

# The Enchanting Lives of the *Pīrs*

## *Structures of Narrative Romance*

*One day Āllā was holding court and  
Hāji Gāji Mahāammad the Apostle took his seat.  
A saint arrived from Makkā and Madinā  
and they discussed the condition of the thirty-two worlds.  
Khodā held forth there in the court and  
with all gathered he considered  
the possible means for salvaging the eon.  
Hāji Gāji Sek Pharid suggested one possibility:  
What if Mānik were to appear as the son of Badar?  
Among hindu clans he would be known  
as the True Form of Lord Nārāyaṇ;  
In jaban families he would be known  
as Mānik, the Ruby Whose Power Blazes Forth.*

—ANONYMOUS, MĀNIKPĪRER JAHURĀNĀMĀ

### 2.1. THE MYTH-HISTORY CONUNDRUM

In the most comprehensive assemblage of hagiographical source materials about the *pīrs* and *gājīs* of the Bangla-speaking world, Girindranāth Dās reported on the lives of thirty-one “historical” (*aitihāsik*) and eight “imaginary” or “fabricated” (*kālpanik*) figures. Among the *kālpanik*, he included Olā Bibi, Khūṇḍi Bibi, Trailokya Pīr, Bonbibī, Bibi Barakat, Mānik Pīr, and Satya Pīr.<sup>1</sup> He did not, however, explain how he derived this classification, which is drawn into question by

1. Girindranāth Dās, *Bāmlā pīr sāhityer kathā*, 1st ed. (Kājipāḍā, Bārāsāt, Cabbīś Pargaṇa: Śehid Lāibrerī, 1383 BS [ca. 1976]), table of contents, vi–vii.

his inclusion of six different figures associated with Pīr Mobārak Baḍakhā Gājī, which he indicated are simply alternate names for the same figure in East Bengal, but several of whose tales seem to be from demonstrably fictive as well as historical individuals.<sup>2</sup> His division of fabricated (*kālpanik*) and historical (*aitihāsik*) *pīrs* and *bibis* is simply one more variation of the *myth* vs. *history* paradigm that has been used to dissect the hagiographical narratives of exemplars, saints, and saviors in any number of religious traditions around the world, and its inconsistencies and arbitrariness are pervasive. But in addition, the connotation of the Bangla term *kālpanik* is inescapably despective, its semantic field a set of dismissive characterizations: “existing only in the mind,” “falsely devised,” “fabricated,” “fictitious,” “false,” and “unreal,”<sup>3</sup> no doubt a residual effect of the scholarly attitudes so common during the last century. As Dās noted in the preface to the second edition of his text, the venerable literary historian Sukumār Sen prompted him to drop the distinction as artificial, for he argued it was impossible to tease out the *aitihāsik* from the *kālpanik* because the historical *pīrs*’ tales strained credulity as much as the fictitious, and the stories of both were presented in a manner equivalent to well-known genres of Bengali Hindu mythology, such as the literary *maṅgal kāvyā*. As a result, when Dās published the second edition of the text in 1998, he dropped the distinction in favor of a single combined list in strict alphabetical order.<sup>4</sup> Sen’s advice was prescient, for the tales are indeed without exception hagiographical and there was no call to separate any perceived mythic bits from the historical. Even if the intention was to elevate the fictional or legendary figures to an equal status with the historical, the result was to subtly and efficiently move in the opposite direction, shifting all the historical figures into the same category as the legendary and setting up both to be dismissed—largely as a result of the miraculous content.

The point is not to criticize prior scholarship or speculate about possible motives, but to use this illustrative episode as a way of identifying why these hagiographical conundrums present so much difficulty to their interpreters—and perhaps why they have been so routinely ignored by scholars of Islamic traditions. Because contemporary historians and historians of religions have demoted the miraculous in the narrative events, they have understandably, one might unreflectively imagine,

2. Girīndranāth Dās, 224; the six include Mobārak Sāh Gājī, Baḍa Khā Gājī, Barakhān Gājī, Mabṛā Gājī, Gājī Sāheb, and Gājī Bābā.

3. See the entry for *kālpanik* in *Bangla Academy Bengali-English Dictionary*, ed. Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Moniruzzaman, and Jahangir Tareque (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), 127.

4. The second edition changed no text, but reordered the presentation to a strict alphabetical list; see Girīndranāth Dās, *Bāmlā pīr sāhityer kathā*, 2nd. ed. (Kalikātā: Suvarṇarekhā, 1998), table of contents, 11–12; his explanation for the change can be found in the introduction (*bhūmikā*) on 14. Interestingly, the great Bangladeshi literary scholar Āhmād Śarīph categorizes the *pīrs* somewhat differently: “*kālpanik*, *aitihāsik evaṃ darveś pīr*,” or “imagined, historical, and dervish”; see Śarīph, *Bāngālī o bānglā sāhitya*, 2:827–58 (chap. 15, sec. 2), which hints at his unwillingness to dismiss the miraculous altogether.

tended to shy away from these tales as legitimate sources of the Islamic experience in Bengal, and this holds especially for those narratives that depict the imaginative or fictional figures such as Satya Pīr, Bonbibī, and others already mentioned. By suppressing these tales by omission, scholars, such as the Orientalists previously noted, ironically find themselves supporting the same side of the evaluative curve as the conservative reformers who wish to do away with most of the tales and all that is associated with them. Regardless of how one classifies these tales, one effect of their omission is to produce an incomplete picture of how Islam came to occupy the place it does in Bengal, and how those stories functioned as part of that process of Islamicization, for as we shall soon see, they do, but in ways that will prove novel. To dismiss those stories is to level an a priori judgment that they have nothing to tell us, and part of that decision, one suspects, is based on a failure to recognize and take seriously the *genre* of the tales. Not surprisingly, the presence of the fantastic seems to have clouded all judgments and deflected analyses away from the religious and cultural work these tales have done and still do.

Most attempts to interpret these tales, when they are examined at all and not simply rejected outright, seem to be driven initially by European notions of history, which gathered momentum with the popularity of positivism in the late nineteenth century. Truth in the form of historical “facts” had to be separated from untruth, which was necessarily ahistorical “fiction” (in the negative sense in which that term is often used). For most scholastic approaches, and implicit in the blanket rejections by reformers, the question of historical veracity—did these things actually happen?—seems to drive a wedge into the narrative by dividing it between some kind of myth (in the popular sense of “falsehood” or counter to fact) and history, which forces an evaluative judgment, while begging the question of what criteria would be used to judge the difference.<sup>5</sup> Tzvetan Todorov usefully problematized the range of these approaches in his study of the genres of the fantastic in fiction—and I think his categories capture much of the sentiment of the scholarly approaches in question. He distinguishes three forms: the *uncanny*, the *fantastic*, and the *marvelous*. He argues that the way each narrative presents the unusual gives pause to both the *characters* in the fiction and the *reader* of the fiction. The parallel to the tales of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* is applicable, for it is ultimately as fictions that we will need to address these stories, though they are not of the type of fiction one suspects Todorov imagined. He writes, “The fantastic is that hesitation

5. Hippolyte Delehaye, S. J., one of the leading authors in the Société des Bollandistes whose mission is to produce hagiographies and evaluate the lives of saints and those under consideration for future designation as saints, produced a rather pointed negative critique of the pitfalls of this approach in his influential *Les légendes hagiographiques* in 1905; see the English translation of chapter 7, “Concerning Certain Hagiographic Heresies,” in Père H(ippolyte) Delehaye, S. J., *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V. M. Crawford (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), esp. 224–25.

experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.” He insists that it is the *response* to, more than the depiction of, the miraculous that defines the genres. “The uncanny is the genre that persists when the reader resolves his hesitation and decides that the order of law is not violated; marvelous is when it is accepted as violated.” The fantastic lies somewhere between the two.<sup>6</sup> Yet these responses do not seem to characterize the way miraculous stories have been received and accounted. The attribution of saints’ miracles or extraordinary feats and the sometimes apparently contradictory tellings from multiple sources have a long tradition among Muslim scholars of being reported without choosing whether any given report is true, or which version is correct (the *ḥadīth* literatures are rife with such deflections). Whether it is uncanny, fantastic, or marvelous does not matter, for while the author may harbor private suspicions (which are seldom openly articulated), they leave the ultimate judgment to God, inserting formulaic phrases such as “God alone knows” or “only God can tell.” This public disavowal of judgment (which expresses the author’s suspension of both belief and disbelief) recognizes that the fantastic may not be what is really at stake from a religious perspective.

For most of the last two centuries, scholastic interpreters of a European bent have resolved the dichotomy by simply assigning the miraculous to a variety of alternate genres such as folk literature, mythology, popular legend, and so forth, without addressing the nature of the narrative qua narrative. In other words, they categorize in order to eliminate, relegating what they deem to be legendary or mythic material to a genre and discipline outside their declared purview, which allows them arbitrarily to ignore any story that presents difficulties for their interests. For every narrative they have approached in this way, scholars have, in effect, constructed two texts, but have given credence only to one, ceding the mythic or marvelous to those who deal professionally with them, to mythographers or folklorists, who, in turn, have routinely treated the tales ahistorically (which, given their criteria of evaluation, may appear on the surface to be appropriate) as part of a universal genre that ultimately hinges on cross-cultural comparisons, acknowledged or not.<sup>7</sup> When the scholarly interpreter has implicitly accepted or even argued for the dichotomy in terms of fact-versus-fiction (again in its popular sense), the litmus test for what is acceptable is one of historical truth of a variety

6. Each is constructed in the act of interpretation by the reader or auditor and teller, but there are distinctions of temporality generally not recognized. In structuralist terminology, marvelous is to the future as uncanny is to the past, while fantastic is in the present between the two. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, with a foreword by Robert Scholes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25, 41–42.

7. So many have adopted this comparative approach that one need only mention the leading names, such as Eliade with his morphological approach, Dumézil with his tripartite Indo-European comparisons, Raglin, Rank, and Campbell’s hero mythology, Lévi-Strauss’s structural study, Propp’s folktale motifs, and of course Stith Thompson.

that is generally recognized today as elusive at best. What these scholars have done, however, is to miss and misread the nature of the texts, to fail to recognize the special features of the narratives. To recover the texts from this awkward handling, our first step to restore their integrity as coherent narratives, and not break them into parts, is to recognize the *fictional* nature of these hagiographical narratives and see how the religious ideals they contain condition them into a special genre.

We shall see that the narratives demonstrate their own rigorous coherence of conception, which we shall endeavor to approach as a whole. We are not simply going to report the stories, but rather will use the tales themselves to open up distinct areas of inquiry as to their form and function, their cultural work. As will become clear, the narratives themselves have histories. They participate in a commonly shared realm of the Bengali *imaginaire*. And their histories, in turn, are bound to their reception by identifiable communities that circulate and perform these texts. The uses to which these texts are put, though not always immediately accessible, constitute another history in themselves,<sup>8</sup> but we must always take care to distinguish each of these propositions from the literal content of the stories. The stories appeal, which is why they endure, but the appeal, we will argue, is not just the entertainment they afford.

For well over a thousand years, much of the appeal of *sūphī* saints across the Islamic world can be found in their awe-inspiring and wondrous feats,<sup>9</sup> and South Asia has had more than a few examples, both predictably regular and wildly irregular in behavior.<sup>10</sup> As paragons of saintliness, *pīrs* are specially marked as the “friends of God,” an epithet routinely designating *sūphī* masters.<sup>11</sup> Theirs is the discourse of *religious biography*, and the legendary or fictive *pīrs* and *bibīs* of Bengal participate in that discourse. While the reporting of miraculous elements is not a desideratum for hagiography, the pious practitioner is often elevated to saintly status by displays of the extraordinary, usually couched in terms of divine power, *karāmat*. Why it is important to place these tales in the larger category of religious biography and, more specifically, hagiography has to do with the stories’

8. One strategy for understanding this type of circulation and use will be suggested in the mapping of the literatures of Satya Pīr in chap. 6, this volume.

9. For instance, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1220–1550* (1994; repr., London: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

10. Simon Digby, trans., *Wonder-Tales of South Asia*, ed. Leonard Harrow (Jersey, Channel Islands: Orient Monographs, 2000; repr., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Raziuddin Aquil, “Miracles, Authority, and Benevolence: Stories of *Karamat* in Sufi Literature of the Delhi Sultanate,” in *Sufi Cults and Evolution of Medieval Indian Culture*, ed. Anup Taneja, Indian Council of Historical Research Monograph Series 9 (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research in Association with the Northern Book Center, 2003), 109–38. For stories from northern India, see Anna Suvarova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1999); for our purposes, note esp. chap. 7, “The Warrior Saints,” and chap. 8, “The Mendicant Saints.”

11. See Renard, *Friends of God*; see also John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

connection to the religious truths they purport to represent. The miraculous powers displayed by the heroes and heroines and the ensuing events these displays precipitate always point to a single source, God, Āllā. That deferral is the single unfailing religious proposition common to all the tales. Miraculous displays, while often present in extremis, can be either necessary conditions or circumstantial by-products of the action, but not the point of these heroes' or heroines' life stories. The religious ideal to which these displays point is.

In a significant volume of essays that emerged from a multi-year project at the University of Chicago in the early 1970s, Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps made a significant move to break the hold of the crude myth-history distinction that had paralyzed the study of religious or sacred biography generally.<sup>12</sup> In place of the category of history, they proposed the *bios*, or life of the individual, without requiring that life to be about facts and dates; rather, the *bios* could be constituted by psychological experience or social role, to name only two alternatives to the more reductive notions of positivist history. The *bios* was the sequence of events that gave shape to the life-narrative as it had been conveyed. In place of myth, they argued for the much more complex *religious ideal*, which was the visionary configuration of the perfect religious figure whose life was shaped by and in turn itself shaped the theological truth and doctrinal directives they promoted. Reynolds and Capps proposed that the religious ideal conditioned the form of the life, *bios*, and in such a way that the two in their combination produced what they termed a distinct *biographical image*. This approach to the understanding of religious biography was generally articulated to displace the worn out and entirely predictable "life and times" (emphasis on contextual history) and "life and teachings" (emphasis on theology, religious abstractions, and mythology) that dominated most scholarly production and still does, and even more so in the popular press. For much hagiography, it is the religious ideal that becomes the primary interest or subject of the religious biography while the *bios* can languish as little more than a frame for it, the ostensible subject.<sup>13</sup> For the unwary, this displacement may not actually change the way the construction of religious biography is perceived; it is too easy to assume that the *bios* is a stand-in for history and the religious ideal a stand-in for the myth; but they are not apposite structural categories. But how might this help us understand better the fabulous tales of what I have been calling the fictional *pīrs* and *bibīs* of Bengal? In fictional stories, overt theology or doctrine tends to be absent

12. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps, eds., *The Biographical Process: Essays in the History and Psychology of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), see introduction, 1–33.

