

Pragmatics of *Pīr Kathā*

Emplotment and Extra-Discursive Effects

*In the Kali Age people reap misery as the fruit of their actions.
 Recognizing that, the Lord created a way to alleviate the suffering.
 For the express purpose of saving all peoples, that Great Protector
 manifested himself in this world, wearing the garb of one who begs for food.
 The Lord Himself extended his immanent dominion across the earth.
 He appeared as Satya Pīr, the perfection of all phakīrs.
 Listen one and all and be glad at heart, for your misery will flee,
 your afflictions will disappear, and happiness will to you accrue.
 Dvija Ghanarām has composed this sweet song—
 Now Lord, may you quickly fulfill every heart's dreams and desires.*

—GHANARĀM CAKRAVARTTĪ, SATYANĀRĀYAṆ RAS SINDHU

6.1. FROM LITERARY EMPLOTMENT TO SOCIAL DISCOURSE

It would have been easy to have ended this book with the conclusions of the last chapter, marking the subtle shift in the tenor of the narratives of the fictional *pīrs* and *bibīs*. The literatures of Satya Pīr taken by themselves—and they constitute the largest block of stories dedicated to a single figure—not only confirm this transformation but demonstrate how the tales enter the political world of the last two centuries. In a sense, the tales of Satya Pīr serve as bookends to the *pīr kathās*; they are the earliest of the fictional *pīrs* to emerge in the manuscript archive, and they actively span the centuries with new stories being generated up to the present. Especially notable is the upsurge of activity that occurred with the advent of inexpensive printing in the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. While the figure and image of Satya Pīr is common in all the tales, when examined collectively they tend to aggregate into at least three separate emplotments. Each of these emplotments was favored by a different audience with very little overlap, the appeal in each instance alerting us to their deployment in the world of ordinary things, not just operating intradiscursively. While maintaining a strong parodic position in their intertextual and presuppositional elements, discourse to discourse, some have been and can be used to confirm outlooks that we associate today with the broad, but still generic, categories that embody the identity politics of the last two centuries. *This is where the autotelic narrative emerges from its isolation in discourse to critique the existing society.*

These fictional tales are hagiographies and share in all of the features of the hagiographies of their historically verifiable counterparts, except for the curious fact that the *bios* is fictional and therefore the religious ideal can only resemble in broad outline any particular dogmatic or theological position that might have been articulated by the *pīrs* of history. That imitation does not mean that the religious ideals to which they point are not truly religious; as we have already observed, by virtue of the constraints of fiction, they can only articulate generic notions of religion, while their religious orientation or commitment must be conveyed through symbolic images, the actions of their characters, and of course the texts and the associations they invoke as precursors. To invoke the precursor is to engage with its presuppositions, positively or negatively, to share or share in part its positions on key cosmological and pragmatic issues, which inevitably formulate an ethical position. As a result, these parodies mimic, for better or worse, the beliefs and practices that are associated with those other texts in the ordinary world of things. *A simulacrum of religious tradition is still a simulacrum of some thing that exists in the world of ordinary things, and therein lies their connection.* Because of this, the stories of Satya Pīr could be pressed into the service of sectarian interests.

We started by treating these *pīr kathās* as pure fictions in order to escape the irresistible urge to treat them as source documents for history (which would inevitably strip them of their miraculous phantasmagoria in the name of demythologizing). Treating them as fictions has allowed us to see some of the mechanics of how they operate, the function of those miraculous elements, and the critical cultural work of commenting on—and in that commentary, critiquing—Bengali culture and religion, its actors and its rituals, as they might occur in the ordinary world. It is through that commentary and critique that the narratives of the *pīr kathās* rightly cross over from their apparent narrative isolation and enter the ordinary world of Bengali religious life, with the self-appointed, express task of influencing their readers to a particular perspective. In formal semiotic terms, the *semantics* and *syntactics* with which we have been concerned to this point move now to the possible effects these tales have on their readers, how they may be deployed to make a difference in the world, that is, to their *pragmatics*. Because of the vast range of stories dedicated to Satya Pīr—easily the largest block in the set

of fictional *pīr kathās* in manuscript and print—just through the tales themselves, we can see emerge the contours of a social history that complicates the exclusive Hindu-Muslim binary that the modern world has accepted as the norm.¹

There are a number of ways these tales could persuade people to look at the world differently. Individual events and the emergence of outright victors in specific episodes point the way. Manipulating the plot toward an optimistic and ultimately favorable end is precisely what the genre of romance tends to do. But as Barbara Fuchs observes, the technique is incremental, and repetition is what pushes the point. The tales displace overt religious argument in favor of symbolic maneuvering of characters and the repositioning of social relationships that point to a resolution of the conflicts that, when strung together, constitute the plot. For instance, in the opening lines of Kṛṣṇahari Dās's *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār puthi*, the author laments the sad state of Āllā's emissaries being harassed and tortured by the malevolent king Mādhāi, which prompts Satya Pīr's descent from heaven. Unremarkable in itself, this simple situation not only invokes analogues from other tales—the scenario of persecution a common enough trope for other religious narratives in Bengal—but also establishes the frame for the plot. The simple setup alerts the reader to the imagined contours of the proposed cosmos, with a heaven above and the possibility of traffic between the celestial and terrestrial realms, and of Āllā's determined interventions on earth. But to effect that goal of neutralizing Mādhāi, Satya Pīr must build his credibility through a series of lesser encounters that ultimately end in a demonstration of power or *kerāmat* that convinces Mādhāi of the folly of his ways. The cosmography, the nature of cause and effect or *karma*, the efficacy of meditating on the names and qualities of Āllā are all propositions that not only associate the text with other narratives that have approached the same situations in Bengal, but the mechanism by which Āllā chooses to intervene in the affairs of earth appropriates and redirects the *purāṇik* notion of the degradation of the ages, which in turn precipitates divine interference as a corrective in the form of *avatār*. Enter Satya Pīr, who in the simplest rationale for the *avatār*, declares, "I will appear in the form of *satya* (truth) to dispel *asatya* (untruth). Unrighteous people will bear the brunt of my appearance when I manifest myself in the form of Satya Pīr."²

1. Farina Mir's brilliant social history of the role played by popular or folk literatures in the Punjab, especially the centrality of the Hir Ranjha romance to the shaping of a unique Punjabi cultural sensibility—that is, the pragmatics of those texts in circulation—provides a model for emulation that our current foray can only hint at for Satya Pīr and Bengal; see Farina Mir, *The Social Place of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

2. Anonymous, *Satyadever pāncālī*, Bengali ms no. 874H, Dhaka University, complete, 10 folios, dtd. 1218 BS [ca. 1811], folio 3b, lines 7–8. See also Anonymous, *Satyadever pāncālī*, Bengali ms no. 3688, Dhaka University, complete 18 folios, dtd. 1239 BS [ca. 1832], folio 5b, lines 1–2. A later manuscript of the same text, also anonymous but attributed to Jaymuni in the catalog, follows the wording verbatim

With hard manuscript evidence in hand, it is clear that as early as the sixteenth century the narratives of Satya Pīr were the first to appropriate this broad (read generic) theological concept among the fictional *pīrs*. It would seem to be no accident that the first of these tales of Satya Pīr began to circulate in the same time frame as the advent of the *gauḍīya vaiṣṇav* movement inspired by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries *vaiṣṇavs* sometimes popularly portrayed *musalmāns* as responsible for, or at least symptomatic of, the ills of the Kali Age;³ but the Satya Pīr storyline turned that perspective on its head and argued that the *sūphī* beliefs and practices promoted by *pīrs* and *phakirs*, by *pirānīs* and *bibīs*, offered a more equitable alternative that made life in this world, and salvation for the next, available to everyone regardless of gender, ethnic background, or social rank. That emplotment directly countered much of the appeal of the *gauḍīya* form of *vaiṣṇav* practice that itself tended to reach across caste and, if one accepts the rhetoric, even sectarian lines.⁴ The *kathās* of Satya Pīr likewise rallied against caste-oriented exclusions from religious practice, while requiring no overt doctrinal or dogmatic positioning to resolve the issue. On the popular level, the *gauḍīya vaiṣṇav* writers and the authors of the *pīr kathās* seemed to be aiming at similar audiences, but the latter ultimately claimed a considerably wider reach. While these *pīr kathās* as romances may not have directly changed the way their audiences committed themselves to religious issues, at the very least they gave pause—they invited the reader or listener to join them in exploring alternative worlds, that subjunctive dimension essential to their construction. But early modern India's incredibly rich regional linguistic diversity, its competing modes of traditional indigenous and imported modes of governance, and different types of competing discursive modes of authority vying for dominance affected the production of these fictions and the resources from the real world on which those fictions drew. As part of the symbolic currency of the tales, ethnic-cum-social distinctions abounded, such as traditional caste markers (e.g., *brāhmaṇ*, *kayastha*, and so forth) which were juxtaposed with labels based on geographic origin (e.g., *turuska*, *jaban*, *bāṅgālī*, *kābulī*, and so forth), each of which indexed stereotyped or expected modes of behavior, commensality, ritual obligation, and so forth. The interactions of these differently designated characters were a constant negotiation of asymmetrical standards. Similarly, holy men

except to insert Satyadev in place of Satya Pīr; see Anonymous [attributed to Jaymuni], *Satyadever pāñcālī*, Bengali MS no. 1316, Dhaka University, complete, 12 folios, dtd. 1273 BS [ca. 1866], folio 3b, lines 7–8. One might easily see this as the harbinger of the eventual instantiation of the exclusive categories of Hindu and Muslim that came to dominate the literature by the end of the nineteenth century.

3. Tony K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60–62, 114; Fuchs, *Romance*, 57–58.

4. The hagiographical materials dedicated to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya routinely extolled the way his message reached across sectarian lines, including to those who followed *śaiva*, *śākta*, and *musalmānī* practices. See Stewart, *Final Word*. For nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments that explicitly target not only those groups but Christians as well, see Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya*.

and women, key technicians of the sacred, navigated landscapes of multiple religious orientations in which they exhibited different types of power in and over the created world (e.g., *pīr*, *pīrānī*, *bibī*, *phakir*, *shaykh*, *mollā*, *sannyāsī*, *vairāgī*, *nāth*, *jogī*, *pūjārī*, *purohit*, *padri*, and so forth), while the invocation of superhuman figures defined the nature of the cosmos and the powers within that were relevant to the religious traditions so indexed (e.g., *nabī*, *avatār*, *jinn*, *pari*, *phereṣṭā*, *kinnara*, *vidyādhari*, *dev*, *devī*, *āsura*, *ḍākini*, *piśācī*, *bhūt*, *pret*), and of course in a similar way, the names and forms of God (e.g., *Āllā*, *Khodā*, *Bhagavān*, *Nirañjan*, and so on). The unique network of choices made by each author to suspend the narrative in this imaginal context dramatically demonstrated the complications of the narrative itself, but also helped to give it shape and impart its perspective on a number of critical issues without having to articulate them in so many words. The specific invocation or mere allusion to another text—such as the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* or the Korān—and the accompanying pragmatic presuppositions relieved the story in question from having to lay out all the parts of its own constructed reality. In this intricate economy of selected precursors, much of the appeal of these tales seemed to lie in the way they creatively mediated the competing standards of authority they called into use. Until the late nineteenth century, these early modern tales hinged on negotiating these differences; after that, we begin to see much more clearly and firmly instantiated positions.

Many of these negotiations only come to light when we isolate the intertextualities and the presuppositions for any given story, as proposed in chapters 4 and 5; but if we follow those leads simplistically as purely mechanistic operations, they are likely to produce but a crude set of propositions. If we use them as a starting point, we can provide consistently measurable elements across multiple stories—each new connection enriching the texture of the work's background. This approach avoids at least some of the vagaries and limitations of relying solely on the interpreter's personal insight for guidance regarding the relationships of these tales. When these connections are traced back from our current text to each precursor, and then to the precursors' precursors (and even further), the broad strokes of these constructed worlds—and what really seems to matter to the authors who make them—become significantly more fine-grained, more focused, defining the conditions through which they emerge in the *imaginaire*. With this kind of mapping, linking generations of texts, authorial choices can be better understood beyond the intuitions we tend to follow without always knowing why, when we have sensed a particular slant or view toward ideological or religious possibilities that may not have been explicitly declared in the narrative proper. That “sense” of the story's direction, I argue, is largely our response to the author's manufacture of a rich semiotic domain that both directly and indirectly references the world of ordinary things and the prior discourses found through other texts. Uncovering the intertextual connections and presuppositions of any text locates it within a discursive arena—and tracing that web of connections reveals where changes in outlook have occurred.

We have to assume that each author deliberately chose his precursor texts; in some instances the precursor provided a complete morally ordered universe that required no modification. But more creative authors would pick and choose from a variety of precursors—as we saw in the Bonbibī narrative—constructing in the process a new conceptual blend. While every plot set up some kind of conflict for resolution, it was often only through the narrative's relationship to its precursors and the parodies of those texts that the full impact of what that resolution meant could be made clear. We witness just such a move in the prolegomena to the *Mānikpīrer jahurānāmā*, where Badar reveals first to Duddibī and then to her father that he is a true friend of God by virtue of his masterful power that enables him to manifest the many forms of the panoply of *vaiṣṇav* gods. The structure of *avatār* has already been invoked with Badar's descent, and the apparent input source is *purāṇik*, but when combined with the second input of a world where Āllā and Āllā alone is divine, the resulting blend is something new, but not without its ambiguities regarding what constitutes a sense of unique identity for Badar or for the gods. In this new blended space, are these *vaiṣṇav* divinities ontologically stable identities, or are they to be understood as appearances or apparitions? The narrative of Badar parodies *purāṇik* mythology, including the portrayal of the feeble attempts of yogic *sādhus* to attain *mokṣa*, which does not just diminish the prominence of gods and goddesses in *purāṇik* cosmology, but by mocking and trivializing its object draws their very reality into question. Similarly, Muḥammad Khater's Bonbibī tale shares pragmatic presuppositions from two inputs—the *Rāy maṅgal* and the *Gāji kālū o cāmpāvati kanyār puthi*—in a way that for the reader conflates the two texts into a single blended narrative in order to establish a different sort of cosmic hierarchy from that found in either of its two precursors. What becomes clear is that this kind of clever manipulation served a purpose, which in these examples hinged on the reordering of the hierarchies of cosmic and worldly power, promoting a world where Āllā alone was Lord. That message made each particular fictional narrative relevant to the ordinary Bengali world of lived history, and here we bump into the pragmatics of the texts' use. These feats of conceptual blending generated possible new structures for the cosmos and the places of humans in it; they found a way, sometimes seemingly willy-nilly, to accommodate a Bengali *purāṇik* world within a generic Korānic framework. That was and is a subjunctive creativity at work.

We have sufficient numbers of Satya Pīr texts to trace and generalize *longue durée* tendencies of common narrative trajectories that point to real-life utility in the world of their readers. As noted in the preface, there are more than seven hundred fifty extant manuscripts⁵ and several hundred print editions,⁶ composed

5. The bulk of the manuscripts are listed in *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts*, comp./ed. Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, vol. 1 (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1978).

6. The British Library has perhaps the largest collection of such tales, though many can be found in the various repositories in Kolkata, Santiniketan, and Dhaka.

by more than a hundred different authors. New tales continued to be produced well into the twentieth century and still circulate today. The reach of Satya Pīr's narratives is transregional, far greater than any of the other *phakirs* and *bibīs* we have encountered. Found across every region of the Bangla-speaking world, these stories have also taken life in Assamese, Oḍiyā, and Sanskrit.⁷

In the late sixteenth century, perhaps sooner, Satya Pīr entered the Bengali imagination with the first known works by Phakīr Rām, Ghanarām Cakravartī, Rāmeśvar, and Ayodhyārām Kavi.⁸ A number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts related new exploits, but it was in the period of easy access to inexpensive printing and the concomitant creation of great entrepreneurial fortunes—the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries—that this literature burgeoned into one of the most prolific in Bangla. Satya Pīr not only survived the transition period from early modern to colonial times, but his appeal expanded from the rural, largely agrarian, communities to urban dwellers in the metropolises of Calcutta and Dhaka, where the bulk of his tales were published.⁹ The religious exploits of Satya Pīr did not initially champion a single group of people or practitioners. In spite of perceived differences in his audiences today, he was and still is accessible to all; his wide embrace provides stability to different people of all social classes with common basic needs.

7. The initial conception of the basic divisions of texts into three types was first published in Tony K. Stewart, "Alternate Structures of Authority: Satya Pīr on the Frontiers of Bengal," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 21–54. This chapter depends on that original analysis, but the concept of emplotment is expanded and the number of references to printed works has been augmented substantially, as have the summaries of texts.

8. Sen, *Bāṅlā sāhityer itihās*, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 471. For Ghanarām's text see the nicely edited version, Ghanarām Cakravartī, *Satyanārāyaṇ ras sindhu*, and the considerably older but also nicely edited, Dvijā Ghanarām, *Satyanārāyaṇ itihās*. An early edition of Phakīr Rām's text is Phakīr Rām, *Satyanārāyaṇ pācālī* (n.p., 1270 BS [ca. 1863]); a reliable and more easily accessible edition is *Śrīśrisatyanārāyaṇer phakīrāmī kathā: pujāpaddhati o śabdārtha sambalitā*, ed. Raghunandan Śatpathī (1382 BS [ca. 1975] reprint: Bānkura: Vikrampur Jagadbandhu Catuṣpathī, 1978). The only version of Ayodhyārām I have found is Kavīcandra Ayodhyārām Rāy, "Satya nārāyaṇ kathā," ed. Vyomakeś Mustaphī, *Bāṅgiya sāhitya pariṣat patrikā* 8, no. 1 (1308 BS [ca. 1901]): 61–72. Arguably the best and most carefully edited version of the many editions of Rāmeśvar can be found in his collected works; see Rāmeśvar, *Satyanārāyaṇ vratkathā*, in *Rāmeśvar racanāvalī*, ed. Pañcānan Cakravartī (Kalikātā: Bāṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat, 1964), 509–28.

9. Richard M. Eaton argues that based on his reading of the *Nabīvaṃśa* of Saiyad Sultān, Bengalis were the first to introduce the idea to the Muslim world that Adam was the first and premier cultivator; see Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, 308, n. 6; but Ayesha Irani convincingly argues that the likely source of the story for Bengal is the account found in Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Kisā'īs' *Ṣaḥīb Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* which Saiyad Sultān was only translating into Bangla; see Ayesha A. Irani, "Sacred Biography, Translation, and Conversion: The *Nabīvaṃśa* of Saiyad Sultān and the Making of Bengali Islam, 1600–Present" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 284, n. 1065.

As literary narratives, the textual materials for glorifying Satya Pīr range from sophisticated poetic productions of the royal courts of the eighteenth century to more rustic oral performances designed to be improvised and delivered by itinerant bards or in touring dramatic troupes. Occasionally an author would insert a cogent exegetical comment in the signature line (*bhanitā*) of a section that provided a guide to the reader on how to interpret what was being conveyed, but the touch tended to remain light. Very occasionally, the author as the omniscient narrator would interrupt the narrative with an observation, usually of greater sociological than theological import, inserted extradiegetically into the narrative frame—and we see this increasingly in the print editions, which raises the question of editorial intervention. Some nineteenth- and twentieth-century publishers clearly seized the opportunity to editorialize in ways that begin to tilt the fictional narrative in the direction of what Macherey calls ideological or religious propaganda. As I have noted elsewhere,¹⁰ the advent of printing religious texts in Bengal provided editors with the opportunity to alter the text from what was found in the manuscripts. But when I compared Satya Pīr manuscripts one to another, especially the older manuscripts, I found overall a strong fidelity of transmission, and in the move from manuscript to printed versions, the texts have, on the whole, suffered only a relatively benign form of intervention—more often in the direction of shifting the tenor by substitutions of nomenclature (e.g., interchanging the names of heaven between *golok* and *bhest*) and the modernizing of spellings or the insertion of punctuation—but I hasten to add that these shifts do not align consistently with what one would expect today given the cleavage of Muslim from Hindu, for often the author's name suggests a background opposite to the expected substitution (e.g., Satya Pīr for Satya Nārāyaṇ or Satya Dev). But the possibility of editorial intervention always looms, especially when there is disagreement among manuscript sources or the use of incomplete manuscripts. Overall, the structures of the stories remain more or less intact from manuscript to print and successive print editions. Because we have such a sizable number of texts at our disposal, we can identify larger trends without recourse to arguments based on a single document or isolated lexical difference of the type that haunts the hermeneutics of Biblical texts or other traditions overwrought about critical editions, but with few sources.

In order to produce a workable, statistically sufficient sample of story types, more than a third of the manuscripts and nearly all of the printed literature available

10. Stewart, *Final Word*, esp. 159–60, 270. Guidelines for editing texts and collating multiple manuscripts were not standardized until around the turn of the twentieth century when, after the publication of some texts of dubious manuscript origin, the Baṅgiya Sāhitya Pariśad (Bengal Literary Academy) took steps to ensure greater precision and ethical scrupulousness in the rendering of manuscripts into print, a trend that has been widely embraced. Till then, and even today in the inexpensive *baṭ-tolā* editions of texts, editors were free to omit passages they found offensive or problematic or simply did not like, and would appear to have felt few qualms when inserting new material or changing readings to adjust the perspective.

have been analyzed. In order to maximize the use of manuscripts, I generally read only complete versions of texts and no more than three versions by any one author, and I surveyed as many authors as possible, starting with the oldest texts available. I attempted to maintain a balance of authors that appeared to represent the general distribution of *hinduyāni* and *musalmāni* names, but the latter especially proved misleading, for the names do not necessarily reflect the author's religious orientation, confirming the inappropriate assumption that "naming" means "belonging" as it is often assumed to do in the new world of identity politics. The tales of Satya Pīr tended to group according to the three basic sets of emplotments that were determined by a combination of the manifest identity of Satya Pīr and his direct role (or absence) in the plot; the social standing and vocation of the protagonists other than Satya Pīr; the nature and direction of instruction; the occasional overt religious point or more general moral of the story; and the audience for which the stories were apparently intended but which can be determined only partially. That audience is where the pragmatics of the texts becomes visible.

Vaiṣṇav Emplotment. Through the mechanism of the *avatār* of the Kali Age, the earliest emplotment seems to have followed the age-old tradition of subsuming important religious figures in the style formally outlined by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad gītā* (chapter 4). I say "seems" because there was some slippage with respect to both terminology and the apparent identities of characters and what those identities portended. Satya Pīr in this emplotment was another form of Viṣṇu who descended to right the decaying moral order by establishing a new form of *dharma* that is simple and geared to the limitations of people in the Kali Age. He disrupted normal expectations by taking on the form of a *musalmāni phakir*. He was a figure of local power.¹¹ As far as one can tell from the names of the authors, and often reinforced by the sometime ambiguity of references to *musalmāni* figures or the simple equivalence of key concepts and institutions (e.g., *mandir* and *maṣjid*), the origin of this first emplotment is generally *hinduyāni* in orientation, conforming to a classical Indic prospect. The overall outlook of this set of texts demonstrates a strong affinity with the various *maṅgal kāvyas* dedicated to Dakṣiṇ Rāy, especially that of Kṛṣṇarām, which we examined in chapter 4, but perhaps with less

11. Some scholars have been inclined to associate him with the historical *pīr* Ḥusayn ibn Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) as the True Pīr, the *pīr* who is *satya*. This popular story is asserted by the editor in Kavivallabh, *Satyānārāyaṇ punthi*, ed. Munsī Abdūl Karīm, Sāhitya Paṛiṣad Granthāvalī no. 49 (Kalikātā: Baṅgiya Sāhitya Paṛiṣad by Rāmkāmal Siṃha, 1322 BS [ca. 1915]), 7, and then repeated frequently in the secondary literature as "hearsay." The most explicit connection is proposed by Louis Massignon in his translation of Husayn Ibn Maṣṣūr Hallāj, *La Passion de Husayn Ibn Maṣṣūr Hallāj*, new ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 2: 299–302. The same thin documentation goes for Satya Pīr's identity as the son of the daughter of the famous ruler of Bengal, Husain Shāh (r. 1493–1519), which is frequently repeated; for the earliest citation, see Sen, *Folk-Literature of Bengal*, 100, where he credits manuscripts of Kavi Āriph and Śaṅkarācārya.

subtlety. All of the tales revolve around the ordeals of indigence and its reversal, the tribulations of generating wealth, and with that wealth, a general weal. They take a formulaic order that begins with the poor *brāhmaṇ*, followed by the tale of the woodcutters, and finally with a merchant's tale.¹²

Emplotment of Gendered Creativity. The second emplotment drew on a prior knowledge of Satya Pīr, but hardly demonstrated any strong religious orientation beyond a very simple devotion to the figure who can be called by either name: Satya Pīr or Satya Nārāyaṇ, epithets which were seamlessly interchanged. Where the first emplotment focused on the elimination of penury as a prerequisite of living a moral life, and secondarily equated the creation of wealth with the general benefit of the family, this second emplotment emphasized the creative responses by individuals to life's vagaries, very much as the classic genre of Romance would demand. Significantly, a large number of these tales placed women in the pivotal role of heroic protagonist, so traditional gendered roles were not fixed, but enacted, modifying the simplistic formula of Romance wherein women had to be faithful while the men were heroic. Satya Pīr's interventions depended on the personal commitment of the heroine (or the occasional hero) to improvise ways to align personal action with a dharmically defined moral order, to exhibit patience in the face of seemingly intractable problems, and to exhibit a gritty determination to succeed, only turning to Satya Pīr when personal resources had been exhausted. Satya Pīr tended to be found residing in an ethereal Mecca, and the protagonist could conjure him with a heartfelt call of his name (in some cases *jikir*, but generally much less elaborately). With his support the protagonists survived the machinations of power-mad kings, malevolent *jogī* magicians, and the perils lurking in the swamps of Bengal, where they were often pitted against *bhūts* and *prets* as well as disciplined sepoy, and in one case even a rogue rhino. Antagonists tended to be transparent manifestations of something akin to the embodiment of the early Christian seven deadly sins (though sloth enjoyed but a cameo appearance). The adventures were mad, but the moral was clear: when you needed help most and did not know what else to do, you demonstrated your devotion to Satya Pīr and all would be well.

