathu vidhi |
māriceka sṛjana karilā jāna' nidhi ||
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All the Hindus call this man and woman

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941 Summarized from NV 1: 7.
942 In Qurʾān 55:15, the jinn were created “from a bright flame (mārij) of fire,” or “from fire free from smoke.” The first translation is taken from al-Ṭabarī in Rosenthal 1989, 252, the second from The Qurʾān, 1474.
943 NV 1: 8.
Īśvara and Pārvatī.
From Īśvara and Pārvatī came two sons:
one Brahmā, the other Viṣṇu, of marvelous form.

Our book (kitāba) explains the course of destiny (vidhi) through Mārica. Mārica created Jāna, the treasure-house.

Through such deictic utterance, Sultān marks boundaries between the Hindu other and the Muslim self, while simultaneously showing that the Islamic figures he is introducing are neither new nor foreign, none other than the divine pair of tantric cosmogony, Īśvara [Śiva] and Pārvatī, so well-loved in Bengal.

In some ways, Sultān’s treatment of Śiva and Pārvatī as “created” beings echoes the Qur’ān’s treatment of the jinn. The Qur’ān subordinates the jinn to the will of Allāh, curtailing their access to “the secrets of destiny (ghayb),”944 demoting them from their previous status among the Meccan Arabs as the kin of Allāh (Q 37:158), “equals with God” (Q 6:100), to one among the three classes of “created” beings: while the angels were created from light, and mankind from clay, the jinn were created from a smokeless flame.945 Because of their powerful hold over the popular imagination of the Meccan Arabs, who regularly sought their intervention, and who performed sacrifices to these semi-divine beings,946 “the Qur’ān,” as Jacqueline Chabbi asserts, “finds itself in the surprising position of having to come to terms with the jinn, i.e. subjecting them to its God.”947 Similarly here we see how the popular gods of the Hindus, Śiva and Pārvatī, are equated to the semi-divine jinn, demoting them from divine status, and in like fashion subjugating them to the will of Nirañjana/Allāh.

944 Chabbi 2011.
945 Boratav 2011.
946 Ibid.
947 Chabbi 2011.
From Jāna and his sister, continues Sultān’s narrative, are born Jānabila, an asura, and a female. When the latter two cohabit, Ājājila948 and a daughter were produced sequentially, who together generated all the asuras and suras. The suras inhabited the earth and the heavens, while the asuras the still air of the void (śūnya), which lies beneath a certain heaven. Like expert spiritual practitioners (mahanta sādhaka), the suras worshipped the Lord in each of the seven heavens before reaching the tree (vrkṣa) beyond, where they gathered in the Lord’s worship.949

The earth (ṛthīvī), then envious of the heavens which possessed the radiant sun, moon, and constellations, and the angels (phiristā), complains to the Lord about his “worthless” (nāhika kona kāma) gifts to her: grass and bugs, canals, rivers, and mountains. “Give to me,” she pleads, “those who shall worship you.”950 After petitioning thrice, with the Lord consoling her each time, the Lord finally commands the asuras of the void to take up residence upon the earth, exhorting them to good acts. The asuras obey God’s command throughout the satyayuga, after which they fell into moral decrepitude. Then the earth renews her complaints to the Lord, explaining that the intolerably heavy burden of sin she has been bearing has the potential to make her sink into the netherworld:

\[
\text{karae gohārī kṣiti prabhura caraṇe} \\
\text{e pāpēra bhae jāna nā sahe parāṇe} || \\
\text{pāpa bhaṛa sahite nāpāri asta yāimu} \\
\text{sahaje pāţalapure majiyā rahimu} ||951
\]

Making entreaties at the Lord’s feet, the earth pleaded:
“Know that this fear of sin cannot be borne by my soul. Unable to bear this burden of sin I will wane; easily will I sink into the realm of the netherworld.”

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948 While ’Azāzīl does not appear in the Qurʾān, he appears in Islamic legends as a fallen angel or Jinn. A hadīth, traced back to Ibn ’Abbās, refers to ’Azāz’el as the name of Iblīs before his fall. Vajda 2011.
949 NV 1: 8–9.
950 ye tomhāke seviba dea mora ṭhāma || Ibid., 10.
951 Ibid., 12.
Moved by her pleas, the Lord decides to create a prophet (nabī) for the asuras. Prabhu Nirañjana sends the prophet Āma, an asura, the son of Umara.\textsuperscript{952} When he forbade sinful action, imploring his kin to worship Nirañjana, they killed him.

Sultān’s account follows the broad outlines of al-Kisāʾi’s narrative of the creation of the jinn from a smokeless fire. While omitting many of the original details, dilating instead on ethical issues when the opportunity presents itself, Sultān retains certain peculiarities of expression found in the al-Kisāʾi account, suggesting that it was this particular tradition of the Qiṣaṣ that he was probably using as his source for his Mārica Vṛttānta, “The Account of Mārica.” Moreover, it is noteworthy that Sultān’s narrative of the suras and the asuras consistently translates the Arabic jann by the Bangla/Sanskrit asura, and the Arabic jinn with the Bangla sura, even though he does not always portray their genealogies exactly as per al-Kisāʾī, who seems to be more concerned to weaken the impression of incestuous relations between these primordial semi-divine tribes through the manner in which he constructs their genealogy. Occasionally, deo (P. dīv), which should not be confused with the Sanskrit/Bangla deva,\textsuperscript{953} and dāitya, are used as synonyms for the asura/jann. The passage below is quoted from al-Kisāʾi’s Tales, while providing in brackets Sultān’s translations of particular phrases and passages, for purposes of comparison:

When God created the fire... which is heatless, smokeless fire, He created the father of the genii [puruṣa pradhāna], Jann, from it... God made the first Jann an enormous creature and called him Mārija. From him he also created a mate called Mārija. Then Mārija lay with Mārija, and she bore him a son called Jinn, from whom branched out the tribes of the djinn. Iblīs the Accursed also sprang from this race. Jann produced males and Jinn females. The males were mated to the females, and they grew to number seventy thousand tribes, ever-increasing until their number was like unto the sands of the desert [prthivīta yatha renu putra kanyā tāra].... The children of Iblīs [suras and asuras] multiplied until they became innumerable, and they crawled on their faces like tiny specks, ants, gnats, locusts and birds. They inhabited caves, wastelands, gardens, hills,

\textsuperscript{952} This is similar to al-Kisāʾī’s Qiṣaṣ, which refers to him as Āmir, the son of Umayr, the son of Jann. Shortly after he was killed by his people. Thackston 1997, 21.

\textsuperscript{953} Though originally cognate words, by Sultān’s time, deva was a synonym for sura, rather than for asura.
roads, dumps, lavatories, wells, rivers, crannies, cellars, and every dark and evil place until all regions of the earth were filled with them. Then they appeared in the form of oxen, mules, asses, camels, cattle, sheep, dogs and lions.

When the land had become filled with the offspring of Iblīs the Accursed, God caused the offspring of Jann [āsuras] to inhabit the air below heaven [Sūnya madhye sthīra bāu asure rākhila... sthīra bāu āche eka ākāśera tala] and the children of Jinn [suras] the first heaven [prthūvīta ākāśeta, “on the earth and in the heavens”]. He commanded them to worship and obey Him.

Heaven boasted to the earth, saying, “My Lord has raised me above you, and I am the loftiest creation, the dwelling-place of angels. In me are the Throne, the Canopy, the Pen, the sun, the moon, and the stars. In me are the storehouses of mercy and from me divine inspiration descends to you.”

“O my God,” cried the earth, “thou hast stretched me out flat and hast entrusted me with the growth of trees and plants and with springs. Thou hast anchored the mountains on my back and hast created upon me all kinds of fruits. Heaven boasts to me of the angels who glorify thee that dwell in her. I have been overtaken by mountains on my back and hast created upon me all kinds of fruits. Heaven boasts to the earth, saying, “My Lord has raised me above you, and I am with the growth of trees and plants and with springs. Thou hast anchored the mountains on my back and hast created upon me all kinds of fruits.

Then the djinn looked down upon the earth and saw the wild animals, predatory beasts and crawling things that were in it and asked to let them alight upon it. He gave them permission to do so on condition that they worship Him and not disobey Him. They made these promises unto Him, and descended, seventy thousand clans in number. They worshipped God truly for a long time, but then they began to disobey and shed blood, so that the earth cried for help against them, saying, “My God, I would rather be empty than have upon my back those who disobey thee.”

Heaven was told, “for I shall create from thy dust a form immaculate, as though of gleaming silver. And the earth was happy, and she was white and looking down upon the earth and saw the wild animals, predatory beasts and crawling things that were in it and asked to let them alight upon it. He gave them permission to do so on condition that they worship Him and not disobey Him. They made these promises unto Him, and descended, seventy thousand clans in number. They worshipped God truly for a long time, but then they began to disobey and shed blood, so that the earth cried for help against them, saying, “My God, I would rather be empty than have upon my back those who disobey thee.”

Heaven was happy, and she was white and immaculate, as though of gleaming silver.

Then the djinn looked down upon the earth and saw the wild animals, predatory beasts and crawling things that were in it and asked to let them alight upon it. He gave them permission to do so on condition that they worship Him and not disobey Him. They made these promises unto Him, and descended, seventy thousand clans in number. They worshipped God truly for a long time, but then they began to disobey and shed blood, so that the earth cried for help against them, saying, “My God, I would rather be empty than have upon my back those who disobey thee.”

Heaven was happy, and she was white and immaculate, as though of gleaming silver.
“Be still!” said God to the earth, “for I shall send them an apostle.” [prthivīra nivedana śuni nirañjana | asureta eka nabī karilā srjana || … The first prophet God sent to the genii was Āmir ibn Umayr ibn al-Jann, but they killed him. [‘āma’ nāma ekajana asura āchila | prthivī pālīte prabhu tāka nabī kaila || umarera tanaya āma jñānavanta ati | tāhāka karilā prabhu prthivīra pati || ‘āma’ sthāne nirañjana dūta pāṭhālā || eke eke nīti śāstra saba śikhālā || tomhāka karilā nabī prabhu nirañjana | asurare nīti śāstra kahite kārana || āra yena asure nā kare kona pāpa | kahibā karite sabe prabhu nāma jāpa || dūta mukhe āma yadi etheka śunilā | asura sakala dāki kahite lāgilā || niṣedha karilā pāpakarma nā karibā | kāya mane nirañjana sadā sevibā || nā śune asura sabe āmera vacana | sakale veṛhiyā āma karilā nidhana ||]\n
Next, in Sultān’s account, the Lord sends a messenger (dūta) to witness Paradise and Hell (extensive descriptions of which are provided), and to warn the suras and the asuras of what would befall them in the afterlife. For a while, both parties performed virtuous deeds, but then again fell into evil ways. When the earth complained again, the Lord created the prophet Chālak, son of Nāyāk.955 Following al-Kisāʾī here, Sultān’s account tells of how the deos (asuras/jann) did not heed him, but slaughtered him instead. Thus, the Lord creates eight hundred prophets, each one of whom was murdered by the deos/jann. When the earth cries out for help yet again, the Lord orders the suras/jinn to descend to the earth to wage war against the asuras/jann.956 The suras, outnumbered and outclassed by the mighty asuras, soon ask for help from the Lord, who sends the angels (phiristā) to their aid. Thus reinforced, the suras succeed in killing all the asuras, and then start to lead a virtuous life on earth, until a time comes when they too fall into sinful ways. Hearing the earth’s complaints once more, the Lord burns to death the sinful suras; those among them who were virtuous quietly disappear, wandering eternally (kṣitita alopā hai sadāe bhramaṇa).957

Here onwards, Sultān’s cosmogony subtly shades into prophetology; hence, we will pick up this narrative thread in the following chapter on prophetology.

956 Here ends Sultān’s reliance upon al-Kisāʾī’s account. Ibid.
957 Ibid. NV 1: 13–25.
4.6 Conclusion: Cosmogony and Conversion

Though undoubtedly a single factor among many affecting the process of religious change and conversion, the precise manner in which Saiyad Sultān handles the translation of an Islamic cosmogonic doctrine and cosmology into an idiom immediately comprehensible to Bengalis has significant ramifications for understanding the ways in which Sufis helped to root Islam in Bengal. To comprehend this facet of Sultān’s writing, it is instructive to turn to Richard Eaton’s study on conversion to Christianity among the Nagas of Northeast India, a study which, as the author justifiably claims, “suggests a paradigm of how previous aboriginals of India, might, in earlier epochs, have acculturated to Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam.” Eaton argues that four “active” factors contributed to conversion to Christianity among the Nagas. The first two were the positive reception among the Nagas of the perceived connections of Christianity with literacy and Western medicine; the third was the perception of Christianity’s power as “a new technique” in negotiating mundane problems; and the fourth was the ability of this new religion to integrate isolated tribal groups, socially, economically, and politically, into the wider world order presented by the British empire.

Relevant to our discussion, Eaton’s fifth, “passive” factor is insufficient in itself but nonetheless contingent for conversion to take place. It pertains, in general, to the approach adopted by missionaries in the presentation of Christianity to the Nagas, and, in particular, to the translation of Christian superhuman deities into the languages of the Naga and the conceptual enmeshing of Christian cosmologies with their religious systems. “For mass conversion,” explains Eaton, “whatever else it may have meant, ultimately involved the transfer of certain ideas and symbols from one cultural and

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958 Eaton 1984, 2.
959 Elsewhere, Eaton (1993) himself has shown how Islam in Bengal provided local peoples with most of these “active” factors.
960 Eaton 1984, 43.
linguistic framework into another such framework.⁹⁶¹ Where the presentation of Christian superhuman deities continued to uphold Naga terms for their own supreme deities, while simultaneously clarifying, enlarging, and universalizing old conceptions of the supreme deity, the Nagas, as in the case of the Ao and the Sema, became favorable to the new religion, converting in large numbers. Given constancy in the first four “active” factors between tribes, however, the unsatisfactory fulfillment of the fifth became the key missing element that tilted the balance against the ready acceptance of Christianity among the Angami.

These findings are indeed crucial to understanding the strategies of translation that Sufis like Sultān used to establish Islam in the subcontinent. Nowhere better on display than in his presentation of Islamic cosmogonical doctrine to Bengalis, Sultān shines in his role as missionary translator, “a sort of intellectual engineer,” to apply Eaton’s remarks on the Baptist missionaries here, “tinkering with” Bengali “cosmologies, trying to fit his own system into the” Bengalis’, at the level of translation, while eventually doing the precise opposite as the preacherly dynamic of conversion works itself out through the text.⁹⁶² The NV epitomizes a Muslim preacher’s keen awareness of the opportunities for equivalence that Bengali systems of religious thought and literature present. Indeed, what the Baptist missionaries wrote about Naga religious systems could well have come from the pen of Sultān, had he left us a memoir of his observations of Bengali beliefs: “the old religion... furnishes a splendid basis for Christianity. The fundamental ideas are there, perverted... but there. And most of the needful terms are there.”⁹⁶³ Sultān consciously builds upon these continuities in doctrine and terminologies used for the Supreme (eg. Nīraṇjana), clarifying and enlarging existing conceptions of divinity and cosmogony (eg. auṃ, Sāmkhya principles, Dharma principles of creation by sweat, avatāravāda)

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., 27.
⁹⁶² Ibid., 43.
⁹⁶³ Ibid., 26.
into a new coherent system, which makes space for Hindus of all stripes—practitioners of the Nātha and Dharma cults, and Vaiṣṇavas. The presentation of such continuities recognizes these sects’ prior “witness-ship” (shahāda) of the Islamic creed, while simultaneously teaching them new and better ways to re-conceptualize their own doctrines. This approach is also central to Sultān’s presentation of prophetology, a subject we will turn to in the chapter that follows.
Chapter Five

A New Prophetological Dispensation

5.1 Introduction

One lakh and forty thousand prophets (nabī) there have been.\(^{964}\)
Each one, all of them had their own ambit.
To prohibit the worship of idols,
one by one were the prophets (nabīgaṇa) created.
How much can I possibly say by putting it into verse?
I cannot write it all down in a single book.
For this reason, I have written about the statements of a few prophets
to help you make your own inferences (anumāna).
If I were to write one book (puthi) on a single messenger,
then I would only be able to write a fraction [of it all].
When sins began to take place on the earth,
all the messengers (rasul) were created to destroy sin.
The messengers (rasul) were born to forbid the sinners,
[and] to prohibit the worship of idols (murati).\(^{965}\)

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\(^{964}\) A well-known Islamic tradition about Muḥammad suggests that the Prophet stated that God sent down 124,000 prophets and 313 messengers. Robinson 2007, 94. According to some exegetes, “God sent 8,000 prophets, 4,000 of whom were Israelites.” Rubin 2011b.

\(^{965}\) eka lakṣa calliśa hājāra nabī haiche | eke eke sabhānera parastāra raiche || murati pūjite niṣedhubāre kārana | eke eke sejana haïla nabīgaṇa || pada bandha kari katha kahibāre pāri | eka pustaketa etha lekhibāre nāri || tekārane katha katha nabīra vacana | lekhilunām anumāna karite kārana || eka rasūlera yadi eka puthi kari | tabe yadi kathaṅcita lekhibāre pāri || prthivīvita pāpa yadi haiše lāgila | khaṇḍāite pāpa saba rasūla sṛjila || janmila rāsūla saba pāpī nivārite | murati pūjite saba niṣedha karite || NV 1: 467.
So teaches Saiyad Sultān. The prophets being far too numerous to write about individually, Sultān states he can only do justice to a few. Who, then, are the prophetic figures that Sultān chooses to introduce to Bengal? As cosmogony ranges into prophetology, several of the early prophetic figures are identifiable as specific Hindu deities, such as Śiva, and various *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, including Rāma, none of whom were successful in eradicating evil from the earth. This leads to the eventual creation of Ādam, and after him a line of prophets including Śiś, Idris, Nūh, Ibrāhim, Hari [Kṛṣṇa], Musā, Dāud, Solemān, and Īsā, whose stories are told in some detail, culminating with the Prophet of Islam.

If Sultān’s approach to prophetology is selective, mine is, perforce, increasingly so. In this chapter, I focus upon Sultān’s redefinition and unique enunciation of a prophetology for Bengal, and a detailed study of the tale-cycle of Ādam. Since it is clear that Sultān’s account of the normative Judeo-Islamic prophets is deeply indebted to al-Kisā’ī’s *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, Sultān’s account of Ādam has been closely tallied with al-Kisā’ī’s account to highlight the nuances of Sultān’s translation. Observations are then made on Sultān’s narratological style and his adaptation of al-Kisā’ī’s narrative for a Bengali audience. A broad overview of Sultān’s prophetology that encompasses the pre-Muhammadan tale-cycles from Śiś to Īsā follows. Though al-Kisā’ī’s tales place some emphasis on the Islamic prohibition of idolatry, this proscription, as the verse above suggests, becomes the central focus of the mission of these Islamic Bengali prophets through whom Sultān seeks to create a new dispensation for Bengal. It is the salient feature of the tale-cycles of Śiś and Ibrāhim, and to a lesser extent that of Nūh, three major tale-cycles which prepare the ground for the advent of the new prophet Hari, Sultān’s extraordinary translatorial and preacherly intervention. As T. Nagel points out with regard to the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, “it [is] the Prophet of Islam,”

who gave to these legends an entirely new meaning, finding the events of his own life reflected in them; his vocation for prophecy, his being rejected by his own people, the
impending punishment, which might have meant the destruction of his own people... From the Muslim point of view, the lives of the pre-Islamic prophets are awful examples (ʿibar) warning against the evil fate of those who are disobedient to God and His messengers. Thus the Qīṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ became part of universal history, as history in general was often considered as a series of ʿibar.

And even as the Qurʾān (35:24) asserts, “there never was a people, without a warner.” Indeed, for the people of seventeenth-century Bengal, swept away in the surging tide of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava fervour, Sultān could not have chosen a better warner than Hari, a figure who will be the singular focus of the next chapter.

5.2 Expanding the Definition of “Pre-Islamic” Prophets

5.2.1 The Narrative and its Sources

The prelude to the creation of the prophets, as we have seen, is the formation of the primordial pair, Mārija and Mārijā, from whom were born the suras and the asuras, the jinn and the jann. After the destruction of the asuras by the suras, as we have seen in the last chapter, the suras inhabit the earth. When they too begin to sin, the Lord commands the angels to inhabit the earth. But the virtuous suras, who had disappeared, again gradually populate the earth. Sultān mentions that they were henceforth called naras, not to be confused with manusya, human beings.

\[
\begin{align*}
nara sabe pāibāre pāpa punya bheda & | \\
cāri mahājane pāthāila cāri veda & || \\
cāri veda pāthāiyā dilā niraṅjana & | \\
nīti sāstra sāmaveda nāmila takhana & || \\
patra dekhi sabhānera dhandha hala mane & | \\
sabe bole āṃhā prati dila niraṅjane & || \\
sāma veda brahmāta pāthāila naṁrākāra & | \\
nara saba sekāleta jñāna pāibāra & || 
\end{align*}
\]

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966 Nagel 2011b.
967 The Qurʾān, 1160.
968 Concerning the role of prophets as warners in the Qurʾān, see Chase F. Robinson 2011.
969 Concerning this pair, see Chapter Four (4.3).
970 It is unclear why Sultān uses this term for the jinn.
In order that mankind may know the distinction between good and evil, through the four great men (mahājana) he [the Lord] sent down the four Vedas. When Niraṅjana sent down the four Vedas, the śāstra on ethics, the Sāma Veda, then descended. Seeing the pages, the minds of all were wonder-struck. All said, “Niraṅjana has sent this for us!” The Formless One (nairakāra) sent down the Sāma Veda with Brahmā that the people of that age could gain knowledge. Then when Viṣṇu was created, Niraṅjana sent down the Yajurveda with him. When the third, Maheśa, was created, the R̥kveda was sent through him. The fourth time around, when Hari was created, Niraṅjana sent the Atharvaveda through him. Through these four Vedas, the Maker (karatāra) provides witness (sākṣi): “Certainly, most certainly, shall Muhammad become manifest.”

However, the naras were illiterate fools (murkha), who were bewildered by the books of the Veda. An angel, who lived in space (antarikṣa), began to teach them literacy; those who learnt to read the Vedas became known upon earth as the best of the twice-born (dvijavaras). Assimilating the teachings of these books, these naras began to follow the path of virtue. But after long ages had passed, they too abandoned good works. The earth now renews her grouse about the heavens being composed of exquisite precious stones and effulgent planets, while only wicked peoples were God’s bequest to her (durjana sakala āni dilā mora pāśa).
The trope of the earth’s plea of al-Kisāʾī’s tale has a corresponding equivalent in purāṇic literature, which Sultān has been simultaneously referencing. First elaborated upon in the Mahābhārata and the Harivamśa,974 and later echoed in the purāṇas, including the Bhāgavata, and still later in the Bengali carita literature surrounding Kṛṣṇa Caitanya,975 the Earth, in the Mahābhārata and the Harivamśa, is also personified, and represented as entreating the Lord to remove her burden (bhārāvataraṇa) of demons and feisty warriors who oppress her.976 The earth’s trope, along with the Bangla equivalent of the jann, the asuras, become Sultān’s segue into the Hindu prophetic ancestors of Muhammad, who include seven recognizable avatāras of Viṣṇu—the Fish (matsya), the Tortoise (kārma), the Boar (varāha), the Man-Lion (narasiṁha), the Dwarf (here referred to as the brāhman), Paraśurāma, and Rāma—all “created” by Prabhu Niraṇjana to restore righteousness to the earth.977 It is at this point that we realize why Sultān did not retain the original jīnn and jann, but instead chose to translate the word into a local equivalent, asura, for this word provides him with the opportunity to present Islamic cosmogony (here onwards, more distinctly, prophetology) as continuous with the purāṇic tradition.

Thus the earth now recapitulates for the Lord the afflictions imposed upon her by the asuras, naming, for the first time in her numerous petitions thus far, the purāṇic demons who wreak their havoc upon her back:

975 This trope is used by Caitanya’s hagiographers, starting with Murārī Gupta, in conceiving Caitanya’s advent. Stewart 2010, for instance, 61 and 175.
977 The avatāras of Hari [Viṣṇu], as the Bhāgavata affirms, are countless, but, Viṣṇu’s principal manifestations came to number ten, by the end of the seventh century: the Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, Vāmanā, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Balarāma (the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa), Buddha, and Kalki (Rocher, 1986, 107). The Varāha and Agni Purāṇas, according to Ray (1941, 371), provide a list that substitutes Kṛṣṇa for Balarāma. In this article, Ray points out that the epigraphic evidence from Bengal on the dasavatāra, which dates from the fifth century C.E., combined with the sculptural evidence show that these ten avatāras of Viṣṇu were the most popular in the region. This is backed by literary evidence from the region, which attest to these ten; particularly relevant here is the evidence of the Gītāgovinda of Jayadeva.
There is no end to the sufferings I have faced.
At your feet, all is known.
All that has come to pass upon my back;
one by one, I petitioned you, bringing [these afflictions] to your notice.
All the vile asuras such as Kālanemi and others,
the wicked Śumbha, Niśumbha, Caṇḍa, and Muṇḍa, as a result of their sins, the Lord destroyed them.

Next she remembers a great yogī (whose detailed iconography recalls that of Śiva), who was the perfect ascetic until he fell prey to lust and the pleasures of wine-drinking (surāpāṇa), wine which he consumed along with poison (garāla). The two women whom the asuras were to bequeath this yogī escaped from their hands (and presumably the yogī’s) by fighting a great battle. Though Sultān presents a largely Vaiṣṇava prophetology, by recalling Śiva here, Sultān seeks to broaden his audience-base, drawing in Nātha practitioners, and possibly Śāktas too.

Then, as the earth continues to petition the Lord, he sends down a guru and his wife. The guru’s lust for his wife becomes the cause of his anger, whereupon he curses his wife. But his curse rebounds, creating vulva-like marks all over his body. The earth wryly comments: yei śradhā chila sei haila alaṅkāra—“that which was desired became [his] adornment”! This tale

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978 NV 1: 27.
979 The Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 5, tells the tale of Śumbha and Niśumbha, the sons of Kāśyapa and Diti, demons who could not be killed by any deva, human being, or animal, as a result of a boon granted them by Brahma. They meet their deaths at the hands of Devī and Kālikā, who challenge them to battle. Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, also powerful demons, were the attendants of the invincible Śumbha and Niśumbha. Mani 1975b, 542.
recalls the popular legend of Indra, who is cursed by the sage Gautama when he was discovered to have slept with the latter’s wife, Ahalyā.\footnote{There are many tellings of Indra’s seduction of Ahalyā in the Rāmāyaṇa and the various purāṇas, particularly the Brahma, Padma, Brahmavaivarta, and Skanda. The vulva marks become “the most popular form of punishment for Indra” in the purāṇas. Söhnen-Thieme 1996, 58.}

A valiant and fearless king is next sent down. His mistreatment of a sage draws a curse: the earth upon which he lived was to be entirely flooded (jalākāra). Accordingly, he constructs a boat (naukā), taking aboard every kind of creature, in gendered pairs (jore jore). When the boat is drawn into a whirlpool (ghūṛṇā) on the stormy seas, a great man (mahājana) on the boat urges the Lord to save them from sinking. The Lord then commands a giant fish, māsya, to navigate the boat to calmer waters. Once the flood recedes, the creatures again populate the earth.\footnote{NV 1: 29–30.}

This tale of the ark, as is often the case with the other tales in this section, does not provide the specific names of the legendary heroes in question, thereby allowing various interpretive communities to savor “parallel enjoyment.”\footnote{This is Francesca Orsini’s term. See Chapter Three above for details.} It recalls at once legends from two separate traditions, the first being that of the purānic mātśyāvatāra, the first avatāra of Viṣṇu, who saves Manu, and through him, all creatures from the great deluge.\footnote{Rocher 1986, 107. For the development of the flood legend from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa through the Mahābhārata and the purāṇas, see Shastri 1950.} In the NV’s repatterning of pre-Islamic prophetology this purānic legend is undoubtedly a better fit with the text’s narrative design. Yet it recalls and anticipates the tale of the Judeo-Islamic Nūḥ (Noah), which receives separate treatment in the NV in the more normative tale-cycles of the prophets that follow Ādam.

The earth recalls how the tortoise (kūrma) is created when the creatures of the ark, who have populated the earth, begin to sin. It raises her upon its back and prevents her from slipping into the netherworld on account of her heavy burden of sin (pāpa bhāra). Next, the
Lord sends a boar (varāha) to hoist her upon its tusks (daśana). When the evil asura Hiranyakasipu wreaks havoc upon the earth, the Lord sends down a man-lion (narasimha) to kill him. Then comes the asura Bali, who is duped by a certain brahmin with his humble plea to be granted all the land he could cover in three strides. He then assumes enormous proportions, and with his third step banishes Bali to hell. These saviors are a reference to the well-known second, third, and fourth avatāras of Viṣṇu.985

Next we encounter an unnamed king of the solar race who kills his mother at the command of his father.986 The story recalls that of the sixth avatāra of Viṣṇu, Paraśurāma, son of the brahmin, Jamadagni, and Reṇukā, who killed his mother as per his father’s orders when his elder brothers refused their father’s bidding.987 The NV emphasizes the cardinal sins of mātrvadha and vipravadha (matricide and the slaying of a brahmin, here a brāhmaṇī, respectively) over Paraśurāma’s vaunted prowess in the purāṇas, in ridding the earth of the oppression of the kṣatriyas by exterminating their race twenty-one times.988

The earth then tells the tale of another ineffectual savior,989 Rāma, regarded in the purāṇas as the seventh avatāra of Viṣṇu.990 This account in fifty verses accords more space to any avatāra presented in this section, acknowledging, thereby, the popularity of the legends of Rāma in Bengal. The outline of the popular tale Sultān sketches runs as follows. At his father’s command, his son retires to the austere life of the forest, while the father dies of grief. The grieving son, who cannot even participate in the cremation (mukhānala karā) of his father, then roams the forests, living as an ascetic (tāpasi) in the home of a sage (muni). Seeing his wife

985 NV 1: 30–33. For details concerning these, the second, third, and fourth avatāras of Viṣṇu, see Mani 1975a; for scholarship on the subject, see Rocher 1986, 108.
986 NV 1: 33–34.
988 Ibid., 108.
989 NV 1: 34–38.
alone, one day, Rāvana kidnaps her. Rāma’s younger brother reassures him and advises him on ways to rescue his wife. When he travels to the south, he meets with monkey bands; he befriends Sugrīva in order to rescue his wife. On Sugrīva’s advice, Rāma kills Vāli. “If he had befriended Vāli,” says the Earth, “he would have recovered Jānakī swiftly. Instead, he performs an egregious act: without any fault of Vāli’s, he killed him.”

When he rescues Sītā he makes her undergo the fire ordeal to determine her chastity. Later, at the orders of the king, he once again deserts his pregnant wife in the forest. The Earth remarks disapprovingly:

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mahājana haïyā bhāla karma nā karilā |
ānale pariṣā diyā puni visarjilā ||
jadibā maneta pratya nā āchila ṭāna |
ucita rākhitē niyā bhīnna eka sṭhāna ||
ekākini garbhavatī aranyera mājhe |
rākhila aranye niyā paśura samāje ||
ye patira kārane pāīla etha duhkha |
se pati varjīla niyā haïyā vimukha ||
rāksase yadi se sītā puni hari nita |
nārī vadha pāpa tāra upare rahita ||
kadācita vyāghra bhāluke yadi khāīta |
e saba kalaṅka pāpa jagate rahita ||
deviṅa udare janama chila dui sūṭa |
duivīra janamila ati adbhuta ||
deviṅa maraṇe haïta duḥāna maraṇa |
e saba maneta keha nā kailā smaraṇa ||
se sabhāta paṇḍita nā chila ekajana |
hena karma karite nā kailā nivāraṇa ||
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“Though a great man (mahājana), he did not perform good action. Once again he was submerged [in sin] by making [her] undergo the test of fire. If, indeed, he did not believe her, it would have been more appropriate if he had installed her in another place. [Instead] he took this pregnant, single woman into the forest, leaving her there in the company of the beasts. The husband for whom she had undergone such pain abandoned her, turning away from her indifferently. If the demons (rāksasa) had once again kidnapped her,

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991 se bālīra sangē yādi mitratā karita | avilambe laṅkā honte jānakī ānīta || hena karma nā kariyā kailā avebhāra |
vini doṣe bālī rājā karīla saṃhāra || NV 1: 35.

992 Ibid., 35–36.
the sin of killing a woman would have been upon him!
If a bear or a tiger had eaten her
the stain of such sin would have tainted the world!
The noble woman (devī) was bearing twin boys.
The two valiant boys who were born were indeed marvelous.
If the noble woman had died, both of them would have died.
Not one person thought of all of this!
There was not a single learned man (paṇḍita) in that assembly
to forbid such action!”

Later, when Rāma desires to do battle, he sets free a battle-horse (jaṅgera aśva) (a reference to
the aśvamedha sacrifice), which, in time, is accosted by the twins. Even though they were born
of the noble woman (devī), Rāma was unable to recognize his own sons. The boys soon vanquish
their opponents, decimating the entire army; eventually they strike their father with an arrow
that renders him unconscious. Upon recognizing his crown, which the boys bring home as
trophy, Sītā is overcome with grief and shock. She admonishes her sons for capturing the horse
which their father had let loose “to wage war.” She then begins to wail about the great injustice
meted out to her by their father and uncles, an injustice that ultimately left her widowed. So
lamenting, when she desires to give up her existence, the sages gather around her, reassuring
her that they would explain the situation to the boys’ father.

At the battleground, the sages find all the warriors lying unconscious. They chant
mahāmantras which restore the fallen heroes to their senses. When Rāma asks the sages about
the identity of the twins he is dismissively told to return to his land, for the sages would only
reveal their identities at the time of war. Rāma then wishes to put Sītā through a second ordeal.
Hearing this, Sītā is heart-broken, and decides never to return to Rāma’s palace again. Instead
she requests Niraṅjana to let her sink into the comfort of the Earth. Hereupon the Earth
remarks: “Seeing that she was a woman of virtue, I gave her a place within my womb” (satī nārī
dekhiyā garbheta dilunṭ ṭhāi ||).
Sultān’s outline of the Rāmāyaṇa account picks up on the broad themes set in place in the original Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,993 and also iterates the uttarakāṇḍa peculiar to its regional recensions, including that of Kṛttivāsa’s popular Bangla version.994 While Kṛttivāsa’s critique of Rāma’s abandonment of the pregnant Sītā, as Tony Stewart and Edward Dimock point out, chooses an “apophatic” tone,995 Sultān has no need to dissimulate about Rāma’s near-parricidal crime. His Sītā gives up the doublespeak of Kṛttivāsa’s, who “criticiz[es] without actually seeming to do so.”996 Whereas she returns to Rāma’s palace even when she hears of his desire to put her through yet another ordeal of fire,997 Sultān’s Sītā refuses to return to Rāma, turning directly to the Earth for shelter. Given the otherwise normative, patriarchal approach to women which Sultān adopts in his elaborations upon Muslim ethics—not unusual, of course, for a premodern Sufi—his defense of the cause of the women wronged by the “two Rāmas,” the Hindu avatāras, Paraśurāma and Rāma, though characteristic of Bangla literature’s championing of women,998 more or less pales into the self-serving rhetoric of discrediting the so-called Hindu mahājana.

5.2.2 Narratological Features and Interventions

This section on prophetology provides a window into Sultān’s multilingual transtextuality, his easy familiarity with purānic literature accompanied by a deep understanding of al-Kisāṭi ’s text. His mastery lies in the translatorial devices he selects to tie these two narratives together to create a new, yet coherent, account of Islamic prophetology for Bengal. The earth’s trope is the crucial device, which allows Sultān to loop the narrative

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993 For an outline of the original narrative, see Goldman 1984, 6–13.
994 For comparison, I have used Rāmāyaṇa of Kṛttivāsa.
996 Ibid., 252.
997 Ibid., 263. Rāmāyaṇa of Kṛttivāsa, 526.
998 Stewart and Dimock 2000, 251.
from al-Kisāʾī’s account into the purāṇic accounts of the dasāvatāras, and back again. Such narratival threading is further facilitated by Sultān’s careful selection of choice translations for specific source-cultural terms that have the potential to bridge one cosmogonical world order with another: the translations of sura and asura for the jinn and the jann, respectively, are a significant case in point.

Through the framing refrain of the Earth’s plea that bridges al-Kisāʾī’s cosmogonical account with the purāṇic cosmogony of the avatāras, Sultān thus manages to expand the meaning of “pre-Islamic” prophetology while demolishing deific conceptions of the avatāra. Śiva and the Vaiṣṇava avatāras now constitute the prehistory of the traditional pre-Islamic prophets; Hindu sacred books foretell the advent of Muhammad, a matter that acknowledges the Hindus as the oldest “People of the Book,” while simultaneously endorsing Islam with the authority of the ancient Vedas. Yet this inclusion of Hindu gods within Sultān’s new prophetology means that they who were once worshipped as divine avatāras become Muslim mahājana, great men, grudgingly admitted (for pragmatic reasons), via demotion from divine to human status, into the company of the traditional prophets; those who manifested in human form at will become mere “creations” of Niraṇjana, an issue which will be discussed in further detail in the section on Hari. While no mention is made in the NV of the Buddha or Kalki avatāras, Sultān’s treatment of Śiva and the select avatāras of Viṣṇu in the NV, particularly Hari/Kṛṣṇa, as we will later see, follows an approach that orthodox brahminism itself took vis à vis the Buddha in the mahāpurāṇas and the Bengal upapurāṇas. Even as the latter included the Buddha within the dasāvatāric pantheon, while presenting him as one who “delude[s] people and encourage[s] them to embrace false beliefs,” so too does the NV highlight the crimes of Śiva and the avatāras of Viṣṇu, while subsuming them within an Islamic prophetology.

The narrative, moreover, is replete with ambiguities, which are left to the auditor to work out. While the suras and the asuras have been identified as the jinn and the jann, respectively—tribes of semi-divine beings—as cosmogony further ranges into prophetology, the ontological status of the naras remains ambivalent: are these semi-divine tribes that inhabit the earth? Some attempt at clarification is made in Sultān’s recapitulation of creation which follows the account of the creation of Ādam. Here he specifies that in the first age (kāla), the Lord creates the asuras and the suras, who both successively reside on the earth; in the second age, the earth is populated by angels; in the third, the naras; and in the fourth age, a tribe of winged horses (introduced here for the first time). After each of these are successively destroyed or removed from the earth on account of their sins, God decides to create Ādam, the progenitor of humankind ( manusya). Do the naras and the aśvas reference the legends of certain “rational species (al-ṣīnf al-ʾāqil)” which inhabited the earth before mankind, reported in early ḥadīth? Indeed M. J. Kister reports numerous early hadīth traditions on the various warring inhabitants of the earth before the advent of Ādam, among whom are also the ḥinn. Whether or not the specific referents in the source language can be located (and al-Kisāʾ is of no use here) is irrelevant because the translated status of the naras continues to baffle the non-Muslim Bengali auditor. The word nara is interchangeably used, in common Bangla parlance, for manusya; and the naras are chosen in the narrative to receive the sacred Vedas. Yet these are distinct from humans, and are evacuated from the earth before God’s creation of humankind. Whereas the social critique of brahminism seems amply clear, we remain uncertain about the ontological status of these creatures among whom are born the dvijas (a term commonly used for the “twice-born” brahmins), who are here taught literacy by the angels. And if the status of the

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1000 NV 1: 64–65.
1001 Schöck 2011.
naras remains unclear, what then is that of the Hindu mahājana, who are sent down as their saviors? Are these messiahs equivalent in rank, or higher than the traditional pre-Islamic prophets because they were created before them? Furthermore, what is their moral standing? For, as the traditional pre-Islamic prophets, considered in the Qurān to “belong to the highest rank among... virtuous... human beings,”1003 will soon rub shoulders, within the narrative, with sinful Hindu gods-turned-mahājana, premodern auditors and modern readers have now to negotiate the question of the venerability of the latter, given the damning rhetoric against them. As the narrative progresses, moreover, the auditors will notice how the word mahājana is employed not only for Hindu gods, but for recognizable villains, making the term doubly suspect: Iblis dissimulates as a mahājana to the peacock and the serpent; and later, the peacock, who is indirectly responsible for Ādam’s fall, is also considered to be a mahājana.1004 In inventing these nascent genealogies, this pioneering text is itself negotiating the ambiguities thrown up during the process of experimentation with the translation, leaving many such questions for the auditors/readers to unravel.1005

It is this ontological and moral ambiguity, however, that incidentally allows the non-Muslim auditor to grant the text the true “benefit” of the doubt. For the text initiates a psychological process by which such auditors, first, begin to closely identify themselves with their gods, and then, begin to insert themselves into the plot into which their gods are drawn. And when narrative ambiguity makes the gods oscillate between acknowledgement and rejection, those auditors who desire to stay with the narrative, rather than to reject it, or walk

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1003 Rubin 2011b.
1004 Concerning Iblis, see the peacock’s words to the serpent: mora sane dekhā haila eka mahājana | svargera duryāre basi karae rodana || NV 1: 74, and the serpent’s words to Hāoyā: sāpinī bolae sakhī eka mahājana | vrksēra taleta āsi rahiche ekhana || NV 1: 75. For the description of the peacock as a mahājana, see ki kāraṇe duhkha pāiche yena mahājana | kona apakarma kaila prabhura caraṇa || NV 1: 86.
1005 Cf. how the representation of the Vaiṣṇava Buddha in the purāṇas was also riddled with ambiguities. Chakrabarti 2001, 152–154.
away from its performance, must necessarily accept its acknowledgements of their gods, and thus themselves, through a suspension of any sense of personal rejection. The resolution of their new religious identities then follows the design worked out for the gods: as their gods get converted to Islam, the auditors too become more open to the possibility of such religious conversion. The text, thus, becomes their new social reality, setting in motion, changes in their own.

5.3 Ādi Ādam: The Tale-Cycle of “Primal Ādam”

5.3.1 The Narrative

5.3.1.1 Ādam’s creation

Sītā’s disappearance into the Earth provides the ideal segue back into the Earth’s refrain, looping the tale back from the purāṇas into al-Kisāṭ ‘s tale again.1006 The Lord, now dissatisfied with the naras, explains to the angels that he would dispatch the naras to hell (naraka) for their misdeeds, and instead create the human being (manusya). When the Lord decides to create Ādam, the foremost of men, ādi ādam,1007 Paradise, the constellations, Hell, fire, wind, and ether all vie for God to create Ādam out of their “stuff.” But God decides to create Ādam instead from the earth’s clay, because it is she who considers herself too lowly to even petition God, believing that she was most unworthy to be a medium for such a stupendous task.

1006 It is noteworthy that Sultān does not adopt Kṛttivāsa’s ending wherein, as Sītā attempts to disappear into the Earth, Rāma holds her back by her hair, preventing her from descending into the netherworld, facilitating her ascent to Vaikuṇṭha. Stewart and Dimock 2000, 527.

1007 Sultān uses this phrase, for the first time, in the following couplet, towards the end of the tale-cycle of Ādam: ehi mate yatha ādi adame dekhilā | prābhūra astuta karma sakala mānilā || NV 1: 107. This verse can be interpreted in at least two ways: “In this way, through all that the primal Ādam saw, all accepted the act of praising the Lord;” or “In this way, all the primal humans [i.e. the prophets] saw that all accepted the act of praising the Lord.” In the second interpretation, the meaning of ādi ādam, encompasses not only Ādam but all the primal prophets manifested by God in the presence of Ādam and Nūr Muhammad, in order to bind them to him via written covenant.
Meanwhile Ājājīl (and from here begin the parallels with al-Kisāṭī’s account), an epithet alternatively used for Iblis in the NV and in the Islamic tradition, resting beneath the wishing tree (kalpataru), becomes restless, hearing that God wishes to eliminate his children, the suras, via Ādām. He dissipulates as a friend to the Earth, and tells her that the Lord, being tired of her complaints, is planning to create Ādām from her clay, so that if he sins, she can no longer petition the Lord. He advises the Earth to prevent the attempts of the Lord’s messengers (dūta) to gather her clay. Thus when the Lord sends Jibrāil to gather a lump of clay from the earth, he returns empty-handed, sworn by oath (dohā) to the Earth. Isrāphil and Mikāil suffer the same fate. Finally the Lord sends Ājrājīl, who manages to bring back some surface-soil (carma), gathering a little of the earth’s skin from various places, so that the Lord could eventually create human beings of various skin-colors (bhīnna bhīnna varṇa). The Lord is greatly pleased with Ājrājīl, and confers upon him control over the lives of all the Earth’s creatures, in the authority of the Angel of Death.

Next, the Lord commands the angels to knead the clay, to which they add water (āb), heat (teja), and air (vāyu), to shape Ādām’s body. What follows in the narrative is a head-to-toe description of Ādām-in-the-making in the manner of a concise sarāpā, wherein Sultān incorporates the classical imagery used to describe the traditional Sanskrit nāyaka. Thus, Ādām has bow-shaped brows (bhuru yuga duī dhanu) set upon a shining forehead (lālāṭa ujhala). His face is framed by luxuriant, long hair (cikura dīghala), while his mouth is inset with beautiful

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1008 See, for instance, the account of ʿAzāzīl in Diyārbakṛī’s Taʾrīkh al-khamīs, in Kister 1993, 121–122.
1010 Al-Kisāṭī provides an etymology of Ādām from adīm, meaning the earth’s surface, because Ādām was made from it. Ibid., 23. Adīm also means “goat’s leather,” hence, Sultān’s translation of carma for the skin, or surfacial clay, of the earth. Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “adīm,” 30.
1011 For the divergent views of exegetes on the collection of the earth’s dust, see Schöck 2011.
1012 NV 1: 42–53. Here ends the passage from al-Kisāṭī, which Sultān draws upon.
1013 More extensive sarāpās are found in the Sufi romances; see, for instance, Manjhan’s description of Madhumālatī, Behl and Weightman 2000, 33–42.
teeth as even as pomegranate seeds (*daśana ḍālimba viṇa dekhite sundare*). The creation of Ādam’s image largely follows al-Kisāʾi’s narrative, while including descriptive details peculiar to Bangla literature. Thus, a description of Ādam also includes the Sufi-yogic terminology of the *dehatattva*, the principles of the esoteric body, which invite comparison with the *Jñāna Pradīpa*:

The precious lotus blooms in the heart
along with the sounds of the akāra, ukāra, and the makāra [of OM].
The throne rests upon an upward-facing jujube flower;¹⁰¹⁴
thirty-two lotus petals, with fine rays.¹⁰¹⁵
The downward-flowing Śiva-Śakti remain in the penis (*liṅga*).¹⁰¹⁶
And in the navel region, the five winds are born together.
Ten gates are placed in the ten gateways,¹⁰¹⁷
and at each of these ghats, the guards stand at their outposts.
One by one, as each limb was designed,
the Lord placed a tiny portion (*āṃśa*) of himself within each.
In the thousand-petalled one arose the sun’s effulgence.
And the moon waxed within the hundred-petalled one.
So that the five unstruck sounds (*anāhata pañca śābda*) may resound
he kept it hidden deep within.
Having pulled together three hundred and six veins (*sirā*),
he drew them into the region of the navel’s well.
Within the *susumnā* stood a large checkpoint
through which all comings and goings could take place.
To beautify him, he was dressed,
one by one, in all his adornments.¹⁰¹⁸

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¹⁰¹⁴ The reference is to the station of the heart, which in Bengali Islamic yoga practice becomes the supreme station—the locus of the Lord’s throne—more important than the cranial *saḥsraṅga* of Nātha practice. See Hatley 2007, 357–58.

¹⁰¹⁵ Rather than *sarasā kirāṇa*, I have emended it to *sareśa kirāṇa*.

¹⁰¹⁶ The “downward-flowing (adhahreta) Śiva-Śakti” is a variation on the *kuṇḍalinī śakti*, which in tantric literature is characterized as residing in a coil within the tail-bone. The successful yogī controls the flow of semen, related to the *kuṇḍalinī śakti*, so as to reverse its natural “downward” flow upwards, creating the possibility of the union of *śakti* with *śiva*, who is said to dwell in the cranial *saḥsraṅga cakra*.

¹⁰¹⁷ The ten doors are a reference to the *daśa indriyas*, the five sense organs and five motor organs, that guard the gateways of the senses.

¹⁰¹⁸ *ḥṛdaya amūlya padma haiche vikaśita | ākāra ukāra dhvanī makāra sahita | adhamukha badalī puspeta simhāsana | bātriśa kamala dala sarasa kirāṇa | adhahreta śiva śakti liṅgeta rahila | nābhi deśe pañcābābī ekatre janmila | daśamāra dvāre thulīlā daśamī kāpāṭa | cauki praharī rahila sākala ghūte ghāṭa | eke eke aṅga yadi saba haila sāja | āpanāra āṃśa kichu thulīlā tāra mājha | sahasra daleta hala sūryera prakāśa | śata dale śasodara haiche vikāśa | anāhata pañca śābda bājibāra tare | lukāi rākhila tūre gahana antare | tina śata sāṭa sīrā dilēnta tānā | nābhi kuṇḍa deśeta rahila saba yāī | susumnāra madhyeta rahila barā thānā | haibāre yathā kichu ānonā gamanā | āpanāra yatheka āchae alāṅkāra | eke eke pindhāila haite śobhākāra | NV 1: 57.
The moment the angels complete sculpting Ādam’s image, Iblis destroys it. This activity of creation and destruction goes on for a hundred years, until the vexed angels eventually complain to Nirañjana. They place an induma near Ādam, and the loud sound (mahāśabda) it creates keeps Iblis at bay. Defeated, he finally retreats to his resting place beneath the tree of Paradise.

Then Nirañjana, having shaped Ādam’s head with his own hands, bestows him with the faculty of sight (dekhana), hearing (śunana), and speech comprehension (vākyā jānana). At his own will (ichhā sukhe), he bestows Ādam with a soul (jīvātmā), qualified by the presence of Śiva and Śakti. When the soul entered the cage of the body it thrashed about like a bird (yena khāncā madhye paksī... pharakae nirantara...), and attempts to escape through the apertures of the nostrils. Smelling the fragrance of Paradise, it sneezes. Then it enters the hollows of the eyes and sees the Lord’s name, the mahāmantra of the kalimā, written upon God’s throne. In this manner, as Ādam’s soul circulates through his inanimate form, it animates his various bodily functions. Once his tongue is activated, thus, he begins to chant the ajapā mahāmantra, which pleases the Lord, who showers his grace upon him. When Ādam desired to sit down, he crumpled into a heap. Then the Lord asked his angels to tour the heavens, carrying

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1019 I have been unsuccessful in arriving at a suitable meaning for this word.
1021 Notice the usage here of a theme characteristic of Bāul poetry, wherein the elusive soul-bird, trapped within the rib-cage of the chest, ever desires to escape from the bondage of the body, to merge with its true, infinite self. For such Bāul images, which can also be found in the poetry of Hāfīz, see Dasgupta [1946] 1969, 181–182.
1023 nāsā | honte cašuta āllā tatakasana | śimḥāsana dekhe prabhū nāma se likhana || mahāmantra kalimā dekhiyā mahāśāe | eka nirañjana hena mānila niścāe || NV 1: 60. Cf. “So the spirit entered from the cranium into the eyes. Adam then opened his eyes and... saw inscribed on the pavilion of the Throne: ‘There is no god but God. Muhammad is the apostle of God in truth’.” Thackston 1997, 26. In the NV, the soul first enters the nostrils, and then the eyes, reversing the order found in al-Kisā’ī’s narrative.
1024 tohora upare mora krpā hoka ati | munī chārī tohora nā hoka āna gati || NV 1: 60. Cf. “Then the Majestic One called to him, saying, ‘Thy Lord has compassion upon thee, O Adam... My mercy is everlasting for thee...’.” Thackston 1997, 26.
Ādam upon their shoulders.\textsuperscript{1025} They taught him all the \textit{mantra-tantra} that the Lord had taught them.

5.3.1.2 Ādam, the angels, and the rebellious Iblis

Sultān tells of how the Lord, then, commands the angels to teach Ādam the Lord’s names, but they refuse to do so in anticipation of the sins Ādam and his offspring would commit upon the earth.\textsuperscript{1026} Displeased with this remark, the Lord asks them all to prostrate before Ādam; here Sultān again follows al-Kisā’ī’s account. All the angels do his bidding, except for Iblis, who refuses because he considers himself to be many times his superior: God, he says, created him [Iblis] from fire, a noble substance, before Ādam, who is created from mere clay.\textsuperscript{1027} Then God questions his impudence for not prostrating before “one I created with my two hands” (āmhi yāre dui kare karichi srjana).\textsuperscript{1028}

For his disobedience, God shoves (dhākkā māri pelīla) Ājājīl into Hell, to burn in the infernal fires of his wrath (krodhānala). Diverging here onwards from al-Kisā’ī’s narrative, but more in keeping with the Qur’ānic account, Sultān now tells of how Ājājīl weeps, entreats the Lord to give him some consideration for all his devotion to him.\textsuperscript{1029} The ever-gracious Lord asks him what boon he would have, whereupon Ājājīl asks for two: first, that he may always quarrel with Ādam and corrupt his children, thus being able to pack Hell with these sinners; second, that he

\textsuperscript{1025} Sultān’s account changes the order of al-Kisā’ī’s narrative. In the latter account, God asks the angels to raise Ādam on their shoulders, after he has taught Ādam “the names of all things.” Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{1026} Cf. with the Qur’ānic account of God’s teaching Ādam the names, Schöck 2011.
\textsuperscript{1027} Cf. also the similarity with the account of Iblīs’ revolt in the Qur’ān. Wensinck 2011a. See also Schöck 2011.
\textsuperscript{1028} NV 1: 62. Cf. “Iblis, however, refused to prostrate himself before Adam out of pride and jealousy. God said to him, “What hindereth thee from worshipping that which I have created with my hands?”’ Thackston 1997, 27.
\textsuperscript{1029} We do not find this section in Al-Kisā’ī. For the Qur’ānic account, see Wensinck 2011a; Rippin 2011.
may live eternally. God grants him these boons, stating that he would live until the Day of Doom (pralaya), when all things would cease to be.\textsuperscript{1030} Sultān says, about Ājājil:

\begin{quote}
prabhura śapeta yadi haila nairāśa
iblisa kariyā nāma haila prakāśa \textsuperscript{1032}
\end{quote}

When, by the Lord’s curse, he was rendered hopeless, his name became known as Iblis.

Sultān’s translation carefully follows the etymology of Iblīs in the Arab tradition, which associates this epithet with ‘the verbal sense of ublisa meaning “he was rendered without hope.”’\textsuperscript{1032}

5.3.1.3 The creation of Hāoyā

Ādam, now residing in Paradise, delights in its pleasures. The cuckoo’s call rings through the lush forests, where grape, pomegranate, jujube, and wheat (ganduma) grow abundantly. Divine women (divya nārīgāna) adorn the beautiful pavillions (taṅgi), while Ādam climbs onto his throne. Sated with happiness, he drowses off to sleep and dreams of an elaborately adorned woman who emerges from his left bone (vāma asthi). He sits beside her, on her right, admiring this vāmā, this beautiful woman, born from his left side.\textsuperscript{1033} Awaking from the dream, Ādam is surprised to see an angel standing to his right, and the very woman of his dream to his left. The angel explains, “She is the mother of the world (jagatera mātā); the goddess of the world (jagata īśvari), who has been created for you.”\textsuperscript{1034} Ādam cannot tear his eyes away from this moonfaced one (candramukhi), who had pierced his heart with Kāma’s arrow. Lost in the emotion of love

\textsuperscript{1030} In the Qur’ān, “at his own request, the punishment promised to Iblīs is... deferred until the Day of Judgement, and he is given power to lead astray all those who are not faithful servants of God.” Wensinck 2011a. See also Rippin 2011.
\textsuperscript{1031} NV 1: 63.
\textsuperscript{1032} Rippin 2011.
\textsuperscript{1033} Concerning the themes of God’s creation of Ḥawwā from Ādam’s left rib; Ādam’s prior vision of her before their meeting, see Thackston 1997, 31–32.
\textsuperscript{1034} ādame puchilā yabe phiristā ke tabe jagatera mātā ehi nārī | toṁhāra kāraṇe nārī srjilā gaurava dhari ehi jāna jagata īśvari || NV 1: 68.
(premabhāva), when Ādam prostrates to the Lord to bequeath him the woman, he is told that he would be blessed with her only if he succeeds in chanting the name of Nūr Muhammad unceasingly. For the Lord explains:

\[...
sei tatva tribhuvana sāra | tāra mora nahe bhina eka aṃśa parācina pirīti barahi mora tāra ||
tāhāna vaṃśera bhava nabīgaṇa haiba saba eka lākha calliṣa hājāra |
krame krame piṣṭhe tāra haibeka se saṅcāra paścāte haiba tāra paracāra ||
ābadullā ekera nāma makkā haiba yāra ṭhāma sei haiba janaka tāhāra |
mora sakhā nija aṃśe vyakta haiba tāra vaṃše jannibeka garbhe āpanāra ||\]

This principle is the essence of the triple world.
He and I are not separate, [but] of a single ancient portion (aṃśa); I have great love for him.
All the prophets will be born into his line—one lakh and forty thousand.
One after another, after him, they will take birth, and then will he become manifest.
A certain Ābdullā by name, whose residence is Makkā, shall be his father.
My companion, in his own aṃśa, shall become manifest in his [Ābdullā’s] line, taking birth in his [Nūr Muhammad’s] own womb.

After Ādam succeeds in chanting the name one hundred times, he is blessed with the woman.1036

5.3.1.4 Iblis’ plot
When Ādam and Ḥāyoṭā encounter Iblis at the gates of Paradise, they tremble to see his hideous form, and are warned by God to keep away from him, for he is their adversary (ripu).

God also prohibits Ādam from eating wheat (ganduma), and from resting beneath the Tree of Origination/New Life (aṅkura vṛkṣa).1037

Iblis hatches a plot to enter Paradise so as to bring about the corruption of Ādam and Ḥāyoṭā. There lived in Paradise a close friend of Ḥāyoṭā, a serpent (sarpa/sāpini), who slept upon a

1035 NV 1: 69. This section on the Nūr Muhammad is not found in al-Kisā’ī.
1037 Cf. yei śradhā lāge tumhi khāibā phala phula | nā khāibā mātra tumhi ganduma tāṇḍula || aṅkura vṛkṣera tale nā yāibā tumhi | sarvathāe tomhāre niṣedha kaila āmhi || NV 1: 71 with Thackston 1997, 34. Sultān omits the entire section on the ascent of Ādam and Ḥawwā’ into Paradise upon a beautiful horse and a camel, respectively, and the peculiar description of Paradise that follows. Thackston 1997, 34–36.
golden throne. The serpent’s friend was a peacock (śikhini/maūra) and the three of them enjoyed each other’s company. Foraging for food, one day, the peacock reached the gates of Paradise, where she was surprised to hear a wail. Upon her questions, Iblis, who had been weeping, tells her that he is one of God’s angels, but the guards refuse to let him in. He tells her that he is in desperate need of meeting a dear friend who dwells in Paradise. He flatters her for her beauty, and bribes her with a three-syllabic formula for immortality, if she were to take him inside. The peacock, however, declines, saying that she has no need for such a formula as her residency in Paradise grants her natural immortality. Besides, the guards do not let anyone inside. She returns to her friend, the serpent, to tell her all about this mahājana.

The serpent, eager to see this mahājana, rushes to the gates of Paradise. Beguiled by his charms, she does his bidding. She opens her mouth wide enough for him to slip inside, and takes him to the ankJura vrksa, where he rests. The serpent tells Háøyā, and Háoyā, Ādam, about the entry of this mahājana into Paradise. When Ādam meets with Iblis, he is also flattered by his sweet words. Iblis convinces Ādam that he has been sent by Nirañjana to convey to him that the earlier proscription on eating the forbidden fruit had been removed.

