

It is the year 947 and the poet speaks the words at the beginning of his story.

The Padminī is queen of Siṃhal Dvīp; Ratansen has brought her to the fortress of Citor.

‘Alā’ al-dīn is the sultan of Delhi and Rāghav Cetan sang her praise to him. On hearing this the *shāh* went to lay siege to the fortress; there was a battle between the Hindu and the Turk.

[The poet] wrote the story, as it is from the beginning to the end, in *bhāṣā* [the vernacular] and tells it in *caupāis* [couplets].

The poet and the bard are like a cup filled with *rasa*; near for him who is far away, far from him who is near.

Far from him who is near, like the thorn that sits next to the flower; near for him who is far away, like the syrup for the ant.

The bee comes from the forest to inhale the smell of the lotus.

The frogs sit next to it, but will never obtain it.

Padmāvat 24¹

Malik Muḥammad Jāyāsī’s *Padmāvat* tells the story of the love between the beautiful princess Padmāvatī of the southern island of Siṃhal and the Rajput king Ratansen from the North. The work was composed in the sixteenth century and written in early Avadhi. The story of Ratansen and Padmāvatī is loosely based on the historical event of the conquest of the Rajput fortress Citor by the sultan ‘Alā’ al-dīn Khiljī in 1303. In Jāyāsī’s poem, the ruler becomes enamoured of the princess after hearing a description of Padmāvatī’s extraordinary beauty, and decides to lay siege to the fortress in order to conquer the beautiful woman.

This semi-historical episode of *Padmāvat* is preceded by a part that describes how king Ratansen becomes a yogī for the love of Padmāvatī, relinquishing his throne and travelling to Siṃhal while heading an army of yogīs. His guide on the journey is the parrot Hīrāmani, Padmāvatī's former companion. The king can only reach Siṃhal and marry the princess if he is prepared to sacrifice his life for his beloved. The two parts of the poem together form a tale of mystical love that, in terms of Sufi symbolism, represents the voyage of the soul to God, the ideal state of union and the return to living in a transient world, full of conflict and deceit.

The juxtaposition of the ideal of the spiritual development of a worldly king and the difficulty to maintain moral integrity in the 'real' world marks the structure and the thematic message of *Padmāvat*. It emphasizes the Rajput king's *sevā* – his sacred dedication – to love, expressed in the idiom of Sufi mysticism, as a moral ideal and an example for the various religious and cultural sensibilities amongst the poet's audience.

Jāyasī was a Sufi poet from the region of Jais in North India, who was initiated in the Chishtī Sufi lineage of Saiyid Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī (d. 840/1436-37). In his poems he claims affiliation to a local branch of this *silsila* (congregation) in Jais, as well as to other important religious figures of his days. Although there is no historical evidence of patronage by local elites, one of his poems seems to suggest such an affiliation. Patronage of Indian Sufi centres by worldly rulers in exchange for support from the charismatic *pīrs* (Sufi teachers) was a common practice. The choice for the story of the siege of Citor and the role of the Rajput queen Padmāvatī as the main theme of *Padmāvat* makes the poem particularly relevant to this context. It locates the poet in a literary field defined by the interests of both worldly and spiritual patrons. His role as a mediator between these worldly and spiritual parties provides a key to Jāyasī's transformation of the tale of love between Ratansen and Padmāvatī and that of 'Alā' al-dīn's campaign against Citor into a mystical romance.

Muḥammad Jāyasī follows in the footsteps of earlier Indian Sufi poets who used Indian folk stories as a base for their *premākhyāns* – their poems of mystical love. His *Padmāvat* stands out in this genre because of its complex polyphony of themes, images and poetical elements from a range of literary and oral sources from the hybrid North Indian cultural environment. It illustrates how the genre of the Sufi *premākhyāns* matured as part of an Indian Islamic literary culture that integrates Persian and Indian forms and content.