13. Tony K. Stewart, "The Subject and the Ostensible Subject: Mapping the Genre of Hagiography among South Asian Chishtīs," in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carl W. Ernst and Richard Martin (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 227–44. This piece also traces the role of institutions, such as the *sūfi silsilā* and various literary forms (*maktūbāt*, *ishārāt*, *tazkirah*, and *malfūzāt*) in the creation, transmission, displacement, and transformation of biographical images in the Indo-Persian context.

or implied, seldom made explicit except in the most general terms. As a result, we must approach the religious ideals embedded in these tales indirectly.

## 2.2. NARRATIVE BIOS AS AUTOTELIC FICTION

We have an admittedly special case of hagiography with this group of tales because the subjects are fictional. If the myth-history dichotomy is deemed to be irrelevant, how can we single out a group of *pīrs* and refer to them as legendary or fictional as opposed to historical? Again, it is the issue of the miraculous events that proves to be the red herring. The fictionality of these heroes and heroines has nothing to do with their miracles. And it is not just a matter of whether they appear in or are corroborated by the historical record outside of hagiography itself. Those *pīrs* whose existence can be confirmed in the Persian chronicles of courts and *silsilās*, in copper plate inscriptions, in East India Company records, and so forth are to be counted as historical (roughly equivalent to Girindranāth Dās's *aitihāśik* category in the first edition of his monograph). But the category of legendary or fictive *pīrs* designates figures whose lives cannot be corroborated by any source outside literary narrative itself; but if this were the only criterion, we would be subject to the same charge of arbitrariness in making the distinction, for an argument from lack of evidence is always contingent, not definitive. We must also make clear that the stories and the characters are fictional, not "fictitious," "false," or "unreal," because their acts exist only in the realm of discourse. For instance, Gāji Pīr is a fictional figure who exists in a literary discourse, and while he, as a subject of that discourse, may be put to use by his creators and the audiences who hear of him, he himself remains in the realm of the fictional, and any reference to him is to his fictional world. There are a finite number of such figures in early modern Bengal, and it is clear that the authors themselves made this distinction, as Rādhāmohan Tarkālaṃkāra Bhaṭṭācāryya tells us in his *Satya nārāyaṇa vratakathā*. In his opening salutations, he first pays obeisance to Viṣṇu and then Śiva, to the goddess in various forms including Gaṅgā, to the *nāgas* ensconced in the eight directions, to the stars scattered across the triple world, and to the places of crossing, pilgrimage sites. He honors Vyāsa as a small part or *aṃśa* of Viṣṇu, and Yam, the *yakṣas*, and everyone worthy now sheltered in Yam's abode. Gaṇeś is singled out, followed by other more specific forms of Viṣṇu and Śiva scattered across the subcontinent in places such as the Vindhya hills and the city of Kāśī. He then notes the *pīrs* who, as equivalent figures to the *hinduyāni* gods and goddesses, deserve his obeisance—and they are all, without exception, fictional.

I have bowed down to the ranks of *brāhmaṇas*,  
 grasping their lotus feet,  
 for only after receiving their command  
 have I undertaken to compose this new text.



In the accustomed manner, I circumambulate  
 and bow in full obeisance to Satya Pīr.  
 This illustrious Lord (*prabhu*) illuminates Makkā  
 in the company of Marḍdhagājī.  
 I fall at the feet of Darphā Khā Gājī,  
 who resides on the banks of the Jāhnavī at the Trivenī.  
 I make fair greetings to Baḍakhā Gājī,  
 a village *pīr* who gallops on his Arabian steed  
 accompanied by a hundred tigers.  
 Just by remembering Satya Pīr is one relieved of all dangers.  
 This set of salutations now ends, leaving us enchanted.<sup>14</sup>

The figures named above constitute part of a set that also includes Bonbibī, Olābibī, and Mānik Pīr, and his father Badar Pīr.<sup>15</sup> Their texts are labeled generically *kathā*, which is “narrative” or “fiction.” Importantly in Bangla, the stories of the exploits of Mohāmmad, Āli, Hāsān, and Husāin, as well as *sūphī* luminaries such as Śāh Jālāl, as a rule do not carry the genre marker of *kathā*, but use other terms denoting history, such as *itihās* or *sirā*. Though a figure like Badar Pīr may be inspired by some historical figure of the same name, a not uncommon conflation, the reader should be leery.<sup>16</sup>

14. Rādhāmohan Tarkālamkār Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Satya nārāyaṇ vratakathā* (Kalikātā: Prakāścandra Bandhyopādhyāy [Bhaṭṭācāryya] at Nūran Sen Press, 1814 śaka [ca. 1892]), 1–2.

15. There are a number of scholars who take these figures as a set. Part of the set-making seems to be geographical (Sunderbans); see Sanatkumar Mitra, ed., *Tigerlore of Bengal* (Kolkata: Research Institute of Folk-Culture, 2008), esp. the essay by Ashutosh Bhattacharya, “The Tiger Cult and Its Literature in Lower Bengal,” 19–44. Inclusion also revolves around the control of tigers, which is of course a well-known power that sets apart *pīrs* and *phakīrs* from their other Indic counterparts; for instance, see the anthropological study of Tushar K. Niyogi, *Tiger Cult of the Sundarvans* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1996). In his report on conditions in the nineteenth century, Śaśāṅk Maṇḍal makes no effective distinction in the worship and following of these characters and Śitalā, goddess of smallpox, Olābibī, matron of cholera, and any of the *pīrs* and gods and goddesses; see Śaśāṅk Maṇḍal, *Britīś rājatve sundarban* (Kalakātā: Punaśca, 1995), 110–30, 150–56.; Sunder Lal Hora, “Worship of the Deities Olā, Jholā and Bōn Bibī in Lower Bengal,” *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 20, no. 8 (1933): 1–4. For a casual introduction to Bonbibī and Dakṣiṇ Rāy, see Sujit Sur, “Folk Deities of Sunderbans—Some Observations,” in *In the Lagoons of the Gangetic Delta*, ed. Gautam K. Bera and Vijoy S. Sahay (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2010), 141–68. For insight into how this plays out in practice, see Sufia Uddin, “Beyond National Borders and Religious Boundaries: Muslim and Hindu Veneration of Bonbibī,” in *Engaging South Asian Religions: Boundaries, Appropriations, and Resistances*, ed. Mathew N. Schmalz and Peter Gottschalk (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 61–84.

16. The complications of historical reconstructions make such connections tenuous at best. For example, Badar is often cited as one of the *pāñc pīr* or five *pīrs*, though the enumeration of those five is highly variable. He is also affiliated with the twelve *aulyās* or saints of Chittagong, but under the name of Badar Oyāliyā, Badr-i-Ālām, Badar Pīr, Pīr Badar, and Badar Śāh—though reports suggest these refer to more than a single figure. Different accounts of his arrival in Chittagong include riding on a fish (reminiscent of Khoyāj Khijir) or riding on a boulder (which appears in the tales of other figures



There is an important distinction: the stories that depict the lives of these *pīrs* are all fictions—which makes their protagonists fictional—while the stories-as-fictions themselves have extra-diegetic histories that we can, to a certain extent, reconstruct through different types of material evidence. Certain biographical information on the authors can be found in the signature lines of the texts, and the plethora of manuscripts, many of which are dated by the author or the time of copying, can be used to reconstruct at least the broad outlines of circulation and consumption. Then there are printed texts, which may or may not reflect what the original authors wrote, allowing us when we have corroborative manuscript evidence to see how stories may have been altered (usually only in minor details, as I have determined from a number of such comparisons), and the publication histories themselves speak to audience, class, and so forth (price indexes and the catalogue of other publications from that publisher). Finally, we can find intertextual evidence in several ways, including where the narrative appears in other traceable documents, such as the encomium provided by Rādhāmohan Tarkālamkār Bhaṭṭācāryya above, the appearance of figures and their stories in other narratives, or their persistence in visual images, which were mentioned in the first chapter.<sup>17</sup> Through these different means, we can document textual histories. But if we move our concern for history outside the frame of diegesis to an altogether different mode of discourse, then the narrative itself begs for a different set of hermeneutic tools. We must recognize that the terms of discourse for these narratives are literary, and the *bios* is a literary invention.

The linchpin is the nature of the narrative of the *bios* itself, for the *bios* is a type of *fiction*. Hayden White has already pointed in this direction in his analysis of historical narratives. Following Northrop Frye, White's now well-known argument is based on the adoption of tropes, literary conventions that shape the telling of the narrative that in turn dictates the narrative's emplotment. In White's scheme, narratives composed by historians tend to follow one of four predictable trajectories based on the author's desired outcome: metaphor emplots romance, metonymy emplots tragedy, synecdoche emplots comedy, and irony emplots satire.<sup>18</sup> But we are not dealing with historical narratives, which are automatically and necessarily second- and third-order syntheses of other materials. The tales of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* are not histories written as fictions; rather, we are dealing with primary narratives,

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as well), and in the text below, he arrives surfing across the waters on his sandals. There are a host of references of this sort; see Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 219–23. Anna Suvarova reports from her Persian sources the connection of Pīr Badr to Chittagong, to the *pāñc pīr*, and both versions of his arrival in Chittagong on a rock and on a fish; see Anna Suvarova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia*, 165–66.

17. See chap. 1, n. 21.

18. Among his many works, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), and White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

fictions that originate in and circulate through the Bangla-speaking world of the fifteenth to twenty-first centuries.

In a manner recognized to hold for any literary text, the hagiographical narrative of the bios-as-fiction creates its own unique, self-contained world that has an end and a purpose in itself; it is a self-referential world, hence *autotelic*. The stories can be detached from and read independently of context; that is, each text can yield a purely literary reading and all that the classification of fiction implies—and many of the tales of the *pīrs* and *phakīrs*, the *bibīs* and *pirānīs*, and *devīs* and the *sādhūs* and *jogīs* circulate just like that—one might even argue *primarily* like that—when delivered in *jātrā* or other performative modes. While the circumstances of a tale's creation and reception do impinge on that fictive world and condition it—the subject of the next three chapters—it is primarily by relying on unstated presuppositions regarding the way the world works, the presentation of images rather than arguments, that indirectly reflect the religious ideal, however vague and imprecise. Rather than thinking of the religious ideal as containing some fixed theological or doctrinal content, it can be better understood as a *perspective*, a way of understanding and operating in the world that, if followed through, would result in some utopian goal; this perspective and the cosmology it implies endorse ethical sensibilities that are imparted through action and deed. But because they are fictions, these narratives cannot articulate a religious ideal in explicit terms of precise sectarian doctrine or attempt to propose a theology, much less something that would qualify as systematic. Understanding why this is so will help us to uncover the work of these fictions and why they are so important to the people who circulate them.

In his study of genre, Tzvetan Todorov, following Northrop Frye, argues that one of the most important inherent structural features of the fictional narrative—whether fable, parable, myth, epic, or novel—is that the narrative is never subject to the truth test. Truthfulness will not arise precisely because the texts are in some basic way literary: the narratives are neither true nor false precisely because they are fictional.<sup>19</sup> This is quite a different proposition from the one most often adopted, which is to say that because they are fictions they are not true (fictitious, unreal; *kālpanik*); rather they are neither true nor false in the ordinary world of

19. Tzvetan Todorov predicates his entire argument about literary genres on this assertion. Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3. With regard to the novel, which I think is also applicable here: “What exists, first of all, is the text, and nothing else; it is only by subjecting the text to a particular type of reading that we construct an imaginary universe on the basis of the text. The novel does not imitate reality, it creates reality” (39). See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of a Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Significantly, Edward S. Casey argues that the act of imagining is similarly complete in and of itself, and so is the content of that imagining, an observation congruous with the assertion of the fiction's autotelic nature; see Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 171–91.

things, but instead, create their own realities. The first authors of the fictional *pīr* narratives, whether named or anonymous, had no need to declare the truth value of the narratives, though on occasion it is clear that they wondered whether they were conveying something acceptable, for one will occasionally encounter the disclaimer (so often heard among the purveyors of the *hadīs* literatures): “no one knows for sure,” or “only God knows.” Yet many of the narratives do contain overt, albeit unsystematic, statements about the nature of the divine, about occasional religious practices, and even hint at weak doctrine. What then is the nature of these pronouncements if they are not subject to normative truth tests?

Without any exception that I can locate, each of the stories of the *bibīs* and *pīrs*, the life narrative or bios, conforms neatly to the trajectory of the genre Western literary critics call *romance*. While romance is a widespread category, it is not at all unknown to India, which is to say that while there is no one Indic language genre category that can undeniably be translated as romance—with the possible exception of the early modern *premākhyān* or *prem kahānī*<sup>20</sup>—that type of tale lies at the heart of the Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, as well as the Persian *Shāh Nāmeḥ*, and is rife in the Buddhist story literature and in the literatures of every vernacular on the subcontinent. For those who tremble at the thought of using any term that is not indigenous—as if refusing to adopt anything other than an indigenous category actually clarifies our understanding—the term is not being deployed here to impute to these texts some ontological reality. Rather, the term is being deployed as an indicator of authorial strategy to help us understand *what these narratives do*, how stories that we call romance accomplish their work. The first step is structural, to identify the predictable markers of romance, then the next step will be to look at the process of narrative, and from that to determine the goal of this kind of writing, which I argue is quite the opposite of some doctrinal or theological assertion, but just as compelling, if not more so, in its persuasive effects on its audience.