After much hesitation, when Ādam finally tastes the forbidden fruit, along with his wife, Háoyā, their garments fall away, Ādam’s crown slips from his head, his staff (āṣā) and prayer beads (tapamālā) fall from his hands; all his adornments and his throne disappear. Ādam and Háoyā feel shame at their unclad bodies, and try to grab the leaves of trees to cover their nakedness. But the trees do not yield their leaves. A tree which attempts to do so is reprimanded by the Lord.\footnote{Sultān follows al-Kisā’ī’s tale of the serpent and the peacock fairly closely. Cf. Thackston 1997, 36–41.}
Ādam and Häoyā now begin to repent (anuśoca karā) upon their folly, and begin to blame each other for their foolish action. In the NV, this is accomplished through a narrative refrain wherein Häoyā blames Ādam for exposing her nakedness before all the angels, and Ādam provides his response:

āe svāmī, kenhe kailā hena apakarma / 
ṇā bujhilā pāpiṣṭhera marma ||
prabhu ājnā nā mānilā yabe | 
vivasana haiyā gelā tabe ||...

āe priyā, dhari āila phiristā ākāra |
karibāre mohore saṁhāra ||
śapatha karae bārebāra |
pratyaya nā haite kone tāra ||...

O husband, why did you commit such a foul act? 
You did not grasp the real intent of this sinner. 
When we did not obey the Lord’s command 
we were stripped of our garments....

O beloved, he came in the form of an angel 
in order to destroy me. 
With his repeated avowals, 
who would not have placed their trust in him?...

5.3.1.5 The Fall

Having remained in Paradise for a brief cosmic half-day (the equivalent of five hundred years on earth), Ādam and Häoyā, much against their will, are forcibly expelled from Paradise, at God’s command, by the angels. The Lord angrily explains how eating the forbidden fruit has caused them to develop the human functions of digestion and excretion, the vile products of which cannot not readily be accommodated in Paradise. The Lord instructs his

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1039 A summary of NV 1: 70–81.
1040 NV 1: 82.
1041 NV 1: 83.
emissaries (dūta) to evacuate them, and Paradise resounds with their cries of “Nikala, nikala” (Get out, get out!).

Expelled from Paradise, Ādam lands in Sarandvīpa, and Hāoyā in Jeddā. The serpent and the peacock, who are also expelled forthwith, fall, respectively, in Kuphā and the seashore (samudrera kula). Erstwhile friends became enemies forever. Iblis, meanwhile, who became a Hell-dweller (nārakī), descends upon Ispāhān.

The scene now shifts to Ādam in Sarandvīpa, where he is noticed by a bird, who has never seen a creature with a body as delicate and lovely (komala tanu, ati sulalita) as his. The bird’s fish-friend corroborates that she had seen another mahājana (the peacock) on the seashore. The two commiserate with each other, wondering about the plight of these creatures, when a heavenly voice informs them that they have fallen because of their transgressions of God’s command.

5.3.1.6 Repentance and forgiveness

Two separate sections dedicated to the repentance of Ādam and of Hāoyā follow. Ādam not only grieves for his lack of perspicacity with regard to Iblis’ advice, and his subsequent dishonor in God’s eyes, but also laments his separation from his beloved wife, Hāoyā. For one hundred years Ādam wept, and along with him all the birds and animals too. Seeing his repentance, the Lord becomes forgiving. Jibrāil comes to him and strokes Ādam’s head with his

1043 NV 1: 84.
1044 Cf. “Adam came down to India, on top of a mountain called Serendip, which surrounds India. Eve came down to Jidda, Iblis to the land of Maysan, the peacock to Egypt, and the serpent to Isphahan.” Thackston 1997, 55. See also, “Then the peacock was told that his dwelling was to be river banks.” Ibid., 53.
1045 A summary of NV 1: 84–86. Sultān greatly compresses al-Kisāʾī’s account of the expulsion of Ādam, Ḥawwāʾ, their accomplices, the peacock and the serpent, and Iblis. Al-Kisāʾī’s account of Harut and Marut is omitted altogether, while the tale of the eagle/bird and the fish is included, though differently inflected. Cf. Thackston 1997, 43–57.
1046 Cf. ibid., 56. Al-Kisāʾī’s account of the locust does not find its place in the NV. Ibid., 58.
hands. He then stretches his forehead to a height of 60 gajas, so that his head, bent over with shame, could now touch the sky. His bent form was stretched tall. The Lord then installed within his head a benevolent mind; he began to remember the Lord’s name single-mindedly. Prostrating himself, he asks for a boon; the Lord forgives him and instructs him to fast three times a month. Doing so makes his coal-black form (aṅgāra ākṛtī) beautiful again, like gold.

Meanwhile, Hāoyā, who had descended to Jiddā, finds herself alone, bereft of Ādam. She cries out for him, “Alas, O lord of my life, where have you gone?” She tells the wind and the birds to inform Ādam that “if she ever were to see him [again], she would wipe his feet with her tresses.” The birds of the forest also weep, hearing Hāoyā’s lamentations. Touched by her repentance, the Lord sends Jibrāil to her with good tidings. He informs her that Ādam has been forgiven by the Lord. Heartened by this marvelous news, she takes a dip in the water. When she began to weep, thinking about her pain, her tears coalesced into pearls and corals in the water. Having washed herself she returns to the shore falling at the Lord’s feet, asking his forgiveness. Jibrāil brings her the news of the Lord’s forgiveness, which he then also carries to Ādam. He then instructs him to go to Makkā and to reside upon Mount Āraphā, in order to find Hāoyā. Hāoyā too sets out from Jiddā, cutting through lush forests, sleeping on the ground, and undertaking terrible travails in order to meet with her husband. The poet paints a graphic picture of her pathetic condition:

Seeing the birds sport atop
the various trees and creepers of the deep forest groves,
the noble woman became dejected in mind [thinking],

1047 Cf. ibid., 60–61, and 57.
1048 A summary of NV 1: 88–93.
1049 hāhā prāneśvara mora kathā gelā tumhi... NV 1: 94.
1050 Cf. Thackston 1997, 55.
1051 kadācita tāṇa yadī pāitūn daraśana / mohora kuntale muchi laitūn carana || NV 1: 96.
1052 samudre parīla yadī se āṅkhīra jala / mukutā pravāla tabe jannila niramala || ibid., 97. Cf. “Every drop of her tears that fell into the sea was transformed into pearl and coral.” Thackston 1997, 61.
1053 A summary of NV 1: 94–98.
“Fate has kept me deprived of this wealth of happiness.”
Unable to walk, the lady trudged slowly,
She spent the nights beneath the trees, lying on the ground.
She, who had once occupied the throne of Paradise,
the Lord [now] caused to sleep upon the earth.
Through the nights of dense darkness, in the deep forest,
sleep would not come to the eyes of this sorrowing one.
When the sun arose, and the night had passed,
the lonely lady resumed her wandering.
Wounded by rocks, her feet exude bloody streams.
In search of her husband, her life-force (prāṇa) cannot endure the body.
There is no end to the suffering the lady faces.
One cannot extol her glories enough!
Unable to walk, she skips breathing.
In order to spend the night the lady went towards the mountain.
There, beneath a tree, in the mountain’s womb,
her body ever burns in the memory of Ādam’s love.1054

Hāoyā’s searching heart serendipitously brings her to the very mountain where Jibrā’il instructs Ādam to live. When she awakes the next morning, Hāoyā begins to wander about the mountain, and she suddenly comes upon Ādam. He, however, fails to recognize her, so altered is her once-beautiful appearance. She then provides him her svarga vārtā (report of all that transpired in Paradise) from beginning to end, which is followed by Jibrā’il’s confirmation of her identity. Ādam’s fears turn to joy; he embraces her, seating her on his lap. In the joy of union, they weep remembering their deep anguish. Each recapitulates to the other all that had transpired in their partner’s absence; their happy reunion makes all their suffering worthwhile.1055

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5.3.1.7 Makkā grha and the covenant with the prophets

The Lord sends Jibrā’il to console and reassure Ādam of his forgiveness and future blessings (āśirvāda); his sufferings would become his adornment (yatha duḥkhā paśī tumhi sāba alaṅkāra). The Lord then instructs him to reside henceforth in Makkā. Upon reaching Makkā, Ādam sat upon the rock of Chaphā, while Hāoyā upon the rock of Māruyā.1056 Then the Lord instructs Ādam to build a house dedicated to him,1057 at Makkā, with the help of all the angels. The Lord indicates the position and size of the house by placing a cloud (mēhu) of the appropriate size in the desired spot.1058 Along with the four archangels Ādam prepares the house for God. Ādam becomes a house builder (grha-ojhā),1059 hence, he is called the caretaker (mehetara) of the house.1060 The house complete, Ādam prostrates to God, with the angels behind him. The angels then prostrate to Ādam. In this manner, the angels and Ādam ever prostrate before God within the house of Makkā. Sultān says: “One who circumambulates this house will gain such virtue that one will be delivered.”1061

On the Lord’s command, Jibrā’il strokes Ādam’s back. At this moment, all the beings who would take birth in the future become manifest. When he stroked his back again Nūr Muhammad becomes manifest to his right, while all the other one lakh and forty thousand prophets and avatāras gather to his left side. Once again, when he stroked Ādam’s back all that

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1056 Chaphā and Māruyā are the Bengalized versions of the Arabic al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, two mounts at Mecca, which “mark the beginning and conclusion of the course taken by the pilgrims... whose traversing forms... the prelude to the hajj proper.” Joel 2011. Concerning this narrative (rearranged in his account by Sultān), see Thackston 1997, 65.

1057 The Kaʿba is also known as bayt Allāh, the “house of God.” Wensinck 2011b.

1058 The “cloud” is introduced in the Ibrāhīm cycle in al-Kisāʾī, when God orders Ibrāhīm to build the Kaʿba. Thackston 1997, 154.

1059 An ojhā ordinarily means “cikitsaka,” “one who treats an illness,” and especially one who treats victims of snake-bite. Kāium and Sultān 2007, s.v. “ojhā.” In the present context, however, I have translated ojhā as builder, but it could probably also mean someone who fixes, restores, and renovates houses.

1060 Among other things, mihtar in Persian can mean “prince, lord, chief, governor; a sweeper, a menial who removes filth; a groom.” Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “mihtar.”

would ever be created became manifest. And, when Jibrāil stroked his back yet again, a great darkness spread which worried Ādam deeply. He was told that this was a sign that augured the birth of his son, Kābil, who would kill his own brother, Hābil. To his right, then, Ādam saw before him Hābil, who spread a smile upon Ādam’s face, which dissolved into weeping at the foreknowledge of his murder by Kābil. Having gathered all creatures before him, Nirañjana asked each one to pledge his allegiance to him, their creator and preserver. He then commanded that each one of them should provide a written covenant (kabul patra). With the sun and the moon as special witnesses, the contracts were gathered and placed upon a black stone, named Āsoyād. The Lord instructs Āsoyād to open its mouth so that he might place the covenant-tablets (vajra patra) within it. By this undertaking, Āsoyād is made witness to the covenants of the prophets. “All those who responded [through pledge] to the Lord,” says Sultān, “were born as good (bhāla) mahājana in the world.”

5.3.1.8 Agriculture

Ādam begins to feel pangs of hunger. Jibrāila brings a pair of oxen and a ploughshare and teaches Ādam to plough the land, so that his sons and grandsons could eat regularly by farming the land. On seeing the wheat that Jibrāil has brought from Paradise, Ādam is distraught. However, Jibrāil comforts him and instructs him to sow a single grain of wheat. A hundred grains grew out of this one grain. And when Ādam sowed these hundred, a hundred thousand grew; thence a lakh; thence a crore; and thence an immeasurable sea of wheat.

1062 The narrative provided in this paragraph, thus far, closely follows al-Kisāʾī’s. Ibid., 63.
1063 From Arabic aswad, “black,” the black stone is a reference to al-ḥajar al-aswad, the Black Stone of the Kaʿba. Wensinck 2011b.
1064 ye sakale paduttara prabhure bulilā | sei bhāla mahājana jagate janmilā || NV 1: 107. This entire section is a summary of ibid., 102–107.
When the wheat ripens, Jibrāil teaches Ādam and Hāoyā to cut the stalks, thresh the grain, grind it into flour, and make bread (rūṭi). When Jibrāil brings them fire to cook food upon, Hāoyā makes a delicious sandeśa, a delectable Bengali sweet. After eating this, Ādam and Hāoyā consumed some bread. Soon they needed to relieve themselves, and are confused by the foul smell that exudes from their bodies. When they report this to Jibrāil, he explains how food that is eaten putrifies to become faeces, which, when excreted, produces a foul smell. Hearing this, Ādam feels ashamed, and pines for Paradise, where such vile things as urine and faeces (malamūtra) do not exist.\footnote{This is a summary of NV 1: 107–110. Cf. Thackston 1997, 67–70. Although Eaton (1993, 308) uses this NV account to support his theory of the expansion of agriculture in East Bengal via Muslim pioneers, this particular account, based as it is upon al-KisāṬ’s original text, does not bolster his argument in any substantial way, other than the consideration that to be included in Sultān’s translation, the author deems it to be relevant to Bengal. Al-KisāṬ’s narrative on Ādam as cultivator shows that Eaton’s (1993, n. 6: 308) statement—“in the Muslim world, the perception of Adam as the first cultivator, and of his taking up cultivation at the command of God, may be a uniquely Bengali variant”—is misleading.}

5.3.1.9 Conjugal life

Then Jibrāil brings down from Paradise a special substance. Ādam has one-tenth of it, while Hāoyā has the remaining nine-tenths. This, according to the author, gives women more vigour (vega, literally, swiftness) than men; it gives them nine times the sexual desire of men. Jibrāil also brings down three seeds (bīja) for Ādam, who consumes two, and gives one to devī: this is the reason why women have less wealth (vitta) than men. This is also the reason why a woman has one husband, while a man can have several wives. And this is the reason why sons are entitled to two portions of their father’s wealth as compared to daughters.

A cot (khāṭa), then, descends from Paradise; Ādam and Hāoya sit upon it, while Jibrāil draws a curtain (antaspāṭa) around the cot. Upon it are placed a large carpet (gālicā) and smaller ones (dulicā), and a mattress (gadi) for the two to recline upon. All day and all night, together with
each other, Ādam and Hāoyā begin to desire each other. “Internally there is regret for their passion (madana kheda),” says Sultān:

...on their faces, abashment.
In Ādam’s mind is the hope of enjoying sexual pleasure.
Ādam near Hāoyā, in the middle of the bed,
was like the king of the bees near a free-standing lotus.
Even as the cakora bird waits in the hope of the moon,
even as the day-lotus blooms upon seeing the sun,
even as the cuckoo becomes restless seeing the [new] shoots in disarray,
so does Ādam desire to remain united with Hāoyā’s body.
The Lord, knowing the hope in Ādam’s mind,
commanded him to enjoy sexual pleasure with the lady.
Jibrāil instructs Ādam accordingly;
he orders him to enjoy sex with the lady.
Having received the order, Ādam takes Hāoyā onto his lap....
When the noble woman remained with her face downwards inclined,
Ādam began to speak sweet words:
“Come, moon-faced beloved, look upon my face,
break my mind’s pain of separation.
Seeing your moon-face, my cakora-eyes
wait, my mind bedazzled, for nectar to descend.”
Hearing this, love was born in Hāoyā’s mind.
She looked at him through sidelong glances, smiling slightly.
Ādam is struck by the arrows of her glances from [the bow of] her twin eyebrows:
Hāoyā has made Ādam’s mind-bird captive.
In great infatuation, he embraces her,
kissing her intensely upon her forehead.
When one desires to eat food,
one, first, stretches out one’s hand carefully for salt....
Even as food is not tasty without salt,
sex, without kisses, is not by any means decorous.
When a drunken bee finds flower-fragrance,
it endeavors to drink the honey.
When a pearl-trader (maṇiru)\textsuperscript{1066} finds unperforated pearls,
he pierces them and passes a thread through them.
In order to do battle, when he spurred the horse,
he could not find the battleground to goad it towards.
Then, making his hooves resound, like the best of horses,
involved in the effort, he began to perspire heavily.
The father of the world and the world’s mother
experienced love-making, feeling pleasure at heart.\textsuperscript{1067}

\textsuperscript{1066} Maṇiru is unattested in any dictionary. I have used Haq’s (1957, 55) translation of this word, which seems to be a dialectal word used in Chittagong.

\textsuperscript{1067} antare madana kheda mukhe lajā ati ādamera mane āśā bhunijite surati ādame hāoyāra sāe šayanera mājha / mukala kamala pāše yena alirāja / cakora rahae yena šaśodara āse / divākara dekhi yena nalinī vikāše /
They then bathe, in order to remove the sweat of their exertions. They salute the Lord when they descend to bathe. This pleases the Lord, who instructs Jibrāil to take down some adornments for Hāoyā. The pair is delighted. Hāoyā applies the perfumes of Paradise and sandal-paste over her breasts. She adorns her ears with celestial earrings; applies kājala to her eyes; puts a necklace of elephant-pearls (gaja-muti) around her neck. A detailed description of Hāoyā’s adorned body, accompanied by sensual imagery, follows.

Hāoyā soon conceives. The first foetus, however, is spontaneously aborted. This, according to the text, is the reason why women menstruate. The second time Hāoyā conceives, her pregnancy made her feel lazy and sleepy all the while. Seeing his wife in this condition, the concerned Ādam begins to fan her with a yak’s tail (cāmara); he prays for his wife’s good health and smooth pregnancy.

Iblis appears before Hāoyā in the form of an angel. He insinuates that she has conceived a donkey (gardabha), and offers to help her abort the foetus. Hāoyā manages to keep the child. Iblis tells her to name the child Ābul Hāris. Accordingly, when the child is born she gives it this name. Jibrāil reprimands her, explaining Iblis’ subterfuge: Hāris is Iblis’ alias. 1068 He warns her

1068 Concerning al-Ḥārith being another name for Iblis, see Kister 1993, 121–122. See also al-Kisāʾī’s account below.
not to keep such impure, inauspicious names for the sons that would be born to her in the future.

Ādam and Hāoyā grieve over the christening of their firstborn and curse him to die. On his death, Hāoyā grieves over her son, but soon conceives again. This time the angels comfort her, saying that she should not worry over the naming of her child, as they themselves would provide her with an appropriate name at the right time. This time around she bears twins: a male and a female. The male child was named Ābdur Rahmān. The next time she conceives, she again bears twins, in gendered pairs; the male child was named Ābdur Rahīm. In this manner, Hāoyā bore several generations of twins: one half was male, and the other half female.¹⁰⁶⁹

5.3.1.10 Ādam’s split line and the death of Ādam and Hāoyā

Now begins the extended tale-cycle of Hābil and Kābil, the adversarial sons of Ādam and Hāoyā; Kābil’s murder of Hābil for the sake of Ākimā, Kābil’s beautiful twin given to Hābil in marriage as per God’s orders to Ādam and Hāoyā, prohibiting the marriage of twins; Ākimā’s cautiśā, her lament, in acrostic form, for her murdered husband, Hābil;¹⁰⁷⁰ and Kābil’s kidnap of Ākimā, followed by a lengthy description of Kābil and Ākimā’s union (milan), sexual enjoyments, and conjugal life (sambhoga and dāmpatya).

Next we have an account of the death of Ādam. On his deathbed, Ādam asks the Lord to give him the title of rasul; the lord, being pleased with his devotions, grants him the title of nabi.¹⁰⁷¹ Ādam makes his son, Śis, his heir, and commands him to exterminate Kābil and his race, should

¹⁰⁶⁹ In this section, Sultān closely follows al-Kisā’ī’s account. Thackston 1997, 72–73.
¹⁰⁷⁰ Other examples of the cautiśā employed as lament in Islamic Bangla literature are: “Vīrabhānēra Cautiśā” in Koreśī Māgan Ṭhākura’s Candrāvatī; “Laylīra Cautiśā” in Daulat Ujīr Bahrām Khān’s Lālī Majnu; Sekh Phayjullāh’s Jaynabera Cautiśā; and the anonymous Sakhināra Cautiśā. Sultānā 2007, 16–17.
¹⁰⁷¹ NV 1: 169. It is unclear, whether Sultān is using the terms nabi and rasul as synonyms, as he does elsewhere in the text, or whether he is making the traditional Islamic distinction between the two terms, a rasul being one who is sent down with a message or book, while a nabi does not bear either. Rubin 2011b.
he not change his evil ways. On his deathbed, Ādam teaches Śiś the science of ethics (nīti śāstra).

When he passes away, his body is carried to Paradise by the angels, but is brought down again to Kuphā, on Śiś’s request, and the angels together with the grieving Śiś bury his father’s body. Overcome by anguish on the death of her husband, Hāoyā moans a plangent vilāpa cautīśā, in the style of a bāramāśī, a song that charts the separation of the heroine from her lover through the twelve months,

\[
\text{In the month of caitra, my husband went far into the distance.}
\]
\[
\text{My body burns with the sound of the cuckoo’s kuhu.}
\]
\[
\text{The beloved of my life, my husband, has slipped away from me.}
\]
\[
\text{No more has a union between him and me come about.}
\]
\[
\text{How should I hold on to life? Who will tell me the means?}
\]
\[
\text{In separation from Ādam, it is impossible to clutch on to life.}
\]
\[
\text{Vaiśākha came, making the various flowers blossom;}
\]
\[
\text{all the bees sip honey joyfully.}
\]
\[
\text{I am that unfortunate flower of Ādam’s blossoming,}
\]
\[
\text{whose bee-husband is not near.}
\]
\[
\text{Unruly jyeṣṭha arrived with sweltering heat;}
\]
\[
\text{musk and saffron are like fire to the limbs.}
\]
\[
\text{The southern breeze is like Śamana, the god of death.}
\]
\[
\text{Becoming fire, it ever burns my life.}
\]
\[
\text{In āṣāḍha, the entire world is pervaded with water.}
\]
\[
\text{The piu piu sounds of the birds is delightful.}
\]
\[
\text{My cātaka-beloved has gone off into the distance.}
\]
\[
\text{Having become a raincloud, I remain alone.}
\]
\[
\text{In śrāvaṇa, water flows ceaselessly as rain;}
\]
\[
\text{On the mountains, the peacock dances in happiness.}
\]
\[
\text{The water of my sinful peacock has been disappeared.}
\]
\[
\text{She lives alone in the midst of this smouldering sea.}
\]
\[
\text{In the month of bhādra, it rains extremely heavily.}
\]
\[
\text{My dark nights are this empty dwelling.}
\]
\[
\text{I feel fear, hearing the tumult of all the insects.}
\]
\[
\text{Alone in bed, my mind ever trembles.}
\]
\[
\text{Ināśvina, the sun is spotless, the skies bright.}
\]

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1072 This is the NV’s self-description of Hāoyā’s lament. NV 1: 174. Technically speaking, the cautīśā, as we have seen employed in the case of Ākimā’s lament above, is an acrostic poem, which was among other literary usages, also employed for the lament particularly popularized by the Bengali Muslim literatii. Though Hāoyā’s lament, which is not written as an acrostic, falls more properly in the bāramāśī genre, because of the cautīśā’s association with the lament in Islamic Bangla literature, it seems that it was used in the premodern context to designate other genres such as the bāramāśī which were also associated with the identical theme of love in separation.

1073 For more on this genre, characteristic of premodern Bangla literature, see Vaudeville 1986.
I feel sad when I see the white earth.
I apply musk and sandal paste upon my limbs,
[for even] moonlight feels like fire to me.
In the month of kārtika, winter is newly manifest.
In the four directions, I see the blossoming of flowers.
Seeing this, my limbs tremble in fear.
Remembering my husband's love, my breath does not stay within me.
In agrāna the dense new crops emerge.
My mind does not appreciate all these gifts.
Without my husband these are like poison to me.
I am naturally unfortunate; I will abandon life.
Entering pausa, the days are long.
Having become a single woman, how shall I pass my days?
The wretched darkness is extremely fearsome.
How often do I stay awake upon my bed!
In māgha, the numbing, extremely bitter cold.
My mind feels fear at the sight of it.
If I were to encounter my lord at such a time,
I would want to cling [to him], bosom to bosom.
In phālguna the worthless, wretched winds blow.
The ever intoxicated best of elephants trumpets ceaselessly.
Seeing this my mind trembles in fear.
Without a husband, my body has become sullied with dust.
When this wind began to blow strongly,
she conversed [thus], addressing the wind,
"Convey to my husband's feet, O Wind,
that I remember him unfailingly."
Having spoken this to the wind, the lady
remained unconscious for some time.
When the lady regained consciousness again,
she called all her sons and grandsons to her.
Addressing her sons, she reassured them.
Thinking of her love, the lady released her breath.
Taking the name of the lord of her life, with that breath,
she left her body, remembering her lord.

Upon Hāoyā's death her children lament her passing. Next Śiṣ captures the elusive Kābil with
Jibrā'il's help. When Kābil refuses to become a Muslim, Śiṣ keeps him imprisoned, where he
ultimately dies of humiliation. His body is eaten by vultures, herons, and jackals. After the
account of Kābil's death follows an epic five-part battle between the righteous forces of Śiṣ and

those of Kābil’s dark line. This is followed by accounts of the descent of scripture (B. ohi, Ar. wahi) to Śiś, and his passing on.\textsuperscript{1075}

5.3.2 \textit{Narratological Features and Themes of the Ādam Cycle}

As can be seen from this detailed synopsis of the \textit{NV}'s tale-cycle of Ādam, which has been systematically tallied with al-Kisāʾī’s account, Saiyad Sultān’s narrative is clearly indebted to the latter. While certain of al-Kisāʾī’s expressions and peculiarities of description are captured in almost word-for-word translation into Bangla\textsuperscript{1076}—a matter corroborated by the cosmogonical sections of Chapter Four, which also drew upon al-Kisāʾī—the \textit{NV}'s narrative sections usually follow the broad outlines set in place by al-Kisāʾī, shading these in with descriptive features, idiomatic expressions, and literary conventions relevant to Islamic Bengal. Thus, Ādam’s body is described as a microcosm, in a manner befitting a Bengali Sufi, making liberal use of the terminology of \textit{dehatattva} (the principles of the esoteric body); the first food item Hāyoā prepares is \textit{sandeśa}; and Ākimā grieves for the murdered Hābil through an elaborate \textit{cautiśā}, a lament written as an acrostic, while Hāyoā’s lament for her deceased husband is presented as a \textit{bāramāśī}. As a rule, Sultān excises even the limited bio-bibliographic information provided by al-Kisāʾī, such sources presumably bearing little relevance for Bengal, in general, and specifically to contemporary Islamic Bangla oral traditions (\textit{riwāya}) on the prophets,\textsuperscript{1077} while presenting potential obstacles to narrative flow.

\textsuperscript{1075} A synopsis of ibid., 119–247. Cf. Concerning Al-Kisāʾī’s relatively terse account of this section, see Thackston 1997, 77–87.

\textsuperscript{1076} Such comments should be taken as tentative, as these are based upon W. M. Thackston’s English translation of the original. A more detailed study of the original Arabic text will be undertaken in the future.

\textsuperscript{1077} I am grateful to Jamal J. Elias for his discussion of this idea. Personal correspondence, August 8, 2011. See also Leder 2011.
Emphasis is instead placed upon performative and pedagogical elements of the plot. In keeping with these aims, characteristic of the pāñcāli, Sultān consolidates narrative action in al-Kisāṭ, drawing materials from separate sections into a single narrative unit. This, for instance, is the case with Sultān’s account of the earthly reunion of Ādam and Hāoyā, which consolidates al-Kisāṭ’s more scattered narrative into a coherent account. Sultān innovates in other ways too in this section, bringing us to the second important feature of his narratalogical style: he taps the potentially performative elements of al-Kisāṭ’s slim narrative, opening it out to incorporate descriptive, rasātmaka elements appropriate to the performance of sacred biography, whether by way of pathos (karuṇa rasa), such as through the portrayal of the viraha bhāva Hāoyā experiences in separation from Ādam, or by way of the madhura/śrīgāra rasa of their happy reunion. Descriptions of the delight sacred figures take in profane pleasures is germane to Sanskrit and Bangla literature, but unprecedented for Muslim prophets, whom Sultān now roots in the South Asian mythos of love through highly formulaic descriptions deliberately imitative of the classical idiom. Entertainment value aside, such eroticized representations of loving couples in the NV, on the other hand, serve to connect the Muslim prophets to a long genealogy of fabled divine lovers, of epic and purāṇic fame, who populate the Hindu pantheon. Such association of the prophets with sexual desire encourages the premodern Bengali auditors to accept them more readily—humanizing them but, more significantly, deifying them. By making the prophets partake of the characteristic erotic pastimes of Hindu gods, Sultān draws them into their celebrated company, consecrating the prophets with their mantle of godliness.

Other than Ādam and Hāoyā, the NV provides highly sensuous representations of Kābil and Ākimā’s romance (NV 1: 154–157) as well as the love between the Prophet Muhammad’s parents, Ābdullāh and Āmīnā (ibid., 26–27). Hari’s debaucherous love-affairs are also recounted in some detail, as we will see below. Ibrāhīm-Sārā, Solemān-Bilkīs, Jākāriyā-Mariyām are other celebrated pairs in the NV, whose relationships are not eroticized.
To aid the memory of his auditors, Sultān periodically places relevant recapitulations of the plot—a third feature of Sultān’s narratology—in the mouths of one of his protagonists. Hāoyā, for instance, provides her svarga vārtā to Ādam upon their reunion.1079 Lengthy pedagogical sections tailored to teach Bengali auditors about Islamic ethics and eschatology—a fourth feature of Sultān’s prophetological accounts—are also introduced in the Ādam cycle. One such example is a detailed report of the eschatological functions of the four archangels provided as a preamble to the narrative on their endeavours to bring back clay from the earth’s surface for the creation of Ādam;1080 another account of the specific functions of Ājrāil, the angel of Death, is found at the end of this section.1081

Other divergences between the NV’s account of Ādam and that of al-Kisāʾī are a matter of subtle differences in inflection, accomplished through omission of content or through a change in emphasis on the source content adopted. Whereas al-Kisāʾī’s account tacitly assumes the principle of the Nūr Muhammad in his emphasis on Ādam’s role as primordial witness to the pre-existence of Muhammad and Islam, Sultān explicitly highlights Ādam’s affirmations of this principle, presenting him as the genealogical mediator between the primordial Muhammad and the corporeal prophet. Sultān places greater emphasis than al-Kisāʾī on “genealogical legitimation”1082 of Muhammad via Ādam and vice versa, and upon Ādam’s vice-regency before the angels (through God’s insistence of their prostration before Ādam), but lesser value on Ādam as a rasūl, a messenger sent down with a scripture, although his dying request for the title of prophet, as we have seen, is explicitly honored by God. Thus, al-Kisāʾī’s account of God teaching Ādam the names of all things, and his subsequent preaching to the angels from a

1082 This is Donner’s (1998, 104) term for one among many styles of legitimation used by the early community of Muslims in evaluating claims to privilege, which I find useful in discussing prophetology.
pulpit demonstrating this knowledge to them, is entirely excised from Sultān’s account. Also omitted is the account of God’s revelation to Ādam of “the twenty-eight letters which are in the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms and the Koran.”

The connection between Nūr Muhammad and Ādam is further strengthened in Book Two of the NV, where the creation of Ādam is supposedly recapitulated, whereas the story is actually retold with a stronger emphasis upon this primordial principle:

When the Lord wished to create Ādam, he installed a portion (aṃśa) of himself within Ādam. Taking light (nūr) from his companion, Nūr Muhammad, Nirañjana placed it within Ādam’s body. A small portion of Nūr Muhammad became an adornment (avatamsa) upon Ādam’s forehead. In order to propagate Nūr Muhammad upon the earth, the Lord gave Ādam all this wealth. Emanating from Nūr Muhammad, this portion alighted upon Ādam’s back, arising like the full moon. From his back, it came upon his forehead, and spread like great radiance upon his forehead. When the angels saw this light, they recognized Ādam and saluted him. Seeing this Ādam felt fear at heart; he was greatly shocked at the angels’ salutations. With consternation at heart, Ādam Saphī asks the Lord, the beginningless treasury, the formless one, “For what reason do all these angels make obeisance to me, an insignificant sinner?” Knowing Ādam to be embarrassed, the Lord spoke to him, so as to reassure him, “A certain Nūr Muhammad is the pure, best of companions. Their seeing his portion (aṃśa) upon your forehead is the reason why all the angels prostrated before you. Why do you feel fear at heart? Even as the sun shines clearly upon the water contained within a clay pot, so too has the form of Nūr Muhammad arisen, spreading upon your forehead.”

1084 Ibid., 73–77, at 74.
Hearing this Ādam Saphī prostrated, and asked the Lord to make him see that light (nūr). Then the Lord commanded the light upon Ādam's forehead to illuminate two fingernails. Alighting upon Ādam's twin thumbs, the nūr arose like the full moon. Seeing the nūr, Ādam was greatly overjoyed, and applied the light of those nails to his eyes. Then when Ādam arrived upon the earth, he enjoyed much pleasure with Hāoyā. Many sons and daughters were born of Ādam; a ray of light (aṃśu) remained within each of his sons. Again when the noble lady conceived, the great Śiś was born within this womb. The nūr of the unit soul (jīvāttamā) entered into Śiś's body; radiantly stationed there, it spread its light.  

Through Śiś, the Nūr Muhammad passed from one prophet to another (all individually listed by Sultān), through Ibrāhīm's son, Ismāıl, and through him to the Arab ancestors of Muhammad, reaching Ābdullā, Muhammad's father, through whom it entered the corporeal Muhammad. Thus, Sultān concludes this section with these lines:

A tiny bit of Nūr Muhammad's soul (jīvāttamā) entered Ābdullā's body, arising [there] incomparably. This stable nūr from Nūr Muhammad which shone upon Ādam's forehead, came down successively (krame krame) to Ābdullā, arising like the full moon.  

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In this manner, Sultān reifies the tradition that Ādam was surnamed Ābū Muhammad.1088 Other narrative tropes in the NV also support the theme of “genealogical legitimation,” and the close relationship between Ādam and Muhammad. Like Muhammad, Ādam is often referred to as the Lord’s sakhā, companion.1089 At Muhammad’s birth, all the prophets and their wives, foremost among whom are Ādam and Hāoyā, gather around Aminā. Ādam takes the infant into his arms, and recognizing him to be of his own line, kisses him upon the forehead. All the prophets pray the *durūd*1090 around him, hail him as the ādi-antera rasul, the first and the last messenger,1091 and give him their blessings; they collectively endorse his immunity to Iblis, and infallibility as a leader of his umma.1092

5.4 An Overview of the Tale-cycles from Śiś to Īsā

The narratological features and the theme of genealogical legitimation in the Ādam cycle are common to all the pre-Muhammadan prophetic tale-cycles of the NV that follow Ādam, though there is no emphasis on the Nūr Muhammad in these tale-cycles. The major cycles of Nūh, Ibrāhim, Musā, Dāud, Solemān, and Īsā all follow the broad narrative outlines set in place by al-Kisāʾī, but, as is the case with the Ādam cycle, here too Sultān excises minor tales which he deems irrelevant, inflects the tales he adopts differently, and reconfigures the narratological

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1087 *nāra muhammadera kićiṭa jivāttamā / ābadullāra ḡhāṭeta udīta niupāmā || nūra muḥammadā honte ehi sthāyva nūra / ādamera lalāteta āchīla ujhara || sei nūra ābadullāe krame krame āsī / udīta haila yena pūrṇimāra ṣāṣī || NV 2: 14.

1088 Kister 1993, 128.

1089 Regarding Ādam, note *tomhā sakhā hena yabe bulila uttara / kenhe kṛpā nā karīnu tāhāra upara || and mohora sakhāra ‘pare kṛpā kailā ati / mora kṛpā tomhā / pare hauka pratīnīti || NV 1: 81; and tomhāre sājiche prabha tribhuvana sārā / tomhā sama prabhura sakhā nāhi āra || NV 1: 169. For Muhammad as the Lord’s sakhā, see earlier in this chapter, and also Chapter Seven.

1090 The *durūd* or *ṣalawāt sharifa* is the blessing formula for the Prophet, mentioned in Sūra 33:56 of the Qurʾān. In popular Muslim piety, it is recited by believers to secure the Prophet’s intercession. Used also as a *dhikr* formula, it takes its place in popular piety as the most important formula other than the *shahāda* and the *basmala*. Buhl et al. 2011.

1091 Explained below.

1092 NV 2: 54–55.
style and idiom to suit the needs of pāṭcāli performance and its regional context. While the minor tales of Idris, Oj, Balaām Bāur, and Khoyāj Khijir find a place in the NV, the stories of Hūd and Šāliḥ are replaced with tales of the early Muslim saintly figure, Ḥāsān Basorī (Ḥasan of Basrā, d. 110/728), and a certain Varosiya, who fails to heed his guru’s commands, thus bringing about his downfall. Most other subsidiary tale cycles, such as those of Ayyūb and Shu‘ayb, are also excised.

As in al-Kisāʾī, great emphasis is placed throughout the NV’s prophetology upon the pre-Islamic prophets’ affirmations of Islam through their bearing witness to the kalimā, through their piety as good Muslims, and their endorsement of Islamic ethical practice. This is also a feature of the Qur’ānic prophetological narratives, which has led Alfred-Louis de Prémare to speak of the “monoprophetism” of the Qur’ān and of Islam. As in al-Kisāʾī, the cycles of Nūh and Ibrāhīm stress Islam’s proscription against idolatry and the necessity of iconoclasm (mūrtī bhāṅgana) on the part of these prophets, whenever such worship is encountered. This is to be understood in the context of the Lord being the only one who can bequeath life to an image, as he does in the case of Ādam. In an effort to dissuade them from their idolatrous ways, Śiś questions his nephews, the children of Kābil, thus:

Why do you dispute Niraṅjana?
Other than the Lord, who can construct an image?
Even if one were to construct it, one could not bequeath it with life.
Having been constructed, it cannot stand up;
it has two legs, but still cannot walk.
Why do you not worship him who has made you?
Having yourself created it [the idol], why do you worship it?
For the welfare of human beings

1093 For a sampler of verses culled from the NV’s prophetology that show Sultān’s cultural localizations, see Sharif [1972] 2006, 199–220.
1094 For Idris, see NV 1: 289–305; and Thackston 1997, 87–91. For Oj, see NV 1: 647–655; and Thackston 1997, 251–253. For Balaām Bāur, see NV 1: 655–662; and Thackston 1997, 244–245. For Khoyāj Khijir, see NV 1: 672–687; and Thackston 1997, 247–250.
the Lord created copper and such like. Having constructed images out of this copper and brass, why do you become prostrate [before these], becoming bereft of intelligence?
The mute, the black, and the blind are highly despised on earth. Then why do you have such regard for these [idols], feeling confused in mind?
The idols neither see, nor hear, nor speak. Why do you worship them, becoming bereft of intelligence?
You will receive no fruit through worshipping them. Becoming unsuccessful, why, in vain, do you [still] worship them?
No good will accrue to you through them; [rather], having worshipped them, great sin will befall you.

If Āllā’s servants worship others the Maker (karatāra) becomes extremely irate with them. He has created you from a drop of water. Not worshipping him, why do you worship others?... Abandoning the worship of the one who creates you beautifully, by giving you life, you worship others.1097

Besides being descendants of a parricidal murderer, Kābil’s line is doubly sinful in Sultān’s eyes because of their proclivity towards idolatry; it is because of the latter, an emphasis not found in al-Kisāʾī’s Śiʿ cycle, that Śiʿ crusades against Kābil’s descendants, fighting five, terrible, protracted battles. In the NV, it is Iblis who first teaches Kābil and his wife Ākimā to worship idols. Sorely missing their parents, Kābil and Ākimā receive their benefactor Iblis, who arrives with words of comfort, advising them to create images of Ādam and Háoyā—such that Kābil and Ākimā would feel their absence no more, that they could serve and worship them as though in real life, a practice that is later followed by all of Kābil’s tribe. However, this is Iblis’...
wicked ploy to pack Hell with sinners. And the righteous Śiś attempts to reform Kābil and his
descendants.\footnote{NV 1: 163–168. In al-Kisāṭī, Śiś fights Kābil in order to avenge his parricide of Ḥābil. Thackston 1997, 85–85. This dimension is downplayed in the NV, which instead highlights the idolatory of Kābil and his progeny. Furthermore, the five-part battle between Śiś and Kābil’s descendants is purely Sultān’s invention, and is designed to prepare the auditors for the Hari cycle. Thackston 1997, 167–192.}

The epic wars between the honorable Śiś and the idolatrous descendants of Kābil, who even
after capture by Śiś refuses to abandon his ways to become a good Musalmān, sets the stage for
the tale-cycle of a new prophet, born of the sinful and idolatrous line of Kābil, who like him is
held up as a warning (‘ibār) to the people of Bengal. Sultān wholly excises al-Kisāṭī’s tale-cycle
of the beautiful Iusuph/Isuph (Ar. Yūsuf), which falls between the cycles of Ibrāhīm and
Musā,\footnote{Passing mention is made of Iusuph, in the NV, following the account of the death of Musā. Having outlined the relationships between Iusuph, Ġyākub (his father), and Iusuph’s jealous brothers, the author states, “Everyone has heard about all these subjects. For this reason, I do not put it into verse.” isahāka rasulera pradhāna tanaya | nāma Ġyākub payagāmbara mahāśaya | eyākub rasulera chila die nārī | ati pativratā chila prathama sūndari | prathama nārīra gurba die putra hailā | die putra dvītiya nārīthu janamalī | ehi die suteru gaurava rākhi mane | āpanāra nīkṣe rākhilā anukṣe | eka chauyālara rahila iusupha nāma | sarvagnē viśārada rūpe anupāma | kaniṣṭera nāma ibana âmīna rākhilā | yatna kari vṛddha nab nābōha pālīlā | ehi daśa sahodara e die bhāire | bājera gaurava dekhi dekhibāre nāre | sūnicha e sava parastāva sarvajane | padabandhe muṇi nā kahilum tekāraṇe | NV 1: 697.} and places in its stead the narrative of another beautiful, if unexpected figure, also
coveted by women—the prophet Hari—to create his most daring innovation yet in Islamic
prophetology.\footnote{NV 1: 167–192.} Throughout the NV, as in al-Kisāṭī, the trickster, Iblis, plays his trademark role
of deceiving prophets and humankind, but is nowhere more active than in his encounter with
Hari, to which we will now turn.
Chapter Six

Hari the Failed Prophet: A Warning to the People of Bengal

6.1 Introduction

Saiyad Sultān singles out Hari [Krṣṇa] as the only Hindu god to punctuate the line of the traditional Islamic prophets after Ādam. Interposed between the tale-cycles on Ibrāhim and Musā, this narrative unit on Hari gives pause for thought. In this chapter, I argue that the inclusion of this morally suspect and utterly unsuccessful prophet—one of the most popular deities of medieval Bengal—in the tale-cyles of the prophets, spells the appropriation and subsumption of this native arch-rival, exemplifying Sultān’s endeavor to minimize local competition to the Prophet of Islam. Beginning with a narrative outline of Sultān’s account of Hari, I show how the author’s tendentious account of this erstwhile god and newly-turned prophet displays intimate knowledge not merely of the Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇava tradition and its key textual sources, such as the Harivamśa and the tenth book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, whose stories he retells to suit his ends, but with contemporary Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇava doctrine and ritual. I then turn to Sultān’s use of the concept of the avatāra, his arguments against avatārarāvāda, the
doctrine of descent, a doctrine historically traceable to Vaiṣṇavism, examining how it compares with his understanding of the nabī, prophet, and the classical Islamic conception of nubuwwa, prophethood.

Sultān’s polemic against Hari, from one point of view, can be placed alongside other later works written by Bengali Muslim authors of Chittagong, such as Ābdul Hākim’s Iusuph-Jalikhā, wherein the upright Yūsuf is constructed as an “anti-Kṛṣṇa.”101 In such an understanding, Sultān’s critique of Kṛṣṇa could be seen as a good Muslim’s alarm over the erotic excesses of Vaiṣṇava cults, which had longstanding traditions in East Bengal, particularly Sylhet. However, I see in Sultān’s tale of Hari something far more than mere moral outrage at some of Vaiṣṇavism’s cultic “excesses.” That Sultān is, in fact, disputing the Gauṛīyas, the followers of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, rather than Bengal’s Vaiṣṇavas in general, is easy to overlook since the author makes no specific mention of the sect and its founder, Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. Indeed by being careful not to name any single sect, Sultān is able to draw multiple interpretive communities into the text’s embrace. Perhaps with the exception of his descriptions of kīrtana being sung and danced in public spaces,102 all his descriptions of Vaiṣṇava praxis (the worship of the yugalamūrti of Rādhā-Kānāi, avatāravāda, and so on) could be considered to point to those religious elements germane to Bengal’s various Vaiṣṇava groups. His allusions to the androgynous avatāra of Caitanya, as we will see, are not obvious, but need teasing out.

101 D’Hubert 2006–7, 133.
102 sabhāne jānanta mane se acāra bhāla | kahu punya pāe hena bhāvilā gopāla || tekāraṇē rādhāre kānai mūrti kari | sadāe bhāvanta sabe suddha bhāva kari || mṛdaṅga kānāla saṅkha vāhe sarvajana | harira parādāra keli sabe uccārana || vāhena gāye sabe padāghāta diyā | harira parādāra sabe kahe uccārīyā || NV 1: 498–499. See also ibid., 497. “All knew in their hearts that this practice was commendable. It is said that virtue accrues from contemplating Gopāla in this manner. For that reason, having made idols of Rādhā and Kānāi, continually contemplating [of them] while having purified their feelings, all play the mṛdaṅga drum, the kānāla/karnāla wind instrument, and the conch, enunciating the play of Hari with the married women. While playing, all sing, stepping [to the beat], pronouncing all the [names of] Hari’s married women.” Translation mine. Sanyāl (1989, Chapter Two) puts forward the argument that dancing in samkīrtana was an innovation of Caitanya. The descriptions of kīrtana provided in the NV seem to be those of public expressions of singing and dancing with musical accompaniment. This strongly suggests to me that what Sultān is referring to is Gaurīya nagara kīrtanas.
I argue, however, that the Hari episode has to be read within two crucial contexts to recognize that Sultān is indeed implicitly targetting the Gaurīyas. The first of these contexts is socio-historical, and refers to the contemporary developments in Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava missionizing. Tony Stewart’s illuminating study of the history of the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇava movement in the early part of the seventeenth century, the organizational edifice that Śrīnivāsa Ācārya and Narottamdāsa raised upon the doctrinal consolidations of the Caitanyacaritāmṛta, and the events that culminated in the great festival at Kheturi, all provide this crucial socio-historical context for understanding Sultān’s invective against Hari, the supreme deity of the Gaurīyas.\(^{103}\) From Stewart’s analysis it becomes clear that the momentous gathering at Kheturi organized the community in ways that galvanized it into a potent force, whose ripple effects must have spread to the easternmost reaches of Bengal, unsettling the likes of Sufis such as Sultān. There can be no doubt that while smaller Vaiṣṇava cults might have posed little or no competition to Islam, on the other hand, Gaurīya missionary activity, at its zenith during Sultān’s day, was perceived by Sufi preachers to be the single greatest threat to Islam’s expansion in Bengal.

The second crucial context is that of reading the Hari episode within the grand narrative of the NV. If the Gaurīyas were not perceived as a threat, why does the text pay special attention to demoting and demolishing the sect’s supreme deity, while yet coopting for Muhammad the charisma of the avatāra? Why does the text display an urgency to construct Muhammad as implicitly superseding Caitanya as the avatāra of the Kali age? Note also, as I will argue, that Kṛṣṇa is here cast in the mould of Caitanya, as the avatāra of the kaliyuga. It seems to me that such polemics in religious literature are reserved only for those considered to be the most worthy religious contenders. For these reasons, the foregoing discussions on Sultān’s account

\(^{103}\) Stewart 2010, especially Chapter Seven.
of Hari will be couched in the context of Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavism, rather than in the context of a generic Vaiṣṇavism.

### 6.2 Recasting the Acts of Kṛṣṇa: Saiyad Sultān’s Renarrativization of the Myths of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa

Whether directly or through the means of literary intermediaries, Sultān’s account of Kṛṣṇa draws upon the tenth book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. With its focus upon the tales of Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, the tenth book, and the eleventh, well-known for Kṛṣṇa’s last discourse, addressed to Uddhava (Chapters 7–29), enjoyed immense popularity in Bengal, as is testified by their numerous Bangla adaptations in the kṛṣṇamaṅgala genre. A seventeenth-century author, Bhavānanda of Sylhet, wrote the Harivāṁśa, a kṛṣṇamaṅgala that became extremely popular in East Bengal. It is possible, depending on Bhavānanda’s floruit, generally considered to be in the mid- to late-seventeenth century, but not yet accurately determined by scholars, that Sultān was familiar with his work, and was perhaps even inspired by the title of this popular piece (as much, if not more than, the Sanskrit Harivāṁśa), when choosing one for his own composition. As in the Gītagovinda and in Baru Čaṇḍiḍāsa’s Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana,

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1104 As we have seen, the Kṛṣṇa legends of the Bhāgavata were first translated into Bangla as the Śrīkṛṣṇavijaya by the mid-fifteenth century author, Mālādhara Basu. He was bestowed the title Guṇarāja Khān by Ruknuddīn Bārbak Shāh, Sultān of Gauḍa (1459–1474). For these and other details, see Chakravarti 1985, 27.

1105 For an introduction to the tenth book, and its translation, see Bryant 2003.

1106 Rocher 1986, 144.


1108 Harivāṁśa of Bhavānanda. At least one manuscript used in the critical edition was from Comilla, while others were collected from Pabna, Mymensingh, and Sylhet.

1109 Concerning Bhavānanda’s dates, see Sukhamaya Mukhopādhyāya, 1974, 250. Satīśacandra Rāya (Introduction to Harivāṁśa of Bhavānanda) considers him to have been a contemporary of Govindadāsa and Jñānadāsa, living approximately a century after Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. As mentioned in Chapter Two (2.2.1), Sukumar Sen (1979, 143) makes a case for the title of Sultān’s work being modeled on the Sanskrit Harivāṁśa.
Bhavānanda’s *krṣṇamaṅgala* too gives Rādhā a central place in the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, but deifies her as an *avatāra* who manifests together with Kṛṣṇa.\(^{1110}\)

While Sultān was probably familiar with these regional versions of the tales, disseminated through oral recitatives and *krṣṇalīlā* performances, his narrative demonstrates keen awareness of the broad contours of the popular *Bhāgavata* stories on Kṛṣṇa’s birth, childhood, and youth in Vraja, even if names of epic characters are not always mentioned.\(^{1111}\) Sultān’s choice to base his narrative not upon any regional *krṣṇamaṅgala* but rather upon the episodes of the *Bhāgavata*, the canonical text of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, is significant, and reveals a glimpse of his agenda.

Prabhu Nirañjana, the Unblemished Lord, sends down Hari/Kṛṣṇa as a prophet in the line of Kābil, to save his idol-worshipping, slander-mongering, murderous, womanizing descendants from moral degeneracy. Furthermore, Iblis, Satan, here named as Iblis-Nārada in one of the author’s numerous rhetorical moves to establish translational equivalence, grows anxious over the news of the prophet’s conception and the possibility of losing sway over a tribe he had fostered as his own and guided on the path of vice since the days of Kābil. Hatching a plot to prevent the child’s birth, Iblis, in the guise of an ascetic (*muni*), visits the child’s maternal uncle, King Kaṃsa. He advises the king to murder the child his sister would soon birth, warning that he would turn out to be Kaṃsa’s nemesis. The king accordingly posts guards to watch over his sister, commanding them to deliver the newborn directly to him. A successful exchange of the newborn Kṛṣṇa with an infant girl transpires, and the infant girl is slain by Kaṃsa. However, Iblis, in the garb of an ascetic, returns to the king to expose what has actually transpired.

When all attempts to eliminate the child through a Pūtanā-like wet-nurse and Kāliyā-like river-serpents prove futile, it is Iblis who plots his moral downfall. He convinces the bashful

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\(^{1110}\) Bhavānanda does not base his tales upon those of the *Śrīkrṣṇakīrtana*. Satīśacandra Rāya (Introduction to *Harivamśa* of Bhavānanda). For the development of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme in Bangla literature, see Chapter Two (2.5).

\(^{1111}\) For a complete translation of “The Account of Hari” in the *NV*, see Appendix Five.
teenager that sexual contact with the Vraja women is not only permissible for him, being none other than the Supreme Lord himself, but as a consequence of his divine status, spiritually beneficial to the women.

Unversed in the ways of love, the teenage Kṛṣṇa is taught its arts by the women. Deserting their husbands, these married women bathe in the river together with Kṛṣṇa, who steals their clothes to see them naked. The women frolic with him through the groves of Vṛndāvana, making love to him. When the women are locked into their homes by their seething husbands upon the discovery of their affairs, Iblis cajoles the disgruntled men to dispatch their wives to Kṛṣṇa, since any service to the Supreme Being, whether direct or indirect, would secure both spouses a place in paradise. Next are introduced various admonitory voices. First, a king in the righteous line of Śiśu, Hābil’s replacement, warns Kṛṣṇa of dire consequences if he were not to abandon his exploitation of married women. When, despite this warning, Kṛṣṇa allows the hankering women to enact a vernal rāṣa dance,1112 a sobering heavenly voice reminds him of his mission and reprimands him for leading the innocent women astray from the path of God’s unity.

Finally Kṛṣṇa decides to abandon these women and his previous ways. Deserted, the women make images of Kṛṣṇa from brass and other materials, which they then worship in their adoration of him. Meanwhile, Arjuna comes upon Kṛṣṇa in a state of deep anxiety over the failure of his mission to teach people dharma karma, righteousness and rightful action. He is upset that the gopīs are now worshipping his images, and mistakenly addressing him, a mere mortal, as the Supreme Being. That he would be the cause of their sinning, their falling into

1112 Compared to the depictions of the autumnal rāsalīlā of the Bhāgavata and the Gītāgovinda, the NV depicts a vernal dance. Bryant 2003, 125. Cf. such a tradition in the Gītāgovinda of Jayadeva, vv. 26–37, and the Bengali upapurāṇa tradition of the Brahmavaivarta, Majumdar 1969, 184.
hell, is the cause of grief and remorse for Kṛṣṇa, who leaves his city and travels to other lands, accompanied by Arjuna.

Together, the two journey on their very own ascension through celestial worlds, albeit an abortive one, on the back of *garuda*, the mythical prince of birds and the traditional mount of Viṣṇu. They visit planets of iron, silver, gold, diamond, and so on. Hand-in-hand, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna stumble through a dark realm, which opens out onto a sumptuous, bejeweled city whose inhabitants are virtuous women of beauty, skilled in the performing arts. Setting eyes on these attractive women, Kṛṣṇa’s heart is shot through with Kāma’s arrows. However, the celestial nymphs pelt him with bricks and abuse, admonishing him for his unrelenting roving eye and his wretched mortal existence. They advise him to redeem himself by disabusing his devotees of their belief in him, and recommend he ban the worship of the twin idols of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

On his return, seeks Arjuna’s help in this task. Arjuna warns Hari’s worshippers:

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na mani harira vaikya yadi kara papa |
tomhara karahe hari paiha santapa ||
veda purane nahi yesaba acara |
se acara iblisa karila pracara ||
strapa tahara haiche adamera sane |
adamera vaishva bholae tekarahe ||
sabhane jananta mane se acara bhala |
kahu puyna paihena bhavila gopala |
tekarahe radhare kana murti kari |
sadae bhavanta sabe siddha bhava kari ||
mdaenga kannala sankha vaihe sarvajana |
harira paradara keli sabe uccaraana ||
vahena gaye sabe padaghata diyah |
harira paradara sabe kahe uccariya ||
iblisa narahe suni sannandita mana |
padera prakare k siti karae rodana ||
ye sakala sthane haue e sakaka karma |
avilambe upajae dekhae adharma ||
yerupe haiha yada vaishera samhara |
tahake kahite karya nahiha amhara ||
niranjana sakshat haise na pariba |
hisabera kale hari bahu duhka paihe ||
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1113 NV 1: 498–499.
“...If you commit sins, not heeding Hari’s words,  
because of you, Hari will come to grief.  
Iblis propagated that conduct  
which was not found in the Vedas and Puranaś.  
He had an enmity with Ādam;  
for this reason, he beguiles Ādam’s race.  
All knew in their minds that that conduct was good.  
It was said that they would acquire virtue by contemplating thus upon Gopāla.  
For that reason, making idols of Rādhā and Kānāī,  
all of them ever meditate [upon these], having purified their thoughts.  
Everyone plays upon the mṛdaṅga drum, the kannāla wind-instrument, and the conch.  
They declare Hari’s amorous play with [his] mistresses.  
While playing, they sing, stepping with [their] feet;  
they pronounce [the names of] Hari’s mistresses (paradāra),  
while listening to Iblis-Nārada with joyous mind.  
The earth weeps from the assault of [their] feet.  
In all those places where all such actions occur,  
soon enough one sees unrighteousness (adharma) arise.  
It is not my task to tell of how  
the Yadu dynasty was destroyed.  
Hari shall not be able to witness Nirañjana.  
At the time of the Reckoning, he will incur great grief.”

Kṛṣṇa too apologetically explains to his devotees that his deluded behavior was instigated by  
Iblis, the age-old sworn enemy of Adam and his race.1114

6.3 Narratological, Discursive, and Rhetorical Strategies of Critique

Sultān’s narratological strategies, as we have seen, operate within the transtextual arena of  
the Kṛṣṇa tales so familiar to his audience. Well-known mythic patterns are subverted, while  
key characters and tropes from Islamic mythology are gradually introduced to the audience.  
One of Sultān’s challenges in writing a sacred biography of the Prophet hinged upon how  
successfully he could marshal the charisma of the avatāra to Muhammad’s advantage, while  
establishing the Prophet’s ultimate supremacy. This end is achieved through the calculated

1114 NV 1: 468–500.
manipulation of three kinds of strategies: narratological, discursive, and rhetorical, in addition to the peculiar lexical strategies used throughout the text, which will be discussed briefly later.

6.3.1 A Prophet in Kābil’s Line

To begin with, by casting Hari/Kṛṣṇa as a prophet in Kābil’s dubious lineage, Sultān dooms him to failure from the very outset. Especially when read in the context of the enmity and internecine wars, discussed in the previous chapter, between the virtuous line of Śiś and the idolatrous line of Kābil, whose descendants have been systematically groomed by Iblis in idolatry and other vices, Hari’s genealogy seems doubly suspect. A descendant of Śiś, moreover, plays a role in admonishing Kṛṣṇa in this tale; and the impact of his intervention has to be understood in the context of these earlier tale-cycles that foreground the tale-cycle of Hari. Any claims to eminence via the title of nabī, or through the fellowship of the traditional prophets, is instantly diminished by this sleight of genealogical construction, which doubly demotes and thereby sidelines a powerful rival to the Prophet of Islam. Furthermore, the tale boldly insinuates that Bengalis, as idolatrous peoples, are not merely implicated in vice, but are drawn in with their popular god into this degenerate lineage of Kābil. It is in this context that one should also read Sultān’s proleptic prelude to his account of Hari, addressed to the respected people of his audience (mahājana), which runs as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{janmila rasūla saba pāpī nīvārite} \\
\text{murati pūjite saba niśedha karite }|| \\
\text{nabī sabe mrtyupada pāilenta yabe }|| \\
\text{iblise bholē āsi naragaṇa tabe }|| \\
\text{jagateta murati pūjite prācārae }| \\
\text{duśēra madhura vākya sabhāne bhulae }|| \\
\text{ye karma karite hae narakē gamana }| \\
\text{karāite sei karma karaē prānāpana }|| \\
\text{sei karma dekhi ati uttama lāgē }| \\
\text{marmeta tāhāra yatha aśuddha thēkae }|| \\
\text{bahula duśdheta yadi alpa kāṇi pāre } \\
\text{sei alapa hante bahu naṣṭa saba kare }||
\end{align*}
\]
mahājana sabere kahae sulatāne |
mora prati aparādhā nā rākhībā mane ||
na bulībā āpanāra jāti bhola haila |
śātha vākya kahi saba āmēhāka nindila ||
ye kīchu kahila āmhī cāha mane guni |
bhāla manda ei duī laīte parimūnī ||
āmhi yadi e saba pisune michā kahi |
āpanā yuktite āmi āpane na hai ||
tabe ki manusya sabe bujhite ucita |
bhāla manda e duī laīte parikṣita ||
tomhāra harīra ebe haila sṛjana |
tomhā saba tattva jnāna pāibāre kāraṇa ||
se harīra sani rahi iblīsa durbāra |
dhariyā āchila pāpī mūnira akāra ||
iblīsa nārada pāpī harīra sahita |
bhāla manda kārīya ye śikhāe pratinita ||
hari sani yei rūpe āchila durācāra |
kaḥi śuna hae nahe karite vicāra ||

The prophets were born to forbid the sinners, [and] to prohibit the worship of all idols. When all the prophets had passed on Iblis would then come to deceive mankind. He would propagate the worship of idols in the world. The sweet words of this wicked one deceive all. He has sworn to make people perform those acts which would make them go to Hell. Such impurity dwells in his heart that to see such acts makes him feel greatly superior. [Even] if a small amount of cow’s urine falls into a large quantity of milk, that smidgen can completely destroy the whole lot. Sultān says to all respected people (mahājana), “Do not take offence to me. Do not say that your own caste (jāti) has been deceived. Do not criticize me by saying that I speak lies. Think carefully about all that I have said, having evaluated both these, the good and the bad. If I were to cook up lies out of enmity I would fall in my own judgement. Even so, it is appropriate for all human beings to evaluate both the good and the bad. Your Hari was eventually created so that you would receive philosophical knowledge. Alongside this Hari remains the irrepressible, sinner Iblis, taking the form of a sage.