The genre refers to many other traditions, but not with the aim of emulating them; it developed its own aesthetics, representing the composite out-

look of its patrons and a wide audience in the context of local courts and Sufi centres. Within these conditions, Jāyasī was a poet of great skill and creative vision, which makes his *Padmāvat* a highlight of early modern Indian literature. His work confirmed the status of the Sufi romances in Avadhi and created a model for religious romances in other Indian vernaculars. The critical editions compiled by Rām Candra Śukla and Mātā Prasād Gupta consolidated the status of the text as a classic in Hindi literature and introduced it to many modern readers. The recognition of the literary and cultural value of the text placed *Padmāvat* prominently on academic curricula of Hindi literature in India and elsewhere.

The seamless polyphony of the idioms of Islamic mysticism and that of popular Indian ascetic traditions in *Padmāvat*, such as the *nāth yogis*, gave rise to numerous conceptual and hermeneutic questions in readings of the text throughout its history. As the interpretations of the poem moved further away from its original context, its hybrid idiom and its religious ethics – in which the Indian Rajput and his loyal queen emerge as the moral victors over the assaults of the Muslim sultan – became increasingly difficult to read.

A major influence on the perception of the text was the acclaim it received in early twentieth-century historiographies of Hindi writing that were compiled from a perspective in which the spirit of Hindu nationalism was beginning to make itself felt, reflecting the political climate of the period. They were initiated by the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabhā of Benares. Their representation of the early modern vernacular traditions was inspired by the notion that these texts were to be positioned as precursors of a modern ‘national’ Hindi literature. This effort encompassed also the production of a Hindi dictionary and editions of the works of major early modern poets such as Jāyasī, Kabīr and Tulsīdās. In this context, the otherness of the Islamic texts was emphasised, projecting contemporary, politicised notions of cultural identity on to the early modern traditions. The cultural hybridity and polyphony of the Sufi texts was categorised as an effort at bridging Hinduism and Islam at the level of mystical experience, which made the Islamic outlook of these works less foreign and thus acceptable within the framework of ‘Indian’ literature. This interpretation became institutionalised in the historiographical canon and influenced subsequent readings of Jāyasī’s poetry.

This syncretist interpretation of early Sufi poetry in the vernaculars by Indian scholars was reinforced by a strong interest on the part of Western audiences for oriental writers that were seen as ‘Prophets of Unity’. This interest came in the wake of popular translations such as Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubaiyat*

of ‘Umar Khayyām (1859), or Rabindranath Tagore’s translation of verses by Kabīr (1915) and reflected on readings of Jāyāsī’s poetry in India. On the one hand, this perception reduced the interaction between Hindu and Muslim communities to a binary opposition; on the other hand, it idealised exchange and circulation of early modern Indian culture as an idyllic syncretism.

These unsatisfactory and incomplete interpretations of the poem called for a reading of *Padmāvat* that unburdens the text from the imprint of later, ideological categorisations and brings back its hybrid idiom to Jāyāsī’s own social and cultural environment. Such a reading engages with interpretations of the poem made in the spirit of nationalism or of idealist syncretism as instances of an ongoing process of reception and transmission in new cultural spaces, not as keys to a fixed meaning of the poem. The contextual reading avoids defining the semantics of cultural signs and practices as immutable, or tying them to specific social or religious identities. It approaches the early modern traditions that shaped *Padmāvat* from the perspective of a circulation of culture, in which the meaning of these signs and practices shifted as they were transmitted and adopted in new contexts.

The reading that is presented here proposes a fresh idiom for describing Jāyāsī’s agency and his poem in relation to the powers and interests that shaped his context. It sees the environment of the Indian Chishtī Sufi centres as a literary field that was defined by the various roles of these places in early modern North Indian society. The centres provided spiritual teaching for the mystical pupils, were sites of worship for a composite audience of devotees of the pīr’s tomb, and offered legitimation of the power of local elites in exchange for patronage. The convergence of these interests, especially the interaction between the discourses of spiritual and worldly power, created a space and a habitus for the mystical poet who wrote in the Indian vernaculars and mediated between the various planes of religious experience and political agency in this context.