Musalmāni Emplotment. The third emplotment embraced a decidedly *musalmāni* outlook, emerging in the early eighteenth century, at least a century later than the *hinduṃyāni* trilogy. Satya Pīr functioned as a moral exemplar in order to make the world safe for *sūphīs* and their followers, to wake up the society of *brāhmaṇs*

12. I am reminded that as the number of these texts proliferated in the early twentieth century, William James's notions of pragmatism hinged on the elimination of penury as the foundation of a moral life; see James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), esp. chap. 1.

and kings (and *brāhmaṇ* kings), and all the other figures of questionable moral standing famous for oppressing or taking advantage of the general population. The world depicted in these tales was not one particularly favorable to *pīrs* and *phakirs* and the *musalmāni* population in general, so Āllā intervened by sending down Satya Pīr. There was a subtle but marked shift, however, in the language that was used to describe the relationship of celestial and terrestrial figures and their place in the cosmos. The stories pointed to a popular, that is, nontechnical or generic form (a simulacrum, of course) of the *sūphī* concept of “unity in being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) to describe the nature of this created world. This cycle of tales was very much in harmony with the various texts dedicated to Gāji, Kālu, and Cāmpāvati, and to Mānik Pīr. There was a new cosmic order being promoted and one that no longer proposed a simple equivalence of all forms of divinity with Āllā and Viṣṇu somehow equal, for in these tales they were not. The new order envisioned only one God, Āllā, with all other so-called divinities demoted to secondary status as celestial figures. It was a new world order heralded by Satya Pīr.¹³

The situations described in the *vaiṣṇav* literature of Satya Pīr constituted a fairly limited narrative domain, using small numbers of fixed character types, in a finite set of possible fictional predicaments, whose primary complications were generally permutations of a much smaller set of underlying themes, for example turning to Satya Pīr to get rich, to be rescued from trouble, or both. These underlying themes, however, were not always approached the same way, but the plots hinged on narrative codes that determined the outcomes of the various emplotments.¹⁴ In the case of Satya Pīr, and in much of the popular religious literature of South Asia, the narrative codes did not simply shape the literary fiction, they had a much more immediate connection to everyday life, that is, their perspectives had relevance to the way people lived and came to understand how they should conduct themselves, how they might better survive, in a world that was opaque or did not always reveal itself in easily discernible features. The most common narrative codes reflected the following strategies to model the interaction between *vaiṣṇav* and *musalmāni* (and, by the mid- or late nineteenth century, Hindu and Muslim) characters, which we will elucidate for each emplotment: they included movements toward *recognition*, *accommodation*, *alliance*, *legitimation*, *appropriation* or *incorporation*, and *subversion*. Here is where the practical consumption of these fictions clearly

13. These tales did not, however, assert the strong position taken in the Bonbibī narrative, which appeared to include an incipient reformist sense of *tawḥīd* that edged toward, if not actually crossed over to, Macherey's notions of religious propaganda as noted in the last chapter. For a summary of the history of the concept of *tawḥīd*, see Tamara Sonn, “Tawḥīd,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5:332–41.

14. I have adopted the notion of narrative code from Gérard Genette; see Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

spilled over into the lives of individuals, precisely because their fictional depictions did, in fact, not only have roots in, but were directed immediately toward, negotiating the everyday culture of Bengal and the interactions of people with the religious opportunities afforded them. They reflected the way actors marshaled competing structures of authority, or pitted one against the other, to modulate the power of survival represented by the protagonist, Satya Pīr, or his devotee. This is a vital function, because when we identify and recover these narrative codes we can see some of the logic by which different people could and did think differently about the same contingent existence, interacting with the same figures in the same settings, but using different standards of measure. Narrative codes served as indexes to the actors' response toward different forms of authority, which allows us to recognize different systems of signification, often reinforced through intertextual references, both overt and implied (e.g., the Satya Nārāyaṇ story in the text of the *revā khaṇḍa* of the *Skānda purāṇa* and of the *Bhaviṣya purāṇa*), or to other cultural institutions (e.g., the tomb or *dargā* as *sūphī* center), that are used to reinforce the orientation, but which also generate the basic contours of the logical presuppositions governing the action. Finally, because these individual items or subsets of alternate signification often stand in metonymic relation to the basic narrative code in the context of the narrative itself—they are often freely mixed and matched as elements in the story—their differences will ultimately reveal that the structures of authority are considerably more complex and subtly nuanced than the basic contemporary political identities of Hindu and Muslim could ever recognize, and they often actively imbricate what are today thought of as either exclusively Hindu or Muslim attitudes and acts.

In short, the identification of narrative codes within the three emplotments refines our ability to differentiate the protagonists' actions and orientations—different ways of thinking about and negotiating the way power is wielded in the world—far more dynamically than the assignment of monolithic labels, such as Hindu or Muslim, which have a flattening effect suitable to a propagandistic monologic. This is not to say that individuals who preserved and propagated these tales of Satya Pīr today would not be cognizant of the signification of the categories Hindu and Muslim, but those categories operate on a different level of experience most often associated with the symbolic posturing appropriate to the larger public sphere, and in that sphere they maintain a kind of consistency of image that everyone recognizes in the identity politics of today (e.g., the rules of public propriety, severely delimited ritual and symbolic action and dress, and so forth). But in the case of Satya Pīr, it would be wrong to read back into the early narratives those kinds of political distinctions, for they were not the signal markers by which people negotiated the private vicissitudes of daily experience on the frontiers of early modern Bengal—and as we have seen, this would also hold for the tales of Dakṣiṇ Rāy and Baḍa Khān Gāji, Bonbibī, Mānik Pīr, Badar Pīr, and others. While those stark distinctions of Hindu and Muslim play large in today's political

world, the categories were incipient but not yet fully formed in the older materials, and, as will become apparent, when invoked could be used as a foil to expose the ignorance of their improper application. Conflating the categories that today are understood to be mutually exclusive is a subjunctive exploratory move that at least continues to question, if not directly critique, the utility of those formations—and none of the *pīr kathās* can escape that repurposing today.

What bound together all three of the Satya Pīr narrative emplotments was the common improvisation necessary to negotiate an often difficult or compromising environment using locally available sources of power, obviously the *pīr*, but also committed or reluctantly reoriented (converted) kings, and especially their entrepreneurial merchants. The environment of their setting was always some kind of frontier, so these are generally read as narratives of survival, and, as Eaton has clearly shown, the land of Bengal where these stories proliferate has for centuries been conceived in just such terms.¹⁵ The frontier, however, is plural and shifting, for they were geographic, political, economic, and religious—and the stories of Satya Pīr addressed them all, sometimes in conjunction and at others in different combinations. In these narratives, the frontier was an arena of human action that lay beyond the circumscribed limits of what was familiar, beyond what constituted the predictably settled world of “tradition.” Therein lay much of the stories’ interest and mystery, if not reason sufficient in itself to question the use of the larger categories of Hindu and Muslim which so often blur in these socially ill-defined areas. These tales documented journeys into the unknown, where dangers were manifold, not so much because they were inherently threatening, although the tales are littered with episodes of real danger to the protagonists, but often simply because the modes of action that were considered normal did not always hold true in a land that was unfamiliar. Yet, for many of the people who listened to the tales of Satya Pīr, that shifting frame of reference described their Bengal precisely: it was a land of constantly renegotiated values, of improvisation, of attempts to impose stability in a physical environment that challenged human intervention. And so it is still perceived today. As a frontier it was a place where the social, political, and economic stakes were often high, with commensurate rewards for success or failure. In this formulation we discover part of the secret of Satya Pīr’s social mobility and appeal. *Meeting the needs of the frontier has allowed Satya Pīr to endure, for his pragmatic approach to the problems of the world is one that has favored innovation and compromise in the pursuit of basic human needs, especially the elimination of penury and the quest for social dignity.* His are the tales of survival in a contingent environment, and for many in Bengal, that is the commonplace of experience.

15. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, esp. chaps. 8–9.

6.2. THE VAIṢṆAV AVATĀR OF THE AGE

In the first emplotment, Satya Pīr deals directly with the most pragmatic concerns of basic survival, especially the generation of wealth—people accept that he wields a power to make their lives better, and that is good no matter how it is labeled. In more dire circumstances, he protects the innocent and reestablishes a proper social and just order. Rather than articulating a new form of religiosity, he simply appears to each individual in a form she or he can recognize as legitimate: Satya Pīr or Satya Nārāyaṇ, with no distinction between them. One early-twentieth-century author neatly summed it up, though his audiences would hear this message differently depending on their orientation:

No matter if one is rich or poor,
no matter *hindu* or *jaban*,
each and every one is rescued.
Should any human being facing disaster,
remember Satya Nārāyaṇ
with heart-felt devotion;
the Lord of Heaven himself
will direct compassion toward him
and make all disasters disappear.
Any time one might fall sick,
but remembers Satya Nārāyaṇ,
the gods' own physician Dhanvantari appears.
When disaster grips one in fear,
he suffers misery no more
when he seeks the refuge of His name.
Listen brother, *hindu* peoples
call on Satya Nārāyaṇ,
while the *jaban* calls on Satya Pīr.¹⁶

To enjoy the benefits of this general weal does not require group participation to be valid—so the direction of these emplotments in no case suggests formal religious commitments, but aims at the individual. To turn one's attention to Satya Pīr is a matter of individual opportunity or convenience. The stories of Satya Pīr tell their listeners to recognize the accessibility of a coercive power to ensure one's health and economic stability, if not be the direct source of riches. These are the oldest stories and still the most widely circulated today.

Manuscript evidence dates this oldest cycle of Satya Pīr narratives to the early or mid-seventeenth century and in astonishing numbers by Bangla manuscript

16. Prāṅkiśor Ghoṣ, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer punthi*, ed. Kumudkānta Devśarmā (Kalikātā: Aśīm Kumār Ghoṣ at Jayaguru Prakāśālay, 1375 BS [ca. 1968]), 34.

standards.¹⁷ The three tales that make up the cycle have ossified into a fixed set and sequence and today account for the overwhelming majority of manuscripts and printed texts: the cycle always begins with the story of the poor *brāhmaṇ*, then the tale of the woodcutters, and finally the merchant's adventure. Ghanarām Cakravartī writes in his *Satyanārāyaṇ ras sindhu*:

Pay your respects to Satyadev daily and with a serious intent, for all great and respectable people throughout the world serve him. In this day and age he descended in the form of a *phakīr* named Satya Pīr, the repository of all powers sufficient to grant every wish. . . . For the express purpose of saving people, that great protector of the world manifested himself on this earth in the garb of a poor mendicant who begs his food. . . . In the dress of a *phakīr*, the Lord wanders—Mathurā, Gokul, Gayā, Govarddhan Mountain, the lands of Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kālīṅga, Utkal, Gauḍa—pointedly determined to spread his *pūjā* worship. Previously, when a *hindu* heard the words *pīr* and *sinni*, he tended to turn away in the oblivion of ignorance, so it was that he first appeared to a *brāhmaṇ* of highly respected rank. Once his power was revealed, the *pūjā* spread, and when they saw its effectiveness, many more people performed the worship. Woodcutters made up the second group to enjoy the benefits; and thirdly, the merchants found all their desires fulfilled. Merchants especially well understood both the pitfalls of gaining and the dangers of losing wealth, so for this reason his majesty became renowned, spreading from region to region. If I tell his story in a way that gives people the knowledge to tread the prescribed path, then all who listen will be everywhere rescued from this ocean of tribulation. To promote this *pūjā* worship among *hindus* and *jabans*, Satyadev descended (*avatār*) assuming the bodily form of a human.¹⁸

The outward form of the *pīr* is semiotically rich, an explicit visual metaphor in the way he combines key marks of a public *musalmāni* and *vaiṣṇav* allegiance. Deliberately flaunting his position through this mixed sartorial code, it is not unusual for Satya Pīr to approach significant religious figures of any community while carrying the Korān and *Bhāgavata purāṇa*. The overt symbolism produces multiple variations of the form of divinity that descended to break up the feud between Dakṣiṇ Rāy and Baḍa Khān Gāji in Kṛṣṇarām's *Rāy maṅgal*. Deliberately conflating signs that would today be considered disjunctive endlessly amuses or

17. All of the early authors tell some version of the same cycle. There are many other manuscripts in private hands in collections whose catalogues had not been included when Jatindra Mohan compiled his monumental *Catalogus Catalogorum*, but based on the latter, the authors with the highest numbers of extant manuscripts, including complete and incomplete, dated and undated, are: Rāmakṛṣṇa Dvija—82; Phakīr Rām Kavibhuṣaṇ—61; Viśveśvar Dvija—42; Rāmeśvar Dvija—35; Rāmbhadra—18; Śaṅkarācārya—17; and Vallabh Kavi—11. The oldest of the dated manuscripts to survive are Śaṅkarācārya dtd. 1062 BS [ca. 1655] × 2, 1102 BS [ca. 1695]; Phakīr Rām dtd. 1086 BS [ca. 1679], 1093 BS [ca. 1686], 1095 BS [ca. 1688]; Rāmeśvar Dvija dtd. 1087 BS [ca. 1680]; Vidyāpati dtd. 1090 BS [ca. 1683]; Gaṅgārām Kavi dtd. 1097 BS [ca. 1690].

18. Ghanarām Cakravartī, *Satyanārāyaṇ ras sindhu*, 2–3.

annoys characters in the narratives—a clear indication that the authors deliberately counted on this effect, and played on these symbolic currencies. This play has a very serious side, for the narrative strategy of conflation serves to create momentary confusions among the characters that predictably elicit spontaneous, unreflective responses of ridicule and invective. These outbreaks create an opening for Satya Pīr to instruct the naïve in a way that is all the more compelling by virtue of the extreme situation he manipulates by playing on their prejudices, hubris, and ignorance to demonstrate the inappropriateness of those perspectives to the more basic business of living, or at least the need to question their commonplaces. To the delight of the listener or reader, he is not above resorting to more brutal magical persuasions to make his point. The content of those biting symbolic homilies varies dramatically, depending on the author's proclivity, for the narratives are anything but uniform in this regard. Apart from these occasional and short opportunities to lecture or preach a basic morality—the content is understandably theologically thin, nearly devoid of doctrine altogether, but frequently contains a biting critique of prejudicial religious practices and class or caste bigotry—most of Satya Pīr's messages emerge through the resolution of predictable dramatic situations.

Variations in the tales reflect the creativity and skill of the poets, rather than differences in plot or message. The frame narrative which sets up the classic trilogy of tales provides some opportunities for improvisation, though authors do have greater latitude to diversify the obstacles thrown in the path of the merchant before he gains success, that tale being always the longest and most elaborate of the set. As we shall see, the merchant's tale clearly shares the same impulse that drives the *maṅgal kāvya* genre as a whole—the establishment of the deity's worship and evidence of its benefits—and the earliest versions of the tale were being composed when the *maṅgal kāvya* was approaching the zenith of its popularity. The complete cycle functions to establish the worship of Satya Pīr as Satya Nārāyaṇ for the whole of society, from the highest-ranking *brāhman*s to the lowest classes who clear the land, including indigenous communities, and those in between, the merchants and kings. Occasionally, but only in extremely elaborate productions, we find a fourth tale about the king variously named Tuṅgadhvaj or Vaṃśadhvaj, who encounters cowherders worshipping Satya Pīr but refuses the offer of *śinni*, an act that results in the death of all one hundred of his sons; he sees his error, worships with sincere devotion, and their lives are restored.¹⁹ While we might not

19. One of the earliest texts of the genre includes the Sanskrit text from the *Skanda purāṇa*, with the standard stories of the poor *brāhman*, the woodcutter, and the merchant, and the concluding tale of King Vaṃśadhvaj appearing in the *revā khaṇḍa*; see Vyāsadeva, *Satyanārāyaṇa nāmaka granthaḥ*, Sanskrit text edited by Rājacandra Rāya, Bengali translation by Dharmadās Mukhopādhyāy (Kalikātā: Kāśināth Śil at Jñānoday Yantra, 1268 BS [ca. 1861]). See also Rāsvihārī Sāṃkhyatīrtha, *Satyanārāyaṇa vrat kathā*, edited with Bangla translation by Rāmdev Miśra (Murshidabad: Rāmdeva Miśra for Haribhaktipradāyini Sabhā of Baharampur at Rādhārāmaṇ Press, 1315 BS [ca. 1908]); that abbreviated tale covers only three pages, 53–55. See also Meghnāth Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Satya nārāyaṇ vratkathā* (Kalikātā:

unreasonably speculate that the merchant's tale was always the driving impulse since it is always so much longer than the other two, the addition of those two abbreviated tales of the poor *brāhmaṇ* and the woodcutters, even the cowherder's tale, was necessary to signal Satya Pīr's extension of help to all active parts of society on the frontier.

Ghanarām gives us the opening for identifying the narrative codes common to this set when he notes that Satya Pīr lacked the *recognition* among those major groups that constituted traditional *hinduyāni* society. The frame for recognition was made possible by *vaiṣṇav avatār* theory. He is a descent (*avatār*) of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇ in *purāṇik* terms. Parenthetically, it should be noted that there are a very small number of texts that also include a connection to the uniquely Bengali deity Dharma Ṭhākur, such as Phayajullā's *Satya pīr pāñcālī*²⁰ and Rāmāi Paṇḍit's *Śūnyapurāṇ*.²¹ The reference to Dharma Ṭhākur does not seem to compete with his identification with Nārāyaṇ, but as one would expect in these tales, the theological niceties are avoided; in other terms, from a narratological perspective, the association does not change the trajectories of action, but from a theological perspective, this loose association may represent a frame of reference that simply seeks *equivalences* among other figures of divinity. This is not idle speculation since at least one of the authors, the same Ghanarām Cakravartī, is known to have also composed a *Dharma maṅgal*²² in addition to his Satya Pīr text already quoted. Put another way, the equivalences seem to efface sectarian distinctions, while subtly projecting the underlying reality based on a traditional Indic pantheon, while the *musalmāni* forms are simply new guises for this Kali Age.

Although the nature of that *avatār* can vary, Satya Pīr is generally accorded the status of *yugāvatār*, Nārāyaṇ's incarnational descent for the Kali Age. The logic of this characterization is quite predictable, for this is one of the earliest propositions and one that is explicitly invoked in the Satya Pīr tales a position that derives from *Bhagavad gītā*, as we have seen repeatedly in other stories. Nārāyaṇ promises to descend whenever the *dharma* has languished, and to assume a form conditioned by the needs of the people of that age (*yug*). Once Satya Pīr is recognized, he is

Samskṛta Pres Dīpajīṭori, 1306 BS [ca. 1899]), who calls it the *Vaṁśadhvaj gop saṁvād*, a variation on the theme of the hunt and encounter with Satyadev; the text by Rāmgopāl Rāy likewise includes the extra tale titled *Vaṁśadhvajoddhār*; see Rāmgopāl Rāy, *Satyamaṅgal bā satyanārāyaṇ dever vratkathā o pūjāpaddhati* (Kalikātā: Jayakṛṣṇa Caudhuri, 1835 śaka [ca. 1913]), 31–35.

20. *Satya pīr pāñcālī* of Phayajullā, discussed in Girīndranāth Dās, *Bāmlā pīr sāhityer kathā*, 453–54. My copy of Phayajullā's text with title page missing—the only copy I could locate anywhere—is badly printed, with ink and dirt clogging the type face so that characters are smudged or altogether indecipherable, the bleeding through the cheap paper obscures text on the recto and verso, and of course large holes abound in the text courtesy of white ants. As a result, I can only partially confirm Dās's observation, but I have found his reporting to be generally very reliable.

21. Rāmāi Paṇḍit, *Śūnyapurāṇ*; see chap. 5, n. 71.

22. Ghanarām Cakravartī, *Dharma maṅgal*.

easily understood to be present to help right the *dharma* of the Kali Age, each new telling incorporating him into a familiar Indic world, completing the process of *accommodation*. The opening frame narrative of the three tales gives us explicit clues to the different strategies by which authors sought to accommodate Satya Pīr into that familiar framework through a series of overt intertextual references that link him to *purāṇik* and epic tales.

Many of the stories begin with Nārāyaṇ asleep on Śeṣa, coiled on the primal ocean of milk or alternately holding forth in his heavenly court. Nārada—that celestial gadfly who is just as responsible for stirring up problems as he is for coming to everyone’s aid—journeys to Nārāyaṇ’s presence to alert him to the malaise that threatens to engulf civilization on earth. After an exchange of traditional greetings, Nārada invites Nārāyaṇ to survey the situation for himself and determine an appropriate response. As Nārāyaṇ wakes up to the full extent of *dharma*’s decay, Nārada prods him to descend in a form people will understand, and because foreigners alien to the traditional brāhmaṇical homeland (*madhya deś*) are everywhere in power, would it not make sense, he reasons, to play on that familiarity for this particular descent, that is, to assume a form recognized as originating from the religious world of those in power? The prologue closes when Nārāyaṇ takes the advice to heart and descends in the form of Satya Pīr, overtly a *pīr*, but in reality none other than the celestial Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇ (those texts that omit the prologue and join the action *in medias res* generally start here). Even for those tellings that do not explicitly provide this narrative frame to justify the descent, it is implied, for it everywhere replicates the *purāṇik* premise of the *avatār*, as Harimohan Śarmma perhaps most eloquently states in a very high *sādhu bhāṣā* register.²³ In what would appear to be an effort to provide a clear *purāṇik* authority and Sanskritize the story, Rādhānāth Mitra composed a text in 1889 called simply *Satyanārāyaṇ*, in which he uses the Nārada visit to frame the tale, exhorting good people, especially *brāhmaṇs*, to discipline their conduct and worship, which Nārāyaṇ recognizes is deteriorating in the Kali Age. He refers repeatedly to the *revā khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda purāṇa* as his source, and he includes the tales of the poor *brāhmaṇ*, the woodcutters, and the merchant, whose wife Līlāvati and daughter Kālāvati play much larger roles than in most versions. He also adds the fourth tale, titled “Vamśadhvaja,” in a synoptic telling of the encounter of the king with the cowherders. *Not once does he mention Satya Pīr*, the only example in this vast literature I have seen where the name Satya Pīr has been systematically eliminated. Everyplace one would expect to see Satya Pīr, he substitutes Satyadev. Nowhere does he propose that *śirni* should be the offering of choice—no variant of the word is used—but rather it is a somewhat

23. See Harimohan Śarmma, *Satyakathā* (Dhākā: Harimohan Basāk at Dhākā Giriś Pres, 1277 BS [ca. 1870]).

more complicated concoction offered as part of a *Satyanārāyaṇ vrat*, which he details in the opening section and then repeats throughout the text.²⁴

On occasion, Yudhiṣṭhīr replaces Nārada as the one who alerts Nārāyaṇ to the disaster that awaits the earth if he does not take action; for instance, see the explicitly titled tale by Dvāraknāth Pāl: *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Kṛṣṇa yudhiṣṭhīr saṃvād o kalāvatār upākhyān*.²⁵ In the tale told by Dvija Rāmdhan, the frame is suggestively complicated when Nārāyaṇ seems to be distracted with Lakṣmī's presence while the earth is in decay.²⁶ In a twentieth-century version of the tale by Dhīrendra Nāth Mukhopādhyāy, Satya Pīr is paired with Śani or the Evil Eye, which is not surprising given the generally somber tone of the state of the world, and with Trilakṣya Pīr, whose own textual tradition is extremely truncated to a single vignette about a devotee who attempts to pay homage to all three hundred thousand (*trilakṣya*) pīrs who have taken action to help alleviate the ills of the world, only to discover that to worship one is to worship them all—and they are all manifestations of Nārāyaṇ.²⁷ Finally, one author, Surnāth Bhaṭṭācāryya, writing in the early twentieth century, noted that the popular versions of the cycle as told by Rāmbhadra and Śivram were outdated and did not really speak to the modern condition; so in addition to retelling the three tales, he “updated” the accompanying *pūjā*, and even included songs, which are interspersed throughout the text. Writing in a very Sanskritized highfalutin *sādhu bhāṣā* form of Bangla, he notes that regardless of religious persuasion—Hindu, Muslim, Christian—we are all humans and we share the same basic laws and moral imperatives, so his approach was to attempt to rectify the theological slant to reflect that extended universalism.²⁸ In his exercise, we see encapsulated in a single text how the narratives of

24. Rādhānāth Mitra, *Satyanārāyaṇ*, 2nd ed. (Kalikātā: Sāradāprasād Mukhopādhyay, 1889).

25. Dvāraknāth Pāl, *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Kṛṣṇa yudhiṣṭhīr saṃvād o kalāvatār upākhyān* (Dhākā: Lachman Basāk at Dhākā Bānglā Press, n.d. [1285 BS (ca. 1878)]). For the same type of frame, see Dinhin Dās, *Śrīśrisatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Līlāvatī o kalāvatī upākhyān*, ed. Sitānāth Basāk, 72nd printing (Kalikātā: Sitānāth Adarśa Lāibreri, 1979); that the copy I have is in its 72nd printing suggests something of the popularity of these small texts, which cost between fifty *paīśa* to several rupees. Dvija Rāmbhadra likewise uses Yudhiṣṭhīr to initiate the action; see Dvija Rāmbhadra, “Satyadev saṃhitā,” ed. Vyomakeś Mustaphī, *Baṅgīya sāhitya pariṣat patrikā* 8, no. 2 (1308 BS [ca. 1901]: 131–36).