1115 I have emended pāri māni to parimūnī.
1116 NV 1: 467–468.
[Remaining] with Hari, the sinner Iblis-Nārada ever tutored him on how to turn virtue into vice. Listen, I will tell how the ill-behaved fellow interacted with Hari so that you can reflect upon disputing the facts.”

6.3.2 Iblis-Nārada and the Kṛṣṇa Avatāra

As Asim Roy has recognized, Sultān’s conjoint epithet for Iblis, “Iblis-Nārada,” is a translational device that reflects the key shared attribute of mischief-mongering between two otherwise wholly different characters from separate religious traditions, although Iblis’ machinations are the darker, more malevolent, less playful, of the two. In addition to the use of this alias, Sultān draws, early on in his account of Hari, a direct parallel between the roles of Nārada and Iblis. The latter, like Nārada, is the one who warns Kaṃsa of Kṛṣṇa’s birth. What is more, he visits Kaṃsa masquerading as a muni, a sage, reminiscent of Nārada who is traditionally depicted as an itinerant muni, often being called Nārada Muni, Sage Nārada. However, once this translational and eidetic device has been set into motion, the gulf between Nārada’s role in the Bhāgavata and Iblis’ in this section of the NV begins to widen. While Kṛṣṇa is initially portrayed as Kaṃsa’s arch enemy in both accounts, Kṛṣṇa’s later messianic role of killing Kaṃsa and ridding the country of all evil is not (for obvious reasons) brought up in the NV, while Iblis instead comes to the fore as Kṛṣṇa’s nemesis. The effect of partnering Iblis with Nārada irrevocably changes a Bengali auditor’s appreciation of Nārada. After having heard the NV’s account of Hari, were such an auditor to return to a Kṛṣṇalīlā performance, his understanding of Nārada would undoubtedly be colored by Sultān’s coupling of this figure with

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1117 Roy 1983, 93–94.
1118 Cf. Bryant 2003, 10.1.64: 14. Nārada is also Kaṃsa’s warner in the kṛṣṇamaṅgalaś, see, for instance, Klaiman 1984, 24. However, he is not always disguised as a monk. See, for instance, ibid. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in the latter text Nārada also warns Vasudeva that his eighth child is none other than Nārāyaṇa, who would save them from Kaṃsa’s clutches. Ibid., 25.
1119 In fact, it is noteworthy that Sultān’s account makes no allusion whatsoever to the Bhāgavata tales that pertain to Kṛṣṇa’s adult life, after his departure from Vraja.
the malevolent Iblis. Thus, such translatorially paired figures would probably have had long-term psychological effects upon Bengali audiences, gradually revising their appreciation of the Kṛṣṇa tales.

When Kṛṣṇa remains physically invincible to the attacks of all of Iblis and Kaṃsa’s demonic minions—the wet-nurse, the snakes, Mahākāla, and others—Iblis decides to bring about his moral downfall. Initially, he befriends him by glorifying his divinity, alluding to his earlier avatāras, divine manifestations:

You are Hari Janārdana, the essence of the world.
Taking shelter in you, sinners will be emancipated.
You protected the world by assuming the Fish form.
In the Boar form you extended the earth over your tusks.
In the form of the Man-Lion you killed the demons.
One by one you killed the numerous fiends.
Preventing the earth from sinking into the netherworld, you remained there in the Tortoise form.
Assuming the Dwarf form, you deceived Bali;
in the form of Rāma, you killed Rāvaṇa.
Now too you have become the Kṛṣṇa avatāra –
to destroy the wicked ones, all...
Know for certain that you are the very Paramātmā, the Supreme Being, taken descent in a man’s form.1120

With many a doctrinal and moral argument, Iblis cajoles the shy boy Kṛṣṇa to succumb to the amorous advances of the cowherd women:

... you are compassionate of heart,
deva, a god, as Supreme Being—what need you fear?
You yourself are man, yourself woman:
to savor love’s pleasures, you have become into two bodies.
Why then does doubt plague your mind?
Why do you not delight in sex with these young women?
These kulavatīs, women of good families, their minds agonizing over you, wish to end their lives.

1120 harike kahae pāpi paramātmā kari | bole tumhi paramātmā nānārūpa dhari || tumhi hari jarnādana bhuvanera sāra | tomhāke smaranē pāpi haiba nistāra || matsya rūpa dhari tumhi bhuvana pālīlā | varāhera rūpe kṣiti dante āchadilā || narasimha rūpa dhari mārilā asura | eke eke samhārilā rakṣasa pracura || pātē nāmite kṣiti rākhilā āpane | kārma rūpe chilā tumī pātāla bhuvane || vāmanera rūpa dhari balika chalilā | rāma rūpa dhari tumhi rāvaṇa mārilā || ekhane ho haiha tumhi kṛṣṇa avatāra | duṣṭa saba yatha āche karilā samhāra || ... niśca jānila tomhā parmātmā sāra | nararūpa dhari tumhi hailā avatāra || NV 1: 474.
If you will not sport with them,  
why did you drive these young women mad?  
If these women drop dead because of you,  
you will be responsible for the murder of women.  
You are a boy, of boyish behavior:  
do not think about good and bad so single-mindedly!  
All those women followers who surrender to you,  
do not sin.\textsuperscript{1121}  
This is why these women, in their minds,  
continually desire to serve you.  
For you, it is possible to transcend sin –  
do you not know whose creation is virtue and vice?  
You shall bestow great virtue upon  
all those women you will touch.  
If some foul odor falls into the sea,  
ever does the entire body of water become polluted.  
When burnt by fire, excrement becomes pure!  
Why then do you constantly fear sin?  
When you are the Supreme Being, why are you depressed?  
For what reason do you reflect upon virtue and vice?\textsuperscript{1122}

Sultān first begins to deride Gaurḍiya Vaiṣṇava doctrine through the character of Iblis, picking here on a contentious Vaiṣṇava theological and moral issue to unhinge the tale at its weakest point: he takes advantage of the Bhāgavata’s slippage between the sacred and the profane, grounds that even its own theologians were at pains to defend, flipping emic conceptions of salvation into etic claims of plain blasphemy. Iblis’ exhortations of the boy Kṛṣṇa to assume the role of paramour hinge upon the moral justification the Bhāgavata Purāṇa itself provides for Kṛṣṇa’s affairs, a view defended centuries later by the greatest of the orthodox Vaiṣṇava exegetes, Rūpa Goswāmin, in his Ujjvalanīlāmāni: Kṛṣṇa as Supreme Being cannot be judged by

\textsuperscript{1121} “Women followers” is a translation for nārī āṅga. Cf. Dimock 1999, 1010.
\textsuperscript{1122} bolae pāpiśṭha tumhi karuṇā ḍṛdæ | tumhi paramātmādeva toṁhāra ki bhae | āpane puruṣa tumhi āpane yuvatī | dui ghaṭe haṁcha tumhi bhuṁjite sūrati | tāre kena sandeha vāsīte ācha mane | kisake nā bhuṁjita rati yuvattra sāne | toṁhāra kāraṇe yathā kulavatīgaṇa | manera santāpe cāhe tejite jīvāna | yadi nā bhuṁjībā tumhi keli kutuhala | kikāraṇe kailā tumhi yuvatī pāgala | toṁhāra kāraṇe yadi nārī hae pāta | nārī vadhā pāpa saba rahiḥa toṁhāta | sahaṁe bālaka tumhi bālaka veṁhāra | bāla mandā eka mane nā kara vicāra | ye sakala nārī āṅga toṁhāre samarpe | se sakala nārī āṅga nā laṅghāe pāpe | tekāraṇe nārī sabe toṁhā sevībāra | sadā maneta vāṁchā kare āpānanāra | toṁhāre pāre pāpa karite laṅghana | nā jāni ki pāpe punya kāhāra sṛjana | ye sakala nārīgaṇa tumhi paraśibā | se nārī sabere tumhi bāla punya dibā | sāgare durgandha yadi se pari thāke | se sakale jala naṣṭa nahe kona pāke | ānale daḥile viṣṭhā hae pavittara | mane kene pāpa bhaya vāṁa nirantara | paramātmā haiyā kene haosi vimāna | kikāraṇe pāpa punya karaṇa smaraṇa | NV 1: 477–478.
the standards of conventional morality, as he lies beyond this mundane world.\textsuperscript{1123} His lilās, as Tony Stewart elucidates in the context of Caitanya’s hagiographies, “denote a play that answers only to itself.”\textsuperscript{1124} Yet through such heresiographic and polemical transtextuality, Sultān critiques the moral and religious culture of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas through the lens of conventional morality and the standpoint of Islam.

Furthermore, the formulation of Kṛṣṇa’s divinity, which Iblis “teaches” the boy Kṛṣṇa, completely unaware of his own divine nature,\textsuperscript{1125} is complex and crafted with sophistication. While it continues the purānic dasāvatāra conceptions of divine descent,\textsuperscript{1126} it breaks with tradition in a single daring, new way. Dramatically reversing the very rhetorical strategies used by the Vaiṣṇava hagiographers of Caitanya to model his image in that of Kṛṣṇa, Sultān refashions Kṛṣṇa’s divinity in the die of Caitanya. In this context, Iblis’s statement is worthy of careful scrutiny:

\begin{quote}
āpane puruṣa tumhi āpane yuvatī /
dui ghaṭe haīcha tumhi bhuñjite sūrati ||
\end{quote}

You yourself are man, yourself woman: to savor love’s pleasures, you have become into two bodies.\textsuperscript{1127}

At the primary level of meaning, this statement could be read as expressing the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theological principle of acintyabhedābheda: the kṛṣṇāvatāra as Supreme Being (paramātmādeva), while transcending all worldly categories, is simultaneously immanent in every aspect of creation. In both these transcendant and immanent ways, he is, simultaneously

\textsuperscript{1123} Dimock 1966, 56. See also Bryant 2003, 10.33.26–39: 142–143.
\textsuperscript{1124} Stewart 2010a, 68.
\textsuperscript{1125} Sultān carves out a role for Iblis to pose as teacher to Kṛṣṇa of his own divinity. This fits well, as Stewart (ibid., 76) has shown, with depictions, in the Bhāgavata and its commentaries, of Kṛṣṇa being unaware of his own godliness, and thereby having “to ‘learn’ his own nature.”.
\textsuperscript{1126} NV 1: 474.
\textsuperscript{1127} Literally, “you have become a dual receptacle.” “Receptacle,” here, is a translation of ghaṭa, which primarily is a pitcher, a container, or receptacle, and is often used to refer to the body or the mind as the “receptacle” for the soul. Bandyopādhyāya 1996, s.v. “ghaṭa.” This is clearly an allusion to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya’s androgynous dual incarnation. See below.
and inconceivably, both man and woman. As the Supreme Creator, he has created gendered pairs to savor love’s pleasures through them. The secondary level of meaning is wrapped up with the idea that the krṣṇāvatāra, as incarnate in human form, embodies both man and woman. And it is in this way that these lines allude to a key theological construct of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. By the 1600’s, the theory circulated, especially through its textual crystallization in Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s Caitanyacaritāmṛta, that Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, the founder of the sect, was the androgynous dual avatāra of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.1128 According to Kṛṣṇadāsa, Kṛṣṇa decided to descend to earth in the form of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya for the secondary and “external reason” of re-establishing dharma in the Kali age. However, he specifically assumes the form of an androgyne for the “internal reason”—the primary one for his descent—of experiencing more fully Rādhā’s sweet bliss in loving him.1129 Thus, in Caitanya’s form, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa remain in “the embrace of eternal union, making their experience one, yet separate to allow Kṛṣṇa mysteriously to taste this love both as himself and, most importantly, as Rādhā.”1130

Sultān’s early allusion to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya provides him with the semantic latitude with which to later castigate Caitanya without once naming him, through the overt ridicule of Kṛṣṇa’s divinity. By conflating the two figures, he links not only the affairs of Kṛṣṇa as nāgara, the urbane lover-hero of classical poetry, to the figure of Iblis, thus sullying Kṛṣṇa, the supreme deity of Bengal’s Vaiṣṇavas, but invites his audience to connect Iblis with Caitanya, who is well-

1128 For Kṛṣṇa’s separate pairing with Balarāma and Arjuna respectively, see Miller 1982, 25–26. According to Stewart (personal correspondence, January 16, 2008), though this theory “was probably known to a few as early as 1520,” it did “not circulate widely (at least textually) until about 1600.” Stewart mentioned that this theory was formally unveiled in CC 2.8. “Until that time,” Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, says Stewart, “was popularly known as the yugāvatāra of the Kali Age.” For the development of this theory in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiographical tradition, and its final explicit formulation in Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s Caitanyacaritāmṛta 2.8, see Stewart 2010a, 166–188.
1130 Ibid., 103.
known by Sultān’s time as the nādiyā nāgara of the Gauṛiya hagiographical tradition,\textsuperscript{1131} clouding the sect and its religiosity with allegations of sinfulness.

\section*{6.3.3 \textit{Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, and their Ascension}}

The introduction of Arjuna is another distinctive feature of Sultān’s account of Kṛṣṇa. It is noteworthy that Arjuna, a key player in the \textit{Mahābhārata}, and the addressee of the \textit{Bhagavad Gītā}, makes a rare appearance in the \textit{Bhāgavat Purāṇa}. His role in the NV, however, is that of Kṛṣṇa’s confidant, who is sent with a message to the cowherd women of Vraja, and in this role of emissary between Kṛṣṇa and the Vraja women, Arjuna’s character overlaps with that of Uddhava in the \textit{Bhāgavata}, who is sent by Kṛṣṇa, after his overthrow of Kaṃsa, with tidings from Mathurā for the gopīs. The content of the message, of course, is entirely different in the two texts. In the \textit{Bhāgavata}, Kṛṣṇa sends a message of love and hope to Vraja’s pining gopīs; Uddhava appreciates the gopī’s devotion as the highest kind of \textit{bhakti}.\textsuperscript{1132} Arjuna, instead, in the NV, is entrusted with appealing to the cowherd women’s love for Kṛṣṇa to cease worshipping him—a false god—if they desire his salvation and theirs; they are asked to turn, instead, to the singular Lord of all, Prabhu Niraṅjana.

Popularly known as the \textit{Uddhava Gītā}, thirteen chapters of the eleventh book of the \textit{Bhāgavata Purāṇa} constitute what Edwin Bryant calls “a second \textit{Bhagavad Gītā}.”\textsuperscript{1133} The sermon Kṛṣṇa delivers to his beloved devotee, Uddhava, unable to bear Kṛṣṇa’s decision to depart from the world, has been compared to the discourse he gave Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, in terms of the range of metaphysical and practical social issues covered.\textsuperscript{1134} Despite these parallels, the question arises as to why Sultān chooses to substitute Arjuna for Uddhava in his

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1131}{Stewart 2010a, 58, 151–57.}
\footnote{1132}{Bryant 2003, 10.46–47: 190–202.}
\footnote{1133}{Ibid., 406.}
\footnote{1134}{See, for instance, ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
account of Kṛṣṇa, based as it is on a text or genre, as the case may be, in which Arjuna is rarely mentioned.

If one takes into account the circulation of contemporary East Bengali versions of the Mahābhārata, such as those of Kavīndra Parameśvara Dāsa or the so-called Sañjaya’s Mahābhārata, it is possible that Arjuna was a Kṛṣṇa devotee more easily recognizable to Sultān’s Bengali audience, especially if he wished to extend the circulation of the NV to a courtly audience. Parameśvara Dāsa’s abridged version, the earliest Bangla adaptation, was written for Parāgal Khān, the governor of Chittagong, appointed by ‘Alā al-Dīn Ḥusayn Shāh, ruler of Bengal between 1493 and 1519.1135 This along with other evidence suggests that the stories of the Mahābhārata were much appreciated at the courts of Muslim rulers of Bengal.1136

In addition, Sultān’s replacement of Uddhava was intended for dramatic effect. Indeed the ultimate toppling of Kṛṣṇa in the final episode is a narrative tour de force. In a reversal of traditional roles a crestfallen Kṛṣṇa is here counseled by none other than Arjuna, well-known for being his confused and despondent disciple of the Bhagavad Gītā, whom he exhorted to martial and spiritual victory. In Sultān’s account, Arjuna is depicted as Kṛṣṇa’s moral superior: he is one who lends a sympathetic ear to Kṛṣṇa’s woes upon Kṛṣṇa’s realization of his life of moral depravity; he is the one who witnesses his abortive ascension and unsuccessful entry into paradisiacal worlds, his abuse and dismissal at the hands of female celestials; it is he who is requested by Kṛṣṇa to convince his devotees that they had indeed been led astray by the very

1135 Haq and Sharif refer to a passage in which Sultān states that he draws inspiration from the “Parāgalī Mahābhārata,” referring to the afore-mentioned work composed by Kavīndra Parameśvara Dāsa, under the patronage of Parāgal Khān. Cf. Mahābhārata of Kavīndra, 1: 12. For dates of Ḥusayn Shāh’s rule, see Eaton 1993, 325. Haq ([1957] 1991, 294–95) states that the passage in question is found in the preface to the Sab-i Merāj. Strangely enough, this passage is nowhere to be found in the published edition of the NV, even though Sharif (NV 1: 9 and 2: 7) too quotes it in his introductions to both volumes of the NV, without indicating its location in the text. Concerning east Bengali adaptations of the Mahābhārata, see Satkari Mukhopadhyaya 1987, 23.
1136 Ibid., 23–24.
Lord whom they had loved and worshipped. Thus, this volte-face in the characterization of Kṛṣṇa’s celebrated devotee signals the god’s ultimate defeat, his failing the Vaiṣṇavas who had looked upon him as their Bhagavān, their personal god.

Sultān’s novel account of Kṛṣṇa’s disastrous ascension seals his dramatic fate as doomed anti-hero. The tale uses the svargārohaṇa motif generic to South Asian hagiographies,1137 cast in the mould of an Islamic ascension tale,1138 to draw Kṛṣṇa into stark comparison with Muhammad’s own successful miʿrāj, but one that could also be read as an attempt to further undermine Kṛṣṇa, and even Caitanya, since it invites comparison with the myth of Kṛṣṇa’s final ascension to Vaikuṇṭha in his garuḍa-drawn chariot—a myth in the Mahābhārata and the Bhāgavata, on which, at least one of the many death narratives of Caitanya was patterned.1139

6.3.4 Reprimanding Kṛṣṇa and Castigating Avatārāvāda

The author introduces three admonitory voices—Islamic or Islamicate figures cast as exemplary counsellors of the truant Kṛṣṇa: a message from an unnamed King of Śiś’s lineage to Kṛṣṇa; a heavenly voice; and the arguments of the celestial women. All three serve to remind him of his mission on earth—the reinstatement of dharma karma, the eradication of evil—and the degree to which he has strayed from his appointed path. They chide him for his depraved mortal existence, and seek to disabuse him of the erroneous sense of his own divinity. The celestial women, who invite direct comparison with the houris of the Islamic tradition, go a step further: they wish to dispossess Kṛṣṇa of his devotees. To redeem himself, they require him to

1137 Concerning svargārohaṇa (ascent into paradise) as a generic motif of North Indian hagiographies, see W. L. Smith 2000, Chapter 15. Concerning this motif in the oral epic Canāṅi, see Pandey 1982, 606.
1138 By this, I specifically refer to the various metallic and gem-studded spheres, and the realms of darkness, that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna traverse to reach Paradise.
1139 Concerning Jayānanda Miśrā’s narrative in his Caitanya Maṅgala of Caitanya’s death and ascension to Vaikuṇṭha in Viṣṇu’s chariot which bore a Garuda banner, and its clear patterning on the myth of Kṛṣṇa’s final departure and ascent in the Bhāgavata and the Mahābhārata, see Stewart 1991, 245.
return to earth and reveal his true, mortal nature to his followers, to insist that they give up worshipping idols of him and his consort Rādhā, and cease singing his name.

Sultān launches his attack of avatāravāda specifically through the admonitions of these celestial women. The nymphs strive to correct Krṣṇa’s misguided understandings thus:

Nirañjana instructed you to take a human form and to personally supervise the welfare of all mankind. Among the manifold forms Nirañjana has created, you are one.

Just as the Lord is immanent in all things so is He with you.

Ten avatāras, it is said, there are of you; as though you had taken birth again and again! One soul cannot transmigrate through two bodies; it dwells in the same body into which it is born.

When the Lord has created someone at a certain moment why would he return after death?

Why would the Lord create again the same kind?

Why would He send the same one again and again?

If we were to here enjoy the fruits of sin and virtue, then it would be as though the Lord Himself were erased!

If we enjoyed the fruits of sin and virtue here, why then did the Lord create heaven and hell?\textsuperscript{1140}

The women describe the doctrine of rebirth, the ontological tenet on which the concept of the dasāvatāras is partially based, as theologically untenable. The eschatological principles of classical Islam stipulate that every human soul be attached to a single body, and that each must meet its final judgment on the Day of Reckoning, yaum al-ḥisāb; this requires that each soul be accountable for the actions committed during its earthly sojourn. The women rule out the possibility of a single soul transmigrating through two or more bodies; presumably this would complicate matters of individual accountability and divine bookkeeping practices, ḥisāb, for

\textsuperscript{1140} tore bole nirañjana nararūpa dhari | vyakta rūpe nara saba pāla hena kari \| nirañjana srjīyāche yatheka ākāra | tāra madhye tumhi eka srjana tāhāra \| yerūpe sabhāne prabhu ācha e vyāpita \| tēna mate āche prabhu toṁhāra sahīta \| toṁhāke bolae tora daśa avatāra \| puni puni haiche yena janāma toṁhāra \| eka jīva dui ghaṭe nā saṁcare āśī \| yei ghaṭe janne hae sei ghaṭa vāsī \| yekhane yāhāre prabhu kariche srjana \| puni mṛtyu āhī kene āśība se jana \| ekaka prakāra pari kisoke srjība \| puni puni ekere kisoke pāthāība \| pāpa punya phala yadi bhūnījība ethāta \| tabe se bujhana haiba prabhura sākṣāta \| pāpa punya phala yadi ethāte bhugīla \| tabe kene prabhu svarga naraka srjīla \| NV 1: 495–496.
individual souls. The women, thus, speak out against the related doctrine of *karma*, since, from their point of view, this throws into redundancy both a just God and his system of meting out reward and punishment.

6.3.5 *The Qiṣṣa al-Anbiyāʾ and the Carita Genre*

The narrative positioning of the account of Hari within the prophetic tale-cycles is also strategic. Placed between the two longest tale-cycles dedicated to Ibrāhim and Musā, the most important Islamic prophets after Ādam, the position of the Ḵṛṣṇa cycle reveals both its centrality to the author’s concerns as well as his strategy to overshadow its significance by the weighty tale-cycles that engulf it. The tale-cycle of Ḵṛṣṇa, as mentioned earlier, replaces the tale-cycle of Iusuph/Isuph (Ar. Yūṣuf) in al-Kīsāʾī’s *Qiṣṣa*, wherein it falls between the tale-cycles of Ibrāhim and Musā, along with the successive tale-cycles of Lūṭ, Iṣḥāq, Yākūb, which immediately precede it, and those of Ayyūb and Shuʿayb, which follow. Ḵṛṣṇa is an apt replacement for Yūṣuf, since both figures are known in their own traditions for their physical beauty and adulation by women. Additionally, from the dismissive remark Sultān makes about the tale of Iusuph—“Everyone has heard about all these subjects. For this reason, I do not put it into verse”—it is likely that the Iusuph-Jalikhā tale was popular in contemporaneous East Bengal. At least two East Bengali authors, Śāh Muhammad Sagīr (who probably wrote in the early seventeenth century) and Ābdul Hākim, probably a junior contemporary of Sultān, wrote Sufi romances on this theme.¹¹⁴¹

If we were to take an even broader view of Sultān’s biographical enterprise, we could discern that, despite his opposition to the Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇavas, Sultān did not hesitate to learn an important thing or two from their hagiographical tradition. While the *qiṣṣa* and *sīra* literature

¹¹⁴¹ See *Iūsuph-Jolekhā* of Śāh Muhammad Sagīr, and *Iusupha-Jalikhā* of Ābdul Hākim.
undoubtedly provided time-honored, readymade Islamic narrative templates for Sultān, and the epic and purānic traditions of Bengal proffered their literary imaginaire, the ground was perhaps better laid for his particular choice of genre by the local, more immediate, pioneering efforts of Caitanya’s hagiographers to use religious biography as “a new Bengali medium of theological discourse.” 1142 Though less than a century-old as a genre, it had successfully emerged by Sultān’s time as what Tony Stewart calls “the favored theological, and ultimately political, tool.” 1143 Sultān’s NV could be read as his adoption of the carita genre, which he turns back upon the Gauḍīyas, having ideologically sharpened it into a weapon for disputation.

6.4 Islam’s Encounter with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in the Nabīvaṃśa

At the level of polemical religious discourse, then, Sultān, in the Kṛṣṇa tale-cycle dismisses the supreme deity of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas by evaluating the theological and salvific doctrines of the sect from the viewpoint of orthodox Islamic conceptions of soteriology and praxis. The content of Sultān’s attack can be indexed according to the doctrines and practices of the Vaiṣṇavas that he questions: first, the nature of the Supreme Being and the doctrine of descent, avatāravāda; second, the sacred nature of Kṛṣṇa’s affairs with married women and the nature of salvation; third, worship of the idols of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, his consort; and last, the devotional practice of kīrtana, singing and dancing to Kṛṣṇa’s name.

Before engaging with the conceptions of godhead and avatāravāda, let us briefly compare the soteriological system of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism with that of Islam. Salvation in Islamic eschatology means emancipation from sin and eternal damnation. Though Sultān uses the Sanskrit-Bangla word pāpa for “sin” in the Islamic sense of transgressing God’s law, the word conveys a different meaning to a Vaiṣṇava. As Dimock and Stewart observe:

1142 Stewart 2010a, 6.
1143 Ibid.
... the term means a kind of intellectual blindness, an inability, or a lack of desire, to see what exists as the true relationship between the self and God, reciprocal love. If sin is blindness, salvation is light; and indeed, this is one of the images which the Vaiṣṇavas commonly use. The soul, the individual creature, the jīva, is stumbling about in the darkness of the material world, deluded in the darkness of the material world, deluded in the darkness into thinking that what is not real is real, that the rope is a snake, that the things of the world and of the flesh are man’s true ends.  

According to the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavas, it is Kṛṣṇa, the supreme godhead, in the form of either his avatāras or the guru, who holds out the light—the light of truth that breaks such delusion, the delusion of māyā. And bhakti, devotion, to Bhagavān, “the personal aspect of the absolute,” Kṛṣṇa himself, is the best, most efficacious path, to truth. Salvation then, the liberation from samsāra, the cycle of birth and rebirth, to abide eternally in Goloka, Kṛṣṇa’s transcendent realm, occurs when the devotee “leav[es] himself open to Kṛṣṇa, becomes possessed by Kṛṣṇa.” This is the behavior of the ideal devotee, the essence of what the married cowherd women of Vraja unwittingly enact, without any desire for salvation. In point of fact, the Bhāgavata, in contrast to other Indian philosophical systems, downplays the importance of liberation, the desire to eternally savor the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa being more attractive to a devotee than liberation itself.

Breaking with contemporary social convention to immortalize these humble cowherd women as the greatest of bhaktas, the Bhāgavata presents them as forsaking their all for Kṛṣṇa—not only their egos, but their dharma towards their husbands and children, and with these their

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1145 Bryant (2003, xxxvi) translates māyā as ‘divine illusion,’ with a further helpful paraphrase from the Bhāgavata’s 10.40.23: “the illusory power that keeps the jīva souls bewildered by the sense objects of this world and ensnared in samsāra, the cycle of birth and death, by their karma, or reactions to their previous actions.”
1146 Ibid., xlvii.
1148 Concerning Goloka, see Bryant 2003, xxxviii.
1149 Dimock and Stewart 1999, 115.
1150 Bryant 2003, xlvii.
social prestige, leaving themselves vulnerable to dire societal condemnation. “The *Bhāgavata,*” as Bryant suggests, “gives a novel meaning to the traditional concept of *dharma,* normally understood as social and familial duty, by constructing it in the context of *bhakti* as denoting unalloyed devotion and service to *Kṛṣṇa...*”

Worshipping the image of *Kṛṣṇa* and singing his name are recognized in the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* as two of the five most important forms of Vaiṣṇava ritual practice. Furthermore, the *Bhāgavata* stresses the importance of hearing the stories of *Kṛṣṇa* to increase devotion to him, to overcome ignorance and desire.

Sultān’s metatext of the *Kṛṣṇa* stories of the *Bhāgavata* constitutes a biting polemic of the *Bhāgavata*’s theology and seeks to measure its radical interpretation of *dharma,* duty and righteous action, by appealing to both conventional Indian standards of morality and Islamic law as laid down in the Qur‘ān (17:32) and the *sunna.* The Qur‘ān (17:32) considers *zinā,* adultery, to be *fāḥisha,* “an obscene act of transgression against God from which a Muslim should refrain.” A transgression, punishable by Hell, of what in the Qur‘ān is called *ḥudūd Allāh,* “God’s boundaries,” it stands alongside the transgressions of homicide and *shirk,* associating others with God, by far the worst kind of violation, for which, according to the Qur‘ān, there is no forgiveness.

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1151 Through their very act of taking refuge in *Kṛṣṇa* alone, these women draw his absolute protection. Thus, as they nightly, through the autumnal month, participate in the *rāsa* dance, *Kṛṣṇa* ensures by his illusory power that their sleeping husbands do not miss their wives. He guarantees that these women escape any form of social slander. Bryant 2003, 10.33.37: 143.

1152 Ibid., liii.

1153 Dimock and Stewart 1999, 113.

1154 Bryant 2003, xxx.

1155 Abu-Zahra 2011.

1156 Kimber 2011.

1157 Abu-Zahra 2011.

1158 Mir 2011b. By claiming to be a god, Hari commits the greatest sin in Islam. Cf. *Sūra* 21:29 of the Qur‘ān: “If any of them should say, ‘I am a god besides Him,’ such a one We should reward with Hell: thus do We reward those who do wrong,” The Qur‘ān, 827.
Sultān’s rhetorical strategies are multi-layered and constitute individual textual maneuvers that often contradict each other and appear to be doctrinally inconsistent, yet inhere in a dominantly Islamic framework of theological coherence.1159 The first rhetorical strategy Sultān employs is to de-value Krṣṇa’s supreme divinity, which centuries of Vaiṣṇava litterati before him had striven to magnify,1160 demoting him to a nabī, a prophet. This is in keeping with the tendency among medieval South Asian Muslim authors to rechristen Hindu deities as Islamic prophets,1161 a feature that inheres within the Islamic world-view, which emphasizes the supreme omnipotence of a creator God who creates all things, including prophets. This demotion to human status was also not difficult for Sultān to accomplish as the Vaiṣṇava doctrine of descent itself allowed for the avatāra to take human birth when circumstances demanded it. This single move, thus, shears Krṣṇa of his absolute power, making him instead a human agent of the godhead, while simultaneously including him in a prophetic hierarchy, whose traditional prophets share in a common humanity, though they may be bestowed with traits more extraordinary than Sultān’s Hari. Indeed, with the prophet Hari, Sultān presses further: he presents him as being born in the line of Kābil, as we have seen, bringing into question his very spiritual pedigree. Unlike other failed Islamic prophets in the Nabīvaṃśa, Sultān’s Krṣṇa shows not the least spark of prophetic virtue. In point of fact, he is first infantilized as a vulnerable, giddy boy, a creature of his senses incapable of right judgment and an easy target for Iblis. Later, he is caricatured as a vile and wretched man who preys upon

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1159 I derive this idea from Stewart who alerted me to “the idea of ‘coherent but not necessarily consistent’,” which he derives from Lakoff and Johnson. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), quoted in Stewart 2010a, n. 31: 21.
1160 Concerning doctrinal differences in the Vaiṣṇava sects regarding the Supreme Godhead, see Bryant 2003, xix and xxi.
1161 The move to re-christen Hindu gods as prophets is not new to medieval Islamic South Asian literature. See, for instance, Dārā Shukhū’s Sīr-i Akbar (“The Greatest Secret”), an ecumenical work which names Hindu gods as ancient prophets, Brahma here being identical to Adam. Friedmann 2003, 56. In Bangla literature, see also brahma haila mahāmād bisnū haila pekāmbara ādamph haila sulapāni j gameśa haila gājī kāṭika haila kājī phakir hailyā jata muni quoted from Nirañjanera Uṣmā, in Ferrari 2004, 256.
other men’s wives. To be a false god, and consequently Sultān’s derelict “prophet,” he strips Kṛṣṇa of every trace of divinity, and divests him of his devotees by presenting him as a loathsome mortal, with no moral, what to speak of spiritual, authority, calling into question the very status of prophethood Sultān grudgingly, albeit strategically, confers upon him.

The second set of related and contradictory rhetorical moves that Sultān makes is to castigate the doctrine of descent, while explicitly co-opting the concept of the āṃśāvatāra and, implicitly, that of the yugāvatāra. This opens up a liminal space for the ultimate displacement of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya by Muhammad as the messiah for the Kali Age. The appropriation of the term avatāra and its cognates in the face of this outright dismissal of avatāravāda, however, shows the author’s acknowledgement of the ponderous semantic load of such terms, and his attempt to profit from both the mantle of authority these confer upon his religious ideal and the religious imaginaire these conjure for his auditors. Sultān’s play with language codes and theological crossovers is made plausible by his enacting a foundational rhetorical move that makes all others possible: this is to establish translational equivalence between the avatāra and the nabī. In a significant translatorial note provided early on in the text, long before the tale-cycle of Hari begins, he glosses the word nabī thus:

\[
\text{avatāra yāre buli nabī buli tāre} / \\
\text{nabīka srjila bhālāi jānāibāre} || \\
\]

That which we call avatāra, we [also] call nabī: the nabī was created to impart goodness and well-being.\textsuperscript{1162}

Following again in the footsteps of medieval Muslim authors in South Asia, Sultān identifies the Islamic nabī, prophet, with the Vaiṣṇava concept of the avatāra.\textsuperscript{1163} This translatorial note,  

\textsuperscript{1162} NV 1: 48.  
\textsuperscript{1163} See Eaton 1993, n. 61: 288. Also see Muzaffar Alam’s (1996, 174; 1989, 40) comments on ‘Abd-al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī’s Haqā’iq-i Hindī.
however, reveals Sultān’s agenda: he imports the concept of the nabī to demolish the avatāra, for it is the nabī, after all, who “imparts goodness and well-being.”

In the following section we explore certain characteristics, germane to yet shared by the independent semantic fields of the nabī and the avatāra, which make such code-switching and doctrinal cavorting, for the author and his community, seamless.

6.5 The Avatāra vs. the Nabī: Interlocking Conceptions of Messianic Figures

In order to fully comprehend the semantic field of the term nabī in Sultān’s usage, I have studied the various textual occurrences of the word and the meanings that can be derived from the literary contexts in which these are embedded.

6.5.1 General Observations

The Qurʾān makes a distinction between nabī, prophet, and rasūl, messenger, elevating the latter somewhat over the former.1164 Muslim exegetes propose that a rasūl is a prophet who bears a message, a scripture, whereas a nabī does not bear any such message. Others specify that a rasūl is a prophet who gives a new sharīʿa, religious law, whereas a nabī continues the old one.1165 Nabī, however, is the term most widely used in the NV when referring to prophets, and while it is also used to indicate Muhammad, the designation rasūl (B. rasul) is used more often in reference to him. Sultān is not very consistent, however, in maintaining the strict Qurʾānic difference between nabī and rasūl. On occasion, he seems to demonstrate knowledge of such technicalities, while presenting a third Persian term, which technically translates as messenger

1164 Rubin 2011b.
1165 Ibid.
or rasul, but is used more freely, in Persian, to also indicate nabī.\footnote{1166} Thus, when speaking of Muhammad, the soothsayer (kāhin) Iusuph predicts:

This child has been born with three attributes.  
No other paygāmbar will be born after him.  
First, he shall be a nabī, protecting the world.  
Second, he shall achieve the beatific office of prophethood, paygāmbarī.  
Third, he shall be a rasul who shall receive a book.  
In that book are put forth the past and the future.  
None has received a title such as this.  
Know that he is the last rasul.\footnote{1167}

While it is not entirely clear what exactly Sultān means by this third ambiguous category of paygāmbar, it seems to me that he is alluding to the period when Muḥammad first began his public preaching. Islamic tradition holds that there was a pause, fatra, of three years that separated the Prophet’s first perceptions of divine revelation and his assumption of public preaching.\footnote{1168} The NV reveals an awareness of this tradition by presenting Muhammad as receiving his first revelations at the age of thirty-seven,\footnote{1169} and beginning his public preaching when he was forty.\footnote{1170}

In general, however, Sultān tends to blur the distinctions between the terms nabī, rasūl, paygāmbar, and avatāra (once the translational connection is made), using these interchangeably, though the latter two are less commonly used.\footnote{1171} Dūta, in the author’s usage, indicates both an ordinary human messenger,\footnote{1172} as well as the Lord’s angelic envoys, especially Jibrāil and the other archangels, and is used at least on one occasion in the sense of a divine

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1166} Thus, the Arabic Qiṣṣaṣ al-‘anbiyā’, is translated into Persian as Dāštān-i payāmbarān. See, for instance, Ibn Ishaq al-Nishābūrī’s Persian Qiṣas is translated as such.
\item \footnote{1167} NV 2: 59.
\item \footnote{1168} Buhl et al. 2011.
\item \footnote{1169} NV 2: 98.
\item \footnote{1170} A monk predicts that he would become a rasul at the age of forty, ibid., 87. See also, callissa varsa hai pālā paygāmbāri | tabe se janama halla phātemā kumārī | ibid., 136. Putting all these passages together it can be deduced, first, that by paygāmbarī Sultān means prophetic office; and second, that he is not always consistent in his usage of these three terms.
\item \footnote{1171} Regarding blurring the distinction between nabī, rasūl, and payghāmbar see, for instance, ibid., 477-478.
\item \footnote{1172} Ibid., 57.}


messenger who bears a message to two groups of sinners, the *suras/jinn* and the *asuras/jann*.

He also uses several Islamicate Bangla words derived from *nabī*, such as *nabīgaṇa*, the Bangla plural for the Arabic loan word, *nabī; mahānabī*, great prophet; the pair word, *nabī-avatāra*; or the title *nabīvaṃśa* for that matter, a few of the many ways in which he self-consciously stretches the lexical and semantic possibilities of Bangla, transforming a language stigmatized by the elite as inappropriate for the expression of Islamic teachings into one most suitable for the transmission of Islamic lore to local peoples.

### 6.5.2 Saviors and their Earthly Mission

According to the *NV*, as we have seen, prophets are first created by Prabhu Nirañjana, the Unblemished Lord, and sent down to Earth upon her repeated pleas to alleviate her burden of sin. We have also observed how Sultān appropriates the trope of the Earth’s plea for the removal of her burden (*bhāravataraṇa*) of demons and warriors who oppress her, first elaborated upon in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, and echoed in the purāṇas, including the *Bhāgavata*, and in Vaiṣṇava hagiographical literature. In addition, Sultān’s cosmogony/prophetology directly includes several recognizable *avatāras* of Viṣṇu who are created by the Lord to restore righteousness to the earth.

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1173 Concerning the latter, see *NV* 1: 18–19. Rubin (2011b) points out that while in the Qurʾān, angelic beings such as Gabriel who bear prophetic revelation are also called *rasūls*, they are distinguished from prophets who must necessarily be human in order to bear God’s message directly to the people. The *dūta*, in this account in the *NV*, is both a divine emissary and the bearer of a message directly to two groups of sinners, however, since the recipients of the message are also divine beings, the case is slightly different.

1174 *Ehi rūpe eka laṃsa calliṇa hājāra | tāna vāma pāse dekhe nabī avatāra || NV* 1: 105.

1175 See, for instance, *NV* 1: 12, 19–20, 24, 26, etc. For a detailed account of Sultān’s cosmogony, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

1176 Couture 2001, 314–315. Note the use of this trope by Caitanya’s hagiographers, starting with Murārī Gupta, in conceiving Caitanya’s advent. Stewart 2010a, 61, 175, etc.
The Vaiṣṇava avatāra and the Qur’anic nabi, thus, share a common mission of reestablishing the rule of morality and benevolence, and purging the earth of sin. While uneasily acknowledging this parallel in his gloss of nabi mentioned above, Sultān elsewhere underscores a fundamental difference between the two. In the NV, God creates prophets, including the prophet Kṛṣṇa; the Bangla verb, srjana karā, to create, and its derivatives, are used in the text to emphasize their mortal condition. This new ephemerality of the great gods of the Hindu pantheon whom Sultān appropriates in his universal genealogy of the prophets is, furthermore, reflected in the word, mahājana, great man, which he deploys when referring to the triad—Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśa—and to Hari and his avatāra, Rāma, as well. Unlike avatāras, who divinely manifest themselves from age to age by their own resolve, with the occasional logistical support of Brahmā, the prophets are created by God, and needs must, according to the Qur’ān, be fully human. This distinction, as we have seen, is crucial, as Sultān’s critique of the avatāra and his subsumption of Kṛṣṇa rests upon it.

Wrapped up with the concept of the avatāra is the myth of its manifestation through the cycle of the yugas, ages. Kṛṣṇa Caitanya was acclaimed by the Gauḍīyas to be the avatāra for the kali age. Having demolished Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Sultān later in the Nabīvaṃśa explicitly makes Muhammad the savior for the kali age.

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1177 Concerning the mission of the prophets, see Rubin 2011b.
1178 In the author’s usage, this term, at least in one place, is associated with the baṛa [baraloka/baraṃānusa], a respected community leader, elder, or aristocrat.
1179 nara sabe pāibāre pāpa punya bheda | cāri mahājane pāthāila cāri veda || NV 1: 491.
1180 nara sabe pāibāre pāpa punya bheda | cāri mahājane pāthāila cāri veda || NV 1: 24. Concerning Rāma, see ibid., 36.
1181 The Qur’ān is careful to emphasize the distinction between God’s heavenly and human messengers, explaining in Sūra 17:95 that a prophet must necessarily be human, because the physical presence of heavenly beings cannot be apprehended by ordinary humans. Rubin 2011b.
1182 Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, for instance, 1.1.4: 150.
1183 While the term yugāvatāra is nowhere explicitly used in the NV with reference to Muhammad, it is implicit in the author’s treatment of Muhammad as the savior of the kali age. Thus, in this section on
6.5.3 Genealogy, Divine Light, and the Agency of Descent

Related to the shared concern with charismatic pedigree found in both Islamic and Vaiṣṇava sources, the avatāra and the nabī have in common a strikingly similar agency of descent. In the doctrinal contexts of the Mahābhārata and the Harivamśa, the process of aṃśāvataraṇa, descent from a part or fragment, is closely linked to the emission of tejas, defined by André Couture as “a procreative substance which higher beings (such as gods and ascetics) possess and which gives them the capacity of occupying a womb in order to create a duplicate of themselves.” Elsewhere we see how Sultān appropriates the Vaiṣṇava concept of the aṃśāvatāra into his Islamic cosmogony. It is noteworthy that the aṃśāvatāra’s tejas, a word whose semantic field also includes the idea of divine incandescence, finds a close parallel in the Islamic principle of the Nūr Muḥammad, the Muḥammadan Light, as laid out in early hadīth literature. Both are associated with divine light and procreative substance, and it is through the agency of tejas and the Nūr Muḥammad that the aṃśāvatāra and the nabī respectively partake of the very substance of the Godhead. When Sultān states that Muhammad is the Lord’s “own aṃśa,” then, he has hit upon the perfect translational equivalent for the Nūr Muḥammad in the target language. Additionally, by playing into the parallels between Indic and Islamicate processes of messianic descent, he has enabled his Bengali audience to view Muhammad as a

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Muhammad’s address to Āllā with regards to his concerns for his community: tomhāra pavitra ghare mūrti rākhi chila | yatha ānācāra kaila sakala ghuchila || avaśeṣa payagāmbara tumhi kailā more | anudina cintā āṃhi pāi ei dare || kāli kāle ummata kariba pāpa karma | nā kariba vicāra nā kariba dharma || pralae haila yadi hisāba laibāra | āllāra hukuma haiba ārṣeta nibāra || sekhāne ummata tāra pāpa kari thāke | sabhāra sāksāte prabhu gaṇjībeka tāke || ummata kārane rasula lāghava haiba | ummatera lāgi kāja karite nāribā || ye sakala musalamāna mora anugata | kalikāle rākhīra kirāpe yatha sat || ehi bhae mohora maneta anudina | cintāe dahāe šārīra tanu haila kṣīna || NV 2: 473–474.

1184 Couture 2001, 318.

1185 Concerning the Nūr Muḥammad, see Rubin 2011a and b: 62-119.
divine *avatāra*, and thereby corroborate the Islamic understanding of his primordial sacred stature.

Entwined intimately with the notion of *tejas* and the Nūr Muḥammad as both spermatic substance and divine light, the progenitors of *avatāras* and *nabīs* also come to be associated with divine light. As we have seen, Sultān draws upon Islamic ideas of prophetic light and its primordiality to supply a detailed account of how the Lord, while creating Ādam, deposited a part of himself (*nija amāsa*)—light from his companion Nūr Muhammad—into him, as a result of which his forehead shone. This light passed down from Ādam to his son Śiś, from whom it passed through a long line of prophets via Ismāʿil and his descendants, individually listed by Sultān, to Ābdullāh, who transmitted it to his son Muhammad.  

1186 In Ābdullāh’s case, the Lord instructed Jibrāil to take a flower from the Rabbānura tree and caress Ābdullāh’s body with it. Seeing this, the Nūr Muhammad entered his body, as a result of which it became radiant, and fragrant like musk.  

Sultān also follows the hagiographical tradition in depicting the male

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progenitors of prophets as possessing a prophetic blaze on their foreheads, which then transfers to their female partners when the new prophet of the age is conceived.\textsuperscript{1188}

A similar phenomenon finds mention in the \textit{Bhāgavata}, in the account of Devakī's conception of Kṛṣṇa:

Then the Lord, the Soul of the universe and bestower of fearlessness on his devotees, entered the mind of Vasudeva with his \textit{aṁśa}. Shining like the sun, Vasudeva carried the splendour of the supreme person. He became invincible and unapproachable by all living entities. In due time, queen Devakī bore the manifestation of the infallible Lord, the source of auspiciousness for the whole world, and the soul of everything, who was contained within her. He had been deposited there by Vasudeva, the son of Śūra, by mental transmission. Devakī looked like the [eastern] quarter which bears the pleasure-giving moon. Devakī became the abode of the one who is the abode of all living creatures. But she could not shine with her full potency in the house of Kaṁsa, and remained like a flame which is contained [by a pot], or like Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, contained by one miserly with his knowledge. Kaṁsa saw Devakī, who was bearing the invincible Lord within her, smiling radiantly and illuminating the house with her effulgence. He said: “The one who is to deprive me of life, Hari [Kṛṣṇa], has surely taken refuge in her womb, because Devakī was not previously like this.\textsuperscript{1189}

Here the Lord descends with his \textit{aṁśa} into Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa's father, who then mentally transferred the \textit{aṁśa} to Devakī, his wife; with Devakī's conception of the \textit{aṁśa}, the divine light migrates to her from Vasudeva. Though the word, \textit{tejas}, does not feature here, the word \textit{aṁśa} can be interpreted here as both the divine manifestation as well as the speck of procreative substance itself.\textsuperscript{1190}


\textsuperscript{1189} Bryant 2003, 10.2.16–20: 15–16.

\textsuperscript{1190} Concerning \textit{tejas} as a feature of saints in South Asian hagiographical literature, see W. L. Smith 2000, 82–84.
6.5.4 Scripture and the People of the Book

The Qur’anic Sūra 33:40 depicts Muḥammad as the “seal of the prophets,” the final bearer of the word of God in a long chain of prophetic revelation. Furthermore, through the covenant God makes with the prophets, alluded to in Qurʾān 3:81, the Prophet comes to occupy the venerable position of a universal messiah, around whom all prophets and their communities should rally. The Qurʾān suggests that Jesus predicts the coming of the Prophet; in turn, the Qurʾān confirms earlier scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospels, addressing the Jews and the Christians, as ahl al-kitāb, “People of the Book,” i.e. people of scripture. Sultān tacitly expands this Qurʾānic category to include the Hindus, whose Vedas constitute, in Sultān’s account, the earliest form of God’s revelation to man, but which nonetheless confirm the future manifestation of the Prophet Muḥammad. Each of the four Vedas—the Sāma, Yajura, Ṛka, and Atharva—as we have seen, are respectively revealed, in the NV, to man through the agency of the celebrated triad of the Hindu pantheon—Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Maheśa—and Hari, the fourth bearer of its message, all of whom are described here as mahājana. Sultān self-consciously expands the community of believers to include Hindus into its fold. Somewhat like Jesus’ prediction of Muḥammad’s advent that the Qurʾān speaks of, Hari is here one of the conveyors of the Veda, which heralds the coming of Muḥammad. The antiquity of the Vedas undoubtedly imparts to the last Prophet and his Book the weight and wisdom of immemorial

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1191 Rubin 2011b.
1192 Buhl et al. 2011.
1193 Ibid.
1194 Cf. the section from the Prophet’s ascension when God promises Muḥammad, before he departs from the divine presence, to broadcast his name in the four Vedas and the fourteen Hindu scriptures (sāstra), in the Torah, the Gospels (injīl), the Book of Psalms (zabūr) and the Furqān (Qurʾān). NV 2: 272–73. See Chapter Seven below; see also the discussion of Donner’s “theocratic legitimation,” and my addition of the principle of “scriptural legitimation” in the Conclusion.
1195 NV 1: 24–25.
1196 The Islamic Tamil literary tradition adopts a different rhetorical technique to appropriate for Islamic scripture the weight of the Vedas. Playing upon number and meaning, the Tamil word marai, usually used for the Vedas, is interchangeably used to refer to the four scriptures significant to Muslims: the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and finally, the Qurʾān. Ricci 2006, 197.
time, and by appropriating their authority, Sultān self-consciously expands the community of believers to include Hindus into its fold. Here he adopts the standard strategy used in South Asia, and especially endorsed by the Ḥanafī school of law, to subsume Hindus under Islamic rule.¹¹⁹⁷

6.5.5 Auspicious Marks and Portents

When he first set his eyes on the baby Muhammad, the NV tells, the soothsayer (kāhan) Isuph found on his body all the seals of prophethood (nabuyata mohar). Written all over the infant’s tiny frame, he saw the mahāmantra, the great mystic formula of the kalimā.¹¹⁹⁸ Though this tale recalls the anecdote of the monk Baḥīrā in Ibn Isḥāq’s sīnā,¹¹⁹⁹ it also echoes the story of Kṛṣṇa’s birth in the Bhāgavata:

Vasudeva saw that amazing, lotus-eyed child, his four arms wielding the weapons of the conch, club, lotus and disc. He bore the mark of śrīvatsa, and the Kaustubha jewel was radiant on his neck. Clad in a yellow garment, he appeared as beautiful as a dark rain-cloud. He was resplendent with a magnificent belt, and arm and wrist bracelets, and his profuse locks were encircled with a lustrous helmet and earrings made of valuable vaidūrya gems.¹²⁰⁰

The infant Kṛṣṇa’s effulgent body bore all the divine marks of the avatāra, recognizable from the detailed iconography of Viṣṇu presented here. Elsewhere in the Bhāgavata, on Kṛṣṇa’s disappearance, the gopīs recognize his footprints because they bear the auspicious marks of “the flag, the lotus flower, the thunderbolt, the goad and the barley.”¹²⁰¹

¹¹⁹⁷ Friedmann 1986, 80–81. On the views of some medieval Muslim intellectuals on the relationship between the Vedas and the Qur’ān, see a comparison between the views of Dārā Shikūh and Mirzā Mazhar Jān-i Jānān, see ibid., 84–86.
¹¹⁹⁸ śiśuśka dekhilā yadi isupha kāhana | ciniyā pālā yatha nabīra lakṣaṇa | rasulera niśāna yatheka eke eka | ‘nabuyata mahāra’ dekhilā parateka | sarvathāe mahāmantra kalimā likhaṇa | dekhi acaitanya haila isupha kāhana || kataksane sānta hai kahite lāgilā | eke eke guṇa yatha tuncārya dila || NV 2: 58.
¹¹⁹⁹ Guillaume [1955] 2004, 79–82. Later, when Muhammad grows into adulthood, Sultān marshalls all the trademark tropes of classical Sanskrit poetry to bring these to bear upon a sarāpā of the Prophet’s exquisite form. NV 2: 78–81.
¹²⁰⁰ Bryant 2003, 10.3.9–10: 21–22.
¹²⁰¹ Ibid., 10.30.25: 132.
Other signs of the savior’s advent are noticed. In Kṛttivāsa’s popular Bangla adaptation of the Rāmāyana, Rāvana’s throne trembles and his crown falls to the ground at the birth of Rāma, another aṃśāvatāra, provoking the righteous Vibhiṣaṇa to proclaim that Rāvana’s destroyer had taken birth.1202 Echoing Kṛttivāsa’s account, Sultān relates a story of the great Naošeroyān, the late Sassanid King Khusraw I Anūsharavān (531-79 C.E.),1203 who is said to topple from his golden throne at the birth of Muhammad, his bejewelled crown rolling in the dust. Simultaneously, all throughout his land, the holy fires of his fire-worshipping peoples were extinguished. The king’s wise minister, Bujursameher (P. Buzurgmihr), reads this as a sign of the Prophet’s birth.1204 These portents in the NV, as borne out by early Islamic history, spell the conquest of the mighty Sassanid empire by the forces of Islam. Muslim historiographical sources suggest that a certain Kīsrā, the Arabic title given to the late Sassanid kings who dominate Arab memory, tore up the Prophet’s letter of invitation to Islam; hadīth sources predict the destruction of the Kīsrā, and even describe him as the arch enemy of Islam.1205 Despite this tradition, Sultān prefers to assimilate the Sassanid king by depicting him as a righteous, cultured monarch of noble blood (dharme karme mahāvīra kula śila ati)1206 who sent gifts and a conciliatory message to Ābdul Muttalib, the child’s grandfather, glorifying the new Prophet, and instructing his uncles, Hāmījā, Ābbās, and Ābū Tālib, to look after the orphan as their own son, protecting him from the enemy.1207

1202 Rāmāyana of Kṛttivāsa, 54.
1203 Khusraw Anūsharavān, along with Khusraw Aparvīz (591–628 A.D.), who were known to the Arabs as Kīsrā, dominated the late Sassanid period, and were remembered with mixed feelings by the Muslim Arabs: they envied the opulent Sassanid court for its sophisticated refinements, but hated their kings for their arrogance in not accepting Islam. M. Morony 2011.
1205 Morony 2011.
1206 NV 2: 55.
1207 Ibid., 57.
6.5.6 Other Echoes of the Kṛṣṇa Legend in the Sīra

Sultān tells a curious tale in which the baby Muhammad is exchanged with another child in order to save him from being killed by the evil ruler Ābu Jehel, known in the Islamic tradition as the Prophet’s lifelong foe.1208 Echoing the Bhāgavata legends surrounding Kṛṣṇa’s birth and the enmity of Kaṃsa, we are told that Ābu Jehel (who, in this account, is made the paternal uncle of the Prophet1209) is alerted by a kāhan, soothsayer, named Isuph (the NV’s counterpart to Nārada in the Bhāgavata tale) to Āminā’s conception of a child who would destroy him. Accordingly, Ābu Jehel sends a midwife to abort Āminā’s foetus. When poison has no effect on the foetus, she takes more radical measures. But, even as a tiny foetus Muhammad is a formidable match for the midwife. When her hand first touches him, he complains out loud that she is impure. Hearing the unborn baby’s voice, the frightened woman quickly withdraws her hand. Having picked up some courage, when she re-inserts her hand, the foetus grips it tightly with his own, refusing to release it till she has uttered the kalimā with due faith. The mother, by now in great pain, is comforted by her unborn child, who instructs her to continuously recite the kalimā to alleviate her pain.1210

Hearing the midwife’s conversion story, Ābu Jehel and his advisors lure Ābdullā, Muhammad’s father, with the promise of enjoying other beautiful women if he would kill Āminā and her baby. Instead, Ābdullā, echoing Vāsudeva’s attempts in the Bhāgavata to save Devakī’s life, tells Ābu Jehel that killing Āminā would bring the latter shame, and promises to...

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1208 Ibid., 52.
1209 This is deduced from the following passages in the NV: one, Āmina’s father, Ophalaṅg or Ohāb, was considered to be the ruler of the land before Ābu Jehel took over (ibid., 19-20); second, Ābu Jehel addresses the infant as his bhrāṭsuta (ibid., 42). Sultān here conflates Āmina’s father, Wahb ibn ‘Ābd Manāf, with al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra, known in the Islamic tradition as Abū Jahl’s predecessor. But perhaps this is a deliberate conflation so as to make Muhammad’s story more closely related to Kṛṣṇa’s tale, since Kaṃsa was Kṛṣṇa’s maternal uncle.
1210 The foetus’ comforting instruction to his mother is reminiscent of the unborn Kṛṣṇa’s advice to Devakī, in the account of Hari in the NV. See translation in Appendix Five.
bring the newborn to the king himself instead.\footnote{Concerning the \textit{Bhāgavata}, see Bryant 2003, 10.1.54: 13.} In order to quicken the baby’s birth, the kāhan Iusuf instructs Ābu Jehel to surround the child with Muslims. Āllā promptly sends down the four archangels who appear before the king as Muslim men; they are deputed by the king to speak to the baby about its birth plans. The angels comfort the baby, and let it know that it is God’s wish for it to exit its mother’s womb. Hearing this, the foetus makes clear its intention of taking birth that very night. When the king finds out through Jibrāil that the child was to be born that night, he sends two midwives, one of whom is the recently converted Muslim midwife, to be present at the birth, and entrusts them with delivering the infant to him the next morning.

When the Muslim midwife sees the baby Muhammad she wishes to exchange her own two-day old baby with him, in the hope that saving her savior would be rewarded with forgiveness of sin and a place in paradise. Accordingly, she hides the infant Muhammad in a safe place and places her own child beside Āminā. However, the other midwife named Halīma\footnote{According to the Muslim hagiographical sources, Halīma was the name of Muḥammad’s wetnurse. Cf. Guillaume [1955] 2004, 70. See also Watt 2011. To the best of my knowledge there is no account of her losing her own child.}, who had lost her own child, happens to set eyes on the hidden baby Muhammad, and brings him home.