The metaphor of the literary field is introduced here to emphasise that this reading of *Padmāvat* focuses on the role of the poet in a particular social and cultural space in which the meaning and value of art is defined, recognised and valued. This prevents the impulse to connect the findings of this reading, especially the notions of Hindu or Islamic identity that can be distinguished in and around *Padmāvat*, to later conditions in South Asian society. It pays homage to the important work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), who has summarised his approach effectively in the following motto:

Le producteur de la valeur de l'oeuvre de l'art n'est pas l'artiste mais le champ de production en tant qu'univers de croyance qui produit la valeur de l'oeuvre d'art comme fétiche en produisant la croyance dans le pouvoir créateur de l'artiste. Étant donné que l'oeuvre d'art n'existe en tant qu'objet symbolique doté de valeur que si elle est connue et reconnue, c'est-à-dire socialement instituée comme oeuvre d'art des spectateurs dotés de la disposition et de la compétence esthétiques qui sont nécessaires pour la connaître comme telle, la science des oeuvres a pour objet non seulement la production matérielle de l'oeuvre mais aussi la production de la valeur de l'oeuvre ou, ce qui revient au même, de la croyance dans la valeur de l'oeuvre.

Pierre Bourdieu: *Les règles de l'art: Génèse et structure du champ littéraire*, 1998: 375.

The necessary groundwork for this new approach to the analysis of Jāyasī's poetry is provided by the increasing knowledge gained in recent research on the various roles and interests that were concurring in and around the Sufi centres, their interactions with Indian devotional movements and the role of patronage by worldly elites. In this respect, the descriptions of the development of Indian Sufism and the embedding of the congregations in the Indian context by scholars such as Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, Simon Digby, Richard Eaton, Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence were of primary importance. They provided an insight into the complex social roles of the Sufi centres, especially when these became host to the large-scale popular cult of the holy men's tombs, attracting a diverse audience of both Hindu and Muslim devotees. At the same time, the *dargāhs* (Sufi centres) remained pivotal in the teaching of Sufi doctrine to the mystical pupils according to the precepts of the founding pīr. The Chishtī lineages to which Jāyasī claims allegiance were formed when the congregation broke up into several local branches. The leaders of these smaller centres competed with Indian *bhakti* and *nāth yogī* congregations for influence and patronage with local elites.

The availability of historical data on the development of the Chishtī Sufi centres provides the background for an interpretation of the theme of the moral legitimation of worldly power in *Padmāvat* that connects the depiction in the poem to issues that were relevant to his social environment. The poem subtly underlines the worldly rulers' need for legitimation of their power and the role of the spiritual guide in providing this. For both, independence is crucial. The ruler will serve an overlord, but only if he retains his honour as a free political agent. The spiritual guide needs to maintain a semblance of independence

from worldly matters to maintain the moral high ground. Rulers and powerful Sufi *shaiḥs* – leaders of the congregations – in Jāyasī's context were involved in the exchange of legitimation and support for land grants and other forms of patronage. The role of the Sufi poet in this context is that of the mediator between the two realms of power. In *Padmāvat*, Jāyasī puts forward the moral ideal of *sevā* for the conundrum of independence, as this is relevant for both the ruler and his spiritual guide. The poet uses the semantic polyphony of the idiom of mystical love to convey this ideal. The mediation characterises the *habitus* of the mystical poet and inspires the actions of many of the characters in the poem, who become like his alter egos.

This exchange between worldly elite and spiritual guide provides the thematic backbone for the representation of the tale of the love between Ratansen and Padmāvatī. In the first part, it is the Rajput king who, through the service and sacrifice for love reaches the moral ideal of the *insān-i kāmīl* – the ideal man who has achieved spiritual liberation in this life. There are many references in *Padmāvat* to the example of Alexander the Great, who embodied this ideal. In the second part, the battle for Citor and the assault and treason by sultan 'Alā' al-dīn shows the dilemma of service to a dishonourable overlord. Also in this part, Ratansen's elevation through the *sevā* of love makes him the moral victor here. In this thematic set-up, the conflict between Ratansen and the sultan concerns different morals of political service, not the religious identity of the king and the sultan, as most modern interpretations of the poem suggest. The notion of *sevā* is a polyphonic concept in this respect, as it connects the idiom of mystical love with more general moral and pious ideals.