26. Dvija Rāmdhan, *Satya Nārāyaṇer punthi* (Kalikātā: Rāju Pāblīkēsāns, n.d.); interestingly it is Satyadev who instructs the author in a dream to compose the text (pp. 4–5).

27. See Dhīrendra Nāth Mukhopādhyāy, *Śani satyanārāyaṇ o trilakṣadever pāñcālī* (Kalikātā: by the author, 1319 BS [ca. 1912]). A slightly different version of the tale can be found in two manuscripts: Anonymous [Harinārāyaṇ?], *Trilakṣya pīrer pāñcālī*, Bengali ms no. 74, Dhaka University, complete, 3 folios, dtd. 1246 BS [1839]; and Anonymous [Harinārāyaṇ?], *Tinlakṣya pīrer pāñcālī*, Bengali ms no. 1313, Dhaka University, complete, 3 folios, dtd. 1259 BS [ca. 1852].

28. Surnāth Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Śrīśrisatyanārāyaṇ vratkathā* (Kalikātā: by the author at Bi. Pi. Emer Pres, 1321 BS [ca. 1914]); the observations about the need for updating, etc., are found in the introduction, pp. 3–6. It is interesting that he names Rāmbhadra and Śivram as popular authors because over the printing history of the cycle, Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmdev have emerged as the most oft-printed tellers of the tales, perhaps suggesting a change in popularity or preference for style over the last century.

Satya Pīr were deployed in such a way that they could cross the gap from discourse to the everyday world through the ritual process. The key was the promise of positive outcomes in the world of ordinary things for anyone who would perform the *pūjā* to Satya Pīr. As a result, the three-story cycle became a staple *kathā* of the ritual *vrāt*, which now women in many households of Bengal routinely conduct. The telling of the story in the context of ritual would improve one's lot.

The *vrats* are relatively simple rituals performed within the household, usually by women (with children attending), and are primarily designed to look after the general weal of the family, the obvious reason why Satya Pīr or Satya Nārāyaṇ was incorporated into the monthly cycle.²⁹ The explicit ritual instruction for worshipping Satya Pīr emerged during the frenzy of printing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike the tales of the other *phakirs* and *pīrānīs* we have examined, the instruction is explicit, but simple in nature. Characters within the narrative will, in times of need or as a result of their thankfulness for Satya Pīr's help, make a simple offering of *śirṇi* (alt. *śirṇi*, *śinni*, *sinni*). But beyond an occasional vague suggestion, instruction on how to make it and offer it falls outside the narrative proper; as we might expect of these tales, the offering is simply noted. The explicit ritual instruction tends to be found in a paratextual apparatus that is appended to the narrative, as either a preface or an appendix in print editions, which is to say that apart from the general directive in the narrative to offer *śirṇi*, the ritual instruction lies outside the narrative and frames it; it is through that paratextual apparatus that the narrative eases into the world of action. One author, Bidubar Ghoṣ, would appear to be one of the first to include instruction on how to do the *pūjā* of the *vrāt* in the body of the text, integrating directly into the narrative some of the material that in most manuscripts was paratextual.³⁰ This manuscript

29. The truncated story of Satya Pīr or Satya Nārāyaṇ is found in virtually every compilation of women's household *vrats*, with publications, often anonymous, running in the hundreds since the nineteenth century; for a particularly well executed example, see Vasantakumār Dāsī, *Meyeder vratkathā bā vrāt mātmya*, edited by Rākhālcandra Dās (Kalikātā: Mahendranāth Kar at Mehendra Lāibreri, n.d. [1340 BS (ca. 1933)]). *Vrat* literature, which is often connected with the visual dimension of the ritual process, is considerable; see Sudhir Ranjan Das, *Folk Religion in Bengal: A Study in Vrata Rites* (Calcutta: S.C. Kar, 1953); Eva Maria Gupta, *Brata und Ālpanā in Bengalen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985).

30. Encased in a single wrapper in the collection, there are two manuscripts of this text, virtually identical with respect to content, but radically different in construction. The first (MS 747A) is produced in the traditional manner of loose-leaf pages in the elongated landscape orientation. The second (MS 747B) is a high-end production, written in a careful hand on machine-milled watermarked paper, the individual leaves stitched together along the left and which are oriented, not in the traditional manuscript landscape orientation, but in portrait on the order of a western printed book, approximately 8vo. The binding edge laces together individual leaves, rather than a folded signature, which suggests mimicry of print without knowledge of the technology. Significantly this second work is titled *Satya nārāyaṇ pustak* (that is, "book," rather than *pāncālī*, which is employed in the body of the text itself). Curiously the authorship of the text would seem to be a joint work, possibly started by Bidubar Ghōṣ

seems to have anticipated the move toward printing as the norm for the emergence of the *vrat kathās* that are routinely performed in the household.

The most common instruction indicates a generic *pūjā* as its model, but one that does not require the offices of a *brāhmaṇ* to perform; it can be and is done by people of all social ranks and religious orientation. In one printed edition from 1909, the cover declares: “This edition includes a *pūjāpaddhati* (ritual instruction) which is not abbreviated. Even children can see it and learn how to do the *pūjā*. Women will be able to prepare precisely everything they need to perform the *pūjā*.”³¹ Rice or rice-flour, sugar, thickened milk, banana, and betel are formed into a ball and offered in a manner that anyone familiar with devotional *pūjās* would recognize. The worship is aniconic; no image is used to receive the offering, though occasionally a small dais or simple stool might be set as the focal point. On occasion a sacred space is first demarcated by inserting sticks or banana stalks (originally arrows) into the ground at the four corners. The formulaic reference for the dais is a golden *āstānā*, which designates the stand, the haunt, or the abode of the *pīr* (which is also a term occasionally used to reference a *pīr*’s tomb). Not infrequently, the dais is spelled *āsthān* or *āsthānā*, which—considering the overall literacy of the authors—can be read not as a spelling mistake but as a playful neologism that conveniently conflates the *pīr*’s place of residence (*sthān*) or the threshold of access to the *pīr* or, more explicitly, the *pīr*’s tomb (both from Persian *āsītāna*), and the devotee’s “confidence,” “faith,” or “allegiance,” signaled by the term *āsthā*. Once the *śinni* is offered, the leftovers (sometimes called *naivedya*, but unlike in other *vaiṣṇav* contexts, seldom *ucchiṣṭa*) are consumed as *prasād*: ingestible grace, food transubstantiated by the touch of the divine. Regardless of what the leftovers are called, the offering has to be made with sincerity to be effective, and if so the *pūjā* is capable of effacing any number of different offenses (*aparādh*).³²

While the benefits are consistent with the idea of *prasād*, these technical terms (*naivedya*, *ucchiṣṭa*, *prasād*) were not used regularly until certain authors began the process of Sanskritizing the ritual. Rāmdev Miśra, the well-known and highly productive second series editor and publisher of *gauḍīya vaiṣṇav* texts on behalf of the Haribhaktipradāyini Sabhā in Murshidabad in the early twentieth century, reproduced the sanctioned edition of the Satya Nārāyaṇ cycle originally compiled and written by Rāsvihāri Sāṃkhyatīrtha, which included twelve full pages of

and completed by Niṣākar Ghoṣ—but that is speculation based on the initial appearance of Bidubar in the first signature line (*bhaṇitā*) and Niṣākar in the remainder; the attribution in the catalogue distinguishes the two as separate authors. Niṣākar Ghoṣ, *Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī*, Bengali ms no. 747A, Dhaka University, complete, 12 folios, n.d. Bidubar Ghoṣ, *Satya nārāyaṇ pustak*, Bengali ms 747B, Dhaka University, complete, 12 folios, dtd. 1265 BS [ca. 1858].

31. Śyāmcaraṇ Kaviratna, ed., *Satyanārāyaṇ o śubhacanīr kathā*, 2nd ed. (Kalikātā: by the editor through Gurudās Caṭṭopādhyāy at Bengal Medical Library, 1315 BS [ca. 1909]).

32. Gaurīsaṅkar, *Satyanārāyaṇ pustak*, Bengali ms no. 1584B, Dhaka University, complete 19 folios, dtd. 1726 śaka [ca. 1804], folios 18a–b.

instruction for the preparation and offering of *śīrṇi* (he understandably uses the high or *sādhu* form of the word). This instructional text extended the number of ingredients to twenty-eight, but when the compounds are analyzed, the full number is forty-three discrete elements—the extreme opposite of the advertisement indicating that even children can learn it. He also integrated other features into the ritual instruction in Sanskrit (*pūjāpaddhati*): worship of the nine planets (*navagraha*) and a eulogistic *stotra* to them, worship of the five deities (*pañcadevatā*), and then *satya nārāyaṇa* worship proper, and accompanying poetic eulogies (*stava*).³³ A decade later Rāmgopāl Rāy's version contained twenty-two detailed pages for performing the offering.³⁴ In a book that is undated, but appears to have been published in the 1970s, Ratneśvar Tantrajyotiśaśāstrī devoted fifteen pages to the offering of the *pūjā*, including illustrations of thirteen hand gestures (*mudras*), a feature nowhere else encountered in the scores of texts consulted, but not surprising given his professional titles.³⁵ In these dramatic expansions one can see the hand of reform-minded élites, seeking to Sanskritize the worship of Satya Pīr to make it conform to that Satya Nārāyaṇ worship found more widely in North India, while eliminating all *musalmāni*-related terminology, but not the structure of the story or the naming of the protagonist himself as a *phakir* or *pīr*.³⁶ It is interesting to note that this impulse toward Sanskritization and the appropriation of the *pūjā* to Satya Pīr and Satya Nārāyaṇ in the *vrata* cycle seems to be the culmination of simple assertions about how the devotee's diligence would open the way to heaven itself. The manuscript of Satyānanda's *Satyar pāñcālī*, dated 1765—a book that I have not been able to locate in print—advised in the concluding verses of the narrative that should one worship Satya Nārāyaṇ as described, one would certainly gain *vaikuṇṭha*, heaven.³⁷ Another unpublished anonymous manuscript written fifteen years earlier indicated clearly that “if you do not worship Satya Nārāyaṇ, you go to hell (*narak gaman*).”³⁸ In the above-mentioned manuscript, Bidubar Ghosh

33. Rāsvihāri Sāṃkhyatīrtha, *Satyānārāyaṇ vrata kathā*. In the introduction Rāmdev Miśra indicated that the text had originally been published under the name of Rāmnārāyaṇ Vidyārātna, who was the series' first editor and who was still alive, the attribution of which he was now correcting in the second version by giving full credit to Rāsvihāri Sāṃkhyatīrtha.

34. Rāmgopāl Rāy, *Satyāmaṅgal bā satyānārāyaṇ dever vratkathā o pūjāpaddhati*; see n. 19 (above).

35. Ratneśvara Tantrajyotiśaśāstrī, ed., *Śrīśrīsatyānārāyaṇ o śubhacunī pūjāpaddhati* (Kalikātā: Puṣpa eṇḍ Kom., n.d.).

36. For the Sanskrit versions and an analysis of their *pūjā*, see the chapter titled “Examples of Occasional *Pūjās*: *Satya Nārāyaṇvrata*” in Gudrun Bühnemann, *Pūjā: A Study in Smārta Ritual*, De Nobili Research Library Publications, vol. 15 (Vienna: Institute for Indology, University of Vienna, 1988), 200–13. For a contemporary version of the story and an account of the *pūjā*, see Anoop Chandola, *The Way to True Worship: A Popular Story of Hinduism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

37. Satyānanda, *Satyar pāñcālī*, Kṛṣṇakanta Rāy Collection, Bengali ms no. K-67, Dhaka University, complete, 17 folios, dtd. 1171 BS [ca. 1765], folio 17a.

38. Anonymous, *Satyānārāyaṇ pustak*, Kṛṣṇakanta Rāy Collection, Bengali ms no. K-434, complete, 8 folios, Dhaka University, dtd. 1157 BS [ca. 1750], folio 8a, line 9—folio 8b, line 1.

and Niṣākar Ghoṣ explained that one needed a proper priest or *purohit* to perform the *pūjā*, and signaled in general terms the negative impact of not performing the worship. But apparently merit will accrue simply by copying the manuscript, for the scribe wrote in the more elaborate of the two manuscripts that “he transcribed the text in the home of Gaura Candra Sen in the western reaches of Ḍhākā *jelā*. He wrote for the welfare of his relatives in Ḍhākā, Śrīhaṭṭa, and in the West.”³⁹

In keeping with this move toward Sanskritization, by the early twentieth century, the most common overt intertextual references were to the previously noted *Bhaviṣya purāṇa* and *Skanda purāṇa* (*revā khaṇḍa*), which are cited as the sources of the trilogy of tales.⁴⁰ Some authors simply referred to these sources, but others included the relevant passages in Sanskrit.⁴¹ Both of these Sanskrit *purāṇas* are among the most malleable in the tradition, with some additions and emendations to the texts appearing well after the sixteenth century, about the time the Satya Pīr narratives began to circulate. The lateness and the lack of a fixed text, especially in the case of the *Bhaviṣya purāṇa*, opens the distinct possibility that the stories circulated first in Bangla, then subsequently were incorporated into the *purāṇik* text, before being reintroduced in Bangla. While that speculation exceeds the ambit of this current inquiry, whether or not it is so does not matter, because the authors who took this tack of referring back to one or the other of these *purāṇas* were attempting to domesticate the story into comfortable *purāṇik* idiom. *Legitimation* follows *recognition* in the process, so the by-then familiar form of the mendicant *pīr* or *phakir* was made suitable to reveal a new *dharma* that would unite the *jaban*

39. Bidubar Ghoṣ, *Satya nārāyaṇ pustak*, Bengali MS 747B, folio 12a.

40. In the manuscript of the *Satyanārāyaṇ pustak*, the anonymous author indicates the source of the story as the *Brahmā purāṇa*, which is the only such attribution I found in the literature. I was unable to locate any such passage in standard editions of the *purāṇa*. See Anonymous, *Satyanārāyaṇ pustak*, Kṛṣṇakanta Rāy Collection, Bengali MS no. K-434, folio 8b, line 2. For the definitive work on the history of the *purāṇas* and *upapurāṇas* and their construction and dating, see Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, in *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda, vol. 2: *Epics and Sanskrit Religious Literature*, fascicle 3 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986); the *Skanda* and *Bhaviṣya* are both classified as *upapurāṇas*. See the pioneering work on *upapurāṇas*, R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1958). It should be noted that at the same times the *Skanda* and *Bhaviṣya purāṇas* added this later material, the worship of Satya Nārāyaṇ was becoming increasingly popular across northern India.

41. Many include the Sanskrit text and/or translations or retellings of the *revā khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda purāṇa* and the section of the *Bhaviṣya purāṇa*; see also Rāmeśvar Bhaṭṭācārya, *Satyanārāyaṇ*, ed. Rādhāvallabh Śil (Kalikātā: Hindu Press, 1276 BS [ca. 1869]); Īśvarcandra Kar, *Satya nārāyaṇer pāñcālī* (Bariśāl: Denovandoo Kar at Satya Prakāś Yantra, 1930 *saṃvat* [ca. 1872]); Rāmkaṇṭh Nyāyapañcānaṇ Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Bāṅgālā pāñcālī kathā: Revā khaṇḍokta satyadev vrat kathāmūlak*, ed. Rasrañjan Sen Gupta (Kahliśākoṭ, Bariśāl: n.p., 1322 BS [ca. 1915]); K. Sadānanda, *Pāñcālī satyanārāyaṇ kathā* (Kāśī: Raghunandan Prasād at Bhavanna Tulśī Pustakālay, 1929), n.b., the text is Bangla in *naḡari* script; Candrakānt Sarkār, *Satyanārāyaṇ nāmakaṁ granthaḥ arthāt vratprakāś o mahimā varṇan*, ed. Rajanikānt Sarkār (Kalikātā: Umeścandra Madak at Jñān Dvīpak Pres, 1281 BS [ca. 1874]); Rāmeśvar Śarmma, *Satyanārāyaṇ* (Kalikātā: Nrtyalāl Śil, 1281 BS [ca. 1874]); Rādhāmohan Tarkālamkār Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Satya nārāyaṇ vratkathā* (Kalikātā: Prakāścandra Bandyopādhyāy at Nūtan Sen Pres, 1819 *śaka* [ca. 1897]).

with the *vaiṣṇav*. This is the final act of *appropriation*, wherein the new object of religiosity is fully incorporated into the existing *vaiṣṇav* cosmological and theological structures. As counterintuitive as this move to incorporate the *jaban* Satya Pīr must have been to some, the strategy was grounded in an unassailable logic; that is, it must have been made to conform to expectations in a way that was undeniably appropriate to the *vaiṣṇav* conception of, or at least orientation to, the world. That is precisely where the narratives begin.

The process of legitimation starts by having an experienced *brāhmaṇ*, who serves as the representative of traditional society—in a manner symptomatic of the degradations of the Kali Age, a society that has failed to support him—recognize the form of Satya Pīr by affirming his “true” identity as Nārāyaṇ. From this simple beginning the *pīr*’s form is gradually valorized throughout the whole of brāhmaṇical society, which is “documented” in the set of three stories—and that set is the overwhelming favorite form for the practicing *vaiṣṇav*.⁴² Nearly three-

42. There are both pre- and early colonial authors whose texts have seen print, several of them regularly, all telling the same basic trilogy. Bhāratcandra’s version of the tale is considered especially elegant though short. Among the many, see Bhāratcandra Rāy, “Satyanārāyaṇ vratkathā,” in *Bhāratcandra granthāvalī*, ed. Vrajendranāth Bandyopādhyāy (Kalikātā: Baṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat, 1357 BS [ca. 1950]), 391–96; Bhāratcandra, “Satyapīr vratkathā,” in *Bhāratcandra racanāsaṃgraha*, ed. Kṣetra Gupta and Viṣṇu Basu (Kalikātā: Bhaumik eṇḍ Sans, 1974), 430–35; and the inexpensive popular edition, Bhāratcandra, “Satyapīr kathā,” in *Bhāratcandra granthāvalī*, ed. Kṣetra Gupta and Viṣṇu Basu (Kalikātā: Basumati Sāhitya Maṇḍir, n.d.), 1–3. Others include Dvija Aśvinikumār, *Śrīśrisatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Pūjāpaddhati, dhyān, pranām, phardamālā evaṃ daridra brāhmaṇer upākhyān sambalita* (Kalikātā: Subhāsnāth Pustakālay, n.d.); the synoptic text by Dvija Dinarām, *Nārāyaṇer dever pāñcālī*, ed. Abdul Karim, *Baṅgiya sāhitya pariṣat patrikā* 12, no. 4 (1312 BS [ca. 1905]): 189–92; the elegant and literarily sophisticated text by Dvija Raghunāth, “Satyanārāyaṇer punthi,” ed. Satīscandra Rāy, *Baṅgiya sāhitya pariṣat patrikā* 24, no. 1 (1324 BS [ca. 1917]): 21–38; Dvija Rāmkrṣṇa, *Satyanārāyaṇer pustak*, ed. Vīrcandra Cakravartī (Dhākā: Dhākā Giriśyantra, 1283 BS [ca. 1876]); Dvija Rāmkrṣṇa, *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī* (Kalikātā: Arunoday Ghōṣ, 1281 BS [ca. 1874]); another short text by Dvija Viśveśvar, “Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī,” ed. Vrajsundar Sānyāl, *Baṅgiya sāhitya pariṣat patrikā* 8, no. 3 (1308 BS [ca. 1901]): 193–200.

More recent mid-nineteenth- to twentieth-century works in the same vein include: Rājendra Rāy, trans., *Satyanārāyaṇ nāmaka granthaḥ* (Kalikātā: Jñānoday Pres, 1268 BS [ca. 1861]); Raghunāth Cakravartī, *Satyanārāyaṇ punthi*, ed. Caitanyaprasād Poddār (Kalikātā: Eṇ. El. Śil Pres, 1277 BS [ca. 1870]); Raghunāth Cakravartī, *Satyanārāyaṇ punthi*, ed. Caitanya Prasād Poddār Mahāśay, 2nd ed. (Noyākhālī: Yogendramohan Poddār, 1315 BS [ca. 1908]); Rāmdayāl Bandyopādhyāy, *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī*, 2nd ed. (Dhākā: Brajās Bābājī in Giriś Pres, 1279 BS [ca. 1872]); Kaliprasād Dattajā Mahāśay, *Satyanārāyaṇ grantha* (Dhākā: Jagadānanda Basu at Dhākā Giriś Yantra, 1281 BS [ca. 1874]); Iśāncandra Rāy, *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī*, 1st ed. (Kalikātā: Akṣay Kumār Rāy eṇḍ Koṃ. n.d. [1876]); Bankim Bihārī Majumdar, *Satyanārāyaṇer kathā* (Kalikātā: Bhavanīpur Somaprakāś Pres, 1284 BS [ca. 1877]); Golokcandra Sengupta, *Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī* (Midnapur: Nibaraṇcandra Dāsgupta at Hari Sabhā Pres, 1319 BS [ca. 1912]); Kālīpada Devśarmma, *Śrīśrisatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī* (Dhākā: by editor at Bāherak Hari Sabhā, 1327 BS [ca. 1920]); Rām Śāstrī, ed., *Śrīśrisatyanārāyaṇ vratkathā bā satya nārāyaṇer pāñcālī* (Kalikātā: Kṛṣṇa Bhāṭṭācāryya at Vāṇī Pustakālay, 1327 BS [ca. 1920]); Śivacandra Sen, *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī*, ed. Nibāraṇcandra Basu (Dhākā: by the editor at Bhikṭoriā Pres, 1328 BS [ca. 1921]); Śyāmākānt Tarkapañcānan, ed., *Satyanārāyaṇ vratkathā* (Vārāṇasī: Vāmāraṇjan Ṭhākur, 1330 BS [ca. 1923]);

quarters of all manuscripts and printed texts are devoted to the three-step narrative precisely because its effectiveness lies in its progression, each story creating greater expectations for the next, as all parts of society are invited to follow Satya Pīr. Of all the renditions, the two versions attributed to the Bengali poets Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmeśvar⁴³ prove most popular and are frequently printed together.⁴⁴

The third tale, that of the merchant, the analogue to the popular *maṅgal kāvyā*, seems to have created the greatest traction and was often composed and published as a stand-alone work, the two most sophisticated and powerful versions composed by famous Vikrampūr poet Lālā Jaykr̥ṣṇa Sen, the *Harilīlā*, and the *Satyanārāyaṇ punthi* of Kavivallabh.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, it is this trilogy which

Premnāth Bhaṭṭācāryya, comp., *Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī: Līlāvatī o kalāvatī upākhyān sambalitā*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: by the editor at Bāndhav Press in Utrāil Kumuk Bhavan, n.d.).