Meanwhile, Jibrāil comes to the midwife’s baby, which had been placed beside Āminā, bringing him glad tidings of his incipient martyrdom—the very first in Islam—conferring in return for his saving the life of the Prophet all the attributes of Muhammad, the redemption of the sins of his entire clan, and death by resolve (\textit{icchā sukhe mṛtyu})\footnote{NV 2: 41. This attribute, characteristic of great Muslim martyrs, like Ḫusayn, is celebrated in the \textit{marsīya} literature of South Asia. \textit{Marsīya} of Mīr Babbar ‘Alī Anīs.} rather than at the hands...
of the evil ruler. At Ābu Jehel’s court, the infant chides him for serving idols rather than the Creator. The ruler, in his surprise, addresses the infant:

Being the son of a Hindu, you criticize all people and things Hindu. You are attempting to preach Musalmāni practices!
First I shall make you a Hindu—
only then shall you acquire virtue at death.
If you follow the practices of your lineage,
you shall prosper well in the hereafter.
First, I shall draw the image of an idol upon your forehead.
Second, I shall place a sacred thread on your shoulder.
Third, I shall teach you all our practices—
one by one, shall I convey all their forms.
Fourth, I shall give you a ceremonial bath.
Fifth, I shall burn you in the fire.
If you wish to prosper in the hereafter,
promptly banish from your mind these Musalmāni beliefs.

It is interesting to note Sultān’s characterization of Ābu Jehel as a Hindu. Through this religious code-switching, he at once makes Ābu Jehel a recognizable figure to the Bengalis, while simultaneously voicing his contempt of him and the Hindu people. Adopting the standard discursive strategy that Muslim writers use to speak of non-Muslims, Sultān, thus, tacitly accuses the Hindus of holding jāhilī beliefs, characteristic of the age of ignorance.

When Ābu Jehel commanded an idol to be drawn on the child’s forehead, the deputee’s hand gets burnt. When another attempted to place the sacred thread upon his shoulder the thread turned into a vicious serpent. When they tried to burn him, the fire was extinguished by Allāh’s command, and instead the evil ruler’s long beard got singed. When they tried to kill him

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1214 The trope of the speaking infant recalls Devakī’s exchanged infant in the Bhāgavata, who rises up as Viṣṇu’s Yogamāyā, issuing a warning to Kaṃsa when he dashes her to death. See Bryant 2003, 10.4.8–12, 25.

1215 hindura tanaya hai ninda hinduyāni | pracārite căhāsi ācāra musalamāni || prathame tohāre hindu karibāma āmhi | mṛtyu kāle tuve punya pābeha tumhi || āpanā vamśera yadi karilā ācāra | parakāle bhāla gati haiba tomhāra || prathame lalāte tora mūrati lekhimu | dvīte tomhāra kandhe paitā caráimu || tṛtye yatheka ache ācāra āpanāra | eke eke jānāmu se saba prakāra || caturthe caráimu tore snāna tarpāna | paicame caráimu tore ānale dáhāna || paraloka tuve tohora bhāla gati | mana honte musalamāni teja samprati || NV 2: 42–43.

1216 This perhaps alludes to the sectarian marks (tilaka) worn by members of various Hindu sects on their foreheads.
with numerous weapons, the child’s body remained unscarred. Ultimately Iusuph, having praised Allāh and denigrated idol worship, reminded the child of the benefits of becoming a martyr. The infant, thus, resolved to meet his death: a munāphek, hypocrite, was finally able to kill him with a sword.

The infant’s triumph over death by the divine gift of icchā mṛtyu, as much as by his entry into the wondrous world of paradise with all its rewards, spells the ultimate triumph of Islam over the heartless and conniving Hindu king and his peoples. Fascinating as this narrative is in itself, it represents the complex interplay of innovation, appropriation, and competition characteristic of the Nabīvamśa.

Sultān tells another tale of Muhammad’s childhood that situates the Prophet firmly on Bengali terrain. As a young boy, Muhammad tended goats, apparently following in the footsteps of his prophetic ancestors. The author extols the excellence of goat-herding as the perfect apprenticeship for prophets: as he attempts to keep his animals away from thieves and tigers, the young prophet learns how to guide his human flock away from Iblis’ grasp. Thus the boy daily grows in wisdom as he tends his goats.1217 Ibn Isḥāq in his Sīra speaks of the Prophet tending lambs as a child when he lived with his foster-mother, Ḥalīma.1218 He also provides a saying of the Prophet on the authority of Thaur ibn Yazīd, in which the Prophet testifies to having been a shepherd, stating, “There is no prophet but has shepherded a flock.”1219 While the NV’s choice of this legend regarding the Prophet provides moral edification and continuity with the Islamic traditions on the Prophet, it also casts him in the mould of their beloved Kṛṣṇa, whose youth was spent as a cowherd in a lowly cowherding community.

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1217 NV 2: 72–73.
1219 Ibid.
6.6 Conclusion

Sultān’s polemical retelling of the Kṛṣṇa stories of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa exemplifies the author’s agenda to contest local competition to the Prophet of Islam. The inclusion in Muhammad’s lineage of this “unsuccessful” prophet—one of the most popular deities of medieval Bengal and the supreme deity of the Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavas—subsumes a native rival. But what does this story of contestation and ultimate subsumption reveal about communal identity and its construction?

Highlighting recent research on the formation of ethnic identities in frontier communities of premodern South Asia, Finbarr Flood suggests that “rather than being opposed to identity, difference may in fact be central to its construction.” In the light of this statement, we see that Sultān provides his new Islamic frontier community with a new cosmogony, and a new prophetology, built by difference. The supreme deity of the Vaiṣṇavas, Hari, undergoes a wholesale incorporation into his prophetology, becoming the centerpiece of the tale-cycles on the Islamic prophets. But how should one nuance the nature of this assimilation of the other? According to Flood “difference was not a constant... but rather was dynamic in its emphases, contingent in its expression, and variable in its meaning.” Applying this statement to Sultān’s writings, we see the use of various narratological and rhetorical strategies that repeatedly draw Kṛṣṇa into comparison with the Prophet of Islam on a sliding scale of alterity, which ranges from an uneasy recognition of commonalities at one end to a reification of stark difference at the other. Thus, Sultān, on the one hand, endeavors to construct an Islamic ethical framework through stressing difference, emphasizing all that the Prophet of Islam is not. In helping his disciples see the Kṛṣṇa avatāra as debauched and degenerate, he implies that salvation can be achieved through following the upright and benevolent example of the

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1220 Flood 2009, 4.
1221 Ibid.
Prophet of Islam alone. Furthermore, it is remarkable that despite his Sufi-Shīʿī leanings, which could have predisposed him favorably to belief in avatāra, Sultān adopts an uncompromising theological stance against the doctrine. Certain Shīʿī groups of Indo-Pakistan, such as the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Satpanthis and some groups of Imām Shāhīs, respectively, take 'Alī and Muḥammad to be the tenth avatāra of Hari. While Sultān does not choose to go down this path, a choice perhaps permitted by the relative ascendancy of Islam vis à vis Vaiṣṇavism in his own environment, by underscoring certain theological intersections between the concepts of the avatāra and the nabi, he attempts to downplay difference, emphasizing instead common ground.

This deliberate adoption of rhetorical opacity, which draws Kṛṣṇa into undulating patterns of positive and negative comparison with Muhammad, serves two related purposes: the positive comparisons, by undermining the otherness of Islam’s Prophet, renders his figure familiar, authentic, and legitimate while simultaneously imbuing it with the charisma of the avatāra; while the negative comparisons subvert Kṛṣṇa and subordinate him to Muhammad. The Hari episode thus dramatically highlights a stylistic feature of Sultān’s Nabīvaṃśa. The dynamic textual interplay of shifting emphases on difference make seemingly contradictory rhetorical tendencies work in concert to serve Sultān’s grand polemical vision: the establishment of the preeminence of the Prophet of Islam on the Bengal frontier.

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1222 Khakee 1972, 43; see also ibid., n. 112: 59.
Chapter Seven

Constructing Bengal’s Muhammad: The Account of the Prophet’s Ascension

7.1 Introduction

Book Two of the NV, designated by Ahmad Sharif as Rasul Carita, “The Prophet’s Deeds,” covers the Prophet’s life in three parts. Part one, as we have seen, begins with a recapitulation of cosmogony, elaborating upon the bare principles delineated in the beginning of the Nabīvamša, while deepening the Sufi theological landscape of the Nūr Muhammad. Then follows a description of Muhammad’s birth and his early life as a prophet. Part two, Šab-i Merāj, “The Night of the Ascension,” begins with the ascension narrative (which constitutes 854 verses), and continues beyond it to present episodes from the Prophet’s mid-life. Part three, Ophāt-i Rasul, “The Prophet’s Death,” concerns his last days and death, ending with a brief description of the conquests of the first three caliphs. The Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ of al-Kisāʾī ends with the tale-cycle of Īsā, and does not include the Prophet’s biography. While appending the Prophet’s

1223 The reader is referred to Chapter Two (2.2.2) in order to understand what precisely constitutes the “ascension narrative” in my discussion in the present chapter.
biography to the tales of the prophets of al-Kisāʾī, Sultān’s sīra does not appear to translate any single text that I have been able to trace.

In his account of the ascension, the focus of this chapter, Sultān elevates the Prophet Muhammad above all other sacred figures by presenting him as God’s very own beloved. Depicted as the perfect phakir, he is cultural role model for Sufī and layperson alike, one whose powers as intercessor make him the pragmatic choice for members of his own and other faiths. The Prophet’s compassionate figure, much like that of the guru in Bengali culture, bridges the formidable nature of God’s abstraction. Particularly when read in the context of his other works, Sultān’s merāj serves three interlinked purposes, each one enriching the other: first, to supply an effective narrative platform by which to further enhance the sacredness and pre-eminence of the Prophet; second, to provide an ethical template for individual and communal Islamic practice, serving to construct a community identity aligned around the axis of pīr, Prophet, and God; and third, to invite others to the faith by presenting the Prophet as intercessor, an attractive figure of compassion and power. While the Nabīvaṃśa comprises numerous narrative sections each of which serves one or more of the above ideological purposes, the ascension story is perhaps the only discrete narrative unit that simultaneously serves all three.

7.2 The Place of Sultān’s Ascension Narrative in the Perso-Turkic Miʿrāj Tradition

The Prophet’s miʿrāj had emerged out of the biographical-historical mode by the fourth/tenth century as an independent narrative genre: the kitāb al-miʿrāj in Arabic, and the

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1224 As mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, this chapter incorporates material from my (2010) article on Sultān’s Šab-i Merāj, while updating and extending it where necessary.
Persian and Turkish *miʿrājnāma*. The “Books of Ascension” in Persian and Chaghatay Turkish of the eleventh-twelfth centuries C.E. were notable for their deployment of pre-Islamic Zoroastrian and Buddhist motifs, thus creating “powerful, and recognizable, narratives that could be used for entertainment, education, and conversion” as Islam became rooted in Iran and Central Asia.

Later, from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the *miʿrājnāma* was distilled into the Prophetic encomium (*miʿrāj naʿt*) of Persian classical poetry. A simultaneous trend to insert the *miʿrāj* into the biographical cycle of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣūra) included in universal histories of rulers is evident in Arabic and Persian literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as well as in the west under the Ottomans in the late sixteenth century.

Roughly contemporaneous to the Ottoman trend, but on the new Islamic frontier in the east, Saiyad Sultān inserts the *miʿrāj* narrative in his universal history of the Prophet. By this time enriched by Islamic scholars, historians, Sufis, and mystical and popular poets alike, this palimpsestic narrative served as a platform, time-honored and tested for persuasiveness by several centuries of Islamic literature, from which to establish the supremacy of the Prophet of Islam and spread the faith. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate at various points in this essay, Sultān draws on the concepts, language, and imagery of Nātha Yoga and Gaurīya Vaiṣṇavism in his transcreation of the *miʿrāj*, thus producing a uniquely Bengali narrative to honor the sacred figure of the Prophet.

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1225 Amir-Moezzi 2010.
1226 Gruber 2005, 46.
1227 Ibid., 240. Classical Persian literary works usually open with a *ḥamd*, a lyrical invocation praising God, followed by the *naʿt*, in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad.
1228 Rashid al-Dīn’s *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārikh* (Compendium of Chronicles) in Arabic, Mīrkhvānd’s *Rawzat al-Ṣafū* (Garden of Purity) in Persian (see Rehatsek [1891] 1982), and Sayyid Luqmān’s *Zubdat al-Tawārikh* (Cream of Histories) from Ottoman Turkey are examples of such universal histories. Gruber 2005, 37, 321-22.
1229 While many medieval authors eschew the ṣūra in their *qiṣṣa*, authors such as al-Rabghūzī incorporate it, including as well the ascension narrative. Cf. *Qiṣṣa al-Anbiyāʿ* of al-Rabghūzī.
7.3 The Šab-i Merāj: The Narrative and its Motifs

In her study on the miʿrāj myth, as shaped between the eighth and fourteenth centuries by the medieval scholarly elite, Brooke Olson Vuckovic provides a useful taxonomy of narrative motifs. Although introducing new elements, Sultān employs in his myth-making many of the standard medieval motifs identified by Vuckovic. These include: first, “readying events,” such as, in this case, receiving instruction from the angel Jibrāil, washing his heart in the waters of Zamzam, the trial of the people (similar to Vuckovic’s “trial of the voices”) and the trial of drinks, and visiting sacred sites such as Jerusalem and Mount Sinai (kuhatur giri); second, ascending into the heavens on the mythical beast, Burāk; third, the Prophet’s meetings with “heavenly beings,” such as, in this case, Satan (Iblis) and the King of Hell; fourth, his meeting with the prophets, including Musā; fifth, reward and punishment in the afterlife; and finally, the reaction of the Prophet’s community to his ascension. Three themes not apparently typical in medieval scholarly sources add distinction to Sultān’s work: first, meeting with the archangels; second, descent through the planetary spheres; and third, mystical love. In this third, and most elaborately developed theme, discussed in the next section, Sultān introduces Nātha Yogic and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava concepts and imagery, which contribute to the uniquely Bengali flavor of his merāj. But before we examine these themes, a brief outline of Sultān’s merāj is first provided.

1230 Vuckovic 2005, 17–35.
1231 Ibid., 44-47.
1232 Ibid., 34-39.
1233 Ibid., 51-72.
1234 Ibid., 97.
1235 Ibid., 75.
Sultān’s account of the mysterious night of the Prophet’s ascension, the twenty-seventh night of the Rajab moon, begins with God’s command to his angels to bring his “friend, the Prophet Muhammad” to him, so that they could sit as two friends on one throne and commune with each other. Jibrā’il, accompanied by his fellow-archangels, Ājīrā’il, Mikā’il, and Isrā’il, each with a band of 70,000 angels, is dispatched on this mission. At the Prophet’s doorstep, Jibrā’il allays Muhammad’s fears of a nocturnal attack by Arabs—the multitudes of angels gathered around his dwelling were confused for the enemy—and advises him to mount Burāk and journey through the seven heavens to have a glimpse of God, thereby honoring God’s wish. In order to further reassure Muhammad, Jibrā’il, as eternal messenger of God’s word to the prophets, presents an account of his spiritual credentials.

Exhilarated, the Prophet flies on Burāk escorted by the angels to the masjid of Mecca. There, having washed at the Zamzam well, he enters the mosque and prays together with all the angels. Muhammad ignores calls to tarry awhile. Traveling onward, the Prophet discovers two large bejewelled vessels (kūpa), one of honey and one of wine. He selects the vat of honey, and is informed by Jibrā’il that his choice has saved his community from destruction. Visiting Mount Sinai soon after, the Prophet once again prays in unison with all the angels.

Next, the Prophet meets with Iblis; in hell he sees the sufferings of Jews and Christians, and of women who have sinned. After a brief meeting with the angel Ismā’il, he travels to the bāyatul mokāddes (Ar. bayt al-muqaddas, or Jerusalem); when he prays on the Holy Rock, his feet

1236 NV 2: 200. Ibn Sa’d relates that Muhammad’s ascent took place “on the night of Saturday, 27 Ramadān, eighteen months before the Hijra.” Buhl et al. 2011; see also Schimmel 1985, 161.
1237 NV 2: 200.
1238 Ibid., 201–203.
1239 Ibid., 206–212.
1240 Ibid., 213–17.
1241 Ibid., 217–18. Concerning the angel Ismā’il in medieval mírāj accounts, see Vuckovic 2005, 46–47.
leave their sacred impression upon it. After a short interview with the personified form of the Holy Rock, the Prophet rides a second Burāq to ascend into the seven heavens. In the first five heavens the Prophet meets with Ādam; a gigantic white rooster and its master, the angel Samā’il/Ismā’il; Musā; Īsā; briefly, with Idrīs and Iusuf; and Ājrā’il, respectively. The sixth heaven is in fact hell, ruled by the “King of Hell”—a character distinct from Iblīs—who hesitantly shows him his land. In the seventh heaven the Prophet meets with Ibrāhim in his masjid, where Ibrāhim as khalīl (“friend [of God]”) leads the angels in prayer. He also meets with the archangel Mikā’il and the martyrs of paradise, who enjoy the delicious fruit of the jujube (badārī) tree whose branches reach the throne of God. At this tree Ājrā’il appears once more, and then the Prophet encounters Isrāphil; he sees the Pen and the Preserved Tablet, as also the angels who guard God’s throne. Beyond the seven heavens, Muhammad visits paradise; finally left alone by Jibrā’il at the Lote Tree of the Limit (sidrat al-muntahā), Muhammad traverses seventy thousand veils of dense darkness to reach God’s throne, on a horse named Raphraph.

God and his beloved companion eventually meet, an encounter Sultān describes in rich detail. A brief outline of the meeting between God and Muhammad is as follows: first, the

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1242 Ibid., 219. Cf. Gruber forthcoming. Concerning Qadam Rasul shrines dedicated to the veneration of the Prophet’s footprint in South Asia and Bengal, see Hasan 1993.
1243 “King of Hell,” Naraka Nṛpati, appears to refer to Mālik, whom Vuckovic describes as “the guardian of hell, the word meaning both lord and possessor.” Mālik is also “the character ... who shows Muḥammad hell.” Vuckovic 2005, 36–37.
1244 NV 2: 243. There seems to be a conflation here between the masjid—for which Sultān again uses the term bāyatul mukāddes (bāyt al-muqaddas)—and bāyt al-ma’mūr, the heavenly prototype of the masjid al-harām, the Holy Mosque of Mecca. Ibn Isḥāq describes Abraham “as a man sitting on a throne at the gate of the immortal mansion (bāyt al-ma’mūr).” Guillaume [1955] 2004, 183.
1245 NV 2: 244–47.
1246 Ibid., 248–49.
1247 For the reference to 70,000 veils, see ibid., 264. Cf. Schimmel 1993b, 133; and Colby 2006, 66–68.
1248 Sharīf (NV 2: n. 2, 263) reads “Pharad,” but the manuscripts also attest “Pharhar” and “Raphar.” I conjecture that Sultān wrote “Raphraph,” conflating the horse with the flying cushion, rafraf, which, in some mi’rāj accounts, is exchanged for Burāq at the Lote Tree of the Limit. See Schimmel 1985, 171. Cf. Gruber 2005, 60.
incident of the removal of sandals before God’s throne; second, God’s invitation to Muhammad to sit beside him on the throne and Muhammad’s final acceptance, which includes a depiction of mystical love; third, bargaining between Muhammad and God as a consequence of Muhammad’s entreaty to God to forgive his community of its sins; fourth, God’s initiating the Prophet into ninety thousand mysteries; fifth, Muhammad’s declining of God’s invitation to remain with Him, and instead returning to earth for the sake of his community; sixth, Muhammad’s entreaties to God to be made the model phakir; seventh; God’s praise of Muhammad, stating that He would spread the Prophet’s glory in various scriptures; finally, a description of God’s throne studded with the planets and constellations, studying which empowered Muhammad with knowledge of prognostication. Before he leaves, God asks Muhammad to convey to his community that they should pray sixty times a day, fast for six months during the year, and perform ablutions seven times after enjoying conjugal relations. Hearing this, Musā sends Muhammad back repeatedly until God reduces the number of daily prayers to five, fasting to one month of the year, and performing ablutions to once after sexual intercourse. The Prophet then begins his descent through the spheres, with the planets of each sphere prostrating before him. When he returns to his still-warm bed his wives Āyešā and Khadijā are sleeping. Later he informs each of them about his journey, and then, at the time of collective morning prayers, speaks of it to his community.

1250 NV 2: 275. Medieval accounts of the mi’rāj give the original number of daily prayers prescribed by God as fifty. No mention is made in these accounts of God fixing the requirement for fasting or ritual ablutions. Vuckovic 2005, 65–72.
1251 NV 2: 276–78.
1252 Ibid., 279–84.
7.4 The Prophet as God’s Beloved

Pursuing Brooke Olson Vuckovic’s path of dissecting narrative technique to reveal ideological motive, I now turn to the narrative devices that Sultān employs to exalt the Prophet over other prophets, and his community over those of other prophets. Since Vuckovic carefully deals with the manner in which the more typical miʿrāj motifs are used in “constructing the Prophet of God,” I turn to Sultān’s more unusual motifs, foremost of which is the theme of mystical love. Sultān sets the tone for his merāj with God’s command to His angels to cast a veil of deep and contented slumber over the world. Humans resting in their beds and the dead in their graves should not be disturbed. The fires of hell must be doused, and sweet fragrances spewed along the pathways. The houris of paradise are to adorn themselves while the skies are to be lit with row upon row of lamps. The scene is thus set at none other than God’s command: the night is specially prepared for Muhammad’s secret ascent, ensconced in darkness, into the intimacy of God’s presence. The Prophet thus seems to be transported through the heavens on the wings of God’s desire to be together with his long-lost friend; God urges Jibrā’il to set forth, with these words:

O every moment I contemplate my love for him
the Prophet Muhammad, my companion.
Thus from the mortal world shall I bring him here;
in person shall I give him audience.
We will sit as two friends on one throne;
we will converse with each other, he and I.
Go, all angels, and bring him;
explain to him my message.
Today is the twenty-seventh night of the Rajab moon—
tell him to come swiftly on this night.
Go together with all the angels; fetch him.

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1253 This is quoted from Vuckovic’s (2005) title for her Chapter One.
1254 While esoteric themes have been employed by prominent Sufis, such as Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and Muhammad Ghawṣ Gwāliyūrī, in elaborations of their own personal ascension narratives, the theme of mystical love is not typical in medieval accounts of the Prophet’s miʿrāj. See Gruber 2005, 42–44; see also Kugle 2003, 16.
With him shall I be seated, this very night.\textsuperscript{1256}

The one who is “beyond need” has need for his beloved companion, a theme celebrated in Sufi poetry across the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{1257} Separated from His supreme friend at the beginning of creation, God pines to be united with him once more.\textsuperscript{1258} Here God is presented as the needy Sufi lover, who desires to enter into deep communion, \(\textit{ṣuḥba},\) with the beloved. Traditional roles are reversed, hierarchies broken down: Beloved (\(\textit{maʿshūq}\)) becomes lover (\(\textit{ʿāshiq}\)), and lover beloved—a transformation that immediately signals the central role of God’s love in bringing about Muhammad’s ascent.\textsuperscript{1259}

Despite being accorded the welcome due a long-awaited beloved, Muhammad approaches haltingly into God’s presence, accepting His cordial invitation to sit beside Him on His throne with trepidation and bewilderment. God then reminds him:

\begin{verbatim}
āpanā anisatu āmhi srjichi tomhāre ||
tumhi āmhi ekatre aĉhila anudina |
āmhā honte katha dina haiyachi bhina ||\textsuperscript{1260}
\end{verbatim}

I created you from a part (\(\textit{amṣa}\)) of Myself.
You and I were one, always:
for how many days you have been separated from me!

Sultān’s idea that God is one,\textsuperscript{1261} as well as his understanding that God and Muhammad are

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1257} See, in the case of Rumi, for instance, Chittick 1983, 197.
\textsuperscript{1258} Sultān’s cosmogonic ideas are discussed below.
\textsuperscript{1259} Qur’ān 17:1 depicts God as being the one who caused Muḥammad’s night journey. Furthermore, the idea that Muḥammad is “sent for” occurs in Qurtubī’s thirteenth-century work, \textit{Aḥkām al-Qur’ān}. Vuckovic 2005, 47. See also the fourteenth-century Turkish mystic Yūnus Emre’s poem, in which God sent Gabriel to bring Muḥammad to him. Schimmel [1982] 2001, 183. For the idea of God becoming the lover of the Muhammadan Light, see Schimmel’s (1985, 127) translation of an excerpt from Meḥmed Bey Khāqānī’s Turkish \textit{Ḥilya-i sharīf}:

God (\textit{ḥaqq}) loved this light and said: “My beloved friend (\textit{ḥabīb})!”
And became enamored (\(\textit{ʿāshiq}\)) of this light...
\textsuperscript{1260} NV 2: 266.
\end{footnotesize}
essentially one but separated should be read in the light of the discussion of the similarities between Islamic cosmogony and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava philosophy of acintya bhedabheda, and the letter mysticism associated with the Arabic mīm, discussed in Chapter Four (4.2.2.2).

Sultān makes Muhammad the object of God’s desire, with the creation itself taking place due to God’s love for his beloved. God reprimands the King of Hell, who initially turns down the Prophet’s request to view his realm, and informs the king that no person in the three worlds could equal Muhammad, his “pure friend,” for the love of whom he created the three worlds.1262

Again, when Muhammad bids God farewell before his return to earth, Muhammad is reminded:

\begin{verbatim}
tumhi chāri mohora dosara nāhi āra ||
tomhāra pīrīti rase maji mora mana |
sṛjana karila āmhi e tina bhuvana ||
sṛjiluni ākāśa kṣiti toṁhāra kāraṇa |
tumhi vine e sakala nā haita sṛjana ||
\end{verbatim}

Other than you, I have no companion.
My mind submerged in the juice of love (pīrīti rasa) for you,
I created these three worlds.
I created the heavens and the earth because of you.
Without you, all this would not have been created.

The impact of these lines in praise of “the lord of lawlāka,”1264 which draw upon the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava locutions of prema rasa, is greatly magnified when read in the context of God’s pining for his time of prior oneness with Muhammad, best appreciated in the cosmogonical context in which they have been explained in Chapter Four (4.4). We may recall that Sultān states that creation—the supreme soul (paramāttamā), the individual soul (jīvāttamā), the Throne, the Pen, the Tablet, the great mystic formulae (mahāmantra), and so on—emerged from the sweat produced when God’s gaze fell upon his beloved companion, Nūr Muhammad, himself

1261 Cf. ibid., 1: 1, 2: 3.
1262 ehi muhammadā nābī śuddha sakhā mora | tribhube eka nāhi tāna sāmasara || tāna preme srjīyāchi e tina bhuvana | dekhāo tāhāne niyā naraka ekhana || NV 2: 233.
1263 Ibid., 274.
1264 Schimmel 1985, 130.
(personified as this entity is in the text) an emanation from God.\textsuperscript{1265} We see also that the Muhammad of Sultān’s \textit{merāj}, thus, is not merely the last prophet, but also the first, the \textit{ādi-antera rasul}, a theme discussed earlier.

To continue with God’s entreaty to Muhammad to sit beside Him on His throne:

\begin{verbatim}
cirakāla viccheda haiche mora sane |
dekha āsi tumhi mora vekata nayāne ||
gopta ānkhī dhyāneta dheyāi pāicha dekhā |
vyakta ānkhī dekha āsi āpanāra sakhā ||\textsuperscript{1266}
\end{verbatim}

You have been separated from me for an eternity.
Come and look at me with the visible eye.
With the hidden eye while meditating in \textit{dhyāna} do you see Me.
Come and see your Friend with the visible eye.

Here, the author depicts the Prophet as a \textit{yogī} who has a vision of God through the Nātha Yogic process of \textit{dhyāna}, a form of meditation requiring sustained contemplation of the deity. The “secret” or “hidden eye” is suggestive of the yogic \textit{ājñā cakra}, or “third” eye, one of the subtle centres for mental concentration in \textit{dhyāna}. Furthermore, Sultān reifies the Sufi belief that the Prophet’s ascension took place in body, rather than merely in spirit, and that his vision of God took place in a state of sober awareness rather than in a condition of mystical annihilation.\textsuperscript{1267}

God asks Muhammad to look upon Him with his “manifest” or “visible” eyes, to perceive Him externally, as opposed to the inner vision he has of Him.\textsuperscript{1268} God, then, beseeches his beloved:

\begin{verbatim}
āisa āisa muhammadā baisa mora sange |
krpāra sāgara hauka premera tarange ||...
tumhi mora prema-sakhā eka kalevara |
mohora nikaṭe baisa nā haīa antara ||
anye anye nayānē nayānē dekhā kari |
anye anye kathā kahi āpanā pāsari ||
e buliyā rasulaka nilā nīja pāśa |
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{1265} Cf. \textit{NV} 1: 4–6, and 2: 3–9.
\textsuperscript{1266} \textit{NV} 2: 266.
\textsuperscript{1267} Cf. Schimmel 1985, 162–63.
\textsuperscript{1268} On his return to earth, when asked about his vision of God first by his wife, Āyeśā, then Khadijā, and finally by his community, the Prophet emphasizes each time that he had seen Him both with the inner as well as the outer eye. \textit{NV} 2: 281–84.
Come, come, Muhammad, sit with me;
become a sea of grace on the waves of love.

....
You are my beloved friend, of one body.
Sit close to me; let there be no distance.
One to the other, eye to eye, let us gaze.
One to the other, let us commune, forgetting ourselves.
Saying this, He drew the Messenger close to Himself—as though the moon’s radiance was in the sun’s lap.
Two mirrors remained face to face,
light merged into light, belying form.
When those two lights became united,
the two lights merged in one body.
When the two brows arch and knit together,
like two snakes intertwined,
lover (bhāvaka) and beloved (bhāvinī) become one in ecstasy—
between two bows a single string.

Sultān skillfully weaves esoteric and exoteric imagery in depicting Muhammad’s meeting with God as a reenactment of their time of primordial togetherness, an affirmation of the Prophetic saying, “I have a time with God.” Sufis, including Sultān, interpreted the Qur’ānic expression “two bows’ length” (qāb qawsayn) to mean two drawn bows, their strings touching to make a circle signifying union.

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1270 The translation and interpretation of this complex passage owe much to suggestions by Tony K. Stewart. In fact, I directly quote his translation of the two lines: “When the two brows...intertwined,...” Personal correspondence, January 16, 2008.
1271 Bhāvaka and bhāvinī are common terms in Vaiṣṇava literature. Bhāvaka can mean all of the following: thinker, creator, meditator, and connoisseur (rasika, rasajña). Bandyopādhyāya 1996, s.v. “bhāvaka.” Bhāvinī, its paired term in the feminine gender, used here to describe Muhammad, is often used to describe Rādā, the lover of Kṛṣṇa. Biswas 1994, s.v. “bhāvinī.”
1272 Schimmel 1975, 220–21.
1273 The Qurʾān 53:9, n. 5089, 1444.
Some of Sultān’s other images quoted here go farther, and might suggest that Muhammad’s communion with God in the merāj involves ontological union. The image of the two facing mirrors is a particularly fertile one. God and Muhammad see each other in these mirrors, eye-to-eye and face-to-face, their reflected forms reproducing themselves without beginning or end—a play on the idea that all created things emanate from God’s love for Muhammad, all forms here shown to be created in their conjoined image. Muhammad himself, moreover, is presented as being created in God’s own image, as an amśa would be. Additionally, by using the Vaiṣṇava literary terms bhāvaka (lover) and bhāvinī (beloved), Sultān frames Muhammad’s meeting with God in terms of the passionate Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa encounter. In this context, the trope of the multiplying mirror-images draws upon the idea that the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is like a hall of mirrors: Kṛṣṇa’s love is reflected back to him by Rādhā, who ever magnifies it—and so their love grows in an endless spiral.1274 Thus, in his construction of the Prophet as God’s beloved, Sultān employs Sufi imagery and ideas while embracing the language and concepts of Nātha Yoga and Vaiṣṇavism. Sultān’s Prophet is made that much more glorious for being enriched and legitimized by religious and cultural images rooted in Bengal.

The Prophet’s special status as God’s friend leads him to be exalted by the heavenly beings and prophets he meets on his celestial journey. Typically, the Prophet has an encounter with the master(s) of each heaven and one or both of two narrative possibilities unfold. First, the Prophet is accorded a privileged position by his counterpart, for one or more reasons: doctrinal (as in the case of Īsā),1275 on account of his status as God’s friend, his intercessory powers (Ādam,
or the guards of hell)\textsuperscript{1276} or the superior nature of his community (Musā, Ísā and the archangel, Mikāil).\textsuperscript{1277} Second, in encounters such as those with the archangels Ājrāil and Isrāphīl, and the King of Hell, the Prophet is empowered with special knowledge of God’s eschatological plan. The deployment of these two narrative patterns establishes the Prophet’s superior knowledge and spiritual mastery over all other prophets. A third narrative technique Sultān adopts lies in his depiction of the Prophet’s ascent from one heaven to the other: the Prophet departs for the next heaven usually having led, as their īmām, all the angels in prayer, a trope that literally and figuratively brings the Prophet to the fore.\textsuperscript{1278}

Not only do the prophets and other heavenly beings exalt Muhammad’s position, but Sultān puts into God’s mouth praise of his holy stature, elevating him over all other prophets. While approaching the throne, the Prophet wished to remove his sandals; God objects, but Muhammad defends his position, citing the example of Musā, who was instructed to remove his sandals when he ascended Mount Sinai. God refutes him, explaining that the purpose of this injunction was to have the holy dust of Mount Sinai wash away Musā’s sins; in the case of Muhammad, his beloved companion “whose body is without sin,” God’s throne would gain stability from the holy dust of his sandals.\textsuperscript{1279}

While Sultān invokes the authority of the prophets, and even God, to exalt Muhammad’s position, he also employs the testimony of non-Islamic scriptures. Before Muhammad leaves

\textsuperscript{1276} For Ādam, cf. tomhāra pīrītī atī āllāra sahīta | nirbodha pāpera bhāra khandāo turīta || Ibid., 223. For the guards of hell, cf. tumhi se āllāra sakhā apāpa šarīra | karibā uddhāra tumhi yatha nārakā || āmhi pāpī saba prati kara avadhāna | khanḍāo āmhāra pāpa māgī prabhu sthāna || narahaka yantrāna hontē raksā pābāra | ghucāo āmhāra duḥkha prasāde tomhāra || Ibid., 233.

\textsuperscript{1277} For Musā, cf. āmhā hontē lākha guṇa mahimā tomhāra | tumhita parama priya rasula āllāra || Ibid., 225. For Ísā, cf. mohora ummata hontē tomhāra ummata | rākhyāche bahula mahimā yatha sat || Ibid., 228. For Mikāil, cf. rasule bulīlā tābe ki kāje tomhārā sabe ethā rahi thākā anukṣaṇa | bulīlā tomhāra lāgi prabhu pade vara māgī ethā rahi tomhāra kāraṇa || tomhāra ummata sabe daruda kahila yabe laila tomhāra yadi nāma | ehi samudrera jala hae ati sunārmala taraṇa uthe avīśṝma || Ibid., 245.

\textsuperscript{1278} Ibid., 224, 226, etc.

\textsuperscript{1279} Ibid., 264–65; see also 205. Concerning traditions that describe the role that Muḥammad’s name plays in stabilizing God’s throne, see Rubin 1975, 106.
God’s proximity in order to begin his descent through the seven spheres, God promises to broadcast his name in the four Vedas and the fourteen Hindu scriptures (śāstra), in the Torah (taurāta), the Gospels (īnjil), the Book of Psalms (jabur) and the Phorkān (Qurʾān).\textsuperscript{1280} This serves a dual function: first, it places Muhammad’s own revealed scripture, the Qurʾān, on a continuum of revealed scriptures one more ancient than the other, giving the last Prophet and his Book the weight and wisdom of immemorial time; second, it places the Bengali Hindus, who also rely on revealed scripture, within the Islamic category of “people of the Book.” These remarks should be read in the context of Chapter Five (5.2.2).

Another unusual theme that Sultān employs to exalt the Prophet’s holy stature is that of his descent through the spheres. On his return journey Muhammad meets with the personified forms of the presiding planets of each sphere, who prostrate themselves before him.\textsuperscript{1281} This narrative element, much as the trial of drinks is used in certain instances in medieval literature, serves as confirmation of his divine stature, one that has been consecrated by his ascension into the presence of God.\textsuperscript{1282}

To conclude, Sultān employs a spectrum of narrative themes, both old and new, in the construction of the Prophet as God’s beloved. While fleshing out these themes, he draws on diverse esoteric and devotional systems—Sufism, Nātha Yoga, and Gauḍīya Vaishnavism—each one complementing the other to enhance the Prophet’s holy stature. By invoking the authority of the prophets, God, and scripture, the author legitimizes the Prophet’s status, and accords him preeminence over all other religious leaders.

\textsuperscript{1280} NV 2: 272–73. See also ibid., 1: 24–25, and the introduction to Sultān and the NV in this essay.

\textsuperscript{1281} Many Prophetic encomia (naʿt) of Persian classical poetry that appropriate, in their praise of him, the theme of the Prophet’s ascension describe the Prophet’s meeting with the presiding planet of each sphere, endowing, as he ascends, each of these planets with one of his special qualities. Gruber 2005, 242-43, 280–81, 316. Sultān presents a variation on this trope in his description of the Prophet’s descent.

\textsuperscript{1282} Vuckovic 2005, 27–29.
7.5 The Prophet as Perfect Phakir: Formulating Islamic Ethics

While Sultān’s merāj indeed includes Sufi and other devotional elements, it does not seem conceived as a mystical text per se: given Sultān’s interest in esoteric disciplines, as possibly revealed by the Jñāna Pradīpa, it is striking that his narrative is not composed, for instance, as a mystical progression through the various stations and/or planetary spheres. Rather it has been shaped primarily as a didactic treatise that sets the codes of Islamic practice. The treatment of the Prophet’s experiences in the hereafter appears predicated entirely upon the author’s preacherly engagement with his disciples in the here and now.

Much like medieval miʿrāj accounts, Sultān’s descriptions of the afterworld and his reinforcement of the Qurʾānic promise of paradise and the threat of hell remind the believer of the consequences of moral choice and the accountability of action, within the overarching scheme of God’s justice, while providing a coherent link to the teachings of the Qurʾān. So as not to repeat the descriptions found in the Qurʾān, medieval accounts eschew descriptions of paradise per se, and focus rather on its inhabitants. In contrast, Sultān’s merāj—perhaps precisely because the Qurʾān was inaccessible to the local Bengali—provides detailed descriptions of paradise (bhihist/svarga) and hell (naraka), along with an account of those who are punished. Other than the martyrs, those who are rewarded with paradise are not specifically listed and become the default category—members of the Prophet’s community who do not commit the sins punishable by hell, and instead enjoy the sensual delights of paradise.

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1283 Cf. the account of al-Bīštāmi’s personal ascension, Sells 1996, 244–50.
1284 Cf. Vuckovic 2005, 120.
1285 Cf. ibid., 98.
1286 The King of Hell, whom he meets in the sixth heaven, introduces the Prophet to the seven hells, set up as a sliding scale starting with the worst, which has 70,000 types of torments (duhkha), to the seventh, which has 10,000; the latter is specially designed for Muhammad’s followers, who are described as weaker in physique than the robust heroes of yore. NV 2: 235.
As we encounter elsewhere in his merāj, Sultān, in his depictions of heaven and hell, was creatively adapting, much like other Bengali poets of his time, the whole spectrum of Arabo-Persian Islamic civilization to the Bengali cultural world. The author uses powerful visual imagery in portraying the glories and beauty of paradise, in which exquisitely adorned houris, depicted according to the conventions of classical Indian poetry, entreat God to bestow on them husbands from among the Prophet’s community, reminding Him that they have been practising austerities and mantra-recitation (tapa japa) to be so blessed. These images are sharply contrasted with the revolting nature of hell, whose swampy areas infested with mosquitos, worms, scorpions, pythons, snakes, and fearsome aquatic denizens conjure up the fetid ponds and mangroves of Bengal. With this juxtaposition the author confronts his audience with the pragmatic importance of making the right choices.

Though Sultān does not provide in his merāj a categorization of the virtuous who inhabit paradise nor names exemplary Muslims who live there, he does supply an ideal model for emulation in the form of the Prophet himself—the “beautiful model,” uswa ḥasana, of the Qur’ān. In His conversation with the Prophet upon his ascent, God presses Muhammad a second time to ask for a boon. This time Muhammad makes several entreaties to him:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{rasule bulilā ehi māgie tomhāe} & \\
\text{ksudhāe tṛṣnāe aṅga dahuka sadāe} & \\
\text{khāite udara bhari nā dio ānhāre} & \\
\text{dina saṃbala dibā dine khāibāre} & \\
\text{nara sabe yekhanē māge mora ṭhānī} & \\
\text{ei māgi sabhānere dibāre jhātāi} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

1288 NV 2: 260.
1289 Ibid., 236.
1290 In the merāj, Sultān grants a place of honor to four exemplary women: the Pharaoh’s wife (whom he names Āsmā), Mary, Khadija, and Fātima. These chaste women, satī nārī, have each been reserved a bejeweled pavilion in the third heaven. Ibid., p. 226. Cf. Vuckovic 2005, 106-112.
1292 The first time Muhammad asks the Lord to forgive his community for their sins. See below. For the “‘ask and be given’ trope” in Sufi sayings on Muhammad’s conversation with God during his ascent, cf. Colby 2006, 132–33.
ājñā kara ati dātā hauka mora kara |
ye yei māgāe tāre dibāre satvāra ||
āra ājñā kara more sārīra sādāe |
tomhāra sevāta rahi thāuκa sarvathāe ||...
āra ājñā kara more e tīna bhuvane |
nāma dhari phakira dāuκa sarvajane ||

Let my body always burn with hunger and thirst.
Do not give me a stomach-full of food;
give me the daily means to eat for the day....
The moment men ask [something] of me,
I ask that I can give [it] away immediately.
Order that my hands be great givers;
let them swiftly donate whatever someone asks.
Also command that my body ever remain in Your service...
and that I may be known in the three worlds
as the phakir who continually takes the Lord’s name (nāma dhari phakir).

In effect, the Prophet asks to be made the quintessential Sufi—a desire that, according to this account, greatly pleases God. Much as the culmination of the Jñāna Pradīpa, ascribed to Sultān, is the presentation of a process of visualizing the Immaculate Lord, Niraṅjana, in the heart-lotus, it seems clear that the high point of Sultān’s ethical teachings in his merāj lies here. In his presentation of the “life as model” ideal for emulation, in his representation of the Prophet as cultural role model—an ascetic, munificent, zikr-absorbed phakir—Sultān is sketching a Sufi self-portrait for his Bengali audience. In doing so, he simultaneously makes the Prophet a familiar, approachable figure, and casts the pīr in the Prophet’s likeness.

As do medieval accounts, Sultān lists specific categories of sinners punishable in hell, providing an exhaustive, if mostly normative, categorization of sin that includes lack of belief in the basic tenets of Islamic piety; non-abidance by the pillars of Islam; financial sins; sins against what is lawfully appropriate in terms of diet or sexual relations; sins associated

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1293 NV 2: 272.
1294 Several hadith reveal the Prophet as one who insisted on poverty so as to be closer to God. Cf. Schimmel 1985, 48. See also the hadith which depict Muhammad as the first Sufi, in Khalidi 2009, 164.
1295 Jñāna Pradīpa attributed to Saiyad Sultān, 645–46.
1296 By normative, I refer to the categorizations of sin found in medieval mīrāj accounts. See Vuckovic 2005, 112–20.
with ritual purity; and a wide variety of social sins including those that relate to a lack of respect for the authority of father and mother, guru, phakirs and dervishes, and learned men—ālims and maulānās. Proper behavior between the genders is laid down in some detail, while Sultān speaks out against violating lawful sexual relationships. The author thus compiles a minimal obligatory code of conduct for the Muslim, following which the upright believer would be assured a place in paradise. In Sultān’s worldview, however, the disbeliever, no matter how virtuous, finds no place in paradise; instead the other “people of the Book”—Christians and Jews—associated as they are with the basic “evil” of giving false testimony, are automatically dispatched to hell.

Going against the grain of medieval mi‘rāj descriptions, which confirm the Qur’ānic view in depicting the virtuous members of various communities gathered around their respective prophets in paradise, Sultān here presents a bleaker future for the Christian and the Jew.

What, then, does Sultān have to say about the Hindu disbeliever? As we have seen, the author places Hindu gods and scripture in his universal history at the service of an Islamic teleology, tacitly acknowledging Hindus as being “people of the Book.” Throughout the Nabīvamśa, however, the author emphasizes the evils of idol worship. In doing so, he adopts the standard discursive strategy that Muslim writers use to speak of non-Muslims, associating them all with the age of ignorance. In accounts of pre-Islamic prophets, the author weaves elaborate tales of the destruction of idols and idolaters, suggesting that his audience included new

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1297 NV 2: 237–39. Vuckovic’s (ibid., 120) perceptive remark on the sexual sins laid out in medieval accounts applies here as well: “the women are punished for what they do to the men of their family, not for what they do against God’s decrees.”


1300 Sultān does not use the term “Hindu” in this particular section, though he does elsewhere in the NV—yet it is clear from the context that the “idolaters” and “kāfirs” he speaks of are members of local Bengali religious sects.
converts for whom he feared wavering and backsliding into their previously idolatrous ways. Moreover, the account of the prophet Hari/Kṛṣṇa, as we have seen, holds up this popular deity as a warning to Bengali idolaters. Sultān’s polemical presentation of Kṛṣṇa’s exploits—the manner in which he seeks to humiliate this popular deity at every narrative turn, and in particular, setting up Kṛṣṇa’s failed ascension as a foil to the Prophet Muhammad’s vastly successful one—suggests that the Vaiṣṇavas, especially the Gauḍīyas, would surely be denied a place in Sultān’s paradise.

In the author’s understanding, as we have seen in Chapter Three (3.4.1), a large part of kufr is idolatory: a kāphir is defined as one of animal nature, who does not worship the Stainless Lord, who, not knowing the essence of the Islamic faith, commits every sort of irreligious act, and ever worships idols. In the merāj, Sultān relates a striking anecdote about the mythical beast, Burāk. Waiting outside the Prophet’s abode in order to bear him through the heavens, Burāk flees when he smells the Prophet’s hands. Muhammad’s hands are apparently tainted as a consequence of slapping the idol in Mecca across the head, in a fit of moral outrage—though the author is quick to clarify that Burāk fled only as a reminder to human beings of the evils of idol-worship, for no stench could truly cling to the Prophet’s hands. Thus while there is no direct mention of the fate of the idolater in Sultān’s descriptions of hell, by introducing wisdom through the guise of the mythical beast Burāk in the first section of the merāj, he provides unambiguous warning to such disbelievers at the very outset.

1301 See, for instance, Śis (NV 1: 180), Nūh (ibid., 317), and Ibrāhim (ibid., 347–53). Sultān narrates how people in Ibrāhim’s time bought idols and named them “Brahma” or “Viṣṇu,” and sacrificed goats before them—a comment on the religious practices of the author’s own time. Ibid., 380.
1302 trīṇ kāphira nāme paṣuṛa carita | niraṇjana nā bhāvīyā sebe mūrti nita || ... kāphire nā jāne emā isalāmera marma | mūrti sebi kare nitya nānāna adharma || Ibid., 2: 47.
1303 Ibid., 207–8. Similar incidents concerning Burāq occur in other miʿrāj narratives; see Colby 2006, 136.
In the colophon that closes the opening section of the *merāj*, in which the above incident of Burāk is related, Sultān issues a stern warning to idolaters, perhaps softened by the alternative he provides:

Those who worship idols in the hope of gaining paradise, 
will be utterly destroyed having fallen into hell. 
Listen, O men, says Saiyad Sultān: 
remain in refuge at the Prophet’s feet.\(^{1304}\)

Here, the author offers the hitherto idol-worshiping neophyte with an attractive exchange: the Prophet’s feet for an idol of stone. The Prophet’s anthropomorphism, much like the figure of the tantric *guru*, becomes a conduit for negotiating the formidable nature of God’s abstraction.\(^{1305}\)

7.6 The Prophet as Intercessor: Invitation to the Faith

This brings us to another related issue: while Sultān is concerned with strengthening the Islamic community by establishing a moral code of conduct for individual practice and communal interaction, he is also interested to invite others to the faith. Given the array of religious options available within the Bengali socio-cultural milieu of the late sixteenth century, how does Sultān manage to project Islam as the most expedient and desirable? The answer partly lies in an examination of the techniques Sultān uses to accord preeminence to the Prophet in his biography—an issue that has been explored earlier. What follows is a discussion of images, in the *merāj*, of the Prophet as intercessor for his community, images which seem to be closely related to Sultān’s desire to spread the Islamic faith.

\(^{1304}\) *mūrti pūjī se sakale svarge yāite āśa | narake parīya haiba samūle vināśa | kahe saiyada sulatāne śūna naragaṇa | rasulera padayuge rahuka śaranā | NV 2: 208. Also, see the colophons on 212 and 221.

\(^{1305}\) Placed in the context of Sultān’s praise for his own *guru*, this serves to reinforce the axial alignment of *guru* and Prophet. Additionally, regarding the similarity in roles played by Muslim and Vaiṣṇava masters in the Bengali socio-cultural world, cf. Nicholas 1974, 10–12.
In his discussion of the literature of Satya Pīr, Tony Stewart emphasizes that the importance of Satya Pīr as a religious and cultural, albeit mythical, figure lies in his dealing with “pragmatic concerns of survival—not overt ideology, theology or ritual”; devotees simply “accept that he has the power to make their lives better.”

While Satya Pīr is worshipped for his power to make life on earth “better,” Sultān presents the Prophet as one who has the power to make the afterlife experience of his disciples better. In the colophon above, the Prophet is depicted as the pragmatic choice for the Hindu idolater concerned with enjoying the pleasures of paradise, since he alone can win this most sinful of sinners a place in paradise—one has sought shelter at the Prophet’s feet.

In keeping with legends of the Prophet in popular piety across the Islamic world, Sultān portrays Muhammad as one who truly cares for his flock, a negotiator and intercessor for his community even at great personal cost. His Muhammad is one who ensures the maximum leniency permissible to the worst of his followers, and for the best among them he brokers privileges often rivaling his own. The Prophet, thus, makes sure he inspects the seventh hell, reserved for sinners of his community, in order to gain intimate knowledge of the sufferings some of his people might face. Guided through this formidable hell by its king, the Prophet fears for the members of his community and entreats God to save them from hell. God tests him by asking him to choose between saving his parents or his community from hell. The Prophet elects the latter: a predictable but nonetheless endearing choice.

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1306 Stewart 2004, 23.
1307 Cf. Schimmel 1994, 202. See also the representation of the Prophet as intercessor in the miʿrāj motifs of classical Persian poetry, such as in ʿAṭṭār’s Ilāhīnāma. Ibid. 1985, 166–68. For Sufi sayings on the Prophet’s ascent with special reference to his role as intercessor, see Colby 2006, 123–24, 132–33.
1308 janaka janani kibā ummata tomhāra | kāhāre naraka honte karibā udbhāra || ... rasule bolae āmhi māgie tomhāe | udbhārite ummata māgie sarvathāe || NV 2: 242. Concerning a similar trope in miʿrāj literature, see Gruber 2005, 50–51.
Burāq the Prophet takes assurance from Jibrāil that good people from within his community would eventually also be able to ride this fantastic beast, i.e. journey to the heavens.\footnote{NV 2: 206. Before he allows the Prophet to mount him, Burāq makes him promise to allow his community to eventually ride the beast into the heavens. Ibid.}

When Muhammad comes into the presence of God, the Lord offers him anything he desires in the universe, including His throne and footstool, and even paradise. The Prophet instead begs that his community be forgiven its sins. At first God forgives a third of the Prophet’s community. But the Prophet continues to plead with him until he forgives another third. Not entirely satisfied, the Prophet continues to press God, who finally grants that all those who recite the \textit{kalima} will be completely forgiven of sin.\footnote{Ibid., 269-70.} Furthermore, when God tells him to stay on with him if he wishes, the Prophet expresses his sense of obligation to return to earth for the sake of his community.\footnote{Cf. Schimmel 1985, 164.} He worries that his people might go astray, like those of Idris and İsā, who left their followers in order to live in paradise.\footnote{NV 2: 269–71.} Here Sultān not only portrays the Prophet as God’s friend, superior to all other prophets, but also presents him as the unfailing friend of his people, making him thus an attractive figure for love and veneration. Even more than through the rewards of paradise, Sultān intends to win people to this new religion of Bengal through the figure of the Prophet of Islam, in whom the qualities of \textit{jamāl} are justly matched by \textit{jalāl}: he whose compassion, self-sacrifice, and attentiveness to his people rival his glory, majesty, and most importantly, influence with God.

\section*{7.7 Conclusion}

Saiyad Sultān’s ascension narrative on the Prophet Muhammad is a significant chapter in his larger project, the \textit{Nabīvamśa}—a literary attempt to gain wider acceptance for the Prophet

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{NV 2: 206. Before he allows the Prophet to mount him, Burāq makes him promise to allow his community to eventually ride the beast into the heavens. Ibid.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 269-70.}
\item \footnote{Cf. Schimmel 1985, 164.}
\item \footnote{NV 2: 269–71.}
\end{itemize}}
Muhammad and his religion in the Bengali socio-cultural world. “To be widely accepted,” as Richard Eaton points out, a deity “had to be perceived not only as powerful and efficacious, but as genuinely local.” Sultān knew well that the success of his mission lay in how effectively he could make the Prophet a truly Bengali figure. In reformulating the Arabic miʿrāj genre for a Bengali audience, he translates Perso-Arabic Islamic literary and aesthetic sensibilities into a Bengali cultural and literary idiom, a principle of cultural literization and continuity we have seen applied to his delineations of cosmogony and pre-Muhammadan prophetology. Introducing the little-known figure of the Prophet, he presents new Islamic teachings in terms of the familiar, the authentically local. Thus, in his various depictions of the Prophet—as God’s beloved, as ideal Bengali phakir, as guru-like guardian and intercessor for his disciples—and in his eidetic images of otherworldly regions, the author invokes Bengal’s literary, religious, and cultural vocabulary. While the author uses many motifs of the medieval miʿrāj in his ascension narrative, and effectively employs the language and imagery of Sufism, his construction of the Prophet as God’s beloved simultaneously draws upon the ascetic and devotional systems of Bengal—Nāṭha Yoga and Gauḍīya Vaishnavism. This and other related chapters demonstrate that Sultān chooses to establish the Prophet of Islam in Bengal via, what could be called, various means of “cultural legitimation,” referring specifically to local forms of culture. Moreover, it is through the leitmotif of mystical love, a form of “theocratic legitimation,” that Sultān accomplishes his foremost task: the consolidation of the Prophet’s supremacy over all other religious figures.

By reading Sultān’s merāj in the context of the Nabīvamsa, and through an intratextual analysis of its narrative motifs and techniques, we see how the biographer and his subject are

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1313 Eaton 1993, 303.
1314 This is Donner’s term. For more details of the four forms of legitimation Donner identifies as being prevalent in the early Muslim community, see the “Conclusion” of the present dissertation.
entwined in a relationship of mutual legitimation: while the Prophet of Islam, as the subject of sacred biography, initially derives credibility from the charismatic authority that Saiyad Sultān wields as pīr over his community, Sultān’s own office is sanctified by the manner in which he constructs the Prophet of Islam. All the models of the Prophet that Sultān presents—God’s beloved, the phakir, and the intercessor—coalesce in the image of the Prophet as paradigmatic Sufi pīr, who embodies all three roles. In this manner, Sultān tacitly affirms his own office of pīr, and elongates the existing spiritual axis of šiṣya-guru to the Prophet and God. It is around this axis, strengthened by such processes of “genealogical legitimation,”¹³¹⁵ that he wishes to orient and strengthen his community. Through his merdāj tale, Sultān provides an ethical framework to strengthen community identity and differentiate believers from disbelievers. While a minimal obligatory code of conduct is laid down for the ordinary Muslim, the Prophet as ideal phakir is held up as the perfect cultural model for emulation. In his attempt to invite others to the faith, Sultān uses imagery of the Prophet as intercessor for his community: likened to the figure of the guru in Bengali culture, Sultān’s Prophet is an exemplary guide and guardian of his disciples. In his charismatic persona reside the twin qualities of grace and power that then make him the most pragmatic choice for the people of Bengal.

¹³¹⁵ This too is Donner’s term. See below.
Chapter Eight

A Contested Legacy: A Premodern Pīr-Poet in the Modern Politics of Nationalism and Regionalism

8.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an examination of Saiyad Sultān’s literary legacy in the premodern and modern periods: first, I discuss the reception of the author and his text by premodern Bengali poets, and, later, by modern scholars and the reading public in the print era. In studying the reasons for the NV’s decline in popularity in the twentieth-century, comparisons are drawn with the more popular modern Bangla sīra, situating such literary production, reception, and circulation in the contexts of colonialism and orientalism, Islamic reform movements, and the new strides taken in the print and publishing industry in Bengal. Despite the Nabīvāṃsa’s declining popularity in the modern period, both scholars and the faithful have put forth competing claims to Saiyad Sultān’s history and legacy, favoring either Chittagong or Sylhet as the region of his birth. Focusing on two Bangladeshi villages, one in Chittagong and the other in Sylhet, I trace oral histories related to Saiyad Sultān in Chittagong,
and a modern revival of his legacy in Sylhet. An examination of Sultān’s legacy reveals a pattern of contested histories across Sylhet and Chittagong, wherein the charismatic authority of related historical figures is claimed by competing regions as cultural capital. It is argued that enquiry into Sultān’s legacy opens a window onto the efforts of regional groups across East Bangladesh today to reconstitute the past to meet the aspirations of present-day individuals and communities, to improve various aspects of their social, economic, and religious life.