The insights into the world of the complex and hybrid environment of the Indian Chishtī centres in the research described above were crucial in understanding the polyphony of Jāyasī's poetry and bringing it back to its original literary field. An important element in this respect is the distinction between the various 'circles' connected with the Sufi centres – the 'serious' mystical pupils who follow the doctrines of the founding pīr, and the devotees from various communities who visit and worship the Sufi shrines. Eaton (1978) described these as the 'inner' and 'outer' circles of the Indian Sufi centre, which provided a model for the composite audience of Jāyasī poetry and account for the thematic polyphony that addresses various religious sensibilities.

Another crucial insight was the emphasis on the influence of popular Islamic piety expressed in the devotion to the figures of the Prophet and Fāṭima, put forward by Annemarie Schimmel in her studies of Sufism in India and elsewhere in the Islamic world. *Padmāvat* contains many elements that refer to

this layer of Islamic devotion. They are not primarily connected with the mystical meaning of the poem, but provide powerful images from orthodox Islamic beliefs, such as that of the Last Judgement. This is the topic of Jāyāsī's *Ākhirī Kalām*, but also inspires many of the images of service in *Padmāvat*.

Schimmel speculated on the idea that Jāyāsī's poetry might be seen as an early example of the deep interleaving of Persian and Indian literary culture that is not exclusively tied to the sphere of Sufi mystical doctrines, which makes it a forerunner of what later became known as Urdu literature (1975: 159). An interesting development of this idea is proposed by Shantanu Phukan (2000), when he reviews the reception of Hindi poetry such as *Padmāvat* and *bārah-māsās* by eighteenth-century Mughal elites.

During the last three decades, the study of early modern, vernacular literature developed at a rapid pace, emancipating itself from its moorings in the classical 'Indological' discourse, as well as from its preoccupation with Hindu bhakti sources. This led to new readings of the idiom of this poetry, especially of the hybrid vocabulary of Sufi, *sant*² and Sikh poets. The pioneering work of Charlotte Vaudeville, Winand Callewaert, Jack Hawley and Kenneth Bryant brought to light the circulation and fragmentation of early modern textual corpora and the role of sectarian movements, who adopted the persona of the poets and constructed canonical collections that added numerous new poems in the author's name.

This research highlighted the vivid dialogic exchange between religious communities and identities in the early modern context, which led to the realisation that the boundaries between religious and cultural communities in early modern North India were much more fluid than was presumed earlier, and that they did not coincide with those that divide contemporary South Asian society.

In the present analysis of Jāyāsī's poetry, these new insights informed the notion that early modern Sufi poetry shared a great deal of its literary forms and creative processes with religious literature that used to be associated exclusively with 'Hindu' devotional religion (bhakti). The focus on the religious background of poets and genres in modern literary historiography obscured the thematic and stylistic polyphony of early modern, vernacular poetry. Reading *Padmāvat* from this perspective brings to light the dialogic nature of the Sufi premākhyāns, which prefigures certain characteristic elements of later iconic bhakti material, such as Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*. Similarly, the functionality of the short *dohā* (two lined verse) in the Sufi romances can be compared very effectively with the rhetorical use of this form in poetry by nāth yogī and sant poets.

Research on the transmission of the corpora of Sūrdās and Kabīr pro-

vided insights that are presented in this study to shed light on the trajectory of *Padmāvat* manuscripts and adaptations through history. This demonstrated how the corpus of bhakti and Sufi poetry travelled along similar routes of transmission. The conceptual difficulties in representing the nature of the circulation of literary elements in the early modern traditions in modern historiographies of Indian literature are shared by both Sufi and bhakti poetry.

