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Poetry and History: Bengali Maṅgal-kābya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal

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revised. Responsibility for the mistakes which remain of course is mine.
A Historian’s Introduction to Reading *Mangal-kabya*

Preface

*An earlier version of this paper, ‘Rhetoric and the Genre of *Mangal-kabya*, was presented for the panel, ‘South Asian Literary Genres in Theory and History’, 32nd Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, October 25, 2003. I thank the organizer, Indira Peterson, and the other participant, Martha Ann Selby, for helping me to think about issues of genre in a more abstract way than I usually do. The impetus to reconsider the ‘discovery’ of *mangal-kabya* by Bengali nationalist scholars as part of the imagination of a nationalist past came from conversations with Lakshmi Subrahmanian, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, and Gautam Bhadra, all of whom I thank. Research in Kolkata for this essay in 2000 was funded in part by a grant from the Bureau for Faculty Research of Western Washington University.*
One fall Chicago day in 1973, sitting in the office of Professor Edward C. Dimock, Jr., I was introduced to questions which gradually opened into the essays of this book.

Professor Dimock was ‘Cam’ to his friends but not to me; I was only a graduate student in history, beginning my third year of Bengali, and my first year of studying with him. He suggested that I read an essay of Claude Lévi-Strass in connection with thinking about the plot of Candimangal, a type of Bengali verse narrative designed to persuade people to worship the goddess Candi. Professor Dimock was skillfully non-directive. ‘Lots of people seem to be excited by this’, he said; ‘see what you can make of it’.

Dimock knew that I was interested in markets and trade in pre-colonial Bengal. He already had recommended that I read with him some excerpts from the Calcutta University edition of Mukunda’s Candimangal. I had been disappointed by the barter described in the story of the merchant Dhanapati’s voyage to Simhala or Sri Lanka, the second of the text’s stories about human worshippers. First of all, I thought that barter must have been anachronistic in the sixteenth century, when Mukunda wrote; and second, the goods described as bartered, one for another, clearly had been chosen because of rhymes and
puns, not because of any interest in a realistic description of trade. On the other hand, in
the first of these human stories in the text, I had been intrigued by the description of the
founding of a central market in the capital of Kalketu’s upstart kingdom of Gujarat.
Supposed to be ‘tax-free’, it immediately became the site of extortion by Kalketu’s
minister, the scoundrel Bharu Datta. So, I had begun to follow the episodes in Kalketu’s
story which led toward this description of conflict in a marketplace. I had read about
Kalketu’s hunting, and the appeals of desperate hunted animals to the goddess Candi for
deliverance from him. After a series of paradoxical tests, which Kalketu apparently passed
because he refused to do what she asked, the goddess gave Kalketu a fabulous treasure,
with the command to stop hunting, to clear the forest, and to founded a new kingdom in its
place.

With these episodes in mind, reading the essay by Lévi-Strauss, I learned that one
could expect to see a pattern of sequences of similar episodes in myths. (Without much
thought I supposed that Candimangal was a ‘myth’.) Lévi-Strauss argued that, having
reduced the myth to a series of simple ‘sentences’ expressing basic ‘relations’ as the
myth’s ‘gross constituent units’ or ‘mythemes’ \{a, b, c, d \ldots\}, one should expect to find, later in the myth, repetition of one or more similar series \{a',b',c',d' \ldots\}, \{a'',b'',c'',d'' \ldots\} and so on. One could read the myth synchronically or ‘structurally’ by treating as its fundamental units the ‘bundles’ of similar mythemes \{a, a', a'' \ldots\}, and \{b, b', b'' \ldots\}, and so on. Individual sentences or mythemes were to be ‘bundled’ by analogies shared among them, and in particular, by finding the common problem or contradiction they shared. ‘Bundles’ of ‘mythemes’ were to be the fundamental unit of analysis. In a second analytical operation, the ‘bundles’ would be related in a logical or developmental or ‘metonymic’ sequence. A statement summarizing relations among the several ‘bundles of mythemes’ would state an unconscious, structural meaning of the ‘myth’ as a whole.

I spent several days reading summaries of the narrative of Candimangal. I learned that two important Bengali scholars thought Kalketu’s story was completely independent of Dhanapati’s story; a lack of narrative coherence was supposed to be a fundamental weakness of the text as a whole. I thought this idea could mistake an absence of metonymical connections through plot for an absence of metaphor, the relations of a
shared narrative pattern. In a sleepless night, I began to assemble terms of a structural key, a narrative pattern repeated throughout the whole story. Of course, this was anything but mature scholarship. Still, the next morning, as I shared the terms I had found with Professor Dimock, we began a collaboration I never will forget. He had a small green blackboard on one wall of his cluttered office. I proposed terms for those episodes which I thought were repeated in a pattern, and wrote them on the blackboard, comparing Kalketu’s story to Dhanapati’s. I remember how I began: in Kalketu’s story we have the initial ‘hunting’ by predatory animals of their animal prey, and in the same relative position in Dhanapati’s story we also have the story of Dhanapati’s pigeon being hunted by a hawk. ‘Hunting’, I argued, will be the first term of a repeated narrative pattern.

As we proceeded, Dimock, who of course knew more about the text, suggested emendations. I erased the blackboard, changed some of the terms, and we contemplated the stories again, as I attempted, without success, to reduce both narratives to structurally congruent ‘bundles’ of ‘mythemes’. We did this over the course of several meetings. We discovered that it was by no means obvious what should be the ‘mythemes’, the
fundamental units of analysis. In this way, however, in a short time my project radically changed; I knew I was not interested in finding ‘facts’ ‘represented’ in the narratives of *Candimangal*. Instead, I wanted to understand the text itself as a whole.