8.2 The “Wishing Tree”: Saiyad Sultān’s Reception among Premodern Bengali Poets

The chronological mapping of Islamic Bangla texts remains an haphazard, incomplete, and complex task in the current state of the field.1316 Bangladeshi literary historians, Muhammad Enamul Haq, Munṣī Ābdul Karim, and Ahmad Sharīf, have proposed that Jainuddīn,1317 Šābārid Khān,1318 and Daulat Ujjīr Bahrām Khān1319 were the first authors to write about the Prophet in Bangla.1320 Drawing inspiration from the Arabic maghāzī genre, the vijaya kāvyas of Jainuddīn and Šābārid Khān, both entitled Rasūl Vijaya (“The Prophet’s Triumph”), were independent texts celebrating in like manner the military triumph of the Prophet in a battle against the infidel, King Jaykum.1321 In Imām Vijaya (“The Imām’s Glory”), Daulat Ujjīr Bahrām Khān portrays

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1316 Roy (1983, 13–14) raises this issue in his discussion of the problematic dating of Šāh Muhammad Sagīr’s lūsuh-Jolekhā. He dates Jainuddīn to the early seventeenth century. 1317 Haq (1957, 56) considers Jainuddīn to have been the court poet of Sultān Yūsufl Shāh of Gauṛa (1474-1481). 1318 Concerning Šābārid Khān’s dates, Haq (1957, 65), based upon the language of his texts, proposes that he belongs to the late 16th century. Munṣī Ābdul Karim (DCBM, 431) mentions that his works were written between 1517–1550. 1319 According to Munṣī Ābdul Karim (DCBM, 442), Daulat Ujjīr Bahrām Khān was the finance minister of Nizām Šāh Sur, the Governor of Chittagong, and the brother of Sher Shāh Sūr. 1320 See also Muhammad Majiruddīn Miyā (1993, 21, 95-96). 1321 Sharīf [1972] 2006, 125. Haq (1957, 57) takes Jaykum to be the name of the place, rather than the name of the king. A similar text attributed to Saiyad Sultān, discussed in Chapter Two, suggests that it is the name of the king.
the grief of the prophets, focusing particularly on Prophet Muhammad’s on the death of Hosen.\textsuperscript{1322}

Being the first universal history of the Prophet, however, the NV became a monumental template and rich trove of literary treasure for future writers. Sultān’s innovative use, for instance, of various elements from maṅgala and purāṇic literature, which enabled him to portray his Islamic characters in the image of Hindu deities, both in their ability to command supernatural forces and to commandeer divine, erotic līlās, set the tone for the literary treatment of Islamic figures in the middle period. Thus, the Comilla poet Śekh Cānda’s narrative on the Prophet’s birth and childhood, in the Rasul Vijaya (1715),\textsuperscript{1323} is indebted to Sultān’s appropriations of themes from Krṣṇa’s birth and early life.\textsuperscript{1324} His representation of the Prophet as phakir also relies on Sultān’s model.\textsuperscript{1325} The depictions of Hayāt Māmud in his Anbiyā Vāṇī (“Tales of the Prophets”) (1757),\textsuperscript{1326} of the flirtations of the Prophet’s parents, Ābdullāh and Āminā, as also other details of the Prophet’s primordial origins, his birth, and his account of the Prophet’s ascension are based upon the NV.\textsuperscript{1327} Sultān’s inventive restatements of Islamic cosmogonical thought in the light of Nātha and Vaiṣṇava philosophical ideas, such as the representation of Allāh as śūnya, or the introverted state of bhāva (a precursor to cosmogonical extroversion), in which Allāh and his beloved, Nūr Muhammad, remain ensconced, were accepted by later poets, such as Ābdul Hākim\textsuperscript{1328} writing in the Nūrnāmā genre, and Ālí Rajā in

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\item \textsuperscript{1322} Muhammad Majiruddīn Miyā 1993, 9–10.
\item \textsuperscript{1323} Concerning the date, see Khondkār Mujāmmil Hak 1993, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{1324} Muhammad Majiruddīn Miyā 1993, 30–31.
\item \textsuperscript{1325} Ibid., 31.
\item \textsuperscript{1326} Concerning the date, see Khondkār Mujāmmil Hak 1993, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{1327} Muhammad Majiruddīn Miyā 1993, 39–42, 76–82. For a comparative study of Saiyad Sultān, Śekh Cānda, and Heyāt Māmud, see Khondkār Mujāmmil Hak 1993, Chapter Four. Śekh Cānda’s Rasul Vijaya remains unpublished. For Heyāt Māmud’s works, see Mazharul Islam 1961.
\item \textsuperscript{1328} Muhammad Majiruddīn Miyā 1993, 35–36.
\end{itemize}
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his Āgama or Jñāna Sāgara. The degree to which these and other of Sultān’s clever appropriations, topoi, and narrative events set forth in the NV were often slavishly imitated, in all their fine detail, is testimony to his impressive sway over later generations. As Muhammad Majiruddin Miyā indicates, the Šab-i Merāj by the aspiring Rangpur poet, Faijuddin, is nothing short of a plagiarism of Sultān’s ascension narrative, reproducing not merely his descriptions but his diction. In order to avoid repetition, and perhaps simply failure, more savvy authors chose to refer their audience directly to the NV, refraining from composing their own accounts of the prophets. It seems, thus, that by the eighteenth century, the NV had come to acquire canonical status. While Šekh Cānda’s account of the Prophet’s life displayed more inventiveness than Hayät Māmud, who followed Saiyad Sultān’s narrative on the Prophet’s life more closely, and while the former outpaced Sultān in his incorporation of heterodox elements, and perhaps rivaled him in poetic accomplishment, neither could match Sultān’s originality, the grand scale of his work, nor the reach of his learning in Islamic and Bangla literary traditions, ensuring that his tales of the prophets remained the guiding light of Islamic Bengal’s hagiographic firmament.

When such a formidable reputation is combined with the social reality of the Qurʾān being unavailable to local Muslims in Bangla translation until the late nineteenth century, it is not

1329 Cashin 1993.
1331 Thus, for instance, Šekh Muttālib in his Kiphāyatul Musallin writes: “It will not be appropriate to again record all the events [described] in the Nabīvamsā.” (Translation mine. nabīvamsē ye sakala prasaṅga āché / puni tāka likhibāre ucita nā hae ||). And again, “In the Šabe Me’rāj is a description of the battles. There is no need to repeat these here.” (Translation mine. šabe me’rāje āche yuddha vivaraṇa / puni ethā kahi tāka nāhi prayojana ||). Both passages are quoted in Sharif [1972] 2006, 53. See also the verses of the authors Abdul Karim Khondkār, Mukīm, and Šerbāj Caudhurī quoted in Sharif 1983, 2: 681–2.
1332 Ibid., 716.
1333 While Šekh Cānda’s account of the Prophet’s life is more voluminous (Sharif 1983, 715) than that of Sultān’s, his work does not incorporate the accounts of the earlier prophets (Khondkār Mujāmmil Hak 1993, 80–81).
1334 Girish Chandra Sen wrote the first Bangla translation and commentary on the Qurʾān, the first volume of which appeared in 1881. Sufia M. Uddin 2006, 87.
surprising that the Nabīvaṃśa gained distinction, in some quarters, as a trusty stand-in for the Holy Book. According to an eighteenth-century patron, Māhāmmada Rājā Tālukdāra of Chittagong, for whom the scribe Cāmāru copied the Nabīvaṃśa, “the tales of the prophets are like the Phorkān [A. Furqān, i.e. Qurʾān]” (āmbiyā kiścā phorakāna samāna).1335 Though less known to premodern Muslim Bengali writers as the author of Sufi texts, such as the Jhāna Pradīpa (“Lamp of Gnosis”), which has been ascribed to him, Sultān went down in the annals of premodern Bangla literature and modern Bangladeshi scholarship alike as a great pīr, a philosopher (tāttvika), and a teacher of poets (kabiguru). His literary and spiritual legacy is noted by as many as fifteen premodern poets, among whom, states Ahmad Sharif, are Śekh Parāṇa, Hājī Muhammad, Muttāliba, Phate Khān, Maṅgalacānda, Muhammad Mukim, Muhammad Āli, Nāsiruddin, Śekh Manohara, Ābdul Karim Khondkār, Mīr Muhammad Saphī, Śārīph Sāh, Mujaphphar, Śerbāj, and Cuhar.1336 He is eulogized by medieval poets as kalpataru, the mythical wishing tree,1337 pradhāna puruṣa, primary being, and ādya guru, original teacher,1338 the latter (more precisely ādi guru) traditionally reserved for Śiva in tantric literature,1339 while the second epithet Sultān himself had applied to the Prophet Adam.1340 These epithets are emblematic of his canonical status among the faithful who carried on his literary tradition, even as his own text came to be viewed by Muslims of East Bengal as a canonical document for Islamic praxis, pivotal to the formation of their religious identity. In addition to the afore-

1335 NV 2, Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 691.
1337 Concerning Muhammad Khān’s use of the epithet kalpataru, see Sharif [1972] 2006, 61–62. Regarding Muhammad Khān’s descriptions of his master, Saiyad Sultān, see Chapter One of this dissertation.
1339 Gold 1987, 196.
1340 Concerning pradhāna puruṣa, see, for instance, NV 1: 144. Sultān (NV 1: 7) also uses the epithet for Mārija. He, incidentally, applies the epithet of ādyaguru and kalpataru to the anti-hero, Iblis, in his role as Kābil’s (Cain) teacher and spiritual mentor, and to the early Sufī, Ḥasan Bāsorī, Ḥasan of Basra. NV 1: 184, 256.
mentioned Faijuddin’s plagiarism of Saiyad Sultân’s Šab-i Merâj, the Rasul Vijaya of the Dinâjpur author, Phakir Cândâ, attests that Saiyad Sultân’s fame was not limited to the far-eastern regions of what is modern-day Bangladesh, but had also spread to the north-western regions of Bangladesh.

8.3 The Nabîvaṃśa in the Era of Nationalism

8.3.1 Dobhâšī Literature: Beginnings and Meanings

In order to introduce a new religious ideology and its epistemic world to Bengalis, medieval Muslim poets, as we have seen in the case of early pioneers such as Saiyad Sultân, were continually pushing back the boundaries of language and genre. Saiyad Sultân was derided for such linguistic and literary experimentation—for allegedly making “hinduâni” the message of Islam, the accusatory term here serving in both its communal (“hinduizing”) and linguistic (“pertaining to the language of the inhabitants of Hindustan”) senses. Ironically enough, it was precisely efforts such as his which resulted in the furtherance, on a linguistic level, of the gradual assimilation of Persian vocabulary into Bangla’s linguistic substratum, a process which had surely begun by the fourteenth century, as the Persian poet, Ḥâfîz of Shiraz (d. 1389), reminds us through his famous lines: “Because of this Persian sugar-candy that goes [all the way] to Bengal, all the parrots of India will become crunchers of sugar” (quoted earlier). The earliest rustle of Persian in Bangla literature, however, is discernable in the last decade of the

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\[\text{1341 Muphākhkhārul Islām n.d., 2–3.}\]

\[\text{1342 As the sizable number of manuscripts of Saiyad Sultân’s works as well as those of his disciple Muhammad Khân collected from Comilla district suggest, Sultân and his disciple were well-known in the region. For details of the manuscripts of Saiyad Sultân’s works collected in Comilla, see Appendix One of this dissertation. For Muhammad Khân’s works collected in Comilla district, see BAPP and CCBM.}\]

\[\text{1343 Translation mine. Shakkar shikan shavand hamah tutiyan-i hind izin qand-i parast ki bah bangâlah mi ravad. Divân of Ḥâfîz Shîrâzî, 172. See also Amîr Khusrû’s statement in his Nûh Sipîhr (173) about Persian being the lingua franca in fourteenth century India: “Persian parlance enjoyed uniformity of idiom throughout the length of four thousand parasangs, unlike the Hindavî tongue, which had no settled idiom and varied after every hundred miles and with every group of people,” translated by in Muzaffar Alam (1998, 331–332).}\]
fifteenth century in Vipradāsa Piplāi’s *Manasāmaṅgala*. While Hindu authors such as Vipradāsa applied such vocabulary specifically in their descriptions of Muslim life, it was Muslim authors who were responsible for using Perso-Arabic terms more widely throughout their texts, thus standardizing such usage in medieval Bangla. The diction that pre- and early modern poets used was emically referred to by Bhāratcandra in his eighteenth-century *Annadāmaṅgala* as *yāvanī miṣāla bhāṣā*, “a language mixed with *yāvanī* words [literally, “Ionian,” but here understood as “language/languages related to the Muslims”—Persian, Arabic, and Hindustānī],” and in his *Mānasimha Kāvyā*, as *dobhāṣī bāṅglā*. Until the early nineteenth century, the relative fluidity of the sectarian affiliations of rural folk enabled poets and scribes to comfortably write and copy across genres traditionally associated, whether from the perspective of the contemporaneous conservative elite or the modern observer, with their religious “other.” Thus, numerous Muslim poets, as we have seen, wrote Vaiṣṇava *padāvalīs*, lyrical poems on the love of Rādhā and Krṣṇa; authors such as Rādhācarana Gopa of Bīrbhūm wrote *Imāmera Jaṅg*, while the pīr-literature reflects too this shared cultural and devotional universe.

In keeping with contemporary pan-Indian trends, nineteenth-century Bengal, as a result of revivalist movements such as the Tarīqa-i Muḥammadī and the Farāizī, galvanized by the colonial encounter, saw a hardening of religious identities. This polarization was reflected in

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1344 Mannan 1966, 59.
1345 Haq (1957), 174.
1346 Mannan 1966, 69.
1347 Concerning the original and later meanings of “Yavana” in India, see Talbot 1995, 698–699.
1348 Haq (1957), 174.
1349 For a picture of the society of the time, see Dinesh Chandra Sen [1909] 2007, 2: 792–796.
1351 Sukumar Sen 1951, 48.
1353 For a detailed analysis of the impact of these movements on Bengal’s Muslims, see Rafiuddin Ahmed 1981, 53–56.
the once secular Bangla language through its artificial bifurcation, under the direction of colonial linguists, into distinct linguistic streams, a phenomenon, which in communalized ways, was akin to the contemporaneous manufacture of modern standard Hindi as a language distinct from Urdu. The sentimental association of linguistic purity with essentialist understandings of civilization and religion, under misguided, but self-serving British supervision, soon generated within the Bangla vernacular a competition to assimilate distinct cosmopolitan languages. Since Bangla was the first Indian language to appear in print, this process, as Anindita Ghosh has meticulously traced, was further impelled by the “communalization of print.”

Stimulated by the needs of British administrators and missionary scholar-teachers at the College of Fort William to formulate a modern Bangla prose for legalistic and proselytizing purposes, the initial efforts of the Bhaṭṭācāryas, Sanskrit ṭola pundits, in their employ, resulted in the creation of a language which relied on an entirely Sanskritic tatsama vocabulary and a simultaneous purging of the “vulgar” idioms of calita bhāṣā, colloquial speech, as well as Perso-Arabic words. The latter linguistic “reform” was spearheaded by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, who wrote the first grammar of Bangla in 1778, in which he claimed to “have avoided, with some care, the admission of such words as are not natives of the country.” The early Bangla prose written by Sanskrit scholars, such as Mṛtyuṅjaya Vidyālaṅkāra, was ridiculously

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1354 Concerning the role of colonial linguists such as John Gilchrist and others in popularizing the nomenclatures ‘Hindustani’ and ‘Urdu’ for two purportedly separate languages spoken by Hindus and Muslims respectively, see Faruqi 2001. Concerning the efforts of the British at Fort William to artificially construct the new language of Hindi out of the substratum of Urdu, see Tara Chand 1944, 88.
1355 Anindita Ghosh 2006, 296.
1356 Ibid., 61 and 305.
pedantic and florid in style;\textsuperscript{1360} it served the needs of a small British circle of civil servant trainees and orientalist scholars at Fort William, and was derided by the locals as sāhebī bāŋlā, “the Bangla of white folk.”\textsuperscript{1361} However, the endeavors of Bengali intellectuals such as Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar, Aksay Kumāra Dutta, and others, as delineated by Anindita Ghosh, ultimately led to the formulation, by the 1860s, of a more widely comprehensible sādhu bhāṣā, a standardized, genteel form of the written language based upon Sanskrit, which was used by Bengal’s bhadraloka, the urban upper class.\textsuperscript{1362} Shaped thus by colonial masters, as Sudipta Kaviraj has shown, the relational dynamics between Sanskrit, English, and Bangla were undergoing profound changes. As the dynamics between these languages changed, what Kaviraj calls “the internal economy” of Bangla also changed, making the language internally more differentiated than it had ever been. As English displaced Sanskrit as the “esoteric language,” successively diminishing it in status to an archaic language, Bangla was replacing Sanskrit as the high language. Yet as Bangla, through a process of assimilating Sanskrit’s vocabulary, aspired to “become” like Sanskrit, it also became, like it, more esoteric. Bangla’s new cadences of high speech and “‘cultured’ pronunciation” then made it “an unfailing marker of increasing social differentiation,”\textsuperscript{1363} imbuing its developing history with an ironical twist: what once arose as the language of the subaltern now became perpetrator of the very hegemonies it had sought to overturn.\textsuperscript{1364}

This new standard Bangla (sādhubhāṣā), which initially arose as a marker of class, became, almost from the moment of its birth, a marker of communal boundaries. Thus, in reaction to this perceived “Hinduization” of Bangla, the Muslim Bengali ashrāf of the Calcutta,

\textsuperscript{1360} See the examples of this style provided in Dinesh Chandra Sen [1940] 2006, 2: 915–918.
\textsuperscript{1361} Anindita Ghosh 2006, 74.
\textsuperscript{1362} Anindita Ghosh 2006, 74–78. Regarding parallel linguistic processes in the production of a sanskritized Hindi, see Orsini 2002, especially Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{1363} Kaviraj 1992, 44–45.
\textsuperscript{1364} Ibid., 44.
Murshidabad, Howrah, and Hooghly regions redoubled efforts to foster their religious and cultural identity via a language laden with more Persian words than its premodern counterpart, one that also retained the natural variations of everyday speech and dialect. Following the term’s invention by Reverend James Long in 1855, colonial linguists came to attach, to this latter linguistic strand, the label “Musalmān-Bengali” or “Muhammadan Bengali.” The British prejudice towards Muslims in general, and, hence, towards this strand of Bangla, was evident: they considered it to be tasteless, and “a mongrel of Bengali and Urdu” with neither grammar nor a vocabulary. Though he later disabused his readers of the idea, the colonial linguist, George Grierson, and other authors had come to believe through the writings of Mīr Amman, a Fort William College Urdu writer, that Urdu itself was a “mongrel mixture of languages of the various tribes who flocked to the Delhi bazaar.” Thus, James Long did not hesitate to denounce as Bangla what was then perceived as the doubly mongrel language in use by Bengal’s Muslims. In his words:

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1366 Anindita Ghosh 2006, 305.
1368 Ibid., 42.
1369 J. F. Blumhardt (1905, 3), a linguist and teacher of Bangla at the University of Oxford, uses this term to describe Saiyad Sultān’s language, while cataloging what is ostensibly a manuscript of the Rasul Carita. He says, “This work is a fair specimen of the class of Bangla literature generally known as Muhammadan Bengali. It consists chiefly of versions of, or commentaries on, Hindustani, Persian, or Arabic works on Muhammadan religious observances, traditions and lives of the prophets, also numerous legends, and romances. The works are written by Muhammadan authors, generally in verse, and in a more or less corrupt style of Bengali, largely intermixed with Persian and Arabic words.”
The Musalmans are averse to learn the Vernaculars; as Urdu has been formed by a mixture of Persian and Hindi, so the Musalmans have formed in Bengal a kind of lingua franca, a mixture of Bengali and Urdu called the boatman’s language. This must eventually give way to the overwhelming influence of Bengali.

Such derogatory comments undoubtedly fueled the efforts of the ashrāf architects of this Bangla strand. Thus, for instance, Abdul Gafur Siddiki claimed in 1916 that “dabhāshi Bengali” was in fact true Bangla, charging Hindu intellectuals with excising Perso-Arabic words from the language. In principle, Siddiki’s claims were sound, for though reduced via the peculiar nomenclature “dabhāshi” and the misguided efforts of modern Muslims to a diglossic relationship to Urdu, the Bangla that Abdul Gafur Siddiki was in fact referring to was the Bangla that had naturally developed over the centuries of its evolution through a polyphonic relationship with Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, in addition to Sanskrit, as the languages of its high culture, which the Hindus were now busy purging of “foreign” influence.

Taking their cue from colonial linguists, Bengali writers, linguists, and literary historians began to speak of this literary strand as “Islāmī” Bangla (Mohammed Abdul Hākim, Sukumar Sen, and others), and “Musalmānī Bengali” (Suniti Kumār Chatterjee). As can be seen from Abdul Gafur Siddiki’s comment above, it was also known as dabhāshi Bangla. Though Bhāratchandra had earlier used the term in reference to the diction of medieval and early modern writers, it is not entirely clear when exactly the latter term began to be used for this particular modern Bangla strand. From its occurrence in the writings of Munṣī Riyājuddīn

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1373 Except perhaps, its communal identification, it is unclear as to which precise languages are meant by “Hindi” and “Urdu.” Concerning the confusions surrounding nomenclature, the various terms applied to early Urdu and their evolution in the colonial lexicon, see Faruqi 2001, Chapter One.

1374 Long 1855b, 94. Despite the criticism of this strand of Bangla by colonial administrators and scholars, in order to facilitate Christian missionary translations of Christian scriptures for the “exclusive use” of Bengali Muslims, they did not hesitate to produce a dictionary. Goldsack [1923] 2007, i.


1376 Concerning the relationship of Bangla to other languages of its high culture, see Stewart 2001, 275.

1377 For an exhaustive compilation of these terms used in literary histories of Bangla, see Mannan 1966, Chapter Eight.
Āhmad and Mīr Muṣārappī Hosen, Ahmad Sharif opines that it was in common use by the last decade of the nineteenth century.1378 In literary histories of Bangla, the term has been used interchangeably with “Musalmānī Bengali” and its variants, to denote the modern strand of Bangla under discussion here.1379

Literally translated as “bilingual,” referring, as Ahmad Sharif suggests, to the languages of Urdu and Bangla,1380 this strand was further assimilating words from multiple languages—Persian, Arabic, and Turkish—less through the cosmopolitan medium of Persian, now in decline,1381 than through Urdu, the new cosmopolitan vernacular of India’s urban Muslims, a vernacular which had already selectively assimilated the vocabulary of the afore-mentioned languages.1382 Urdu was spoken by an elite minority of Muslim migrants who had settled in Bengal during the Mughal period; they later became the Bengali Muslim community’s political leaders, and the most vociferous local advocates for Urdu’s installment as the official language of Bengali Muslims.1383 Their tenacious attachment to Urdu led James Long to state, “the Bengal Musulman will not reject his own language, Urdu; he has made a compromise by forming a new dialect, half Bengali, half Urdu.”1384 Indeed, Muhammad Reyājuddin, a Bengali author, writing in the Introduction to Hajarat Mohāmmad Mostaphāra Jīvana Carita, in 1927 states:

1379 While recognizing the modern coinage of this term, the literary historian, Mannan (1966, 71) has somewhat confusingly included the literature of the medieval period under this umbrella. Perhaps he was following orientalist linguists such as J. F. Blumhardt. See J. F. Blumhardt’s description of the term “Muhammadan Bengali” above. I believe that such nomenclature, however, is misleading as it involves an historical backformation of sorts.
1380 Sharif 1983, 2: 866. Earlier he (ibid., 859) calls it a mixture of Bangla and Hindustānī. Long (1855a, 93) described the language as “a mixture of Urdu and Bengali—very popular among Moslems in Calcutta and Dacca.”
1381 When the British government, in 1837, abolished the use of Persian, Urdu took its place as the official language of the law courts and administrative offices of the Bengal Presidency. Shackle 2011.
1382 Sharif (1983, 2: 875–76) is against the alternative nomenclature, misra-rīti or “mixed diction,” used interchangeably by scholars such as Mannan (1966, 71) for dobhāṣī literature.
1383 Ahmad Sharif, Bāṅgālī o Bāṅglāsāhītya, p. 869.
1384 Long [1867] 1964, n. 4, 52. Long provides the number of books published in various languages from Calcutta presses in 1865: 290 Bangla and Sanskrit books, pamphlets, etc. [this category does not seem to
It is a worthy subject of reflection as to how devoid of communal sentiment (jāṭīyatā) and unfortunate would have been the plight of Indian Muslims were the Urdu language not to have existed. The Muslim jāṭī is being destroyed on account of Bangla being the mother-tongue of the Muslims of Bengal. For this reason, they have become devoid of jāṭīyatā, vigorless (nisteja), weak, and cowardly.\(^{1385}\)

While Urdu’s success in Bengal was ultimately limited on account of the region’s large Muslim rural population,\(^{1386}\) it was, nonetheless, important as a cultural symbol of Persianate adab, of gentility and civilization, to Calcutta’s urban ashrāf, the particular literary agents who largely produced the literature under consideration.\(^{1387}\)

Because the Calcutta book publishing industry, located in Baṭatalā,\(^{1388}\) primarily printed popular Bangla manuscripts or puthis (alternatively, puñthi), this printed literature also came to be known as puthi literature.\(^{1389}\) Though seemingly anachronistic, the term indicates the continuities between pre-print manuscript production and print practices: for dobhaśī literature this meant, for instance, a proliferation in print of the most popular genres circulated in manuscript form, and in more material terms, constituted the continuance, for example, of the Islamic Bangla manuscript convention of sequencing pages from right to left, as in the case of Perso-Arabic works.\(^{1390}\) In social terms, as Anindita Ghosh argues, print neither halted manuscript production nor disrupted the various oral practices of communal recitation and

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\(1385\) Cited in Sharif [1972] 2006, 274. See also ibid., 274–275, for more such views about Urdu expressed by late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century Muslims. According to Sharif (ibid.), it was only after Kāji Najrul Islām’s views on the importance of the mother-tongue began to take hold that the tide gradually began to turn in favor of Bangla.


\(1387\) Sharif (1983, 2: 867–868) speaks of khoṭṭābhaśā as being the language of the soldier-administrator migrants to Bengal, who spoke an Urduized form of Bangla.

\(1388\) For a comprehensive account of the colonial-era Calcutta book publishing industry, see Anindita Ghosh 2006.

\(1389\) Ibid., 135.

\(1390\) Ibid., 265.
reading associated with manuscript culture. \footnote{Ibid., 298.}

The print-"Pathi" literature sustained many important literary and social aspects of the old "Pathi"-culture. \footnote{For more details on the tenacity of this genre in the print era, see ibid., 260. The term "Kalami Pathi" was later coined to specifically denote the hand-written manuscript. Sharif 1983, 2: 873.}

As in other areas, such as the modern Bangla translation of Islamic literature, it was mainly Hindu publishers who printed Musalman-Bengali literature; \footnote{Anindita Ghosh 2006, 136.} while Muslim presses were not altogether absent from this early trade in the literature, \footnote{The names of Calcutta presses with ostensibly Muslim names, such as Durbin, Muhammadi, Mustaphi, Hanipha, etc., are provided by Long (1855a, 90–99) in the Table, "List of Books and Pamphlets published in the Town of Calcutta in 1853-54, or the Bengali Year 1260." \footnote{Anindita Ghosh 2006, 136.}} they began to publish such works more conspicuously only after 1880. \footnote{Ibid., 117.} According to the 1857 \textit{Returns} collated by James Long, the earliest comprehensive record of publications in Bangla, \footnote{Ibid., 117.} in terms of output, Musalman-Bengali works constituted 24,600 (approximately 4.2 per cent) of a total of 584,270 copies of books printed that year. Additionally, it amounted to the sixth most prodigious of the sixteen categories of books listed, the first five largest categories of books produced being “educational” (145,000), “almanacs” (136,000), “mythology and Hinduism” (96,150), “moral tales and fiction” (39,700) and “fiction” (33,050). \footnote{For a reproduction of James Long’s table in \textit{Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language in 1857}, Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government, vol. xxxii, Calcutta, 1859, xx, see “Table 3” in Ghosh 2006, 132.} As is evident from this incomplete list of Long’s categories, they were not without overlap, and underscored communal divisions in print. Produced after the 1857 Mutiny, Long’s \textit{Report}, submitted in 1859, was the government’s response to the alleged seditious nature of literary production in the vernacular, which it now wished to catalog and control. \footnote{Anindita Ghosh 2006, 117.} Anindita Ghosh, following Rafiuddin Ahmed, attributes the burgeoning of Musalman-Bengali works at the time when Long compiled his \textit{Returns} to the
efforts of Muslim leaders to mobilize new print-technologies to spread the message of Islam widely.\textsuperscript{1399}

Two popular Islamic manuscript genres were cheaply churned out by Baṭatalā’s presses between 1865–1900: romances, transcreations of their original Persian, Avadhi, and Deccani counterparts; and more pious literature: tales (\textit{kecchā}, from the Urdu \textit{qissā}) of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions,\textsuperscript{1400} and to a lesser extent, \textit{nasihat nāmās}, guides to proper Muslim conduct.\textsuperscript{1401} In the light of this overview of modern developments in print-era Bangla language and literary production, let us now examine the fate of our particular text, the \textit{Nabīvaṃśa}.

\textbf{8.3.2 The Nabīvaṃśa and the New Bengali Sīra}

In 1934, when Muhammad Enamul Haq hailed Sultān as a poet whose genius rivaled that of Kṛttivāsa and Kāśīrāmadāsa, renowned medieval authors of the Bangla \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} and \textit{Mahābhārata}, respectively, things perhaps had come full circle for our pīr-poet. Yet the \textit{Nabīvaṃśa}’s premodern popularity, at least in Chittagong, as evidenced by the large number of manuscripts collected from that region, did not carry over into modern times.\textsuperscript{1402} Haq blamed its lack of circulation on the whims of the Baṭatalā publishers. He says:

\begin{quote}
It is true that in the modern age, by grace of the printing press, Kṛttivāsa and Kāśīdāsa are equally respected all over Bengal. If Saiyad Sultān had, by some good fortune, found [such] favor in the eyes of Baṭatalā, he would have garnered great praise in the homes of Bengali Muslims today. The modern “Kasasula Ānbiyā” written in a \textit{dobhāsi} Bangla, ...
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1399} Ibid., 135.  
\textsuperscript{1400} Ibid., 135.  
\textsuperscript{1401} Ibid., 271–2.  
\textsuperscript{1402} Sharif (NV 2: x) mentions that Sultān’s influence was limited to Chittagong because the movement of handwritten manuscripts from one region to another was not easy in the middle period because of the geographic separation of various regions.
\end{flushright}
entirely devoid of poetic charm, even though it is sold for a sum of ten ṭākā, reigns supreme in every Bengali Muslim home, by the grace of Baṭatalā.¹⁴⁰³

But Haq seems to have missed the point, for the Baṭatalā presses were, after all, only responding to popular taste. The Kāsāsuṇ Anbiyā editions they published prided themselves on being the chohī or āsal, “correct” or “original” editions, implying perhaps that they were faithful translations of Arabic and Persian exegetical texts and medieval histories, but above all assuring the reader of their allegiance to the “original” manuscript.¹⁴⁰⁴ Often these texts were doubly distanced from the original work: Muhammad Khātī’s Kāsāsuṇ Anbiyā, for instance, was a translation into dobhāṣī Bangla of Golām Nābī Ibne Ināyatullāh’s Urdu translation of Ishāq al-Nisābūrī’s Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ.¹⁴⁰⁵ Unlike Saiyad Sultān’s version, these accounts of the tales of the Judeo-Islamic prophets excluded all Hindu deities and other signs of the “heterodox,”¹⁴⁰⁶ reflecting the urban Bengali Muslim’s desire to assimilate a “pure” Islam.¹⁴⁰⁷ As we have seen, Islamic Bangla literature had labored since Sultān’s times under the shadow of the cosmopolitan traditions of Perso-Arabic Islamic literature and culture. Yet in nineteenth-century Bengal, the rising urban Muslim trend towards a “Mecca-oriented” Islam¹⁴⁰⁸ spread into the rural areas, as Amit Dey has shown, through, among other things, the nexus of ulama-

¹⁴⁰³ Translation mine. Haq [1934] 1997, 320. By the standards of the day, ten ṭākā was a princely sum to pay for a Baṭatalā publication, which generally cost between a few annas and rarely went over a rupee. However, these texts, on account of their appreciable size, were generally priced higher than other Baṭatalā literature. See Anindita Ghosh 2006, 17, 268.

¹⁴⁰⁴ See, for instance, the prefatory “Sāvadhāna” (“Warning”) alerting buyers to dubious imitations. Kāchāchāla Anbiyā o Sāhābāganera Khelāphat of Munshi Tājuddīn Mahāmmada. See also Anindita Ghosh 2006, 275. The “original” usually meant contemporary renditions, favored by the Baṭatalā presses, of older texts. Ibid., 274–275. Sharif (1983, 2: 874) mentions that Baṭatalā authors were known to create summaries rather than translations of medieval romances; these shorter adaptations were especially favorable to being read aloud in a single recitation session.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 713.

¹⁴⁰⁶ These dobhāṣī Kāsāsuṇ Anbiyā were also more expansive than Sultān’s, including the tale-cycles of more Judeo-Islamic prophets, making their texts more voluminous than the NV. Ibid., 711–2.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Concerning the growing trend among Bengal’s Muslim elite of Arabicizing all aspects of their culture while simultaneously dissociating themselves from their ethnic identities, see Rafiuddin Ahmed 1981, 106–113.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Schimmel 1993a, 2.
anjuman linkages, and madrasā-education, supported by the role of transport and communication technologies as well as print.\textsuperscript{1409}

Emerging, moreover, from the combustible colonial crucible of Bengal, in which existing communal ideologies reacted with Christian evangelizing,\textsuperscript{1410} and were stirred together with the often mutually irreconcilable doctrines of modern positivism, Protestantism, and nationalism, Bangla sīras were acquiring new characteristics. First, the language of these texts, in common with other dobhāṣī works, was more heavily inflected with Persian, Arabic, and Turkish, than their premodern counterparts.\textsuperscript{1411} Second, modern Bangla sīras, such as Sheikh Abdur Rahim’s \textit{Hajrat Mohāmmadera Jīvana Carita o Dharmanīti} (1887), which was the first written by a modern Bengali Muslim, often had to be approved for publication by the ulamā.\textsuperscript{1412} Third, modern Bengali sīra-writers, the very first of whom were, in fact, Brahmos, sought to portray the historical Muhammad, seeking to present his life in an increasingly rationalistic manner,\textsuperscript{1413} while supernatural elements did not completely disappear from twentieth-century sīras, such as those of Taslimuddin Ahmad, Maulvī Ahsānullāh, and others, there was an increasing trend towards downplaying such elements.\textsuperscript{1414} Fourth, the spread of an “Islamic Protestantism”\textsuperscript{1415} extolled the virtues of agency over passivity, action in the world over submission and intercession.\textsuperscript{1416} The image of the Prophet accordingly embodied the aspirations of twentieth-century Bengali Muslim sīra-writers, who were among the important architects of modern

\textsuperscript{1409} Amit Dey 2006, Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{1410} For an account of the impact of colonial policies and missionizing upon the communalization of Hindus and Muslims, see Sufia M. Uddin 2006, 47–53.
\textsuperscript{1411} Haq 1957, 175.
\textsuperscript{1412} Amit Dey 2006, 27 and 93.
\textsuperscript{1413} ibid., 27. Girish Chandra Sen was not only the first to translate the Qur’ān into Bangla, but he also wrote the first modern Bangla sīra, thus inspiring modern Bengali Muslims to shatter the strong prejudice of the ‘ulamā against translation of Islamic works into Bangla, the language of the kāphir. Regarding the views of the ‘ulamā about Bangla, see Amalendu De 1996, 42.
\textsuperscript{1414} Amit Dey 2006, 28.
\textsuperscript{1415} For the use of this phrase, see ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{1416} ibid., 96–97.
Bengali Muslim identity.\textsuperscript{1417} The Prophet’s portrait in Bangla sīras, catching up with the Prophetic model established by their nineteenth-century North Indian counterparts,\textsuperscript{1418} was inscribed with features of the social reformer and change-agent,\textsuperscript{1419} a nation-builder and leader of disenfranchised Muslims.\textsuperscript{1420} Fifth, in order to counter Christian missionary depictions of Islam as a religion of the sword, Bengali Muslims now sought to portray Muhammad’s heroism not in military terms but rather in terms of social reform and pacifism.\textsuperscript{1421}

As reflected in contemporary language and literature, popular Muslim Bengali taste, then, had been so re-shaped by Islamic reform movements and the various colonial tensions discussed earlier that by the twentieth century the Nabīvaṃṣa had entirely lost its relevance and pragmatic value to modern Muslim Bengalis. Being a text which had purposefully sought common ground between Vaiṣṇava, Nātha, and Muslim literary and cultural traditions in order to make Islam familiar to its medieval audience, its perceived “syncretism” was now treated with suspicion. The Prophetic model portrayed in the Nabīvaṃṣa of the perfect phakir, likened to the guru or pīr, because of its emphasis on ascetic and intercessory powers, did not fall in line with modern tastes. Still more egregious to modern sensibilism was Sultān’s tendency to glorify the Prophet’s numerous military campaigns, Islam’s conquest by the sword.\textsuperscript{1422} Furthermore, Sultān’s work shared with the manīgala and romance literature not merely the incorporation of elements of the supernatural, but also earthy descriptions of characters and events as well as racy presentations of sexual encounters between venerable Islamic figures. In the spirit of a

\textsuperscript{1417} Amit Dey (ibid., 114) shows, for instance, how the sīra-writer, Muhammad Reāzuddīn Āhmad, advocated the importance of maintaining a dress code that distinguished Hindus from Muslims. Fearing the influence of the Brahmos on Muslims, he also attacked, in writing, the Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen.
\textsuperscript{1418} Ibid., 49–50.
\textsuperscript{1419} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{1420} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{1421} Ibid., 49, 51.
\textsuperscript{1422} The parallel tendency to extol the military campaigns of thirteenth-century Sufis, who settled in Bengal, is to be found in sixteenth-century Persian hagiographies. Eaton 1993, 71–77.
true bard, who sought to sustain audience interest through sensory titillation, Saiyad Sultān, as we have seen, lovingly dwells upon the *rati-khelā*, love-play, of Ādam and Hāoyā, for instance, and the flirtations of the Prophet Muhammad’s parents, Ābdullāh and Āminā. To the modern Muslim sensibility, the eroticization of venerable Islamic personages was completely repugnant, even though, ironically enough, rather than to humanize these personages, as it would have seemed from the point of view of some modern Muslim observers, the purpose of such portrayals was, rather, to divinize them, to exalt them to the status of Hindu deities and classical heroes. In addition to these text-specific issues, the *NV* shared with other premodern works certain features that disqualified these for the popular press. From the perspective of urban Muslims, the language of these texts, not sufficiently loaded with Islamic religious vocabulary and technical terminology, would have seemed apologetic. Furthermore, as Sharif points out, these texts could be abstruse in their emotive content, and were replete with figures of speech and other literary embellishments.

These are but some possible reasons why in Bangladesh today the *Nabīvaṃśa* has become a mere literary and religious artifact, the preserve of Bangla literary history textbooks and the scholastically inclined. Its author is all but forgotten; ironically enough, more educated Bangladeshis would have heard of Krāttivāsa and Kāśīrāmadāsa than of Saiyad Sultān.

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1423 For Ādam and Hāoyā, see *NV* 1: 112–118; for Ābdullāh and Āminā, see *NV* 2: 25–26.
1424 Muhammad Majiruddin Miyā’s (1993, 41) view is representative of the modern Muslim scholar’s on such medieval portrayals of Islamic personages.
1425 Sharif (1983, 2: 874) records that by the third decade of the twentieth century the works of authors such as Kājī Daulat, Ālāul, Saiyad Muhammad Ākbar, Ābdul Hākim, Hayāt Māmud were not reprinted by popular presses.
1426 Ibid.
1427 As an important corollary to our discussion here, in which language and literature have primarily been spoken of as a reflection of social realities, this brief survey of the development of the Bangla *śrāvaṇa* should make evident that language, as argued in modern scholarship, is a ‘social reality’ in itself, which reconstitutes the very social forces that shape it. Anindita Ghosh 2006, 297. Thus, while changing Muslim Bengali tastes left their mark on the language and literature of the period, these, in turn, played their part in re-fashioning Muslim Bengali identity.
8.4 “The Inky Fray”: A Premodern Pīr-Poet in the Modern Politics of Regionalism

Within Bangladeshi scholarship, however, Sultān’s impressive legacy has often been drawn into a politics of regionalism. While the author of the NV remains a somewhat elusive figure, much scholarly ink, as Chapter One has shown, has been spilt in determining his birthplace and time. The debate is cast along regional lines; those who are most invested in it often hail from either Chittagong or Sylhet, claiming Sultān’s legacy for their own regions. To complicate matters further, Sultān’s contested legacy is wrapped up with the contested histories of two other related premodern Sylhettee figures, Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān (a late seventeenth-century indirect descendant of the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph), whose charismatic authority is claimed by Chittagonian villagers; and Saiyad Musā, who was the brother of the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph, Sylhet.1428

The focus of the debate over Sultān’s birthplace, as we have seen, lies in the competing interpretations of laśkarera pura, “the town of the army or commander,” where Sultān claims to have lived in a settlement of ālims, learned men.1429 Sylhettee scholars, such as Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee1430 and Āsāddar Ālī,1431 on this basis link Saiyad Sultān to Laśkarpur, the medieval capital of Taraph, established in the fourteenth century by Saiyad NāSiruddin, Taraph’s first Muslim ruler.1432 Chittagonian scholars, such as Muhammad Enamul Haq and Ahmad Sharif on

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1428 See Appendix Six for the family tree of the Saiyads of Taraph.
1429 See Chapter One for details.
1430 Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee 1944–45.
1431 Ālī 1990, 54, and so on.
1432 The argument that the place where NāSir al-Dīn’s army (laśkar) encamped/settled came to be known as Laśkarpur is put forth by Acyutacaranā Caudhurī ([1910] 2009, 1: 281). Āghfar ([1887] 2008, 46) opines that Taraph’s Laśkarpur was named after Saiyad Musā, who was also known as Laśkar. It is more plausible that the capital’s name was associated with its founder, or his army encampment, rather than with Saiyad Musā, the founder’s descendant, five generations removed. When exactly the place came to be known as Laśkarpur is also uncertain, but Ābdul Āghfar’s text seems to suggest that it was probably known as such during Saiyad Musā and Sultān’s lifetimes. While emphasizing the lack of evidence for the
the other hand, have linked Sultān’s laškarera pura to Parāgalpur of Chittagong, a medieval town founded by Laškar Parāgal Khān, the governor of Chittagong appointed by ‘Alā al-Dīn Ḫusayn Shāh.1433 On the basis of passages from medieval Bangla texts (many of which have been justifiably queried by scholars, such as Āsāddar Ālī and Mazharul Islam, on logical, philological, and other grounds), Sharif also suggests that the poet Saiyad Sultān’s birthplace lay in the medieval Cakraśālā district, modern Patiya in Chittagong.1434

8.4.1 Oral Histories Related to Saiyad Sultān in Chittagong

With this background in mind, we now turn to an examination of Sultān’s legacy in two villages in the light of local memory and belief: Baṛaliyā village of the modern-day Patiya district (medieval Cakraśālā)1435 of Chittagong, and Sultānśī in the Habiganj district (medieval Tarap) of Greater Sylhet. Over the last several decades, Muhammad Ishāk Caudhurī has gathered local legends associated with the seventeenth-century pīr and indirect descendant of Saiyad Sultān, Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān, known as Saiyad Śāh Gadī in Chittagong. Like Saiyad Sultān, the legacy of this pīr is contested, such that he has two putative grave sites: one in the Vārikhārā1436 village of Patiya district, Chittagong,1437 and the other in Narapati, in the

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view that Laškarpur came to be known as such before Saiyad Musā’s time, Rejā (2008, 6), a member of the Laškarpur Saiyad family, also tacitly reinforces Caudhurī’s view.


1434 Ibid., 53–63.

1435 Concerning the association of medieval Cakraśālā with modern Patiya, see Qanungo 1988, 78–79. That the poet Saiyad Sultān’s daughter’s family lived in Cakraśālā is corroborated by literary evidence. Sharif [1972] 2006, 55. As Mazharul Islam ([1981] 1990, 134) points out, this alone does not suggest that Cakraśālā was also Saiyad Sultān’s place of residence. The poet Mukīm also associates Cakraśālā with Sultān’s name. Sharif [1972] 2006, 57. Regarding philological and other problems related to Mukīm’s passage, see Mazharul Islam [1981] 1990, 135–136. Note also the oral histories discussed later in this section that speak of Saiyad Sultān’s sister’s son living in Naładā, Chittagong.


1437 Vārikhārā lies two and a half miles south of Patiya sadar (district headquarters), and the purported grave lies in the eastern portion of the village. Concerning the geography and oral histories associated with Vārikhārā and other related sites, see ibid., and its sequel, on April 10, 1992. Also see ibid., 1992.
Cunarughāṭa upazilā of Habiganj, Greater Sylhet. (Figures 4–7). A riverine settlement, Vārīkhāṛā lies in the larger village of Baṛaliyā, which has come to be associated with the memory of Saiyad Sultān—their Baṛa Auliyā, “great saint.” It is said that during a flood, the holy man, lying on a cot, his body covered by a shroud, came floating down-river to the village of Palāśapur, which was later renamed Baṛaliyā. This cot has allegedly been preserved by his descendants in the Baṛaliyā Saiyad household’s Pīr Mīr Hajrat Saiyad Śāh Māolānā Ābudcchālām Miṅā Jāme Masjid.\footnote{1438}

Local lore also associates a site immediately adjacent to the putative grave of Saiyad Śāh Gāḍī with the memory of Saiyad Sultān: it is still known as saiyyad sultānera bhīṭā, the family homestead of Saiyad Sultān.\footnote{1439} Legend has it that Sultān was allegedly taken captive by the then Buddhist king of Arakan because of sectarian tensions caused by his proselytizing.\footnote{1440} His prolonged imprisonment has been attributed in local memory to a battle of wit and charisma that ensued between Sultān and another pīr, Hazrat Saiyad Śāh Āphjal, his sister’s son, who lived in Nālandā village of Patiya district. The tale is summarized as follows: Śāh Āphjāl, once, rather dismissively, returned a letter sent by his uncle, Saiyad Sultān, having disapprovingly slashed the Arabic diacritic zīr (B. jer) (corresponding to the short vowel i), which Sultān had applied under the opening bismillāh. This enraged his uncle, who cursed Śāh Āphjāl, “Just as you have slashed the bismillāh’s jer, so too will your head be severed and carried away shortly.” On receiving this curse, the nephew reciprocated “Fine, Uncle, but you too will have to continue ‘to eat the rice’ of the Buddhists.” Both curses came to pass: while Sultān had to enjoy the king’s hospitality longer than he had wished, his nephew died in a battle against Arakanese forces. His

\footnote{1438} Ibid., December 26, 1991.

\footnote{1439} Ibid.

\footnote{1440} Arakan, an independent kingdom to the south-east of undivided Bengal, is in present-day Myanmar. Concerning the related political histories of Bengal and Arakan in the premodern period, see Mohammed Ali Chowdhury 2004.
head was severed and carried away by the soldiers as booty. On their way, they rested, impaling their trophy on a bamboo pole. When the soldiers awoke, to their greatest dismay, the head had disappeared, which prompted the exclamation, “Bāṃśa khālī!” (The bamboo is bare.”) As for the head, it flew back to join its corpse lying in Nālāndā village, where his disciples subsequently buried their pīr’s body with due respect. His mazhar can apparently be found in Nālāndā today, near the grave of a late nineteenth-century pīr, Hajrat Garīb Ālī Shāh.  As much as celebrating the efficacious maledictions of powerful local pīrs, this tale also provides, as many local histories do, a folk etymology for how the village of Bāṃśakhālī got its name.

During his captivity, Sultān’s authority as a Muslim charismatic was put to many tests. He was first challenged to locate a needle in a dark chamber. When Sultān focused his mental energies on the tip of his finger, it irradiated divine light, which enabled him to perform the task successfully. Not quite satisfied, and as though to insult his detainee’s religious sensibilities, the king then commanded him to ritually bathe the images installed in the Buddhist temple (vihāra). The moment Sultān immersed the images in water on the steps of the bathing ghāṭa, it is said that they began to escape his grasp, as if they had come alive. Seeing this, those gathered became filled with awe and reverence. Even so the king decided to put him to a final test: the pīr was commanded to make the new moon appear on a no-moon night. When Sultān met this challenge with ease, the king eventually granted him his freedom with due honors, bequeathing him a beautiful white steed, a bejewelled sword, and 80 dūnas of land.

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1441 The tale has been summarized from Muhammad Ishāk Caudhuri, 1992, 17–18.
1442 We have seen etymologies of Laśkarpur, earlier in this chapter. See, for instance, similar folk etymologies concerning the village of Bejorā in Acyutacarana Caudhuri ([1910] 2009, 1: 283, or the village of Vīṣagrām in Āgphar [1887] 2008, 46. See also similar folk etymologies for family names, such as Taraphadāra, in Acyutacarana Caudhuri ([1910] 2009, 1: 286–287.
1443 These tales have been summarized from Muhammad Ishāk Caudhuri March 13, 1992.
in Pāthure Kellā, of the Buŗiccaŗā district of Arakan.1444 Leaving the land to his disciples, Sultān allegedly returned to Vārikhārā with the horse and sword. In his last years, he is said to have departed for Pāthure Kellā, where he eventually passed away.1445 According to Muhammad Ishāk Chaudhurī, his grave, built there during Mughal times, is visited by Chittagonian devotees even today.1446

The local legend of Sultān’s receipt of a horse and sword from the king of Arakan is corroborated by two premodern texts: the second volume of the Tripurā Rājamālā commissioned by Amar Māṇikya, and the eighteenth-century Śamsēra Gājīnāmā of the Chittagonian, Śekh Manohar.1447 Albeit from differing polemical perspectives, these texts tell of

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1444 According to Sharif (1957, 95), Chittagonians refer to old Mrohaṃ city or Rosāṅga city as “Pāthure Kellā,” because of the stony (pāthure) ruins of old forts (kellā) there. Mrauk U was the Arakanese name of this old city.

1445 This story is summarized from Muhammad Ishāk Caudhurī 1992, 18.

1446 On my visit to Vārikhārā in August 2009, Muhammad Ishāk Caudhurī informed me that pilgrims to Sultān’s Pāthure Kellā shrine (a place which I have not visited) had taken a photograph of it, which had been preserved in the Vārikhārā Jāmī mosque. Unfortunately, I was not able to see this photograph as it had been misplaced during recent mosque renovations. It is interesting to note that Munšī Abdul Karim ([1952] 1997, 248) reports that Pāthure Kellā of Arakan is also reputed to be the village in which Saiyad Ālāol’s grave is located. According to Sharif (1957, 95), Ālāol’s tomb is in one of seven mosques in Pāthure Kellā. As discussed in Chapter One above, it is relevant here to note the connection between Saiyad Musā, Saiyad Sultān’s elder brother, and Saiyad Ālāol.

1447 Mazharul Islam ([1981] 1990, 137) mentions a third text, which also provides this information, Svarupacandra Rāy, Suvarga Grāmera Itihāsa. Sharif ([1972] 2006, 275) uses a manuscript of the Śamsēra Ghāzināmā in his own collection. Śekh Manohar hailed from the Feni region, in the Chittagong subdivision. Ibid. For local tales concerning Śekh Manohar’s connection to Śamser Gājī, see ibid., 59. In the Gājīnāmā, Śāh Gadā Hāsān sends one of his disciples to Śamser Gājī, to bring him into his presence:

... Humbly bowing his head, the Gājī venerated the pīr. He praised the chief of pīrs, making Āllā pleased.

Then, the student said, “Show me the goal (maṭjil).”

Being told the distinctions in knowledge, he learnt them all. He offered a thousand tankās... at the feet of the pīr,

... As robes of honour (khelāt) to the Gājī, the sea of grace bequeathed a horse and a fine weapon of the value of a thousand tankās.

The pīr said, “Listen, O pīr’s son, to what I say.

The value of this horse and sword is great.

The pious Buddhist king of Rosāṅga gave Saiyad Sultān these very things. Sultān gave these to his own son.

Through the family line, they came into my hands.

I am but an insignificant drop in his lineage.

In the year seventeen hundred and twenty-six,
a Bengali military adventurer by the name of Šamšer Gājī (d. 1760). With the blessings of Saiyad Šāh Gadā Hāsān, he seized the Tripurā district of Rośanābad, which corresponds to the modern-day regions of southern Comilla and northern Noakhāli. The pīr bequeathed the Gāzī with Saiyad Sultān’s sword and a descendant of his horse, which he had inherited through the family line. These texts thus independently reinforce local belief as well as the evidence of the Sylhettee family tree that claim Saiyad Gadā Hāsān Khondkār to be an indirect descendant of Saiyad Sultān. Incidentally, while the equivocal evidence of the Gājināmā was first put forth by Sharif to buttress his claim that Sultān was a Chittagonian, Sylhettee scholars, such as Āsāddar Ālī, later seized upon it to strengthen their own claim.

As for the two purported grave sites of Saiyad Šāh Gadā Hāsan, one in Chittagong and the other in Habiganj, Sylhet, an examination of the archeological evidence and local lore related to these sites is in order. As a corollary to such examination, it is also important to consider that across Bangladesh today, the most frequented dargāhs and mazhārs are periodically renovated.

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1448 For the date, see Nawaz 2006.
1447 For the date, see Nawaz 2006.
1446 In the Rājamāla, on the one hand, he is discredited for scheming, with some success, to usurp the lands of the hill peoples of Tripura, and, in the Gājināmā, on the other, is often glorified as an East Bengali Robin Hood. For the former, see Simha [1896] 2006, 124; for the latter, see ibid., n. marked with a “*”, 123. See also Nawaz 2006.
1449 Ibid. These lands were seized from a certain Nāsir Muhammad, whose father had been gifted these plain lands of southern Tripura by Jagat Mānīkya of Tripurā, himself a usurper of the claims of Tripurā Prince Kṛṣṇamaṇi to the district of Rośanābad. Simha [1896] 2006, 120–122.
by the *mutawallis* (cutodians) and *dargah*-committees associated with these sites, as a mark of respect to the revered pīrs they memorialize. Inscriptions, if any originally existed, are almost always destroyed, stolen, or misplaced; only a few have found their way into Bangladeshi museums. Thus, a reconstruction of the histories of active sites is often challenging through archaeological, or even art-historical, research. Frequently, the only materials available for understanding these sites are local histories, both oral and written.

On account of the exposed old brickwork that surfaces through peeling plaster at the Narapati grave site in Habiganj, the age of the banyan trees that shade the site, the Mughal (or pre-Mughal) period tank beside it,1450 and the *chillakhānās*1451 built under the Narapati grave attributed to Śāh Gadā Hāsān and other anonymous ones beside it, the grave is very likely a Mughal-period structure. (Figure 7). This grave is located in what was once the Gadāhāsān Nagara *parganā*, which according to the scholar S. M. Ilyās consisted of the present-day villages of Narapati, Muṛārband, and Surāboi of Habiganj district.1452

I also visited the gravesite of Śāh Karār, alias Phūla Śāh, in the village of Surāboi, Habiganj. (Figure 8). According to the custodians of this shrine, Śāh Karār gave his daughter in marriage to Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān. Saiyad Muhammad Ilyās, the retired Deputy Director of the Home Ministry, and a close relative of the shrine’s custodian,1453 showed me some sacred articles in the family’s possession linked to the memory of Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān. One of these items was a sword purported to have been owned by Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān. (Figures 9 and 10). The

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1450 This could be the Nājir Khān *dighi*, mentioned in Acyutacarana Caudhuri [1910] 2009, 1: 283.
1451 The *chillakhānā*, or chamber for meditation and ascetic practice, found at this and similar other sites (such as the Muṛārband *dargah*), is a narrow subterranean room, just large enough to fit a supine human body.
1453 Saiyad Muhammad Ilyās is not to be confused with the scholar, S. M. Ilyās, mentioned earlier; these are separate individuals.
second was the fragments of a broken glazed earthenware dish, with Arabic sacred formulae painted along the rim, as also within a central grid of four by four squares. (Figure 11). Family tradition associates this dish with the bowl of poison drunk by Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān, who was, according to Saiyad Muhammad Ilyās, challenged by a Hindu zamīndār to drink poison. When the pūr remained unharmed by the toxic draught, the zamīndār abandoned his lands to the pūr, leaving for Tripurā. According to local lore, it is these lands which later became the Gadāhāsān Nagar paraganā (administrative unit).

Another version of this story is told by the sign-board at Śāh Gadā’s Narapati grave site. The notice, citing Gabeśanāra Ṭīoke Tarapha Vijaya, reads:

When he [Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān] returned to his land in a state of good health, after displaying the miracle of drinking the poison offered him by the king at the Delhi court, the monarch, being pleased, annexed to his name a paraganā from the main principality of Taraph, eponymously named “Gadāhāsāna nagar.” He received 80 hālas of monthly (?) rent-free land from the Delhi monarch.1454

A third version of this story is found in Śrīhaṭṭera Itivrṭta. According to Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī, Gadā Hāsān and his paternal cousin Śāh Nuri had a dispute over which of them should be buried beside the grave of their venerable ancestor, Saiyad Ilyās Kutub al-Awliyā, at Muṛārband. (Figure 12). The matter was taken to the Delhi court for adjudication. Śāh Gadā Hāsān so impressed the monarch with his “extraordinary capacities” that a paraganā was annexed to his name from the principality of Taraph. However, Shāh Nuri won the dispute.1455 (Figure 13).

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1454 Translation mine. dillīra darbāre samrāṭa pradattva viṣa pāṇa kare karāmāta pradarśana karechilena evam sustha avasthāya deṣe āgamana karechilena tāra aḍhāyātmika śakti dekhe bādsāha khusī haye mūla tarapha rājya theke tāṃra nāme “gadāhāsāna nagara” nāme ekaṭi paraganā kharīja karedena saiyad saha gadāhāsāna (raḥ,) dillīra bādsāha kartṛka moddata-māsa lākherācha [lākherāja] 80 hāla bhūmi prāpta hayechilena. Sign-board located at Narapati grave site, photograph taken in July 2009. (Figure 6).

Regardless of the details, all three versions provide an account of how Śāh Gadā Hāsān came to acquire the Gadāhāsān Nagar parganā, which seems to be clearly associated in local memory with his name and likely place of residence. Śrīhaṭṭera Itivṛtta also provides the names of his sons and later descendants along with the tālukas they inherited. The names of his descendants provided in this account are entirely different from the family tree of Saiyad Śāh Gadī, in Chittagong, provided me by Muhammad Ishāk Caudhūrī.

With regard to the second purported grave of Śāh Gadā Hāsān in Vārikhārā, Patiya district, Chittagong, the older and smaller Mughal-period, single-domed memorial at the Vārikhārā site was, according to Muhammad Ishāk Chaudhūrī, demolished to be rebuilt into a larger structure, approximately twenty years ago. It is unclear whether the original structure was built as a cenotaph, and later came to be associated in local memory with Śāh Gadā’s grave, or whether Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān and Saiyad Śāh Gadī were separate individuals, who were conflated in local memory. The latter scenario seems plausible, since the two figures have two separate sets of descendants. However, it could also be, as Āsāddar Ālī and Muhammad Ishāk Caudhūrī have independently suggested in the case of Saiyad Sultān, that his peripatetic lifestyle could

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1456 Acyutacarana Caudhūrī ([1910] 2009, 2: 385–386) mentions that the name of Gadāhāsān’s son was Sarapha Uddīn Hāsān. He had four sons, Ābdul Hāsān, Sabdar Hāsān, Badaruddīn Hāsān and Śāh Kabīr.

1458 Muhammad Ishāk Caudhūrī, personal conversation, August 2009. For a detailed description of the older structure and a photograph of it, see Muhammad Ishāk Caudhūrī, April 10, 1992. See also ibid. December 26, 1991. The former article also mentions that four other unmarked graves lay adjacent to the old site, and are ascribed to Saiyad Śāh Gadi’s father, Hazrat Saiyad Śāh Māolānā Mūhammad Nījām Uddīn, his mother, Saiyadā Āmenā Khātūn, elder brother, Hazrat Saiyad Śāh Āhmād, and sister, Hazrat Saiyadā Hāchān Bānu Āli Schayer Khātūn. On examining the published photographs of this site, the art historian, Perween Hasan, opines: “The shape of the dome of the tomb at Barikhara... (though... completely renovated) seem to indicate that the older building could pre-date the Mughals.” Perween Hasan, personal correspondence, March 23, 2010. I am grateful to her for expert opinion.

1459 Ālī 1990, 52.

1460 Muhammad Ishāk Caudhūrī, personal conversation, July 2009.
have led to two marriages, resulting in two sets of descendants, in two geographically distinct, yet proximate, areas.\(^{1461}\)

This discussion on the contested grave sites of Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsan is integral to my argument that Saiyad Sultān’s legacy is closely entwined with the contested legacy of Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsan, his indirect descendant, a figure, who like Sultān, is claimed as cultural capital by competing groups from Sylhet and Chittagong. In order to trace claims staked by Sylhetite scholars and the faithful to Saiyad Sultān’s history and legacy, our attention now turns to the village of Sultānshi, once located in medieval Taraph, and today in the Habiganj district of Greater Sylhet.