43. Of the two, Rāmeśvar most often appears separately; the most reliable single-author edition is Rāmeśvar Bandyopādhyāy, *Satyapīrer kathā*, ed. Nagendranāth Gupta (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Viśvavidyālay, 1336 BS [ca. 1929]); see also Rāmeśvar, *Satyanārāyaṇ*, ed. Trailoknāth Datta, 2nd ed. (Kalikātā: by the editor, 1283 BS [ca. 1876]); Rāmeśvar, *Rāmeśvarī satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī*, 5th ed. (Khāñtāi: Madhusudān Jānā, 1330 BS [ca. 1923]); Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Līlāvatī, kalāvatī o daridra brāhmaṇ upākhyān (pūjādravya o pūjāpaddhati sambalita)*, ed. Paśupati Caṭṭopādhyāy (Kalikātā: Jenārel Lāibrerī, n.d.); Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Pūjāpaddhati, dhyān, praṇām, pharḍdamālā, evaṃ daridra brāhmaṇ upākhyān*, ed. Tirthanāth Bhaṭṭācāryya Kāvyatīrtha (Kalikātā: Oriyeṇṭ Lāibrerī, n.d.); and Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇ o subacani vratkathā bā pāñcālī*, ed. Śrīmantu Cakravartī (Kalikātā: Māyā Lāibrerī, n.d.).

44. These two texts are available in multiple *baṭ-tolā* editions and have been printed together as many times as they have been issued separately. I have personally examined more than fifty such publications. Typical among them is Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Līlāvatī kalāvatī daridra brāhmaṇer upākhyān (pūjādravya, pūjāvidhi, dhyān o praṇām sambalita)*, ed. Gaurāṅgasundar Bhaṭṭācāryya (Kalikātā: Rajendra Lāibrerī, n.d.). With usually only relatively minor variations, see the previously cited Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇ o śubhacani pūjāpaddhati*, ed. Rāmeśvar Tantrajyotiśaśāstrī (Kalikātā: Puṣpa eṇḍ Kom., n.d.). Many of the texts are nearly identical, suggesting the nature of *baṭ-tolā* printing; see Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Līlāvatī, kalāvatī o daridra brāhmaṇ upākhyān*, ed. Avināścandra Mukhopādhyāy and Sudrendranāth Bhaṭṭācāryya (Kalikātā: Śrī Kārttik Candra Basu at Kalikātā Tāun Lāibrerī, 1360 BS [ca. 1953]); Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmeśvar Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Līlāvatī, kalāvatī o daridra brāhmaṇer upākhyān*, ed. Paṇḍit Śrī Kālīprasanna Vidyāratna (Kalikātā: Akṣay Lāibrerī, n.d.); Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmeśvar, *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī: Līlāvatī, kalāvatī o daridra brāhmaṇ upākhyān* (Kalikātā: Rāmnāth Dās at Tārācāṇḍ Dās eṇḍ Sans, n.d.). Anonymous texts are often by either Śaṅkarācārya or Rāmeśvar, and sometimes based on both. One scholarly edition includes the story by Bhāratcandra in addition to Rāmeśvar and Śaṅkarācārya; Priyanāth Ghoṣāl, ed., *Śrīśrīsatyanārāyaṇ: Trividha kathā* (Kalikātā: by the editor at Ripon College, 1910).

45. Lālā Jaykr̥ṣṇa Sen, *Harilīlā*, ed. Dīneśacandra Sen and Basantarāṅjan Rāy (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Viśvavidyālay, 1928); the text was finished in 1772 (p. 7). See also Kavivallabh, in his aforementioned *Satyanārāyaṇ punthi*, which was composed earlier in the eighteenth century (p. 15). Both of these texts are substantially larger than the standard trilogy taken as a whole. David Cashin has included a translation of Vallabha's *Satyanārāyaṇer punthi* in his chapter on "The Cult of the Pīr"; see Cashin, *The Ocean of Love: Middle Bengali Sufi Literature and the Fakirs of Bengal*, Skrifter utgivna av Föreningen för Orientaliska Studier no. 27 (Stockholm: Association of Oriental Studies, Stockholm University, 1995), 251–82.

forms the basis for incorporation into the monthly *vrat* cycle of the wider Hindu households of Bengal.⁴⁶

One particularly enterprising scholar, Priyanāth Ghoṣāl Jñānvinod, produced a scholarly labor of love that captures the entire process of *recognition*, *legitimation* through Sanskritization, and *appropriation* in a single volume motivated by a reformer's zeal. In the introduction to his 1903 publication titled *Satyanārāyaṇ vratvyavasthā, pūjāpaddhati o pañcavidha mātmyakathā*, he deplores the poor quality of the *vrat kathās* and endeavors to clean up the textual tradition and improve the *pūjā* (as we noted above). He claims to have consulted numerous unpublished manuscripts and prefers the narrative style of the tale in the *Bhaviṣya purāṇa*, but he then composes his own new version of the trilogy based on the skeletal outline of Rāmeśvar, declaring his preference for Rāmeśvar over Śaṅkarācārya because of the latter's use of obviously Hindi words. He seems to be associating what he calls Hindi words with Urdu—evidence of that late-nineteenth-century move to identify languages as indices of religious identity—so apparently in his outlook, Bangla is purely Hindu, while Hindi (Urdu) marks the speaker as Muslim.⁴⁷ This text of some 122 pages includes Sanskrit texts of the *purāṇik* accounts of Satya Pīr and the author's own Bangla translations of those, in addition to his own composition.⁴⁸ So in this vast array of manuscripts and publications, the texts range from the simplest crudely printed and abbreviated retellings to elaborate productions that would tax all but the most assiduous *brāhmaṇ*. The basic trilogy can be summarized as follows.

The Brāhmaṇ's Tale

The tales begin with the saga of the old *brāhmaṇ* who has been reduced to utter penury. He lives in Vārānaśī, that center of traditional piety, but cannot even beg a day's worth of alms to feed his wife and himself. He is distraught over his prospects

46. For translations of different versions of these three tales from the *vaiṣṇav vrat kathās*, see Tony K. Stewart, trans., "Satya Pīr: Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God," in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 578–97. There are four selections in order: "Salutations to Prepare for the Ritual," from Dvija Rāmbhadra, *Satyadev saṃhitā*, 131–36; "Satya Pīr Described," from Bhāratcandra Rāy, "Satyanārāyaṇ vratkathā," in *Bhāratcandra granthāvali*, 440; "The Story of the Poor *Brāhmaṇ*" and "The Woodcutters' Tale," from Śaṅkarācārya, *Satyanārāyaṇer pāñcālī*, ed. Gaurāṅgasundar Bhaṭṭācāryya, Baṭ-tolā edition (Kalikātā: Rājendraī, n.d.); and "The Merchant's Adventure," from Kavicandra Ayodhyārām Rāy, *Satya nārāyaṇ kathā*, 61–72.

47. As we have seen, language marks the creation of discrete Muslim and Hindu identities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Ahmed, *Bengal Muslims*; Bose, *Recasting the Region*; and Halder, "Of Blood and Tears."

48. Priyanāth Ghoṣāl Jñānvinod, *Satyanārāyaṇ vratvyavasthā, pūjāpaddhati o pañcavidha mātmyakathā* (Kalikātā: Petrik Pres, 1310 BS [ca. 1903]). Another scholar notes that he prefers Rāmeśvar because his language is sweeter and more melodious (*sulalit*), so he has cleaned up the infelicities of the *baṭ-tolā* editions (p. 1) and included the Sanskrit text of the *Skanda purāṇa*; see Śyāmācarāṇ Kaviratna, *Satyanārāyaṇ o śubhacanīr kathā*, preface.

because the downward spiral conspires to keep him from being productive as a priest, for the poorer he becomes, the less likely his employment in his calling. When his prospects dim to the point where he can no longer offer a viable service to the competitive world of that metropolis, he finds himself in the unthinkable horror of being pushed to the very edges of civilization, east into the wilds of Bengal.⁴⁹ In this pitiful state, he is approached by Satya Pīr, who holds out one last alternative. “Offer *śinni* to me,” he commands, “and your wishes will be fulfilled.” Ever polite and sorely tempted, the *brāhmaṇ* resists the cry of his stomach and refuses to jettison what he considers to be the last remnants of his dignity as a *brāhmaṇ*, demurring on the grounds that Satya Pīr is *jaban* and such worship would be improper. Satya Pīr acknowledges the *brāhmaṇ*’s piety and instructs him to pay close attention. He gently suggests to that good but poor *brāhmaṇ* that he must never be fooled by outward appearance, for Satya Pīr is really none other than Nārāyaṇ himself. The *brāhmaṇ* is skeptical and asks for proof, which Satya Pīr provides by displaying his four-armed form (and even a less common six-armed form) as Viṣṇu, the form of Satya Nārāyaṇ. “Satya Pīr,” he explains, “was but an *avatār*.” Having witnessed it with his own eyes, the *brāhmaṇ* happily acknowledges the revelation, proffers the *śinni* precisely as instructed, and in an instant grows wealthy, all to the extreme pleasure and benefit of himself, his wife, and others around him. In every version of the story he does, in fact, live quite comfortably ever after.

. . .

The Woodcutters’ Tale

Numerous woodcutters inhabit the same area as the *brāhmaṇ*, and it falls to them to clear land for cultivation and provide wood for fuel in this expanding economy. They have grown accustomed to passing the old *brāhmaṇ* beside the road as they made their daily trips deep into the forests. When the *brāhmaṇ*’s fortunes abruptly change, they are astounded, for the transformation is miraculous and rapid; overnight he has become successful and highly esteemed. Naturally, they want to know the source of his good fortune, and when they inquire, the *brāhmaṇ* proves himself worthy of Satya Pīr’s trust. Being ever grateful to that mysterious *pīr*

49. It is interesting that the eastern reaches of the delta region have always provided last-ditch moneymaking opportunities for poor *brāhmaṇs*, for the dearth of *brāhmaṇs* in the region puts their services at a premium; even Kṛṣṇa Caitanya made the journey when his family was in financial straits; see Stewart, *Final Word*, 50. Being momentarily itinerant in the region does not seem to overly affect the status of the *brāhmaṇ*, but residence in the region during this period does seem to compromise status, for most of Bengal sits outside the boundaries of *madhyadeś*, the traditional *brāhmaṇical* homeland, and therefore lies beyond the reaches of civilization, a barbaric frontier. It is, then, the ideal place for a *pīr* to exercise his power.

who has so dramatically secured his fortune, he does just as he has been instructed and shares the secret. He is blunt: “Sincerely worship Satya Pīr with *śinni*, and you too will become rich.” Not slow to recognize the opportunity, the woodcutters follow the injunction and within a very short time they become custodians of fabulous wealth. Their success allows them to build large fortresses on the tracts of land they clear, their estates expanding rapidly, while the frontier they are taming recedes further east and south. Inevitably, their success brings more land under cultivation and makes it fit for habitation by traditional brāhmaṇical society, for not only is it cleared but it is filled with moral people, including law-abiding kings to rule, and *brāhmaṇs*, like the one who shared his secret, to ensure propriety.

. . .

The Merchant's Tale

As the settlements develop in Bengal, local rulers require certain royal items, both luxury and symbolic, to assert their status and claim to power, that is, simply to be recognized as chieftains of these new lands. To bring the requisite and rare goods to court, each ruler finds himself in need of reliable merchants, who themselves, if they are successful, will become fabulously wealthy and powerful in the process. Procuring these unusual items, however, entails great risks, for their sources invariably lie beyond the seas; any trading venture is perilous, and the risk is compounded exponentially by traversing the ocean waterways. Through their own devices or with the financial backing of the king, the merchants set off to adventures only imagined by ordinary people. Their ships would glide effortlessly through the familiar waters of Bengal, out into the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. When they dare to venture away from land, they cannot but suffer events unique to the tricks of the deep seas, for instance, the report of Dayāl, who records “a tomb of marble floating on the sea with girls dancing around it to the musical accompaniment of celestial *kiṃnaras*, exquisitely situated in the middle of the ocean, deerskins were spread like carpets on the surface of the waters, with four *phakīrs* pronouncing their *namāj* facing West.”⁵⁰ Because of such reports and with a practical estimate of their own limitations, they more often prefer to hug the coast as they work their way south. They stop periodically at cities and lands of decreasing familiarity until they reach the furthest outposts of civilization: Kaliṅga, then the Draviḍa region, and even the isle of Lāṅka, which in the legacy

50. Sukumār Sen, *Bāṅglā sāhityer itihās*, vol. 1, pt. 2: 474–75; the text quoted is Dayāl's *Śaṅkara gadya pālā*, Bengali ms B-7484, Bāṅglā Bibhāg, Kalikātā Viśvavidyālay. The merchant Śrīmanṭa likewise sees the extraordinary image of the goddess Abhayā Caṇḍī, in the form of a Kamalekāmīnī, a moon-faced maiden sitting on a freshly opened lotus, effortlessly engorging and then vomiting out an elephant over and over again; see Kavikaṅkan Mukundarām Cakravarti, *Caṇḍimaṅgal*, 249–52, secs. 433–36 (the *pālā* to be performed on the night of the seventh day).

of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is always populated by demons and monsters, who predictably protect great wealth.

To offset the dangers, the merchants turn to Satya Pīr, for the creator of instant wealth can likewise be counted on to watch over its acquisition. Thus Satya Pīr comes to be the protector of merchants and travelers in general. To ensure this success, the merchants promise to worship Satya Pīr to a degree commensurate with their acquired wealth. But if wealth and good fortune can be created at a stroke, so too can those precious commodities be lost and destroyed; a failure to maintain that promise to worship Satya Pīr will only result in disaster. Sometimes it is the merchant who refuses to give alms to Satya Pīr when the latter comes in disguise, or it is the merchant's accompanying son, whose greed causes one of them to withhold the worship, which in turn precipitates the ship's foundering or lands one of them in jail. In those vile dungeons they may languish for years with no hope of escape until they belatedly remember the offense to Satya Pīr. Equally disastrous is the negligent action of the merchant's wife who has remained at home, or more frequently it is the action of the selfish daughter-in-law, who offends Satya Pīr so that success is denied even as the ships sail back into view after years abroad, sinking in the estuary as they come to dock. The variations are many, but the theme is relentlessly driven home: *if you fail to make good on your contractual promise to worship Satya Pīr in exchange for his protection, you are doomed*. But here, when the worship is properly discharged or the mistakes are acknowledged and corrected with appropriate humility, the merchant enjoys success with fortunes reversed: the chieftain receives the goods he desires to maintain his status as a right and just ruler of the land, the merchant accrues wealth and status for his reliable delivery, the merchant's wife and daughters-in-law receive appropriate protection of their fidelity in the merchant's absence, and the society as a whole confirms the validity of its attempt to maintain stability and order—all because Satya Pīr is widely worshipped. In short, *dharma* prevails, everyone prospers, and, say the stories, if you pay attention, you, too, can prosper.⁵¹ The emphasis on humility and sincerity is central to all the stories, suggesting a leveling of social distinctions and an indirect parodic critique of *brāhmaṇs* in particular, who are nearly always depicted as arrogant, self-centered, and insincere. It is, perhaps, no accident that in early modern Bangla, the word for merchant was *sādhū*, which

51. Sukumār Sen ignores the woodcutters' tale while declaring the merchant's tale to be an unimagined recapitulation of the *Dhanapati khullana* in the *Caṇḍī maṅgal*; Sukumār Sen, *Bāṅglā sāhityer itihāsa*, vol. 1, pt. 2: 471. The merchant's tale is indeed sufficiently close to be called a variant, but the question of historical or aesthetic priority—that is, whether Satya Pīr's story or Caṇḍī's story is earliest and/or the model—is never considered, largely, one suspects, because on account of the monumental stature of the text of the *Caṇḍī maṅgal*, its priority is assumed, just the opposite of my own reading wherein numerous authors develop the idea which the *Caṇḍī maṅgal* ultimately epitomizes.

meant adjectively: good, honest, virtuous, excellent, righteous, honorable, respectable; as a noun: holy man or, alternately, trader.

. . .

These three tales should be already familiar as part of the stock and trade of the *pīr kathās* as a whole, for we have seen Gāji Pīr intervening for the benefit of *brāhmaṇs* and rewarding woodcutters. Dakṣiṇ Rāy confers benefaction on woodcutters as a result of their hospitality and work in the Bonbibī tale. Like Satya Pīr, Badar Pīr displays his multi-armed form of Viṣṇu to Dudbibī as living proof of his divine calling. And in a tale not included in this set of essays, but which I have translated elsewhere, Mānik Pīr not only helps woodcutters but inverts the story of the briefly noted Tuṅgadhvaj episode when he kills the sons of the cowherd for not paying their respects, then restores them to life when their wives intervene and do the needful by proffering *śirṇi*.⁵² Finally, recall the hapless merchant Puṣpadatta, who, while in search of his father in the *Rāy maṅgal*, witnesses the fabulous scene in the middle of the ocean, the reporting of which lands him in jail in Kaliṅga—that entire episode reminiscent of the merchant’s tale common to all tellings of the Satya Pīr trilogy.

Of all the communities in early modern Bengal we can call religious, it should not surprise us that the *vaiṣṇavs* (and later *bāuls*) were the ones to appropriate a figure who was clearly “foreign” or *jaban*, for they alone could justify the action through the mechanism of their ever-expanding *avatār* theory, which could and often did claim virtually any popular figure as its own. As becomes apparent through the other narrative types, the *vaiṣṇav* model of God’s descent, the *avatār*, and the Islamic institution of the *pīr* can be allied not only because the respective images of the holy man—*pīr* and *phakir* (sometimes *dārveś*) and *vairāgī* and *sannyāsī*—coincided so conveniently as images of the embodiment of power, but because there was a basic theological compatibility that undergirded both conceptions of divinity to which they referred, and this consonance would generate apposite orientations toward authority that would prove their coherence in the narratives of Satya Pīr.

Like the *vairāgī*, the *pīr* did not prescribe for the public the esoteric practices he reserved for adepts like himself, but proposed simpler and more popular forms of piety appropriate to ordinary householders. Much of his guidance fell into the adjudication of everyday problems, marital issues, arbitration of disputes, and the curbing of individual vices, such as greed and parsimoniousness, and so forth. The image of divinity associated with these simpler prescriptive rituals and instructions would run the full gamut of experiences, just as they do in the *vaiṣṇav* order. Not only were the institutional structures of the *pīr* and *vairāgī*, then, analogous

52. Stewart, trans., “Tales of Mānik Pīr: Protector of Cows in Bengal.”

in a general way, but their operational and theological underpinnings were closely equivalent, and that is borne out in comparisons of both general and historically specific issues of theology, such as the nature of the godhead and the injunctions to ritual practices. While it may be easy to speculate in purely intellectual or theological terms why these two traditions might be inclined to find mutual alliance, it was their operational dimension that bore out the practicality of it—and that allowed the *vaiṣṇavs* to appropriate the image of Satya Pīr with virtual impunity—in fact, one might even argue, with a very unsurprising anticipation if not expectation of its inevitability. The trilogy not only told the story of this process; the stories themselves served the process.

Given the similarity of the functions of the *vaiṣṇav* and *sūphī* spiritual guides and the theological parallels they represented, it was ultimately the fact that Satya Pīr was a mythic or fictional figure that effectively eliminated any possible challenge to the narrative's veracity, for no historical documentation of the *pīr*'s life and teachings aligned him with any particular sectarian group.⁵³ This independence of the narrative from historical verification dramatically aided the process of appropriation by enabling the *vaiṣṇav* to sanitize it. In this, Satya Pīr's image was plastic and malleable in the manner of a *purāṇik* figure and, indeed, he quietly slipped into the *purāṇas* as another form of Nārāyaṇ. This same kind of plasticity likewise extended to the use of the narratives, for it enabled them to be applied to a wide range of generic situations, again quite apart from any explicit historical event. Each of the *vaiṣṇav* episodes deals tacitly, if not explicitly, with generalized processes of *reclamation*—geographical and cultural—making habitable a land that has been off-limits to *brāhmaṇs* and therefore problematic for establishing a proper brāhmaṇical society.⁵⁴ Because of its lack of specificity, the nature of that rehabilitation could be adjusted to the user's immediate

53. The only historical *pīr* or *musalmāni* figure that I can find being appropriated by the Bengali *vaiṣṇav* traditions is the *jaban* Haridās, whose stories percolate through the hagiographies of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, though the historicity of some of his tales is very much in question; see especially the tales in Vṛndāvan Dās, *Caitanya bhāgavat*, 1.11, and in Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāj, *Caitanya caritāmṛta*, 3.3 and 3.11. For translations, see Tony K. Stewart, "The Exemplary Devotion of the 'Servant of Hari,'" in *The Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 564–77. There were, however, large numbers of *musalmāni* poets who wrote *vaiṣṇav*-style lyrics on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa; see Jatindranāth Bhattachārya, *Bāṅgālār vaiṣṇavbhāvēpāṇna musalmān kavir padsamajūṣā*; and Edward C. Dimock, "Muslim Vaiṣṇava Poets of Bengal," in *Languages and Areas: Studies Presented to George V. Bobrinskoy on the Occasion of His Academic Retirement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 28–36.

54. Ronald B. Inden argued that in previous centuries the genealogical histories included several mythic episodes for the royal importation of *brāhmaṇs* with proper Vedic knowledge to people the land and make it properly habitable; the last of these kings faded into the historical figure of Ballāl Sen. See Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 49–82. It should be noted that *hinduyāni* Bengal has been, including in the myths, a two-*varṇa* society, composed of *brāhmaṇs* and *sūdras*, and in that frame, it is easy to see where *jabans* fit.

circumstance. The progress documented in the trilogy of *vaiṣṇav* tales curiously paralleled the historical events of the settling of Bengal. As the Gaṅgā shifted steadily to the east, the limits of what defined the traditional heartland or *madhya deś* of brāhmaṇical culture could be extended, but only if brought under proper control. Making good use of the available powers, one agent of that *vaiṣṇav* domestication became the generic *pīr*, for the *pīr* could actually do what *brāhmaṇs* themselves could not: inhabit a wild land and tame it. Though some question the stereotype, ironically, the *pīr* has often been depicted as the very same agent for analogous processes of Islamization, for a number of scholars over the last half century have argued that the *sūphī* guide—as *pīr* or *pha-kīr* or *shaykh*—was often the first to enter new regions to make Islam available to the local population—sometimes converting but, perhaps much more often and more effectively, simply making familiar what initially might have seemed alien—so that the land might be brought into the line of traditional Islamic culture. Bengal was no exception. The same figure of the *pīr* served two religious orientations in nearly exactly the same capacity.

Therein may lie the most important reason for *vaiṣṇavs* to appropriate the *pīr*'s image, for by doing so they not only unquestionably acknowledged the presence of Islam as a legitimate social organization and religious option in the region, bowing to the reality of *musalmāni* presence, but they also acknowledged that the *pīr* worked as an effective source of local power. It was an act of a pragmatic *Realpolitik* in that the *vaiṣṇavs* adopted a stance toward their rulers' culture and religion that did not try to wish away the reality of that rule but attempted to adapt to its presence and co-opt its power by appropriating it: they took the *pīr* as one of the most effective tools for spreading the example of Islam and then revalorized the *pīr*'s image to their own ends. It should come as no surprise, however, that even though Satya Pīr was embraced, the embrace was not unmitigated or unconditional, because the *vaiṣṇavs* did not elevate him to the level of their adored Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya, but by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century absorbed him into the lower strata of the brāhmaṇical hierarchy, placing him squarely in the women's ritual cycle of the *vrat*, which was dominated nearly exclusively by lesser images of divinity, especially the household goddesses, such as Śaṣṭhī, Lakṣmī, et al., who were (and still are) petitioned to make life easier and more fruitful; interestingly Olābibī, the matron of cholera and other water-borne diseases, and Bonbibī both often find themselves similarly incorporated. But Satya Pīr, whose stories were circulating before those of the *pīr kathās*, proved his worth by doing much of the "dirty work" of making the land habitable and ensuring the wealth and weal of the family—the mundane role of lesser celestials—and in that proved his expediency. In spite of the "official" recognition, he was destined to remain a ubiquitous but marginal figure at the lower end of the *vaiṣṇav* and brāhmaṇical world.

6.3. GENDERED WITNESS TO SATYA PĪR'S POWERS

In the tales that deploy the second emplotment, Satya Pīr provides courage and moral support for the protagonists who are befuddled by their predicaments, which tend to be attributed to the fruits of past *karma* or, just as often, simply the inexorable machinery of fate. When these heroines and heroes attempt on their own to resolve the issues they confront, when they exhibit patience, commit to a dharmically defined moral order, and demonstrate an improvisational creativity in the face of repeated obstructions—only then, with resources exhausted, do they turn to Satya Pīr with a heartfelt summons to which he graciously responds. He tends to hover in the background, but where and how is not always clear. On occasion he is said to fly in from Makkā, a misty ethereal sacred location where he dwells with other friends of God. Sometimes he descends directly from *bhest*, heaven, and at others simply magically materializes out of thin air. His interventions are, for the most part, *enabling* rather than resolving, for he adjusts the situations to help the protagonists, his devotees, to restart their quest on their own, leaving them to their own devices to take advantage of the opportunities he presents. He does not simply fix things; rather, he encourages his devotees to utilize their own resources to benefit those around them before themselves.