I knew I had to know more. I had to read the whole text, not just summaries. I had to become good at reading its difficult middle-period Bengali. Later on, of course, I would realize that Lévi-Strauss’s methods were, to say the least, not an entirely adequate way to read Mukunda’s richly literary, comic and ironic text. Still, readers will find some results of this effort in the three essays on *Candimangal* collected in this volume. Each one includes in its analysis a triad of terms: hunting and war, buying and selling, and an unequal exchange of gifts initiated when an inferior gives *bhet* and follows it with a supplication to a superior. In these first explorations with Dimock, it already seemed clear to me that ‘hunting’ would be a term by which *Candimangal* texts would explore the problem of predatory and exploitative relations in human society, and I was sure that other terms in a shared narrative pattern would extend and deepen this theme. Contrary to Lévi-Strauss, even in these first explorations, I did not expect to emphasize ‘meanings’ in
Mukunda’s text of which Mukunda and his audiences had been unconscious. His

*Candimangal* as a whole, I was sure, would prove to be what it clearly was in its parts: intelligent, thoughtful, and self-reflective. I was sure that he had thought carefully about problems of exploitation in his world. Finally, looking back at myself, I know that a literary quality had caught my interest. Mukunda, the author, was full of sympathy for his characters, and at the same time delightfully ironic in presenting their foibles. His plot included some wonderfully funny turns. His language sparkled with surprises and puns—once I had deciphered it, dictionaries in hand. His figures of speech were witty. Beyond whatever uses I might make of it as a historian, this was a text I would love.

**A Genre and its Definition**

This book is a collection of essays by a historian about texts which belong to a genre of literature, Bengali *mangal-kabya*. In this introduction, and in the book as a whole, I examine three different kinds of questions about how historians should read *mangal-kabya*, the genre of texts to which Mukunda’s *Candimangal* belongs. The first question is:

How can historians read *mangal-kabya* in a way appropriate to their character as
literature, and still find a use for them in writing history. My assumption is that there is something problematic and troubling about looking for ‘representations’ of any kind of social class in middle Bengali literature, for example; as if literature were a kind of social science survey. I begin by supposing that historians should fully recognize the characteristics of mangal-kabya as imaginative works of literature, not as reports or documents. Nevertheless, this formulation also is too simple, for ‘historical documents’ themselves have an imaginative dimension; indeed, they sometimes are entirely fictitious. Any attempt to describe something in words must be inadequate to what is being described. Still, it seems to me that sometimes actions of the heroic characters of mangal-kabya were not meant to ‘represent’ what ordinary people could have or should have done: when her husband died of snakebite, for example, an ordinary Bengali daughter-in-law was not expected literally to follow Behula’s example and float downriver on a raft bearing her husband’s rotting corpse. Rather, exactly as Lévi-Strauss argued that myths do, Behula’s story enacts and attempts to resolve a contradiction in the moral expectations for brides. They should stay modestly secluded, for otherwise they are
exposed to dangerous attacks upon their chastity and their husband’s family’s honor; and somehow, at the same time they should do whatever is necessary for the well-being of their husbands.9 Can it be acknowledged, nevertheless, that ‘the mangalkavya tradition offers a detailed and reliable picture of a lower-class social world, reflected in the activities performed by the main characters, and so brings startlingly realistic depictions of everyday life into the highly stylized world of conventional literatures’? Their ‘reconstruction of the conventional aesthetic world and its narrative economy’ certainly includes lower jati characters, and allows such characters both surprising virtues and ‘colorful language’ and ‘forceful expletives’, but does this amount to consistently ‘realistic depictions’?10 If not, how can we know when representations in the narrative were meant to be ‘realistic’? Certainly, when mangal-kabya conveyed the pleasures of satire, as they often did, they must have presented, in an exaggerated way, characters that an audience would believe were typical of some people, or the satire would not have been effective. These reflections imply questions about different protocols of characterization within a single genre
of literature, and suggest that understanding the nature of the genre must precede our attempts to use individual works for historical purposes.

How are we to define the genre of *mangal-kabya*? Reading these Bengali narrative poems which justify and teach worship of one or another deity, most scholars have found relations between didactic forms and purposes. Relations between didactic forms and purposes have helped scholars shape the following definition of *mangal-kabya* as a genre.¹¹

*Mangal-kabya* are works of vernacular Bengali (more properly, of *Bamla*) narrative poetry, composed, as far as we know from surviving texts, during the period of the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. (Most scholars suppose an undocumented, anterior period of oral and possibly of written composition lasting several centuries.) They are religious and didactic narratives; they justify and teach the worship of one or another deity. They were meant to be recited or performed as a part of ritual designed to produce some good. They were recited to musical accompaniment, and sometimes even with staging, characters and costumes, or at least with puppets or narrative scrolls. They usually were quite long, being recited for several hours at a time, over the course of several consecutive
days and nights. These statements about the genre, describing a common language and
form, a period of composition, a didactic purpose, and communicative fulfillment in
performance as part of a beneficial ritual, have the consent of most scholars.\textsuperscript{12}

Taken together, the initial question, how should a historian read \textit{mangal-kabya}, and
the definition of the genre to which scholarly consensus has arrived, suggest three further
questions. First, \textit{mangal-kabya} always were intended to be performed for an audience, not
read in solitude. This feature has implications for a historian. A good historian must be
attentive to their performative potentials. How were \textit{mangal-kabya} performed? How did
performance shape the work of authors and the receptivity of audiences? Second, their
common purpose as a genre was to be beneficial for authors, performers and audiences,
because performances were intended to act upon and to bring about some good for all
three. \textit{Mangal-kabya} texts apparently were so named because they were thought to bring
auspiciousness and well-being (\textit{mangal}).\textsuperscript{13} This purpose was achieved by careful attention
to a perfect performance, and could be threatened by an imperfect one. A second set of
questions are: What relation might there be between didactic and ritually beneficial
purposes? How can a historian define and investigate circumstances of composition and performance, including the rituals which performance accompanied? How might we discern whether and when the beneficial and ameliorative purposes of performances of *mangal-kabya* and the circumstances of their composition and performance changed to require altered or even entirely new texts? A third set of questions are: How can a historian think about changes in the genre as a whole during the period of its composition? What kinds of changes can be observed? How can they be explained? Of course, all of these questions only can be raised when a scholar has read a number of related texts, and can compare them in some detail.

