It was through the literatures of Satya Pīr that I first encountered the world of the legendary *pīrs* of Bengal. The stories of these *sūphī* saints are rife with miraculous events and mind-boggling escapades, the sheer joy of which prompted me to translate eight tales in *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pīrs*.[1] Long before that volume appeared, I had discovered that Satya Pīr was part of a constellation of fictional *pīrs* whose stories have circulated in the Bangla-speaking regions for as long as five or six centuries. The stories self-identify as fictions, *kathā*—a term with a long history in the subcontinent, but it should be noted that the semantic field of *kathā* in the Bangla language does not map exactly onto the Sanskrit term or as it is used in other north Indian vernaculars. While the worlds these *kathās* construct bear a resemblance to the well-known lands of Bengal, their geography is often creative, their temporalities malleable, and their miracles defy the constraints of the ordinary created world as we know it. As fictions their protagonists are necessarily fictional too, though one or another character may have been inspired by an identifiable historical figure. For instance, the misty memory of Pīr Badar of Chittagong is likely the inspiration for the stories found in the prolegomena to the *Mānikpīrer jahurānāmā* that I have translated in chapter 2—but that possibility does not constitute a causal connection, and one should resist conflating the stories of the historical figures with stories told in these fictions, even if they share events, seemingly historical or miraculous. As the life stories of fictional saints, these tales are both literary and hagiographical, but the religion they promote can

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1. Tony K. Stewart, trans., *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pīrs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

only be described as a generic form of Islam. The tales depend on a generalized knowledge of Islam to tell their story, just as they assume the readers' or auditors' general knowledge of a traditional Bengali culture with all the gods and goddesses, *brāhmaṇs* and kings, and so forth that make up a world steeped in traditional Sanskritic and Indic culture. Because many of the recognized *pīrs* and *bibīs* are credited with miracles, there is a tendency to lump together those historical figures with these fictional ones. Historians either have dismissed the lot or have sifted through those tales, separating "fact" from "fiction" in an exercise that does great violence to the original life stories, discarding the miraculous as legends, myths, folk tales, wives' tales, and so forth, all of which conveniently excuse these scholars from having to address the texts as a whole with all of the interpretive problems these fabulations engender. If we treat the texts as the fictions they are, then we must use interpretive tools appropriate to the genres, and those tools are primarily literary critical. That is precisely the approach I have adopted.

These tales depict a world of miracle-working saints, *sūphī* (Bangla for Sufi or *ṣūfī*) *pīrs* and *phakīrs* (Bangla for *fakīr* or *faqīr*, mendicant), the terms are used interchangeably. Nearly all of these figures represent the ideals of the warrior-saint or *gājī* (Bangla for *ghāzī*), including the matron of the Sunderban forests, Bonbibī. They do battle in an effort to persuade people to recognize the validity of Muhāmmad and the place of Āllā (Bangla for Allāh) as the sole and supreme God, but, more often, they win over people by providing them with wealth, with protection from the vagaries of existence in the miasmic mangrove swamps, by helping the childless gain sons and daughters, and by brokering peace, usually through the fixing of kinship relations in which all parties have a vested interest. To accomplish their goals, these *pīrs*, *phakīrs*, and *bibīs* will conjure entire cities overnight, fly to the heavens to consult with the Prophet, or venture into the underworld of the god of death, Yam (Sanskrit Yama). They display traditional Indic forms of divinity as easily as they perform the recitation of the names of god in *jikir* (from Arabic *dhikr*, Persian *zikir*). And they engineer the most miraculous forms of conception, creating virgin mothers and even theriomorphic birth. Their stories are easily understood as variants of hero-mythology and fall within the category of Romance, but because they are driven by a concern to inculcate an appreciation of Islamic perspectives, and to aid *musalmāni* populations, these tales of saints are fictional hagiographies. The stories are wonderfully entertaining but elusive with respect to their real cultural work.