The proposed contextual reading of *Padmāvat* is prompted by a critique of the representation of Jāyasi's work in the critical editions and the early historiography of Hindi literature that developed under the influence of nationalist language politics. It also engages intensively with more recent studies on his poetry. An important contribution in this respect has been the PhD dissertation of John Millis (1984) that provided a wealth of data on Jāyasi's social and religious background, culled from a wide range of sources in Hindi. Millis' work is of great value for the extensive analysis of the critical studies on Jāyasi's poetry by Indian commentators. His translation of a large number of stanzas from the first part of *Padmāvat*, with many enlightening notes, is a valuable introduction to the rich imagery used by the poet.

Millis focuses in his reading of *Padmāvat* on the expression of concepts from monistic Sufi doctrine in images taken from nāth yogī mystical theories. His analysis of the yogic images in the poem is effective, but revolves around the notion that *Padmāvat* is primarily a mystical allegory. This interpretation is based on a *kuñjī* – an allegorical key – that has been shown in critical editions to be a later addition to the poem. Millis' analysis of the 'translation' of Sufi concepts in the Indian images falls short, as it does not take into account enough how Jāyasi constructs the Indian material in a polyphonic representation, juxtaposing it with images from other sources. The poet incorporates the material into his poem, but always moves it slightly away from its original semantics. The notion of a mystical allegory represents an interpretation of *Padmāvat* that evolved during its transmission and reception, but which does not reflect the full thematic complexity of the poem.

Since the defence in 1996 of the PhD dissertation on which this present study is based, the interest in early modern Indian Islam and Sufi poetry has grown considerably. The dissertation circulated among scholars and, judging on citations,³ contributed to a new perspective on Jāyasi's work. One of the notions that has been developed in research since then is that the nexus between worldly and religious power was an important motif for Jāyasi's work. The most eloquent exposition of this is in Ramya Sreenivasan's study of the trajectory of the theme of the *padmini* (the 'lotus-woman')⁴ queen and the attempts

by a Muslim sultan to capture her in early modern and colonial North Indian literature (2007). She extensively describes the various incarnations of this theme in Jāyāsī's *Padmāvat*, epics from the context of Rajput courts by Jain poets and later reconstructions of Rajput tradition in British colonial history by James Tod. This study is by far the most complete analysis of the *padmīnī* theme in vernacular literature to this day.

Sreenivasan follows the theme mainly from the perspective of its functionality in constructing a historical memory of Rajput identity, distinguishing how different milieus emphasise either the heroic, the romantic or the mystical side of the story. She effectively locates the creation of *Padmāvat* in sixteenth-century politics in the Avadhi area, where the rising influence of Sher Shāh (1486 – 1545) led to great anxiety on the part of regional elites of Rajput origin. This made the story of the defence of Citor and the heroic role of the *padmīnī* queen a narrative of resistance to usurpation in a larger empirical structure. As these Avadhi elites were deeply involved in the patronage of Chishtī Sufis, it seems all the more justified to position Jāyāsī's *Padmāvat* in this context.

The present analysis of *Padmāvat* also engages with the work of Aditya Behl who, due to his untimely demise in 2009, was not able to finish the publication that came out of his primary research project: a comprehensive study of the genre of the Avadhi Sufi romances and its poetics. Central to Behl's research was the notion that these works are part of an Indian Islamic literary culture based in Muslim courts starting from the days of the Delhi Sultanate (twelfth to fourteenth century) and continued in the many minor regional courts thereafter. The inspiration for this literature came from the models of Persian courtly poetry, but it developed its own unique aesthetic and conceptual idiom, in which Indian cultural and religious heritage was fully embedded. Behl sees at the core of this literature the desire to capture the divine, invisible dimension of God's creation in worldly terms with a local, Indian relevance. The strong role of Sufi lineages provided the religious tone and semantics for this poetry, but it had a wider impact than just courts or Sufi centres. The Avadhi romances distance themselves both from the classical Indian literary traditions, as well as from the Persian models. This double distancing creates their specific identity of '*hindavī*' poetry. It creates a location for the appearance of a 'heaven on earth' that conforms to Islamic beliefs on Indian soil, in which the Islamic identity of the poets and their audience can be fully expressed in local terms.⁵ Behl's encyclopedic knowledge of the romances and their reception in the Chishtī Sufi milieu made his readings of the Sufi pre-mākhyāns exceptionally valuable.