Most of those stories, with perhaps one or two exceptions, seem to have originated in the nineteenth century, and the numbers of manuscripts are virtually nil, which suggests that most of the productions moved straight to print. The protagonists of these tales, generally more often women than men, provide direct witness to the fruitfulness and virtue of devotion and the responding power of Satya Pīr. They share the narrative code of the demand for *recognition* of the *pīr* found in all the tales, but focusing primarily on the outcomes, on the *efficacy of worship* and the benefits that will accrue, regardless of social standing or orientations toward the divine. They can be read as essentially nonsectarian, for they require no one to alter any preexisting allegiances. One could predict that the final rewards of worship are gendered—the female protagonists' fidelity to their husbands proves their worth and enhances the social standing and wealth of their husbands, while, as a result of the heroines' actions, the males garner great riches and beautiful princesses for wives and co-wives and even gain control of entire kingdoms filled with unimaginable wealth. But the plots often undercut expectations of gender, championing the independence, the education, the morality, and the self-determination of women. These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tales fully illustrate Judith Butler's now widely accepted argument that gendered roles are not assigned, but *enacted* sometimes deliberately and at others as necessity demands.⁵⁵ When the

55. Among a host of publications refining the argument that the performance of gender creates gender, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

naïve and hapless men nearly inevitably become incapacitated or even killed, the women step forward to do what the men cannot—they fight with swords, negotiate royal support, sleuth the sources of problems in ways that outfox even the williest constables, and receive rewards from kings for service and valor. I have located a dozen of these tales, eight of which can be found in full translations in *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs*. In that volume, there are three tales by Kavi Kiṅkar or Kiṅkar Dās: *Rāmbhāvatī pālā*,⁵⁶ translated as “The Unwilling Garland of Faithfulness”; *Śaśidhar pālā*,⁵⁷ as “The Bloodthirsty Ogress Who Would Be Queen”; and *Matilāler pālā*,⁵⁸ as “The Mother’s Son Who Spat Up Pearls.” Others in the anthology include: Kavi Kaṇva’s *Ākhoṭi pālā*,⁵⁹ translated as “The Fabled *Beṅgamā* Bird and the Stupid Prince”; Dvīja Kavibar’s *Bāghāambarer pālā*,⁶⁰ as “The Disconsolate Yogī Who Turned the Merchant’s Wife into a Dog”; Gayārām’s *Madanamañjari pālā*,⁶¹ as “The Princess Who Nursed Her Own Husband”; and Rasmay’s *Manohar phāsārār pālā*,⁶² as “The Erstwhile Bride and Her Winged Horse.” The lead story in that anthology is Kavi Āriph’s *Lālmoner kâhini*,⁶³ trans-

56. Kiṅkar Dās, *Rāmbhāvatī pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī*, 4th ed. (Khāntāi: Madhusudan Jān at Nihār Press, 1331 BS [ca. 1924]).

57. Kiṅkar Dās, *Śaśidhar pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī* (Khāntāi: Madhusudan Jān at Nihār Press, 1322 BS [ca. 1915]).

58. Kiṅkar Dās, *Matilāler pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī* (Khāntāi: Nihār Press, 1322 BS [ca. 1915]).

59. Kavi Kaṇva [= Kavi Kaṇa], *Ākhoṭi pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ kathā* (Manuscript no. 59B, Dhaka University Library, 14 folios, complete, dtd. 1273 BS [ca. 1866]); the scribe used a *baphalā* (v) in lieu of a *reph* (4) throughout, hence the unusual spelling of Kaṇva rather than Kaṇa. Bishnupada Panda edited a version of the text which shows many discrepancies when compared to the original manuscript; see Kavi Kaṇa’s “Satyanārāyaṇ ākhoṭi pālā” in Śrī Kavi Kaṇa, *Pālās of Śrī Kavi Kaṇa*, comp./ed./trans. Bishnupada Panda, 4 vols., Kalāmūlasāstra Series, vols. 4–7 (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), vol. 1 (KS Series, vol. 4): 1–93. After publishing my translation of the *Ākhoṭi pālā* in *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs*, I found two more versions of this same text, but attributed to Rāmeśvar; see Rāmeśvar, *Ākhoṭi pālā*, in *Rāmeśvar racanāvalī*, ed. Pañcānan Cakravartī (Kolkata: Baṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat, 1371 BS [ca. 1964]), 536–49; and Rāmeśvar, *Ākhoṭi pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī*, 3rd ed. (Khāntāi: Madhusudan Jān at Nihār Press, 1924).

60. Dvīja Kavibar, *Bāghāambarer pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī*, 10th ed. (Kānthāi: Nihār Press, 1322 BS [ca. 1915]).

61. Gayārām, *Madanmañjari pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī* (Khāntāi: Madhusudan Jān at Nihār Press, 1334 BS [ca. 1927]).

62. Anonymous, *Manohar phāsārār pālā: Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī*, 10th ed. (Kānthāi: Nihār Press, 1313 BS [ca. 1906]); the attribution as anonymous is unfortunate because after I had translated the text for the volume, I discovered the text was by Rasmay; see Rasmay, *Galakāṭā phāsyārār pālā* (Bengali ms no. 214. Dhaka University Library, 17 folios, complete, dtd. 1264 BS [ca. 1857]). It should be noted that the Nihār Press editor took liberties with the text, emending a few sections, including sanitizing a couple of passages for what appear to be prurient interests.

63. Kavi Āriph, *Lālmoner kâhini*, ed. Girindranāth Dās (Gokūlpur, Cabbīś Pargaṇās: Śrīmati Karuṇāmayī Dās, 1984). This version is virtually identical to two printed editions from the mid-nineteenth century; see Āriph, *Lālmoner kecchā* (Kalakātā: Sudhānidhi Yantra, 1274 BS [ca. 1867]), and Āriph, *Lālmoner kecchā* (Kalakātā: Viśvambhar Lāhā, 1276 BS [ca. 1869]). There are at least a dozen

lated as “The Wazir’s Daughter Who Married a Sacrificial Goat.” In many respects the story of *Lālmon* serves as a prototype for these tales and is likely the oldest of the stories that comprise this grouping. It is also the most popular, seeing frequent printings. The story goes like this:

The Adventure of Lālmon

Lālmon is the daughter of the king’s chief minister, but she is being raised as a boy because of the minister’s frustrated desire for a son. She is sent to school disguised as a boy and becomes literate in the usual branches of knowledge, including literature and mathematics and other subjects typical of royal training. A young prince named *Husāin Šāh* finds himself frequently enjoying the company of his gifted classmate until one day, as he is walking down the street, he looks up and sees that she is not a boy at all. She is standing at her window, combing out her long hair, exposing her budding breasts. He is immediately smitten and presses her to agree to marry him on the spot for his instant gratification. She refuses unless there is a witness, but strangely enough, there is no one around to do the needful. *Husāin* is impatient, his desire now little more than unmitigated lust, so he determinedly importunes her and presses her to capitulate. Worried that should she yield, he will, in spite of his promises, just as quickly abandon her, she meditates on *Satya Pīr* to come to witness *Husāin*’s promise of fidelity and support. *Satya Pīr* magically appears from his abode in *Makkā*. *Husāin*, angered by this unwelcome intrusion, picks up a pen that is sitting on *Lālmon*’s writing desk and, with a volley of vile imprecations, hurls it at *Satya Pīr*. *Satya Pīr* unhesitatingly counters with a curse that *Husāin* will be fated to lose his head, then stands as *Lālmon*’s witness. After he leaves, the two consummate their betrothal. As was nearly always the case in palaces, the word is soon out and *Husāin* realizes that both his father and the minister will take him to task for his lack of restraint, so he and *Lālmon* bolt just before the guards arrive. Dressed as soldiers, they ride deep into the forest. Brigands surround them and they fight back-to-back as well as any trained *laskār* soldiers might. They slay the disorganized highwaymen, but counter to *Lālmon*’s counsel, *Husāin* spares one young servant. When they are finally able to sleep, that young boy picks up *Husāin*’s sword and lops off his head. *Lālmon* quickly dispatches the lad, but the deed is done.

Lālmon cradles *Husāin*’s severed head in her lap and weeps as she meditates on *Satya Pīr*. The extraordinary nature of her lamentation brings the wildlife of the forest to a complete standstill. The animals realize she is just like the famed *Behulā*

more reprints and other editions over the next several decades. There is another retelling that circulated in the early decades of the twentieth century, but not since; see *Chaiyad Hāmjā Sāheb, Chahi baḍa lālmon* (Kalikātā: Hāji Ājjaddīn Āhmad enḍ Sans at Gāouchiyā Lāibrerī, 1344 BS [ca. 1937]); and what appears to be an earlier imprint, *Chaiyad Hāmjā Sāheb, Chahi baḍa lālmon* (Kalikātā: Śrī Rāmlāl Śil at Niu-Bhikṭoriyā Pres, n.d.).

of the *Manasā maṅgal*, who floated down the river with the dead body of her snake-bitten husband, Lakṣhindār, in pursuit of a miracle of revival.⁶⁴ The animals of the forest empathetically fast to multiply the urgency of her appeal to Satya Pīr for help. Satya Pīr is moved by the anguish, and he flies again to Lālmon's side. He grants her wish, reattaches Husāin's head to his lifeless body, and revivifies him. Balance and harmony are restored to the forest, and Lālmon nurses Husāin till he regains his strength. Off they go. They camp deep in the forest to escape detection, tethering their royal steeds to the trees. As soon as they have dismounted and settled, Husāin strikes for the nearest town to secure food. On the way, a woman gardener, a garland weaver, sees him and from visage and comportment recognizes instantly that he is a royal. She quickly spruces up her appearance, sprinkles a magic spell on one of her garlands and, using all of her feminine charms, beckons him to come closer. Husāin, of course, cannot resist the allure of her exposed breasts and, when he leans forward for a better look, she slips the magic garland over his head and turns him into a ram. He is ensorcelled. She tethers him to a post in her yard and keeps him as breeding stock. At night she returns him to his manly form so that she can have her pleasure, but keeps him mute, only to transmogrify him back into a ram the next day, transformations that soon become routine.

Meanwhile, Lālmon, alarmed at Husāin's failure to return, is set to search when a party of the local king's scouts discover her hideaway—because she is dressed as a *laskār*, to them she appears as a soldier of unknown allegiance suspiciously in possession of what, by the look of them, could only be royal horses. They haul her to jail as a horse thief without recourse to a hearing. As she languishes in jail—and Husāin continues to service his new mistress—a rogue white rhino goes on a rampage, terrorizing the kingdom, destroying crops, and killing peasants. For the one who can kill it, the king offers a handsome reward, including half of his kingdom and the hand of his daughter in marriage. Lālmon overhears the guards discussing it, and so, still dressed as a *laskār*, she bribes her way out of jail. With a little help from Satya Pīr, she tracks and slays it, quickly cutting off its horn and tongue. Other bounty hunters soon arrive and begin taking ears and other parts of the rhino hoping to prove they have slain it, but the king knows that the real destroyer of that beast will possess the horn and tongue—and so when Lālmon, still in *laskār*

64. One of the most widely circulated versions of Behulā's tale is by Ketakādās; see Ketakādās Kṣemānanda, *Manasā Maṅgal*, ed. Jatindramohan Bhaṭṭācāryya (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1949), and Ketakādāsa Kṣemānanda, *Manasāmaṅgal*, ed. Bijanbihārī Bhaṭṭācāryya (New Delhi: Sāhitya Academy, 1977). For a retelling of Ketakādās's tale, see Ketakā Dāsa, "The Manasā Maṅgal of Ketakā Dāsa: Behulā and Lakhindār," in *The Thief of Love: Bengali Tales from Court and Village*, trans. Edward C. Dimock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 195–294. For an unabridged French translation of the story as told by Bipradās, see Vipradāsa, *La victoire de Manasā: Traduction française du Manasā Vijaya, poème bengali de Vipradāsa (XV^e)*, trans. France Bhattacharya, Collection Indologies 105 (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2007). For an analysis of Behulā's actions as a ritual of *tantrik* revivification, see Stewart, "Process of Surface Narrative."

drag, presents the horn and tongue to the king, he proclaims that *laskār* the winner of the purse, including the gift of his daughter's hand. Lālmon plays along.

The union is made official, but much to the distress of the young princess Māhtāb, Lālmon refuses to consummate their marriage. Lāl tells her that after one month she will reveal all, but to be patient. Māhtāb, of course, has no choice, and perhaps out of embarrassment remains silent. During that month Lāl, who is now running much of the kingdom, devises a strategy to locate her wayward Husāin. She orders the construction of a *masjid*, with a promise of free food and celebrations to last for weeks, rightly figuring that when the word spreads everyone in the kingdom will eventually show up for the festivities. Sure enough, the garland weaver arrives with Husāin in tow, but he is still magically rendered dumb. He does manage to scribble a message to Lāl on the wall of the *masjid* using the gum of smoked tobacco he finds on the ground. That message is just what she was hoping to see, and see she does.

Soon Lāl rounds up the garland weaver witch and her ram and has them hauled into the palace. When instructed to turn her ram back into the man Husāin, the garland weaver laughs and pointedly replies that she can no more do that than a horse thief can run the country. Finally, under threat of death, she complies, and for her trouble is instantly dispatched, her mutilated body unceremoniously thrown into a ditch. After Husāin has regained his form, Lāl reveals to her astonished audience of king, queen, and bride the truth of her gender ruse. The king is flummoxed by his gaff, the princess humiliated, and Husāin astonished at this turn of events. The king is not sure what to do, but the young princess immediately determines a course of action: because she is married to Lāl and Lāl is married to Husāin, she will assume the role of second wife, but will not be Husāin's sexual partner; she will remain as the devoted companion of Lālmon, since it is to her she was betrothed. So, by the interventions of Lālmon, aided by Satya Pīr, Lālmon wins a wife, and the randy prince Husāin inherits a second kingdom and now a second wife. He returns home to succeed his father with dominion over a now expanded territory. Everyone dutifully followed Lālmon's lead in worshiping Satya Pīr as the guarantor of all things good.

. . .

The story attests to the power of the *pīr* to aid his devotees through every trial and tribulation, but the devotee must be bold and enterprising in utilizing the aid proffered. There is no theological positioning in these tales: God is seldom, if ever, positively identified, unlike in the trilogy where Nārāyaṇ and Āllā are asserted to be equivalent, with Āllā taking the form of Satya Pīr. Nor does God intervene—that is the work of Satya Pīr. But because the texts tend to be noncommittal regarding the identification of Āllā and Nārāyaṇ, nor do they assert the supremacy of Āllā—which, as we shall see, is the dominant trope in the third set of tales—the audiences for this second form of emplotment are free to read or

hear the attribution as they see fit, and it is in this sense they effectively circulate as nonsectarian, openly malleable in orientation. It would not be unreasonable to suspect that the near total absence of even the most rudimentary religious sentiment beyond the enacted examples of the benefits of worshiping Satya Pīr was the reason these tales were often characterized as simply entertainment. But the more likely underlying explanation was that, because Satya Pīr is never the protagonist—rather, his devotees are—they must prove themselves worthy of his aid, and when they do, benefits accrue. It is the *instrumentality* and *efficacy* of the *pīr* that is demonstrated over and again.

Sharing in this second emplotment is a set of stories by a poet who composed tales in a dialectical form of Bangla mixed with Oḍiyā: Kavikarṇa (seen above as Kavi Kaṇva). The stories circulated in a set of sixteen tales, but editor Bishnupada Panda, who published a four-volume work with his selection of the preferred sixteen tales, indicated in the introduction that nineteen tales can be found among the various editions of his works.⁶⁵ The tales tend to feature men as the protagonists and are marked by plots with minimal transitions and speech that is often abrupt, suggesting planned oral performance (or, conversely, suggesting its origins in public performance prior to transcription).

We have already seen nearly every trope and twist of plot to be found in these tales, and the reader can draw the connections. Both the intertextual references and the cosmological structures tend to reference a classical Bengali world. Satya Pīr's punishments and rewards favor the swift and dramatic, in an economy of brutal chastisement and retribution, usually indicated by seemingly intractable conflicts, balanced at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum by his magnanimity and beneficence, which inevitably translate into wealth and weal. These extremes mirror in their diegetic expression the radical endpoints of the two characteristics that in *vaiṣṇav* circles define the nature of Nārāyaṇ's or Kṛṣṇa's divinity—omnipotent lordship (*aiśvarya*) balanced by his loving sweetness (*mādhurya*) or, just as easily, can point to the analogous qualities of Āllā that bracket his traditionally eulogized ninety-nine qualities—awesome majesty (*jalāl*) and sublime beauty (*jamāl*). In effect, the cosmos was then sufficiently neutral to require no explicit commitment to a preferred form of divinity, which had the effect of shifting the focus almost entirely onto the action. In most of these tales there is an ebb and flow of predicaments and resolutions typical of Romance, but I have located one text, published by Nihār Press, composed in a very heavily Oḍiyā-inflected Bangla, that

65. The tales include: Śrī Kavi Karṇa, *Pālās of Śrī Kavi Karṇa* (vol. 4): "Satyanārāyaṇ ākhotī pālā," "Satyanārāyaṇ pālā," "Madansundar pālā"; (vol. 5): "Marddagāji janma pālā," "Marddagāji vibha pālā," "Padmalocan pālā," "Guḍiā śaṅkar pālā," "Vidyādhār pālā," "Śrīmanta saudāgar pālā"; (vol. 6): "Abhinna-madan pālā," "Herācānd pālā," "Phāśiyārā pālā," "Kāthuriyā pālā," "Kiśormohan pālā," "Lakṣmaṅkumar pālā," "Durjan siṃha pālā"; (vol. 7): "Satyanārāyaṇ janma pālā," "Candrāji vibha pālā," "Nīlasundar pālā," "Daś avatār pālā," and "Hīrāmohan pālā."

starkly captures the link between the rewards that accrue from devotion to the *pīr* and the disasters that follow for ignoring him. With no author credited, the text of the *Nalanīler pālā* straddles both gendered forms of the tales that constitute this second emplotment. One young man, Nal, faithfully and patiently pays his respects to Satya Pīr and reaps the rewards; his twin brother Nīl scoffs and refuses to commit, and Satya Pīr discretely arranges for his education in the vagaries of worldly life. But it is the king's scheming wife who has created the problem and her faithful and brilliant daughters-in-law who resolve it. The story goes like this.⁶⁶

The Tale of Nal and Nīl

King Virbhadra of Surāt Nagar has two wives, both gorgeous, both childless. They long for at least one son. Following the advice of their *paṇḍit*, together they go to petition Śiv, and along the way they pass a *pīr*, hunched down in his tattered mendicant's garb. He has not eaten for three days. He begs food with the promise to fulfill their desires; but in response, the younger queen angrily rebuffs him, while her elder co-wife responds more compassionately and unhesitatingly lays at the feet of the *pīr* all of the jewelry she has on her person.

When they pray at the Śiv temple, Hara reveals that it is that old *pīr*, named Satya Pīr, who is the giver of sons. He predicts that the elder will have twins because of her beneficent act of giving to the *pīr*. He also foretells that the younger will be punished for her lack of charity; she will remain barren. Then he advises them both to offer *śirṇi* to the *pīr*. The younger queen is distraught, rightly fearing she will soon be sidelined by the good fortune of her senior co-wife. As predicted, in no time the elder queen is pregnant, and ten months later she delivers twins. The king makes all the appropriate donations to *brāhmaṇs* and so forth, and the older queen dedicates the two boys to Satya Pīr for protection. As they celebrate, the jealous younger queen slips poison into the food of her senior, who realizes too late the perfidy. She knows she is dying, and the king's distress mirrors Rām's grief when Sitā is stolen away by Rāvaṇ. Moments before her death, the queen hands the care of her twins to her co-wife and instructs her to name them Nīl and Nal—and with that final breath, a chariot descends from *vaikuṇṭha* (heaven) to whisk her away. But the king grows suspicious of the obsequiousness of the surviving wife, a behavior previously uncharacteristic, so as a precaution he consigns the boys to the care of his constable for rearing.

The Constable raises the boys with diligence and pride. He has them educated in the forms of knowledge appropriate to their station. When they reach twelve, he returns them to the king and is handsomely rewarded. The younger queen had hoped to have a son of her own, but these two boys stand first in the line of kingly succession, so she schemes to remove them. One day the boys rambunctiously

66. Anonymous, *Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī: Nalanīler pālā*, 6th ed. (Kāñthāi: Jatindranāth Jānā at Nihār Press, 1340 BS [ca. 1933]).

chase a bird into their stepmother's apartment. Sensing an opportunity, she hides the bird in the folds of her sari, and when the boys burst in, she accuses them of entering her private quarters with salacious intent. She surreptitiously inflicts wounds on her body that would pass as the result of a violent sexual assault. She demands that the king punish them or else she will commit suicide, which would lay the guilt on the king, making him complicit.

Just look at my body, clawed all over by the nails of those boys—your sons! How can this be permitted in a dharmic world? The servants can attest to my pitiful condition. If you, as the head of this kingdom, allow these boys to go unpunished, be sure that no good will come of it. If this violation of my person is allowed to stand, then your kingdom is doomed.⁶⁷

Angry, unsettled, and unsure, the king summons his courtiers and friends, and on their advice decrees that the boys present an abomination to his lineage and threaten the stability of the kingdom. He orders them taken to the jungle and executed and instructs the guards to return with their blood so the queen can expiate their unholy transgressions by bathing in it.

Their guardian the Constable is aghast at the sentence because he does not believe the accusations. The boys protest their innocence, but the king charges the Constable to carry out the sentence. With no way to countermand the king's order, he sets out to do as told. When they reach the forest, he raises his sword above their heads, but his arm freezes mid-swing. One of the boys has called Satya Nārāyaṇ, who materializes, seething with anger. Sensing the violation, a darkness settles over the forest. The enervating roar of the tigers knocks the Constable senseless, allowing Satya Pīr to spirit the boys away. When the Constable finally awakens, Satya Pīr instructs him to slaughter a goat and catch its blood, and that will serve as ostensible proof of the boys' execution. Not long after, the young queen bathes herself in a blood ecstasy. She can finally imagine that her own son will become king. Meanwhile, the boys' adventures are just beginning.

The *pīr* abandoned the boys in the thick of the jungle and vanished. As the boys hunkered down at the foot of a massive banyan tree, they pondered their plight. Nal spoke while Nīl listened. "Satya Nārāyaṇ saved us. Come, let us perform a *pūjā* to worship Satya Pīr. He will surely drive away any danger."

Nīl listened to his brother's words and replied softly, "You are proposing that we give worship to a *jaban devatā*? How is it possible for a *hindu* to do such a thing? If we worship a *hindu devatā* like Śiv, we will be protected against all harm. If we worship Ambikā, Caṇḍī, and Mahākālī, our suffering will come to an end. In the Tretā age, Rām Raghumaṇi worshiped the Parvata Nandinī, and by that he was able to destroy Rāvaṇ of Laṅkā and rescue Sītā. Who can even begin to fathom the endless

67. Anonymous, *Satyanārāyaṇ pāñcālī: Nalanīler pālā*, 16.

glory and majesty of *hindu devatās*? Go ahead and perform your worship, but do not expect me to follow suit.”

At Nil’s pronouncements, Nal was dismayed, but went about the business. He set up a small dais, *āsthānā*, in the lap of the banyan tree’s roots. After gathering fruits and flowers, he installed the *pīr* at the base of the banyan tree. He pressed the palms of his hands together and cried out loudly, “Lord, Prabhu, please grant your protection!”

At these words, the *pīr* acknowledged the great qualities of Nala: “Today I will bestow upon you a great honor and opportunity. Harbor in your heart no doubts. You are destined to become the Lord of Kings, Rājēśvar.”⁶⁸

Nal keeps watch while Nil sleeps, but he soon grows thirsty—the thirst, of course, instigated by Satya Pīr—so he carefully leaves fruits and edible roots next to the place of worship and sets out to find a sweet water stream. The river traverses a kingdom called Nāgeśvar, whose ruler is named Candraketu. Candraketu’s only issue is female, and she is of marriageable age, but she has been cursed: every prospective groom will fall dead with the first touch of her hand. The king despairs of ever finding a groom.

Worried over his daughter’s prospects, Candraketu summons his trusted bull elephant to search the world over for a suitable boy. Satya Nārāyaṇ contrives to cross paths with the elephant and promises to furnish the object of the king’s desire. Together with the elephant, he heads to the river where they espy Nal, radiant with the marks of royalty. The elephant ceremoniously wraps his trunk around Nal and gently lifts him onto his back. Deed accomplished, Satya Pīr vanishes, while the elephant returns to Candraketu with his prize. Candraketu wastes no time in arranging the wedding. Rather than killing Nal, the daughter’s touch has the opposite effect: it renders his body immutable, no longer subject to any kind of decay. The princess’s curse is annulled, the king is thrilled, and Nal is soon conducting affairs of state as the crown prince.