Much of what follows is an effort to develop strategies for making sense of the *pīr kathās* on their own terms. Because the tales are little known outside of the Bangla-speaking world and they have virtually no interpretive legacy in any language, I have chosen first to tell the story—usually by direct translation or a combination of summaries punctuated with sometimes lengthy translations of key passages—in order to establish a hermeneutical baseline. Only after their retelling do I move to more contemporary modes of interpretation, and those in only a

rudimentary way. To retain a logical progression of tellings and explorations, the first five chapters constitute a general semiotic analysis covering the *semantics*, the *syntactics*, and then the *pragmatics* of these texts, illustrating each category with different tales. The final chapter on the literatures of Satya Pīr illustrates all three of these semiotic interests. Under that larger semiotic umbrella, each successive chapter will introduce a new strategy of interpretation, on which the succeeding chapter will build: chapter 1 provides a first glimpse into the *nature of the tales*; chapters 2 and 3 argue for the genre of *romance* and the stories' propensity to *parody*; chapter 4 introduces the concept of the *imaginaire*, and chapter 5 builds on that to trace historical change through the model of *conceptual blending*. Because of the plethora of materials dedicated to Satya Pīr, chapter 6 will show how *emplotment* and *narrative codes* signal religious positioning and condition expectation and reception. The brevity of analysis will undoubtedly disappoint some readers, but without any prior literary interpretations on which to depend (when noticed at all, literary histories only report the stories), these six chapters should serve as a good starting point to enter this literature and perhaps inspire others to look more closely at these dazzling productions and bring to bear an increasingly sophisticated hermeneutic. Though they are fictions, the tales play with religious issues without participating in the primary discourses of theology, doctrine, ritual, and so on; as stories, they can only point to those discussions, but point they most definitely do. The religious sensibilities that drive the plots do, in fact, routinely refer to the world of everyday reality in which their auditors live. What the texts are trying to accomplish religiously will gradually emerge when we examine them as a set—and even though they have been composed over several centuries, they do constitute a set because several of the authors have identified them as such, and because the tales operate in and through a shared *imaginaire*, as will be explored starting in chapters 4 and 5.

In the early stages of gauging the extent of these *pīr kathās*, and anticipating that other regions of South or Southeast Asia might have analogues, I proposed some years ago to several colleagues that we organize a workshop on what I then casually termed "Islamic mythologies." I was informed rather brusquely that Islam had no mythology, that to characterize any Muslim writing as such would be offensive, and under no circumstance would they support such an effort. While I was sympathetic to the desire not to be offensive, what was glaringly obvious to me—that such a literature existed, no matter what you called it—seemed to be truly invisible to my colleagues. I first thought the term "mythology" was the root of their resistance, but it soon became clear that I had stumbled into a much bigger problem. The tales I was reading and translating—stories of Satya Pīr, Baḍa Khān Gājī, Bonbibī, Mānik Pīr, and others that have proliferated over the last five centuries—I had come to realize were not only invisible to my colleagues, but were effaced in much of Bengali *belles-lettres*, in studies of religion and history, and in virtually every other field of intellectual inquiry. Imagine my surprise when in the early

1990s I first surveyed the literatures of Satya Pīr (who is favored by both Muslims and Hindus even today) to discover more than seven hundred fifty manuscripts and one hundred sixty printed titles composed by more than a hundred authors. Statistically, these tales constitute one of the largest blocks of literary productivity in Bangla, yet at the beginning of that project, I could locate fewer than eighty pages of secondary literature in any language focused on Satya Pīr and only a few pages more addressing the other protagonists. When the manuscripts and printed texts dedicated to the exploits of the other fictional *pīrs* and *bibīs* are added in, the totals of unexamined tales climb even further. Scholars, it seems, were on the whole unaware of these tales. I began to realize that the glaring absence of these stories pointed to something much more systemic, which raised serious questions about the intellectual industry dedicated to the re/construction of the cultures of the Bangla-speaking world; on the theoretical level, these lacunae redirected my inquiries to epistemology, especially regarding the issue of "not knowing."