Before we can take up these questions, however, the synchronic and apparently self-evident terms of the definition of *mangal-kabya* should be historicized and criticized. The original ‘rediscovery’ of *mangal-kabya* as a genre, and reading, summarizing, editing and publishing texts for a wider audience have been the work of Bengali scholars, amateur and professional, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the first person to suggest a genre of *mangal-kabya* as an object for literary study was Dinesh Chandra Sen
in his influential *Bangabhasa o Sahitya*, first published in 1896. Two recent essays about Dinesh Chandra by Bengali historians can help us to see how his very particular version of ‘romantic nationalism’ made Bengali literature an ‘archival resource with which to remake society’ by uniting past and present and elites and common folk in a ‘continuity of emotional experience’.

He thought that the ‘original’, ‘unadulterated’ and ‘fundamental’ forms of Bengali civilization and of Bengali language had been preserved ‘in the village, within households, by women’. He sought to recover their common source in village folk tales, ballads and songs, and in this way to recover a basis for national unity. Of course this was a common article of faith among romantic nationalists. Of more interest to me is a sense of incompleteness and loss that seems to attend this very project. In any case, the discovery of a genre of *mangal-kabya* occurred in this historical context. A brief analysis of Dinesh Chandra’s later survey in English, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, may help us to place the genre’s definition in the historical context of his romantic nationalism, and to use it more critically.
Far from existing outside of history, the very definition of *mangal-kabya* as a genre was shaped by the nationalist context of its discovery, and by the way that discovery looked at the past with an emotional valence of present loss, and with the project of recovering works of an authentic, traditional folk art. In both his *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, and especially in his Bengali historical synthesis *Brhat Banga*, Sen sought to restore appreciation of traditional Bengali culture in general, and not just appreciation of traditional literature. Thus, Sen’s work must be placed in the context of other efforts to recover, collect, translate and publish Bengali folklore, and to recover Bengali folk art more generally; with regard to Bengali visual arts his references to E.B. Havell are particularly interesting.\(^\text{18}\)

Sen’s descriptions of ‘*mangal-gan*’, narrative songs performed by village singers, stressed links between epic and *puranic* stories in Sanskrit literature and the specifically Bengali narratives of ‘Hindu’ poems devoted to Siva, Manasa, Candi and Dharma, the principle narratives of *mangal-kabya*. He believed that the manuscripts of these narratives preserve traces of an ancient Bengali oral and folk literature, formed over centuries in an
intimate and natural relation between village singers and their audiences. His discussions of the genre display a nationalist’s admiration for the unifying potential of a literature into which are gathered ‘expressions of all the poetry of the race’ from ‘a remotely ancient past’.

For example, the ‘whole race’ of Bengalis to which the literature of Bengal ‘belonged’ understood the ‘highly wrought literary style’ of the eighteenth century’s ‘Sanskritic Bengali’. They understood, therewith, ‘the most difficult points in the Hindu philosophy or poetry’ because Hindus and Muslims lived together ‘in close proximity’.

Sen himself carefully analyzed a few Bengali Sufi romances in the same chronological series in which he discussed mangal-kabya, and with the same qualities of interest and sympathy. One criterion by which he chose to include or exclude works by Muslim Bengalis seems to have been linguistic: did they, like Alaol, write in a ‘high-flown Sanskritic Bengali’, or did they write in ‘Musalmani Bangala’, an ‘admixture of Urdu, Persian and Arabic words with corrupt Bengali’. For ‘various reasons’ he had ‘not found it convenient to include books written in the Musalmani Bangala’.

Sen’s praise of Alaol for the sympathy and accuracy of his representations of Hindu beliefs and practices must be
matched with his comment about ‘how far the taste of the Muhammadans was imbued with
Hindu culture’--even in ‘backwoods Chittagong’ where Alaol’s manuscripts were carefully
preserved. Sen did not similarly place a high value upon the understanding of
specifically Muslim ideas among Hindu Bengalis. On the contrary, he denigrated the
abundant use of Arabic and Persian words in Bengali literature. Implicitly, the ‘whole
race’ whose literature he sought to recover was more Hindu than Muslim. Perhaps it has
been natural for scholars to continue to identify mangal-kabya as a genre of Hindu Bengali
literature, even as one may criticize Dinesh Chandra Sen’s ‘almost exclusive identification
of Bengali literature with the Hindu heritage, his idealization of many patriarchal and
Brahmanical precepts, and his search for a pure Bengali essence bereft of all foreign
influence’. 

My acceptance of this definition, however, has prevented me from looking for
influences from other genres of literature, ones not as Bengali, not as Hindu, not as
didactic. Aditya Behl in contrast, writing about a Hindavi Sufi ‘romance’, has suggested
that the ‘travels of narrative motifs mark deep and long cultural interactions between
peoples’ in the pre-modern world of the Indian Ocean; and that ‘circulation and mutual acceptance’ of diverse and alien story-telling traditions in the Indian Ocean may be understood through an analogy with the circulation of luxury goods. Particularly when we examine pleasures of performance, the uses of satire, and the insertion of romances and comic melodramas into mangal-kabya, we will want to move beyond the long established definition of mangal-kabya, and pay attention to the increased influence of other, related story-telling traditions. As Behl suggests, many of these story-telling traditions belong simultaneously to Indic and Persian cultures.

Ameliorative Purposes and Didactic Plots
Regardless of problems of how to define *mangal-kabya*, and how to think about them in relation to other, more or less closely related genres, we do have a large body of relatively long and complex texts which have many common features and which may be analyzed in common. I propose that most attempts to treat both individual texts and the history of the genre as a whole have considered their religious and didactic purposes far too narrowly. Worship advocated by these texts usually had this-worldly purposes. The beneficial purposes of *mangal-kabya*, the bliss, welfare, prosperity or virtue to be restored, presumed the redress of religious problems, but often they also presumed, and described, social, economic, political, and patriarchal problems.\textsuperscript{28}

True, in bare outline, the plots of *mangal-kabya* are very simple, and they can be related directly to the purpose of religious proselytizing. From an early date in the history of their composition texts devoted to the same deity ‘begin to follow the same traditional customs of composition’ and usually they copy the same basic plot. In order to establish worship of the deity on earth, one or more characters are cursed to be born to mortal life. There they learn to overcome a series of increasingly difficult and dangerous situations
through proper worship of the deity in question. When the deity’s claims to worship have been acknowledged, these human characters are taken back to heaven.\textsuperscript{29} Their worship establishes the pattern for later humans to emulate.