Behl's and Weightman's translation of Manjhan's *Madhumālātī* (2000) demonstrates how the poet created a literary universe using images from Indian tradition but with a rhetorical purpose that was mainly focused at an erudite audience of Indian Sufis. It remains to be seen whether this approach also applies to Jāyāsī's work, which contains a mystical programme but also addresses the 'outer' circle of the Sufi dargāh and puts a strong emphasis on political morals. This is also where the present interpretation of Jāyāsī's poetry differs from Behl's reading, which acknowledges the polyphony of the poems but locates them primarily in the mystical doctrines and practice of Indian Chishtī Sufis. This undervalues the strong subtext of Islamic piety and general moralism in the Avadhi romances and their functionality in wider society.

Aditya Behl's insightful and creative work on the genre of Avadhi pre-mākhyāns will remain unfinished, but continues to provide a lasting inspiration to the field.

The contextual reading of *Padmāvat* envisaged in this study also informs the structure of the book. With some adaptations, this follows the layout of the original dissertation. Its first chapter comprises an analysis of the available data on the life of the poet as it can be reconstructed from hagiographical and historical sources. This provides the basis for a rich description of the social and cultural conditions in which the poet operated, leading to a reflection on the political aspects of the choice for the theme of the ransacking of Citor. This description also deals extensively with the spiritual teachers Jāyāsī mentions in the prologues of his work. These parts of the poem give an insight into what the poet himself saw as important players in the literary field. Similarly, the references in the poem to connections with worldly powers are discussed. This description serves as a reflection on the connection between the thematic programme of *Padmāvat* and the interests of his spiritual and worldly patrons.

Chapter two adds to this an analysis of the textual history of *Padmāvat*, starting from a critique of the modern critical editions. This further underlines the necessity of a contextual reading, as it shows how the perception of the poem changed with its distribution in various directions in the centuries after its conception. The impact of this transmission on the shape of the text has been considerable, which undermines the notion that the manuscripts and other versions of the text, even those the editors considered primary sources, can yield a reliable insight into the text as it was produced by the poet. The variety in the nature and content of the earliest sources resists a philological reconstruction of the original shape of the poem and the extrapolation of an 'authentic' text from the earliest set of manuscripts. This analysis also encom-

passes the interference of textual and oral transmissions in the distribution of the poem and its spread in translations or adaptations of its theme in various literary traditions.

The third chapter is devoted to analysing the numerous references to oral and literary traditions in *Padmāvat*, positioning the poem in the cultural space of early modern vernacular texts and oral traditions. Just as locating the poet in his social context is crucial for a meaningful reading of the poem, it is equally important to understand how Jāyasī makes use of the vast cultural hinterland of Indian and Persian material. This chapter describes in detail how images and themes from neighbouring traditions, and also Jāyasī's own *Akharāvaṭ*, *Ākhirī Kalām* and *Kanhāvat*, are being drawn into the thematic structure of *Padmāvat*. Engaging with the arguments put forward by Aditya Behl on the position of the Sufi romances in the Indian cultural context, this analysis underlines the notion that *Padmāvat* and other premākhyāns should not be seen as derivative or emulations of either Persian poetry or any other literary example. The text are grounded in their own discourse and speak their own idiolect, based on the preferences and interests that prevail in the context of Indian Sufi congregations. The Indian images the poet draws into the poem, especially from the nāth yogī idiom, are always combined with other images, emphasizing that his version of Ratansen and Padmāvatī engages in a dialogue with other narratives. This exchange enriches the meaning of this version of the tale Ratansen and Padmāvatī in the poet's own environment. It does not make it a derivative of other literary genres.