In Western philosophy, the realm of ignorance is but a very small subset of epistemology, which tends to focus on what philosophers consider to be mistakes and untruths, what it means to be wrong, or simply not knowing what is right. More recently the field has moved in the direction of Bayesian statistics, which shifts the emphasis from not knowing to predicting the probability of knowing (probabilistic epistemology)—neither direction being particularly germane to the issues at hand, not least because of (Western) assumptions about the nature of the un/truths under investigation.[2] But in rummaging that literature, I ran across the more genial concept of *agnotology*, a precise term for a concept with which I was already all too familiar (and which anyone who has considered the underbelly of Foucauldian analyses knows well). In the sociology of epistemology, which examines structures of knowledge and their power relations, agnotology is characterized as the failure to recognize or the failure to know (which is not the same as ignorance with its incisively negative connotation, though scholars do sometimes invoke the term): *it is the study of our intellectual blind spots.* The causes range from simply not knowing enough because the state of knowledge has not yet reached sufficient levels of sophistication to reach what we know must be there (e.g., science), or from systems that institutionalize the hiding of knowledge (e.g., state secrets), to more complicated decisions generated in particular discourses that a priori eliminate areas of inquiry as not useful or as uninteresting (e.g., medical

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2. The literature on the epistemology of ignorance is not trivial, but among more recent forays, I found the following useful: John D. Norton, "Ignorance and Indifference," *Philosophy of Science* 75 (January 2008): 45–68; and the collected essays on epistemology by Nicholas Rescher; see Rescher, *Studies in Epistemology: Nicholas Rescher Collected Papers*, vol. 14 (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007); immediately germane to our purpose are the last three essays in this collection, "On Learned Ignorance" (131–45), "Coping with Cognitive Limitations" (147–55), and especially "On Ignorance and Limits of Knowledge" (157–79).

knowledge of female orgasm), or ideological and doctrinal decisions that make it impossible to think certain thoughts, or at least to acknowledge them, rendering them invisible (e.g., religious commitment). It is these latter two perspectives that I found most provocatively relevant. Nancy Tuana's essay "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance," in the Proctor and Schiebinger volume titled *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, suggested strategies to uncover the stories' apparent invisibility and how I might proceed.[3] It was not long before I could identify systemic blindness and obstruction among Orientalists, sectarian fundamentalists, historians, literary historians, and even linguists. While it has on occasion been tempting to become self-righteous about the pervasive suppression of any discussion of these tales—tales which I happen to find so intriguing—I am convinced now that the blocking of these tales has been primarily a product of the prevailing structures of knowledge operational in the colonial and immediate postcolonial setting of South Asia—which would, of course, include ethnic, religious, and linguistic biases and which were, not surprisingly, conditioned by political agendas far beyond scholarly control, but an exercise in which scholars have been unwittingly complicit. These tales tell us about the ways people have been subtly persuaded to think about religion in Bengal, to think about Islam in a Bengali context, and we have ignored them even though they have been pervasive for centuries. It is our loss if we do not listen to these voices—and from them we can learn things not possible through the dominant discourses of history, theology, and law that drive so much of our understanding of Islam today.

As I have noted elsewhere, the concept of "invisible religion"—a term coined by Assman, following Luckmann—helped to lay open at least some of the stories' religious and cultural work,[4] and without explicitly invoking Assman and Luckman, I have built on that concept through the early chapters of this volume. What is invisible is what makes these tales in many respects culturally Bengali rather than overtly sectarian Muslim or Hindu or some combination. The authors explore the cosmological and social assumptions of a Bengali heritage, its habits,

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3. Nancy Tuana, "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance," in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 108–45. The volume covers a wide range of possible forms of agnotology.

4. Tony K. Stewart, "Religion in the Subjunctive: Vaiṣṇava Narrative, Sufi Counter-Narrative in Early Modern Bengal," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 6 (2013): 53–73. There I point out that Jan Assmann has argued that the invisible religion formulated by Thomas Luckmann, when traced historically, functions as an archive of cultural memory; Assmann, "Introduction: What Is Cultural Memory" and chap. 1: "Invisible Religion and Cultural Memory," in *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 1–45. For Luckmann's concept of invisible religion vis-à-vis visible religion, see Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