Of the many studies, Frye’s *The Secular Scripture*<sup>21</sup> gives us a good starting point because he is primarily concerned with the structure of the romance narrative.

20. See Behl, *Love’s Subtle Magic*. As previously noted, the best comparative study of the Bangla *premākhyān* is by Mantajur Rahmān Taraphdār; see Taraphdār, *Bāmlā romāṇṭik kāvyer āoyādhi-hindī paṭbhūmi*. See also Oyākil Āhmad, *Bāmlā romāṇṭik praṇayopākhyān*, 6th printing (Dhākā: Khān Brāḍārs eyāṇḍ Kompāni, 2004); and Māhmudā Khānam, *Madhyajugīya bāmlā sāhitya hindī suphī kāvyer prabhāv* (Dhākā: Bāmlā Ekāḍemī, 1410 BS [2003]). Francesca Orsini has addressed this issue of vernacular names for romances in an essay titled “The Social History of a Genre: *Kathas* across Languages in Early Modern North India,” *Medieval History Journal* 20, no. 1 (2017): 1–37. See also Orsini, “Texts and Tellings: *Kathas* in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature, and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge, UK: OpenBook Publishers, 2015), 327–58.

21. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1974–75 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). Though Todorov used many of Frye’s propositions about the structure of literary works, in *The Secular Scripture*, Frye is not willing to go quite as far as Todorov regarding the truth question because of the distinction he makes between

Briefly, according to Frye, the trajectory of the narrative is focused on the protagonist, male or female, who descends into some kind of confusion or illusion and then reverses that descent with a world-changing ascent. In this latter phase of ascent, the hero struggles to set the world right, addresses or overtly challenges morality and law, and counters with heroism the antagonist's negative counter response to the troubling moral situation. In all of our tales of *pīrs* and *bibīs*, that portion of the biographical image that is concerned with the religious ideal provides the resolution to these challenges to morality and law and is used to establish or reestablish a morally ordered world at story's end, or at least push the characters in that direction. Or, perhaps more accurately, the actions of the hero both create and investigate these ideals, which are often derived from nimble situation creativity prompted by the needs of the plot. These stories, however, are about action; there is little to no psychological or moral "development" in any character. Their public actions define them entirely, and problems are resolved accordingly.

Following Frye's narrative trajectory, the descent into illusion manifests itself in both personal and social confusion, trouble, war, or ignorance, all of which are characterized by meandering adventure, loss of identity, displacement of rightful role, and uncertain action that often leads to the underworld or some metaphoric equivalent. Vows and curses lead characters to descend into the darker realms of illusion and ignorance that routinely involve gender confusions, society with animals, deployment of extreme violence, and cunning deception in a world of fraud as tests of the hero's or heroine's fortitude. Once the hero or heroine recognizes the extremes of his or her alienation and divorce from what is good and proper, the struggle to make the world right signals the ascent. One can easily imagine the ascent as the heroes and heroines salvage what is left of their families or kingdoms to reestablish order. The themes are often of escape and survival. While in Frye's schema, the ascent often culminates in the leading character's own destruction, these resolutions tend to leave the world a better place, or, failing that, put into place the elements necessary to correct it after their own demise. It is, in Frye's terms, a predictably utopian outcome.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly in the tales of the historical *pīrs*, martyrdom provides one plotline that results in that final destruction of the hero. In Sufi hagiography, martyrdom is generally understood to be a self-sacrifice that leads to the further establishment and spread of Islam on earth; the protagonist gains as reward a coveted spot in paradise. This well-known and often idealized pattern is repeated throughout the Islamic world. But the fictional *pīrs* and *bibīs* of Bengal generally come to a less violent end, indeed, if any proper "end" is recorded, but never without going

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myth and romance. He writes, "The anxiety of society, when it urges the authority of a myth and the necessity of believing it, seems to be less to proclaim its truth than to prevent anyone from questioning it" (16).

22. Frye, *Secular Scripture*, chap. 4, "Themes of Descent."

through a series of challenging adventures, often involving conflict, through which the hero or heroine establishes a pattern of action that leads to a more profoundly sound world.

To illustrate how these features are incorporated into the narratives, we will turn to a prolegomena of a larger work titled the *Mānikpīr jahurānāmā* of Jaidi or Jayaraddhi, which can be translated as “celebrating the glorious appearance (*jahurā*) of Mānikpīr.” The text is a previously untranslated tale from an incomplete manuscript held in the library at Viśva Bhārati in Santiniketan, West Bengal, and transcribed by Pāñcānan Maṇḍal.<sup>23</sup> The date of the manuscript is 1817, and from internal evidence I would judge the composition to be not more than several decades earlier than that date, perhaps as early as 1780 or 1790. We do not know if the scribe is the author or some other. This particular piece illustrates the nature of these materials in their unedited form. Most of the so-called *musalmāni bāṅglā* texts that have made it into print have been subject to very inconsistent editing, starting minimally with seemingly innocuous standardization of spellings, but often intervening much further by the inclusion of paratextual apparatus in the form of dividing the unbroken text into chapters, giving titles to chapters, and even substituting modern words for older, and in some cases transposing couplets or the feet within couplets or rearranging syntax to a more easily read modern standard.<sup>24</sup> I can confirm, however, that Pāñcānan Maṇḍal presented the text “as is.” Though the text is a fragment of a larger manuscript, it contains the discrete story of the descent of Mānik Pīr’s father from heaven at the command of Āllā, and the exploits leading to the birth of his more famous son. It compresses the elements of romance noted above, which makes it ideal for illustrative purposes, but at the same time manages in a short span to convey the incredible complexity of a seemingly simple tale of the sort generally dismissed by those who have examined the history of Islam in the Bangla-speaking region. I have inserted limited explanatory footnotes and a few paragraph breaks, but the author’s signature line (*bhaṇitā*) marks the ends of sections as he has created them. Those signature lines are italicized and in the author’s own voice, though sometimes in the third person. I have refrained from smoothing out some of the precipitous transitions, or lack thereof, especially in dialogues where abrupt speech (not marked by tag clauses) is typical of a dramatic enactment on stage, specifically in this case the *jātrā* form; in other passages the speech is attributive. Where I have inserted a connecting or

23. Jaidi or Jayaraddhi, “Mānikpīrer jahurānāmā,” in *Punthi paricay*, ed. Pāñcānan Maṇḍal (Śāntiniketan: Viśvabhārati, 1958), 305–18; MS no. 936, 12–1/2 folios, dtd. 1224 BS [ca. 1817], incomplete. Asim Roy summarizes the tale; see Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 241–45.

24. For the classic study of the nature and function of the various paratextual strategies, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

modifying word, I have adopted the standard convention of placing that word or phrase in square brackets.

I have also included what I consider to be significant Bangla words in parentheses. Many of these are, from the perspective of the study of religion, potentially technical terms, and their connection to their Arabic, Persian, or Sanskrit antecedents will be relatively obvious. So as we noted in the prefatory material, one will see Āllā as it is spelled in Bangla, *phakir* or *phakīr* rather than *fakīr*, *tapisvyā* rather than *tapasya*, and so forth. In many instances the scribe will spell the same word as many as four different ways, including the author's name as Jaidi, Jaiddi, Jayardhhi, and Jayaradhhi—and I have opted to retain those different spellings.<sup>25</sup> Clearly similar to the very incomplete anonymous manuscript cited in the epigraph of this chapter, the translation of Jaidi's *Mānikpīrer jahurānāmā*, or *The Tale of the Glory of Mānik Pīr*, follows here in its entirety as transcribed by Pāñcānan Maṇḍal.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.3 PROLEGOMENA TO THE MĀNIKPĪRER JAHURĀNĀMĀ OF JAIDI

One day Āllā<sup>27</sup> Sāheb took his seat in his *dargā* shrine and began to tell of the twelve saints (*āule*). Then Khodā asked who would take up his words and go to the earth to spread his fame and glory (*jahurā*). “That one who will be entrusted with the burden of the world, will in the Kali Age descend as an *avatār* named Mānik. He will speak to everyone about Haji, Gāji, Māhāmad, Rahim, Karim, Rasul, Paygambhar, Ijjat, and Mādār.” Just then Badar, servant of Āllā, presented himself. “Merciful and gracious Lord, I will go spread the word (*jāhir*)<sup>28</sup> with your blessings. Send me to earth, if it pleases you. Āllā, please give me my instructions now.” Then Āllā spoke of the many and great virtues of his servant Badar, but warned, “If you fall into the hands of a woman, she will distract your resolve.” Badar responded, “Of that I am completely ignorant, please explain.” When he [Āllā] was finished, he again enu-

25. It would be useful to refer to the “Conventions Regarding Transliteration and Nomenclature” in the front matter to see why and how the decisions for rendering this and the other texts were made.

26. See n. 23 above.

27. Throughout this manuscript, the word is frequently also rendered as *āllā*, but this particular scribe routinely deploys the rep */-r/* to indicate the *japhalā* */-y/*, producing *ālyā*; the geminate consonants, already doubled in pronunciation, are further exaggerated by the *japhalā* (here, *-ll-* effectively becomes *-lll-*) and, for this scribe, that *japhalā* also substitutes for a long final */ā/*, which reasonably approximates the Arabic pronunciation. For reasons of recognition, I have chosen to retain a single spelling of Āllā; this is the only editorial intervention with respect to orthography that I have introduced. Orthography in manuscripts is highly inconsistent and often completely idiosyncratic to the scribe, and with the exception just noted, I have left the multiple spellings to convey something of the local nature of the text. The editor of the print edition, Pāñcānan Maṇḍal, is to be lauded for his strict transcriptions in the volumes of the *Puñthi paricay*, choosing a very light editorial touch.

28. The spellings *jāhir* and *jāhirā* (derived from Arabic *ẓāhir*) are used interchangeably, meaning “to make public” or “make known or manifest” the splendor of Āllā, often glossed as proselytizing or preaching.

merated Badar's many qualities; upon receiving this benediction, Badar begged his leave. Badar bowed his head to Āllā, seated in his court (*darbār*). Khodā's servant then gave precise instructions of his mission. Badar replied, "Khodā, may I suggest that I should go to the earth dressed as a *phakir mursid*." Āllā then furnished him with everything needed for the garb of a *phakir* with attention to every detail: the Summoner (*dāoān*)<sup>29</sup> received the rope-belt, tight-fitting pajamas for leggings, short cotton trousers, a staff, a robe, a horse Duldul,<sup>30</sup> and in his hand a crop of thorny bamboo. His face was covered with a strikingly handsome beard. He sported a necklace at his throat, a peaked hat on his head, and gems and jewels that glistened in the light. When he [Badar] put on his shoulder bag, Āllā opened his mouth in a wide smile of approval, and the Summoner gazed at the three worlds therein. His faithful follower (*momin*) affirmed to Khodā his commitment; then, prostrating himself before Āllā, he departed.

*May the mother of the Master (kartā) be blessed, finding riches everywhere.*<sup>31</sup>

With the names of Āllā resounding in his mouth, Badar Sāheb went. On his way to preach (*jāhirā*) in the city of Delhi, he first landed in the city of Lahore. In his *phakir's* garb, he begged in the streets of Lahore. Muttering the incantation "*dām dām mādār*"—by the very breath of Mādār—he could cover great distances.<sup>32</sup> As soon as men and women heard the *phakir*, they would take out four cowries on a golden plate, "Oh Summoner *muni*, please take these alms, please accept them!" But the

29. The title *dāoān* refers to the person who calls out the *da'wa* (Arabic) or *dāoyā/dāoā* (Bangla), summoning people to join the *ummā*, the issuing of the invitation, which is a form of proselytizing, but with implicit intention to establish Islamic conventions of governance and law (Arabic *shari'a*), not just to invite individuals to participate. It will be translated as the Summoner throughout. From time to time the scribe will write *deoān*, which would be an alternate spelling of *deoyān* (from Persian *dewān*) rather than *dāoān*, but this title of minister or chief officer of state only distantly works if he is considered the minister of Āllā's court. For this author, however, this term and several other technical designations for the courts seem to function as honorifics as much as specific stations.

30. Coincidentally (?) Duldul is the same name as Ali's mount.

31. "Finding riches everywhere" is literally "finding gems in the mud."

32. The Sufi followers of Badi 'al-Din Madār were famous for their self-scrutiny (Arabic *muḥāsaba*) and self-contemplation (Arabic *murāqaba*), and silent forms of *dhikr/zikir* (Bangla *jikir*) including recitation of verses of the Qur'an coupled with breath control (*habs-i dam*), which seems to be suggested here. For more on their practices and the ways scholars have reported on their apparent transgressive practices, especially the *malangs*, see Ute Falasch, "The Islamic Mystic Tradition in India: The Madari Sufi Brotherhood," in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation, and Conflict*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmed and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi: Esha Beteille, Social Science Press, 2004), 256–72. For the more miraculous tales and local Bengali color, see the section on Mādār Pīr in Girindranāth Dās, *Bāmlā pīr sāhityer kathā*, 1st ed., 321–27, which also includes verbatim the entire section titled "Dām mādār o kālendar panth" in Sen, *Islāmi Bānglā sāhitya*, 143–47. The story he transcribes tells how Mādār Pīr engaged in a lively game of hide and seek with Baḍa Pīr when it was time to offer *śirni*, then how at the invitation of Āllā he was fetched by the angels Jibril and Ejraḥīl to receive direct instruction from God. Āli, Bibi Phatemā, the two *imāms* Hāsan and Hosen and Hajrat Nabi, the Prophet, were all present. The section ends with a description of Mādār's unconventional habits and his penchant for meditation and silent recitation of the names. Sen cites his source as the *Śāh mādārēr kāhini*, collected by Chāyād Āli Khondkār, but unfortunately gives no bibliographic information nor was I was able to locate it.