One method of analysis has been that, for each deity, an attempt is made to deduce ‘the circumstances of the origin of the cult and the manner of its dissemination’, by supposing that human characters in \textit{mangal-kabya} texts represented social groups who historically had joined in worship or who had resisted worship.\textsuperscript{30} This method presupposed that, consciously or unconsciously, authors of \textit{mangal-kabya} represented historical processes of conversion, a historicity for which we have little direct evidence. Still it seems reasonable to suppose that many \textit{mangal-kabya} narratives accurately represent the reluctance of high status men to worship local deities associated with lower \textit{jati}.

Two scholars recently have provided another approach to the relations between didactic and ameliorative purposes of \textit{mangal-kabya}. Using Proppian terms of analysis, France Bhattacharya and Clint Seely independently have observed that the plots of many \textit{mangal-kabya} have two distinct ‘plot functions’. In the primary plot function the deity sets
in motion actions which establish his or her worship on earth, while in the secondary plot
function the status and honor of that deity’s protagonists are degraded and must be re-
established. Sometimes as their status is degraded, protagonists face problems directly
caused by the deity; sometimes they face problems which arise in an ordinary life from
ordinary human conflicts. In either case, proper worship of the deity resolves conflicts for
the deity’s protagonists. In this secondary plot function, conflicts and their resolutions can
involve family relations among a husband and rival co-wives, relations between a king and
foreign merchants, relations between a king and his highest minister, relations between
rival rajas, ‘little kings’ who accept the authority of a common overlord, and relations
between a raja and the dominant military cohort in his army, to take just a few examples
from Candimangal and Dharmamangal texts.

Were the problems faced by protagonists and resolved by worship the same
problems that were faced by the audience and treated by rituals associated with
performance of these texts? Sometimes this seems to have been the case; protagonists
were protected from smallpox and snakebite in the narratives devoted to Sitala and
Manasa respectively; did not audiences who witnessed performances of their mangal-kabya also hope for the same protection? In other cases, answering this question is not an easy task, because the contexts and meanings of rituals also may have changed dramatically since the eighteenth century, and we have no descriptions of ritual earlier than the nineteenth century. I suggest that we can ask: What problems did protagonists try to resolve in the secondary plot functions of their narratives? Do we have evidence that those problems were important during the period when the texts were composed? Did those problems change in any way during the period when mangal-kabya were performed, and do we observe any corresponding changes in their composition or performance?

Thus, instead of beginning with the plot function which deals with the deity’s quest to establish worship on earth, we might begin with the problems faced by protagonists and their efforts to restore their honor and to re-order their lives. In this way perhaps we can explore relations between the narrowly religious instruction of the texts, the often this-worldly, ameliorative purposes for their performance, the rituals which were their occasions for performance, and the changing circumstances of authors and audiences.
Dates, Authors and Audiences

One feature that makes *mangal-kabya* interesting to a historian is that authors name themselves, both in accounts of how they came to compose and in signature lines (*bhanita*), and almost always they also name their lineage, *jati*, and village, and their locality (*des*) and its ruler as well. Thus they locate themselves in a social and political geography. More often than not, authors also date their compositions through the use of ‘chronograms’: a group of words each one of which is associated with a number, so that the group of words can be read to yield a date. The date of composition sometimes can be confirmed by the mention of a patron or ruler who is known to historical records; such evidence is especially good for eighteenth century texts. Parenthetically, I must note that controversies abound about decoding chronograms. Individual words used in chronograms sometimes are not clearly associated with a single number, and sometimes chronograms deliberately were composed as riddles. Chronograms also are ambiguous when texts leave unspecified the era to which their date refers. Finally, because chronograms often were located at the end of texts, on the pages most likely to become lost or damaged,
many incomplete manuscripts now are undated. Despite the difficulties of dating some
texts, however, mangal-kabya are unlike Sanskrit puranas and the Mahabharata, which
carefully deny, or at least make problematic their human authorship. Certainly there is
no reason to suppose an anonymous, collective, or exclusively oral authorship, even for the
now obscure figures who sometimes are cited by early authors as having provided the
models for their compositions.

Too few studies have attempted to relate texts to the particular circumstances in
which they were composed and performed. I think this omission is related to implicit
assumptions about the religious purposes of mangal-kabya, and about the unchanging
nature of such purposes. On the other hand, too many studies present a summary of an
‘archetypal’ plot, one usually abstracted from a single text. Here I want to acknowledge
the influence of two other scholars whom I met at the University of Chicago, Professor
Ralph W. Nicholas, and Aditi Nath Sarkar. In an important, and not well noticed study of
Sitalamangal texts, Nicholas and Sarkar suggested that in the nineteenth century
competition to print the preeminent Sitalamangal text by Nityananda Cakravarti (c. 1756-
followed shortly after the outbreaks of new, more morbid forms of malaria in the 1850s and 1860s. Then, examining an efflorescence of new *Sitalamangal* texts in the mid-eighteenth century, they found more important roles for Sitala’s assistant, Jvarasur, the fever demon, and for fevers compared to the pustular diseases ‘given’ by Sitala in the seventeenth century Bengali *Sitalamangal* of Krsnaram Das (c. 1690). I note how important it may be to look for subtle variations in individual versions of *mangal-kabya*, variations which correspond to the circumstances of their composition and performance, in a way that the ‘archetypal’ plot cannot. Readers will find studies of alterations of the basic plot of *Candimangal*, alterations which can be linked to changing historical contexts of composition, in two essays in this volume, ‘“Voluntary” Relationships and Royal Gifts of *Pan* in Mughal Bengal’, and ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: *Candimangal* after British Dominance’.

Information about patronage is much rarer than information about authorship, but it provides us with another way to place *mangal-kabya* in their social, political and artistic contexts. Readers of this volume will find one essay based on the relation between a
patron and an author. ‘Maharaja Krsnacandra, Hinduism, and Kingship in the Contact Zone of Bengal’, describes both works of literature and temple architecture sponsored by the raja and zamindar of Nadiya, the patron of Bharat’candra Ray’s great poem, Annadamangal.