Meanwhile Nil wakes to find his twin gone, and he fears the worst there in the wild. A horse from the royal stable of Candraketu mysteriously winds up tethered to a tree near the place where Nil had been resting. Soon soldiers appear and apprehend him as a horse thief. In jail, bound hand and foot, and with a stone placed on his chest, Nil’s spirits run the gamut of despair and puzzlement. The entire farce is, of course, the result of the *pīr*’s magical meddling. Thoroughly befuddled, Nil slips into the delirium of sleep, only to encounter Satya Pīr in a vision. Satya Pīr offers him a way out: “Offer *śirṇi* to me, or you will die in this prison.” In his abject condition, what can he do but agree? Satya Pīr promises to deliver him in three days.

Now the king needs sandal and wood apple timber for his monthly sacrifices, so he requisitions more from a trader named Bāṅgāl. When the stars and planets align favorably, the merchant’s crew pushes off, but the boat refuses to budge. The

68. Anonymous, *Satyānārāyaṇ pāñcālī: Nalanīler pālā*, 22–23.

merchant fetches the king's astrologer, who turns out to be none other than Satya Nārāyaṇ. Working his calculations, he instructs the king to produce the horse thief languishing in prison. The moment he sets foot on the boat, it lunges into the waves. They head to Siṃha Island.

The king of Siṃha Island is, appropriately enough, named Siṃhabāhu. His daughter Lilāvati possesses an electric beauty. As the merchant arrives at Siṃhanagar, the king's daughter is to choose her groom from among a host of suitors, so the place is crawling with kings and princes. Just as she passes the gawking Nil in his tattered rags, Satya Pīr makes him appear breathtakingly beautiful to her mind's eye. Lilāvati does not hesitate to choose him, and they quickly exchange garlands to the outrage of all present, including her father the king.⁶⁹ Humiliated, the king rebukes her, and confines her and her new husband to house arrest. Satya Pīr intervenes, claiming Nil was his personal servant, so the king, seeing an easy way, releases them to return with Bāṅgāl to Candraketu's kingdom, which is now being ruled by Nal. Bāṅgāl, cleverly sensing an opportunity, plots to push Nil overboard en route and then offer the princess as a gift to the king. Nil soon finds himself unceremoniously bobbing in the water. As anticipated, Nal is smitten with Lilāvati's beauty, but she resists his offer of marriage until she can complete her Ūṣā vow, a *vrata* to the goddess. She decrees that she must keep to her room for nine months and lay eyes on no man; if her vow of chaste seclusion is not honored, she promised to commit suicide. Not wishing to court disaster, Nal agrees.

Meanwhile, Satya Pīr, the Prime Mover, plops into the water and takes the form of a log, to which Nil clings.⁷⁰ After a full month, addled from sun and surf, he washes up on shore in a bleak and barren garden, which miraculously bursts into bloom. Wonderstruck, the gardener goes to investigate and stumbles across a young man curled up asleep in the roots of an *aśoka* tree. At her touch Nil awakes. She manages to coax him home where she nurses him back to health, a tonic for her own childless condition.

When Lilāvati is about to conclude her Ūṣū *vrata*, the king summons his most knowledgeable *brāhmaṇ* priest to explain the vow. The *brāhmaṇ* is stumped: there is nothing like it in the Veda or the *purāṇas*, he proclaims, so he cannot possibly

69. This is an inversion of the story of Nala and Damayanti in the *Mahābhārata*, wherein the gods conspire to marry Damayanti by taking on his appearance, but which she sees through because the gods, though identical in every way to him, hover slightly above the ground while he is firmly planted on it, so she knows it is he. For a lively translation of the Nala and Damayanti story, see "Nala" in *The Mahābhārata*, trans./ed. J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), vol. 3, bk. 3 (32a), 319–64.

70. Given its Oḍiyā inflection, the allusion here seems to be to Jagannāth, who is known as the *dāru brahmā*, the *brahmā* in the form of wood, combined with the well-worn metaphorical trope of God providing the raft by which an individual might navigate across the river of life or *saṃsār*. In some forms of Oḍiyā *vaiṣṇava* theology, Jagannāth inhabits the void, *śūnyatā*, the ocean in which Satya Pīr now floats.

predict what it means. He proposes that the king load his most trusted elephant with riches and let it roam through the land to reward anyone who can explain; imposters will reveal themselves and be executed for their greed. The man who can unravel the puzzle of the vow will clearly possess an arcane knowledge, and the elephant will bring him to the palace to reveal all.⁷¹ Eventually, the elephant passes by the gardener's house, and when Nīl hears the wager, he understands. He gifts the elephant's riches to the gardener and, looking wan and emaciated, heads to the palace. His twin brother Nal does not recognize him, for through his tribulations Nīl has lost his royal luster. Curiously, Nīl, too, fails to recognize Nal. As the time approaches, the excitement rises; even the seas swell in anticipation of the end of this unusual Ūṣā *vrat*.

Everyone who is someone is present. Līlāvati immediately spots him and, as rehearsed, he takes his place and begins his tale, a reprise of his life—how his mother died, how he and his brother were falsely accused, how he was whisked away to the forest where his brother disappeared, how he was apprehended as a horse thief, and how his escape was engineered. He narrates how he fatefully landed up on Siṃhala and managed to win the princess in a *svayamvar* bride choice. Then, after being cast out of the king's palace and en route to Candraketu's land, the merchant pushed him overboard. He tells how he clung to a buoyant wooden plank that luckily floated by, and how he eventually washed up on the gardener's beach. Līlāvati confirms it. As the story unfolds, it gradually dawns on Nal that this man is none other than his own brother, whom he once nearly had killed as a horse thief. They are soon reconciled. Nal quickly orders the merchant jailed with the same stone on his chest that Nīl suffered.

Nal and Nīl together worship Satya Pīr and then send a messenger to Līlāvati's father, Siṃhabāhu, to join them. In thanks, they lavishly worship Satya Pīr to spread his fame. Siṃhabāhu will bring Nīl and Līlāvati back to Siṃhala Nagar, where he will install them as the rightful rulers. Nal and Nīl then send for their father Virbhadrā. In his grief-stricken condition, having lost his wife and his two sons, he has ceased to care about life, but when he learns that both of sons have survived and each has a princess for a wife, he finds hope. Reunited, he and his sons and everyone in the kingdom worship Satya Pīr.

. . .

Nal and Nīl's saga very unsubtly distills the message into its starkest binary: *worship Satya Pīr and prosper, fail to worship and suffer*. The coercive quality of Satya

71. This release of the elephant with its challenge and reward seems to be a structural inversion of the traditional *aśvamedha* or horse sacrifice wherein an aspiring king, seeking to assert sovereignty over a particular territory, would release a horse, with proclamation attached, but accompanied by an army. At the end of the year, the horse would be escorted back and the territory it had traversed would be, ipso facto, subject to the king because no one had succeeded in killing it. Here the peregrination is in search of the hero-king, and no one else would dare to assert that identity.

Pīr's intercession bluntly moves the male figures into a place of submission, but the optative interventions he offers his female leads, such as in Lālmon's story noted above, again apply. It is Līlāvati's prescient realization that prompts her to initiate a new *vrat*, that of the goddess Ūṣū, which is an Oḍiyā variant of Uṣas, Dawn, attested frequently in the *R̥g veda*. Uṣas is closely allied with *ṛta*, the principle of cosmic and moral order, and is naturally associated with the Āśvins, the twins, who in their form as horses or men with horse heads pull the sun's chariot. Consistent with the impulse behind this cycle of tales, it is with the help of Satya Pīr that Līlāvati has been empowered to take matters into her own hands. She figures out what no one else yet knows, so by undertaking her vow she will reveal the two men as *twins*, which will correct the horrible miscarriage of justice perpetrated by the younger queen by restoring both rightful heirs to their kingdom. It will at the same time expiate the sins of the father for having wrongly ordered their execution—precisely the kind of moral order the goddess Uṣas would engender. With the connection to the Āśvins (who are identified with horses), it is hardly a coincidence that Satya Pīr uses the ruse of the royal horse to cause Nīl to be suspected of thievery.

This second emplotment deploys the narrative code that touts the efficacy of worshipping Satya Pīr or Satya Nārāyaṇ. Female protagonists reason and work their way toward a happy resolution that judiciously calls on Satya Pīr's aid—knowing when and how to utilize his extraordinary power—while many of the male protagonists seem to require more brutal instruction and even coercion before they learn. In the same way women are instrumental in insinuating the worship of Satya Pīr through the *vrats* that constitute the trilogy of the first emplotment, more often than not it is the women in this second emplotment who are responsible for slipping the worship of Satya Pīr into everyday life, who explore the prospects of tapping alternate forms of power that open the Bengali cosmos to accommodate what was initially a non-Bengali form of religiosity. But it is the third emplotment that inverts the trope of a simple accommodation of the *sūphī pīr* into a *hinduyāni* cosmology: the traditional Bengali cosmology finds itself incorporated into a larger *musalmāni* cosmos that displaces the easy equivalences of the other two emplotments.

6.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SATYA PĪR IN MUSALMĀNI TERMS

The tales of Satya Pīr that are *musalmāni* in their provenance and orientation take a decidedly different tack to the power of the *pīr* and the dynamics of interacting with the local populace. The overarching perspectives transform a traditional Indic cosmological frame to a *musalmāni* one. With that shift, no time need be spent justifying Satya Pīr's existence, as was necessary for the *vaiṣṇavs*, for *pīrs* are already part of the everyday *musalmāni* world. Nor is there any attempt to equate

Satya Pīr with a *sannyāsī* or *vairāgī* or *jogī*, even though the authors routinely refer to these figures in ways commensurate with the analogues of the *phakir* and *pīr*, and in so doing draw upon the association of their underlying signification systems. Because the form of the *pīr* functions in Bengal's culture as a source of local power and moral fortitude, any *pīr* would be an obvious choice for literary interest. But relating Satya Pīr's triumphs as a way of celebrating his superiority is clearly subsumed by the larger interest of proving or confirming that he is worthy of a following in the first place. Much of that message is communicated semiotically through the changes in his physical image, the conflation of *vaiṣṇav* images of divinity and suggested ritual practices with the accoutrements and *phakirī* customs of *sūphī* mendicants.⁷² Examining these images in some detail will help us to uncover the art of *incremental realignment*, that is, conditioning the audience to changes that will ultimately invert the cosmological relationships. Often displayed in order to elicit some kind of confrontation, these semiotically rich images manipulate the encounter with divinity experienced by the antagonists and, at the same time, subtly manipulate the reader's emotional world in ways that might influence behavior.

These triumphs of Satya Pīr are not always narratively sequenced as they are in the *vaiṣṇav* trilogy, nor are they ordered for consumption in any way similar to the incorporation of his tales into the *vrat* cycle. Most are independent or only loosely related to others, but the liveliest coordinated group can be found in one expansive collection composed in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, the *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi* of Kṛṣṇahari Dās,⁷³ with which we started this book. It is structured in the form of an anecdotal hagiography of the generic religious hero and constitutes the largest single text telling the tales of Satya Pīr. The author's name might suggest an overt *vaiṣṇav* orientation; he conveys that his father is named Rāmdēv, his mother Pañcamī, but importantly his *guru*'s name is Mohāmmad Sarkār—the name of his *guru* telling of the text's perspective.⁷⁴ Here

72. A number of scholars have come to recognize the obviousness of the partnership of *pīrs* and *vaiṣṇavs*, an image patterned after that of Satya Pīr; see Ajoy Kumār Ghoṣ, "Viṣṇupurer pīr sthān," in *Bākuḍār khayālī: Jaṅgalmohal saṃkalan*, ed. Arabinda Caṭṭopādhyāy (Pratāpabāgān, Bākuḍā: E. Tī. Pres, 2014), 125–43.

73. Girīndranāth Dās includes a summary of Kṛṣṇahari Dās's *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*; see Dās, *Bāmlā pīr sāhityer kathā*, 469–92. Unfortunately, the subtle textures of the narrative are completely lost as he simply reports the action, especially conflict, which not-so-generously changes the text to fit into his stark Hindu-Muslim binary. See also the second revised edition: Dās, *Bāmlā pīr sāhityer kathā*, 2nd ed (Kalikātā: Suvarṇarekhā, 1998), 347–62. For a rare synoptic article that includes references to Kṛṣṇahari Dās's text, see Kānāi Lāl Rāy, "Satyapīr," in *Bāmlā Ekādemī Patrikā*, ed. Mohāmmad Hārūn-ur-Raṣīd (Śrāvaṇ-Āśvin 1399 BS [ca. 1992]), 71–82. It should be noted, however, that his Kṛṣṇahari Dās references are to Muḥammad Ṣahīdullāh's *Bāmlā sāhityer kathā*, which can now be found in Ṣahīdullāh, *Ṣahīdullāh racanābālī*, ed. Ānisujjāmān, 3 vols. (Ḍhākā: Bāmlā Ekādemī, 1994), 2:1–504.

74. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 59–60.

we have confirmation that names do not automatically signal religious orientation even as late as the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as they are assumed to do today.

Kṛṣṇahari Dās's lengthy tome opens by invoking the glory of Āllā and the Prophet and describing the wonders of *bhest* (heavenly paradise). Because a certain *brāhmaṇ* king named Maidānava, a worshiper of Kālī, has been persecuting *pīrs* and *phakīrs* indiscriminately, Satya Pīr is sent down—recall the convolutions of his birth that were described in chapter 1. More than half of Kṛṣṇahari Dās's lengthy volume is taken up by the quest of Satya Pīr to prepare himself, finally meet, and eventually triumph over King Maidānav—the primary *raison d'être* for the *pīr's* descent.⁷⁵ After the *pīr's* emergence from the turtle's egg, he disappears into the jungly forest and only after five years returns to his mother. Almost immediately after his birth, he encounters Khoyājā Khijir. We must assume that Satya Pīr is fully formed and intellectually and emotionally accomplished (having lost little or nothing between the time he was summoned by God and when he descends⁷⁶), so he begs Khoyājā to accept him as his *murid* or student. Khoyājā quickly disappears, but Satya Pīr demonstrates his eligibility and patience by trailing him for more than a week, guided only by the sound of the Khoyājā's anklets. They traverse through all seven levels of the underworld, eventually landing in the underground realm of Pātāl where Khoyājā begins his instruction in earnest.⁷⁷ The young *pīr's* tutelage constitutes one of the lengthiest passages about Khoyājā Jendā Pīr in early modern Bangla literature, as far as I have been able to determine, exceeded only by the recapitulation of the Korānic tale told by Saiyad Sultān's *Nabivamśa*.⁷⁸

Khoyājā Khijir, often simply called the Green One, is regularly invoked as the guide and protector of boatmen and fisherfolk along the coastal waterways and out into the Bay of Bengal.⁷⁹ He is an enigmatic figure whose first mention is in the Qur'ān (18.60–82), where he is known as al-Khidr in Arabic. Since his original notice, he is said to be found “where the two seas meet.”⁸⁰ In the Korānic

75. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 1–134.

76. This is different from traditional *vaiṣṇav* divinity, whose characters undergo some kind of amnesia in order to descend to earth and only gradually discover their identity as divine.

77. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 35–36. The spelling here is Khoyājā, while in other texts and traditions, Khoyāj.

78. Saiyad Sultān, *Nabivamśa*, 1: 670–84; for translation, see Stewart and Irani, “Curbing Moses' Hubris.”

79. Pīr Badar shares these duties as protector of seamen, especially those operating toward the south along the coasts of Chittagong and further to the east into southeastern Asia; recall Badar Pīr's base of operations as recounted above in chapter 2. There is a festival known as *baḍo bhāsān*, which is performed at the end of the month of Bhādra to ensure the purity of the waters of the rivers and is done in devotion of Khoyāj Khijir and/or Gaṅgādevī; see Anonymous, “Baḍo bhāsān,” *Lok sāhitya* 51 (Phālgun 1397 BS [February 1991]): 1–184.

80. Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*. The reports that follow here document al-Khidr's place in the commentarial tradition.

passage, it is in order to curb Musā's growing hubris that God sends Moses to al-Khiḍr to receive instruction. As possessor of the most esoteric knowledge of the saints, al-Khiḍr attempts to instruct Musā, but in three discrete episodes, al-Khiḍr exposes the limits of Musā's capacity to comprehend the inscrutable esoteric domains of the religious insight reserved for the most accomplished of prophets (*nabī*), apostles (*paygambar*), and saints (*auliyā*). He succeeds primarily in exposing Musā's habit of impatience, whereupon al-Khiḍr dismisses him for not following his instruction. As the ultimate *murśid*, al-Khiḍr is the teacher of teachers.⁸¹ Traditions associated with Alexander, including the *Iskandarnāma*, tell that al-Khiḍr drank from the fountain of life and so became physically immortal.⁸² By virtue of that physical immortality, he is said to have continued to guide extraordinary *sūphī* masters through successive centuries.⁸³ Appearing in the earliest *ḥadīth* literatures of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the *tafsīr* commentaries attest to his continued presence and his initiation of key saints, including Rūzbihān Baqlī, Ibn ʿArabī, Rūmī, and Ḥāfiz, among others.⁸⁴ In the larger Islamic traditions, the rare intervention by al-Khiḍr signals the elevated status of the accomplished *pīr* who becomes his disciple or *murid*; the same holds for his rare appearances in the stories of *pīrs* in Bengal. A similar association, though not as forcefully articulated, is suggested for Gāji Pīr when he and Kālu meet Khoyājā Khijir in the guise of a child and Gāji immediately recognizes him and pays his respects, while Kālu does not. For the receiver of these stories, the presence of Khoyājā Khijir signals a level of accomplishment of these heroic *pīrs* that validates them completely. That Khoyājā Jendā Pīr initiates Satya Pīr and then gives him instruction for five years places Satya Pīr among the most accomplished in all of God's creation.

When Satya Pīr follows Khoyājā down beneath the surface of the world into Bali's domain, and trails every step of the way by the Lord of Death, Yam, he

81. For a much more comprehensive study of al-Khiḍr and the spread of his tales, see Patrick Franke, *Begegnung mit Khiḍr: Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im traditionellen Islam*, Beirut Texts and Studies 15 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000).

82. When Alexander and al-Khiḍr have been journeying through the Land of Darkness for four months, al-Khiḍr accidentally drops something from his hand, and when he reaches for it, his hand brushes against a source of water. The water tastes of honey and he realizes instantly that it is the fabled water of life. He orders the army to stop right there so they will not lose the site while he sends for Alexander, but when Alexander returns, the fount has disappeared. See Anonymous, *Iskandernamah*, trans. Minoo S. Southgate (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 57–58. See the three appendices of that volume for Khiḍr's discovery of the waters of life in the Persian Alexander romances, in the Pahlavi literature, and in the work of Persian and Arabic historians, including Firdausi.

83. Franke traces the controversy in the twentieth century of the historicity of al-Khiḍr, specifically regarding his longevity and his classification as saint or celestial figure; see Franke, *Begegnung mit Khiḍr*, 306–70.

84. Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*, 195–247; for a more expansive narration of al-Khiḍr's role as teacher of God's friends, that is, as *murśid* to numerous *sūphī* saints throughout history, see Franke, *Begegnung mit Khiḍr*, 175–264.

demonstrates his heroic resolve. There he receives direct instruction and promise of help from the Waters, from the Wind, and from the Earth, granting him control of each by simply calling on Nirāñjan, at the foot of whose throne lies heavenly Golok Vṇḍāban. He is then advised of the nature of his birth, how he, as a *phakir* of Āllā, was born to Devī Sandhyāvatī in the family of King Maidānav of Mālañcā.⁸⁵ Khoyājā instructs him in the use of the *kalemā* and *bichmillā* as tools to destroy obstacles and achieve his goals. Once armed with that secret knowledge, Satya Pīr is ready. Khoyājā initiates him into more advanced metaphysical issues. “Khoyājā said, ‘Listen, my child, to the nature of the stainless Nirāñjan’s form (*rūp*). His name (*nām*) and essential nature (*svarūp*) constitute the complete godhead (*pūrṇa brahmā*). Should anyone claim to see Khodā in any other form, they do not attain salvation, for he has no identifiable marks (*dhvajāgajā*). He has no form (*rūp*).’”⁸⁶ When Khoyājā has taught him what he needs to know, Satya Pīr is directed to visit his mother before beginning his work. Five years have passed.

Because his mother has never seen him, he first presents himself in a dream as a saint (*oli*), before arriving in person. She is understandably nonplussed and suspicious. So she puts him to the test: after he performs *jikir* of the prophet and Āllā, he suckles her breasts, which triggers a thick flow of creamy milk—an effect only a son could produce.⁸⁷ Then Dharmarāj, Yam, appears from the seventh underworld and confirms that he has not died and is indeed her son.⁸⁸ She has a hard time believing it until he explains how the turtle encased him in the egg and gestated him and how Khoyājā took him in and taught him. Then he says, “I can tell you now my name, who I am: I, Satya Nārāyaṇ, am Satya Pīr.”⁸⁹

Though she has her opulent dwelling, without family support Sandhyāvatī has suffered there in the forest, so to help make up for it, Satya Pīr decides to improve her living conditions. He visits the settlement of Jhāḍakhaṇḍa, controlled by one Basanta Rājā. Appearing in his mendicant’s garb, he provocatively begs one of the king’s protected royal geese as alms. Basanta Rājā takes umbrage and orders the constabulary to drive away this nuisance of a *pīr*. Having engineered the confrontation, in retaliation Satya Pīr then steals—and that is the way it is expressed—Basanta Rājā’s subjects. To effect this, he appears in a dream to the prominent figure Cānd Khā, to whom he reveals himself as Satya Nārāyaṇ. He commands Cānd Khā to lead the subjects of Jhāḍakhaṇḍa to Sandhyāvatī’s forest abode, to clear the land, and to build a city around her palace appropriate to her station.

85. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 36–37.

86. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 37–38. *Dhvajāgajā* is gender marking by the presence of the penis.

87. Satya Pīr proposes a similar test to prove maternity when Śilāvatī’s son, Motilāl, has been switched by the midwife for a stillborn; see Kiṅkara Dāsa, “The Mother’s Son Who Spat Up Pearls,” in Stewart, trans., *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pīrs*, 140–42.

88. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 43–44.

89. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 45–46.

Cānd Khā is convinced, but no one else is, so they refuse to budge. Realizing muscle will be required, Satya Pīr summons the goddess of diseases, Rogeśvarī. He instructs her to afflict Jhāḍakhaṇḍa with leprosy to persuade the inhabitants to join him. She readily agrees and does. Appearing in a bright flash as the fearsome goddess Cāmuṇḍa, she unleashes leprosy and a score of other dread diseases that within five days lay waste to much of the population. With fevers sweeping through the residents of every part of the city, *bhūts*, hungry ghosts, patrol the carnage. Bodies are covered with blood that has boiled to the surface of the skin of unfortunates; others fall, dotted with suppurating abscesses, while still others find their bones extruding their skin. The agony is unimaginable. With so many dying, Cānd Khā finally persuades those remaining survivors to flee and to build the city of which he has dreamed. In no time the settlement of Jhāḍakhaṇḍa is bereft of its entire population.⁹⁰

Their trek through the jungle seems endless as they weather tigers and other beasts of prey. It is so wild that they encounter no other humans. When they finally reach Sandhyāvati's compound—constructed by Viśvakarma years earlier—they see that it rivals the celestial capital of Indrapurī. They rejoice at finally having reached their destination, realizing it has not been just a dream; so they apply themselves to clearing the land and constructing a proper city. They settle their new urban space with *brāhmaṇs*, *sannyāsīs*, oil pressers, gardeners, garland weavers, farmers and ploughmen, blacksmiths, traders, physicians, weavers, cotton carders, and cowherders. Sweet-makers, perfumers, conch carvers, and gold- and silversmiths all settle. Sekhs and Saiyads come in numbers, Pāṭhāns too. Some Europeans, Mughals, and Khāns find their places. The markets are packed with different merchants, their flood of wares covering every imaginable need. And of course there are instrument makers, drummers, and musicians of all types. Doms and Namaśūdras dot the banks of the river, beside leather workers, brickmakers, boatbuilders, ferrymen, and untold others, even the occasional madman or epileptic. Altogether there are thirty-four social ranks (*jāti*) that make the city complete.⁹¹

That night Satya Pīr enters the dreams of Basanta Rājā and chides him for not giving the goose as alms. He reveals that in retribution, it was he who lured away his subjects. Basanta Rājā sends his chief of police, who confirms its truth. Enraged, he orders his soldiers to pursue Satya Pīr, to sack Sandhyāvati's new urban paradise, and force his lost subjects back to Jhāḍakhaṇḍa. The first of his warriors to confront Satya Pīr are summarily dispatched by five *mantra*-sprinkled arrows. So the

90. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 47–50.

91. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 52–53. The creation of a new city and the relocating of inhabitants from another is central to the story of Kāketu in the *Caṇḍimaṅgal* of Kavikaṇkan; see Kavikaṇkan Mukundarām Cakravartī, *Caṇḍimaṅgal*, 66–83, secs. 109–36 (the *pālā* performed on the night of the third day). For an analysis of this settlement process, see Ronald B. Inden, “The Hindu Chieftdom in Middle Bengali Literature,” *Bengal, Literature and History* (East Lansing, MI: Asian Studies Center, 1967), 21–46.

king himself sets off, swearing to teach that *phakir* something about real *phakirī*. It is like Raghunāth himself assaulting Laṅkā. When his massive forces reach the Begavati River banks, they pause. Satya Pīr, now in *sannyāsī*'s garb, approaches in the form of Satya Nārāyaṇ. He greets the *mahārāj* to ascertain his intentions. The king declares he is there to fight and, after winning, plans to turn Sandhyāvati into his personal slave by way of retribution.⁹² Because of his dream, he knows that this is the *sannyāsī* whom he spurned and who has been behind it all.

“The head of that *sannyāsī* will be cut off right before my eyes!” At the command of the *mahārāj*, two soldiers leapt to attack the *sannyāsī*. Anticipating them, Satya Nārāyaṇ reflexively acted. He silently repeated (*jap*) the personal names of Nirāñjan, the Stainless, and his body mysteriously metamorphosed into adamantite rock. The blast of shot from the soldiers’ muskets streaked like so many shooting stars, but the pellets splintered apart upon impact with his body, split open, the sound reverberating like the crack of a bird’s egg. Witnesses all were dumbfounded. Clearly his death had not been inscribed, for he was still very much alive. Flooded with an unimaginable fear, everyone scattered. Satya Pīr gave chase, raising his staff, intent on slaying them; once again he resorted to his magical control of the created world (*māyā*). He waded into the field of battle and assumed the terrifying image of pestilence and death. Everyone panicked, lost their nerve, what little strength they had left draining away as they fled. By the power of *mantras*, he froze everyone in their tracks. Reciting the personal names of Nirāñjan, his body suddenly expanded upward to a height of fourteen hands. His skin turned black as pitch, his face monstrously terrifying, and in his hand, his staff transformed into a magical cudgel. Everyone who bore witness to this spectacle could only shake with fear.⁹³

Two brave souls challenge him with sharply pointed missiles, but he simply snatches them from the air and sends them back, splitting open their unfortunate heads. The engagement seems to be over, but the king himself shows signs of continued resistance, so Satya Nārāyaṇ

assumed his four-armed form, holding the conch, disc, club, and lotus. He towered directly over the *rājā*. When Basanta Rājā beheld that magnificent four-armed image, he quickly pulled a cloth around his neck and began to sing hymns of praise. “You are not a mere mortal, but the manifest Nārāyaṇ. Please forgive any offense I may have committed for I am lowly and despicable.”

Satya Pīr then explained the nature of this magical subterfuge. “I am not just Nārāyaṇ; I am a *phakir* of Āllā. You may recall that previous incident when a beggar came to you asking for a goose, but you refused to make that gift; that was your mistake, your great offense. That failure led directly to the destruction of Jhāḍakhaṇḍa.

92. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 56–57.

93. The image from the scroll painting held in the British Museum that graces the cover of this volume illustrates this scene.

I am a god (*devatā*) to *hindus*; I am a *pīr* to *musalmāns*. I have come to receive the worship and service (*sevā*) of both communities (*kūl*). I am Satya Nārāyaṇ, I am Satya Pīr.”⁹⁴

The army retreats and Basanta Rājā then smartly institutes the regular worship of Satya Bhagavān.

Satya Pīr returns to his mother in another emotion-laden reunion. Then the angel Jibril descends to remind Satya Pīr that he must go to Mālañcā to deal with the *pīr*-torturing king, Maidānav. As he starts to take leave of his mother, Sandhyāvati weeps, rehearsing her various misfortunes—according to form, the author breaks into a formal lament (*bāramās*) of Sandhyāvati’s tribulations enumerated through the twelve months of the year.⁹⁵ As her son prepares to depart, she changes her tack and insists that she too should go, just as Gupicānd’s four wives tried to accompany him as *joginīs*; but Satya Pīr summarily dismisses the suggestion.⁹⁶ Feeling remorse, he does tarry longer than is prudent, and that delay comes to the attention of Āllā, who makes it clear that his command is not to be ignored! The *paygambar* ensures he gets the message. Chastised, Satya Pīr waits until his mother is asleep, takes some of her bangles, and then dons his ascetic’s garb.

Rudrākṣa beads around his neck, he wound his hair into a coil, which draped down, matted. He donned an ochre robe and picked up his mendicant’s staff. His limbs glistened the golden color of the sun, his whole body was radiant, resplendent; the deerskin that hung loosely over his body broadcast a compelling image of majesty. From his left ear swung a gold earring. Everything about him glistened the color of gold. This erstwhile *sannyāsī* picked up in his right hand the flute of the *avatār* Kānāi, with the other he picked up the bows and arrows of Rām and Lakṣmaṇ. The ascetic’s staff of the *avatār* Nitāi [Nityānanda] magically appeared, as did the plow of the *avatār* Balarām, and all the implements of the ten *avatārs* as well. Satya Nārāyaṇ then slipped the jeweled bracelets from Sandhyāvati’s arms and hung them casually in his hair. The measure of Satya Pīr’s majesty could scarcely be calculated.⁹⁷

94. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 57.

95. The *bāramās* (twelve-month lamentation) has a long history in Bengali letters wherein the poet describes the cycle of emotional trauma—usually of separation from the object of love or devotion—through the metaphor of the cycle of the seasons. For contemporary social use of lament, including the *bāramās*, see James M. Wilce, *Eloquence in Trouble: The Poetics of Complaint in Rural Bangladesh*, Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

96. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 61–62. Gupicānd, or Gopicāndra, is the subject of several famous *nāth* tales. For the four wives’ attempt to accompany Gopicānd, see Bhābanidās, “Gopicāndrer pāñcālī,” in *Gopicāndrer gān*, ed. Aśutoṣ Bhattachāryya, 3rd ed. (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Viśvavidyālay, 1965), 283–85, ll. 355–428.

97. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 63–64. A similar formulaic description of his sartorial style is repeated a few pages later, 70–71.

When Sandhyāvatī awakes, he is gone. She goes mad with grief, but eventually gathers her wits sufficiently to summon a magical talking *śuyā* bird to track him; it reports that Satya Pīr is wending his way toward Mālañcā country.⁹⁸

After the village of Nandipur, Satya Pīr reaches the banks of the Gomani. The current is fast, the waves high, and there is no boat. A lounging crocodile offers to ferry him across for the price of a goat, but if he produces no goat, he promises to eat half of the *pīr*'s body in payment. With no goat handy, Satya Pīr meditates on God and does enter the mouth of the crocodile. When he reaches the belly, he summons his powers and tears it apart. The crocodile magically transforms into a nymph, *vidyādhari*. Cursed by Indra for a misstep in her dance, she has waited twelve years for release by the touch of Satya Pīr, for she knows him to be the *avatār* of the Kali Age. She pays her profound respects, and then a chariot arrives from heaven to escort her back to her rightful place.⁹⁹

Satya Pīr heads on to Mālañcā, picking his way through obscure paths till he reaches the settlement of Kesarā Nagar. The village headman, Bhimā, is a thief who, after slyly estimating the value of the gold bracelets hanging in Satya Pīr's hair, feigns hospitality, only to steal them later. Satya Pīr confronts Bhimā, who affects ignorance. Satya Pīr erupts in anger, and in a matter of seconds all four of Bhimā's sons are struck down, blood spurting from their mouths as they writhe in agony and die. Bhimā, too, he curses to lose his head in the town of Akullapur. Bhimā and his wife are dumbstruck as the *pīr* makes sure they understand whom they have offended: he is Satya Nārāyaṇ for *hindus* and Satya Pīr for *musalmāns*. Bhimā repents, returns the bracelets, then offers nine rupees' worth of *sinni*. Mollified, Satya Pīr restores life to his sons. But he does not lift the malediction; some years later, as a result of his shenanigans, Bhimā meets his fate in the village of Akullapur.¹⁰⁰

The *pīr* proceeds through a host of settlements, some well-known, others not; at long last he reaches the land of Mālañcā, the capital of which perches on the Damudar River. The magnificence of the king's residence rivals the palaces of Lañkā. He calculates that for best effect, he should replace his *phakir*'s garments with the more opulent dress of a *sannyāsī*. Once again his clothes and accoutrements magically transform. He is greeted with affection and respect by everyone he meets—no one suspects he is really a *pīr*. And so he enters the court of Maidānav Rājā and is seated in honor beside the king.¹⁰¹ He claims to be on pilgrimage, but that he has heard that the king is a great devotee and so has detoured. The king

98. The four wives of Gopīcānd similarly dispatch their parrot to trace his whereabouts, which was across the Gomati River in the town of Suripu; see Bhābanidās, "Gopīcāndrer *pāñcālī*," 319–20, ll. 1420–55.

99. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 67–68.

100. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 68–70.

101. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 70–71.

queries the provenance of the bracelets hanging in his hair. Satya Pīr reports that he received them from a young woman living in the forest named Sandhyāvatī; she had no husband, but bore a son named Satya Nārāyaṇ. Satya Pīr continues: the boy's grandfather is named Maidānav, a *vārindri brāhmaṇ*, an assertion challenged by the king.¹⁰² Then Satya Pīr reveals his identity as a *phakir*. The queen secretly meets Satya Pīr and questions how her *brāhmaṇ* daughter could be connected to a *phakir*; she advises him to decamp before her husband has him killed. Her two sisters, Rūpavatī and Mālāvati, would show him out, but he refuses. When Satya Pīr tells the saga of Sandhyāvatī, they know it to be true. Recognizing him, Rūpavati asks to cook for him, but he declines, for he only eats uncooked food: a small handful of rice flour, mixed with sugar, milk, and plantain; anything else would be an indulgence. The women press him to leave, but Khodā himself has guaranteed his safety.¹⁰³ The next day he appears in his mendicant's dress,

He had the prophet's mantle draped over his shoulders, sandal smeared on his face, a ruby diadem gracing his forehead. Around his neck hung a string of prayer beads, under his right arm was tucked the *Bhāgavat purāṇ*. In his hand he fingered a *tulsīmālā* as he performed *jap*, the recitation of the names of God. With wooden sandals on his feet, he stepped lightly like a wagtail bird. The body of Sandhyā's son radiated in brilliance. In his left hand he carried a Korān and in his right hand his mendicant's staff. He did not wear the head covering of either a *phakir* or *vairāgī*. One leg sported an anklet, while the other was bare. The aureate limbs of this saint's body shone like molten gold as he walked. People talked and gossiped, but no one could fathom it. And that is how he entered the city.¹⁰⁴

The townsfolk are flabbergasted and crowd around, hearing him recite *bichmillā* and then the name of Rām in the same breath. Neither the scriptural *āgamas* or the *nigamas* has prepared them for this: to hear the *Bhāgavat purāṇ* and Korān mixed together. They are unsettled, for he is praising the gods of the *hindu* folk and paying respects to the *phakirs* of the faithful *momins*.¹⁰⁵

He makes his way to the palace and petitions to see the king, but the king flies into a rage. He orders the durwan to give the beggar a handful of rice and shoo him away, but Satya Pīr keeps insisting on seeing the king in person. They go back and forth till, exasperated, one of the king's personal eunuchs (*khōjā*) attempts to intervene, suggesting that the mendicant must be smoking too much *gāñjā*.¹⁰⁶ Satya Pīr still refuses to budge. Aggravated, the king orders the *pīr* be jailed and

102. *Vārendra brāhmaṇs* are one of the two top clans of *kulīn brāhmaṇs*, the other being *rādhī*. The historical region of *vārendra* settlement was in the north, with *rādhī brāhmaṇs* to the south. See Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, esp. chap. 1.

103. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 72–75.

104. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 75–76.

105. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 76.

106. When the eunuch speaks, his language is a *pidgin hindustāni*, telling his non-Bengali origins.

executed without delay. It takes a small army of highly trained soldiers to bind him and throw him into jail. Coming to feel Satya Pīr's tribulations as he languishes in jail, Jibril delivers a flower from Āllā that, laced with secret syllables, magically sunders his irons and breaks open the jail as soon as he touches it to his forehead. Satya Pīr is freed.¹⁰⁷

Satya Pīr visits the queen's sister Mālāvati, revealing his true identity and his plan to escape to Mālāvatiapur in the shapeshifted guise of a seven-year-old boy. Pretending to be an orphan, he winds up at the home of a *brāhmaṇ* named Kuśal. He convinces the childless *brāhmaṇ* that he is quite positive he is a *vārendri brāhmaṇ*. When asked, he says his name is Satya, but he does not know his *gotra* classification. They take him in. The *brāhmaṇ*'s wife, Anandi, rejoices at their fortune, but when she goes to cook for him, he tells her it is his habit only to take uncooked food, again reciting the ingredients for *sinni*.¹⁰⁸

Back in Mālāncā, Maidānav decides to sacrifice the *phakir* to the goddess Kālī, but when his minions reach the jail, he is nowhere to be found. As Maidānav fulminates, Satya Pīr is already far far away, living as a young boy in the home of the *brāhmaṇ* Kuśal, the tutor of the king's two sons, Śyāmsundar and Dāmodar. Attempts to tutor Satya fail, moving Kuśal to raise his staff to strike Satya, but his wife intervenes. In dreams, Satya eventually reveals to them who he is—"I am Satya Nārāyaṇ, I am Satya Pīr." They accept, and from that point forward he is free to do as he pleases.¹⁰⁹ After bathing in the Nur River, Satya Pīr picks up a Korān, but Kuśal is adamant that he not read it. When asked why, he replies that for a *brāhmaṇ* to read the Korān or recite the name of God, *bichmillā*,¹¹⁰ would mean loss of social standing, nor could he ever enter *vaikuṇṭha*, heaven.

Chuckling, Satya Nārāyaṇ said, "Who ever said that those names [of God] could not be conjoined? There is but one supreme lord, *brahmā*, not two. God as creator (*kartā*) is singular, Nirāñjan Gosāi. One recites (*jap*) the names of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvar. Untold numbers of Brahmā-eggs can be found in each pore of his skin; though he has no hands or feet, he holds and embraces this created world of existence. Though he has no mouth, he eats; with no ears he yet hears; with no eyes he sees."¹¹¹ No one

107. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 78–82.

108. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 82–84.

109. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 85–87.

110. It should be noted that here and in the passage that follows, this author uses *bichmillā* as a proper name of Āllā, not as the benediction that opens the Korān that says "In the name of God . . ." Very occasionally the reference seems to be the incipit verse of the Korān, but even that is not always clear.

111. This is a reference to the previously noted *śloka* in the *Svetāśvatara upaniṣad* 3:19, which translates as: "Without hands or feet he moves and he grasps, without eyes he sees, without ears he hears. He knows all, yet no one can know him. [People] call him the most excellent primeval man." The Sanskrit of the upaniṣadic verse reads: *apāñipādo javano grahitā paśyatyacakṣuḥ sa śṛṇotyakarnaḥ / sa vetti vedyam na ca tasyāsti vettā tamāhuraḥ puruṣaṁ mahāntam //*; see chap. 1, n. 59.

can fully cognize that he is inherent within, innate to all things created. The very one who is called Nirāñjan, the Stainless, people call Bichmillā. There is no distinction whatsoever between Viṣṇu and Bichmillā. People may discern one stream going this way, another that, but they all come together and are mixed in the ocean. The thirty-four social ranks (*jāti*) actually make for a single group. Though people take different paths, they end up mixed together.” When he heard this exposition, the [*brāhmaṇ*] *ṭhākur* was stunned.¹¹²

The *brāhmaṇ* realizes he needs to study the Korān. He does not know how to read the script, but with the help of Āllā he is soon able. From then on he keeps a Korān in the house.

It is the sixth of Jyaiṣṭha (May–June), the day for Ṣaṣṭhī *pūjā*, the celebration of the goddess who looks after children. When Bhāṇḍārī Ṭhākur calls for Kuśāl to perform the *pūjā* for the king’s two sons, Satya Pīr causes his adopted father to fall ill, so he can replace him. Kuśāl gives instruction and off he goes. He is presented to the king’s wife Priyāvati, who wonders who he is, but her two sisters, Rūpāvati and Mālāvati, have already figured out his disguise. Satya Pīr begins the *pūjā* by ritually rinsing his mouth while remembering Śrī Viṣṇu; then the queen offers flowers. The saint places his finger in his ear and recites *bichmillā*. When the queen hears this, she angrily throws away her flowers and water offering, but the *pīr* pretends to be nonplussed. “How can the word *bichmillā* come out of the mouth of a *brāhmaṇ*?” she sharply retorts. So they start again and complete the ritual, the food offerings (*naibedya*) cleansed with Gaṅgā water. Satya Pīr meditates on Khodā, recites the *mohāmmadi kalamā*, and finishes the *pūjā*. The queen gives the expected *dakṣiṇā*, but Satya Pīr toys with her, making it disappear and reappear, refusing and accepting, while Rūpāvati and Mālāvati gleefully play along. Finally he accepts her tribute and goes home, much to the joy of Anandi and Kuśāl the *brāhmaṇ*.¹¹³

Kuśāl is getting on in years, so Satya Nārāyaṇ begins to serve as tutor. At one point Śyāmsundar mocks Satya Nārāyaṇ for his limited knowledge of the texts, and a violent scrap ensues. When the blows come, using his God-given powers, Satya Pīr turns his body hard as stone; when he retaliates, he strikes Śyāmsundar once, but his blow is so hard it kills him. The god Yam arrives to fetch him. The king orders Satya Pīr put to death, but it takes more than twenty men to subdue him. Eventually they manage to strap him over the mouth of a cannon. Satya Pīr meditates on Lokmān Hākīm, who appears, and together they meditate on the names of Āllā and the Prophet. When the cannon roars, belching smoke and fire, Satya Pīr emerges unscathed.¹¹⁴ Then soldiers tie a massive boulder to his legs and

112. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 87–88.

113. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 88–91.

114. Lokmān Hākīm (Luqmān) here is a somewhat elusive figure who seems to conflate the popular Arabic Jahaliyya figure and the Luqmān found in Qur’ān 31; he is known for his wisdom and insight

throw him into the river. Satya Pīr continues to pray to Karim Kartā, the Creator, and suddenly the rock floats and he rides it like a boat. No one can believe it.¹¹⁵ Confusion reigns, and Maidānav has Kuśāl imprisoned, for which his wife Anandi blames Satya Pīr. He manifests his four-armed form to console her, but naturally she is frightened. He then gently explains that he is a *devatā* and *pīr* in a single human body and that he will appear as whatever deity she may invoke. “For my birth in this Kali Age I take the name Satya Pīr. I have taken birth in this Kali Age to make my presence known. I am the *devatā* of the *hindu* and the *pīr* of the *momin*. Whatever one desires, I can effect. I am known as the son of Sandhyāvatī.” And then he explains the entire saga of his birth and Sandhyāvatī’s years of suffering. Because she the old *brāhmaṇ*’s wife has been good to him, he gives her the boon that she will have a son, and off he goes to the king’s palace.¹¹⁶

Satya Pīr somehow slips into the palace jail unseen and changes places with his adopted father. When summoned, he reveals to the king that he is actually the son of Sandhyāvatī, but the king will hear nothing of it. As he did with Anandi, Satya Pīr patiently explains that he is a *devatā* for *hindus* and a *pīr* for *momins*, to teach both clans to promote his service (*sevā*). He promises to revive the king’s son if he will offer *sinni*, but the king puts his fingers in his ears, muttering “Viṣṇu Viṣṇu,” closing his ears and his heart to any such suggestion. He orders his *laskārs* to bind Satya Pīr to be sacrificed in the Kālī temple, but while his guards hesitate, Satya Pīr metamorphoses into a white fly and flies off.¹¹⁷ The constable responsible for killing the prisoner is named Tularām, so when Satya Pīr flies off, the king vents his rage on his ineffectual executioner and cuts out his tongue with much gushing of blood. From afar Satya Pīr, still in the form of a fly, watches the spectacle with dismay, then flies off.¹¹⁸

Satya Pīr wings his way to heaven where he approaches Indra, the King of the Gods, sitting on sacred *kuśa* grass, resplendent in his four-armed form. Satya Pīr is seated beside him and they discuss the dire situation in Mālañcā and Maidānav’s continued refusal to acknowledge the validity of the *pīrs*. Satya Pīr then requests Indra to send storm clouds to flood Mālañcā, and he readily agrees. When summoned, each of the twelve storm clouds comes forward, boasting of prowess in various types of inundations and promising to do the deed in anywhere from one hour to seven days. Together they ride down to earth on Indra’s elephant and begin

into the mechanics of this world, so it is likely that the cannon would count among machines that could be successfully manipulated. In Kṛṣṇaharī’s text, you may recall, he is depicted in the opening chapters as the analogue of Viśvakarmma, architect of the gods.

115. Kṛṣṇaharī Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 92–94. The ordeals of both Mānik and Gāji as well as the legend of Badar Pīr come to mind.

116. Kṛṣṇaharī Dās, 94–96.

117. Satya Pīr will use this same trick of changing into a white fly in the episode of Kāśikānt in his later adventures noted below; we have also seen the same technique used by Bonbibī above in chap. 4.

118. Kṛṣṇaharī Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 97–99.

their work—light rains, followed by winds, lightning, thunder, then torrential pelting sheets of rain. The waters are rapidly rising in Mālañcā, and soon people, horses, and elephants are being swept away. Rūpāvātī and Mālāvātī meditate on Satya Pīr and are saved when they offered *sinni*. Meanwhile the king struggles to stay alive.

Satya Pīr promises these good women that if the king will but offer a little *sinni*, everyone will be saved and come to no grief in the floods. The items for *sinni*, of course, are not immediately available, so the women find their way to a nearby town, its market controlled by one shyster merchant named Bīrbalā, who tries to con them, but they call his bluff. Being called a cheat ignites Bīrbalā's anger.¹¹⁹ Satya Pīr miraculously materializes to investigate the commotion and Bīrbalā turns to strike him, which naturally angers the *phakir*.¹²⁰ Satya Pīr enlists the help of a poisonous serpent, a *nāginī*, to slay Bīrbalā's seven-year-old son as retribution, which will also conveniently demonstrate his power. The snake performs as asked. Grieving, the boy's mother remembers that the sacred texts instruct them to take a snakebite victim to the banks of a river, where the poison may be drawn out and life restored.¹²¹ So they haul him to the verge of the Nur River, where Satya Pīr approaches the dead child and whispers a *brahma mantra* in his ear. Though it has been three days, the child regains consciousness. Bīrbalā finally fully reckons the power of the *pīr* and, forswearing all interest in the profits off the bangles, submits to Satya Pīr, who shows him grace. The couple are overjoyed, and the wife heads home with her now-revived son, while Bīrbalā seeks out the two sisters, expresses his abject misery at his wrongdoing, and returns their bangles and then some.¹²²

Satya Pīr assures the lives of all those stranded in the flood. He conjures a boat with his heaven-sent powers and collects King Maidānav. The king refuses to change his attitude; he insists that he is a good upstanding *vārendra brāhmaṇ* and has done nothing wrong to warrant the destruction of his city. Satya Pīr confronts the king for his horrible treatment of *phakirs*, and then rehearses the saga of Sandhyāvātī and the unbearable pain Maidānav caused his own daughter out of fear of a bastard child. "I am that child and I have come here as a *phakir*." The king is adamant and still refuses to acknowledge him, the recitation only inciting his further ire. Round and round they go, repeating the same arguments with the king still refusing to offer *sinni* or to acknowledge Satya Pīr, for, he asks, "What *pīr* has ever heaped goodness on a *hindu*?" Satya Pīr explains that all will be well if

119. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 99–104.

120. There is a lengthy give-and-take here where Satya Pīr details Bīrbalā's faults and failings, somewhat uncharacteristic of the rest of the text, but perhaps a not-so-subtle commentary on the character of gold, silver, and jewelry merchants as swindlers.

121. The popular wisdom is that if one takes a victim of snakebite to the river, an *ojhā* (master of snakes and poisons) might be able to revivify the corpse, a practice with at least hints of *tantrik* necromancy; see Stewart, "Process of Surface Narrative."

122. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvātī kanyār punthi*, 104–10.

the king will offer *śinni* to the tombs of *pīrs*, but the king counters that as a good *vārendra brāhmaṇ* he would lose all social rank and heaven as well. There is no possible way he would undertake such an act. Then he chides Satya Pīr for falsely claiming to be Satya Nārāyaṇ. Satya Pīr settles the issue by manifesting his four-armed celestial form. Agape, Maidānav is finally convinced and rejoices in the fact that it is his daughter who has given birth to Satya Nārāyaṇ, his own Lord. At long last he can relent; he eats and sleeps.¹²³

As Maidānav sleeps, Satya Pīr flies back to Indra's heaven, where he greets that four-armed lord and again petitions his help. He wishes to enlist the help of Viśvakarmma to rebuild the city and environs that the rains destroyed. Indra agrees and Viśvakarmma is summoned; he declares that he will rebuild everything within ten hours, so that when Maidānav awakens, his city will be restored. He not only rebuilds it, but exceeds its previous magnificence, erecting palaces and pavilions, open spaces, and living quarters for all. Soon the inhabitants begin to return, and the streets and stables are filled with horses and elephants and the markets with people. Those who perished in the floods are restored, but strangely without any memory of it. The city is back to normal in no time. Queen Priyāvati and her sons, Śyāmsundar and Damodar, enter the palace and rejoin the king. Satya Pīr arrives amidst a certain fanfare, but he notices that the king does not seem as happy as he had expected.¹²⁴

The king is still suffering the horrible loss of his eldest son Harihar, who was devoured by a crocodile while bathing in the river. He was only twelve at the time. Satya Pīr, who had not realized there was a deceased first son, promises to locate him, so off he goes to the river to interrogate the crocodiles. The crocodiles are cooperative and gather to pay their respects to Satya Pīr. When he asks who is responsible, who ate the crown prince Harihar when he came to bathe, Tirimiṅgā, the elder among the crocodiles, replies in the negative and vouches for all his clan, for, he declares, they are only fish-eaters. The old crocodile summons Neñjā Muḍā, the constable of the crocodiles, to investigate deeper downstream and along the swampy byways. After a while, the constable finds one very ancient crocodile named Hāṅguḍā who protests that he has eaten elephants and horses by the thousands, but never a human. As he is testifying, another crocodile named Baṅgaḍā comes forward and identifies the culprit as Chedaḍā, who is quickly summoned. Chedaḍā, who is also quite old, feigns memory loss and indicates he is not sure, that he does not clearly recall ever eating a boy. Satya Pīr sees through it, quickly utters the names of Āllā in *jikir*, and the old croc splits right apart. Half of him is crocodile, the other half young Harihar.¹²⁵ Satya Pīr magnanimously grants

123. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 111–17.

124. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 117–19.

125. There is an unstated and very clever visual/verbal pun here: Harihar is of course the combined form of the deities Kṛṣṇa (Hari) and Śiva (Har). Throughout this passage the author has used *kumir* for

Chedaḍā what is left of his natural life, and he slips back under the waters, but Harihar, on shore, lies insensate. Satya Pīr realizes that he will have to journey to Yam's abode to recover the boy's life, and so he does. Yam's residence is a house in Sandhyamani Nagar in Pātāl, so Satya Pīr stretches his own body four times its normal size, into that of a giant, then smears himself head to toe with oil infused with the secret incantations (*śabda*) of *brahma*, and off he flies. As soon as he arrives, he transfigures back into his normal form of Satya Pīr.¹²⁶

When he lands, one of Yam's messengers tries to capture him. Satya Pīr gets the upper hand in the tussle and eventually finds his way to an audience. Yam is puzzled as to how Satya Pīr can be standing there before him and not be dead. But recovering his wits, he politely inquires why he has come, and Satya Pīr explains his mission. When he entreats Yam to return Harihar's soul, Yam informs him that the boy is not to be found in his settlement. He has been spirited away and has taken the form of a *bhūt pret* roaming the earth as a hungry ghost. Yam opines that he will be born again, but it will take untold numbers of lives to release him from the abominable practices he has already undertaken as a *bhūt*. Satya Pīr presses him further, and Yam reveals that Harihar can be found in a particular tamarisk tree in the Gardens of Āduni along with countless others *bhūts* and *prets*.¹²⁷ When Satya Pīr arrives, he hears the *bhūt* sentinels chirping away in their incomprehensible language. As soon as the sentries spot Satya Pīr and report, the king of the *bhūts* orders his minions to attack. Satya Pīr senses the danger, settles himself, and begins to recite the names of God, and the bodies of the *bhūts* instantaneously burst into flames with the fire of *brahma*, and they bail out of the trees in a tumble and flee.¹²⁸ Realizing Satya Pīr's formidable powers, the king of the *bhūts* asks him why he has ventured into their lair. Satya Pīr calmly recites the saga of Harihar, whom he wishes to retrieve. With their help, Satya Pīr finally locates him, but the task of bringing him back is complicated, so once again he petitions God, and begins to recite the *kalemā*, initiating a cleansing process which will restore Harihar. As he is purified, Satya Pīr whispers in his ear the revivifying *mantras* of the *kalandars*. As the boy regains consciousness, he can remember nothing. Satya Pīr explains all

crocodile, rather than the more common *kumbhīr*. As soon as the prince is recovered he is called the prince or *kumār*. When Chedaḍā splits apart, at least some in the audience would realize that after he ate Harihar, Chedaḍā had become the analogue to Harihar, a combined figure, *kumirkumār* (crocodile and prince combined), though the compound is left unconstructed.

126. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 119–22.

127. The tamarisk (*Caryophyllales*, *Tamaricaceae*, here likely *Tamarix gallica* var. *indica*) is a shrub or small tree with reddish brown bark containing high concentrations of salt. It proliferates along waterways and grows up to twenty feet (unlike its cousins in the Middle East and Africa which can tower sixty feet). The Indic version produces a dense but wispy canopy, which is perfect for protecting *bhūts* and *prets*. It is not to be confused with the tamarind.

128. This same strategy was used by Gāji when he dispersed the ghosts and goblins the goddess Caṇḍī had supplied to Dakṣiṇā Rāy; see chap. 5.

that has happened to the incredulous young man, who, when it finally sinks in that he has been dead for forty years and Satya Pīr has restored his life, falls down and begs Satya Pīr to become his master, *mursīd*. Satya Pīr readily agrees, so he sits him down and carefully instructs him in the four *kalemās*,¹²⁹ before sending him back to his father. It is not hard to imagine how tearful that family reunion is. The king, having once again experienced firsthand the power of the *phakir*, gratefully orders his servants to prepare a hundred thousand *ṭākās*’ worth of *śinni* as offering. He also has prepared additional items appropriate to a more elaborate *pūjā*, in keeping with his brāhmaṇical status.¹³⁰

After the commotion settles, Satya Pīr initiates the king into the recitation of the *kalemā*, and the king’s heart is moved; he is profoundly transformed. He prostrates himself at the feet of Satya Pīr when he receives his own secret name of initiation, and all parties assembled pay their respects. Satya Pīr reminds the king of his long-lost daughter Sandhyāvātī and how badly she has fared as a result of the king’s shortsighted and bigoted actions. When Satya Pīr describes the circumstances of the pregnancy—how God sent down the flower to impregnate her—he goes on to declare, “I am not a human, I am the *jindā pīr* of the Kali age. . . . I reign everywhere covered by the skies. That one you as king call Lord Īśvar—he is my servant.” Then *śinni* is distributed to everyone, but a recalcitrant *brāhmaṇ*, one Gokul Paṇḍit, refuses to touch it until Satya Pīr persuades him in an outburst of earth-shattering power.¹³¹

Brooding on Sandhyāvātī, his long-forgotten daughter, the king has no idea in which part of the forest she can be found. Satya Pīr assures him that he knows the way and will take Harihar with him to fetch her. The king assembles an appropriately royal entourage with all the requisite attendants, staff, aides, and so forth, all to be transported on elephants and horses. Satya Pīr demurs at the offer of a royal ride, for it is not meet for a *phakir*. They are on the Nur River, so he pushes off by boat while Harihar and company travel alongside on the riverbank. At the small outpost town of Bāināṭ, the local garrison officer mistakes the retinue for a raiding party and launches his soldiers to check the procession before it reaches the settlement. In his inexperience, Harihar is frightened and shies away. Using his powerful control over the created world of *māyā*, Satya Pīr assumes the form of a soldier himself and handily subdues the advance party. He then ceremonially makes his way to the local king and presents himself, explaining that the retinue are simply passing through so that King Daināv’s son, Prince Harihar, can visit the home of a relative. Satya Pīr cannot help noticing that the king has in his household one princess by the name of Līlāvātī, so he proposes that, to keep peace, she be married to Harihar. The king, sensing the advantages of liaison with the powerful

129. Six is the usual number.

130. Kṛṣṇaharī Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvātī kanyār punthi*, 122–26.

131. Kṛṣṇaharī Dās, 126–27.

King Maidānav—and having little choice since his men have just been defeated—instantly agrees. Knowing that Maidānav is a *brāhmaṇ*, the petty ruler is troubled that some of his own past actions, such as eating meat, may come back to haunt him and compromise his and his daughter's social standing. Satya Pīr reassures him that those matters are for God to decide. The king gives the order to make the wedding arrangements, promises one lakh of *ṭākās*, and happily submits as vassal to the righteous but absent King Maidānav with the gift of his daughter Līlāvati to the crown prince. Harihar is pleased, but a little puzzled at just why Satya Pīr is making his marriage arrangements when his relatives, especially his parents, are not present, but he does not dwell on the matter after Satya Pīr's instruction.¹³² At the appropriate time, the *paṇḍits* perform the needful rituals, recite their Vedic *mantras*, and the coupled solemnize their vows. Everyone rejoices.¹³³

As Līlāvati prepares to depart with her groom of a few days, her mother laments the all-too-sudden leave-taking, and it is she, rather than Līlāvati, who needs to be consoled. Harihar formally takes leave of his new in-laws, and the retinue continues forward on elephants, while Satya Pīr walks; together they head to Sandhyāvati's forest abode. Before they arrive, Satya Pīr visits his mother in a dream and tells her they are traveling towards her. Sandhyāvati worries at the prospect of some foul play, for she has been abandoned with her bastard child and cannot understand why now her brother may be on his way. When they arrive, Harihar confirms Satya Pīr's explanation, and she reluctantly believes it. She summons her trusted vassal Cānd Khā to help her finalize arrangements for her permanent departure. She deposes him Rājā in her stead and vests him with the responsibility of looking after all of her subjects, to see to the welfare of her small kingdom and the weal of all its residents. All of her subjects are in shock and weep, but Cānd Khā assures her of his honorable commitment to her and to her father. Sandhyāvati takes personal charge of her talking *śuyā* bird, who has been her close companion since the time of Satya Pīr's departure, and her other personal effects are loaded onto carts. Her attendants follow. Just after Nandipāl village, they reach the banks of the Nur River. Switching to the water course, they make their way steadily but slowly toward the Mālañcā. Eventually they glimpse the ramparts of the city in the distance and ease up to the landing *ghāṭs*. News is sent ahead, including the intelligence that Harihar has married, an unexpected turn of events that ever-much delights his father.¹³⁴

132. Harihar—whom the narrator identifies as Satya Pīr's uncle (*māmā*) as they make ready to leave—clearly has not realized that Satya Pīr is a relative, his nephew by virtue of Satya Pīr being given birth by Sandhyāvati, Harihar's younger sister; but their seniority is reversed by virtue of Harihar taking Satya Pīr as his *muṣid*.

133. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvati kanyār punthi*, 127–30.

134. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 130–33.

Finally comes the reunion. Sandhyāvātī meets her mother, who is contrite over the agonies her daughter has suffered on behalf of Satya Pīr. Meanwhile Rūpāvātī, sister of the queen, joins the reunion and organizes elegant foods for all to celebrate. Satya Pīr joins them and triumphantly proclaims that now his mother's worries should finally dissipate. No sooner have they reunited than—much to everyone's surprise—Satya Pīr informs his mother that Āllā's work is not finished and he must depart. She cries with the same biting sorrow as the unfortunate Kauśalyā felt when Rām entered the forest in exile. He tries to reassure her that he will return in due course—and with that he slips away. After saying goodbye to his mother, he takes his leave of everyone in the family, starting with his father King Maidānav, the queen Priyāvātī, then the three princes; then he meets with all the servants and retainers. He visits Mālāvātī and Rūpāvātī on his way out. He has righted the wrong done to his mother, reunited the family, and his responsibilities toward them are fully discharged, his family mission accomplished. But according to the command of Āllā, he has more work to do, and off he dances in his inscrutable play.

Thus ends the Mālāñcā Chapter of Satya Pīr's story.¹³⁵

6.5. THE NEVER-ENDING MISSION OF SATYA PĪR

If we look to the remaining nine stories that make up the second half of the *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvātī kanyār punthi*, there is no story that tells of Satya Pīr returning to his mother as promised. The rest of the saga traces Satya Pīr's peregrinations around Bengal, and while the plots are often analogous to those of the main hagiographical narrative that constitutes the first half of the book, the order seems random and the tales only loosely connected to one another. Many of the motifs will by now be familiar. As the moral of each story is drawn, Satya Pīr's identity as a *devatā* or god for the *hindus* and a *phakir* for the *momins* is confirmed, often including instruction to recite in *jikir* or *jap* the names of Āllā, of the Prophet, and occasionally of Phātemā. The sequence starts with his visit to the city of Amar where he encounters King Śiśupāla. The king is about to sacrifice a boy to Ardhakālī, or Half Kālī,¹³⁶ to gain the boon of a son, for his five queens are barren. Satya Pīr averts the boy's death and lectures the king about the abominations

135. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 133–34.

136. Today Arddhakālī is not normally found in a temple and is not normally associated with human sacrifice; she is conceived as a human female manifestation of Kālī, a Bengali housewife whose sari dropped as she had her hands full cooking. Before it could fall all the way down, she spontaneously sprouted two more arms to pull it back and maintain her modesty—and that is how people knew her to be an *avatār* of the goddess. See Sures Chandra Banerji's *A Brief History of Tantric Literature* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1998), 472, and the story in more detail in Banerjee, *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in Its Origin, Development, and Influence*, 2nd rev. ed. (1978; New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), 234–35 (personal communication from Rachel McDermott, May 2017).

of human sacrifice. He arranges to give five bananas to the queens to aid their conception, but when they go to the appointed place to collect them, he appears in disguise and begs for food. Only the youngest named Bindumati has compassion and readily hands over her banana to the *pīr*, foregoing her own pregnancy. By her selfless act of honoring the *phakir*, she is soon rewarded with pregnancy, the only one of the sisters to be so. When she gives birth to a boy, jealousy and fear prompt the four co-wives to steal the baby, dump it in a box, and set it upon the waters of the Gaṅgā—the classic motif of heroes. The goddess herself soon intervenes to save the baby, which is nursed by the Mother Earth, Basumatī. In what appears to be an act of sympathy, Khoyājā Khijir mysteriously appears and discusses with Basumatī the degradation of the Kali age as they await the arrival of Satya Pīr to rescue the child. Satya Pīr does eventually collect the child and return it to its mother. In joy at having an heir, the king releases all prisoners, banishes the four evil co-wives, and arranges for the lavish worship of the *pīr*.¹³⁷

Satya Pīr then encounters Hir the cobbler, whom he severely tests in a classic trickster mode—demanding food he knows Hir cannot provide, then in false anger having the tiger Nāgeśvari eat Hir's son Madhurām. Hir and his wife eventually manage to scramble together a meal, but before they can serve the *śinni*, Hir lectures the *pīr* about the inappropriateness of his anger, how it is disproportionate to the offense.¹³⁸ Satya Pīr is pleased with his devotee, accepts the *śinni*, restores the life of his son, and enlists Viśvakarma to erect a palace for the cobbler and provide all the wealth it requires. That sudden change of fortune catches the attention of a jealous woman who reports to Mān Siṃha, who in turn confiscates Hir's wealth and has him thrown in jail. The cobbler patiently recites an elaborate *cautiśā* poem in praise of Satya Pīr,¹³⁹ who is alerted to the cobbler's imminent demise and so visits Mān Siṃha in a dream threatening his death. Man Siṃha quickly releases the cobbler and restores his wealth. Satya Pīr blesses them all and heads toward Bagjod town.¹⁴⁰

On his way, Āllā himself tries to deceive Satya Pīr by placing in his path the accomplished and beautiful courtesan Śaśī. When she accosts him, the *pīr* transforms himself into a child, crawling on the ground. Naturally Śaśī goes to pick him up, so he magically turns himself into a parrot and flees; astonished, she concedes. Śaśī becomes his devotee and, at his command, distributes her considerable wealth to *brāhmaṇs* and bathes in the Saraju River to wash away her past sins. There, Satya

137. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 135–53.

138. Hir's lecture to Satya Pīr about the comportment appropriate to a *phakir* (Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 159) seems to be a restatement of the *śikṣāśataka*, or the eight verses of instruction attributed to the *vaiṣṇav* god-man Kṛṣṇa Caitanya; see Stewart, *Final Word*, 170–72.

139. A *cautiśā*, or more properly, *cautriśā*, is a poetic form that starts each line with a different consonant and follows in alphabetical order.

140. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvatī kanyār punthi*, 154–77.

Pir instructs her to locate a certain large stone to bring home. It is too heavy, so rather than fail, she decides the only honorable path is to commit suicide on that stone, but her efforts are thwarted by Satya Pīr. As she again falls at his feet, she faints, and while she is insensate, Satya Pīr meditates on his *guru*, Khoyājā, who miraculously appears for consultation, then disappears. When Śaśī revives, Satya Pīr instructs her to bathe again, while he moves the stone to a spot underneath a tree near the river. He leaves his personal imprint on that stone and instructs her to worship it day and night. She is then initiated as Jasi Phakirāṇī and she worships that stone, which has a special power for all who encounter it, as one unnamed female flower vendor soon discovers after refusing to proffer fresh flowers to Jasi for its worship.¹⁴¹

The remaining episodes diminish in length and follow what should by now be recognized as a finite set of formulaic plots, the storyteller no longer providing the rich descriptions and mind-bending digressions, rather opting for relatively straightforward and predictable narratives that assume the reader or listener will anticipate sufficiently to fill in the gaps. Two stories of Jasmanta the merchant and Śundi the trader follow much of the pattern of the merchant's tale that makes up the largest part of the *hinduyāni* trilogy noted above—a parallel that is confirmed by the fact that these are the only two tales in the entire text where Satya Pīr is not the primary focus of the narrative, but which also signals that the author was well aware of the merchant narratives, making those short tales an intertextual acknowledgement. In the first, Jasmanta promises to make a donation of great wealth to Satya Pīr if he is successful in his voyage, but upon return, he tries to shortchange him, which proves a disastrous decision. Everything is lost until his son recognizes the insult to Satya Pīr and corrects what his father has done. In the second of the merchant tales, Satya Pīr meets a somewhat hapless trader named Śundi, who is childless. After hearing their tale and in exchange for *śinni*, Satya Pīr provides him and his wife with two flowers. She is instructed to wash the flowers and then drink the water, and she will conceive—but they have to agree to one condition: the younger of the two sons must be handed over to Satya Pīr when asked. They faithfully perform as instructed and soon have two boys. Twelve years later Satya Pīr returns to collect on their promise. The merchant is heartbroken and pretends that his youngest is actually a girl. The *pīr* asks to see her, so the merchant presents the boy dressed in drag appropriate to his/her age. Satya Pīr exposes him (literally) and leaves with the boy in tow. Nothing is mentioned about what happens to the young man later.¹⁴²

In my essay originally exploring the Satya Pīr materials, the interested reader can find synopses of the tale of King Kāśikānt, whose wives are incited to dance lasciviously in the public space of the court as a result of the king's recalcitrance,

141. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 177–86.

142. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 186–206.

and the saga of Dhanañjay the milkman, whose stinginess and refusal to give a little food to the *pīr* causes him to lose everything before coming to his senses and having it all restored.¹⁴³ In the last two tales of *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvātī kanyār puthi*, Satya Pīr shows mercy to his faithful devotee Maṅgalu the musician and then to the loathsome king Main Gidāl, who sacrifices every *musalmān* he can find to the goddess Kālī, but who has a change of heart when he meets Satya Pīr. Here the story simply ends.¹⁴⁴

. . .

Each tale magnifies the strength and depth of Satya Pīr's miraculous powers and his ever-expanding circle of influence. The book is of special interest because it attempts to create a "life" (*bios*) for Satya Pīr on the order of hagiographies devoted to historical figures of the early modern period; only the earliest manuscript versions of the dual hagiography of Gāji and Kālu as told by Khodā Bakhś and by Kavi Hālūmīr rival the length and number of episodes that make up Satya Pīr's adventures. The narrative code adopted by this *musalmāni* cycle clearly hinges first on a demand for recognition by the *pīr* in what is obviously a *hinduyāni*, *brāhmaṇ*-dominated world of anti-*phakir* kings. In *Baḍa satya pīr o sandhyāvātī kanyār puthi*, the land of Bengal is portrayed as generally hostile to *pīrs*; indeed, the opening gambit, which frames the tale, has Āllā and the Prophet deciding to intervene in worldly affairs to counter the acts of King Maidānav, to address his intolerance of *phakirs*, which provides the *raison d'être* of Satya Pīr's descent. In this frame, it is imperative that the worship of the *pīrs* be integrated into the practices considered normal for Bengal's inhabitants. King Maidānav, who serves as a metonym for the Bengali cultural environment, must be convinced: to persuade Maidānav of the *phakirs*' efficacy, and through that, Satya Pīr's legitimacy, is to convince Bengal of the same. But the approach is not always brutally head-on; instead, long-term, incremental, and seemingly roundabout strategies induce the desired end. In that strategy, Satya Pīr utilizes and manipulates those around the ultimate object of his obsession: officials in various capacities, wives, and sons. He just as often coaxes people to a new way of thinking and acting in this world. Once his power is acknowledged, he educates by demonstrating that the familiar hierarchical world of traditional Bengal still has value, but that there is a higher figure atop that hierarchy. Āllā is not the equivalent of Nārāyaṇ or Kṛṣṇa; he reigns supreme as the only God. Pragmatically, a new cosmology was articulated through these stories, one that subsumed wholly the preexisting order but displaced it downward, while the social hierarchy of traditional Indic society was finding itself being leveled into a new model of *musalmāni* brotherhood. It was the *pīr* who was equal to Nārāyaṇ.

143. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 206–16; the synopses can be found in Stewart, "Alternate Structures of Authority," 41–46.

144. Kṛṣṇahari Dās, 206–20; for the words of closing, see chap. 3, this volume.

The three emplotments that make up the cycle of Satya Pīr stories do not represent a linear teleology, far from it. Much more accurately than most historical reconstructions can manage, they document the range of possibilities for understanding how this *sūphī phakir* could operate in a Bengali-conditioned world. These approaches do not record discrete moments to be understood serially or in some kind of succession, but rather highlight overlapping prospects that by the late nineteenth century were simultaneously circulating. The demand for recognition and the insinuation of the *pīr* into the traditional Bengali cosmology, the demonstration of efficacy of devotion to the *pīr*, confirmed through his displays of *karāmat*, and the elevation of Āllā effected by the explicit but subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle demotion of the *hinduyāni* hierarchy of celestial figures to establish equivalences between *devs* and *pīrs* and *devīs* and *bibīs*—each of these three had its sympathetic audience.

One of the common messages of these tales is that *brāhmaṇs* do not have to change the ways they function, they do not have to forego their obsession with ritual purity, though they are reminded that their hubris is not to the benefit of the rest of the Bengali world, that they need to acknowledge that there are other forms of power than those in which they traffic, that relationships based on the family are more significant than caste rankings, and that commensal restrictions are not so strict. Kings, much more than *brāhmaṇs*, tend to be the focus of Satya Pīr's attention, and those kings are made to understand that a properly dharmic rule is all-embracing, not selectively favorable to *hinduyāni* communities alone. In the end, the message seems to be that Āllā has made allowances for traditional Bengali understandings of the world to continue without interruption as long as the supremacy of the *pīr* and God's unity are acknowledged. That Satya Pīr had from the beginning of his narrative cycle adopted a *pūjā* offering of *śirṇi* as the best expression of devotion meant that people could make this accommodation without having to adjust what was commonly familiar. That would beg, then, the question of conversion, or perhaps more accurately, problematize the issue that undercuts the models of conversion that are naïvely predicated on Protestant constructs of intellectual assent as a prerequisite for reorientation, generating in its wake an exclusivity of belief and practice. Though these are fictional tales, whose characters operate in autotelic worlds of the authors' own making, and whose explicit religious positions are constitutive of a generic Islam, a simulacrum of historical perspectives, they connect to the world of everyday things by exploring alternatives to the received wisdom about the way things are, by insisting that a real-life offering of *śirṇi* to Satya Pīr will have positive real-life effects. These tales subtly, and by virtue of their myriad repetitions, incrementally persuaded their audiences to think of the world differently, a world where *jabans*, *turuskas*, *kābulis*, *saiyads*, and other *musalmāni* folk have become properly *hinduyāni* in the real sense of that word—Indic; and that Indic world could now understand how and why Āllā alone was supreme.