Summoner replied, “I will not take any such alms.” The devout (*momin*) servant of God (*bāndār*) said that he could never take alms in his hands unless he was [the donor’s] spiritual preceptor (*mursid*). They contemplated over and again what the servant of God (*bāndār*) said. “Since the moment we were born, we have never known a proper preceptor (*mursid*).” The Summoner explained patiently what this entailed. “Chant three times ‘Ed Āllā! Ed Āllā!’—only then will I accept alms from your hands, otherwise it would be counted an offense in the court (*darbār*) of Āllā.” When they heard this, this servant of God (*bāndār*) became their preceptor (*mursid*). Everyone in the city of Lahore flocked to give him alms. Some brought tray upon tray, others platters full. Some said, “May we ever hold him in our hearts!” Some women found themselves weeping on account of the *phakir*. Others pleaded, “Let us accompany you!” The *phakir* comforted everyone there, “I am going to the city of Delhi to preach (*jāhir*).” And so it was that he left Lahore.

. . .

[small break in manuscript]

Śrī Śrī Durgā, Śrī Śrī Durgā, Śrī Śrī Durgā, Śrī Śrī Durgā,  
 Śrī Śrī Durgā, Śrī Śrī Durgā, Śrī Śrī Durgā  
 Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ, Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ, Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ,  
 Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ, Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ, Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ<sup>33</sup>

. . .

[section of MS missing]

. . . mother held [him] in her heart. And so in this way Badar left Sāntipur and soon arrived at Sāhābājār, where he conversed with Golāmālī Sāheb. “I shall go to Cāṭigāṇ [Chittagong] in order to make known the Divine’s eminence.” From there the Summoner crossed the rivers and not long after arrived at Saptagrām, the place where Gāṅgā Devī descended. Badar Mursid went to that place, and then he came to the landing *ghāt* of Triveni, a place where rishis [*risi*] and sages [*muni*] practiced their penance (*tapisvyā*), so stationary were they that reeds had grown up to cover their bodies. Hundreds of sages (*muni*) performed their austerities there. Some had restless eyes, while others had restless minds—and for that lack of concentration they had failed to gain the vision of Gaṅgā.

So then the *phakir* addressed the crowd. “Would you explain to me why you are sitting here stoically waiting?” Some said to themselves, “What is the lowly shaved head (*neḍiyā*)<sup>34</sup> talking about?” Another said, “We’re undertaking austerities (*tapisyā*) for Gaṅgā, what’s it to you?” As soon as he heard this snappy retort, Badar covered his ears with his hands and muttered, “Āllā! Āllā! What an awful and stupid thing to

33. The scribe’s religious orientation is suggested by his choice of the names used to seal up the rupture of the manuscript with the vocative call to the goddess Durgā and the god Nārāyaṇ.

34. The term *neḍa* or *neḍā* is a shorn or tonsured individual, but *neḍe* is sometimes used to designate a *bauddha* or *vaiṣṇav* mendicant or, in a more vulgar tone, a *musalmāni* beggar; regardless of the specific reference, the tone is despective.

say! He who, in his mind, chants (*japi*) “There is no God but God . . .”<sup>35</sup> will turn the tide. Seated in his aerial vehicle (*bimān*), Khodā will appear here. With an unsullied heart, call Gaṅgā! Pay heed to what I say. Or better yet, let me invoke [Gaṅgā] and may you behold for yourselves.” When Badar spoke these words to these spiritual practitioners (*padri*),<sup>36</sup> it was like pouring ghee on a glowing fire.

“Where do you come from, *phakir*, what insignificant backwater? We have been seated here for twelve years performing our austerities (*tapasya*), so long that reeds have grown over our bodies. Still the mother of Brahmā has not yet appeared. From just what place, *phakir*, do you derive such overbearing self-importance?”

The Summoner retorted, “See for yourselves my manifest glory (*jāhiri*)!” Badar said this, flying into a rage. He sat on a tiger skin and began to practice a form of austerity (*tapisyā*) with great diligence.<sup>37</sup> May the power of the Lord ferry me across right now! Gaṅgā please show yourself, your elder brother is calling you!” As Badar uttered these words, he concentrated on Gaṅgā and soon Gaṅgādevī herself appeared, bubbling with pleasure. No sooner had they gained sight of Gaṅgādevī than they headed straight to Brahmālok as four-armed (*caturbhuj*) rishis (*risi*) and sages (*muni*). As he watched, Badar mulled over the spectacle. After watching the spiritual men (*pādri*) become four-armed, ‘I shall see just how much virtue and power lies in those lotus feet.’ He began to call out, “Hear me, hear me, Mother Gaṅgā!”

*The lowly and poor Jaidi sings through a boon granted by Gajamānik, the one who shines like a magnificent ruby. Every one present who hears this tale will be blessed with wealth and sons.*

Badar began to call out, “Gaṅgā, Gaṅgā.” Devī did not normally come when a *jaban* called, but Badar wooed, “I want to see your face, to see your figure with my own eyes.” Gaṅgā replied, “I’ll show you, if you can survive the onslaught of my seven waves.” When the Summoner heard this he experienced a nervous thrill. “With an appeal to Āllā I shall indeed withstand the seven waves!” Mother Gaṅgā then manifested herself in seven massive breakers. Seeing that enormous swell, Badar realized he was in dire straits, but he centered his mind, remembering the Creator (*kartā*). “Ed Āllā! Ed Āllā! Just this one time, this one time!” And so Badar called Āllā to mind with this chant and Āllā, seated in his aerial car (*bimān*), came to know of

35. The spelling is typical of the manuscript: the text reads *ilāhilerllā*, a shorthand for the Arabic *shahada*: *lā ‘ilāha ‘illāllāh, muḥammadun rasūlullāh*. It is precisely this kind of expression that is labeled pidgin Arabic and has reinforced the classification of these texts by literary scholars as doggerel and of no cultural or literary value, though in this case, with the scribe’s propensity for using the *reph* to indicate a *japhalā* (n. 27 above), its pronunciation is much closer than an average reader might reckon: *ilāhilellā*. Unfortunately, that negative characterization fails to take into account the near impossibility of rendering Arabic or Persian in an accurate phonetic transliteration in Bangla.

36. The word *padri* or *pādri* is *pādari* or *pādārī*, technically a Christian clergyman or padre; it is not clear here if he means to be disrespectful of the sages or if he is using it as one more equivalent term for holy man, or more likely both, in a strategy of recognizing equivalence.

37. In addition to “diligence,” the expression *ujā karya* invokes images of “reversing the tide,” that is, going upstream, a typical yogic expression for a *tantrik*-style *sāadhanā* that seeks to reverse the unfolding of the world in order to go back to the source of all creative power. The expression is adopted by *vaiṣṇav sahaṅgiyās* and *nāth jogis*. The use of the tiger skin for meditation is a classic image for *yogis* in traditional India.

everything. Āllā immediately called out to the Wind, “You will summon Gaṅgā right away in order to tie her up in [Badar’s] shoulder bag. Assuming the form of a white fly, the Wind flew with haste. When he reached Badar Mursid, his words tumbled out in a rush. But no sooner had he heard than Badar obeyed and opened up his shoulder bag. Gaṅgā Mātā towered above him in seven massive breakers, and those seven rollers swelled even higher, reaching a frighteningly enormous height. The tidal waves reached for the sky and bore down, violently shaking the land. Obediently and calmly remembering the Creator (*kartā*), he spread open his shoulder bag and impelled Gaṅgādevī to slip quietly inside. He carefully, purposefully cinched the pouch tight with a rope and Gaṅgā remained trapped in the bag. And in this way was the Bhāgirathi subdued.<sup>38</sup>

Badar then decided that he would now make known his majesty, just as the Creator (*kartā*) instructed. “Today I will plant jute along the river. I will draw attention (*jāhīrā*) [to God’s greatness] by planting the jute.” By the clever intervention of Āllā did the plants sprout quickly. In a single day the sprouts popped out leaves. Within a mere seven days their stalks shot up, roots had grown, flowers blossomed, and their slender fruits emerged. Soon Badar was cooking this leafy vegetable along the river. “Take this, Āllā; I make the first offering to you, honoring my word.”

Gaṅgā then pleaded, “Please release me. I now realize that you are indeed my senior, my elder brother from times past.” Badar responded, “Gaṅgā, let me set one condition. If you promise you are now calmed and exhausted, I shall open the knotted mouth of the pouch and release you.” When Gaṅgā acknowledged her submission and the mouth of the bag opened, the waters exploded out as if ignited by fire, and that watery deluge engulfed the Triveni. It was from that time that the river course was bent like a hunchback. Badar said, “Gaṅgā, I have released you, but Gaṅgādevī, I must now press one urgent request. O esteemed one, please transport stones to me here. I shall arrange to display His majesty here at the Triveni.” Once she heard the Summoner’s request, she could not avoid it, so she hauled stones from the Setubandha.<sup>39</sup> By the magical action of the Goddess Devī, the stones floated on the ocean’s waters. One by one they floated all the way upriver until they reached that place.

When he finally caught sight of the stones, Badar was delighted and immediately summoned there Visvakarmā, the celestial architect. Badar supplicated him, offering betel and flowers. “Over the next seven days and nights, please construct a building for a *masjid*.” Visāi replied, “Badar, that will be sufficient for your request, but you must maintain darkness for all seven days and nights. I will not stay past the moment the dawn breaks the dark of night. No matter how far along the building construction has gotten, I will move out.” Badar responded, “Visāi, what kind of talk is this? I shall call on the night this very day to ensure the nighttime prevails.” And so the Summoner called the night and explained everything. Visvakarmā began to construct the building. Two days passed smoothly in this activity, but Āllā, seated

38. Bhāgirathi is the name of one of the two headstreams of the Gaṅgā and the preferred name for the Gaṅgā in that part of Bengal.

39. This is the legendary land bridge of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic that was believed to connect present-day Sri Lanka with the mainland of India.

in his aerial vehicle (*bimān*), began to express alarm that Visāi would erect a great building such that Makkā, Madīnā, and heaven itself would be humbled in comparison. Considering all this, Āli was summoned by Khodā for the sake of honor: “Assume the form of a white crow and wing your way quickly.” As soon as the Creator’s (*kartā*) command registered, he moved with alacrity. Perching on a branch of a magnolia tree,<sup>40</sup> the crow began to caw rather raucously. On cue, dawn broke, blotting out the moon, and the Master Builder himself dropped his axe and scurried away, the structure only half completed.

When Badar saw Visāi flee, he began to call for Daphargā Gāji.<sup>41</sup> Soon Daphagā Gāji arrived in the presence of the esteemed Badar. “You stay put here at the Triveni where you will receive offerings of flowers and *sinni*.<sup>42</sup> I shall extol in song your glory and virtue throughout the world of humans. I shall place the [image of the] egg of the fabled *beṅgamā* and *beṅgama* birds<sup>43</sup> on your banner.” And so Badar handed over the Triveni to Daphagā Gāji and with a light heart headed toward the city of Cāṭṭigām [Chittagong].

The Summoner Badar moved on with clearheaded intention, his mind and heart unclouded by ambiguity. He surfed across the Gaṅgā on his wooden sandals, then along the way he held assemblies (*majlis*) for the next three days. The Summoner shared what was in his heart with the company of the faithful. Badar said, “O faithful *momin*, let me just explain one thing. I shall visit his highness, the Bādsā,<sup>44</sup> Sultan of Dilli.” The faithful replied, “Do go and pay a visit to the honorable Bādsā.” [And Badar replied,] “Afterwards I shall return and make known Āllā’s magnificence in the city of Cāṭṭigā.” With this plan in mind, the Summoner embarked.

40. Magnolia is *cānpā* (*Michelia campaka*) with its distinctive yellow and white flower, common to all of Bengal.

41. Spellings alternate between *daphargā*, *daphaga*, and *daphagā*. Daphargā Gāji would appear to be a variant spelling of Dafar Khān Gāji (Za’far Khān Ghāzi) at Triveni, where there is a *dargā* in his name. He is sometimes identified with Zafar Khān Gāji, a thirteenth-century warrior-saint from Murshidabad who was involved in the conquest of lower Bengal, but whether it is an attempt to use a historical *pīr* in the narrative or one who is modeled on the historical is impossible to determine. For more, see N. B. Roy, “Studies in Islamic History,” *Visva Bharati Annals* 4 (1951): 70–84. I am indebted to Projit Mukharji for the reference. Further, see Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1975), 196–97. The half-built mosque may be an oblique reference to the *dargā* of Dafar Khān Gāji (d. 1313) which, according to Haq, is located within an old temple on the site, which would be consistent with the structure erected by Viśvakarma in the tale.

42. The traditional offering to these *pīrs* is *sinni* or *śirṇi*, a mixture of rice flour, banana, jaggery or sugar, betel, and a mix of spices.

43. The *beṅgamā* bird is fabled because of its ability to speak; it appears in many popular tales, for instance, see Kavi Kaṇva, “The Fabled *Beṅgamā* Bird and the Stupid Prince: Kavi Kaṇva’s *Akhoti Pālā*,” in Tony K. Stewart, trans., *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 67–94.

44. The term is *bādsā*, and in this manuscript it is also spelled *badśā*, *bādsā*, and *bādsva*; because of the Bangla phonology, all three are pronounced the same: baad-shah; English is generally Badshah. I have retained the different original different spellings throughout.

[Badar] went and presented himself in the court (*darbār*) of the Bādsā. In his dress as a *phakir*, the Summoner<sup>45</sup> carried a peacock feather fan.<sup>46</sup> He gave every appearance of the full moon in dark sky.<sup>47</sup> The Bādsā then inquired after the Summoner, “Explain the reason you have come here to my court (*darbār*).” The *phakir* replied, “Bādsvā, please honor my request. I am only begging a small favor, promise me you will abide by it. First commit yourself, then I shall tell you.” When the Minister (*ujir*) listened to this request, he immediately considered the implications. But when the Bādsvā heard, he was instantly ignited. [The Minister] took it up and threatened Badar in a blustery rage. “What kind of *phakir* are you? Where do you come from? Who do you think you are? How dare you speak to my Lord this way!” Badar retorted, “Bādsvā, I have no fear of you. Know now that your soon-to-be son-in-law is sitting here in your court (*darbār*).”

The Minister advised the Bādsvā to listen, “Have him bound and throw him into prison for three days.” The Bādsvā was seething at the *phakir*’s words and with a violent outburst ordered the guard to do it. Hearing the Bādsvā’s command, his personal security detail pummeled the *phakir*, some yanked his beard, and others verbally threatened him. Thinking about the welfare of the faithful, the Summoner devised a plan: “Today I will humble the arrogance of this Bādsvā.”