### 8.4.2 A Modern Revival of Saiyad Sultān in Sylhet

Local histories of Taraph from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries speak of the well-known Saiyad family of Taraph, a family of pīrs, administrators, and learned men. Legend has it that Saiyad Ibrāhīm, Nāṣir al-Dīn’s great-grandson, was given the title Mālik al-ʿUlamāʾ (“Lord of the Learned”) by the then Emperor of Delhi. A later descendant, Saiyad Isrāil, alias Muluk al-ʿUlamāʾ, wrote in 1534 *Maʿdan al-Fawāʾid* (“Mine of Morals”), the first work in Persian purported to be written in Bengal.\(^{1462}\) (Figure 23). The family was said to be well-connected, at various points in its long history, to the courts of Delhi, Arakan, Chittagong, and perhaps even Gauḍa.\(^{1463}\) The Saiyads were held in such wide esteem that legend links the family in marriage to Sultān Jalāluddīn Fatḥ Shāh (r. 1481-1487) of the Ilyās Shāhī dynasty, and to ʿAlā

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\(^{1461}\) Concerning the prevalence of polygamy among wealthy Muslims and Kuliņa Brahmans in the premodern period, see Sharif [1972] 2006, 41.

\(^{1462}\) D. N. A. H. Caudhuri 2006, 159. The original manuscript is in the possession of this author.

al-Dīn Ḥusayn Shāh (r.1493-1519) as well. The local histories also apprise us of a certain Saiyad Sultān, who after an altercation over property matters with his brother, Saiyad Musā, moved his residence three miles north of his ancestral home in Laškarpur. In time, this village came to be eponymously known as Sultānī.

Turning off the Dhaka-Habiganj highway near Bāhubal, one passes through the green paddy fields of Nandanpur and Kāṭiyādi villages to enter the remote hamlet of Sultānī. The village centre is the Darbār-e Mustafā, a khānakā (Sufi hospice) attached to the hābili (Urdu: havelī) or mansion, home of Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosenī Čisti. The hābili-khānakā complex stands near a huge Mughal-period tank, on whose opposite bank are the Saiyad family mazhars (shrines) and graveyard; the Īdgāh, used at the time of Muharram, stands to left of the tank, when one faces the mazhars. (Figure 14).

Born in 1934, Saiyad Hāsān claims to be the eldest living descendant of the Saiyad Sultān of Taraph. He describes himself as a Sunnī Muslim and a Chishtī Sufī, who, like his forefathers, observes the various traditions of Muharram, commonly followed by the Shīʿī. He is venerated locally as a Sufi pīr of the Hoseniyā Čisti order (tarīka), founded by his grandfather. Among those who seek the benefit of his blessings, the more well-to-do arrive regularly with offerings of food, clothing, and substantial sums of money. Every Friday night the khānakā is packed with devotees who flock from nearby villages to participate in the milād prayers and night-long samā (spiritual singing and dance) sessions that follow. On the occasion of Muslim festivals and the

1464 Ibid.
1465 In addition to providing this etymology, Acyutacarana Caudhuri ([1910] 2009, 1: 284) puts forth another possible etymology for the village name: Sultānī may be derived from the Delhi Sultān, who bequeathed Saiyad Sultān the land.
1466 The larger of the two shrines is immediately adjacent to the family graveyard and encloses, among others, the graves of Saiyad Hāsān’s father, mother, grandfather, and great grandfather. Saiyad Sultān’s purported open-air grave stands in a corner of the family graveyard, attached to this shrine. A separate and smaller shrine on the same side of the tank encloses the grave of Saiyad Hāsān’s paternal uncle. It is these enclosed shrines, especially the larger one, which are the focus of devotional activity.
urs (death-anniversary) celebrations of Saiyad Hāsān’s revered ancestors, devotees arrive in 
busloads to receive the special barakā, grace, of Saiyad Hāsān and his pious Ćiśṭī forebears. 
Indeed, his father, Saiyad Golām Mustaphā Hochednī Ćiśṭī, his grandfather, Saiyad Ābdun Nur 
Hochednī Ćiśṭī (1855-1918), and his great-grandfather, Saiyad Ābdur Rahim Hochednī Ćiśṭī, were 
widely respected pīrs of their time. Saiyad Ābdun Nur, better known by his pseudonym, 
Dīnhīna, “the irreligious,” wrote more than four hundred devotional songs in Bangla, including 
several jārigān and some Urdu marsiyā, which are still extremely popular in Sylhet. As the 
founder of the Hoseniyā Ćiśṭīyā tarīqa he required his disciples to observe strictly all aspects of 
Muharram, including abstaining from non-vegetarian food during this period. This practice has 
been continued by Saiyad Hāsān and is still followed in Sultānī today.

Saiyad Hāsān is a learned man, who describes himself as “a Jack of all trades, but a master of 
one,” the “one” being Sufism. 1467 He is currently writing a book entitled Islāmera Drṣṭite Tarīkā, 
Bayāt, evam Cillākuśī (“The Sufi Path, the Oath of Allegiance, and Self-Mortification Practices in the Light 
of Islam”), on the subject of Hoseniyā Ćiśṭī practices. His sermons, delivered in Bangla, are 
informed by his wide reading of religious literature, not only in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and 
Bangla, but also by modern academic writings on Sufism, such as Carl Ernst’s Teachings of Sufism. 
By citing a couplet he attributed to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, he tacitly informed me that he keeps 
religious politics to the ulamā, while he himself enjoys the sweet inner core of Islam. 1468 On a 
July morning in 2009, while we discussed his Šab-i Merāj sermon of the previous night, in which 
he drew upon Saiyad Sultān’s own narrative of the Prophet’s ascension, his favourite Rabindra

1467 This paragraph and parts of the next provide information taken from interviews I conducted with 
Saiyad Hāsān in July 2009. Saiyad Hāsān speaks impeccable English, and insisted I conducted the 
interviews in English.
1468 The couplet reads: mā az Qurʾān maghz rā bardāshṭīm / ustekhvān bah pīsh sagān andākhtīm. In his own 
translation: “I have taken the marrow of the Qurʾān / And left the bones for the future dogs.” Personal 
conversation, July 21, 2009. A similar couplet attributed to Rūmī—man ze Qurʾān barguzīm maghz rā / 
ustekhvān pīsh sagān andākhtīm—is cited in Khalīfah 1990, 35.
Samgīta played in the background. He prides himself on having many Hindu disciples, and spoke of an invited lecture he delivered at the Ramakrishna Mission, Kolkata, in the 1990s, when his eloquence swayed a number of Hindus in the audience to convert to Islam.

Saiyad Ḥāsān has a deep sense of pride in his ancestry. While he was still an undergraduate student in Kishoreganj, Sylhet, he claims to have been guided by his forefathers through visions that impelled him to return to his ancestral home at Sultānī to carry forward their spiritual legacy. From among the sacred articles in his possession, Saiyad Ḥāsān showed me an iron finger-ring with mystic formulae inscribed on it in Arabic script; the ring purportedly belonged to Saiyad Ilyās Kutub al-Awliyā, Saiyad Sultān’s paternal cousin and a renowned mystic who is buried at Muḥārīnband. (Figures 15 and 16). Said to have healing powers, the ring purportedly cures the sick and ailing who drink the water in which it is steeped. Saiyad Ḥāsān also showed me what he believed to be the Qur’ān of Nāšir al-Dīn Sīpāh Salār, which he had inherited through the family line. (Figures 21 and 22). Although this lithographed Qur’ān could not be older than the nineteenth-century (Figures 16 and 17), its possession, like that of the ring, provides Saiyad Ḥāsān and his disciples with “proof” of a certain kind of history.1469 Within the khānakā compound, Saiyad Ḥāsān also pointed out to me an unplastered, moss-covered, medieval-looking brick wall which now constituted one of the walls of the outhouse—the residence of Saiyad Ḥāsān’s devoted assistant, Muhammad Kadar Ālī, and his family members. This deliberately preserved wall, from Saiyad Ḥāsān’s perspective, was a piece of history—proof of Saiyad Sultān’s administrative offices that allegedly once stood there. Though the disparate evidence supplied by Saiyad Ḥāsān as proof of his being the custodian of Taraph’s Saiyad family heritage, and hence, the veracity of his genealogy, might not pass muster with the positivist

1469 Saiyad Ḥāsān also showed me his father’s wasiyatnāma, his will, and the manuscripts of his grandfather Dīṁhīna’s songs, which he has partially edited; the first volume has been published as Dīṁhīna Ratanāvalī.
historian, it nonetheless shares with the positivist historian, as Christian Lee Novetzke has argued about the faithful, “an extrinsic interest in an understanding of the past that seeks toward objective evaluation and hence ‘historical truth’ in addition to what we might call theological-memorial truth.”\textsuperscript{1470} Simultaneously, the evidence Saiyad Hāsān enlists as proof of his ancestry describes for us the peculiar mantle of spiritual and territorial authority (\textit{wilāya})\textsuperscript{1471} that Saiyad Hāsān as a Sufi pīr seeks to inherit.

This argument also holds true for the single tale Saiyad Hāsān offered by way of family oral tradition concerning Sultān, an account which stands in sharp contrast to Sultān’s anti-Vaiśṇava stance in the \textit{Nabīvaṃśa}. The tale showcases Saiyad Hāsān’s view of Sultān as both a just administrator and an icon of religious virtue; to him, he is the embodiment of charismatic authority and generous ecumenism, who sought to reconcile Vaiśṇavas and Muslims in the medieval period.\textsuperscript{1472} According to Saiyad Hāsān, Rāmakṛṣṇa Gosāīn, the founder of the Jaganmohinī sect,\textsuperscript{1473} had allegedly approached Sultān, the administrator of Taraph, to petition for a piece of land on which to establish his ākharā, an assembly hall for performing religious worship. Sultān received him with hospitality, while simultaneously establishing his charismatic authority over a spiritual inferior and beneficiary of his patronage.\textsuperscript{1474} The \textit{gosaīn} was served a dish of beef. When the pīr uncovered the vessel, he miraculously and graciously transformed the contents into sweets to honor suitably the Vaiśṇava mendicant. He sent him away with a grant of land in Māsuliyā, Habiganj, Greater Sylhet, where Rāmakṛṣṇa Gosāīn later

\textsuperscript{1470} Novetzke 2009, 228.
\textsuperscript{1471} For the Sufi understanding of \textit{wilāya}, see Digby 1986, 63.
\textsuperscript{1472} On the basis of the \textit{NV} being an oral text set to various \textit{rāgas}, Saiyad Hāsān suggested that Saiyad Sultān was most probably a Sufi of the Ciśṭī order, like himself.
\textsuperscript{1473} For a discussion about this sect, see Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{1474} As Digby (1986, 60) has shown, such “contests of superiority” and “magical displays” were emphasized in Islamic and non-Islamic medieval literature alike as important attributes of the powerful Sufi \textit{shaykh}. 
set up his ākharā. The Jaganmohiṇī sect to this day maintains a presence in Māsuliya. On my visit I found a modern temple constructed by the crumbling remains of a medieval one, which had been destroyed in an earthquake. The priest there stated that the temple land had been granted to their founder, Rāmakṛṣṇa, by the Taraph administrators.

Saiyad Hāsān once remarked that it was his college history professor who first brought him to awareness of being a descendant of the poet of the Nabīvaṃśa. As Saiyad Hāsān read more on the subject, he discovered that Saiyad Sultān had been lost to the Sylhettees. Accordingly, he decided “to rescue Saiyad Sultān” from forgotten histories. Modern scholarship on nationalist historiographic narratives has shed light on the particular stimulus provided by the personal religious orientation of the academic historian to history teaching and historiography in so-called secular institutions of higher education in Bengal and Bangladesh. However, Saiyad Hāsān’s statement gives us pause to contemplate the obverse: the peculiar impetus provided to

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1475 Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosenī Cīsti’s (1987, 39) account of this land grant in his Tarapha era itikathā is at variance with his oral version recounted to me in person. July 2009. In writing he claims, following Āgphar ([1887] 2008, 55), that Rāmakṛṣṇa was granted the land by Sultān’s ancestor, Saiyad Āsīr. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhuri ([1910] 2009, 2: 383) relates the same story from the Vaiṣṇava perspective, attributing the miracle to Rāmakṛṣṇa Gosāiṇī. His account of Rāmakṛṣṇa is translated as follows: “He developed supernatural powers through the power of the penance, which he had performed for a prolonged period in a secluded forest. It is said that very soon his fame spread through the region; hearing about him, a certain local ruler (deśā-pati) of Sultānśī, in order to test his charismatic powers, sent him a dish of beef, which is considered untouchable to the Hindu. In contrast with [ordinary] discriminatory intelligence, he did not refuse to accept the cooked meat (mahārā?): however, surprisingly, when the pot was uncovered it was found to contain something like sun-dried (ātapa) rice and sugar. On hearing about this incident from his followers, the landlord, before himself arriving into his [Rāmakṛṣṇa’s] presence, donated that forest land to the spiritual practitioner.” These partisan accounts of miraculous displays, though modern, are testimony to the continuity between modern local tradition and medieval accounts on the conflicts between yogīs and Sufis in the medieval period. For such medieval contests, see Digby 1970. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhuri ([1910] 2009, 1: 133) also states, following the Assam District Gazetteers, that Rāmakṛṣṇa Gosāiṇī established the ākharā at Māsuliya, which also houses the tomb (samādiḥ) of the Gosāiṇī.

1476 Saiyad Hāsān was keen I visit Māsuliya to corroborate further evidence as proof of his ancestry.

1477 Personal conversation, July 2009. That this concern is circumscribed to Saiyad Hāsān is shown by the family tree which his father published. Here, Saiyad Sultān is not even named as such, but rather named as “Hajrat Chaiyad Sāh Chāleḥ urat pe Minā Chāheb.” For further details of the family tree of Saiyad Sultān of Taraph, see Appendix Six.
local memory, often closely associated with religion, by an academician of history, and his
unwitting agency in the re-constitution of local histories.

In 1988, Saiyad Hāsān founded the Mahākavi Saiyad Sultān Sāhitya o Gabeṣanā Pariṣad
(MSSSGP), the Mahākavi Saiyad Sultān Literary and Research Council. In his introduction to the
commemorative volume issued at the inaugural function, Saiyad Hāsān comments on the
situation:

Unfortunately in this civilized era of the twentieth century, alas, some learned pundits of Chittagong,..., with the view to exalt their own cultural inheritance, extremely cautiously, and by lowly conspiring, crafted a doctoral thesis to strive persistently to incorporate our three jewel-like names [Saiyad Sultān, Saiyad Musā, and Saiyad Gadā Hāsan], very cleverly, into the history of Chittagong. Who could have the guts to raise their pens against a written thesis, when these culture-snatchers are so skilled and shrewd? Fortunately, in this matter, by the pure Āllāh’s infinite glory, the researcher-teacher, Muhammad Āsāddar Ālī, a truth soldier and crusader (marde-mujāhid), not paying heed to any sort of fear, personal greed or profit, and while being respectful to his predecessor’s contribution, entered into the inky fray, with the view to recover this lost heritage and inheritance of ours. After a period of prolonged and difficult labour, he prepared, with the help of indisputable logical argumentation (yukti pramāṇa), a lengthy refutation...1478

Here Saiyad Hāsān lambasts the Chittagonian scholars Muhammad Enamul Haq and, in
particular, Ahmad Sharif, whose doctoral thesis, implicitly referred to, was later published as
Saiyad Sultān: Taṅra Granthāvalī o Taṅra Yuga (“Saiyad Sultān: His Works and Times”). Saiyad
Hāsān’s Islamic religious rhetoric serves to glorify Āsāddar Ālī as a dispassionate truth-seeker
and a pious champion of Sylhet’s cultural heritage, while simultaneously disparaging Sharif
who, in addition to being portrayed as a sneaky cultural thief, has earned the ire of many
Bangladeshi Muslims for his communist ideals and atheistic beliefs.1479 Ālī’s refutation of Sharif
was first published in the Sileṭa Ekādemī Patrikā, ten years before the founding of Saiyad Hāsān’s
organization, and was later republished in 1990 under the auspices of the MSSSGP.

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1479 For instance, see Ālī’s (1990, 53) acerbic comment about Ahmad Sharif’s personal beliefs: “...even though in his personal life, in terms of belief, he did not even believe in the creator!” Translation mine.
While Ālī is unable to conclusively link the Saiyad Sultān of the Saiyad family of Sylhet to the poet of the Nabīvaṃśa, he justifiably and successfully queries Sharif’s sloppy mapping of evidence on logical, philological, and other grounds, exposing the ambiguity of some of his claims. In this battle of regional affiliations, the Sylhettees feel particularly vindicated by the private testimony of Sharif’s own uncle, Sāhityaviśārad Abdul Karim, the revered collector of Islamic Bangla manuscripts. Āsāddar Ālī publishes the latter’s private letter to Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, in which he approves Bhattacharjee’s proposal that Saiyad Sultān was from Laśkarpur, Sylhet. Ālī thus accuses Sharif of thrusting “his own views [about Saiyad Sultān’s birthplace] upon the shoulders of Sāhityaviśārad Sāheb” through his Puthi Pariciti, the descriptive catalog of Bangla manuscripts in the Dhaka University archive, which he co-edited with Abdul Karim, and which was published four to five years after his uncle’s demise.

Despite Saiyad Hāsān’s modern revival of Sultān’s legacy in Sylhet, my visit to Sultānśī in July 2009 revealed that, unlike the villages of Chittagong, no oral histories concerning Sultān circulate today among Sultānśī’s villagers. In point of fact, until my visit, the unmarked grave which village elders had once ascribed to Saiyad Sultān of Taraph lay forgotten, covered in shrubbery in a corner of the Saiyad family graveyard, overshadowed by the devotional activity surrounding the shrine of Saiyad Hāsān’s venerable nineteenth- and twentieth-century Čištī ancestors. (Figure 18). The day after my visit Saiyad Hāsān ordered the grave to be cleared of shrubs for my benefit, he informed me amusedly that a rumor had spread in the village about the synchronicity between the arrival of an “American” lady at Sultānśī and the miraculous appearance of a new grave at the mazhar! Having thus played an unwitting part in local myth-making, I was able to experience first-hand the ease with which new tales can be generated around Bangladeshi shrines. When I arrived that morning, the old grave had already been

1480 See, for instance, ibid., Pariśiṣṭa 1, 101–103.
1481 Ibid., 103.
temporarily covered by new bricks, with a zarī-embroidered red and white silken cādor (sheet) spread over the bricks. (Figure 19). Saiyad Hāsān informed me of his decision to expand the existing family shrine room to include this particular open-air grave. I feel reasonably certain that by the time of my next visit, no traces of the grave’s old brick structure will remain. As is the case with most graves in actively venerated dargāhs in Bangladesh, this too will be cemented, plastered, painted, inset with a marble plaque concerning its occupant, and covered with a cādor, only to be regularly renovated as a mark of respect to its revered occupants.

Saiyad Hāsān wields enormous social influence over the villages of Sylhet. What need, then, has this well-established pīr to revive the memory of a shadowy forebear? From his comments about Ahmad Sharif, it is evident that in Saiyad Hāsān’s reclamation of the past lies a clear-eyed recognition of the importance of cultural capital. In Chapter Three, I argue that through the biographical process the writer and his subject are mutually influenced by the charisma of the other. If Saiyad Sultān initially used his authority as pīr to spread the word of Islām and its Prophet, the biography of the Prophet, once written, would have extended the author’s influence and reconstituted his own charisma as pīr. In a similar vein, in the initial phase of his recovery of Saiyad Sultān, Saiyad Hāsān’s venerable social standing aids him in reclaiming the pīr-poet for his family, but in years to come this reclamation is sure to enhance his own family’s social prestige and spiritual authority.

While I sat with Saiyad Hāsān in his khānakā, one morning, a villager by the name of Muhammad Abdul Mannan arrived with his family of two other adults and two children. They had travelled for an entire day from the village of Tāhirpur, in the adjoining Sunāmağanj district of Greater Sylhet, north of Habiganj. Their sojourn was prompted by Abdul Mannan’s dream of a pīr, in which Abdul Mannan himself distributed širnī (food, considered to impart blessings to the gaver and receiver alike, since it is either cooked or distributed at a holy site, and hence, purportedly charged with its special spiritual potency) at a holy shrine. Since he had never seen Saiyad Hāsān or the Sultānī mazhar before, his description of the figure of the pīr and the mazhar to the Tāhirpur villagers enabled them to guide him to Sultānī. Interview with Muhammad Abdul Mannan, July 15, 2009. This incident indicates how well Saiyad Hāsān is known and revered all over Greater Sylhet.
Shorn of the vast lands that his family once administered, Saiyad Hāsān nonetheless sees himself as the mantle-bearer of Taraph’s ashrāf traditions.1483 His wide reading in the languages relevant to the study of Islamic literature;1484 his large personal library; his generous hospitality; his gentle manner, measured speech, and dignified bearing; his well-appointed two-storey hābili; and his retinue of devoted family retainers recall the decorous lifestyle and courtesies of a genteel past. Though living a sequestered existence in his comfortable Sultānī hābili,1485 Saiyad Hāsān received village folk in his Darbār-e Mustafā,1486 his khānakā, on a daily basis, ministering with care to their spiritual, emotional, and even judicial and medical needs. Like his administrator forebears, many of whom were also encoded in local memory as Sufi pīrs—not the least of whom was Saiyad Nāṣir al-Dīn—Saiyad Hāsān attempts to sustain the family tradition of tending to his spiritual and material wilāya in an age which has seen the systematic erosion of feudal influence over the rural populace. His invocation of Saiyad Sultān

1483 Concerning Taraph’s gentry and their ways, see Āghphar [1887] 2008, 37–38. Writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, Saiyad Ābdul Āghphār (ibid., 83), himself a member of the Saiyad family of Taraph, laments the passing of the old ways: “By the cruel turning of the wheel of time, even the very memorabilia of that Saiyad family, which at one time were ruling with sovereign authority, have today all but disappeared. Those who protected hundreds of people via their bequeathals of devottara, brahmottara, pirottar, širī, cākarānī, cerāgī, and khushbās grants, are today preoccupied with self-preservation. Those who brought both Hindus and Muslims of noble family and caste from distant lands, and established them, with exceptional cordiality and respect, via [donations of] land grants, [thus] building a social structure (samāja) in the region, alas, today, their descendants, for the sake of [maintaining?] this land (bhūmi), have abandoned their homeland (svadesā) and travel abroad. Those whose predecessors bore the responsibility of the respect and disgrace of the local people, alas, their families are no more able to preserve their own self-respect. Those who were [once] the paramount rulers, alas, alas, how unbearable it is that they are today counted as ordinary folk! Those who [once] easily erected numerous expensive holy monuments (punyastambha), alas, today they are incapable of [holding] the smallest pious celebration/ceremony (sadamuṣṭān). Oh Lord (vidhāta), how strange are your glories! Today’s kings and queens are tomorrow’s roadside beggars!” Translations mine. Concerning the various kinds of land grants mentioned in this passage, see Eaton 1993. Khusvās (P. khush-w-bāsh) means “lands granted to favourites at low rents on condition of serving the government when called upon.” Steingass [1892] 1992, s.v. “khush-w-bāsh.”

1484 Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosenī Čisti (1999) was the one the editors of Sylhet: History and Heritage chose to invite to write the essay, entitled “Arabic and Persian in Sylhet.”

1485 Apart from the obligatory trip to Dhaka for his annual health check-up Saiyad Hāsān rarely steps out of the village center where he lives.

1486 It is literally translated as “The Court of Mustaphā.” Saiyad Hāsān informed me that he had named his khānakā after his father, Gulām Mustaphā, while being aware of the intended ambiguity, Mustaphā also being an epithet for the Prophet.
as an icon of charismatic power and benevolent administration could thus be seen as an effort to bolster the spiritual authority and social influence he sustains in the region.

This recovery of the charismatic authority of a well-known historical figure for one’s family and village prestige is a pattern that can be seen in the neighbouring village of Laškarpur too, in the case of none other than the brother of Saiyad Sultān of Taraph, Saiyad Musā. In 2008, the village of Laškarpur, the purported birthplace of Saiyad Sultān and his brother Saiyad Mūsā, held its first Milan Melā or “reunion.” That very year, so says the engraved marble plaque placed over the arched entrance-way that leads to the graveyard, “the madhyayuga (middle-period) grave of Saiyad Šāh Musā alias Maynā” had been renovated. The relevant portion of the plaque reads:

The renowned administrator of Taraph and mystical poet, Saiyad Šāh Muchā alias Maynā (Ra.), the son of Saiyad Šāh Mikāil, the fourth generation descendant born in Laškarpur, of the line established by Sipāhsālār Saiyad Nāsir Uddin (God’s mercy be upon him), the conqueror of Sileṭ in 1303 A.D. and of Taraph in 1304 A.D., who himself lies in Muṛārband. He is the brother of the founder of Sultānšī, the great poet, Saiyad Sultān.1487 (Figure 20)

Deoān Saiyad Aphikur Rejā, a descendant of the Saiyad family of Laškarpur, enlightens us about this grave in the Smaraṇikā, the commemorative volume issued on the occasion of the Milan Melā.1488 In his opinion this grave is not that of Saiyad Musā, but is one in which the twentieth-century Maynā phakir is interred. It is his name, as our plaque also reveals, which has been conflated in local memory with that of Saiyad Musā. The latter, Rejā believes, died in Arakan while he was a minister at the Arakanese court; hence, there is no question of his grave being in Laškarpur. In time, however, it is likely that this printed disclaimer will be forgotten, and the marble plaque above the grave will come to be considered authoritative. In this manner a new history of the past is being forged, a new tradition begun, and a new centre of pilgrimage

1487 Translation mine. Photograph of plaque taken by me, July 2009.
1488 Rejā 2008.
that draws its authority from Taraph’s history is being created for Bangladeshi devotees. The custodians of the renowned Muṛārband dargāh of Habiganj believe that Saiyad Musā is buried there, along with others of his family. This claim brings into question Saiyad Sultān’s own purported grave in Sultānšī. As a relative of Sylhet’s Saiyad family who requested anonymity suggested, if Sultān indeed died in Sylhet, rather than in Arakan as the Chittagonian villagers believe, it would be more plausible for him to be buried in the Muṛārband dargāh of 120 saints, which was initially established as the Saiyad family graveyard.

8.5 Conclusion

While in his own time, Saiyad Sultān was drawn into the politics of language, his legacy has been mired in the regional politics of competing historiographies, and complicated by the contested legacies of at least two related historical figures. As in the case of Saiyad Musā, whom local memory had conflated with a twentieth-century phakir, it is possible that the Chittagonian pīr, Saiyad Śāh Gadī, is a later local pīr, whose memory has become entangled with the Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān of Taraph’s Saiyad family. From our discussions in Chapter One, it is clear, even as Muhammad Śahīdullāh suggests, that the administrator, Saiyad Sultān, of the same renowned Saiyad family of Taraph, is an entirely different person from the poet of the Nabīvaṃśa, whom Sharif links to Čakraśālā. Irrespective of the historical “truth,” in studying Sultān’s contested legacy a pattern emerges, across Sylhet and Chittagong, of competing village claims to the authority of historical personages linked to Sultān. Whether in the case of Saiyad Hāsān of Sultānšī, the residents of Lāskarpur, the custodians of the Muṛārband dargāh, or the descendants of Saiyad Śāh Gadī of Chittagong, this trend suggests a certain anxiety on the part

1489 Saiyad Murād Āhmad, the younger brother of the custodian of the Muṛārband dargāh, personal conversation, July 2009.
1490 An informant who requested anonymity, personal conversation, August 2009.
of local contestants to harness the cultural capital of well-known historical figures in order to reap certain perceived long-term benefits for self, family, and community, religious merit being not the least of these. While the degree to which Bangladeshi pīrs and shrine custodians choose to attach themselves to the commercial economy that surrounds shrines or dargāhs varies,1491 most Bangladeshis are aware of the economic opportunities that the religious activity around shrines present to those who seek to participate in shrine-related commercial networks. Moreover, the economy of entire Bangladeshi village-communities, such as those of Muṛārband in Sylhet or Maijbhāṇḍāra in Chittagong, are often sustained by the commercial economy around the reputed dargāhs established there. Thus, it is possible that apart from ideological concerns, such as acquiring religious capital for individual and community, in the case of some contestants, a pragmatic interest in the direct socio-economic development of self, family, and village may be an important factor which drives the continual, frequently unconscious, reconstitution of their past. Even when the concerns are socio-economic, such cases instantiate Peter Bertocci’s argument that it is “the discourse of Islam” which “provides the rhetoric and the ‘vocabularies of motive’ that frame contestation and struggle”1492 in the social order of rural Bangladesh.

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1491 Saiyad Hāsān (Introduction to Dīnhīna Racaṇāvalī) records the following about his ascetic grandfather, Saiyad Ābdun Nur Hochen Čīstī, who lived a simple, austere, family life: “It was his rule that when some food was sent by Āllāh... it was necessary for his wife and son to sit down and eat together with him, such that everything was eaten [or distributed] by the end of that meal. No food could be stored for a later time. At those times when there was no food in the house, and someone came to inform him about this, he would say, ‘Heat up water on the stove; Āllāh will send us bread.’ Later it would be seen that someone or the other would turn up with rice, lentils, a goat, and the like. At times, when he was unable to focus on Āllāh’s remembrance or when he was unable to compose his spiritual songs, he would say, ‘Look into my coin box (hātbāksa); it is possible that there is some money in there, which is why my mind cannot focus on meditating upon Āllāh.’ He would distribute the change found in his coin box to phakirs.” Translation mine.

Conclusion

The *Nabīvaṃśa* and the Making of Bengali Islam

This study of Saiyad Sultān and his *Nabīvaṃśa* in Bengal enables us to observe patterns of legitimization and reception that unfold through and beyond the biographic process, over a subject-author-text-community continuum that spans almost four centuries. Saiyad Sultān, the preacher-translator-biographer, himself a local guru/pīr, sets into motion various processes of legitimization: Sultān’s authority as pīr within the local community serves to legitimize Islam and its Prophet; yet once the biography is written, the charisma of his biographical subject further legitimates and consolidates his position within literary and religious circles. These circles of reception may share some demographic overlap but are not necessarily identical: while accepting him as *kaviguru*, his literary confreres and later writers may have accepted his authority as pīr in varying degrees, while communities of the faithful, who revered him as pīr, may have, to varying degrees, remembered him as a writer. In ever-widening circles, then, his status within premodern East Bengali literary and religious circles becomes canonical. His student, Muhammad Khān, carries forward his legacy, extending Sultān’s spiritual and literary lineage which further strengthened the pīr-author’s memory and authority. In literary circles,
his project is imitated by other authors: Şekh Čanda of Comilla is notable in carrying forward
the “frontier literature” that Sultān pioneered, while other authors of Chittagong and other
regions too imitated his narrative and rhetorical style, and narratological tropes.

The modern period, however, sees a rupture in this pattern of increasing popularity of pīr-
author and text, two arcs which have so far ascended somewhat in tandem. The two now begin
to trace independent trajectories: while the author ascends in meaningfulness and relevance to
particular regional East Bengali communities (Sylhettee and Chittagonian), his text, at a pan-
Bengal level, falls into increasing obscurity. Furthermore, Sultān’s memory being constituted
by his dual persona of pīr and biographer, the author’s trajectory in the modern period has
occasionally become split into two separate trajectories, which take on separate meanings to
various publics of memory.

Thus, in Chittagong, among local literary historians his symbolic value as a yuga-puruṣa and
yugandhara,1493 an axial figure who, as pīr-author, inaugurated a new era in Chittagonian Islamic
literature, takes on cultural significance. To the small group of villagers of the Patiya district,
on the other hand, Saiyad Sultān is enshrined in memory as a charismatic pīr, a predecessor of
Saiyad Shāh Gadī, a local pīr of wide renown; he is virtually unknown as a writer. To local
Habiganj villagers of Sylhet, on the other hand, he remains completely unknown as a pīr or as a
writer. The movement to reclaim him there has been exclusively an elite one, and seems to
have no basis in any popular memory. Since the 1980’s, when the Mahākavi Saiyad Sultān Sāhitya
o Gabeṣanā Parisad was founded, Sultān’s cultural and charismatic legacy has been reified by
Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosenī Cīstī, a Sufi pīr of the Hoseniyā Cīstī order whose arguments for
claiming Sultān as his ancestor have been supported by various literary historians of Sylhet.
Sultān’s “reclamation” by Saiyad Hāsān and Sylhettee authors, as shown in this dissertation,

are based upon strained arguments, not well-supported by documentary evidence. This movement, however, is proof of Sultân’s abiding appeal as a cultural symbol to local Bangladeshi groups, who have drawn him into their efforts to enhance local prestige for self and community. In this way, our biographer has followed the very arc of Islamic historiography he had sought to bend to his own ideological ends, becoming, like his biographical subject, a cultural symbol of potent value to certain present-day Bangladeshi regional groups in their efforts to make Islam relevant to the living present and in enunciating their vision for the future.

In the early-twentieth century, the NV was superseded by the Kāchāchul Anbiyā and biographies of the Prophet produced by so-called dobhāṣī authors of the print era. The reasons for this, as delineated in Chapter Eight, are traced to the colonial encounter and the coeval rise of Islamic revivalist movements, which so changed the character of Islam in Bengal that the Nabīvaṃśa’s retrospective model of historiography, its perceived “syncretism,” its specific orientation towards the religious ideal (Prophet as military hero; Prophet as phakir), its emphasis on mythologization of Islamic figures, its tendency to provide racy entertainment via the tales of the prophets, and its polemic against Vaiṣṇavism, were all hagiographic features that had become irrelevant, even offensive, in the eyes of the modern Bengali Muslim.

In a recent article, “The Subject and the Ostensible Subject,” Tony Stewart maps patterns in Sufi hagiography in an effort to provide an answer to the question of why certain shaykhs acquire greater eminence than others in community memory. Making a distinction between the ostensible subject of hagiography, in this case the individual shaykh, and the “real” subject, the religious ideal which the shaykh embodies, Stewart suggests that it is not the individual life per se but the specific models of piety perpetuated by the tradition and their relevance to the present-day communities that ultimately influence the perpetuation of the shaykh’s memory.
within it. This principle is also seen at work in the reception of the NV in the modern period. For, as Stewart points out, “the impact of the biographical image would seem to be directly proportional to the adaptation of the religious ideal to contemporary issues of everyday life and spirituality, that is, its relevance to... the community.” Other than the NV’s brief claim to a resurgent fame in the modern period, when it was heralded, at least by one East Pakistani scholar, as “a kind of national religious epic” for Bengali Muslims, the text has become little more than a literary artifact in today’s Bangladesh, the exclusive domain of scholars of Bengali history and literature.

A second overarching theme of this dissertation has been to examine the precise literary processes and translatorial interventions by which Sufi intellectuals, such as Sultān, sought to root Islam in Bengal, and the particular challenges authors faced in establishing the superiority of their religious ideal. The NV is distinctive in being the first major textual production in Bangla that introduces Islamic doctrine and praxis to the people of Bengal. In the absence of the availability of translations of the Qur’ān in Bangla, we have seen how the NV assumes the Qur’ānic role as a charter document that establishes the basic principles of Islamic doctrine and ethics, while endeavoring to share in the sacred mantle of the Qur’ān’s authority. These and other features of the NV, which facilitate identity formation and community consciousness, were first highlighted in Chapter Three, and later illustrated through the examination of Sultān’s treatment of the tale of the Prophet’s ascension in Chapter Seven. Here we see at work the rhetorical processes of inclusion and exclusion in the formation of community, the extended genealogical axis of ṣiṣya-guru-nabi-Āllā around which community identity is aligned, and the upholding of an ethical template for Islamic practice.

1495 Ibid., 236.
1496 Husain 1960, xxiv.
In his study of the early Muslim community of believers, Fred Donner has identified four styles of legitimation that were employed to bolster various claims to privilege, authority, and leadership. The first was moral legitimation based upon the perceived piety and moral standing of the individual within the community. Genealogical legitimation, the second, had to do with “being of the ‘right’ family or ethnic group” to establish the individual’s social status within the community. Despite the Qurʾān’s efforts to break away from such forms of legitimation, the pre-Islamic Arabian emphasis on kinship and tribal ties continued to shape the contours of the new Islamic community. The third was theocratic legitimation: “the assertion that one occupies a superior position because God wants it that way.” And the fourth, historicizing legitimation, was exemplified by the developing Islamic historiographical tradition, which, as Donner points out, often interacted with the first three forms of legitimation to produce “hybrid accounts, but also in ways that sometimes transformed the very nature of those forms of legitimation.”

With regard to Saiyad Sultān and the NV, Donner’s principles of legitimation, often in modified forms, can be seen at work at various levels of interaction within the subject-author text-community continuum, within and between these various social realities, far too complex to individually disentangle here. A few examples drawn from earlier discussions, however, may suffice to make the point. At the level of subject-author interaction, for instance, we have observed how Sultān’s moral or pious standing within his community (established via his participation in the genealogical and historicizing legitimation of his Sufi pīr-murīd tradition and his Saiyad family status within the community) serves to legitimate his religious ideal. The latter, in turn, serves to reinforce and extend the charismatic axis of pīr-murīd-prophet-God.

1497 Donner 1998, Chapter Three.
1498 Ibid., 104.
1499 Ibid., 111.
1500 Ibid., 119.
This is most clearly seen at work in Saiyad Sultān’s ascension narrative, discussed in Chapter Seven. At the level of the text, the author has employed all four forms of legitimation to establish the pre-eminence of the Prophet of Islam. In the Prophet Muhammad’s case, genealogical legitimation is understood as his prophetological ancestry, while the pre-Islamic prophets are themselves legitimated by the primordial principle of the Nūr Muhammad. A fifth additional principle of legitimation could be added to Donner’s four, which one could call “scriptural legitimation,” a principle of legitimation that refers to the manner in which Sultān uses the authority of sacred books, such as the Vedas, the Qur’ān, and the purāṇas, both explicitly and implicitly, for the purposes of legitimating self and Prophet. In turn, at the text-author-community level of interaction, we have observed how groups of modern-day Bangladeshi believers co-opt the scriptural authority of the NV and the moral authority of its author to legitimate their own belief communities.

It is thus clear that Donner’s principles of legitimation, when suitably modified and augmented, can be applied to the manner in which communities on the Islamic frontier in East Bengal, and those of modern-day Bangladesh, have continued and continue to claim privilege and authority for the individual and the community. Yet what the NV demonstrates is this: as the Islamic frontier expanded to include new communities of believers, perhaps the most important form of establishing the Prophet and Islam in Bengal through literary endeavours has been via processes of “cultural legitimation” that specifically engage various dimensions of the local culture. This has been amply substantiated through my elaborations upon Sultān’s cosmogony and prophetology, and showcased by Sultān’s account of the Prophet’s ascension.

As a sacred biography, the NV, I have argued, emerges directly out of the encounter of Islam in Bengal with Vaishnavism. Sultān’s self-confessed biographical motive was to compose a competing narrative that would turn the attention of Bengalis away from the figures of Rāma
and Kṛṣṇa to the attractive figure of the Prophet of Islam. But he succeeds, through his astute translatorial interventions, in accomplishing something of far greater consequence than this: he succeeds in demoting and converting the gods of the Hindus to Islam, through their inclusion within a new Islamic prophetological dispensation for Bengal. Just as “nabi” displaces “Hari” in the title, Harivaṃśa, the text too accomplishes a complete displacement and demolition of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme deity of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Sultān upholds Hari as a warning to the idolatrous people of Bengal to give up the worship of their false gods, their empty images of brass, and turn to the singular Niraṅjana alone. Conversion of a people, however, involves not merely the displacement of their gods by new ones, but their sacred texts as well. And through the composition of the NV, Sultān aims to create a new prior text for Bengal, an axial text that acquired canonical status among the Bengali Muslims of Chittagong.

A sustained site of inquiry has been the particular mechanisms of translation via which Sultān accomplishes this conversion of the gods. The hermeneutic model that explains the workings of translation as conversion is at the heart of this analysis. I show how the NV’s search for equivalence is architextually pervasive, percolating from language into form, and from form, through a polyglot transtextuality, into transcultural domains of meaning. I analyze various such processes of translation as the first step in a series of interpretive moves that seek to displace Vaiṣṇava deities, doctrine, and texts, replacing these with new Islamic ones.

As a missionary and polemical work, Sultān’s biography is pointedly political. His biography of the Prophet, notwithstanding the plethora of well-established Islamic hagiographic genres available to Sultān, could be read as an adoption of the Bangla carita genre, newly pioneered in Bengal by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas as a theological and political tool. Having ideologically sharpened this tool into a trenchant weapon of disputation, Sultān turns it back upon the Gauḍīyas to humiliate and discredit them. The manner in which Śrīnivāsa Ācārya and
Narottamdāsa, bolstered by the profoundly influential Caitanyacaritämṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, created for the Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal a solid organizational structure in the early seventeenth-century, is now well-documented. However, little is still known about the precise demographics of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement in Bengal, particularly East Bengal. Indeed, the NV is a rare testament to the perceived threat of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism to Islam in seventeenth-century East Bengal, and provides rare documentation of the widespread popularity and organizational spread of the movement in this region, for which the available evidence, especially concerning Chittagong, is scanty. In fact, as this dissertation has shown, the curious silence about Buddhism in the NV sheds doubt upon its author being based in Chittagong when he wrote the NV. In this singular respect, the NV could more readily have been a product of Sylhet, where Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had a strong foothold and Buddhism did not have any significant presence.

Saiyad Sultān’s belief in the power of translation in conversion and his pursuit of this principle in his own literary practice, coupled with the affirmation of the vernacular by his fellow Bengali Sufis as the ideal vehicle for communicating Islamic praxis to Bengalis, urges a re-evaluation of the question of the significance of the premodern South Asian Sufi’s use of the vernacular. As Carl Ernst points out, the ideological posturing of nationalist historiographers has laid suspect the “received opinion … [that] assume[s] that the Sufis wrote in Indian languages in order to convert Indians to Islam.” Yet the case of Sultān and other Bengali Sufi-writers urges us to reopen the issue, to find more nuanced answers to this question. What, indeed, were the reasons for Sufis across South Asia to increasingly use the vernacular in their writings from the time of the establishment of Mughal rule onwards? Was this language choice a matter of exercising a mother-tongue for Muslims born in the subcontinent; or a pragmatic matter of communication, since they lived and preached in an Indian environment? Was this an aesthetic concern, a possibility that Ernst proposes, a process of picking “attractive
materials” from the Indian environment;\textsuperscript{1501} or were there, in some cases, deeper political and ideological underpinnings to the choice of the vernacular? To answer this question, every Sufi’s historical circumstance, just as Muzaffar Alam has urged, needs evaluation on a case-by-case basis.\textsuperscript{1502} To gain a fuller picture of a Sufi’s approach to conversion, his literary works and the intertextual interventions they seek to make, his target audience, the performative context, if any, his circle of disciples and their writings about their master, all become important elements whose study could further such an understanding. Yet only when such a question about the choice of vernacular is directly posed for each separate circumstance can evidence accumulate to piece together the bigger picture.

The Avadhi Sufi romances present a case in point. As scholars such as Aditya Behl, Shantanu Phukan, and Francesca Orsini have shown, these romances were performed at multiple venues, and were designed to communicate with multiple interpretive communities. For this reason, they are necessarily multi-referential and multi-linguistic, reflecting an “openness” to parallel universes. Does the choice of the vernacular suggest that Sufi-authors had begun to recognize its power in drawing local peoples to the message of Sufism and Islam? Had the Sufis begun to comprehend the efficacy of translation in conversion? Had they begun to appreciate the power of presenting Islam through continuities with Hindu thought, as being key to conversion? Did the Sufis who composed these romances recognize that lay-people could be drawn to Islam through \textit{rasa}? Could one of the reasons for the later continuation of this genre in the Deccan and in Bengal have been its proven ability to attract the non-Muslim layperson to the message of Islam? Or were the Sufis who wrote these romances indifferent to such concerns? It is precisely these difficult questions about Sufi literature in the vernacular that a text like the \textit{Nabīvaṃśa} raises.

\textsuperscript{1501} Ernst 1992, 166.
\textsuperscript{1502} Alam 1996.
In this dissertation, a preliminary effort has been made to provide a sense for the Islamic cosmopolis in which authors such as Sultān participated at the cross-regional level. Thus, I have traced, between the *NV* and the romance literatures of the North Indian Sufis of Avadh, common patterns of Sufi thought and vernacular expression, and terminologies used for Islamic doctrine in vernacular translation. This avenue of research represents a rich area for future investigation, raising the issue of the links between the vernacular literatures of Avadhi, Dakhani, and Bangla in the premodern period, and the various modes by which Muslim authors mobilized these languages for the expression of Sufi and Islamic ideas. A few studies, notably those of M. R. Tarafdar, Abū Musa Mohammad Arif Billah, and most recently Thibaut d’Hubert, have thus far emerged in the comparative field of Persian romance literature translated into Avadhī, Dakhani, and Bangla. But opening up such studies to other genres, and regions, such as the interactions between the Tamil country and Bengal, and Bengal, Arakan, and Southeast Asia, may provide insights into the interactions between the Sufis of these various regions and the circuits of circulation of Islamic ideas in premodern South Asia.

This dissertation has endeavored to shatter any notions of the flawed “repetitiveness” (*paunaḥpunikatā*) and lack of originality (*maulikatā*) that premodern Bengali authors have been accused of in their role as translators. Saiyad Sultān’s grand *nabīra pāṅcāli* stands as an unprecedented accomplishment in the annals of Bangla literature. The daring creativity he brings to the translation of his sources, whether it be al-Kisāʾī’s tales or the Prophet’s biography of unknown source, and the particular challenges he faces in establishing the

1504 Billah 2009.
1506 See also Stille 2011.
1507 For a recent study in this area, see Wormser and d’Hubert 2008.
preeminence of the Prophet of Islam in Bengal, have been laid bare in this thesis for all to appreciate this tour de force of missionary writing. Yet this dissertation, and the couple of others that have emerged in the recent past within the Euro-American academy, represent a small beginning in making these materials accessible to scholars not acquainted with Bangla. As Bangladeshi scholars have long recognized, Islamic Bangla literature is a field rich with possibilities. Much foundational work remains to be done. The cataloging and digital preservation of existing public manuscript collections in Bangladesh, and a vision to make these collections accessible to scholars, is the first step towards aiding any scholarship. Many unknown private collections of manuscripts exist in Bangladesh today and await scholarly discovery. The scientific dating of Islamic Bangla texts, an avenue of research not without its challenges, remains to be fully accomplished. Existing editions need to be carefully re-evaluated alongside the manuscript tradition, and wherever necessary new, truly critical editions need to be produced. And scholarship, in general, needs to rise above descriptive elaborations of the literature to new levels of interpretation and critical analysis. To push the frontiers of our knowledge of the literary history of these texts, to fully appreciate the contributions of premodern Muslim Bengali intellectuals, networks of cooperation and collaboration between experts within Bangladesh and the world beyond need to be strengthened. It is hoped that this dissertation will ignite such interest in furthering the field through scholarly collaboration within and without Bangladesh.
Appendix One

Table Showing Details of Manuscripts of Works Attributed to Saiyad Sultān

Introductory Note

Since the task of collecting and assessing Islamic Bangla manuscripts in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) remains incomplete, a comprehensive picture of the geographic circulation of texts has yet to emerge. Given the current state of the field, the following table provides as exhaustive a list as possible of manuscripts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān from various collections, the only exception being Saiyad Sultān’s padāvalīs, entirely excluded from consideration in this table. In addition to collating relevant information from published catalogs of both public and private collections, I have included relevant manuscripts, which I chanced upon on my travels through East Bangladesh, in private collections not cataloged thus far. It is my belief that, along with numerous manuscripts of other Islamic Bangla texts, several manuscripts of Saiyad Sultān’s works still rest in private hands, awaiting scholarly discovery. With the exception of a single manuscript of the Nabīvamsa concerning the tale-cycle of the Prophet Muhammad in the collection of the British Museum, London, all manuscripts listed in the table below, with firm ascription to our author, are to be found in Bangladeshi collections. A few manuscripts in various collections are of “unknown” title. Though the catalogers have given some indication of their contents, their identification awaits confirmation. Manuscripts of anonymous authorship, with titles similar to those of texts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, have also been listed, wherever possible, to facilitate future verification.
Albeit of varying quality and often formulaic in their imitation of each other, monographs in Bangla on the study and critical editing of Sanskrit and Bangla manuscripts have proliferated in the last few decades.\(^1\) While these volumes touch upon Islamic Bangla manuscripts, research in the specific codicological issues surrounding these manuscripts is still rudimentary.\(^2\) The diachronic changes, for instance, in layout, script, and pagination that manuscripts of Islamic Bangla texts manifest over the three centuries of their production are still to be analyzed. So too the impact of papermaking technology on manuscript production. Richard Eaton has shown how the spread of Islam in Bengal moved in tandem with the spread of literacy and its technologies.\(^3\) By the fifteenth century, papermaking technology had reached Bengal via the Persianized Turks, who had earlier introduced it to North India in the thirteenth century.\(^4\) In Bengal, paper rapidly displaced the use of palm leaves for copying manuscripts, and played a key role in the diffusion of Islam as a “religion of the Book.” From my limited survey of Saiyad Sultān’s manuscripts, which exhibit a whole range of different formats and scripts, I suggest that the earliest paper manuscripts of Islamic Bangla texts were produced in imitation of the traditional horizontal, palm-leaf format of Sanskrit and Bangla manuscripts, with their pages ordered accordingly from front to back. The vertical format, and a corresponding shift to right-to-left pagination, in emulation of the format of Perso-Arabic manuscripts, was introduced later.\(^5\)

The transliteration of Bangla texts into Arabic script began in the nineteenth century possibly to satisfy the needs of a special kind of readership. Writing in 1978, Ahmad Sharif

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\(^2\) Through her inclusion of Islamic Bangla texts in her study of the puspikās in Bangla mss., Basu Bhaumika (1999) has taken some preliminary steps in this direction.
\(^3\) Eaton 1993, 291–297.
\(^4\) Losty 1982, 10–12.
\(^5\) Even though such manuscripts are paginated from right to left, the individual lines continue to be ordered from left to right, a format natural to the Bangla script.
suggested that the Arabic script came into use for Bangla texts 125-130 years ago for the specific purpose of providing madrasa-educated students, unlettered in Bangla, access to Islamic Bangla texts. As is the case with the scribe, Āphtābuddin, copying a manuscript of the Jaykum Rājāra Lārā, scribes copying such manuscripts sometimes specifically mentioned, “pūrvera bāṅgālā aksara āmi karilāma ārabī,” indicating that they transliterated the Bangla into Arabic script. A few manuscripts of texts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, written in the Arabic script, are extant. It has been my observation that catalogs usually make a special note of script only in the case of Arabic; when no mention is made Bangla script can be safely presumed. This is to be kept in mind when reading “not mentioned (NM)” under the “Script” column. When I have personally consulted a manuscript, I have made specific note of the script under the “My Notes” column.

Except for the column entitled “My Notes” in the table below, the details listed under all other column headings have been collated from the concerned catalog or other specified source, abbreviations for which have been provided in the prefatory notes of this dissertation. Extensive annotation under the “My Notes” column has been furnished for those manuscripts for which the Dhaka University Library has graciously provided me with digital photographs. Since Punithi Paricit (PP) was translated into English as the Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim’s Collection (DCBM), I have provided manuscript details as supplied in the DCBM; however, when in doubt, and especially in the case of puşpikās, scribal colophons, I have consulted the PP, providing appropriate citation.

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6 NV 2, Pariśīṣṭa Kha, 700–701. Eaton (1993, 294) records the existence of a manuscript of the Maktul Hosen, preserved in the Dhaka Museum, dated to 1645, which was written in the Arabic script. This would be one of the earliest Islamic Bangla texts to be written in the Arabic script.
7 NV 2, Pariśīṣṭa Kha, 700.
8 For an example of a folio from a manuscript of Saiyad Sultān’s Ophāt-i Rasul, copied in Arabic, see CCBM, penultimate unnumbered page.
The Bangla technical terms, *bhaṇītā* and *puspikā* have been retained to indicate the authorial signature-line and scribal colophon respectively. Concerning the *puspikā*, some familiarity with the abbreviations employed by scribes is useful: “*iṃ*” for “*iti*” (Skt.) “thus”; “*piṃ*” for *pichare* or, occasionally, *pisare* (Per. *pisar-i*) “son of”; “*auṃ*” for *aurase* (Skt. *aurasa*) “offspring of”; “*tāṃ*” for *tārīkh* (Per. *tārīkh*), “date”; “*sāṃ*” for *sākine* (Ar. *sākin-i*) “inhabitant of;” “*mṛṃ*” for *mṛta*, “the late” [Mr. x]; “*cauṃ*” for *caudhūrī*, a specific title and family name; “*mauṃ*” for *mauJe* (Per. *mauJ-i*) “the hamlet of”; “*paṃ*” for *pargane* (Per. *parganah-i*) “the *parganā* of,” *parganā* being “a subdivision of a *žil* or district”; “*jiṃ*” for *jile* (Per. *žil-i*), “district of.” When indicating that a particular manuscript begins at the very beginning of the text provided in the critical edition, I indicate “incipit” when providing the opening lines of the ms. However, when the manuscript has the first folio missing, or when the scribe has skipped the opening section of the text, I state “opening lines” when supplying the first lines on the first extant folio. Often, in cases of independent manuscripts of sub-sections of the *NV*, such as the *Śab-i Merāj*, or the *Ophāt-i Rasul*, scribes provide their own invocatory couplets, ranging from a single line of the *bismillāh* to a couple of verses composed in the *payāra* metre. Furthermore, many scribes begin the enterprise of copying with the *āñji*, an auspicious sign identical in appearance to the Bangla numeral 7, which signifies the name of God, and is in itself an invocation of the divine, even replacing, in some cases, invocatory lines.10

With regards to conventions employed by catalogers, it is to be noted that the abbreviations “*Ka*” and “*Kha*” are used to indicate recto and verso respectively. Often mss. have been provided with misleading titles by their catalogers; in such cases I have suggested

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9 Kāium and Sultānā, s.v. “āñji.”
10 For the use of the *āñji*, in addition to the scribal invocatory line/couplets, see, for instance, *Ophāt-i Rasul* mss. DCBM No. 51 Ms. 363; DCBM No. 52 Ms. 478; *Rasul Carita* mss. Ā. Ša. 71; *Rasul Vijaya* ms. Ā. Ša. 287 Ka; and *Śab-i Merāj* ms. DCBM No. 494 Ms. 669. For the use of the *āñji*, without invocatory couplets, see *Nabīvamsā* mss. DCBM No. 222 Ms. 656 and DCBM No. 230 Ms. 737; *Rasul Carita* ms. Ā. Ša. 255; and *Śab-i Merāj* ms. Ā. Ša. 356. See also *Śab-i Merāj* mss. DCBM No. 495, Ms. 672.
appropriate designations. In the case of Jaykum Rājāra Lārā, Ahmad Sharīf has admitted to providing a conjectural title. Concerning the title Rasul Carita, while separate mss. on the life of the Prophet Muhammad are extant, and while sectional and manuscript markers such as “iti sabe merāj samāpta” or “iti ophāte rachul samāpta” exist, no single manuscript I have examined thus far bears the scribal designation Rasul Carita. Additionally, in early catalogs (including early designations given by Sharīf himself, as manifested in the table below) and studies of Saiyad Sultān’s works, there is no concordance between the titles given to such mss. Thus, the Rasul Carita title probably reflects Ahmad Sharīf’s cataloguing attempt to provide a single designation for all mss. on the life of the Prophet ascribed to Saiyad Sultān. However, since the title has now become firmly associated, in historiographies of Islamic Bangla literature, with Saiyad Sultān’s life of the Prophet, I have suggested that several mss. cataloged as Šab-i Merāj, often on the basis of scribal colophons, but which in fact cover details of the Prophet’s life that precede and follow the narrative of his ascension, be re-designated on the basis of their content with Sharīf’s pragmatic designation. In the case of manuscripts cataloged as Rasul Vijaya, I have also suggested that they be re-cataloged as Rasul Carita, to avoid confusion with Šekh Cānda’s text by the same title.

The convoluted, often unrecorded, histories of manuscript collecting and gifting have resulted in some overlap between the manuscripts listed here from separate catalogs. Since Abdul Karim gifted his personal collection of manuscripts, first cataloged by him in Bāṅgalā Prācīna Puṃthira Vivaraṇa (BPPV), to the Dhaka University Library, wherever possible, the relevant BPPV manuscripts have been cross-referenced with those of the DCBM. Similarly, Alī Āhmad’s private collection of Islamic Bangla manuscripts, cataloged by him in Bāṃlā Kalamī Puthira Vivaraṇa (BKPV), later found a place in the Bāṃlā Ekādemī Puṃthī Pariṣaya (BAPP), the catalog of the Bangla Academy, which is the institution that currently holds the manuscripts
(which were gifted by Ālī Āhmād in 1964 to the now obsolete Kendriya Bāṅglā Unnayan Borḍa). Accordingly, wherever possible, the BKPV manuscripts too have been cross-referenced with those of the BAPP. Details on the history of these and other manuscript collections, with specific reference to Islamic Bangla manuscripts, can be found in the relevant annotated section of the Selected Bibliography of this dissertation.

Ahmad Sharīf’s family gifted his personal collection of manuscripts to the Dhaka University Library in 2009, thus augmenting the Library’s collection of Islamic Bangla manuscripts, a sizable part of which was gifted to the Library by none other than Sharīf’s uncle, Munṣī Ābdul Karim. The Library is currently in the process of cataloging this newly acquired collection. Having prepared a tentative catalog of those manuscripts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān, the Library has kindly provided me with digital photographs of these. As the table itself indicates, there is reason, however, to doubt that the list provided me thus far by the Library is exhaustive; I await the completion of the cataloging process to personally verify this. Meanwhile, I have provided extensive annotations in the “My Notes” column for those manuscripts I have personally consulted, though the particulars under other columns have been supplied from the provisional loose-leaf catalog for each manuscript compiled by the Dhaka University Library.

An effort has been made to identify, wherever possible, the manuscripts from various collections that Ahmad Sharif used in preparing the critical edition of the NV. These titles have been marked with a single asterisk for ease of identification. Annotating his collection has helped to identify a few of the “mystery” manuscripts Ahmad Sharif used for the critical edition of the NV.

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11 Ālī Āhmād 1980, 10. In this important article, Ālī Āhmād, the then supervisor of the Manuscript Section of the Dhaka University Library, records the history of numerous manuscript collections in West Bengal and Bangladesh. He (ibid., 9–10) documents the tragic dissolution, after the partition of Bengal, of the entire collection of manuscripts and ancient sculptures of the Dhākā Sāhitya Pariṣad. Apart from the lone sculpture of the Naṭėśvara of Cāndinā, now housed in the Dhākā Museum, none of the other national treasures that once constituted this collection can be traced. The treasures of the Tripurā Sāhitya Pariṣad also seem to have met with a similar fate. Kāium 2000, 45.
Before Sharif critically edited all of Sultān’s works, Ālī Āhmad also made a critical edition of the Ophāt-i Rasul from manuscripts in his personal collection. Since Sharif also consulted all five mss. which Ālī Āhmad used for his critical edition, these manuscripts have been indicated with a double asterisk in the “Title” column.

Muhammad Enamul Haq’s private collection of Islamic Bangla manuscripts has been partially gifted to the Varendra Research Museum. However, not a single manuscript of texts ascribed to Saiyad Sultān can be found in this now public collection, which contains 18 Islamic Bangla manuscripts. Ahmad Sharif has stated that he used some manuscripts from Haq’s private collection for the purposes of his critical edition. (These manuscripts, as cataloged by Sharif, have also been listed in the table below.) Moreover, an appendix in the PP of a list of public and private manuscript collections in East Pakistan and West Bengal records that Muhammad Enamul Haq’s private collection contains 125 manuscripts.\textsuperscript{13} All this suggests that a significant trove of manuscripts, including some of the NV, might still be in the possession of Haq’s family. The one manuscript of the Šab-i Merāq, which provides the author’s self-portrait and date of composition (not part of the critical edition itself), a passage which Muhammad Enamul Haq and Sharif both repeatedly cite, is also probably in Haq’s collection. (For more details on this manuscript, see the table below and Chapter One). It is hoped that these valuable manuscripts would some day be made available to researchers.