We should assume that performances were based on manuscripts, but we also should assume that performances could be different from the written texts upon which they were based. Different manuscript traditions for texts which became widely circulated might be studied to discover the influence of performance upon texts, but on the whole this is an inquiry which remains to be undertaken. It is clear, for example, that older and more popular texts were altered in the process of transmission, and contain much interpolated material, and many simplifying revisions of problematic verses. Mukunda’s Candimangal has at least two distinct manuscript traditions, one longer and one shorter.

The printed editions upon which all of us must rely most of the time are the product of entirely modern and continuing scholarly labors, based upon changing styles of translation between what always was a more various tradition of manuscripts and the more uniform
one of print culture. No doubt many manuscripts have been lost; many more are slowly
disappearing through natural processes of decay. ⁴¹ There is an urgent need for a
continued study of manuscripts, not just of printed editions.

Reading Strategies for Didactic Texts

I do not know of any way to describe a uniform method for locating a text’s
particular historical contexts. If we confine ourselves to reading a particular mangal-kabya,
we do know something about how to discover what instruction it was intended to give, or
at least we have some procedures for how to begin. Episodes of mangal-kabya develop
common themes, and set up structured contrasts between different characters and
episodes. Of course, didactic narratives from all over the world, oral and written,
premodern and modern, have these same features. For example, Lau Sen in

Dharmamangal should be compared with his two main antagonists, first his evil maternal
uncle, the minister Mahamad, and second, his lower-jati rival, the rebellious raja Ichai
Ghos. With Ichai Ghos the plot explores conflict between a loyal raja and a rebellious
one. When Lau Sen himself also becomes a kind of minister to his king, Dharmamangal
explore conflicts between him as a loyal and truthful advisor, and Mahamad as lying and
manipulative one.\textsuperscript{42}

\textit{Mangal-kabya} also instruct through argumentation. Characters in conflict justify
their respective positions. Audiences were expected to evaluate the arguments between
different characters, as logically sound or not, and as morally correct or not. Of course,
these evaluations were shaped by all sorts of information provided through episodes of the
narrative itself, and sometimes by authorial commentary as well. Thus narratives do not
just defeat antagonists; they also refute arguments of those antagonists. In Mukunda’s
\textit{Candimangal}, for example, arguments made by Lahana against sexual relations with a pre-
pubertal bride are refuted, both by the bride herself in a counter-argument, and by the plot
of the narrative, in which the young girl triumphs over the unjustified opposition of this
elder co-wife, by being sexually attractive to their common husband.\textsuperscript{43} That it seemed
important to refute these arguments, however, may be taken as evidence for their
continuing presence in Bengali society, and this may be one of the most important ways
that \textit{mangal-kabya} can be read as historical documents.
Mangal-kabya often refer to, and invite comparisons with other mangal-kabya, as well as with stories from the epics and the puranas. For example, attentive readers of Candimangal and Dharmamangal should compare the character of Kalketu in Candimangal with Kalu Dom in Dharmamangal for reasons more important than the similarity of their names. Both are born in untouchable jati, and both are described as hunters in wild forests, who naturally also are masters of military arts. Kalketu is given a kingdom by the goddess Candi, and when a high jati king fights a battle with him to assert the right to rule and tax his newly cleared land, peace is restored through intervention of the goddess, and Kalketu is consecrated as a raja subordinate to the king. On the other hand, when Kalu Dom temporarily is deputed to be ruler over Lau Sen’s land of Mayna, he promptly proves his incapacity to rule. In an affirmation of the fundamental ideology of jati, Dharmamangal represent Kalu and his fellow Doms as inordinately fond of alcohol, and on the eve of battle with the Mahamad, the evil minister, Kalu Dom fails to worship the goddess and passes out. In striking contrast to the plot resolution of Candimangal, in Dharmamangal an untouchable hunter and warrior is allowed no potential to become a raja. Historians should
be interested in the rhetorical refutation of Kalketu’s story accomplished by these fundamental differences of plot in *Dharmamangal*.

Of course, most often intertextuality involves comments which make comparisons between characters in a *mangal-kabya* and those in the epics or *puranas*. For example, in *Dharmamangal* Lau Sen systematically and repeatedly is compared to Rama, so much so that we may be invited to read his story as an new version of Rama’s epic in and for the Kali Age.\(^4^5\) Sometimes intertextuality includes direct quotation of familiar passages. Of course this is not especially remarkable when we are dealing with texts devoted to the same deity and following the same basic plot, but sometimes quotations cross these sub-generic boundaries. For example, alone among authors of *Dharmamangal* whom I have read, Ram’das Adak suggests a comparison between the hero Lau Sen and Kalketu, despite the fact that Lau Sen is a high-*jati* warrior and *raja*. He does this by a long passage which is almost a quotation from Mukunda’s *Candimangal*, describing the better terms which Lau Sen offers to attract settlers to his kingdom.\(^4^6\) Just as Kalketu’s realm did, so also Lau Sen’s expands so much and so rapidly that it threatens to depopulate the
kingdom of his overlord. By this quotation Ram’das notices the contradiction between the
ideology of fealty and a practical reality: regardless of his duty to remain loyal, by his
success in attracting settlers Lau Sen becomes the \textit{de facto} ruler of Gaur, the city and
kingdom of his overlord.

In summary, some of the formal features of plot which may be explained by a
didactic purpose include: common themes in different episodes, similarities and contrasts
between characters, both use and refutation of arguments by protagonists and antagonists,
and intertextual references to or quotations from other \textit{mangal-kabya} and other narratives.

These are also among the most obvious of the characteristics that historians should attend
to in making use of works of this genre. Note, however, that they omit pleasures of
performance and the purpose of entertainment. Belatedly I have come to recognize that
such pleasures also are a proper subject for historians to consider. The next three
sections of this essay explore performative pleasures of \textit{mangal-kabya}, and they only begin
to explore this rich topic.