Everyone was astonished to see the Summoner suddenly withdraw from sight. Sulking over the rebuke within the court (*darbār*), Badar, the Summoner, considering the faithful, disappeared into the forest. In a clearing where the undergrowth was trampled down, the Summoner took his seat, his mind at ease. He thought, “With my retinue of tigers, I shall capture the Bādsvā’s daughter.”

*The poor and lowly Garib Jaidi sings: May you shower your grace! Grant a boon of wealth and a son for the ones in charge.*

As his rage welled up again, Badar summoned all the tigers. Heeding his call, hundreds of thousands of tigers came forward in leaps and bounds. The tiger that led the streak was called by the name of Hum. Arriving with the tigresses, he proffered a royal salute. Then Kēd and Mēd arrived in the august presence of Badar. Gobāgā and Sobāgā ran with soaring leaps and bounds. Jaṭiyā and Maṭiyā came running with

45. When Badar is in the court of the *bādsā*, the scribe has titled him *deoyān*, minister or *dewan*, rather than *dāoān* (see n. 30 above). Because the function of the traditional *dewan* does not make sense for Badar, I take *deoyān* to be an alternate spelling of *dāoān* and have translated both terms as Summoner throughout.

46. Peacock feathers and fans and fly whisks made from them have long associations with royalty and sanctity in South Asia. It was not uncommon for many Sufis to carry peacock feathers, and they were a common sight in courts. It is not clear if the *beṅgama* bird egg mentioned a few lines earlier is a similar association with the ostrich egg in South Asian and Middle Eastern contexts. For more on this, see Nile Green, “Ostrich Eggs and Peacock Feathers: Sacred Objects as Cultural Exchange between Christianity and Islam,” *Al-Masāq* 18, no. 1 (2006): 27–78, esp. 60–62. For contemporary use, see Samuel Landell Mills, “The Hardware of Sanctity: Anthropomorphic Objects in Bangladeshi Sufism,” in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (London: Routledge, 1998), 31–54.

47. *Badar*, of course, means “moon,” an image that will play through the text.

the spirit and dignity of lions. The two brothers Cāndā and Cilya could leap a *yojana*—about five miles<sup>48</sup>—in leaps and bounds. Cāmar and Sāmar came along, running from house to house, and right behind them the tiger Kālā—the Black Death—sprang up and down. Taraṅgini, the Wavy One, rolled in like a swelling breaker, while Gigantic or Baḍa Humā plodded forward like a towering mountain. The pair Āblāk and Sāmlāk came running, and Nākesvari bounded with a single stride to the head of the frontrunners. Like the wind itself, the brothers Sonā and Dhanā breezed along. In but one single night they could traverse the distance ordinarily taking eighteen days. The four—Ud and Bud, Āmāne and Sāmāne—together came, running roughshod over anything that obstructed their way. Mātaāle and Sātaāle were accompanied by three hundred thousand others, and by the end twelve hundred thousand tigers came ready for a romping good play. One by one the Summoner received each of the tigers in the rally.

*The poor Garib Jaidi sings, focused on Mānik the Emissary.*<sup>49</sup>

Badar spoke, “Tigers, listen carefully to what I ask. Please enumerate to me the strengths and weaknesses of your many violent propensities.” One by one all of the tigers of the rally offered their take. The tiger Hum stepped forward in the assembly and began to speak: “I always announce ‘I have arrived, I am here’ with a fittingly loud roar. The heavens, the world of men, and the nether world stand silenced by my call.” A tigress then said, “Listen, Summoner, you who are a sage (*muni*), you need only give the command and I will turn the world upside down.” Gobāgā and Sobāgā then spoke. “Let us elaborate our style. In the murky waters of the marsh thick with arum we lie in wait. Just when men squat down there to piss we leap and fall on their necks, then drag them away.” Ked and Med spoke: “Listen, Summoner, to our techniques. We grab our humans by the nape of the neck and drain them of their blood—glub glub—in one long swallow.” The tiger Jaṭe lamented, “One time I crouched along the edges of the marsh, after jumping from a large *jiuli* tree.<sup>50</sup> I landed in a bog of those prickly seed pods of the castor oil plant<sup>51</sup> that were floating right in the middle of a cast of crabs. Just as I lunged for the neck [of a human], the crabs’ claws ripped open my scrotum.” Sobāgā added, “O Summoner, hear my submission. One day I showed up at Kājipāḍā, and as I was waiting under the eaves of the house to hunt, [someone] threw out the excess water from boiling rice and scorched my face.” Jaṭiyā and Maṭiyā spoke in turn. “Listen, revered Summoner, two of my paws’ claws got snagged deep in the arm of a man.” The tigers Cāndā and Cile spoke: “I was cheered when I located the home of a bard, a public narrator of popular tales. On the day I landed up at the home of that versifier, I found the door bolted and could not

48. Some calculate the *yojana* as a fraction under five miles, while others calculate it closer to eight or nine miles, clearly a long distance here.

49. Emissary is *deoān*, the same title given Badar (see n. 30 above). When the term is used with Mānik, I have translated it as Emissary to distinguish from his father Badar.

50. Also called *jikā*, a large deciduous tree used for timber (*Odina woodier* or *Lannea grandis*); its flowers are used in Ayurvedic medicine for *vattha* disorders and have anti-inflammatory capabilities.

51. The castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) has prickly fruit pods that hold three seeds, the poisonous seeds of course being the primary interest in the plant for its medicinal oil.

open it, so I climbed onto the roof when, all of a sudden, someone rammed a red hot poker—a prickly stick, sharp as a needle—right up my anus. Listen, O Summoner, Sage (*muni*), when I jumped, I fell and it hurt! The ground was really hard!”

Cāmāre and Sāmāre, Ghaṛa and Ghaṛe—each of these four tigers agreed, “I am capable of running nonstop for about five miles.” The tiger Kālā, the Black One, then said, “I am Kālā of the Sea. Know that my weakness concerns the resounding crack of thunder—when it booms the hair bristles on my neck and I freeze, I cannot open my eyes, paralyzed I cannot move a muscle.” Nāpāne and Jhāpāne spoke: “Listen carefully. At the first sniff of a human we are spooked and flee helter-skelter.” The pair of Taraṅgini and Śuraṅgini laughed, “We crouched down on some pieces of lumber being joined by a carpenter. On the opposite side of the road a number of people were passing by. Of course our greedy desires got the better of us, so we raced toward them. We roared ferociously as if engaged in a great hunt, but truth be told, it was because our nut sacks had stayed put, hard snagged on one of the carpenter’s pegs!” The senior tiger, Baḍa Hum spoke. “Once when I called my sister, my roar caused a poor pregnant woman, huddled in a dark corner, to abort.” When the two tigers called Abalā and Sāmālā were summoned, they flew like the wind, a swift death. The tiger Nākeśvari boasted, “Listen O sage (*muni*) Summoner, I can turn your world completely upside down!” The two brothers, Sonā and Dhanā, reported the following: “In a single night we can cover the distance [a human] needs eighteen days to cover.” The four brothers Ud, Bud, Āmāle, and Sāmāle promised, “There is no protection, no escape for any human who lives in the forest. We move from house to house breaking down all the doors. Do understand that these are qualities of us four brothers.”

The tigers Mātāle and Sātāle were joined by three hundred thousand others. And altogether twelve hundred thousand made a show of their prowess while romping in fun. The Summoner was filled with pleasure to see the gathering, and then this devoted servant addressed Cādā and Cile once again. Badar said, “Tigers all, please honor my command. Fetch the daughter of the Bādsavā from the palace!” The tigers Cādā, Cile, Hum, and Nākeśvari all spoke: “We will bring [princess] Dudbibī and place her at your feet.” No sooner had they received the order than they left as a group. They soon had the dwelling of the Bādsavā in their sights. The dark of that night was ink-thick all around. The tigers easily leapt on top of and then over the wall, and they soon entered inside the great palace residence. The princess Dudbibī was sleeping in her own room all alone. Lamps were lit all around as far as one could see. A mosquito net of delicately thin decorative gauze was draped from the four posters of the bed. Deep in sleep, Dudbibī remained blissfully innocent. Each of the four tigers lifted up one of the legs making a four-bearer litter. All four jumped in unison to the top of the wall; the Bādsavā’s daughter, still deep in sleep, registered nothing. The princess was stretched out on the bed like a ruby gemstone. The tigers seemed to make the bed float in the air as they entered the forest where Badar sat serene. They brought Dudbibī and placed her there within his view. The Summoner pulled up the mosquito net. To his mind’s utter confusion, [it was as if] two moons had risen in that one spot. The Summoner gazed on the stunning countenance<sup>52</sup> of

52. The letter ষ, /y/, in যুরত, /yurat/, is an obvious and not uncommon orthographic miscue for ষ,



the Bibi with his own eyes. Badar whispered to her over and over, “Wake up, sit up,” but the Bibi lay completely insensate, lost in her sleep. As he gazed intently, Badar was befuddled, inexplicably bewildered.

The Bibi [awoke] and, nonplussed, alertly said, “Tell me, just who are you? And why have you brought me into the forest?” The Summoner replied, “Listen carefully to our situation. When I was in the court, the Bādsavā humiliated me. For that reason I summoned all the tigers to capture you. Now you must marry me and all will be well.” Wits about her, Dudbibī replied, “I have one stipulation. In the Tretā Age I was devoted to Rām Nārāyaṇ. After that I lived in Gokul as a cowherdess (*gupini*). In the home of Nanda and Nandini, I always fed [Kṛṣṇa] butter. Assume your four-armed form and show it to me. I promise that if you can do that, I will marry you.” Badar instructed her, “Bibi, please do as I request: close your eyes and you will behold that very form.” Bibi closed her eyes and experienced a thrill. Casting off his garb as a *phakir*, Badar assumed the form of Lord Rām. He held a bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right, while Lakṣmana held a royal parasol above his head. When the daughter of the Bādsavā beheld this, she was astonished. Then Badar in turn transformed into the *avatār* Kānāi, holding the conch, discus, club, and lotus. He then held a garland of wildflowers and played the flute with Balarām at his side; he stood beneath a *kadamba*<sup>53</sup> tree, revealing himself to be Kṛṣṇa. Rippling with pleasure, Bibi draped a garland over his neck, and the couple solemnized a *gandharva* style marriage of mutual consent.<sup>54</sup> The night passed, and in the morning the sun rose on the happy couple.

*The lowly Jaidi sings, meditating on the gem Mānik. Badar’s actions will make them both happy, while the princess’s mother will be calling out in a panic, “My child, my child!” over and over, her heart trembling with fear.*<sup>55</sup>

When the dawn broke through the night, the *kokil* bird<sup>56</sup> sang, and the mother of Dudbibī stirred from the bed. One by one every resident was questioned, but

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/ṣ/, so সুর, /*surat*/; that, in turn, is a common enough scribal misspelling of সুর, /*surat*/, where স, /ṣ/, is written for স, /s/, which means “form, figure, shape, face, countenance,” but importantly with its homophone সুরত, /*surata*/, hints at the double entendre of “amorous or sexual pleasure, arousal, intercourse.” That arousal is precisely the pitfall about which Āllā warns Badar in heaven before descending. He is smitten with a single glance.

53. The *kadamba* (previously classified as *Nauclea kadamba*, but now *Neolamarkia cadamba*) is a fast-growing fir tree with distinctive orange globular flowers, long associated with Kṛṣṇa, who plays his flute beneath it; it is sometimes called *haripriyā* or “beloved of Hari (Kṛṣṇa).” In the following passage, the *padma* and *kamal* names for lotuses and the *kadamba* appear to be used synonymously by this author.

54. According to *The Laws of Mānu* (3.21–42), the *gandharva* style is one of the eight classical Indic forms of marriage consisting of a consensual agreement where the woman chooses the man, signaled by the exchange of garlands in some private trysting place and requiring the permission of no one else. Citations reach back in to the early *Grihya sūtra* literatures and epics. See Wendy Doniger, trans., *The Laws of Manu*, with an introduction and notes by Wendy Doniger with Brian K. Smith (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 45–47.

55. This line does not scan.

56. *Kokil* is a generic name for black cuckoo, of which there are no fewer than twenty species in

Dudbibī was not in her room or anywhere else in the palace. The Bādsvā lamented, “Oh my, alas, what has happened to my little girl?” [Queen] Dhanbibī slapped her head and rolled around on the ground in grief. The Bādsvā then called his advisors and went to meet them. “Go throughout this land and beyond. Search her out among all peoples.” And as soon as they heard his command they dashed in all directions, but nowhere was the precious daughter of the Bādsvā to be found. In each and every town they searched, house to house, but were bewildered to discover not a single trace of her. At this point, the king’s minister suggested to the Bādsvā, “You should enter into the forest and search every part of it.” When he heard the minister’s advice, the king’s spirits were raised. They equipped themselves from the stores of the city: Turkish horse carts, hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of elephants assembled, matched with assorted musical tumult, all accompanied by pike-wielding infantry. They lumbered along until they finally entered the forest.

The precious daughter of the king registered the sound of their entry and worried in her heart of hearts. Dudbibī warned, “O Summoner, take heed of the looming shadow. For my sake my mother and father have entered into the forest. Here comes my father with his minister. Tell me quickly what subterfuge I can adopt to distract him!” Badar quickly replied, “Bibī, listen carefully to what I say: We two shall assume the guise of Rām and Sitya.”<sup>57</sup> And so Badar became Rām and the Bibī transformed into Sitya on his left, two moons of incomparable beauty rising in the midst of the forest.