its mores. That the tales do not play to any explicitly doctrinal position, but to a more generalized outlook, no doubt accounts for part of their low profile in the highly charged political and sectarian space of colonial Bengal and beyond, where religious identity had become a de facto political identity. I will argue that in the period which runs up to the time when identity politics began to take a definitive shape in the late nineteenth century, these stories were *subjunctive* in the exploratory mode of that concept.[5] They were test-driving ideas that could find no other easy outlet. I was pleased to see that in his recently published, incisive, and somewhat controversial book *What Is Islam?*, Shahab Ahmed argued that these kinds of experimental literary forms were to be expected in the efflorescence of Islamic culture in what he terms the Balkans-to-Bengal complex.[6] He wrote, "Unlike many Muslims of today, the Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex did not feel the need to articulate or legitimate their Muslim-ness/their Islam by mimesis of a pristine time of the earliest generations of the community (the *salaf*). Rather, they felt able to be Muslim in explorative, creative, and contrary trajectories . . . taking as a point of departure the array and synthesis of the major developments of the preceding centuries . . . and made productive of new meanings in a new vocabulary of Islam."[7] The *explorative authority* he invokes captures the tenor of these fictional *pīr kathās*—though I hasten to add he was primarily interested in personal modalities of experience and insight (especially Sufi) that had potentially profound theological implications. That explorative authority contrasts completely, indeed finds itself contesting, the monologic of the prescriptive authority of the conservative elements of the mainstream. As has become increasingly apparent, stories seem to have little place in the latter's heavily politicized discourse. Ahmed's binary may be too broadly painted to account historically for the improvisations that have marked the mainstream Sunni traditions—and even more so the conservative elements, laboring under the strictures of theology, history, and law—but it is heuristically useful, for in its broad strokes it captures precisely the generic nature of subjunctive religious exploration found in the *pīr kathās*.

Ironically, we might further speculate that these tales have not received any attention from the mainstream religious traditions of greater Bengal (both Muslim and Hindu) because they frequently rely on *parody* to make their point—irony of

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5. In a different context, Amitav Ghosh recently made a similar point: "But to reproduce the world as it exists need not be the project of fiction; what fiction—and by this I mean not only the novel but also epic and myth—makes possible is to approach the world through a subjunctive mode, to conceive of it *as if* it were other than it is: in short, the great, irreplaceable potentiality of fiction is that it makes possible the imagining of possibilities." See Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 128.

6. Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

7. Ahmed, 81.

course being the critical trope for making parody work (following Hutcheon[8]). Parody and humor do not play well among modern religious reformers, so I suppose we should not be surprised that in their eyes these tales do not pass muster as proper religious texts. But there is no question that parody is fully operational throughout, which should astonish no one familiar with Indic literary and religious expression; Bangla literature has a robust tradition of parody. There are a large number of Bangla terms whose semantic fields fit the full range of the English notions of parody, and these texts deploy them all.[9] In the last century, even explicitly declared parodies of the parodies have been performed on stage and circulated in print. I will argue that it is through parody—from positive mimicry to acerbic criticism and everything in between—that the stories of the *pīrs* reach out from their fictional perch and touch the world of ordinary things, invoking texts and traditions in freewheeling fashion. But why this urge to parody and to the subjunctive? As banal as it might seem, I am increasingly convinced that, like so much else in Bengali culture, it is in part tied to its geography.

Today largely composed of Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, the Bangla-speaking regions are of course riddled with thousands of distributaries of the Gaṅgā and Brahmāputra rivers, their lands' fertility annually boosted from the silt of the Himalayas carried down by the annual floods. But those floods constantly carve the landscape into new forms; in spate rivers can suddenly become ten or twenty miles wide, their courses changing day by day, and with that volume of water and silt, old lands are submerged and new islands (*caḍā*, *carā*) rise in the middle of waterways or extend the land mass further into the Bay of Bengal. It is not hard to see how the contingency of the land itself, constantly shifting, profoundly affects, even unsettles, the Bengali psyche. So ubiquitous is the water that in the early modern period in which our investigation begins, *pār karā* was the verbal form that signified simply "to go" somewhere, that is, to make one's way (using some form of the verb *karā*, from the root *kṛ-*) to the other shore (*pār*).