\textbf{Performative Pleasures and other ‘Characteristics’}
In addition to, if not without regard to, the definition of *mangal-kabya* in terms of language and form, time frame, and didactic purpose, the consensus of Bengali scholars has been that the genre is defined by other ‘characteristics’ (*laksan*), which texts and their performances were expected to have. Some of these ‘characteristics’ were required by the role of reciting texts as part of a ritual; for example, the introductory invocation of deities, the ‘vigil recital’ (*jagaran pala*), performed throughout the night of the penultimate day of the ritual, and containing the climactic events of the narrative, and on the final day of the ritual, a recital of the benefits of having listened to the whole performance. Two ‘characteristics’ are special verse forms by which authors displayed their virtuosity: the ‘twelve-month litany’ (*baramasi*), a traditional verse form expressing a woman’s grief in each month and season of the year, and an alphabetic song of praise (*cautisa*) addressed to the deity, in which the first word and most other words in the first couplet begin with a single character, the first letter of the alphabet; and succeeding couplets similarly use in order all the remaining characters of the alphabet.
Most ‘characteristics’, however, are thematic or topical, and while often the expected topics are intimately related to daily life in Bengal, just as often they are only distantly related to the didactic purposes of the text. Verses elaborately describing wedding rituals, the dress and ornaments of the bride, cooking and cuisine, battle slaughter and agony, and river, coastwise and ocean voyages to distant and vaguely known lands were as much expected by audiences as were verses describing creation of the cosmos, or how the author came to compose his text by divine intervention. Some of these characteristics must have come to be expected because they provided pleasure: for example, riddles, and the almost universal comic satires of pati-ninda, the contest among a group of wives to see whose husband could be described as worst of the lot. Perhaps all expected topics which cannot be explained by their didactic purpose can be explained by the pleasures they provided. Expected ‘characteristics’ whose purpose was a kind of pleasure, not a kind of instruction, provide a theoretical opening for revisiting the definition of the genre of mangal-kabya. I suggest that mangal-kabya always include the pleasures of satire, and that these pleasures can be related to didactic purposes in two very different
ways. I also note that in the course of the eighteenth century authors stretched the boundaries of the genre in order to include other kinds of narratives and to provide other kinds of pleasure to their audiences.

Pleasures of Satire

The role of satire in mangal-kabya has received appreciative attention from many Bengali scholars, but clearer conceptualization of the pleasures and uses of satire might suggest new topics for research. The following remarks illustrate one possible way of classifying satirical pleasures. I argue that different kinds of satirical pleasure in turn are related to different kinds of rhetorical uses of satire.

Consider the following dialogue taken from Ghanaram’s Dharmanangal. The characters are the hero Lau Sen and his younger brother Karpur, who have just arrived in a strange city, and Guriksa, a local woman. Lau Sen calls her a ‘dancer’ (nati), here a pejorative term which, not without reason, implies sexual availability. There is an important intertextual reference to stories about a prince coming in disguise to a strange city to find his true bride, a virgin princess. We expect the prince to meet a widowed or unmarried
Garland-maker (malini), who fondly will invite him to her own house, and who will become his go-between and introduce him to the princess. But Guriksa, who will be a go-between, is in fact a maidservant of the polyandrous queen of the matriarchal land of Golahat, and she has been sent to bring Lausen to her queen. The idea of a ‘matriarchal kingdom’ introduces a different intertextual reference, this time to the story of the yogi Matsyendranath, who failed to resist seduction and became trapped by desire in the all-female and necessarily matriarchal ‘Kingdom of the Plantain Forest’. Moreover, in the immediately previous episode, Lau Sen already had met with a woman who, in the expected pattern, had sought to take him to her home, but this woman was married; moreover, she killed her own child and tried to blame his death on Lau Sen when he refused her advances. Karpur then cut off her nose to punish her wickedness. Multiple intertextual contexts, and departures at the same time from expected patterns make the scene between Lau Sen and Guriksa by no means simple: we know almost before it begins that the author intends to confront our expectations and to tell a different kind of story. He describes Guriksa and their meeting as follows:
Sandalwood ornaments her forehead, a garland of oleander her throat, and all directions are brightened by the light from her limbs. With a brief, sidelong glance at Lau Sen she calls respectfully, ‘Come, sir, sit down here after the labors of your journey. The little drops of sweat on your sweet face are like pearls—lord, I see them and feel pity, come, sit, be refreshed. Sit, and here is a roll of pan scented with finest camphor, eat! Take a little relief from the heat’.

Thus she speaks, artfully sounding many notes, but Sen is the servant of Dharma, and do seductive arts work with him? Sen says, ‘One can bear anything by restraint of the body, and I go, lady, under control of my duty—what do I fear from the sun’s heat? And if I should want rest, why, there is the shade of a tree! It isn’t right to sit next to a young woman’.
Guriksa says, ‘Lord, if a couple consent, what can the Muslim ruler, the nobles or the qadi do?’

Karpur says, ‘Dada (elder brother), listen to her go on! This is why I advised against coming this way: so much already, and how much more to come? Be careful! Think, nothing but Dharma is on your mind?’

Guriksa says, ‘You are a city man, sophisticated, what more can I say when you are drowned in your own heart? I ask you, lord, come to my home. Suriksa, who is this land’s queen, will be your maidservant. You be her guest today. Tomorrow, at dawn, go, anywhere’.

Sen says, ‘Enough fancy talk, dancer! I have never seen any young woman’s face in all the world! Not in this life! All this talk is useless with me. Leave this path. Put these sinful things behind you’.

But when Sen speaks so harshly, Guriksa says, ‘Why should I ask anything of you? With the touch of this doctored pan you’ll turn into a
This brief passage invites performance even if it is simply read. There are opportunities for comic exaggeration in tones and gestures portraying the characters, and chiefly, the pleasures of this scene are those of satire. Who knows people like this? To this question we are invited to respond that we do know such people. Moreover, there may be one topical, satirical reference. The desire of Mughal political and religious authorities to police prostitution had received a special impetus when Emperor Aurangzeb, in 1659, began to appoint market censors (*muhtasib*). A knowledgeable audience may have enjoyed hearing about the futility of such efforts. Rhyming the two key words of the sentence, ‘consent’ of the couple, and ‘*qad*l’, the judge of Islamic religious law, makes the comment particularly witty in Bengali: *guriksa bale ray, dohe yadi raji, ki karite pare, mir mian kaji?*
The following scene, while it continues to invite the pleasures of satire, also brings these pleasures to a sudden closure of a very particular kind. Lau Sen does agree to see the queen, and he and the queen engage in two contests, with the stake that if Lau Sen loses, he will spend the night with her and so give up his chastity, his ascetic powers and his jati. The first contest is proposed by Lau Sen. If the queen Suriksa can cook a meal for him according to his impossible specifications, he will have to eat it and spend the night with her. With the help of the goddess she succeeds. Well before the sun is due to rise, she fetches water from a distant lake and cooks him a fine vegetarian meal in an unfired clay pot, using only the lake’s wet duckweed for fuel. Lau Sen prays for divine intervention, and Dharma (the Bengali deity) makes the sun rise before its time, and before the meal can be served.62