When he witnessed this, the Bādsvā contemplated the prospects. “How is it possible that we now see Rām and Sitya in the forest? Speak out, my minister, explain this, for I am unable to fathom it! Where has Dudbibī disappeared? Who could have stolen her away?” At that moment Badar the Summoner spoke. “Close your eyes and you shall see straight away.” Heeding this instruction, the Minister and the Bādsvā closed their eyes and the forms of Badar and Dudbibī were suddenly and surprisingly revealed. The Bādsvā queried, “My precious daughter, what is this all about? How, why did you leave the palace and enter the forest?” Dudbibī responded, “Daddy, do you not understand what has just transpired? In birth after birth Badar has been my husband and lord. He arrived at your court in order to marry me, but you not only insulted him publicly, but bound him and threw him in prison. Because of that insult, the Summoner retreated into the forest. He sent tigers to fetch my bed, and here in the forest the two of us joined together in a *gandharva*-style marriage. Consider this and then do what you think is right.” The Bādsvā replied, “My precious daughter, listen to my counsel. Marry in great joy and come along with me.” When the Bādsvā spoke these special words to the couple, a thrill coursed through Bibī and she returned to her familiar hereditary home. Badar, Dudbibī, and the Bādsvā returned together to their homeland, their joy reflected in the reverberating sounds of the musical instruments at play.

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the Bangla-speaking world, mostly resident; the male is extremely vocal. Given the context of stealing Dudbibī’s bed, there seems to be a vague allusion to the *kokils’* habit of placing their eggs in the nests of other birds, pushing out the original eggs.

57. This scribe’s use of the *japhalā* to substitute for a final /ā/ causes *sitya* to be pronounced *sitā*.

Life returned to energize [Dudbibī's mother] Dhanbibī's body, and everyone from the town came to watch the spectacle. A great joy arose as if Rām and Sitya had arrived home in Ÿajaddhya.<sup>58</sup> The Bādsvā then addressed the minister, "Please call the judge (*kāji*) and the *marllā*<sup>59</sup> to perform a proper wedding ceremony as quickly as possible." It was only then that Āllā, sitting in heaven (*bhest*), became aware of it, so he dispatched Hāji Kāji Muhammad (*mahārmmad*).<sup>60</sup> Accompanied by Rahim, Karim, and Sek Phakorān, the judge soon arrived near the city of Dirlli (Delhi). Badar, as *mursid*, sat on a royal divan. All the town's inhabitants thronged around to have a look at the Bādsvā's new son-in-law. With a stentorian tone, the Bādsvā called out, "Minister, minister! Summon the judge quickly to make the wedding of my precious daughter official!" And so the letters of invitation were sent through the realm and beyond. Any number of other Bādsvās came to the city of Dirlli. As they were arriving, the Bādsvā spoke to his wife Dhanbibī: "Waste no time in calling all of the women from all parts of the city!" When she heard this, she interrogated her precious daughter Bibī Dud. "How did your mind come to be smitten, charmed by a *phakir*?" Then the young woman explained in great detail and concluded, "When you examine your heart you know that 'God is singularly great.'"<sup>61</sup> "Listen carefully, my darling child, let me explain. I had planned to arrange your marriage to the son of a Bādsvā, a prince." She consoled her mother, "Listen mother: Āllā, the jewel of virtue, presented him to me."

Eventually Dhanbibī was satisfied and set about making the customary ritual preparations consistent with their social status (*jāti*). After receiving permission from the Bādsvā, the *morllā* was called. Four *morllās* came, each carrying the *Ketāb Korān*. Opening the *Ketāb Korān*, they performed their calculations and concluded that it was Khodā's action that brought about this union.

*The lowly Jaidi sings focused on Mānik, while Badar will pray to behold a son.*

. . .

### *The Dark Lord, Kālā*

Listen to the name, the virtues of the Dark Lord  
heard in home after home.

58. *Ÿajaddhya* is Ayodhyā, the famous home of Rām and Sitā. This scribe routinely prefaces words beginning in अ, /a/ or ञ, with the addition of the on-glide य, /y/, interchangeable with homophones ञ, /j/, and य, /y/, producing *Ÿajarddha*. This scribe uses the reph /-r/ to signal a *japhalā* /-y/, to produce *Ÿajaddhya*. Because this scribe routinely uses the *japhalā* /-y/ with the final geminate consonants to substitute for a final /ā/ (n. 27 above), we read *Ÿajaddhyā*. So *Ÿajaddhyā* > *ajaddhyā* > *ayaddhyā*, and because the following high vowel turns the inherent vowel /a/ or ञ into /o/, we end up with the pronunciation of *ayoddyā*, which is of course *ayodhyā*.

59. The word for *mullah* is spelled three ways: *mollā*, *mallā*, and *marllā* (but pronounced *mollā*).

60. It appears that Hāji and Kāji are titles for Muhammad, spelled predictably here as *mahārmmad*, but understood as *muhammad*.

61. The text reads slightly differently from that noted above (n. 36): *ilāhilelellā*, which with the *japhalā* shift produces *ilāhilelelallā*, with one extra syllable that may be a scribal inconsistency but does allow the line to scan.

I shall write Kālā's own name  
 on the trailing edge of my sari.  
 Who brought to this land  
 a moon so dark,  
 that in dancer's disguise has pilfered  
 the honor of this virtuous wife?  
 How inauspicious the moment  
 I dipped my foot into the Jamunā's waters.  
 At the foot of the *kadamba*, bent in his careless pose,  
 he played mischief with his flute.

*Phakir Guñjar contemplates his worthless body—  
 a hollowed out dead tree  
 whose leaves have dropped off  
 and floated away.*

. . .

As the Bādsvā sat with everyone in the court gathering (*majlis*), the four *mallās* arrived from heaven (*bhest*). The legal affairs were settled under a tree in the midst of a plantain forest in which Badar sat perfectly calm and content on a flayed skin, impervious to everything,<sup>62</sup> while the judge and the *morllā* had him read the *kalmā*.<sup>63</sup> Hāji Gāji Sek Pharid, the theologian, sat down. Submitting themselves before Khodā, each in quick succession disavowed any future divorce and, with eyes cast down, were then bound together by the marriage contract. The Bādsvā formally made over Dudbibī to Badar.

62. These few couplets are obscure. A traditional Bengali wedding marks off a sacred space by setting up plantain trees (often small saplings or even single plantain leaves stuck in mud mounds or pots) on each of the four corners; but one can imagine the wedding could take place in a plantain forest, as is clearly indicated here (*kadalī ban*). I read *māmṛā* [*māmṛā* < *māmlā* < *mokaddamā* < *makaddamā*] as “legal affairs.” But *māmṛa* can also be read as *māmṛi*, which indicates a scabrous, dried flesh, or a place where skins are tanned, with the verb *karā*, which would indicate *maṛamari*, the flaying of skin—the flayed skin of a tiger is precisely what *jogīs* and other mendicants use for meditation. The second reading is contextually more difficult to construe and would normally call for the application of the general principle of *lectio difficilior lectio potior*. The image, however, seems to be foreshadowed in the last line of the poem above, the body as dried-up trunk, which here is doubled sitting on the flayed skin. The plantain is often used to designate a woman's thighs, and the plantain forest is a sign of immersion in the sensual world, especially sexual, which was the troubling period for the *nāth jogī* Gopīcānd and other characters in Bangla literature of the period. Badar was warned by Āllā to be wary of that pitfall and here he now is, initially appearing to be impervious to the charms of his bride. For Gopīcānd's adventure, see Bhābanidās, “Gopīcāndrer pāñcālī,” in *Gopīcāndrer gān*, ed. Āśuṭoṣ Bhāṭṭācāryya, 3rd ed. (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Viśvavidyālay, 1965), 273–324. Contextually, however, the king has just ordered that all the necessary legal documents be gotten in order to validate the marriage in the eyes of the court and according to Islamic custom, and in the very next verses the *mullahs* comply. So I have chosen to read the word both ways—were the text more orthographically sound, the decision might be clearer.

63. *Kalmā* is *kalimā*; whether one or all six is not indicated

When the night gave way to morning, the pair were favorably disposed and comfortable with one another. They strung up a screen of cloth and then played among the flowers strewn on the bed. Bibī would hurl flowers at his feet and then steal them back, while the Summoner flung flowers at Bibī's head. And in this way the two consummated their marriage, passing the night with joyful hearts in the pleasures of making love. [The maidservant] Mukil richly adorned Dudbibī's body; she wore with glamour the eight types of ornaments. They passed so many days savoring the joys of making love that Badar had forgotten everything else, totally distracted by this delectable gifted lover in his lap. This sensuous woman stupefied him like the God of Love, Smara, a seductress who shot love arrows from the corners of her eyes.

And so it was that many years passed with no thought of his austerities (*tapisvy*) ever entering Badar's mind until late one night a reminder appeared to him in a dream. Three times he recited, "Ed Āllā, Ed Āllā." [Then he said,] "That I needed to spread the glory of God has not entered my thoughts of late." The Summoner then called for Dudbibī. "I shall go to the city of Caṭṭagān to spread word of his greatness (*jahurā*). You must stay here in your beloved's home and I will join you at the end of the next age when you are again young!" Listening to these words Bibī smiled sweetly, but pulled a cloth over her head signaling her distress. "O Summoner, you have gone crazy. You do not know love. You are going to cast off a nubile woman for the sake of spreading the word! If a bee did not drink the sweet nectar of a lotus, understand that that lotus would have bloomed in vain. Consider how the sun lavishes its love from hundreds of thousands of miles away, and sitting in the waters the day-blooming lotus opens up at the sun's touch. For no reason at all, a storm blows the leaves and petals off of flowers in the garden, and similarly, for no reason at all, a voluptuous wife has to live bereft of her lord and husband. Listen, O Summoner, how shall I manage to pass the time, to survive?" Then Bibī called her maidservant Mukil and confessed her troubles.

*The lowly Jaidi sings thinking of Mānik—Badar will be gracious upon seeing the boy.*

. . .

Hey, stitch fine garlands with consummate care,  
as the ruby (*mānik*) is carefully strung in the heart.  
All five flowers rest on a single branch, so which flower will bloom?  
What twenty-bud [garland] can be stitched with no thread?  
How can you sew a garland made of rubies (*mānik*) and gemstones?  
Is it possible for a lamp immersed in water to disperse the dark of night?  
O how will I recognize that particular flower?

*Phakir Guñjar sings, contemplating this hollowed,  
dessicated trunk, shedding a single petal that floats away.*

. . .

In response to what the Summoner had announced, the maidservant responded, "A woman's youth does not last very long. At twelve she enters the sudden rush of puberty, at fourteen she blossoms, at sixteen she becomes the stuff of poetry. At

eighteen she is still someone's sister, but at twenty she is a mother. At twenty-five the beautiful woman enters old age."

The Summoner was incensed by the maidservant's cheeky observations. "My words mark the beginning of my mission to bear witness." After handing over Bibi to the care of Mukil, he now undertook in earnest his mission in the city of Cātigañ.

Though Bibi had wailed and wept and put up a fuss, Badar went away undeterred in pursuit of his ascetic cause. He pulled his mendicant's robes around his neck and wore golden sandals. In his gatherings (*majlis*) lasting some four *daṇḍas*—about an hour and half—he cinched his loincloth around his waist and with great sincerity performed his prayers (*namāj*). He assumed the name of Gaṅgā Badar when he began his preaching (*jahurā*). He left there and went his way in this image, and he soon appeared on the *ghaṭs* of Cātigañ. Establishing himself by the edge of the river, the skin of a tiger for a seat, with singular concentration the Summoner recited silently the attributes of God.<sup>64</sup> He then repeated over and again the formulaic *ilāhilellā*, which made Āllā, sitting in his aerial vehicle (*bimān*), aware of his action. Right then Khodā suffered a fit of sneezing; he coughed violently, expelling a camphor phlegm which he spat into a flower he had picked up in his hand. He concentrated, and suddenly an insect the color of gold emerged from the lotus's stem. Āllā said, "Go, tiny insect, I give you this boon! You will become the prince, son of Dudbibi, with the name Mānik."

Just at that time Dudbibi saw the blood of her period, but she brooded that her groom was not at home. One, two, then three menstruations ensued, then a fourth. Acil, the maidservant, discretely spoke to the Bādsavā, with appropriate bowing and greetings. "[Dudbibi] must go to the river to bathe. The entire distant of one *yojana* will be screened with cloth. Dudbibi wants very much to go to cleanse herself." The Bādsavā was satisfied with what he had been told and he called the minister quickly to arrange the stretching of the cloth.

Meanwhile Āllā, seated in his aerial car (*bimān*), looked deep in his heart of hearts and realized that Dudbibi was set to go to bathe after her period. Khodā spoke, "Flower blossom, cross over the river to the place where the saint (*āuliya*) Badar is practicing his penance (*tapisvy*)." Saying "Go!" he threw the flower into the stream, and it floated on and on till it approached the city of Delhi (*dirlli*).<sup>65</sup>

Badar was sitting on his tigerskin doing his penance (*tapisvy*). Right at that moment, at the command of Āllā, he spotted the flower and lifted it up in his hand. The Summoner was somehow very gratified to see it. He began to muse, 'Dudbibi used to dress beautifully and adorn herself with flowers. But alas, what can I do? You, flower, are inappropriate for my chosen garb. But as I have said to you already, it

64. The text reads *ekmane kare deoān āllāre saṅgaran* [< *smaraṇa*], which rather than a simple "remembering" is the silent recitation of the attributes of God in *jikir* consistent with Madāri practice, as noted above (n. 32).

65. At first blush, it appears the narrator has forgotten where Badar is, or there is a missing verse or two, or Badar went to Delhi after Chittagong, or perhaps the narrator meant that he went to Delhi all along; based on usage, I am inclined to see Delhi as the place where heaven is connected to earth, serving as one portal to India, while later in the text it does appear that Badar has only been in Chittagong since departing.

would be beautiful on Duddibī's outfit.' And mumbling in this manner, he threw the flower back into the stream. "By the graciousness of Āllā, take yourself to the town of Cāṭṭigāñ! I swear by the name of the Creator (*kartā*) that when Bibī picks up a *kadam* flower,<sup>66</sup> it will be this one and no other that goes into her hand!"