When *musalmāns* first entered Bengal, they did not shy away from the frontier wilderness, which was just beginning to yield to the pressure of encroaching development.[10] This riparian landscape was laden with natural perils to a degree seldom encountered in the rest of greater India, and one of the most profound affective

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8. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985, reprint 2000).

9. Terms include: *nakal* as copying, copy, reproduction, imitation, mimicry, mimicking, aping, forgery, counterfeiting, plagiarism, and as an adjective, artificial, sham, spurious; *anukaraṇ*, understood as an act of copying, imitation, following, going after, pursuit; *anukṛta*, meaning imitated, copied, mimicked, followed; and as a noun, *anukṛti* as imitation, copy; *lālikā* as jesting, evasive reply, equivocation (such as puns or ambiguous expression), parody; *bhã̄ḍāmi*, which means jesting, buffoonery, drollery, horseplay; and finally *mithya abhinay* as mockery and explicitly dramatic parody.

10. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

responses was to seek some kind of supernatural help in coping. *Hinduyāni* followers sought the aid of the gods and goddesses, resulting in a new and unique genre of literary production, the *maṅgal kāvya*. The genre's name can be translated as the "poetry (*kāvya*) of benefaction or auspiciousness (*maṅgal*)." These tales are generally characterized as semi-epics, sagas documenting the establishment and inculcation of the worship of the goddess, but I would argue the genre is more a literature that sought to chronicle the pacification of the land and all its imminent threats. Those threats were multiple. They included the dreaded world of serpents—kraits, pythons, vipers, keelbacks, and of course the cobra, king of all— so Manasā, daughter of Śiv, was celebrated as their master in her many *Manasā maṅgals*. A range of dread diseases were, and to a certain extent still are, endemic to the region, especially prevalent in the southern reaches, so the goddess Śitalā was eulogized to reign over smallpox and other eruptive ailments, skin diseases such as leprosy, leukoderma, and a host of minor but common annoyances, such as wenns, warts, and sebaceous cysts. Threats were social, too, as *hinduyāni* culture increasingly came into contact with indigenous (i.e., non-*hindu*) populations, the *ādibāsīs* or "original inhabitants" of these forested regions, groups that historically stood outside of a proper Indic world as outlined in the classical Sanskrit texts. The goddess Caṇḍī and the god Dharma were invoked in their respective *maṅgal kāvyas* to help settle these *ādibāsī* peoples, creating new, ideal cities in the middle of the forests and integrating their populations. As depicted in these texts, pacifying the wild was a complex process of social, agricultural, and pastoral domestication and urban construction. When *musalmāns* joined the land, their literatures make clear that they joined in these same efforts as their *hinduyāni* equivalents, and here is where the legends of the *pīrs* began to emerge in the popular imagination.[11] In all of these tales, the *sūphī pīr* and *phakīr*, the *shaykh* and *dārveś*, tended to be solitary figures following a call that was their own, even when they were part of recognized *silsilās* or lineages; they were not urban dwellers, and they gravitated to the wilderness, where few would venture. By the time the *maṅgal kāvya* genre was firmly established in the sixteenth century, the exploits of these *pīrs* in the wilds began to gain their own traction, flourishing in concert and eventually outlasting their *hinduyāni* literary counterparts. Those tales mimicked the *maṅgal kāvya*, initially through positive parodies that eventually led to socially biting satires, parody turned to the service of the political.

In these tales of the *pīrs*, we witness attempts to tame the land and make a space to recognize the legitimacy of *musalmāni* presence and practices, especially in the southern and eastern reaches of the region. Figures such as the forest-dwelling Baḍa Khān Gāji became synonymous with control of the vast tiger population, the

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11. Richard M. Eaton argues the process had begun even earlier; see Eaton, "Forest Clearing and Growth of Islam in Bengal" in *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 375–89.

great Bengal tiger, *panthera tigris tigris*, but also with establishing a mobile administration of justice in untamed areas. The *sūphī* matron Bonbibī likewise trafficked in tigers, crocodiles, and sharks. As mother to all the inhabitants of Sunderbans, she and Gāji were both involved in settling the land and in building communities among the local populations of *ādibāsīs*. As a protegée of Śitalā, the youthful Olābibī provided prophylaxis for cholera and other water-borne ailments such as dysentery. Each of these figures carved out a special domain for action. Today they are often collectively worshiped by those living in the Sunderbans, crowning a process that began with the demand for recognition and cultural accommodation of a *musalmāni* perspective on the world, exploratory moves that led to more complex interactions of appropriation and even displacement of the old into a new *musalmāni* cosmology. But each figure was also significant in mobilizing, organizing the local populations to settle the land, to create communities that integrated every social, religious, ethnic, geographic, and trade classification. It was the latter that seemed to be a preoccupation of many of the authors, for settlement meant trade.