As for the Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts (CCBM) compiled by Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, though this compendium is fairly dated with respect to catalogs of Islamic Bangla manuscript collections, the relevant manuscripts listed therein have, nonetheless, been tallied with their respective catalogs. Two discrepancies are noted. First, the CCBM omits the

\textsuperscript{12} For the complete list of mss., see NV 2, Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 690–701.

\textsuperscript{13} PP, 704.
single manuscript ascribed to Saiyad Sultan in the collection of the British Museum. Second, in its bibliography, the *CCBM* notes that the *BKPV* was published in one volume, with 356 manuscripts cataloged therein.\(^{14}\) However, in numerous places the *CCBM* indicates *BKPV* catalog numbers that range beyond No. 356. Alī Ahmad has noted in *BKPV*, volume one (the only catalog in this series that came to press), that in addition to the 356 manuscripts cataloged therein, another 300 in his collection remain to be cataloged.\(^{15}\) Moreover, in his Introduction to his critical edition of the *Ophāt-i Rasul*, Alī Ahmad notes a ms. numbered “408,” among his list of the ten mss. ascribed to Saiyad Sultan in his private collection. This suggests that the remaining mss. had been cataloged by him, making it possible for him to have passed on a handwritten catalog of the remaining mss. to Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, for inclusion in the *CCBM*. This, however, finds neither mention in Bhattacharjee’s introduction nor citation in his bibliography. Where the *CCBM* has provided *BKPV* catalog numbers for manuscripts ascribed to Saiyad Sultan, beyond No. 356, I have noted these in the table. Many details of these manuscripts have not been furnished by the *CCBM*; hence, it is not possible to tally these with those listed in the *BAPP* catalog. If these have not yet fallen prey to theft or an archivist’s carelessness, the sad fate, as plainly recorded in their catalog (*BAPP*), of many important Islamic Bangla manuscripts in the Bangla Academy collection, it can be presumed that all Alī Ahmad’s mss. are still a part of this archive.

With the exception of Alī Ahmad, collectors have not been systematic in recording manuscript provenance, crucial for mapping the specific geographical circulation of texts and literary traditions. The *DCBM/PP* is perhaps the most unhelpful in this regard. In the Introduction to the *PP*, Ahmad Sharif states that most of the manuscripts were collected from

\(^{14}\) *CCBM*, Pariṣiṣṭa Ka, 368.

\(^{15}\) *BKPV*, pp. 8–9; see also *PP*, 704.
Chittagong, and a few from Noakhali and Tripura. 16 Hence, in the case of the provenance of all DCBM/PP manuscripts, I have mentioned “probably from or near Chittagong.” As for the manuscripts in the Chittagong University Library, most were collected by Ābdus Sāttār Caudhurī from the Chittagong region. 17 Accordingly, with regards to the provenance of all manuscripts from this collection, I have stated “probably Chittagong.”

Conventions

AS Arabic script
Ā. Ša. Tentative cataloguing abbreviation provided by the Dhaka University Library for manuscripts in the Ahmad Sharīf collection gifted to the library in 2009
BS Bangla script
C Complete
I Incomplete
NM Not mentioned in catalog
R Recto
V Verso
* Ms. used by Ahmad Sharīf for his critical editions of Saiyad Sultān’s works
** Ms. used by Ahmad Sharīf and Ālī Āhmad for their critical editions of the Ophāt-i Rasul

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16 PP, “u.” See also Husain 1960, xxii.
17 CV, 50.
The author is unknown; but the text needs to be tallied with that of Saiyad Sultān inaddin, Home of M. Haider Ali, Bu. Mu. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. According to the cataloger has suggested could be “Cholem” (mentioned on folio 40) probably be that of Saiyad Sultān inaddin, Home of M. Haider Ali, Bu. Mu. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. The cataloger has suggested could be “Cholem” (mentioned on folio 40) probably be that of Saiyad Sultān inaddin, Home of M. Haider Ali, Bu. Mu. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. The cataloger has suggested could be “Cholem” (mentioned on folio 40) probably be that of Saiyad Sultān inaddin, Home of M. Haider Ali, Bu. Mu. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. The cataloger has suggested could be “Cholem” (mentioned on folio 40) probably be that of Saiyad Sultān inaddin, Home of M. Haider Ali, Bu. Mu. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā. The cataloger has suggested could be “Cholem” (mentioned on folio 40) probably be that of Saiyad Sultān inaddin, Home of M. Haider Ali, Bu. Mu. Pümā. The author is Mosalm, E. Sa. Pümā.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Manuscript</th>
<th>Ms.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Collector</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 2/3&quot; x 6&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-3, 4 unnumbered</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>104/Sula 6/Jñāna Cau 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>BKPV No. 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>This ms. used for the critical edition. Sharif (NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha, 700) notes that the bhaṇitā provides the name Cheyānata Ullāh, in the same place where DCBM No. 151, Ms. 641 above provides Saiyad Sultān's name. Sharif proposes that Cheyānata Ullāh was the name of the scribe. The author of this ms. is unknown; it needs to be tallied with Saiyad Sultān's text. It is possible that Sharif (NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha, 700) consulted this and other Bangla Academy manuscripts for his critical edition. The author of the text is unknown; verification is needed to rule out Saiyad Sultān. This ms. is identical with BKPV No. 14 below. It is possible that Sharif (NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha, 700) consulted this and other Bangla Academy manuscripts for his critical edition. The ms. details do not tally with any ms. in the DCBM. It does not seem to tally with any ms. in the DCBM.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For the critical edition, the ms. is bound together with BAPP Bā. Bo. Hi. Puṃ. Naṃ. 392, which is a small ms. 21 folios; unnumbered 1-4 and 6 extant. 37 unnumbered folios 1-3 folios NM; 152 lines. The author of the text is unknown, and would have needed verification. This ms. is identical with BAPP Bā. E. Sa. Pum̐. Naṃ. 104/Sula 6/Jñāna Cau 1. It is possible that Sharif (NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha, 700) consulted this and other Bangla Academy manuscripts for his critical edition. The author of the text is unknown, and would have needed verification. This ms. is identical with BAPP Bā. Bo. Hi. Puṃ. Naṃ. 10 above. This ms. is without a bhaṇitā, and needs to be tallied with the Jñāna Cautīśā of Saiyad Sultān. It does not seem to tally with any ms. in the DCBM.
**Concerning the Ms. number and Introduction, please do not.**

Concerning the Ms. number and Introduction, please do not.

Concerning the Ms. number and Introduction, please do not.

Concerning the Ms. number and Introduction, please do not.

Concerning the Ms. number and Introduction, please do not.

Concerning the Ms. number and Introduction, please do not.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCBM No.</th>
<th>Ms. No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>Private Collection of Muhammad Enamul Haq (as per Ahmad Sharif’s description in NV2: Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>Private Collection of Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Guwahati (as listed in the CCBM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mokṣadā Collection of Bengali Mss., (Private Collection of Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Guwahati)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mokṣadā Collection of Bengali Mss., (Private Collection of Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Guwahati)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mokṣadā Collection of Bengali Mss., (Private Collection of Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Guwahati)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mokṣadā Collection of Bengali Mss., (Private Collection of Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Guwahati)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mokṣadā Collection of Bengali Mss., (Private Collection of Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, Guwahati)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- This is Ms. Kha of Ahmad Sharif’s critical edition (NV2: Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 699). The ms. begins with the incipit.
- This is Ms. Ga of Ahmad Sharif’s critical edition (NV2: Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 699).
- This is Ms. Gha of Ahmad Sharif’s critical edition (NV2: Pariśiṣṭa Kha, 699).
- This ms. is by an anonymous author, and needs to be tallied with Saiyad Sultān’s text.
Adam begins and the tale-cycles of the prophets continue up to the tale-cycle of Solomon. The ms. ends with "Comilla"

According to Ahmad, the ms. begins with the life of the Prophet. On folio 14, the creation of Muhammad (Muhammad Enamul Haq), the collector, comes from Rama Bahadur Hosen, Bulbul Hosen, and the ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. is the second volume of Ms. 198, from the owner, the ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. is the second volume of Ms. 198 below, and should probably be cataloged as a manuscript of the Pasha and Mosaparu, Bu Macandravī, and the ms. opens with the Battle of Khaybar. This could be identical with the BAPP Ms. 312 below, and should probably be cataloged as a manuscript of the Pasha and Mosaparu, Bu Macandravī, and the ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. is the second volume of Ms. 198, by Muhammad Enamul Haq and gifted to this collection.

The ms. is probably identical with the BAPP Ms. 312 below, and should probably be cataloged as a manuscript of the Pasha and Mosaparu, Bu Macandravī, and the ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. is the second volume of Ms. 198, by Muhammad Enamul Haq and gifted to this collection.

The ms. is probably identical with the BAPP Ms. 312 below, and should probably be cataloged as a manuscript of the Pasha and Mosaparu, Bu Macandravī, and the ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. was collected from the owner, this ms. is the second volume of Ms. 198, by Muhammad Enamul Haq and gifted to this collection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>MS Number</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>216</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>Ms. 390</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Ṣaḥīḥ al-Ṭāhirah</td>
<td>Noy. 18, 1248</td>
<td>Contains the account of Adam's creation to the death of the Prophet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>1227</td>
<td>Ms. 59</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Ṣaḥīḥ al-Ṭāhirah</td>
<td>Noy. 17, Ms. 59</td>
<td>Contains the account of Adam's creation to the death of the Prophet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>1063</td>
<td>Ms. 616</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Ṣaḥīḥ al-Ṭāhirah</td>
<td>No. 59, Sam. 57</td>
<td>Contains the account of Adam's creation to the death of the Prophet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>219</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>Ms. 207</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>Ṣaḥīḥ al-Ṭāhirah</td>
<td>No. 219, Ms. 207</td>
<td>Contains the account of Adam's creation to the death of the Prophet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Probably from or near Chittagong.
### Explanatory Notes

The opening lines of the ms. provided in the DCBM correspond to NV 1: 710. The last lines of the ms. on folio 501V are tabe tumhi ___ pare āsi punarvva āra | bh ālamanda correspond to NV 1: 923.

This BS ms. is Ms. Ga which Ahmad Sharif used in preparing his critical edition of the NV.

The ms. layout is horizontal, pagination is from left to right in the traditional format of a Sanskrit ms. The lines provided in the DCBM from folio 4 correspond to NV 1: 24–25. The last lines on folio 187V (provided in the catalog) correspond to NV 1: 917.

This ms. was consulted by Ahmad Sharif while preparing his critical edition of the NV.

The opening lines of this ms. provided in the DCBM correspond to NV 2: 6. The last lines of this ms. provided in the DCBM correspond to NV 2: 479. It is curious why this ms. has been cataloged as the NV, nor why Sharif cites it as one of the mss. he uses to prepare the critical edition of NV (1), when it, in fact, is a ms. of the Rasul Carita. It may need to be re-cataloged.

The opening lines of the ms. provided in the PP correspond to NV 1: 27. The opening lines of the ms. provided in the PP correspond to NV 1: 32–33. (Note the use here of vāmana instead of brāhmaṇa of the critical edition.) The last lines are from the section on Pharaoh, and present variant readings not found in the critical edition. This manuscript, may be consulted for alternative readings.
The manuscript is in pristine condition; it even includes a table of contents. It is produced in vertical format with right-to-left pagination in the style of an Arabic ms. The account of Moses.

The ms. opens with the mantra ṛ̥ṣa āśī. The owner's numerical date provided by the scribe is either 1204, 1208, or 1210. From this we know that the ms. is from the thirteenth century. The ms. concerns the account of Moses.
This manuscript has also been donated to the Dhaka University Library along with his entire collection. It opens with (unnumbered folio): 2: 462. The last few folios are missing. Cf. era chākāya mula | ṣyagaru candana gandha jinni vrīṃśa vaṇati | tṇeta nara prībeka vrāṇe 2: 344. Then follows the lines (unnumbered folio): āśā gāra ghare | nabike dekhiyāyilāle henakā 2: 5. Ends with unnumbered folio 124: īṃśra vaṇe makkāddhi | tabe nara pribeka vrāṇa || bulil chilā bandi ānstvan sabā haïca dukā 2: 490. Then follows the sign followed by the lines (unnumbered folio): prathame prāmāṇa ?le ākib gala rāhāra hālhhvāl || prabhu nirañjana | madata ?le...

This ms. has been erroneously cataloged as "complete." It opens with (unnumbered folio): 2: 4. Ends with (unnumbered folio): 25 mē bheka vrāṇa || bulil chilā bandi ānstvan sabā haïca dukā 2: 57) and ends with NVś stuti bahula vacana || nabira samukhe hail nabike karil

Ms. opens with (folio unnumbered, after 2: 254 Ā20 cm. x 31 cm. 1-115, 119-121, 124

The opening lines of this ms. that follow the rasul carita (folio unnumbered, after 2: 147. The last lines of this ms. on folio 103 are:...
While Sharif fails to supply the crucial information that the manuscript was in his private collection, he confirms my suspicion about the scribe being K...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The opening lines of the manuskript in the CBM correspond to NV 2:4. The last lines of the ms. (provided in the CBM) correspond to NV 2:195, before the section of the Śab-i Meraj begins. The Bangla Academy Microfilm Section has a microfilm of this ms. in the British Museum collection. See BAPP Bā. Bo. Mu. Puṃ. Naṃ. 15 (not listed separately in this table). It has been mistakenly cataloged in the BAPP under the title Nabīvaṃśa. The CBM mentions: “The author appears to have been a native of Assam, as he occasionally uses Assamese inflectional forms, as gelenta and ichilenta. This statement needs further linguistic analysis.

The author appears to have been a native of Assam, as he occasionally uses Assamese inflectional forms, as gelenta and ichilenta. This statement needs further linguistic analysis.
**Rasul Carita**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCBM Nos.</th>
<th>Mss.</th>
<th>(DCBM Nos. 427-429, Mss. 210-211 are bound together)</th>
<th>DCBM No. 430; Ms. 614</th>
<th>DCBM No. 431; Ms. 667</th>
<th>DCBM No. 432; Ms. 670</th>
<th>DCBM No. 433; Ms. 451</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-112</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I I I I in the beginning and end</td>
<td>31 folios</td>
<td>18-159 extant; folios 28, 32, 58, 63-65, 153 missing</td>
<td>108 folios; 85-90 missing</td>
<td>1-256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One manuscript, Private Collection of Muhammad Enamul Haq (as described by Ahmad Sharif in NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha, 694)

In the beginning and end of the manuscript, the collector has written the following words: *samsuddin āhammad haïte prāpta.*

Opening lines on ms. page 7 (provided in catalog) correspond with NV 2: 14 and closing lines on last unnumbered page (provided in catalog) correspond with NV 2: 546. The Śab-i Merāj begins on page 112 of the ms.

The section begins with an opening *bismillāh* and the title "Ophāṭ-i Rasul."

This BS ms. is produced in horizontal format, in the style of a Sanskrit text; however, the central square, generally used for numbering, has not been kept blank. The incipit is to be found on the first folio. The folios are unnumbered, and are in disarray.

This ms. has been consulted for the critical edition. This ms. is in BS; it is produced in a vertical manner from right to left as in an Arabic book. The collector has written the following words on the folio of this ms.: *samsuddin āhammad haïte prāpta.*

Opening lines of folio 4 (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 8. The last lines on folio 64 (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 139.

This ms. has been consulted for preparing the critical edition. This ms. is in BS; it is produced in a vertical manner from right to left as in an Arabic book. The collector has written the following words on the folio of this ms.: *samsuddin āhammad haïte prāpta.*

Opening lines provided in the catalog correspond to NV 2: 406. The last line on folio 91V niścae prātha ehi pābhrāle nāmita corresponds to NV 2: 421.

According to the PP, the ms. does not contain a bhaṇṭā. The opening lines of folio 4 (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 8. The last lines on folio 64 (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 139.

This ms. has been consulted for the critical edition. The ms. opens with a *bismillāh* followed by the incipit. The last lines on the last folio correspond to NV 2: 493.

This is Ms. Ṅga of Sharif's critical edition of the Rasul Carita section. For details on Muhammad Enamul Haq's collection, see Introductory Notes. The opening lines (provided in NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha, 694) correspond with NV 2: 29 and the last lines correspond with NV 2: 526.
In dogs, the most significant pattern is a significant trend towards increasing longevity, with an increase in the median age of death from 12 to 17 years. This trend is consistent across different breeds, indicating that the factors underlying this increase are not breed-specific. The increase in longevity is most pronounced in smaller breeds, such as Pomeranians and Chihuahuas, which typically have shorter lifespans than larger breeds. The reasons for this trend are not fully understood, but they may include improvements in veterinary care, better nutrition, and a healthier environment. However, it is also possible that these factors are merely coincidental with other changes in society, such as increased urbanization and a decrease in the number of diseases that are common in dogs but not in humans.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<th>BKPV</th>
<th>Ms.</th>
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<td>11-20</td>
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<td>7-20</td>
<td>11-6</td>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>11-20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7-20</td>
<td>11-6</td>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>11-20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to the CCBM, the owner is also the scribe. Deo alī, son of Muhammad Anīs, consults this ms. for preparing the critical edition. According to the CV, the ms. begins with an account of writing the Nabīvaṃśa (NV 2: 476) and ends with the Prophet's death. This ms. could be identical with DCBM No. 41 Ms. 138 below. This ms. has been consulted by A. Sharif for preparing the critical edition. The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 500. The last lines (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 546.
The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 511. The last lines (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 534.

The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 547. This ms. seems to be identical with BPPV Ms. 138 above.

The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 497. The last lines (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 501.

The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 530. The last lines (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 540.

The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 513. The last lines (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 527–528.

The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 525. The last lines (provided in the PP) correspond to NV 2: 535.

According to the PP, this ms. is around 200 years old.
The last 33 pages of the ms. consist of the *t-i Rasul*.

This ms. has been consulted for the critical edition. According to the

Probable from or near Chittagong

The opening lines of the ms. (provided in the

Unnumbered folios

501. The last lines (provided in the

Unnumbered folios

52 folios

8 folios

3 folios

4 folios

4 folios

The ms. opens with the line

This ms. has been consulted by A. Sharif for preparing the critical edition. This BS ms. is

The ms. begins with interesting invocatory verses: "First, I shall offer many thanks to

Two: 540. The last lines (provided in the

84 folios

15" x 6"

17" x 7"

15" x 5"

11" x 7"

7" x 5"
<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Pages</th>
<th>Handwriting</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One manuscript, probably in the Ahmad Sharif Collection, Dhaka University Library</td>
<td>One manuscript, Private Collection of Muhammad Enamul Haq</td>
<td>1-124</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>11” x 6”</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>According to PP, after Ms. 488 is completed, then Ophāt-i Rasul begins on folio 88 and ends on 93-96; folios 89-92 missing. 10 folios; begins after DCBM No. 549. 162 folios 33-106. 1623 maghī or 1682 hijrī. NM.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rahmatull

Unknown

NM

1207

since the author is unknown, Rasul Vijaya says that this is perhaps a ms. of the 

Sekhī BAPP 519 Na; verification is needed. 

Jāb-i Mer Ś suggests that this is a ms. of the 

BAPP The NM Unknown I, the Prophet Muhammad. 

According to the 

Comilla section. 

This ms. is identical with 

BKPV Ms. 313 below. 

The Prophet's ascension. However, since the author is 

be tallied with that of Saiyad Sultānā, the text is probably a fragment of the 

The Šāhāni section. This ms.

the Prophet's ascension. Since the author is unknown, this text needs to be 

mentioning that concerns the Prophet's ascension. However, since the author is

Aristarchus, Ptolemy, and Eudoxus. In the 2nd century CE, the Greek astronomer

Ptolemy wrote a summary of all prior astronomical research in his great

Almagest, which laid the foundation for the next 1500 years of Western

astronomy. Ptolemy, however, was not the first to develop a geocentric model of

the universe. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE) had already

proposed a geocentric model of the universe and had influenced many later

astronomers. However, Ptolemy's model was more accurate and detailed than any

previous one. It accounted for the apparent retrogradation of the planets, the

apparent parallax of the stars, and the apparent epicycles of the moon and

planets. Ptolemy also included a model for the libration of the moon, which

explained the apparent motion of the moon's shadow during a lunar eclipse.

Ptolemy's model was so successful that it was accepted as the standard model of

the universe for over 1500 years. It was not until the 17th century CE that

Copernicus and Tycho Brahe proposed heliocentric models, which were more

accurate and consistent with observed data. However, it was not until the

19th century CE that astronomers began to develop more accurate models of

the universe, such as the modern heliocentric model.
For more details on this collector, see Jahangir 2000. See also the Introduction to CV, Abdul Sattar Caudhuri’s son, Muhammad Ishak Caudhuri continues his father’s tradition and has a sizable private collection of fine Islamic Bangla, Persian, and Arabic mss., including a fine ms. of Alqil Padmatic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collector's Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>MS No.</th>
<th>Note</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DCBM, 155, NV, 2</td>
<td>Pariśṭa Kha, 700.</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>BKPV Ms. 566 (provided in CCBM)</td>
<td>1-125 sālām, 1238 sanāt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ibid. 5

Both later and son were well-known professional scribes of Chittagong; their particular scriptal hand was locally known as madhurā lipi. For this and

Husain 1966, xx.

Though the place of copying is not specifically mentioned, Khalid's hand is a professional scribe from Chittagong. Chittagong, BPPV 1:1, 186. See also

NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha. 693.

The numbers provided here are the tentative catalog numbers supplied me by the Dhaka University Library.

Vishwa Burney 1999, 203 and 252.

Though the place of copying is not specifically mentioned, Khalid's hand is a professional scribe from Chittagong. Chittagong, BPPV 1:1, 186. See also

NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha. 693.

This abbreviation denotes Ahmad Shamsul's private collection of manuscripts posthumously donated to the Dhaka University Library by his family in 2009.

These details were provided by the collector, personal conversation with Muhammad Habibur Rehman Khan, Dhaka, July 2009.

NV 2: Pariṣṭa Kha. 690–691.

The numbers provided here are the tentative catalog numbers supplied me by the Dhaka University Library.

Vishwa Burney 1999, 203 and 252.

Concerning Muhammad Iskāč, see n. 2 above.

Ibid.
Chart One showing Relationship of Manuscripts Utilized by Ahmad Sharif to the Text of the Critical Edition of the Nabīvaṃśa: Volume One.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Sharif's Designations</th>
<th>Manuscript Number and Portion of the Text that the Ms. contains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-50</td>
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<td>101-150</td>
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<td>201-250</td>
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<td></td>
<td>851-900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>901-935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Appendix Two**
| No. 220, Ms. 574; NV 1: 740–924 |
| No. 221, Ms. 90; NV 1: 323–567 |
| No. 222, Ms. 656; NV 1: 710–923 |


Cha

Ca

Ṅga

Gha

Ga

Kha

Ka

?, M.E. Haq Private Collection; NV 2: 147–450

Ā. Śa. ?; Section on Ophāt-e Rasul complete.

Rasul Vijaya Ā. Śa. 287 Ka; complete text

?, M.E. Haq Private Collection; NV 2: 29–526

Rasul Carita Ā. Śa. 255; NV 2: 83–beyond 517

Rasul Carita Ā. Śa. 254; NV 2: 5–143

Rasul Carita Ā. Śa. 289; NV 2: 95–519

Rasul Carita Ā. Śa. 290; NV 2: 55–477

3504
51100

101150

151200

SM

251300

SM

301350

SM

351400

SM

401450

SM

451500

SM

501547

OR

452

201250

C hart Two showing Relationship of Manuscripts Utilized by Ahmad Sharif
to the Text of the Critical Edition of the Nabīvaṃśa, Volume Two
Manuscript Number and Portion of the Text that the Ms. contains

Ja
?, M.E. Haq Private Collection; NV 2: 1–460

A. Sharif’s
D esignations

Jha



Ā.1
Ā.2

BKPV Śab-i Merāj Ms. 195; probably BAPP Bā. Bo. Mu. Pum̐. Naṃ. 207; not precisely
determined; from folio 157 begins the Ophāt-i Rasul section and continues for 408 lines.
BKPV Nabīvaṃśa Ms. 312; probably BAPP Bā. Bo. Mu. Pum̐. Naṃ. 275; NV 2: 498–547,
with pp. 521–523 missing.
DCBM Rasul Carita No. 427–428, Mss. 210–211; NV 2: 14–546

BKPV Ophāte Rasul Ms. 59; BAPP Ophāte Rasul Bā. Bo. Mu. Pum̐. Naṃ. 30; probably NV 2:
476 (OR, p. 3) to NV 2: 547 (OR, 83)
BKPV Unknown Ms. 93; probably BAPP Unknown Bā. Bo. Mu. Pum̐. Naṃ. 48; life of the
Prophet upto mention of the “hail of stones” after section on Prophet’s haj.

Ā.3
Ā.4
Ā.5
Others5

DCBM Rasul Carita No. 433, Ms. 451; NV 2: 1–493; folios 85-90 are missing
DCBM Nabīvaṃśa No. 224, Ms. 647; NV 2: 6–479


For Ahmad Sharif's critical apparatus, see NV 2: 590–701.

Page numbers refer to the critical edition, NV 2. SM and OR above the page numbers refer to those page numbers, which correspond to the respective Śab-i Merāj and Ophāt-i Rasul sections in the critical edition. Concerning the gray scale used in the cells, see n. 2 above.

This category refers to miscellaneous mss. that Sharif claims to have consulted; the precise manner of utilization is unclear. The two for which he provided catalog details have been mentioned here. Sharif (NV 2, Pariśīṣṭa Kha, 692–696) does not identify the three manuscripts he consulted from the Bangla Academy, and one from the Kendrāya Bāṅglā Unnayana Bōra. Since I have not examined these manuscripts personally, their relationship with the text of the critical edition is yet to be determined.

Page numbers refer to the critical edition, NV 2. SM and OR above the page numbers refer to those page numbers, which correspond to the respective Śab-i Merāj and Ophāt-i Rasul sections in the critical edition. Concerning the gray scale used in the cells, see n. 2 above.

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Appendix Three

Manuscript collation for the first fifty couplets of the critical edition of Nabīvaṃśa, Volume Two

List of manuscripts collated with the critical edition, and their abbreviations:

**Mss. used by A. Sharif to prepare critical edition:**
E1 Rasul Carita Ā. Ša. 254; Sharif’s Ms. Ga
E2 Rasul Vijaya Ā. Ša. 287 Ka; Sharif’s Ms. Ca

**Mss. not used by A. Sharif for critical edition:**
A CBM Or. 5349; 1R is extant, but completely faded; transcription begins with 1V
B Rasul Carita Ā. Ša. 71
C Rasul Carita DCBM No. 429, Ms. 280
D Śab-i Merāj DCBM No. 487, Ms. 297
E Śab-i Merāj DCBM No. 490, Ms. 433

Rasula Carita (Vol. 2)

| Pūrvakathā |

prathame praṇāma kari prabhu nairākāra |
ardheka ye ēchila kathā karimu pracāra ||* 1 [p. 3]\(^3\)

prathame praṇāma kari prabhu nairākāra

---

1 For details of these manuscripts, see Appendix One above. To create this sample chart, I have used all relevant manuscripts made available to me in digitized form. These manuscripts are only a sample of those extant, and have been selected purely on the basis of their accessibility to me in digitized versions. All these manuscripts, with the exception of the single manuscript provided me by the British Museum, have been made available via the kind courtesy of the Dhaka University Archives.

2 Ahmad Sharif uses nine manuscripts for the purposes of the critical edition of NV, vol. 2 (Rasul Carita).

3 The first set of lines, highlighted in bold, represent the critical edition, and page numbers are marked at the beginning of every new page.
yārdhe ye āchila kathā karimu pracāra |* E2 [1V begins; manuscript begins with ānji sign followed by yālāhu yākbar.]

prathame pranāma kari prabhu nairākāra |
ardheka āchila tāḥā karimu pracāra || B [1V begins; manuscript begins with ānji sign followed by állāhu gani mohāmmada ārabie āhārkkahu ]

prathame pranāma ka? prabhu nairākāra |
ardheka ye āchila tāḥā karimu ??? || C [Two invocatory lines provided by scribe before incipit]

prathame pranāma kari prabhu nairākāra |
ākāsa pātāla khīti srijana jāhāra || [Before the incipit is: bīsamīlahvah herrahemāna nīrāhima]
dvitie pranāma kari prabhu nairākāra |
ārdheka āchila jāhā karima pracāra || D

prathame pranāma āmhā prabu nairākāra | [Begins on 1V]
āirdheta āchila jāhā karima pracāra ||* E

ye rūpe ādama saphi hai la utapana |
kahila kiñcit kichu se saba vivaraṇa ||* 2

je rūpe yādama chaphi karila utapana |
kahibha kiñcita kathā sesa vivaraṇa || E2

ye rūpe ādama chaphi hai lyā utapana |
kahibama se saba kiñcit vivaraṇa || B

First pāda illegible; second pāda torn in C

ye rūpe ādama saphi haila utapana |
kahibama se saba kiñcita vivarana || D
ye rūpe ādama chaphi hāīla utpana |
kahima se saba kathā bujhite kāraṇa || E

dvitīe prañāma kari rasula āllāra |
nūra muhammadera ye karimu pracāra || 3

ebe yāmi kahibāma suna diyā mana |
nura mohāmadade kahimu vibharana || E2

dvitīe prañāma kari prabhu nirañjana |
nūra muhammadera kahimu vivaraṇa || B

dvitīe prañāma kari prabhu nirañjana |
nūra mohāmmādera ye kahimu vivaraṇa || C

ditīe prañāma kari prabhu nirañjana |
nūra mohāmmādera karimu vivaraṇa || D

prathāme prañāma kari prabhu nirañjana |
śuna kahi nura mohāmmade vivaraṇa || E

kahite rasula-kathā mane hābilāsha |
tāra āge ādyā kathā karimu prakāsa ||* 4

verse not found in E2

verse not found in B

verse not found in C

verse not found in D
verse not found in E

**ekākāra rūpa prabhu ākāra varjita |**
āchile e akhaṇḍa prabhu khaṇḍana sahita || 5

ekākāra rūpa prabhu ākāra varji? |
yāchila akhaṇḍa rūpa khaṇḍana sahi? || E2

ekākāra rūpa prabhu ākālambita |
āchile akhaṇḍa rūpa khaṇḍana sahita || B

ekākāra rūpa prabhu ākāra varajita |
āchile e akhaṇḍa prabhu ???? || C

ekākāra ākāraka prabhue varjita |
āchile akhaṇḍa rūpa khaṇḍana sahita || D

ekāra ākāri prabu ākāra varjita |
āchila akhaṇḍa rūpa khaṇḍana sahita || E

**heṭa 'para samukha-vimukha dāna-vāma |**
**sarva rūpa ekarūpa chila śunya ṭhāma || 6**

heṭa 'para samuka-vimuka dāna vāma |
sarva rūpa ekarūpa chila eka ṭhāma || E2

heṭa 'para samuka vimukha dāna vāma |
sarva rūpe ekarūpa ekarūpa chila śunya ṭhāma || B

first pāda torn off
sarva rūpa ekarūpa chila eka ṭhāma || C
heṭa para samukha-vimukha ḍāna vāma |
sarva rūpe ekarūpe chila eka ṭhāma || D

heṭa urdha samuka vimuka ḍāna vāma |
vāyya rūpe ekarūpe ṣṛjileka ṭhāma || E

yatheka ākāra chila nairākāra līna |
bhinna bhinna ākāra nā chila paricina || 7

yatheka yākāra chila nikāreta līna |
bhinna 2 ākāra nā haiła paracina || E2

yatheka ākāra chila nairākāra līna |
bhinna bhinna ākāra nā chila paricina || B

yatheka ākāra chila nairākāra līna |
bhirnna 2 ākāra nā chila paracina || D

yatheka ākāra chila nairākāra nila |
bhinya 2 paracina ākāra āchila || E

yatheka ākāra chila nairākāra līna |

tabl yadi āpaṇāra* jñāna upajila |
akhaṇḍa maṇḍalākāre khaṇḍite icchila || 8

tabe jadi āpaṇāra jñāna upajila |
akhaṇḍa maṇḍalākāre khaṇḍite icchila || E2

tabe jadi ānande maṇḍala upajila |
yakhaṇḍa maṇḍalākāre khaṇḍite icchila || B
tabe yadi ??????????
second pāda torn || C

tabe yadi ārntajñāne jñāna |
akhaṇḍa maṇḍalākāra khaṇḍite ichila || D

tabe jadi ādesita jñāna uparajila |
akhaṇḍa maṇḍale keha khaṇḍa nā icchila || E

**ghora nāsti ghiriyā āchila andhakāra |**
*ghucāila vimala haite āpanāra || 9*

ghora nāsti ghiriyā yāchila andhakā? |
ghucāila vimala haite āpanāra || E2

ghora nāsti ghirīā āchila andhakāra |
ghucāila vimala haite āpanāra || B [1V begins with “āpanāra”]

ghora nāsti ghirīā āchila andhakāra |
ghucāila vimala haite āpanāra || C

ghora nāsti ghirīā āchila andhakāra |
ghocāila vimala haite āpanāra || D

ghora nāsti āchilaha andakāra |
ghucāila vrihmāna haite āpanāra || E

**nairākāra ākāreta janmila ukāra [[p. 4]]**
*pāilā āpeta āpe udita makāra || 10*

ki kāraṇeta yākāreta jarmila ukāra | [2R begins]
pāiyā yāpeta yāpe udita makāra || E2

nirākāra ākāreta janmila ukāra |
pāila āpeta āpe udita ākāra || B

nirākāra ākāreta janmila ukāra |
pāilā āpeta āpe udita makāra || C

nirākāra ākāreta janmila ukāra |
pāilā āpeta āpe udita makāra || D

verse not found in E

āpanāra makāra darśana āpe pāi |
ākāra ukāra madhye rahila lukāe ||* 11

yāpanāra makāra drasane yāpe jāi |
yākāra ukāra sane rahilā misāi || E2

āpanāra makāra drasane dekhā pāi |
ākāra ukāra maidhye sane rahila misāi || B

first pāda torn off
ākāra ukāra madhye rahila misāya || C

āpanāra makāra darpane dekhā pāi |
ākāra ukāra sane rahī? misāi || D

āpanāra darpane maiura dekhā pāi |
ukāra ākāra sane rahila mīsāi || E

ākāra ukāra sane makāra maṇḍalī |
āchileka cirakāla haïyā kuṇḍalī || 12

yākāra ukāra sane makāra maṇḍalī |
yāchileka cirakāla ekahi kuṇḍalī || E2

ākāra ukāra same makāra maṇḍalī |
āchileka cirakāla haïyā kuṇḍalī || B

ākāra ukāra maidhye makāra maṇḍalī |
āchileka cirakāla ekahi kuṇḍalī || C

ākāra ukāra sane makāra maṇḍalī |
āchileka cirakāla ekaï kuṇḍalī || D

ākāra ukāra sane yakkhara maṇḍalī | [2R begins here]
āchilanta chirakāle ebai kuṇḍali || E

ākāra makāra madhye ukāra rahila |
eka aṃśa dui khaṇḍe daṇḍa upajila || 13

yākāra makāra madhye ukāra rahila |
eka khaṇḍe dui khaṇḍe daṇḍa upajriḷa || E2

ākāra maudhye jadi ukāra rahila |
eka aṃśa dui khaṇḍe daṇḍa upajila || B

ākāra makāra madhye ukāra rahila |
second pāda torn off || C

ākāra ukāra madhye makāra rahila |
eka aṃśe dui khaṇḍa daṇḍa upajrīḷa || D
ākāra ukāra sane makare rahila |
eka aṁsa dui hai daṇḍa uparajila | E

āhāda āhamada makāra* bhina |
ehī makāra* madhye tribhuvana cina || 14

yāhāda yāhāmada mohā khurā bhina |
ei mohākhura maidhye tribhuvana cina || E2

āhāda āhammada chila ekattara |
na yāchila bhirīṇa bhirīṇa eka kalevara || B

ādama āhammada eka māyā khura bhina |
ehī ma ākhāra* maidhye tribhuvana cina || C

āhādeta āhammada honte atha bhina |
sei ma akṣara maidhye tribhuvana cina || D

mohāmmada āhammada aikṣara prabhina |
sei se aikṣara madheye tribhuvana cina || E

āhamada honte nūra kailā makāra |
āhāda āhamada dui eka kalevara || 15

yāhamada honte nūra kailā mahākhara |
yāhāda yāhammada dui eka kalevara || E2

this verse is not found in B, as it has been conflated with the one above

āhārmma honte nūra kailā ma akhāra |
āhāda āhamada dui eka kalevara || C
āhādemu honte nūra kaila ma āksara |
āhāde āhommada dui eka kalevara || D

mohāmmada hante nura kailya mima aikṣara |
āhāmada mohāmmada eka kalevara || E

āhāde pāila yadi āhamada daraśana |
haiyā bhāvaka rūpa* kailā nirikṣaṇa || 16

yāhāde yāhāmade pāila darasana |
haiyā bhāvaka rūpa kailā nirarkṣaṇa || E2

āhāde pāila yadi āhamadera darasana |
haiā bhāvaka rūpa kailā niraiķaṇa || B

first pāda torn off, except for last syllable “na” |
haiā bhāvaka rūpa kailā niraiķaṇa || C

āhāde pāila āhāmmadera draśana |
haiā bhāvaka rūpa kailā nirakṣaṇa || D

āhāmada mohāmmada pāi drarasana |
haiā bhāvaka rūpa kailya nirañjana || E

āhamada rūpe āpanā dekhā pāi |
sādhaka haiyā rūpa rahilā dheyai || 17

yāhamada rūpeta āpanā dekhā pāi |
sādhaka haiyā rūpa rahilā dhiyāi || E2

āhāda rūpeta āpanā dekhā pāi |
sādhaka haiā rūpa rahilā vi dh? || B

āhārmada rūpe āpanā dekhā pāi |
sādaka haiā rūpa rahiyā dhiāi || C

āhāmmada rūpe āpanā dekhā pāi |
haā ā sādhaka rūpa rahilā dheāi || D

mohāmada rūpeta āpanā dekhā pāi |
sādaka haiā rūpa rahila dheāi || E

prītirase magna haiyā prabhu nairākāra |
ṇūra muhammadaka lāgilā darśibāra || 18

prītirase magna haiyā prabhu nairākāra |
ṇūra mahammadaka lāgilā drasibāra || E2

prītirasa prema bhāve jadi se majjila |
magne prema bhāve gharma upajila || B

prītirase magna haiā prabhu nairākāra |
second pāda is torn off || C

prītirase magna haī prabhu nairākāra |
nūra muhammadaka lāgilā drasibāra || D

prītirase magna haī prabhu nairākāra |
nūra muhammadare lāgilā kahibāra || E

anye anye drṣṭibhāve darśileka yabe |
anye anye drṣṭirase gharma haīla tabe || 19
yanye 2 दृष्टिहावे द्रासिलेका यावे | [2V begins]
yanye 2 दीश्त्री रासे ग्हरम्मा हावळे तावे || E2

anye 2 दीश्ता अवे द्रासिलेका जावे |
anye 2 प्रितिरासे ग्हरम्मा हावळे तावे || A

verse not found in B; another conflation of verses

anye 2 दृष्टि भावे द्रासिलेका यावे |
anye 2 प्रितिरासे ग्हरम्मा हावळे तावे || C

anye 2 दृष्टिहावे द्रासिलेका जावे |
anye 2 प्रितिरासे ग्हरम्मा हावळे तावे || D

अर्नवे 2 प्रितिहावे प्रावेशिला जावे |
अर्नवे 2 प्रितिराशे जार्मिलेका तावे || E

**sei ग्हरम्मे महामन्त्रा यात्का जानमिला |**
**सताईशा ब्रह्मण्ड आदि साबा उपजिला || 20**

sei ग्हरम्मे महामन्त्रा जात्का जार्मिला |
sताईशा ब्रह्मण्डा यादि जात्ता उपजिला || E2

sei ग्हरम्मे मोहा मात्रा जात्का जार्मिला |
sताईशा ब्रह्मण्डा आदि जात्ता जार्मिला || A

sei ग्हरम्मे मोहा मन्त्रा यात्का यात्शे जानमिला | [2R begins with “मन्त्रा”]
ब्रह्मण्डा आदि इथा उपजिला || B

sei ग्हरम्मे महामन्त्रा जात्हाइका जार्मिला |
sताईशा ब्रह्मण्डा आदि जात्ता उपजिला || C
sei gharme mohāmantra yatheka janmila |
satāisa brahmāṇḍa ādi jatha uparjila || D

sei gharmme mohāmmadera jateka janmila |
satāisa vehmāṇḍa ādi jāra parajila || E

sei gharme aṣṭādaśa hājāra ālāma |
sṛjana karila prabhu ati anupāma ||* 21

sei gharme aṣṭādaśa hājāra ālāme |
sṛjana karila prabhu yati yanupāma || E2

sei gharme aṣṭa dasa hājāra ālama |
srajanā karila prabhu ati an??ma || A

sei gharme aṣṭādaśa hājāra ālāma |
sṛūjranā karila prabhu ati avilama || B

first pāda torn except last word “ālāma” |
sṛjana karila prabhu ati avi pama || C

sei gharme aṣṭādaśa hājāra ālāma |
sṛjana karilā prabhu ati anupāma || D

candra sura nakṣatra sarga rachulati |
se gharme sṛjana karilā mohāmati || E

jīvāttamā parmāttamā hai dui ati* |
sei gharme sṛjana karilā dui juti || 22 [p. 5]

jīvarttamā pararttamā hai dui yati* |
sei gharme sṛjana karila dui juti || E2
jiva ārttamā para ārttamā moha āila ati |
sei gharme srajana hahala haï juti || A

jivārttamā paramārttamā haï ati |
sei gharme srijana karila dui chuti || B

jivāttamā parāttamā haiya dui ati* |
sei gharmme sṛjana karilā dui juti || C

??? (illegible) paramā ārttamā hai dui ati |
sei gharme srijana karila dui juti || D

verse not found in E

phiristā sakala hai lá sē gharme sṛjana |
sei gharme prabhura hai lá khaṭa simhāsana || 23

phiristā sakala hai lá sē gharme sṛjana |
se gharmeta prabhura hai lá khaṭa simhāsana || E2

pherestā sakala sei gharme hai lá prabhura khaṭa simhāsana | A

phiristā sakala haila se gharme srijana |
sei gharme prabhura haila khaṭa simhāsana || B

phiristā sakala haila se gharme srijana |
second pāda torn except for khaṭa simhāsana || C

phiristā sakala haila se gharmmme sṛjana |
sei gharmmme prabhura haila khā? si???? (illegible) || D
phiristā sakala haila se gharmme srajana |
se gharmme hāila prabhura khāṭa śimhāsana || E

ānala varaṇā bābi mṛttikā* janmila |
svarga naraka ādi yatheka sṛjila ||* 24

ānala varaṇā bābi mṛttikā jarmila |
svarga naraka yādi jatheka sṛjila || E2

ānola varaṇa vāri mṛttikā srajilā |
sarga naraka ādi yateka nirmilā || A

ānala varaṇa bābi mṛttikā crijila |
e svarga naraka ādi jathaka nirmila || B

ānala varaṇa bābi jatheka śrijala |
svarga naraka ādi jatane (?unclear) sṛjila || C

???? (illegible) bābi mṛttikā janmila |
svarga ādi naraka yatheka uparjila || D

āpanara rūpa bābi mṛttikā srajila |
virvidha prakāre suvāsa taru nirmila || E

**tabe prabhu niraṇjana anādi nīdhāna |**
suvalita eka taru karilā sṛjana || 25

**tabe prabhu niraṇjana anādi nīdhana |**
suvalita eka taru karilā sṛjana || E2

suvalita eka vrarkṣa karilā srajana |
vivirdha prakāre bhāse se taru nirmāna || A
tabe prabhu prabhu nirañjana anādi nidhana |
suvalita eka taru karilā srijana || B

tabe prabhu nirañjana anādi nidhāna |
suvalita eka taru karilā sṛjana || C

tabe prabhu anādi nidhana nirañjana |
suvalita taru eka karilā srijana || D

verse not found in E

āpanā agreta* taru sṛjīyā rākhilā |
vividhā prakāre taru slobhāya nirmilā ||* 26

yāpanāra yagreta taru sṛjīyiā rākīla |
vividhā prakāre taru slobhāe nirmila || E2

āpanā agreta taru sṛjīyā rākhilā |
vividhā prakāre slobhā setaru nirmilā || A

āpanā ārgreta* tarū srijī rākhilā |
vividhā prakāre slobhā se tarū nirmilā || B

missing folios in C |

āpanā agrate taru srijī???? |
??????? ???bhā ???? || D

verse not found in E

ati jutirmaya taru sugandhi veṣṭita |


**āgara candana gandha jini** *vṛkṣa mūla* |
**rattana nirmita** *ḍāla lamita bahula* || 28

yāgaru candana gandha jini vṛkrṣya mula |
rattana nirmita ḍāla lamita bahula || E1 [First folio illegible; begins here with 3R]

yāgara candana gandha nirmi virkṣa mūla | [3R begins]
rattana nirmita ḍāla lamita bahula || E2

āgara candana jini se vrakṣera mula |
rattane nirmita ḍāla lamita bahula || A
āgara candana gandha jini se vr̥kṣar mūla |
rattana jaḍita ṇāla lambita bahula || B

missing folio in C |

āgara candane gandha jini vr̥kṣa mūla |
rattane nirmita ṇāla lambita ??? || D

agara sugandhi ganda je vrikiṣa mula |
rarttana nirmita ṇāla nrmimita bahula (cannot understand writing) || E

patrasaba jamaruda jini jota ati |
vinī bābi jhalkae* bijulīra gati || 29

patra saba jamuruda jini jota yati |
vinī bābi jalakae vichulīra gati || E1

patrasaba jamudera jini jota yati |
vinī bābi jhalakaе* bichulīra gati || E2

patra saba jamaruda jini jota ati |
vine vāri jhalakaе bijulīra gāta || A

patrasaba jamarude vajuti jini darnta |
vini nāni jhalakaе* e bijulīra juti || B

missing folio in C |

?? saba jamarude jini juti ati |
vinī bābi jhalkae* vijulīra gati || D
patra saba jamarūdera jutiramae ati |
vinī bāe jhalakae vijulira gati | E

kāphura kasturī jini se vṛkṣera chāla |
nānā varṇe puṣpa vikāše viśāla || 30

kasturi kāphura jini se vrikṣyera chāla |
nānā varṇe puṣpa saba tāhāte viśāla || E1

kāphura kasturī jini se virkṣera chāla |
nānā varṇe puṣpa saba vikāśa viśāla || E2

kisara kasturi jini se vrarkṣera chāla |
nānā varṇa puṣpa saba tāhāta viśāla || A

kasturi kāphura jini se vṛkṣera phala |
nānā varṇe puṣpa saba jhalake bahula || B

missing folio in C |

kāphura kasturī jini se vṛ?? chā? |
nānā varṇe puṣpa saba ?i?se viśāla || D

kasturi kāphura jini se vrikṣera stale |
nānā varṇa puṣapa saba j armae visāle || E

ati jutirmaya puṣpa sugandhi veṣṭita* |
se puṣpera jota sapta svarga* vyāpita || 31
yati chutirmae taru chugandhi viṣṭīta |
se puṣapara chuti saba yākāsa vyāpiṭa || E1

chutirmae puṣpa saba sugandhi viṣṭīta |
se puṣpera jota sapta svarga* vyāpiṭa || E2

ati yuti yutirmae puṣpa sugandhe viṣṭīta |
se vrarkṣera jota sapta sarga vyāpiṭa || A

ati jutirmae puṣpa sugandhi viṣṭīta |
se puṣpera jota sapta svarga veāpiṭa || B

missing folio in C |

ati jutirmae puṣpa sugandhi ??? |
? puṣpera juti sapta āgāsa udita || D [1V begins here]

ati jutiramae ganda sugandhi viṣṭira |
se puṣpera jutie ākāsa viāpiṭa || E

ākāśera puṣpera juti ati diptimae* |
niti prati phala phula janmite āchae || 32

yākāsera puṣpa chuti ati chutirmae |
niti prati phala phula jarmite yāchae || E1

yākāsa puṣpera juti yati chutirmae* |
niti prati phala phula jarmite yāchae || E2

ākāśe vrarkṣera yuti ati yutirmae |
niti priti phala phula jarmite āchae || A
ākaśe puṣpera juti ati jutirmae* |
niti prati phala phula jarmite āchae || B

missing folio in C |

ākaśe puṣpera juti ati jutirmae |
niti prati phala phula jarmite āchae || D

ākāṣeta urdhva haṭi vasuti ramie |
niti priti phala phula jarmite āchae || E

ākāśa prāthivī madhye āche yatha jana |
eka phala tāra yadi sakale bhakṣaṇa || 33

yākāsa prāthimi maidhye yāche jatha jana |
eka phala tāre yadi sakale bhaikṣyaṇa || E1

prāthivi yākāsa maidhye yāche jatha jana |
eka phala tāra jadi sakale bharkṣaṇa || E2

prārthivi ākāśa maidhye āche yata jona | [I V begins with “āche yata”]
eka phala tārā jadi sakale karae bharkṣaṇa || A

prthi ākāśa maidhye āche jatha jana |
eka phala tāra jadi karae bhaikṣaṇa || B

missing folio in C |

ākāśa prāthimvi mārdhye āche yatha jana |
eka phala tāra jadi sakale bhakṣyaṇa || D

pritimvi ākāśa madhye āche jatha jana | [I V begins]
tāra eka phala jadi karae bhaiṣana || E

sehi phala ardheka khāite nā pārae | [p. 6 begins]
tila parimāṇa khāile udara bhae || 34

sehi phala ardheka khāite nā pārae
tila paramāṇa khāile udara bhae | E1

sei phala yardheka khāite nā pārae |
tila parimāṇa haile udara bhae || E2

sei phala ardhha khāla khāite nā pārana |
tila pramāṇa khāile pare udara bhae || A

sei phala ardheka khāite nā bae |
tila parimāṇa khāile udara bhae || B

missing folio in C |

sehi phala ardheka khāite nā pārae |
tila paramāṇa khāile udara bhae || D

sei phala ardheka khāite na pāriba |
tila paramāṇa haile udhara bhariba || E

ekadina* sei phala yadi se khāila |
anudina sei phala jihvāte rahila || 35

eka tina* sei phala yadi se khāila |
anudina jībha sane se majā rahila || E1
ekadina sei phala yadi se khāila |
yathadina sei phala jihväte rahila || E2

ekadina* sei phala yadi se khāila |
aneka dina jirvvā maidhye se majā āchila || A

ekadina* sei phala jadi se khāila |
anudina ? bhaikhane se majā rahila || B

missing folio in C |

ekadina sei phala yadi se khāila |
ciradine sei jirbhā mule se marjā rahila || D

ekadina sei phala jadi se khāiba |
āna dina jirvvā sthale se majā rahība || E

phasis sugandhi ati jiniyā kāphura |
phasis pāne sugandhi satvara* yāe dūra || 36

se phala chugandhi yati jiniyā kāphura |
phasis pāne chugandhi saurava jāe dura || E1 [Before this pāda, scribe notes: Śrī Yämāna ???, probably his own name, or name of patron. 3V begins with “phasis pāne.”]

phasis sugandhi yati jiniyā kāphura |
phasis pāne sugandhi saurava yāe dūra || E2

phasis sugandhi ati jiniyā kāphura |
phasis pāne sugandhita saurava yāe dūra || A

phasis sugandhi ati jiniā kāphura |
phasis phula sugandhita sundhi saurava jāe dūra || B [3R begins with “phasis phula”]
missing folio in C |

phulera sugandi ati jini kāphura |
phala pāne sugandi śmaurava jāe dūra || D

phula sugandi ati jini kāphura |
phala pāne sugandi saurava jāe dura || E

‘rabbānura’ kari thuilā se vrksera nāma |
ati jutirmaya taru dekhite upāma || 37

rarbānura kariyā vrksṣyera thuila nāma |
ati chutirmae taru dekhīte upāma || E1

jarbanura kari thuilā se virkṣāra nāma | [3V begins]
yati chutirmae taru dekhīte upāma || E2

rarbbanura kari thuilā sei vrarkṣera nāma |
ati yutirmae taru dekhīte anupāma || A

rabunura kari thuilā se vrkṣera nāma |
jutirmae sei taru dekhite upāma || B

missing folio in C |

rarbbanura kari thuilā se vrikṣera nāma |
phiristā sakale tathā karanta viśrāma || D

rarbba nura kariā thuila vrikṣa nāma |
ati jutirnmae taru dekhita upāma || E
se vṛkṣera 'pare* nūra muhammadā giyā |
rahilenta maürera ākāra dhariyā || 38

se vrirksyera māje nūra mohāmada giyā |
rahilenta maiürera yākāra dhariyā || E1

se vrirksera pare nūra mohāmmada giyā |
rahilenta maürera ākāra dhariyā || E2

se vrarkṣera pare nura maharmuda giyā |
rahileka maiurero ākāra dhariyā || A

sei vṛkṣa 'pare nūra mohānda giā |
āchilenta mauurerā ākāra dhariā || B

missing folio in C |

sei vṛkṣa pare nura mohāmmada giā |
rahileka maiurera ākāra dhariā || D

sei se vrkṣera pare mohāmmada giā |
rahileka maiurera ākāra dhariā || E

prabhura ājñāe haila maūra ākāra |
vṛkṣa 'pare rahiyā smarae karatāra || 39

prabhura ājñāe haila maiura ākāra |
vṛrkṣa pare rahileka smayāriyā yārndhāra || E1

prabhura yājñāe hatla maîra ākāra |
virksa pare rahiyā smarae karatāra || E2
vrarkṣera upare rahi svare karatāra || A
prabhura ārjñāye haila mairera ||

prabhura ājñāe hailā mau-ra ākāra || B
vikṣa 'pare rahi smarae karatāra ||

missing folio in C ||

prabhura ājñā hailā mau-ra ākāra || D
vrkṣa pare rahiā smarē karatāra |

vrikṣa pare rahileka smari karatāra |
sattaika hājāra abda kari namaskāra || E

**sattara hājāra abda kailā paraṇāma ||**
**kāyamane prabhuka bhāvilā* aviśrāma || 40**

sattera hājāra abda kailyā paraṇāma |
kāeyā mane prabhuke sevilā aviśrāma || E1

saittahara hājāra abda kailā paranāma |
kāyamane prabhuka sevilā aviśrāma || E2

sarttara hājāra abda karilā prañāma |
kāye mone prabhuka sevaabhiśrama || A

tathāta rahiā yatha kaila paraṇāma |
kāemane prabhuka sīvila a비스rama || B

missing folio in C ||

sattaura hājāra abda karilā prañāma |
kāemane prabhuka sevilā aviśrāma || D

verse combined with one above in E

tāra pāche ājñā dilā prabhu niraṅjana*
mānyera samudre* ḍuba dibāre takhana || 41

tāra pāche yājñā kailā prabhu niraṅjana |
mānyera sāgare ḍuba dibāre takhana || E1

tāra pāche yājñā dilā prabhu niraṅjana |
mānyera samudre* ḍuba dibāre takhana || E2

tāra pāche ājñā karilā niraṅjana |
mānyera sāgare udibāra kāraṇa || A

tāra pāche ājñā dila prabhu niraṅjana*|
mārānā sāgare ḍuba dibāre takhana || B

missing folio in C |

tāra pāche ājñā kailā prabhu niraṅjana |
mānyera sāgare* ḍoba dibāre kāraṇa || D

tāra pāče ājñā kailā prabhu niraṅjana |
mānyera sāgare ḍuba dibāre kāraṇa || E

ājñā pāinūre giyā mānyera sāgare |
ḍuba diyā rahileka samudra antare || 42

yājñā pāi nüre giyā mānyera sāgare |
ḍuba diyā rahilenya sāgara yantare || E1
yājña pāiyā ṃuba diyā mānyera sāgare |
ṛuba diyā rahileka samudra antare || E2

ājña pāiyā nura giyā mānyera sāgore |
ṛuba diyā rahilenta sumudra antare || A

ājña pāi nūra giā māṛñera sāgare |
ṛuba diā rahilenta samudra antare || B

missing folio in C |

ājña pāi nūre giā mānyera sāgare |
ṛuba diā rahileka samudra jale || D

ājña pāi nura giā mānyeara sāgare |
ṛuba diā rahileka gahina gambire || E

sattara hājāra abda samudre rahilā |
tathā rahī kāyamane prabhu pranāmilā || 43

sattera hājāra yabda samudre rahilā |
tathā rahī prabhuka je pranāma karilā || E1

saırttarhara hājāra yabda mānya samudre rahilā |
tathā rahī kāyamane prabhu pranāmilā || E2

sarttari hājāra kariyā pranāma |
kāye mone prabhuka sevae abhiśrāma || A

sattaura hājāra abda samudre rahilā |
tathāta rahī prabhu pada pranāmilā || B
sattra hājāra abda samudre rahilā |
tathā rahī prabhu pada sevite lāgilā || D

satera hājāra abda sāgare rahila |
rathā rahī prabhu pardma sevite lāgilā || E

tāra pāche mahimāra sāgareta giyā |
sattara hājāra abda prabhuka bhaviyā || 44

tāra pāche mahimāra sāgareta giyā |
sattera hājāra yabda prabhuke bhaviyā || E1

tāra pāche mahimāra sāgareta giyā |
sairttahara hājāra yabda āchila bhaviyā || E2

verse not found in A

tāra pāche mahimāra sāgareta giā |
sattaura hājāra yabda āchilā heriā || B

missing folio in C |

tāra pāche mahimāra sāgareta giā |
niraṇjana pranāmilā stupti bhakti haiā|| D

verse not found in E

tāhāra paścāte gelā khemāra sāgare |
prabhuka sevilā* rahī samudra antare || 45
tāhāra paścāte gelā khemāira sāgare | [4R begins with “tāhāra.”]
prabhuke bhāvilā* rahi sāgara yantare || E1

tāhāra paścāte gelā khemāira sāgare |
prabhuka seviyā rahi sāgara yantare || E2

tāhāra paścāde gelā kṣemāra sāgare |
prabhu sevilā basi sumudra antare || A [v. 45 comes after v. 46]

tāhāra paścāte gelā khemāra sāgare |
prabhuka sevilā* rahi samudra antare || B

missing folio in C |

tāra pāche nura gelā khemāra sāgare |
prabhuka sevilā rahi samudra antare || D

verse not found in E

**tāra pāche vikramera sāgareta paśi |**

[p. 7 begins]

niraṅjana praṇāma karilā uṭhi basi || 46

tāra pāche vikramera sāgareta paśi |
nirāṅjana praṇāma karilā uṭhi basi || E1

verse not found in E2

**tāra pāche vikramera sāgareta paśi |**

nirāṅjana praṇāma karilā uṭhi basi || A

tāra pāche gelā nura sapta do sāgare | [3V begins with “tāra”]
tatha rahī anukṛāṃ bhāvīlā prabhuke ||
tāra pāche sāhāśera samudreta gelā |
sataira hājare abda prabhu ke bhāvīlā ||
tāra pāche vikremera samudreta pasi |
niraṅjana praṇāma karilā uṭhi basi ||
tāhāra paścāte gelā ye sabe sāgare |
prabhuka sevilā rahī samudra antare ||
tāra pāche ārjñā dila prabhu niraṅjana |
gunera samudre jahaita bulilā takhana || B

missing folio in C |

tāra pāche vikramera sāgareta pasi |
niraṅjana praṇāma karilā uṭhi basi || D

tāra pāche samudra vikrama guṇe basi |
niraṅjana pranāmilā mārne se bāsi || E

lahuta samudre nūra kariyā praveṣa |
sapta sāgare nūr miśāila viśeṣa || 47

verse not found in E1

lahura samudre nūra kariyā pravesa | [4R begins]
e sapta sāgare nūr sāsilā visesa || E2

verse not found in A

verse not found in B

missing folio in C
verse not found in D

verse not found in E

ehī mate kathā kathā* samudrera mājha |
nirāņjana praṇāmiyā sādhilā nija kāja || 48

ehī mate eke 2 samudrera māja |
nirāņjana praṇāmiyā sādilā nija kāja || E1

ehī mate kathā 2 samudrera māja |
nirāņjana praṇāmiyā sāsilā nija kāja || E2

ei mata kata 2 sumudrara mājāra |
nirānjanā praṇāmī sādi nija kāja || A

ehī mate kathā 2 samudrera māja |
nirāņjana praṇāmi sādhilā nija kāja || B

missing folio in C |

?i mate kathā 2 samudrera māja |
nirāņjana praṇāmi sādhilā nirja kāja || D

ehī mate eke 2 samudrera māja |
nirāņjana praṇāmiā sāde nija kāja || E

e sakala honte guṇa yathēka sādhilā* |
punarapi sei vṛkṣe āsiyā mililā || 49

e sakala honte guṇa yatha āpekṣilā |
punarāpi se vṛikṣyeta āsiyā rahilā || E1

e sakala honte guṇa yatha āpekiṣilā |
puni rābbana vṛkṣe āsiyā mililā || E2

e sakala hate jata guṇa apaksiilā |
punarupī āsi sei vṛkṣeta mililā || A

e sakala honte katha guṇa (?) jatha āpekiṣilā |
punarāpi sei vṛkṣe āsiā mililā || B

missing folio in C |

e sakala honte jatha gona āpekiṣilā |
punarvāra sei vṛikṣa āsiā mililā || D

e sakala hante jatha guṇa āpekiṣila |
punaraphi sei vṛikṣa āsiā milila || E

tabe eka kandila sṛjīyā karatāra |
nūra muhammada thuilā tāhāra mājhūra || 50

tabe eka kandila sṛjīlā karatāra |
nūra mohamada thuilā tāhāra mājāra || E1

tabe eka kandila sṛjīlā karatāra |
nūra muhammada thuilā tāhāra yantara || E2

tabe eka kāndala sṛajīlā karatāre |  [2V begins with “tabe eka”]
nura mahārmuda thuilā tāhāra mājāre || A

tabe eka kandila sṛjīlā karatāre | [4R begins with “tabe”]
nūra muhammadā thuilā tāhāra antare || B

missing folio in C |

tabe eka kandila srijīla karatāre |
nūra mohāmmada thuilā tāhāre mārjhāre || D

tabe eka kandila rucilā karatāra |
nura mohāmmada thuila tāhāra mājāra || E
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Appendix Five

Harīra Vyṛttaṇta: “The Account of Hari”

When no great prophet existed upon the earth,
when Kābil’s line became powerful, 1
those of Kābil’s line lived, while continuing to worship idols,
disregarding the words of numerous prophets. 2
Every moment, all were engaged in ill action—
in stealing [other’s] wives, in violence, and malevolence towards others. 3
Then, the lord Nirañjana,1 the essence of the three worlds,
had a desire to create an individual in that line. 4 [p. 468]
The lord told his angels
to create a single infant in that line. 5
“I created the prophets to protect mankind.
The sinners, all, do not grasp their words. 6
In order that Kābil’s line may attain knowledge,
I shall create a wise infant. 7
Then, kinsfolk listening to the words of their kin,
shall thus know that Nirañjana is one.” 8
Thus, in order for that lineage to attain knowledge,
a wise infant was created. 9

1 Nirañjana literally means “the unblemished or untainted one.” I have retained this appellation to distinguish it from others, such as Āllā, which Sultān uses in other sections.
When that infant was conceived in its mother’s womb, Iblis, the most sinful, heard the news. 10

In mental agony, the evil-minded one began to brood. Ridden with extreme anxiety, upon seeing the birth of the child, 11

the wicked one said, “Into other lineages have prophets been born. I fooled them into accepting them as prophets in this [their own], line. 12

Now if a prophet was born in this [very] line, how shall I beguile everyone’s minds? 13

They shall [surely] accept the word of their own kind.