Back in that place, Duddibī went to have her bath, and she was merrily perched on the banks of the river with her maidservant. Someone massaged her body with oil and turmeric, another brought fragrant tamarind fronds and fenugreek to massage her scalp. She was thoroughly enjoying herself playing in the water with Mukil when, at that very moment, a flower floated straight up to her. Bibī said, "Whoever is able to capture that flower will be made beautiful and honorable enough to adorn the house of Khodā." Under the order of Āllā to go to no one else, it was quickly lifted by the hand of Duddibī. When she looked at the lotus blossom<sup>67</sup> she experienced a bliss, but then sadly remembered that Badar was no longer at home. Duddibī quickly then returned to her quarters and had herself dressed in her various ornaments and jewelry. Even though it was at the very end of the day, she dressed herself immaculately, and her wavy hair fanned out just like a peacock's spread tail. Around her neck she draped a necklace of coral called a "hundred goddesses," and her face glowed like a full moon. She added more layers of elegant clothes, scented herself with expensive perfume, and chewed forty betel nuts with coquettish delight. Over her breasts she pulled a tight-fitting bodice that dazzled like the glow of a rising sun. Bibī wrapped herself in a diaphanous shawl by the name of *kuñāṭhuṭi*, twenty-two yards in length but which was so fine that it could be compressed in its entirety in one's fist. When she was finished dressing, the maidservant spoke, "When the husband is not at home, there is no reason to dress up, no reason for this finery. When that woman whose husband is out of the country dresses up in her own home, the flowers groomed by the gardener drop without prompting. When a bee does not come to sip the intoxicating nectar of the blooming lotus, know that that is inauspicious, a woman in her youth wasting without a man. A woman in her youth lies awake for four watches of the night, listlessly passing the time while her husband is in another land." When the maidservant had gone on prattling such profundities, Bibī was suddenly overwhelmed that the son-in-law, her husband, was not home. Now she was beside herself and wept inconsolably. Feeling hurt and deprived, Bibī retired to her private quarters. When she stretched out on her raised bed, she silently muttered three times "Ed Āllā." In her heart she thought over and again of Badar the Summoner, and that lotus flower Bibī pressed hard against her heart.

Cruising in his aerial car, Āllā understood exactly why she did this, so he called out over and over again, "Saytān, Saytān!" At Āllā's divine command Saytān presented himself. "Go quickly and enter into Badar's body!" Receiving this divine order, Saytān wasted no time in going, and in the middle of the night, he entered into the

66. The *kadam* or *kadamba* (*Neolamarkia cadamba*) has a globus head flower, red orange in color, with a diameter of about two inches with a sweet fragrance; as previously noted, it has a long history in Indian culture and is associated with the love play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The lotus and *kadamba* seem to be interchangeable in this passage, connoting simply "beautiful flower."

67. Lotus is *kamal* (*Nelumbo nucifera*).



body of Badar [to incite him]. In their dreams, the couple looked at one another. In that year, their paths . . . [rest of verse illegible]. Their clothed bodies pressed hard together, their faces were mouth to mouth. In their dreams that night the couple embraced. They kissed, they hugged, and they coupled in sexual intercourse. [First four syllables illegible] . . . was the lotus Bibi held in her hand. The insect crawled out of the lotus stem up her nostril and seated itself in the hundred-petaled navel lotus to take birth. Mānik had entered Dudbibi's womb; Bibi's sleep was interrupted, and she began to fret. She groped frantically all over the bed, then wailed, "You came to me and then disappeared!" And this is the sad situation that transpired for these two. Then Bibi called out for her maidservant and began to tell her. The maidservant began to lecture her, "You weep for no good reason. What you see in dreams never comes true in reality." And so the night passed, the sun brought the dawn, and the post-menstrual bathing healed Bibi completely.

*By the boon of Mānik does poor Jaidi sing: O Mānik, shower mercy on him who narrates this tale.*

Mānik began to grow, and Dudbibi was content and comfortable. One, two, three, four, and then five months passed. At six months Dudbibi began to roll around on the ground [from the pains], and when the maidservant finally noticed the telltale signs of her belly, she cried out in alarm. After the seventh and eighth months, all the maidservants worried that when the Summoner learned of it, he would be furious. When nine months had passed, there was much concerned discussion and gossip, so they came to a decision and called Visvakarma there. There was one resourceful, indeed wily servant girl who would instigate a conflict between Āllā and Visāi.<sup>68</sup> "Listen Visvakarma, please construct a body-shaped hollow copper vessel, and I will give you fine garments, ornaments, and fifty gold coins." As soon as he received the commission, Visāi eagerly went his way. In his workshop he stoked the mighty fire of his furnace, refined and cast the copper into a casket, and covered it with a silver lid. Then Visāi forged a golden hinge and bolt. He presented the vessel to the Bibi,<sup>69</sup> who gave him the eight kinds of ornaments and various and sundry other forms of wealth. Visāi took his leave and then departed for his own home.

After the ninth month had been endured, the tenth month had at last arrived.<sup>70</sup> As Mānik lay curled comfortably in the womb, he decided, 'I will not make it difficult for mother Dudbibi to give birth.' The day for delivery finally arrived, and right on time the young Emissary was born with a blooming of flowers and fruits. He did not cry, he did not throw an arm-waving tantrum, he remained deathly still—he appeared to be stillborn.

Meanwhile the young serving girl had floated the copper vessel on the river.

*I will sing of the virtues of Mānik, reflecting on them in my heart. May Badar and his assembly shower mercy on our heads.*

68. Visāi is Visvakarmma. The text indicates conflict, but the action suggests collusion in the saving of Mānik. The manuscript is incomplete, so that mystery will remain unresolved.

69. This Bibi is the maidservant, not Dudbibi; the maidservants were apparently hiding Dudbibi's pregnancy from her parents and planned to take remedial measures.

70. See chap. 1, n. 5.

“Where will I find another miserable wretch like me with a stillborn baby?” Bibī had begun to weep uncontrollably, striking her head with her fists. “Where will I ever see again that golden color so beautiful? My Mānik, the young Emissary, was floated on the river’s waters.” Experiencing insufferable pain, Dudbibī cried out in agony.

In his copper casket, the Emissary Mānik floated away on the waters. But Āllā, ensconced in his cruising aerial car (*bimān*), caught sight of it. He Himself sat aboard the casket as the helmsman, and it sailed on as if it were a thirty-two oared ocean-going galley. In this way did Mānik the Emissary head to the settlement of Dip.<sup>71</sup> After twenty-one days, the boat managed to reach shore. There lived a gardener named Madu, and his garden was perched on the banks above the river. His garden had no blooming flowers because the land was completely parched—it had been twelve years since it had produced fresh young buds. It was nighttime when the young Emissary first touched the banks, and instantly all manner of flowers in a rush of wild colors miraculously burst forth. When it was morning, the cowherds were headed to graze the cows when they were unsettled by the fragrance of the masses of flowers. There were white Arabian jasmines, royal jasmines, milkwoods, and oodles of fragrant tuberose; there were blossoms of coral jasmine and other plants like it, there was Spanish jasmine and the like. There was jungle flame, mahogany, magnolia, screwpine, amaranth, and cobra’s saffron. Sacred basil was spread across the place and everywhere sprouted lotuses.<sup>72</sup> The cowherds plucked various colors and types of flowers, then in the pandemonium they all yelled to the gardener Madu. When he heard the commotion, the gardener and his wife hurried out: “Your flower

71. An alternate reading for *dip sahar* would be “a city on an island” with *dip* < *dvīp* (island); but the way cities have been designated throughout the text, e.g., *dirli sahar*, suggests that *dip* is the name of the city.

72. Taken in order, Arabian jasmine is the name in the United States; *mallikā* (*Jasminum sambac*) has small white flowers, very fragrant. Royal jasmine, *malatī* (*Jasminum grandiflora*) is one of the most common forms of jasmine in South Asia. The designation *ṭagar* is milkwood, but can be of the pin-wheel or crêpe jasmine variety. Tuberose is *gandharāj* (*Polianthis tuberosa*); it has long stalks and, as the name suggests, tube-like flowers that are extremely fragrant. Coral jasmine or night-blooming jasmine, *śiuli* (*Nyctanthes arbortristis*), has five- to eight-petaled white flowers, each with a distinctive orange red center; it blooms in the autumn. I read *eiuli śiuli* as “coral jasmine and plants like it,” since *eiuli* appears to be only a reduplicative form and not a specific flower designation. Spanish jasmine, *jāti*, is another version of royal jasmine (*Jasminum grandiflora*) with the synonym of *campelī*. Likewise, another jasmine, *jutī*, is *jūthī/yūthī*, most likely from *jūhī* (*Jasminum auriculatum*), but it is extremely difficult to differentiate from Spanish jasmine, so the pair *jāti jutī* can also be read as a reduplicative form which elicits the same meaning, “Spanish jasmine and the like.” Jungle flame or jungle geranium, *raṅgan* (*Ixora coccinea*), has dense rounded clusters of scarlet flowers. Mahogany is *piyāṅg* (< *priyāṅg*) (*aglaia Roxburghiana*). Magnolia is *cānpā* (*Michelia campaka*), with its distinctive yellow and white flower. Screwpine is *ketuki* (< *ketakī*) (*Pandanus tectorius*). Amaranth is *parijātā* (*Amaranthus caudatus*) with its distinctive red or magenta drooping flowers; the authorities, however, are not in agreement, some indicating it is the coral tree of paradise (*Erythrina fulgens*), which also bears very similar vividly red, small flower clusters. Cobra’s saffron or Indian rose chestnut is *nāgeśvar* (also *nāg keśar*) (*Mesua nagsasarium*), an enormous tree up to thirty meters tall and two meters in diameter with reddish bark and flowers with four white petals and reddish-orange stamens. Sacred basil is *tulsi* (*Occimum tenuiflorum*). Lotus is *śatadal* (*Nelumbo nucifera*), not indicating whether day- or night-blooming.

gardens have all miraculously bloomed!" When Madu the gardener heard this from the mouths of the ruffians, the couple raced up to the flower gardens to see for themselves. They systematically scrutinized the gardens, working in opposite directions. The bees buzzed noisily in one particular place, and they searched and searched but could find nothing, then suddenly Madhusudan spotted something lodged in the tall marsh grass. When the gardener noticed the copper casket, it piqued his curiosity, and he blurted, "Oh me, oh my, let's waste no time in hauling this away!" Thinking it might be rubies (*mānik*) and other gemstones, they lugged it home. Once inside the house, they opened the lid and gazed, mesmerized—they were dumbfounded. Their eyes were riveted to the beautiful baby Mānik, a ruby indeed. Then they began to hatch a plan, considering all the angles.

*I, lowly and poor Jayaraddhi, sing with my mind fixed on Mānik—may he shower blessings on him who narrates.*

When they saw the baby boy, they were filled with delight, for the god Bidhātā, Fate, had made them both infertile. The gardener said, "Mālini my dear, let me tell you what you should do. Bind a water bag around your stomach and make a point of going specifically to the house of Sēgatini. They will surely feed you the ceremonial *sādh* dinner.<sup>73</sup> Then, as soon as you can, return home. Afterward that, I will go to the home of the midwife Hirā." Without wasting time, the Mālini tied a bag of water around her waist; she visited her friend's house and ate the *sādh* meal. She crooned with genuine affection; then she quickly asked the question, "Friend, my dear friend, how many days have passed?" "Nine months have elapsed and now the tenth month has arrived." She continued, "I had had this wish to visit you, my friend, to have my *sādh* meal." Saying "May you be well! May you experience good!" they proffered their blessings. They fed her the ceremonial foods and presented her with gifts. The woman took her leave and hurried back to her own home.

[She continued the act:] "Aiee, the child, I'm dying from the pain, Gardener, feel my head!" The gardener dutifully called the neighbors as his wife continued her complaints, "Umh, umh, I'm dying. Quick, call Hirya [the midwife]." The gardener then sent for Hirya, with a feeling of sheer delight. As soon as Hirya heard, she came running as quickly as an old woman could. In the thick dark of night no one could see clearly as Mānik lay among the fruits and flowers on the floor, crying.

*Mānik descended (yavatirnya) in the home of the gardener Madu. May the Hindus chant "Hari, Hari!" for this ranking official among those devoted servants of God (mamin). By the boon of Mānik does the poor and lowly Jayaraddhi sing: May He direct his grace to him who narrates.*

So it was in this way that Mānik began to grow up. One, two, three, four, five days passed, and on the fifth day, oil was given away and the customary rituals were

73. The *sādh* dinner is a ceremonial occasion, usually served by relatives or close friends anywhere from the seventh to late in the ninth month of pregnancy (based on the traditional ten-month gestation); today it includes special dishes, such as cooked fish head, fried banana, and a bitter curry, completed by rice pudding. The food is followed by a showering of gifts, the whole event very much like a baby shower.

performed.<sup>74</sup> On the sixth day the gardener performed the *seṭerā* ritual to propitiate the Goddess Ṣaṣṭhī, while on the sixth day the gardener's wife performed the formal *pūjā* worship to her.<sup>75</sup> And so Mānik, full of virtues, made it through to the seventh day. On the eighth day, eight cowries and eight fried cakes were given away, and these were accompanied by gifts of silver and gold. On the ninth day the mothers of both the gardeners performed the *nattā* ritual for the boy's welfare.<sup>76</sup> On the twenty-first day, another Ṣaṣṭhī *pūjā* was performed with great thrill and excitement: [they offered] twenty-one heaps of parched rice and twenty-one bowls of milk. To look on the face of their son gave them untold pleasure. One, two, three months passed, then through four and five; in the sixth month he was ritually fed solid food.<sup>77</sup> In this way did Mānik start to grow.

One, two, three years, then the fourth came and went. Five, six, seven, and then eight years did Mānik manifest his glory. Then the ninth and tenth years passed until Badar had performed his austerities (*tapisvy*) for a full twelve years. Badar performed those austerities (*tapisvy*) in the name of Āllā, then finally one day [he remembered] the lady Dudbibī and decided to go home. Memories of his beloved flooded his mind and his heart became unsettled, so he broke off his austerities (*tapisvy*) and returned to his home place. He had golden sandals on his feet, and he carried a long staff. Know that he wasted little time as headed for the town of the Ṣultān Rājā. The rooms of the gardener were close by the seat of the Bādsā, and being weary, he took a room there and settled down for a short rest. Meanwhile Dudbibī had gone to the lake, where she caught sight of the *phakir*. She immediately inquired of the gardener's wife. "Listen carefully, madame gardener, please take this seriously. Tell me truthfully, where did that *phakir* come from?" The gardener's wife replied, "Bibī, I have no idea. Why not go and ask the Summoner yourself?"