The tales found in both the *maṅgal kāvyas* and *pīr kathās* routinely depict the adventures of the trading voyage and the other activities of merchants, a preoccupation which is, I think, partially a function of the strategic geography of Bengal, its place in the long history of maritime trade networks of the subcontinent. This fixation on trade, where textiles and spices particularly come to mind, went hand in hand with the domestication of the land, the exploitation of its vast natural resources: salt, timber, honey, and wax. Trade and basic transportation oriented Bengal to the inland waterways, and externally to the Bay of Bengal. As a hub of economic activity in the early modern trade routes, its role expanded further with the colonial intrusion of the Portuguese, French, and British.[12] Considering seriously this orientation to the water and the connections it brought to a larger world, I would caution that we should not automatically look to developments in the practice of North Indian Islam imported overland as the source of inspiration for Bengali *musalmāni* interests. There were connections that can be especially remarked in some of the higher *musalmāni* literary forms (often bypassing North India to go back to Persian and some Arabic stimulation and vision), but the *pīr kathās* of our study seem to be much more local, indigenous efforts. As has been well documented, religious ideas inevitably follow trade routes, and for Bengal, many of those routes skirted around the coasts of the subcontinent into the regions of the Middle East, and in the other direction into Southeast Asia, a pipeline that

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12. For an all-too-brief set of essays on the impact of the littoral regions on the movement of ideas and the impact of trade, see Shatarupa Bhattacharyya, *The Magnificent World of the Littoral: The Northern Bay of Bengal on the Eve of Colonialism* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012). There are, of course, substantial numbers of studies on Indian Ocean trade too numerous to address here.

inevitably worked in both directions, for the great port of Chittagong anchored the kingdom of Mrauk-U, Arakan, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. I have noticed over the years that the mapping of the expansion of Islam is nearly always visually represented as land-based, an inexorable tide moving across the continents from west to east, in South Asia extended by marauding bands pushing territorial domains ever eastward to the eventual fixing of stable Sultanate and Mughal rules. But given Bengal's relation and orientation to the water, it is worth noting that the generative locus of the tales of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* is precisely where Bengal touched the rest of the world in the early modern and colonial periods, that is, through the littoral regions along Bengal's intricate coast, the maritime highway of trade. Surely that geographical situation with its many points of contact must have had a hand in spurring the novel responses embodied in the *pīr kathās*; and it points to the possibility that "folk" literatures in other areas of southern and southeastern Asia may have performed similar functions. Michael Murrin has convincingly argued that the burgeoning of heroic romance in European languages from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries went hand-in-hand with the expansion of trade into Asia, a fabulous spur to the imagination.[13] So we are left to wonder if the romantic narratives of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* in Bengal were somehow indirect beneficiaries of a similar impulse based not in Europe but in Asia—but that historical inquiry must be left to others to explore lest this essay expand to epic proportions. Regardless of the possible connections, these stories suggest, at least in part, how *musalmāni* practices and perspectives were naturalized in the Indic world of traditional Bengal, helping to create an indigenous form of *musalmāni* religious belief and practice that was Bengali in its outlook and appearance, responding to conditions that seem to be unique to the Bangla-speaking world, but suggestive of the more subtle ways the religious imagination rides the literary, a conjunction that is likely to complicate our notions of what it means to convert. If nothing else comes of this book, the stories alone will invite the reader to explore this imaginative realm, no doubt provoking a sense of wonder and humor as these authors hold up a mirror to their Bangla-speaking audiences, an inevitable effect of the subjunctive at work.

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13. Michael Murrin, *Trade and Romance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013).