This argument is further developed in the fourth chapter which deals with the way the poem is structured around the expression of its thematic message. This is analysed both from a formal perspective, as well as from the point of view of the aesthetic programme that is at work in producing the meaning of the poem. Again, the polyphony of Indian and Persian poetic traditions and their aesthetic programmes is the main focus of this analysis. Elements from both traditions are present in the poem, but are used to enhance the authentic expressiveness of the poem, not to bring it closer to either one of these backgrounds. This further underlines that, conceptually, Jāyasī created his poem independently from the traditions from which he derived his material. This can only be argued by freeing the text from the notions that it 'translates' other literary elements, and by seeing its semantic polyphony as a characteristic of its particular cultural context. Special attention is given to the function of the prologue of the poem in introducing the main themes of the poem. The prologue also serves to frame the tale in a 'sacred' space, a universe which obeys the logic of the poem's thematic programme. This concludes the first part of the

study, where the focus is mainly on the imprint of external conditions and influences on *Padmāvat*.

The second part of the study analyses how the themes that tie the poem to its context are expressed in the text. The sixth chapter takes the theme of love as a starting point for demonstrating how Jāyāsī connects the morals that matter to his patrons through their association with the notions of service, sacrifice and truthfulness. These notions are meaningful both in a worldly and in a spiritual, religious context. The idiom of mystical love provides an ideal carrier wave to integrate the different sides of these notions in the example of the Rajput king and his devotion to his queen.

Chapter six highlights the poetical tool of the metaphorical scheme to impose a thematic coherence on the motifs and images the poet draws into his poem from various sides. The notion that Padmāvatī brought the *nūr muḥammadī* – the divine light – to the world and thereby occasioned the temporary presence of the divine, provides a metaphoric scheme in which a broad range of images connected with light can be infused with a thematic meaning. The poet skilfully connects poetic conventions with practices from popular religion, which revolve around ‘seeing’ the divine through worship. He also encompasses his own agency as a one-eyed, but visionary poet into this scheme, thus making the notion of light the thematic backbone of his poem.

The seventh chapter follows the many leads to the poet’s own position by analysing the expression of service and moral integrity in the actions of many mediators and messengers portrayed in the poem. The moral of service is expounded in a very direct manner in the roles of these characters and in numerous asides in concluding verses (*dohās*) throughout the poem. This representation of the poet’s agency provides an important key to the meaning of the poem in its literary field, as it demonstrates the crucial role of the spiritually inspired guide who mediates between the dilemmas of worldly power and the vision of the divine embodied in the *silsila* of the Sufi *pīrs*. The analysis of the representation of the role of the poet also adds an important contextual relevance to the use of the polyphonic idiom of Sufi monistic mysticism in *Padmāvat*, which underlines the need to step away from readings of the poem as purely a mystical textbook or allegory.

This study of *Padmāvat* is the result of a prolonged and sustained scholarly engagement with early modern Indian Sufi poetry, during which the topic developed from an odd niche to a more mainstream subject in South Asian studies. More scholars than ever before are aware of the enormous value of the corpus of Sufi poetry in the Indian vernacular for the understanding of the

dynamics of early modern Indian culture. New perspectives on the contribution of Islam to this environment changed the reading of other forms of literature from this period. New research perspectives opened up when the notion of a circulation of culture was accepted more widely, breaking down barriers between scholarly traditions and bringing to light the dialogic quality of South Asian culture. This book is therefore meant to inspire those students of Indian literature who want to travel further on that road.

Leiden, 2011

Notes

1. All translations in this book are by the author. See appendix 3 for the Hindi texts of the quoted and translated verses.
2. The sants were an influential early modern religious sect, who cultivated an abstract (nirguṇa) form of the divine.
3. The most notable were in Sreenivasan (2007) and Behl (2005).
4. The term *padmini* refers to a classification of the beauty of women (*śrībhedavarṇana*) in the aesthetics of Sanskrit art poetry, in which system the woman who is 'like a lotus', the *padmini*, is regarded as the highest class. This classification is the background for Padmāvatī's characterisation. In the poem, the Brahmin Rāghav Cetan describes the categories to sultan 'Alā' al-dīn (463-467) when he praises the beauty of Padmāvatī. See also: Kapp (1975).
5. This rendering of Behl's views on the genre of the premākhyāns is primarily based on the unpublished text of a series of three lectures he gave in Paris at the EHESS in the spring of 2005.