Lau Sen claims victory, but Suriksa, noting the untimeliness of the sunrise, insists on a second contest, this time one on her terms. She proposes to ask him and his brother Karpur riddles, with the same stakes. At first, they easily solve all the riddles she propounds. She therefore prays to the goddess, and then, perhaps by inspiration, thinks of
a brilliant final riddle, which she announces will be a test of Lau Sen’s ‘virility’ ($paurusa$, sic. for $paurusya$):63

Let’s see you tell me about the erotic passion in a woman’s body. When making love, where is the seat of her essential humor ($dhatu$), where does it always stay, and by what virtue ($gun$) is it held there?64

Lau Sen is confounded. A virgin warrior and wrestler, sworn to a vow of chastity, he admits that he knows nothing of the arts of love. All the male gods in heaven also are stumped. The goddess herself reveals the answer. She tells Siva, who tells Dharma, who tells Hanuman, who tells Lau Sen:

Listen Lord, the essential humor is seated in a woman’s eyes. A woman makes a man enchanted by aiming sidelong glances. At the time of lovemaking that humor is bound to her husband.65
Lau Sen relays this solution to Suriksa, having stipulated the further condition that this time, if he is victorious, he will cut off her nose and cut out her eyes. Suriksa acknowledges defeat, and Lau Sen’s younger brother Karpur immediately executes her punishment, which echoes the riddle’s solution, and so hints at sexual mutilation. Violence to the character of Suriksa is also an assertion of textual power over the interpretation of audiences: had you thought to sympathize with her in their contest of wit?

**Satire and Didactic Purposes**

Satires may have one of two very different forms of closure, and these two forms of closure necessarily involve very different relations between the pleasures of satire and the didactic purposes of a text. Compare the following scene, where a woman also engages a man in a contest of wits. The woman is Durbala, a maidservant, and the man her employer, Dhanapati, a wealthy merchant. Wanting to arrange a feast to be cooked by his young bride, Dhanapati has sent Durbala to do the shopping, and in this scene Durbala renders an entirely improbable account, recited from memory, of the large sums she has
given in charity in the market to protect her master’s honor, and the almost equally large amounts she has spent on the feast to come, and on her own lunch in the market.

Mukunda concludes the passages as follows:

So Durbala speaks in fear for her life. The merchant says, ‘It’s nothing’. Durbala prostrates herself. ‘If the speech is false, cut off Durbala’s nose!’—Kabikankan, the Bracelet of Poets, has composed this.66

Does Durbala make this offer to suffer facial mutilation to guarantee her honesty, or does the poet make it? Its place in the signature line, and the use of Durbala’s name rather than the personal pronoun ‘my’ suggest that the offer is the poet’s own; in which case it is doubly ironic, since of course the speech is true to her character, not false at all, and were it false, the poet ought to be punished, not his character. In any case, the offer is not to be taken seriously. Durbala is not caught out. She gives the merchant an offering of a goat, which she had bought at market for eight strings of the merchant’s cowries, and she
is rewarded with the gift of two gold necklaces. Indeed, we may come to suspect that even if Durbala had been caught, she might have been threatened but would not have been punished. We are invited to find both characters humorous, and indeed we can sympathize with both. All in the audience, and not just maidservants, are led to enjoy Durbala’s clever triumph, and simultaneously all of us can enjoy just as much the picture of a merchant who is so much in love that he forgets to worry about his accounts. Satire opens into comic irony. While satirizing his characters, Mukunda also gives them a kind of freedom to be themselves, both men and women, high and low jati, good and not so good. No character is so irremediably evil as to require her eyes to be put out and her nose cut off.

The distinction I am proposing may partly correspond to one made by Alf Hiltebeitel between large scale narrative structures of the ‘metaphoric’ and the ‘metonymic’. This distinction in turn is similar to Kenneth Burke’s analysis of the difference between rhetorical uses of ‘order’ which are ‘eulogistic’ and ‘dyslogistic’. In a rhetoric eulogizing order, metaphors are used to constitute a total, transparent, and harmonious picture of social and
cosmic order. Narratives thus ‘metaphoric’ on a large scale are ‘total’ because the ‘role models’ presented include all; they are transparent because role models are arranged dialectically in a coherent hierarchy. The highest level of the hierarchy adequately can represent an ideal for all others to imitate. Such narratives are harmonious because irresolvable conflicts between different levels of the hierarchy are replaced by different degrees of perfection or imperfection in attaining the one ultimate ideal. In a rhetoric which ‘dyslogizes’ order and eulogizes conflict, on the other hand, metonyms replace metaphors because no part or level of a system of conflicts can be presumed to stand for the whole. The parts are different and opaque one to another; they act upon one another through irresolvable conflicts among them, rather than reflecting perfectly or imperfectly a single harmonious ideal. Hiltebeitel in the following passage makes it clear that he sympathizes with the rhetoric of some ‘counter-narratives’ which eulogize conflict: ‘. . .the politics of discontinuity can find its most expressive figuration in a poesis of "creative metonymy" that "buries metaphors" and darkens the "transparency" and "complicity" of metaphoric continuities of resemblance’. Mukunda’s satire of Durbala by this analysis
would be ‘metaphoric’ in eulogizing order, while Ghanaram’s satire of Suriksa would be metonymic in eulogizing conflict. The comic resolution of the satire of Durbala and Dhanapati is similar to the harmonious and pacific resolution of conflict between Kalketu and the king who becomes his overlord, and of conflicts in general in Mukunda’s text. On the contrary, in Ghanaram’s text conflicts generally are resolved with victory for one side only; for example, the mutilation which concludes the satire of Suriksa, and the elaborately contrived death which ends Ichai’s rebellion. Despite these comments about Mukunda’s and Ghanaram’s texts, however, I do not wish to classify mangal-kabya in general by this dichotomy, since the same work can be both ‘metaphoric’ and ‘metonymic’ in different places. Moreover, the terms ‘metaphoric’ and ‘metonymic’ erase the very concern with pleasures of performance by which we entered this discussion. I argue that the two satires have a different quality of pleasure because of differences in authorial control over interpretation.
This brings me to my final question, How should historians think about historical changes in the genre of *mangal-kabya*? I suggest, first, that in the eighteenth century long episodes of some *mangal-kabya* did not have a primary purpose that was didactic. Instead, their primary purpose was to give the audience some kind of comic pleasure.