Never shall I be able to uphold my resolve to [retain] the status of Nārada! 14

If they, whom I have ushered into this line to make my own, if they, having become of this lineage, do not play their part,² 15

what shall become of my nāradāmī, mischief-mongering?

My wiliness shall no longer endure within this gathering. 16

If a single [wise] person was born among these peoples, none would remain to worship idols. 17

Between men, I shall not be able to create dissent.

I shall become despondent in my dispute with the Lord. 18 [p. 469]

When a kinsman hears the words of another kinsman, I shall then not be able to beguile him. 19

Hoping, in this manner, to devour mosquitoes and flies, by spreading his web, the wicked spider, 20

² Raṅga has multiple meanings: “colour;... complexion; (of playing cards) a suit... or trump; a variety entertainment or dramatic performance; a game or sport...; an athletic contest, a tournament; a battle; a struggle...; an action; a field of battle or action; a theatre, a stage; an artistic or affected pose or movement; manner, mode, style, fashion.” Biswas 1994, s.v. “raṅga.”
ever attempted to serve his palate,
and remained in a corner of his house, laying out this web. 21

When the bugs came and fell into the web,
the spider, gleefully, took a single leap. 22

Just as he became trapped in his own web,
I knew that a similar [circumstance] had befallen me.” 23

Thinking thus, the sinner began to weep.
Within his own mind, he began to brood. 24

When he became inclined to thwart the infant’s birth.
he took on the form of a sage. 25

Forthwith the sinner appeared before
the monarch, Kaṃsa, the infant’s maternal uncle. 26

Taking on the garb of a sage, he began to narrate [all].
He recounted every aspect of the infant. 27

He said, “Within the womb of this sister,
an infant has been conceived who shall kill you. 28

If you wish for your welfare, O best of kings,
kill this infant instantly upon birth.” 29

Hearing this, the king became disconcerted;
he appointed male and female slaves to guard [his] sister. 30

The king said, “When the infant is born,
all of you will bring the child to me. 31

Do not cause a delay in my task:
bring it to me the instant it is born from the womb. 32 [p. 470]

If not, I shall slaughter you by all means:

consider that your [successfully completing this] task is the means to [your] life. 33

At the king’s command, all the guards

went to stand guard by the woman. 34

When the king’s sister heard of this,

her mind was overcome with pain; she was extremely anxious. 35

[Even though] she spoke long with her brother,

she was not able to effect a change of heart. 36

One night, that infant, remaining within the womb,

spoke, addressing his mother, 37

“Listen, mother, do not worry at heart:

who indeed is able to kill me? 38

If the lord Nirañjana does not [himself] kill me,

who in the three worlds would be able to do so? 39

There lives a cowherd, by the shores of the sea;

his wife has most certainly conceived. 40

When I shall be born from your womb,

a baby girl shall be born at the cowherd’s house. 41

You shall give birth to me during the night.

Take me to the cowherd’s house and leave me [there]. 42

Having stolen her, you shall bring the cowherd’s baby girl [here].

Everyone shall believe that the girl is begotten of you. 43
All the guards will be unconscious in slumber.
No one shall obstruct your coming and going.” 44
Hearing this, the woman became joyful.
She remained, in jest, amidst all [her] female companions. 45

Having given birth to the child, the woman did as told,
effectively as the infant had taught her, while yet within the womb. 46 [p. 471]
The young woman gave birth to the infant during the night.
Taking her son, she left him in the cowherd’s lap. 47
The cowherd’s wife was unconscious in slumber.
Stealing the baby girl, which she had delivered, she brought her [here]. 48
Having brought the girl, she informed the guards;
all saw that a daughter had been born. 49
The guards went into the king’s presence
to tell of the condition of the woman, who had delivered the infant. 50
The king commanded that the baby girl be killed.
He gave [his] sister [his] daughter to bring up. 51

Donning the garb of a sage, taking the form of an old man,
he went to Kamsa and told him what had actually transpired. 52
Iblis told all to the king:
how the infant went to the cowherd’s house. 53
Iblis, the most sinful, went in the guise of a sage
and reported the whereabouts of the infant. 54
Hearing this, the king was astounded;
he swiftly sent a sister [there]. 55

Another sister went to beguile one sister’s son.

Going hurriedly, she took the sister’s son into her lap. 56

The king sent his own sister to grasp his neck, and squeeze it,
in the guise of feeding him milk. 57

Taking the infant into her lap, she placed her breast in [his] mouth;
she held him by the throat and began to squeeze it. 58

The infant gave such a bite upon [her] breast
that the woman gave up her life, and fell afar. 59

All the cowherds became unsettled upon seeing this;
out of fear for their children, they became extremely worried. 60 [p. 472]

He desired to kill the infant, in order to destroy him,
thus, through several means of assassination. 61

Seeing this, wicked Iblis, the most sinful one,
felt pain at heart and began to brood. 62

[Anxious] to kill the child the sinner flew into a rage;
he sent a male slave, having disguised him [to the child]. 63

There exists a slave of his by the name of Mahākāla;
he sent him to the child. 64

Entering a corner of the room, Mahākāla, lay there;
waiting for an opportunity to kill him, he watched the boy. 65

The boy was very intelligent, and recognizing his [Mahākāla’s] nature,
he remained hidden, when he saw the most sinful one. 66

Another day, seizing the boy,

he began to thrash him, while hurling him. 67

The boy struck him on the chest with a staff.

Beaten with the staff, Mahākāla went [directly] to Yama’s house. 68

When the sinner, Mahākāla, died,

Iblis, the evil-minded sinner, wept copiously. 69

The ill-mannered, most sinful one told the king,

“Kill him, by any means.” 70

He has been created for the purpose of destroying you.

His death is in your best interests. 71

The king became astounded by the wicked one’s words.

He desired to kill the child, in numerous ways. 72

When Iblis saw that he was unable to kill him,

he came [to him], in the form of a friend, to ask him the reason. 73

Donning the garb of a sage, he approached as a well-wisher;

laden with affection, he sidled up to Hari. 74

When he could not kill the child by any means,

he took on the form of a friend to beguile him. 75

The sinner spoke all those words to the boy

which would infuriate Nirañjana. 76

He addressed Hari as Paramātmā, the Supreme Being, saying,

“You are the Supreme Being who has taken numerous forms. 77
You are Hari, Janārdana, the essence of the world.
By remembering you, sinners will be saved. 78
Taking the form of a fish, you protected the earth.
In the form of the boar, you spread the earth upon [your] tusks. 79
Taking the form of the man-lion, you killed the demons.
One by one you destroyed numberless demons. 80
By descending into the netherworld, pātāla, you yourself preserved the earth.
In the netherworld you remained in the form of a tortoise. 81
In the form of the dwarf, you deceived Bali.
Taking the form of Rāma, you killed Rāvaṇa. 82
Now too you have become the Kṛṣṇa avatāra,
in order to destroy all the wicked. 83
I, a sinner, in order to test you,
continue to commit evil deeds at your feet. 84
One after another, each one tried to test you;
each one fathomed your various acts. 85
They knew, for certain, that you are, in essence, the Supreme Being. 86
I have now come\textsuperscript{3} to beg you to absolve me of the crimes
I committed at your feet.” 87
The most sinful, indomitable one uttered many falsehoods:
that sinner called a created one the Creator. 88
When he spoke thus, making him the Supreme,
he made known the grave danger [implicit] in such action. 89 [p. 474]

\textsuperscript{3} I have emended āchīla to āila.
Thus in order to make all men into denizens of hell, he, sadly, publicized him among men. 90
He beguiled humans to serve [other] humans. Making a philosophical principle of a human being, he told them to meditate upon him. 91
The Lord created Hari to protect men, in order to spread [the significance of] good deeds upon the earth. 92
“Hari is such,” he proclaimed thus among men; all remained unaware, being carried away by emotion. 93
Coming before Hari in the form of a friend, the sinner conveyed to him all these perilous matters. 94
Hari remained beguiled by the words of this rogue. In his mind, he accepted him as his friend. 95
Approaching in the form of a friend, he ever wished to dissipate himself along with Hari. 96
Primal creation, the sinner has regard for none. Taking the form of a friend, he causes trouble. 97

In childhood, when Hari kept cows, he remained with them enthusiastically, tending to the calves. 98
One day, Iblis hit upon a plan: summoning lakhs and lakhs of snakes, he carefully assembled them. 99
He had a great affection for snakes:
indeed, they were born into a single line.” 4 100  
He deposited all those snakes in a river,  
beckoning Hari to pass by. 101  
Taking Hari, he hurled him into the river;  
all the snakes bit Hari’s body. 102  
The poison of these snakes did not flow through Hari’s body;  
[even though] lakhs and lakhs of snakes bit Hari. 103 [p. 475]  
He did not tell his mother and father about all this;  
[after all] one faces the consequence of the actions one performs. 104  

His garment, a yellow loin-cloth, on his waist, a tinkling girdle.  
Upon his feet, anklets play, sounding runujhunu. 105  
On his head, a peacock’s feather; a garland of wildflowers about [his] neck;  
bejeweled earrings adorn the orbs of his ears. 106  
On his forehead, a fine tilaka; Holi’s red powder on every side;  
the moon and the sun were shining with one light. 107  
Having applied a sandal-musk paste upon his body,  
the boy wanders everywhere, his cows before him. 108  
His body in the trifold (tribhaṅga) pose, one foot locked behind the other,  
contented at heart, he plays his flute. 109  
When he began to fill his flute with sound,  
in his cosmic play, the pride5 of the arrogant young women (māninī) broke. 110  

4 Note how, when expelled from Paradise, Iblis returned to the Garden of Eden, hidden in the belly of a snake, to beguile Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life. Noegel and Wheeler 2002, s.v. “Satan.”  
5 The text reads mana bhaṅga, which I have emended to māna bhaṅga.
With one look, he sizes up the women;

the women continuously chant “Hari, Hari.” 111

Forgetting themselves in Hari’s rasa, all those women, from good families,
abandoned their domestic duties [and] deserted their own husbands. 112

Taking all the women, Hari, with a boy’s guile,
planted kisses upon their foreheads, embracing them close. 113

To ever destroy the mental separation
all the women placed thigh upon thigh. 114

Those women of good families, seeing Hari’s form,
desired to enjoy sexual pleasure with Hari. 115

Hari was internally embarrassed by the women’s words.

In abashment and fear, he did not approach the women. 116

He did not look at the women even cursorily.

[However,] he became unconscious, exhausted by sexual longing. 117 [p. 476]

The ill-mannered Iblis caused these longings to arise within the mind.

If I were to write all of this, many topics would emerge. 118

Having listened to but a little, great individuals gather many meanings.

It is not [my] task to write so much down in detail. 119

Not fulfilling the minds of the young women,

Hari, then, would flee upon seeing all these young women. 120

Taking the form of a friend, the evil-minded Iblis,
approached Hari, offering affection. 121

The most sinful one said, “You are compassionate of heart:
You are the Lord who is the Supreme Being; what fear can you have? 122
You are man, you yourself youthful woman.
You have become into two bodies in order to enjoy sexual pleasure. 123
Why then does doubt plague your mind?
Why do you not enjoy sex with these young women? 124
Because of you all these women from good families,
wish to give up their lives in mental agony. 125
If you will not enjoy the pleasures of love’s sports
for what reason did you make these young women crazy? 126
If these women drop [dead] because of you,
you will be responsible for the sin of woman-slaughter. 127
By nature, you are a boy; your behaviour is that of a boy:
do not analyze good and bad with [such] single-mindedness. 128
Those women’s bodies, which surrender to you,
do not trespass into sin. 129
For this reason, in order to serve you, all the women
eternally keep you alive in their minds. 130
For you, it is possible to navigate sinning.
Don’t I know whose creation is sin and virtue? 131 [p. 477]
All those women you shall touch,
shall be bestowed with fine virtue. 132
If a foul odour falls into the sea,
by no means will all the water be ruined. 133
Burnt in fire, [even] excreta becomes pure.
Why do you constantly fear sin at heart? 134
Being the Supreme Being, why do you become despondent?
For what reason do you contemplate virtue and vice?” 135

At first, the boy Hari was very inexperienced (tarala);
he became paralyzed, upon hearing Iblis’ words. 136
Possessing a boy-like nature, Hari did not know the erotic arts.
The women taught him how to enjoy sex. 137
When he would go to the Yamunā to bathe,
the women would go there to seek Hari. 138
All the young women, gathered together,
and enjoyed sex with Hari within the water. 139
Hari would snatch the garments of all, and carry these away.
Leaving all the young women unclothed, he would gawk at them. 140
Forgetting themselves in Hari’s rasa, all the women
abandoned their own husbands. 141
Such are the doings of the ill-mannered Iblis that
he produces perversions between men and women espoused to others. 142
By showing them, another’s man, rather than their own husband,
he causes delight within the women’s minds. 143
Even if one’s own husband is exceedingly good,
another’s husband still stirs the mind. 144
Going to Vṛndāvana, Hari enacts numerous delightful scenes:
he gathers flowers along with the young women. 145 [p. 478]
Coming upon a forest grove, at his own ease,
he enjoys sex with one, [while] the others watch. 146

With one woman he makes love,
with others he laughs heartily. 147

Remaining on four sides, all the women
close in on Hari’s body and pelt it with flowers. 148

Some among all the young women call, “Hari, Hari,”
uniting together all the young women forget themselves in Hari’s form. 149

Having enjoyed sexual pleasure with the women,
Hari returns home, with his cows. 150

There was a certain cowherd’s wife of good character;
she had not made love to Hari. 151

In order to make love to Hari, this woman had
bashfulness upon [her] face, [but] perversion at heart. 152

One day, Hari went to this woman’s house:
he saw that the young woman was sitting upon a cot, alone. 153

Seeing Hari, the woman beckoned him close;
bearing respect and affection in mind, she made him sit upon her lap. 154

The woman covered one breast with [her] garment;
the other she displayed to Hari. 155

Smilingly, planting kisses upon Hari’s forehead,
she made him sit upon her lap and embraced [him] with [her] breasts. 156
One moment, she is pleased with Hari; \(^a\) one moment, she yearns for sex; moment by moment she jests with the child. 157

When he understood the woman’s mental longings, abashment abandoned Hari’s face. 158

Through other guile, then, Hari extended his hand; he laid his touch upon twin breasts. 159 \([p. 479]\)

With furtive looks, he injures; upon the chest, slaps; with [her] teeth the woman bites her own tongue. 160

Snickering into cupped hands, the beautiful young woman casts her hand upon her head, turning her face away. 161

Seeing this, a pang of separation arose within Hari’s mind. Abandoning the abashment on [his] face, he caught [her] by [her] clothes. 162

“No, no,” the woman began to say; one moment, with mental displeasure; another moment, with smiles. 163

Then Hari gave the young woman an embrace; he kissed her repeatedly upon her brow. 164

On seeing Hari’s moon-like face, the beautiful young woman like a cakora bird, remained [immersed] in the juice of love. 165

In delight, Hari, remained with the woman; sitting in various positions, he enjoyed sexual pleasure. 166

In the love between them, there was affection.

The young woman was replete with many kinds of emotions. 167

One lip to the other, Hari drank of wine,

\(^a\) Paurati in the critical edition is obscure; it needs to be checked against various mss. I have tentatively translated it as a variant of pūrti.
like the bee that hovers over the lotus. 168

Placing thigh upon thigh, they embraced.

Upon her brow and face, he kissed her repeatedly. 169

Impassioned by his repeated assaults upon [her] loins,

he became extremely exhausted in love-making’s battle. 170

The bells on her hips resounded loudly;

the anklets and bangles repeat the runu jhunu sound. 171

[Her] bracelets slid,7 her garment fell off.

On [her] breasts were manifest nail-writings. 172

The necklace was broken; the bodice torn.

In the sweat of exertion, body dyes were smudged. 173

Lips became dry from the fervent drinking of [their] wine.

Vermillion with collyrium became mixed together. 174

Vermillion looked beautiful within the collyrium

like the rising sun amidst rainclouds. 175

Sweet-scented, curly hair became wild,

and sprang upon [his] moon-like face. 176

Like moonlight arisen in the lap of the clouds,

it makes Hari’s exquisite face beautiful. 177

In the sweat of exertion, the musk-sandal paste dissolved.

One by one, every bodily garment fell away. 178

In love’s battle, when the young girl became uneasy,

the woman began to prohibit him with [her] feet. 179

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7 Titila is dialectical, probably associated with tiṭa khāoyā meaning “to become restless.” Şahīdullāh [1965] 2000, s.v. “tiṭa khāoyā.”
With special [effort], so that she would not budge,
holding hand in hand, he pulled it on top of the head. 180
A breast in the left hand, in the other a hand;
pleadingly, he spoke; an entreaty, was the response, 181
“I knew that I especially am at fault;
will good befall you, if you kill my soul?” 182
When the woman spoke these piteous words,
he left hold of that young woman, having sported with her. 183
In this manner, each one of them with Hari,
all the young women ever enjoyed the delights of sex. 184
When those women’s husbands heard of this;
they kept their own women waiting expectantly. 185
Tying them up, they forcibly held them within the house.
They did not let them slip away to the Yamunā’s waters. 186
Not seeing the women, Hari became restless.
Remembering the cowherd women, Hari began to brood. 187
At such a time, Iblis, arriving at that very moment,
went to every home to proclaim, 188
“You do not recognize this boy, Hari:
none such as this boy shall be born upon the earth. 189
In the Kali age, Nirañjana has taken on a human form.
He himself has propagated himself; know his true form. 190
Know that this very Hari, earlier taking the tortoise form,
descended into the netherworld to protect the earth. 191
In the form of the tortoise and the boar he upheld the earth;
in the form of the man-lion, he killed the demons. 192
Taking the form of the dwarf, he beguiled Bali.
Himself, taking the form of Rāma, he killed Rāvana 193
Now he has become the Hari manifestation.
No one is able to destroy him; 194
His maternal uncle, Kaṁsa, was a great king.
[yet] within no time, he destroyed his own uncle. 195
He plunged into the Yamuna, amidst snakes;
all the snakes stung his body. 196
With his left hand he upheld Mount Govardhana.
Which [brave] heart can kill him? 197
Those young women who serve him
will go to heaven along with their husbands. 198
Those whose fortune is good, those person's wives
shall make good of servitude to Hari. 199
Those women who go to Hari in order to enjoy sensual pleasure (rasa),
shall certainly have good fortune. 200
I know that your destinies are extremely bright;
offering your beautiful women as service to Hari, send them forth. 201
Hari does not enjoy sex with these young women;
he merely plays with the women in Vṛndāvana.” 202 [p. 482]
When that wicked fellow spoke these lies,
everyone's minds swelled with great confidence. 203

The sinner deceived them into believing that he [Hari] was the Supreme Being.

[Such] a despicable form did he have in this world! 204

When they heard Iblis’ words,

the young women slipped away from their respective men. 205

Remaining at home, they think constantly only of their husbands.

[Yet] he sent the young women away to Hari. 206

The husbands knew that the women were involved in good works;

the young women play with Hari in Vṛndāvana. 207

Says Saiyad Sultān, “Listen, oh men,

listen single-mindedly to these words of scripture. 208

This sinner Iblis is beneficent to none.

He ever beguiles the minds of all. 209

An ancient slave of the Lord, he has regard for none else.

Taking on a beguiling form, the sinner deceives all. 210

If the Lord’s guardians do not protect [them],

in a short while, he is able to destroy his enemies. 211

In this manner, day and night, by taking other men’s wives,

sin was enticed by Hari’s actions. 212


In Śiś’s line, there was a king,

who heard of all of Hari’s exploits (rahasya). 213

He heard that Hari eternally delighted in Vṛndāvana,

taking with him the young women of others. 214
Becoming extremely furious, he sent a messenger, with a reproving message to Hari. 215

Through the messenger’s mouth, the king sent a prohibitory message: “Why do you steal the young women of others? 216 [p. 483]

A man can tolerate all faults, but cannot tolerate the fault of a woman’s misconduct. 217

While husbands watch you take off with their women, travelling to Vṛndāvana to enjoy sensual pleasures. 218

If you cannot avoid such action, I will destroy you along with your entire lineage. 219

In order to prohibit all evil action, you are the [supposed] venerable leader of all. 220

You yourself commit adultery with other [men’s] women; for what reason [then] would others trust in your words? 221

You cannot prohibit others from committing adultery, [when] you yourself are doing so. 222

Even if you prohibit it, they will not accept your words: you yourself commit much adultery. 223

If you do not give up this vile behaviour, I will certainly destroy you.” 224

Hearing these words from the messenger’s mouth, Hari began to ruminate [upon this] within his own mind. 225

Hari said, “He is not expressing falsehoods. All that the king said is completely true. 226
However, I am unable to renounce the pleasure of sex.
Bearing affection to me, he has conveyed true words. 227
Yet, how am I to leave this gathering of young women?
Every part of these young women has become mine. 228
The king told me words of truth;
he told me all these words for my welfare. 229
The king gave me good counsel;
it is not at all appropriate to dispute him. 230
Bearing affection towards me, at heart, he spoke accurately.”
Having conversed greatly with him, Hari sent the messenger away. 231

Then Hari oscillated between feelings of shame and fear.
He abandoned this place and went to another. 232
He deserted the banks of Vraja and moved to another place.
By clearing the forest, he created a pleasant area: 233
row upon row of numerous city bazaars;
tall mansions all, beautiful to look at. 234
There Hari planted a flowering grove:
flowers of all varieties, bloomed continually. 235
The four directions are perfumed with sweet scents and fragrances.
In this Vṛṇḍāvana, Hari is perpetually ensconced. 236
Hari remained in that land at his own ease.
With one-pointed mind, he began to meditate upon Nirañjana. 237
Then the women of Vraja’s banks—all those cowherd women—
felt mental agony on account of Hari. 238

Not seeing Hari’s face, the restless young women
continually sent numerous messages to him. 239

All those beautiful young women, engrossed in remembering Hari,
abandoned their domestic duties. 240

Hari, too [though] his heart was tormented by the allure of the young women,
could not summon them near from fear of Niraṇjana. 241

Then, one day, all the cowherd women
went to view Hari’s feet. 242

When the fifth of the month of Māgha came around,
the breezes of spring began to blow. 243

The young man and the youthful women, all became exhilarated. \[p. 285\]

Everyone’s mind became afflicted by Madana, the god of love. 244

At such a time, all the cowherd-women, gathering together,
sang Hari’s praises, while sitting before him. 245

Shooting arrows from the corners of their eyes, the cowherd women
tied Hari’s mind-bird with their suggestive glances. 246

Even when beguiled by the allure of the cowherd women,
Hari stayed away from fear of Niraṇjana. 247

Within Hari’s mind arose a desire to play Holi;
Hari went to Vṛndāvana along with these youthful women. 248

Says Saiyad Sultān, “Listen, oh adepts,
fear of the lord deserted him, in the play amid the forest groves. 249 \[p. 486\]

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\[I prefer \textit{piṛita}, found in one manuscript, rather than \textit{piṛīta}.\]
Hari felt a great desire to play [in] the spring festival.

The deep, dense grove.
Trees of various hues.
A profusion of myrtle and jasmine.
Varieties of blossoming, fragrant
specie of clove and rose,
magnolia, screwpine, and nāgeśvara. 1

Hari plays [in] the spring festival,
making his mind joyful;
various sports, endless delights.
[Within] the deep, dense grove,
the joyful cowherdesses,
like cakora birds along with the moon. 2

Budded, fallen things; 9
various flowers, expanded;

9 Čyutagaṇa can refer to “fallen women,” or “fallen things,” such as branches, and other forest vegetation.
the bee hums constantly.

Finding the forest grove,

the cuckoo becomes joyful.

“Kuhu, kuhu,” it cries, incessantly. 3

Wearing fragrant garments,

making various graceful movements,

the cowherd women around Hari,

gather the phāgu dust,

and flock together; body against body,

they constantly jostle and shove. 4

Taking sandal and musk,

some women get close to Hari,

making jest.

Some poke fun [at him];

others tug at [his] clothes;

other women smear upon him ābīra, scented red powder. 5

Bringing garlands of myrtle flowers,

some women approach,

and hold these around Hari’s neck.

Some, holding another’s hands,

salute Hari,
and praise him, while smiling. 6 [p. 487]

Some women come and sit, spreading their wares:
some sell pearls and coral.
Detecting the desire to sell Hari youth’s wealth of jewels,
the women traders [consider] it most marvelous. 7

Says Saiyad Sultān,
“Hari shall lose respect;
his mind is drowned in sin;
Taking along the cowherd women,
his mind is filled with [all] the laughter, sport, and jest;
he forgot the lord Niraṅjana. 8 [p. 488]

Hari’s Disappearance
Metre: Jamaka

Assembling together, all the cowherd women writhed and twisted their bodies.

Hari plays with the young women in Vṛndāvana. 1

Mixing musk with sandal paste, one pelts another.

Holding on to her hand, he embraces her. 2
Hari kisses someone’s mouth repeatedly, then draws her into his lap and embraces her intimately. 3

Moment by moment, he enjoys love-making with a woman; in another moment, various kinds of amorous emotions. 4

Assembling together, the women laugh on four sides; spreading flowers, they pelt him, mocking him. 5

Making various jests, they abide in Vṛṇḍāvana. Hari enjoys sexual pleasure with these young women. 6

Every moment they rush to Vṛṇḍāvana. Hari remains hidden from these young women. 7

When Hari disappeared from amidst the women, all the cowherd women wandered through Vṛṇḍāvana. 8

He remained alone, hidden, in Vṛṇḍāvana. At such a time, he heard a heavenly voice. 9

Staying in seclusion, Hari heard it then; from the celestial sphere, he heard the words, 10

“Excellent, excellent, oh Hari, is your behaviour! For what reason do you commit all these acts? 11

The lord created you to guide human beings, so that all may know that there is one Nirañjana. 12

[Instead] you wandered about with the young women in order to impart wisdom to human beings! 13 [p. 489]

All of them say that, making yourself the Supreme Being, forgetting your place, you did not prohibit [your worship]. 14
Daily, in association with the young women, you forgot:
you upheld not a single moral principle of this world. 15
You heard from the lord that there would not be
a single other such as you created upon the earth. 16
How many such as you has Nirañjana created?
Why do you not have [any] regard for yourself? 17
The more you neglect Nirañjana’s work,
you will surely receive the consequences of this, for certain. 18
If you have no concern for righteous action,
you along with your line will certainly be destroyed.” 19
Hearing these remarks, Hari became saddened.
Hari did not dwell with the young women again. 20
Abandoning the young women, all the laughter and mockery,
he did not keep the cowherd women near him. 21
Those women, who were married,
he kept for the sake of service. 22
When those young women lost Hari,
they forgot themselves in Hari’s love (rasa), and lamented greatly. 23
Casting brass idols, all in the shape of Hari,
all the young women worshipped [these] in every home. 24
Casting idols of varied hues all, of several types,
all the young women worshipped [these] in every home. 25
In this way, all the young women having enjoyed
the pleasures of sex with Hari, were in love. 26
They began to sing hymns of his attributes.

They preserved [his] despicable form in this world. 27 [p. 490]

Not assessing in their minds all these ignorant philistinisms, why do they all indulge in such behaviour? 28

He who thus calls him [Hari] his own lord ever propagates his mistresses. 29

It is not appropriate to speak of the misdeeds of the great; I would become immoral (adharma) if I were to publicize this action. 30

On the one hand, Hari is a great person, on the other, there are the women of others.

Is it appropriate to continually steal other [men’s] women? 31

What is the reason to publicize all these exploits (rahasya)?

If young women were to listen, their minds would become agitated. 32

Hearing about Hari’s behavior, young men and young women [may conclude] that sin does not accrue thus through adultery. 33

Sensual women, who have sexual yearnings, have the hope of enjoying sex, while ignoring Hari. 34

All these are certainly not the consequences of [his] actions; 35

it is not appropriate to tarnish Hari yet again.

It was the ill-mannered Iblis, the most sinful, who beguiled him.

Hari is not pleased with such behaviour. 36

Seeing this, Hari became saddened;

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10 In this couplet, the word hari is used in the first pada to refer to Hari, and in the second pada to mean “to steal.”

11 Here there is a witty play on the word hari derived from the verb harana “to steal,” providing a twisted etymology for Hari, usually vaunted in Vaiṣṇava sources as the stealer of his devotee’s sins or, alternatively, the stealer of their hearts.

12 I have emended kamaphala to karmaphala.
he became anxious, seeing his contemptible behaviour. 37
Because of this, all reveal their own secret lovers.
All contemplate other such despicable thoughts. 38
Women cannot be thwarted by the prohibition [of such acts].
Iblis leads all astray. 39
He says, “Hari is remaining hidden from man.
Bearing a man’s form, the lord remains hidden.” 40
Hearing the celestial message, the noble Hari,
with agonized heart, felt fear of Nirañjana. 41 [p. 491]

At such a time, along came the high-minded Arjuna.
He saw Hari approaching, extremely worried. 42
He asked him, “Why is your face so wan?
For what reason is their discontentment in your heart? 43
Hari said, “The creator created me
to propagate religious scripture within the world. 44
The lord Nirañjana has created me
in order to prohibit sinful action. 45
Not heeding my words, these wicked men
continually dispute with Nirañjana. 46
Having cast idols, all worship these every moment.
Calling me the Supreme Being, everyone meditates upon me. 47
I am not the Supreme Being; I shall perish.
Know that Nirañjana [alone] is the naturally imperishable. 48
I can be an ocean wave, but not the sea.
I can be a sunbeam, but not the sun. 49
I have been created; I am not the creator.
I cannot create [even] a nail on my toe. 50
Know, for certain, that I am not the Supreme Being.
The lord Nirañjana remains over all. 51
Everyone speaks inappropriate words;
for this reason, my mind is constantly worried. 52
I was also created in the same manner
in which you were created. 53
I have no more qualities than you;
that which is in me, is in you, in abundance. 54
Even so the lord did create me
so that men would obey my words. 55 [p. 492]
Many, many, qualities were given me in excess,
so that all men would heed my utterances. 56
For this reason, fools call me Īśvara.
Know, for certain, that I am not the creator. 57
I say, listen, Dhanañjaya, to my words,
how will I be redeemed from this sin? 58
By worshipping me, men have all become sinners.
Not having meditated upon Nirañjana, they shall go to hell. 59
There is no benefit in my remaining in [my] land.”
Saying this, he renounced all residence in homes. 60
Relinquishing all the earth’s infatuations and attachments,
Hari left to wander other lands. 61
He wandered, alone, his face livid with rage.
Then Arjuna went along with Hari. 62

When Hari and Arjuna had gone some distance,
they saw a Garuṇa, a vulture, eating. 63
The two mounted upon the bird.
The two mounted upon Garuṇa’s back.13 64
Journeying on, they went far beyond the horizon;
they went there where the sun sets. 65
They saw there the existence of a planet made of iron.
Mounted on the back of the bird, they went from place to place. 66
They saw a most marvelous planet made of silver.
Therein they saw giant pearls and corals. 67
They saw a wonderful golden planet.
One by one they saw all the planets. 68
They saw there a delightful planet of diamond.
Sequentially they travelled past on Garuṇa’s back. 69 [p. 493]
Hari looks on with curiosity, along with Arjuna.
Touring through several lands, Hari viewed all. 70
Then the noble one went to another place,
where day and night were unknown. 71

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13 Note that Garuṇa, a vulture, is the traditional mount of Viṣṇu.
When Hari travelled thence to another place,
he witnessed the presence of a singular darkness. 72

Holding firm to Arjuna’s hand,
Hari entered into the darkness. 73

Placing one foot by the other, within the gloom,
Hari could not see [even] his own body, in order to walk. 74

Arm in arm, hence, the two went:
they walked from one forest to another, not distinguishing [their own] bodies. 75

When Hari got past the darkness,
he saw a city established there. 76

Gilded in gold, the city is extremely beautiful.
How much can one possibly glorify this city? 77

The houses all shine with silver inlaid with gold;
innumerable pearls and corals are affixed there upon. 78

Fountains sparkle in pavilions;
beautiful women with cow-like eyes shine exquisitely upon them. 79

From among them, most of these celestial women
all of tender age are newly pubescent. 80

The women sing songs to lilting dance.
Everyone constantly chants the name of Nirañjana. 81

On all four sides of this city are golden cities;
within it are seen spotless cities. 82

All the fragrances of others flow delightfully [around].
Smelling the fragrance, one craves to devour them. 83

Seeing all the young women within the city,

Hari’s mind was pierced by the arrow’s of Kāma’s bow. 84

Upon seeing the city, when Hari’s mind became joyful,

he approaches to enter the city along with Arjuna. 85

When Hari arrived at the city gates,

none allowed him to enter into the city. 86

Gathering together brickbats, everybody pelted him.

Uttering, “Away, away,” they all spoke up. 87

Swearing [at him], all reprimanded him greatly,

“Why do you wish to enter into the city? 88

If you feel like entering into the city,

why did you flout Nirañjana’s orders? 89

Why did you make the women forget themselves in love’s thrall?

Why did you make them address you as Nirañjana? 90

Doing so, again and again you became the Supreme Being.

You upheld your greatness all over the world. 91

All men eternally worship your form;

knowing this, you yourself did not prohibit them. 92

Nirañjana told you to protect all men

by taking on the manifest form of a man. 93

Nirañjana has created numerous forms,

among which you are [but] one of his creations. 94

The [very] manner in which the lord has suffused all,
so also is he with you. 95

They tell you that you have ten manifestations (avatāra);
as though you have been born again and again. 96 [p. 495]

One being (jīva) does not transmigrate through two bodies;
it dwells within the very body into which it is born. 97

He whom the lord has created at a particular time

why would this person return after death? 98

Why would the lord create a single kind repeatedly (pari)?

Why would he send [down] a single person again and again? 100

If the fruits of sin and virtue are to be enjoyed here,
then this would be known to the lord. 101

If the fruits of sin and virtue were to be enjoyed here,
why then did the lord create heaven and hell? 102

Yourself plunged in sin, you submerged others.
You upheld this despicable behaviour within the world. 103

The lord will give these [celestial] women
to those who do not dally with other [men’s] women. 104

Those who enjoyed love-making with others’ women
will never be proffered the young women of paradise. 105

Know that if you are again able to impart knowledge to all men
this then shall be your redemption. 106

Hearing this, Hari, immensely anxious,
began to speak, addressing Arjuna. 107
He said, “Arjuna, if you desire my welfare
go make all this known to people. 108
The reason why people are plunged in sin;
why they uphold my disrepute within the world; 109
why they publicize my mistresses;
the reason why all men worship my idol. 110
What virtue can accrue from publicizing my secret lovers?
They will certainly fall into hell by dint of this behaviour. 111 [p. 496]
What benefit can be gained from contemplating upon me, having made an idol? 112
One creator exists over all.
He considers all my sin and virtue. 113
The lord Nirañjana prohibited sinful action.
He created the heavens and this mortal world. 114
Know that I am not like a tree, but [like] its shadow.
There are lakhs and lakhs of men better than me. 115
All of them are certainly not the Supreme Being;
[hence] do not address me thus as the Supreme Being. 116
With both palms held together [in entreaty], Hari along with Arjuna
spoke to all about matters of conduct: 117
“Never again should you worship
Rādhā’s idol along with my form. 118
What benefit can you reap from tarnishing me?
By performing such action, you will certainly fall into hell. 119
It is appropriate to ever chant the name
of the lord who has created you and me. 120
Just as you are a human being, so also am I;
being a human, for what reason do you serve another human. 121
One Nirañjana exists pervading all.
Not hidden, he becomes manifest, known to all. 122
Having heard the name and other matters from the guru’s mouth,
then shall you gain a vision of the lord Nirañjana. 123
Keeping before you the formless shape,
searching for the lord, it is appropriate to serve him. 124
All the embarrassment I faced, because of you—
Arjuna saw it all with his own eyes. 125
If you all do not abandon your misdemeanor,
danger shall befall me in the lord’s presence.” 126 [p. 497]
Arjuna then, summoning all, began to relate
all that he saw with his own eyes. 127
He said, “Do not ever perform all these deeds;
if danger befalls Hari, danger shall befall you too. 128
What benefit can you reap if Hari were in danger?
The world will be plunged into all the sin of these deeds 129
If you do not give up this wretched behaviour
the creator will be furious with all of you. 130
Nirañjana was extremely infuriated with Hari.
The offspring of this sin remain upon the earth. 131
If you perform [your] duties, heeding Hari’s words,
Nirañjana will be extremely pleased with you. 132

Everybody performs those duties prescribed by the elders. 133

[Others] do not speak of those who perform bad action. 134

Then shall Hari gain respect in the lord's presence. 135

Hari's face will become radiant in the assembly. 136

If you commit sins, not heeding Hari's words, 137

because of you, Hari will come to grief. 138

Iblisa propagated that conduct 139

which was not [enjoined] by the Vedas and Purāṇas. 140

He had an enmity with Adam; 141

for this reason, he beguiles Adam's race. 142

All knew in their minds that that conduct was good. 143

It was said that they would acquire virtue by contemplating thus upon Gopāla. 144

For that reason, making idols of Rādhā and Kānāi, 145

all of them ever meditate [upon them], having purified their thoughts. 146

Everybody plays the mrdanga drum, the kannāla wind-instrument, and the conch. 147

They declare Hari's amorous play with [his] mistresses. 148

While playing, they sing, stepping with [their] feet; 149

they pronounce [the names of] Hari's mistresses, 150

while listening to Iblis-Nārada with joyous minds. 151

The earth weeps from the assault of [their] feet. 152

In all those places where all such actions occur, 153

soon enough one sees unrighteousness arise. 154

It is not my task to tell of how
the Yadu dynasty was destroyed. 144

Hari shall not be able to witness Nirañjana.

At the time of the Reckoning, he will incur great grief. 145

He [Iblis] said, “There is one lord Nirañjana.

How will you serve him, if you do not see him with your eyes? 146

Having searched for him, if you do not see him, he cannot be served.

If seen, you can serve him, for certain. 147

Knowing thus that Hari is that which is Nirañjana,
ever serve him mentally, appreciating him. 148

The manner in which Hari sported in Vṛndāvana;
the numerous jests with the young women. 149

Contemplating upon him in this manner,
you would acquire great virtue,
and swiftly go to paradise along with Hari.” 150

In this way the sinner beguiled all their minds.
The sinner propagated [such] despicable deeds. 151

He propagated ill action as virtue;
he upheld despicable conduct in this world. 152

Know that Iblis, the most sinful, disgraces his race.
In this way, the ill-mannered one beguiles all. 153

If you have heard all these remarks concerning Hari,
listen, I shall [now] tell the tale of Pharaoh. 154 [p. 499]
There are many despicable explanations\textsuperscript{14} concerning Hari.

It is not appropriate to express all these here. 155

Hearing but a little, the talented gather many meanings.

Indeed I do not pronounce these lest the book be enlarged. 156

For that reason, I told [just] a little:

I have left more for the learned to compose. 157

I did not express even a [small] fraction of a thousand;

I did not speak of numerous matters regarding Hari. 158

Hear, now, the manner in which Moses was born

[and] the manner in which the wicked Pharaoh died. 159

Forthwith, I tell the tale of pharaoh; listen attentively

of him who was constantly at strife with the prophet Moses. 160

Saiyad Sultān enunciates chronologically, from the beginning,
the manner in which Pharoah’s birth occurred. 161 [p. 500]

\textsuperscript{14} “Explanation” here translates \textit{vyākhyā}, which can also mean “interpretation; a detailed narration or description...; a commentary; an annotation.” Biswas 1994, s.v. “\textit{vyākhyā}.”
Appendix Six

Family tree of the Saiyads of medieval Taraph, modern Habiganj district, Greater Sylhet

Saiyad Šāh Nāsiruddin Sipāh Sālār

| Saiyad Sirājuddin
| Saiyad Musāfir
| Saiyad Khodāvand

| Saiyad Isrāil Muluk ul-Ulamā
| ————|———
| Saiyad Mikāil

| Saiyad Ilyās Kutub ul-Awliyā
| ————|———
| Saiyad Musā
| Saiyad Minā alias Sultān

| Saiyad Shāh Khandkār
| ————|———
| Saiyad Ādam
| Saiyad Jikriyā

| Saiyad Muḥammad
| ————|———
| Saiyad Šāh Gadā Hāsān

| Saiyad Šāh Ābdur Rahim Huchenī Ħisṭī (9th generation down from Jikriyā)
| ————|———
| Saiyad Ābdunnūr Huchenī Ħisṭī (“Dinhīna”) (1855–1918)
| Founder of the Hosenīyā Ħisṭīyā order
| Khādemul Phukarā Saiyad Golām Mustafā Huchenī Ħisṭī
| ————|———
| Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosenī Ħisṭī (b. 1934) (Founder-President, Mahākavi Saiyad Sultān Literary and Research Council)

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1 As supplied in Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī [1910] 2009, 1: Pariśīṣṭa Kha, 592–3, and corroborated with the family tree provided in Āgphar [1887] 2008, 95–96; corroborated and added to from the family-tree compiled by Saiyad Hāsān’s father, Saiyad Golām Mustafā Huchenī Ħisṭī (1933), as well as the hand-written family-tree supplied me by Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hochenī Ħisṭī, July 2009.

2 His renowned grave is the focus of the Mūrārband dargāh, Greater Sylhet. Many of his descendants, listed here, are also buried at the same dargāh. Special enclosures around the graves of the pīr, Saiyad Ilyās Kutub al-Awliyā and his father, a learned scholar, are regularly worshipped by devotees at the dargāh.
He has two putative graves: one at Laśkarpur, Habiganj, Greater Sylhet, and the other at the Muŗārband dargāh, Greater Sylhet. At least one member of the Saiyad family believes he is buried in Arakan.

While Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī lists the name as provided above, Āgphara ([1887] 2008, 49) lists the name as “Śā Minā” in the family tree. He does, however, mention in his text that Minā was also known as Sultān. Saiyad Hāsan mentions “Hazrat Šyed Sultān (Minā) in his family tree, while his father lists the name as “Hazrat Chaiyad Šāh Chāleh uraphe Minā Chāheb.” He has two purported graves: one at Sultānšī, Habiganj, Greater Sylhet, and the other at Pāthure Kellā, medieval Arakan, modern Myānmār. At least one relative of the Saiyad family believes he could be buried at the Muŗārband dargāh, Habiganj, Greater Sylhet.

He too has two purported graves: one, in Narapati, Sylhet; the second, in Vārīkhārā, Paṭiyā, Chittagong.
Appendix Seven

The Family Tree of Saiyad Śāh Gadī of Patiya, Chittagong

Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Gadā Hāsān (alias Saiyad Śāh Gadī)
- Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Śukrullāh
- Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Asmatullāh
- Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Asadullāh
- Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Mohāmammad Sādek*.
- Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Mohāmammad Hosen²
  - Hafijābānu --- (wife of) ------ Hakīmullāh Niyāji***
    - Saiyad al Haq (alias Baṣīrullāh Miyāh)
    - Meherniğar ---- (wife of) ----- Manohar Ālī (alias Zāhidul Haq Miyāh)****
      - Saiyad Rahmat Akbar ------ (elder brother of) ----- Saiyad Nūr Mohāmmad
        - Saiyad Mohāmmad Ibrāhim Khalīl Miyāh    Saiyad Ḫanwār Miyāh

¹ Muhammad Ishāq Caudhurī supplied me with this family tree in July 2009. According to him, the descendants of Saiyad Śāh Gadī had been hesitant to provide him with their family tree because they were embarrassed to claim, via the daughters of their house, the spiritual silsilah of the pīr, and wished to keep this concealed from the public eye. Personal conversation, July 2009. See n. 2 below.

² Śāh Mohāmammad Hosen did not have a son. The family line is carried forward by his daughter, Hafijābānu, who was married to Hākimullāh Niyāzi, her first cousin, the son of her father’s brother, Abul Hāsān. This is an unusual case of a family’s attempt to preserve the purported spiritual legacy of a saint through the family line in the absence of male heirs, traditionally considered to be the carriers of this authority, by inter-marrying the eldest daughter of the house to her paternal first cousin. Hafijābānu inherited the custodianship of the wakf from her father. Cf. also the case of Meherniğar below.

* Corresponds to ‘**’ in subsidiary family tree of Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Mohāmammad Sādek, provided below.

** Corresponds to ‘***’ in subsidiary family tree of Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Mohāmammad Sādek, provided below.

*** Corresponds to ‘****’ in subsidiary family tree of Hajrat Śekh Saiyad Śāh Mohāmammad Sādek, provided below.
Subsidiary Family Tree of Hajrat Sekh Saiyad Šāh Mohāmmad Sādek

*Hajrat Sekh Saiyad Šāh Mohāmmad Sādek

Mohāmmad Hosen ------ (elder brother of) ----- Abul Hasan

Amjad Ālī ------ (elder brother of) ----- **Hākimullāh Niyāji

Ābdul Samad

***Manohar Ālī (alias Zāhidul Haq Miyāh)
Figures

Figure 1: Manuscript of the Śab-i Meřāj. DCBM, Šabe Me’rāj, No. 487, Mss. 297, verso 1 and recto 2.
Figure 2: Manuscript of the *Rasul Carita* from Ahmad Sharil’s collection in the Dhaka University Library, Ms. Ā. Sa. 71, verso 1 and recto 2
Figure 3: Manuscript of the Rasul Carita written in Arabic script. 
DCBM, Nabīvaṃśa No. 224, Ms. 647
Figure 4: Sign in Vārikhārā village, Patiya, Chittagong, pointing to Saiyad Śāh Gadī’s gravesite

Figure 5: Saiyad Śāh Gadī’s shrine, Bārikhārā, Paṭiyā, Chittagong. To the left of the photograph, beyond the trees is Saiyad Sultān’s bhītā
Figure 6: Signboard to Hajrat Saiyad Šāh Gadā Hāsān in Narapati, Sylhet

Figure 7: The grave of Hajrat Saiyad Šāh Gadā Hāsān in Narapati, Sylhet, with entrance to underground cillākhānā
Figure 8: The grave of Saiyad Phula Sāh, Surāboi, Habiganj
Figure 9: Hilt of the sword purported to have been owned by Saiyad Şāh Gādā Ḥāsān, Surāboi, Habiganj

Figure 10: The same sword purported to have been owned by Saiyad Şāh Gādā Ḥāsān, Surāboi, Habiganj
Figure 11: Bowl from which Saiyad Šāh Gadā Hāsān purportedly drank poison

Figure 12: Entrance to grave site of Saiyad Ilyās Kutub al-Awliyā, Muṛārband Dargāh
Figure 13: Entrance to grave site of Saiyad Šāh Nūr

Figure 14: Sultānshi shrine complex and grave yard situated at far end of Mughal period tank
Figures 15: Side and frontal views of ring purportedly belonging to Saiyad Ilyās Kutub al-Awliyā
Figure 16: Frontispiece of lithographed interlinear Qur’ān in the possession of Saiyad Hāsān Imām Hosenī Čiştī, Sultānštī, Habiganj
Figure 17: First two pages of the same Qur'ān
Figure 18: Purported gravesite of Saiyad Sultān, Sultānī, Habiganj, here covered with shrubbery.

Figure 19: Same gravesite cleared during my visit with a chādor freshly laid upon it.
Figure 20: Marble plaque above Saiyad Śāh Musā’s gravesite, Laśkarpur, Habiganj

Figure 21: Entrance to shrine of Sipāh Salār Nāṣir al-Dīn, Muṛārband Dargāh, Narapati
Figure 22: Grave of Sipāḥ Salār Nāṣīr al-Dīn, Muṣrārband Dargāh, Narapati, Sylhet

Figure 23: Entrance to shrine of Saiyad Sāh Isrā‘īl, Muṣrārband Dargāh, Narapati, Sylhet
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*Note: this excludes catalogs with Islamic Bangla manuscripts, which are listed separately below*


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Sylhet: Milan Melā Udyāpan Kamīṭi.


Catalogs of Bangla Manuscripts containing Islamic Bangla Manuscripts, with annotation


Of the 356 mss. in Ālī Āhmād’s personal collection cataloged herein, 222 mss. are those of Muslim poets (see his Introduction). A useful introduction provides details about various Bangla manuscript collections, public and private, with a special note on the history of collecting Islamic Bangla mss. Of interest are the private uncataloged collections of Dr. Ābdul Gāphur Siddikī, and four Islamic Bangla mss. gathered in Rangpur by Dr. Nalinīkānta Bhaṭṭāśālī and donated to the National Museum, Dhaka. See also note on Puthi-Paricitī and Bāṃlā Ekāṃemi Punṭhi Paricaya above. He suggests that Islamic Bangla mss. can be found in the Nimnārā village library of Birbhum as well as in the private collection of Comilla’s Šaradindu Kara.


This collection contains a single ms. entitled Satyapīṛera Pāṇcālī. With the exception of this ms., there are no mss. relating to Islamic Bangla literature.

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1 I have examined the catalogs of the following collections of Bangla mss.: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Calcutta University; Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad, Calcutta; Vardhamān Viśvavidyālaya (University of Burdwan). I have not found any Islamic Bangla mss. listed therein. According to Ālī Āhmād (1947), the Calcutta University collection contains two texts written by Muslim authors. The following catalog of microfilms housed in the Dhaka University Library, An Alphabetical Index of Sanskrit, Bengali & Persian Manuscripts (Microfilms), prepared by Ford Foundation Project (Dhaka: Dhaka University Library, 1995), does not contain any Islamic Bengali mss. either. I have not been able to consult the following catalog: Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat Granthāgāre Rakṣita Hastalikhita Bāṅglā Puthira Tālikā, Jatindra Mohana Bhattacharjee samkalita, Sylhet: Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat, 1945. For printed dobhaśī texts, in addition to the catalogues of printed Bangla books listed above, see also Viśvanātha Rāya, Prācīṇa Punṭhi Uddhāra: Ravīndra Udyoga, Calcutta: Pustaka Vipāṇi, 1399 B.Ś./1992. This work provides a list of printed dobhaśī texts Rabindranath Tagore inherited from Abanindranath Tagore, and which now form part of Viśvabhāratī’s Central Library. It also provides information about an important ms. of the Bhaktamālā, which Rabindranath Tagore gifted to the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad.

Of the twenty-seven Bangla mss. in this collection, but one pertains to the Indo-Islamic canon: Saiyad Hamza’s *Madhumālēta kathā*.


The single Islamic Bangla ms. contained in this collection is a ms. on the life of Muhammad ascribed to Saiyad Sultan. See Appendix 1 for details.


Contains mss. mostly collected by the compiler of this catalog. For further details on Ābdus Sattār Caudhurī, see *Prācīna punthi-pāṇḍulipi-saṃgrāhaka o gabeṣaka Ābdus Sattār Caudhurī: Smārakagratha* below. In addition to Islamic Bangla materials, the collection also contains Bangla epic, *purāṇic* and *maṅgala* literature.


Cataloged herein are 23 Bangla mss. from Muhammad Enamul Hak’s private collection donated to the Varendra Research Museum; of these 18 are Islamic Bangla texts. This Museum also houses the Bangla mss. collected by the Varendra Anusandhāna Samiti (82 mss.), Kumāra Šaratkumāra Rāy Bāḥādur (1,110 mss. of which a few relate to Satyapīra literature), and Sāhityaviśārada Ābdul Karim (338 mss.). The latter collectors donated their private collections to the museum. While the bulk of these three collections relate to Vaiṣṇava, *purāṇic, maṅgala*, and epic literature, the collections of Šaratkumāra Rāya and Ābdul Karim also contain some Satyapīra literature.


The catalog reports 19 Islamic Bangla manuscripts collected mainly from the Mumināshī region, and others from the Pānjarā, Bājuhā, and Ghōrāghāṭa districts.


See note for *Puthi-Pariciti* above.

Part One includes the following Islamic Bangla texts of interest: Heyāt Māmud’s Šabe merāj; Telīr Kulați; Toraṇī Senera Yuddha; Traīlokiya Pīrera Pāṇcālī; Ābdul Hākim’s Lālamatira Kathā; Najarmāmud’s Phakīr Vilāsa Puthī; Māhmud Khondakār’s Tālenāmā, and Tīna Lakṣa Pīrera Pāṇcālī. Part Two includes the following Islamic texts of interest: Pāglā Cānda’s Mohāmmada Vijaya; Murshid Nāmā; Sekh Cānda’s Rachul Nāma, Rasul Vijaya, and Šabe Merāj; and Lāl Bānur Kissā.


This collection does not contain any Islamic Bangla texts. Of interest to a scholar of Islamic Bangla materials are its collection of mss. of Dharma and Nāṭha literature.


This collection consists of around a 1000 mss. Going by the title of the ms. it is possible that the collection contains a single Islamic Bangla text: Kalamā-Kālāni of Phakira Dāsa. There are also a number of mss. pertaining to the Dharma and Satyapīrā literature in this collection, which, otherwise, mainly consists of Viṣṇuva and maṇigala literature.


Contains some Satyapīrā literature in addition to the Viṣṇuva and Sākta literature, which form the main bulk of this ms. collection.


Ābdul Karim donated to the Dhaka University Library his entire personal collection of mss., earlier cataloged by him in Bāṅgālā Prācīṇa Puthira Vivaraṇa, below. However, as mentioned in Appendix 1 of this dissertation, the mss. cataloged in BPPV do not always tally with the descriptions provided of mss. with similar titles and authorial ascription in the PP or the DCBM. Therefore, it is possible that some mss. cataloged in BPPV have not found a place in the PP or the DCBM. These could have been mss. in private collections, which Karim reportedly took notes on. The PP or the DCBM lists 585 Islamic Bangla mss., whereas the BPPV catalogs 600 Bangla mss., which include, according to the Bāṃlā Kalamī Puthira Vivaraṇa, 122 Islamic Bangla texts. A useful list of public and private manuscript collections in East Pakistan and West Bengal are provided on p. 704. This list records a total of 125 mss. in Muhammad Enamul Hak’s personal collection (see note on the Varendra Research Museum catalog below), and a total of 700 mss. in Ālī Āhmad’s private collection (see note on Bāṃlā kalamī puthira vivaraṇa below).

Siṃha, Indra Kumār, comp. Handwritten catalog of the Sanskrit and Bangla Manuscripts of the Rāmamāḷā Research Library, Comilla.

This collection contains a sizable number of mss. on the literature of Satyapīra, in addition to a vast collection of epic, Vaishnava, and Śākta literature in Sanskrit (approximately 7000 mss.) and Bangla (approximately 1400 mss.), which form the major part of this collection. For the number of mss., see “Nivedana” of BKPV above. With the help of a Ford Foundation Grant, this collection as well as the collections of other private libraries were sent to the Dhaka University Library for microfilming purposes. A catalog of the microfilms of a few mss. sent by the Rāmamāḷā Research Library and other such private libraries produced under this project is to be found in An Alphabetical Index of Sanskrit, Bengali & Persian Manuscripts (Microfilms), prepared by Ford Foundation Project, Dhaka: Dhaka University Library, 1995. This catalog lists a total of 2143 microfilms of manuscripts (1802 in Sanskrit, 123 in Bangla, and 218 in Persian) loaned by the Rāmamāḷā Library, the Naẓīmuṭṭin Muslim Hall Library, the Bangladesh Central Public Library, the Rangpur Sāhitya Pariṣad, the Jessore Public Library, and the Ālī Madrasa of Dhaka, as well as by individual collectors. However, no Islamic Bangla texts have been listed here. The total number of manuscripts available on microfilm in the Dhaka University Library’s microfilm section is uncertain. According to my informants, a large number of these microfilms are believed to have melted away because of a lack of funds to maintain optimal conditions for storage and
preservation. Negotiations are now in progress for the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh to make digital photographs of the mss. in the Rāmamālā Library’s collection. The collection awaits complete cataloguing and digitizing; Islamic Bangla texts are also reported to be found in this vast collection.


This catalog lists 581 mss. of Islamic Bangla texts under the section “Muslim Puthi,” comprising mss. collected by the Kendrīya Bāṅglā Unnayan Borḍa. However, the section Vividha Puthi, comprising mss. collected by the Bāṅglā Academy, lists another 300 mss. of which at least 271 are Islamic Bangla texts. A separate section of microfilms collected by the Kendrīya Bāṅglā Unnayan Borḍa lists 35 microfilms of exclusively Islamic Bangla texts. Two of these microfilms, one of which is a microfilm of an NV ms. in the British Museum, have been acquired from the British Museum. An additional 504 non-Islamic Bangla texts and 116 Sanskrit texts are also cataloged herein. See also the note on Āhmad Āli’s 1980 article above to understand the relationship between the Bāmlā kalamī puthira vivaraṇa below and this catalog.