The extraordinary beauty of the Summoner filled Bibī's vision, "Listen O Summoner, hear me!" as she called him repeatedly. Badar replied, "Beautiful woman, hear my story; listen carefully. For these last twelve years I have been performing austerities (*tapasvi*) on behalf of Āllā. On account of my beloved wife, my . . . [damaged ms ends].

. . .

74. Commonly on the fifth day the parturition room is ritually cleansed, local women bring gifts of grain and money, sweets are distributed, and the barber and midwife are paid. The details here are scanty, so the oil may be a substitute for the gifts by local women. Neither the word *pācuṭe* or any of its possible variants appears in any of the dictionaries consulted.

75. Ṣaṣṭhī is the goddess of child bearing and rearing, and on the sixth day she is said to write the fortune of the child on its head. Monthly *vrats* or domestic ritual vows are also performed to maintain her protection. For translations of the *vrats* of Ṣaṣṭhī, see Tony K. Stewart, trans., "The Goddess Ṣaṣṭhī Protects Children," in *The Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 352–66; see also June McDaniel, *Making Virtuous Daughters and Wives: An Introduction to Women's Brata Rituals in Bengali Folk Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 39–84.

76. This ceremony is to celebrate the birth of a son (i.e., etymologically, a grandson; < *naptya*).

77. This ritual, normally called *annaprāśan*, the "offering of first rice," is simply called here *bhojan*, or "eating."

2.4 EXPLORING THE ROMANCE  
OF MĀNIK PĪR'S BIRTH

Following Northrop Frye's characterizations, the short tale of Badar Pīr found in the opening to Jaidī's *Mānikpīrer jahurānāmā* contains many of the key essential, and just as many minor, elements of the structure of romance, though the story does not take us through the entire life of Badar Pīr on earth. Other manuscripts telling the exploits of Mānik Pīr suggest that the point reached in our example is very close to the end of Badar's assigned role as popularly conceived. Frye argues that to characterize a narrative as romance is really to recognize its special mental landscape, a contrast between the world's heroes and villains. Typical of this perspective is the axial orientation of the idyllic world above, a world of happiness, security, peace, innocence, a domain aligned with spring and summer, with flowers and sunshine, contrasted with the world below, a painful landscape of separation, loneliness, humiliation, a world of darkness.<sup>78</sup> This binary functions as a constant contextual frame for the action. In the opening to this tale, Badar Pīr is summoned by Āllā to his court within heaven and commissioned to descend to earth to prepare the way for the arrival of Mānik Pīr by summoning people to recognize and accept the glory and sovereignty of Āllā, about which they have been slack. The movement from the idyllic world of heaven to the less-than-ideal world of humans is the first step in this descent, a meandering journey that will actually take several stages.

When he comes to earth, Badar initially knows fully well who he is and what he is about, but he is warned of the pitfalls of sensuality, the attraction of women, about whom he is admittedly ignorant. This warning from Āllā functions as an indirect curse. Curses operate analogously to vows in the way their damning power is directly proportional to the moral purity of the offended party, impelling action and event. Here Āllā's warning foreshadows the ever-devoted Badar's descent into the sensual realm, a realm that replaces clarity of vision and mission with illusion and loss of memory, but an experience necessary to the larger need of effecting Mānik's birth. Early on, Badar's boldness with respect to the Gaṅgā gets him momentarily in trouble. A short while later the offense he takes at the Bādsvā's rudeness leads him to escape into the jungle, that is, away from the ordered world of culture into the wilds of nature. True to Frye's depictions, Badar enjoys society with animals,<sup>79</sup> specifically the tigers, who jump at his wizard-like command. While he does not resort to physical violence, he does perpetrate a different kind of violence when he orders the tigers to steal the Bādsvā's daughter as she sleeps innocently on her royal bed.<sup>80</sup> The tigers' potential for violence is accentuated by the

78. Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 53.

79. Frye, 115.

80. This is a common trope that can be traced at least as far back as the story of Qamar al-Zamān; see Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, with Hassan Wassouf, "Qamar al-Zamān and Budūr,"

comic relief they provide in their whining complaints about what a tough life they live as their would-be victims retaliate, striking at their genitalia, and so forth (one can imagine how this would go over on stage, as this piece was likely performed).

The real loss of identity for Badar that comes with this descent<sup>81</sup>—which may be better understood in terms of his loss of mission—takes hold when he is smitten the moment he sets his eyes on Dudbibī. That infatuation will provide the biggest test of his mettle. In Frye's structure, entry into the forest is dreamlike, and the entering takes on an erotic quality so that the surrounding forest becomes itself a sexual personality.<sup>82</sup> Badar Pīr's forest soon gives way to a plantain forest that results in marriage, and as previously noted, the plantain forest is synonymous with infatuation with the sensual, especially the sexual. Even the marriage comes in two stages, the first in the forest in *gandharva* style when Dudbibī consents to the tryst, taking the decision away from Badar who wants it, but will not force it, choosing rather to reveal to her the inevitability of it based on her correlative confirmation of inevitability should he meet the test of displaying his forms as Rām, Nārāyaṇ, and Viṣṇu. Then, after their retrieval by Dudbibī's father, their liaison is subsequently made official according to Islamic custom and in the eyes of the law and God, with the blessings of the king and queen. This now-official marriage and entry into the world of royals inducts Badar into the throes of domestic obligation, farther and farther away from his function as a *pīr* performing a mission directed from Āllā Himself, yet ironically his lapse into sensuality serves God's plan. That a divinity often directs or occasionally impels the action is not at all atypical in this type of tale, according to Frye<sup>83</sup>—but I would hasten to add that this kind of intervention is so frequent that the gods and demigods should be seen as simply active characters rather than the force behind the *deus ex machina* that populates Western fictions as an extraordinary and timely one-off event.

Frye notes that in the narratives of romance the loss of identity—forgetting who you are and why you are there—is often accompanied by, or the result of, gender or identity confusions.<sup>84</sup> In Badar and Dudbibī's story there is no direct gender confusion, but there is illusion regarding identity when Badar shows Dudbibī his multi-armed forms of Nārāyaṇ, and then the two together show themselves to be

in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2004), 1:341–45. See also the introduction to Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Shattārī Rājgīrī, *Madhumālātī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, translated with an introduction and notes by Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, with Shyam Manohar Pandey, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xxxi–xxxii, cited as Story 167 in Richard F. Burton, trans., *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 4 vols. (London: Kama Shastra Society, 1885–86), 3:212–348, 4:1–29.

81. Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 129.

82. Frye, 104.

83. Frye, 107–8.

84. Frye, 105–6.

Rām and Sītā when her father arrives. Dudbibī does not recognize Badar until he has her close her eyes to see the truth, the truth in some kind of undefined apparitional way that points to the primacy of the heart in determining such matters, rather than outward appearances. Similarly, the Badshah does not recognize Badar or his own daughter until Badar has him close his eyes to see the truth, an inversion of the process Badar uses to reveal himself to Dudbibī: the king, with eyes wide open, sees Sītā and Rām, who are visible only in the mind's eye of Dudbibī and Badar. This murky set of revelations in this apparent subterfuge both discloses identities and at the same time confuses and conflates, exhibiting a kind of cunning that ameliorates a potentially disastrous encounter with both Dudbibī and the Bādsavā. The first revelation to Dudbibī allows Badar to avoid violence; the second revelation to the Badshah averts the latter's likely violence.

Dudbibī similarly adheres to the typical pattern of heroines. She is high born, a princess, who is virginal and chaste, that virginity one of the primary concerns of the upper echelons of society.<sup>85</sup> Once married to Badar she remains faithful, that fidelity being the primary currency of the romantic heroine. As Wendy Doniger has noted in comparing Damayantī to Penelope, the issue in these types of tales is “his identity and her fidelity, the two qualities that are implicitly equated and essentialized: where he must prove who he is, she must prove that she is his.”<sup>86</sup> This dual expectation is part of the currency of romance and no less so here. Though Dudbibī seems to acquiesce rather quickly to the circumstances of her kidnapping—not only by agreeing to marry Badar, but actively choosing him as her mate—that quick consent actually confirms the true extent of her fidelity, which stretches over æons: in the Tretā Age when she was Sītā with Rām, in the Dvāpara Age when she was a *gopī* with Kṛṣṇa (though the text does not identify her explicitly as Rādhā, it only implies it by analogy with Sītā—perhaps reflecting the author's knowledge of Rādhā's status as unmarried in most retellings), and now in the Kali Age where she has been reunited, this time with Badar Pīr as her spouse. She is not only faithful, she has maintained a serial fidelity that speaks of karmic rebirth. How Dudbibī's fidelity is proved after getting pregnant, however, is never revealed. Significantly, the knowledge appears to be kept from her parents by the active intervention of the maidservants, though it is not explicitly spelled out. Those maidservants are no doubt devoted to Dudbibī, but equally watchful of their own well-being, as the actions of the one devious maidservant suggest. The audience, of course, knows how Dudbibī got pregnant, so no explanation is neces-

85. Frye notes that virginity signals that “she is not a slave,” which would resonate in the Indian context; Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 73.

86. Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 167; this passage is also quoted in Alf Hiltebeitel, “Listening to Nala and Damayantī,” in Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 222 and n. 18.



sary. Indeed, that subterfuge by which the maidservants disguise her pregnancy makes possible the removal of the child Mānik to safer grounds for, no doubt, the Bādsvā would have taken drastic steps to protect his and his kingdom's honor—a variation of the classic royal threat to the birth of the hero.

Badar Pīr's birth (that is, his descent from heaven) hardly conforms to the myth of the birth of the hero, as Rank and others have outlined it, but his son Mānik's does, with some distinctively South Asian twists.<sup>87</sup> His mother, Dudbibī, is of royal stature, a princess, impregnated directly by Āllā's intervention when, by producing camphor phlegm, he impregnates the lotus flower, a standard symbol for both the vulva and the womb, which in turn generates an insect. The insect in turn impregnates Dudbibī through her nostril, thereby protecting her erstwhile virginity (though presumably she had already consummated her marriage), virginity here really suggesting her fidelity—she did not have sexual relations with a man. The impregnation, however, does miraculously flow through Badar when he intercepts the flower, speaks directly into it—invoking the long-standing image of the *guru* initiating the student through the overtly sexual whispering of the seed syllable *mantra* (the tongue as phallus) into the ear (as vulva)—and through the creative and coercive delivery of a command in the name of Āllā, sends it on its way with instruction to fall only into the hands of Dudbibī. It is insemination by relay: semen as phlegm, into a flower womb, which bears an insect and is again inseminated by the word, the insect then entering the nasal cavity as vulva, and seating itself in the hundred-petaled lotus of her yogic interior landscape. Mānik's paternity is as opaque as Badar's and Dudbibī's identities in the forest.

Mānik's miraculous conception—miraculous because Badar has been gone many months, as Dudbibī's multiple periods attest—results in a birth typical of heroic figures all over South Asia: the newborn is sentient in the womb, decides to appear without fuss, and makes not even a single sound after he is dropped, his mother mistaking that silence for stillbirth. That in turn plays directly into the hands of the maidservant who, appearing to be protecting her mistress or possibly simply being mischievous, secretes the baby away and deposits it into the copper vessel and floats it on the river, the vessel corresponding to Rank's and Frye's basket or boat<sup>88</sup>—but the text seems to suggest that her deviousness lies in enlisting Viśvakarma to do her bidding, which would seem initially to derail the divine plan for Mānik by removing him from the royal household. Certainly the Bādsvā would have made her and her compatriots pay for their deception as much as Dudbibī, so the lowborn maidservant becomes Mānik's and Dudbibī's accomplice, looking after everyone's best interest, regardless of apparent ambiguous intention. Āllā intervenes, and Mānik reaches a safe haven. The earth, which

87. Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology*, trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe (New York: Robert Brunner, 1952).

88. Frye makes this explicit; *Secular Scripture*, 148. Rank illustrates this trope throughout his text.

had not remarked Mānik's birth with any special omens, miraculously blossoms fully when he reaches his new home—his second birth—where he is raised by the low-status gardener Madu and his wife. Curiously, in the signature line or *bhanitā* of the section narrating the gardeners' subterfuge of the second birth, the author uses the term *yavatirnya* (from *avatār*, descent) to describe Mānik's coming down to earth. Since he was already descended in his birth to Dudbibī, we might surmise that the term is not being used in quite the same technical way as the *vaiṣṇav* notion of theophany, but more as appearance. Of course, the hero being high-born but then cast into the wilderness to be raised by simpler peasants is one of Rank's most common hero birth motifs and typical in romance literatures worldwide. The gardener and his wife raise him for twelve years—to the age of puberty—when his erstwhile proxy "father" Badar Pir returns to take a room in the same house. And here the manuscript of Jaidi's *Mānikpīrer jahurānāmā* breaks off.

The predicament of Dudbibī's pregnancy is the result of the hero Badar's return to his mission. Frye observes that once the hero recognizes the extremes of his alienation and his divorce from what is good and proper, his struggle to make the world right signals the ascent.<sup>89</sup> After indulging in the sensual benefits of marriage, Badar wakes up to his forgotten mission, reaffirms his resolve, and departs, abandoning his young wife—but was not his matrimonial bond to Dudbibī good and proper? Though Dudbibī is abandoned and left to her own devices to manage the pregnancy, the trajectory of the narrative of this incomplete story points to a reunion that will demonstrate Dudbibī's fidelity to Badar, thus successfully fulfilling her function as heroine. On the surface, it appears that Badar may have interrupted the original plan—he was specifically sent by Āllā to father Mānik—but in fact his action allowed God himself to intervene in a way that removed the carnality of the impregnation and guaranteed Mānik's extraordinary status as a friend of God, resolving the tension between the asceticism requisite for Badar's religious calling and his erotic function as progenitor of the savior of the Kali Age.<sup>90</sup>

89. Frye, 129–33.

90. Wendy Doniger has traced this now well-known ascetic-erotic trope through the range of Hindu and other mythologies, starting with Śiva; see Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty), *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), and Doniger, *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).