Comedies, however, require a rhetoric of their own, for an audience must sympathize with the heroes and heroines for whose eventual happiness they hope. In the best of the comedies which were inserted into *mangal-kabya*, heroes and heroines secure their own happiness with audacity. Young heroines especially transgress expected norms of modesty and deference for women. The sympathy of audiences therefore must be achieved by careful and continual authorial intervention.

Comic and often melodramatic stories were added to many eighteenth century *mangal-kabya* narratives. Most of these stories have antecedents in what loosely are called ‘fabulous’ stories or ‘romances’ taken from Persian story-telling traditions (but as we have seen Persian story-telling in turn had borrowed from earlier Indic traditions).
acknowledge my indebtedness to Tony K. Stewart, who has translated several of these
narratives and written a stimulating introduction to them.73

Stewart makes a distinction, very similar to the one I mean to explore, between the
‘fabulous’ stories and the ‘more sectarian’ stories found in those mangal-kabya devoted to
Satya Narayan or Satya Pir. The fabulous stories he has translated were inserted into and
framed by the more ordinary, didactic mangal-kabya narratives, but Stewart suggests that
they have a different orientation in ‘discursive space’ than do the sectarian stories which
provide their frame.74 None of the fabulous stories is ‘particularly didactic’. Rather, they
are ‘exploratory fictions’. ‘The incorporation of the fabulous into these tales signals that
the action occurs in fictional worlds that are automatically set apart from ordinary
experience.’75 Gender forms are challenged and holy men are parodied in stories of
women who:

. . . don armor to fight dacoits, slay raging rhinos . . ., harness flying horses
to rescue their lovers, transform ignorant men into billy goats to serve as
breeding stock for their passions, weave magic garlands that ensorcel the men while in other contexts proving their own fidelity, and generally instruct the kings and princes of the world in the ways of statecraft.\textsuperscript{76}

Religion is ‘sidelined’, compared to its treatment in the sectarian stories, and the divinity, Satya Narayan or Satya Pir, ‘seems to sit largely on the periphery of these fabulous tales’.\textsuperscript{77}

Stewart reiterates a distinction between didactic stories and ‘fiction’ properly speaking, which latter must be ‘basically doctrine-free’. Fiction, he suggests, ‘constitutes its reality’; while didactic stores are derived from orders of truth and morality outside and independent of them.\textsuperscript{78} Again, we have come to a theoretical position which erases the particular, performative pleasures of ‘fabulous’ stories. These pleasures are comic ones. For example, comic reversals of ordinary expectations can be glimpsed in some of the titles Stewart has given to his translations: ‘The Mother’s Son who Spat up Pearls’, ‘The Wazir’s Daughter who Married a Sacrificial Goat’, and ‘The Disconsolate Yogi who Turned
the Merchant’s Wife into a Dog’. In their comic plots, characters who ordinarily would not have been expected to be heroes become involved in extremely complex and difficult situations, and then save the day, with surprising brilliance, courage or audacity. Often they leave one tiny strand of the problem unresolved, but then that strand becomes a rope, and that rope drags in a cartload of new troubles. Through a series of improbable stratagems, some of which fail, and despite an uncertainty of outcome which remains until the very end of the story, the world of the characters with whom we sympathize is returned at the end to proper order. Of course, this is the plot structure of comic melodrama, and stories which provide the pleasures of melodrama have ancient antecedents in Indic and Persian story-telling traditions. But melodrama, at least in the stories Stewart has collected, often has a didactic dimension; as he suggests they may teach us that ‘radical situations require radical action’.79

We can add that comic fictions were taken into or created for the narratives of a number of other kinds of mangal-kabya. Of course, the most famous example is Bharat’candra’s ‘Vidya-Sundar’, a romantic comedy framed by the didactic stories of his
Annadamangal. In this romance Bharat’candra reshaped the plot, the characters, and the spectacle of traditional Kalikamangal texts and performances, which had a didactic Vidya-Sundar narrative, to produce a brilliant comic fiction. In final the essay, ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: Candimangal after British Dominance’, readers of this book will find an analysis of another ‘fabulous story’ which was brought into the plot structure of Candimangal by Lala Jay’narayan Sen. But much more work on particular mangal-kabya and their contexts is needed before we can suggest why eighteenth century authors began to incorporate comic melodramas into their texts.

Conclusion

I have tried to examine three different kinds of questions about how historians should read mangal-kabya, the genre of texts to which Mukunda’s Candimangal belongs. For the essays collected in this volume, I hope that this attempt will help readers see more clearly the methods I have used, and the methods I have slighted.

The first question is: How can historians read literature in this genre appropriately to their character as literature. I begin by supposing that historians should fully recognize
the characteristics of *mangal-kabya* as imaginative works of literature, not as reports or
documents. This supposition implies questions about the forms and purposes of a genre
of literature. Most Bengali scholars have described the genre of *mangal-kabya* by means
of didactic purposes: they explain and justify the worship of a particular deity. But we
also have noticed a secondary plot function, by means of which protagonists of that deity
become involved in this-worldly problems, and then are restored to situations of proper
order. What may be more interesting to historians are the ways the protagonists’ problems
are described: they provide a window on patriarchal, political, economic and social
conflicts, and sometimes plots of *mangal-kabya* allow their divinities to provide solutions
which involve changes in this-worldly institutions.

Second, *mangal-kabya* always were intended to be performed for an audience, not
read in solitude. We should be attentive to their performative potentials and ritual contexts.

By their nature as a genre *mangal-kabya* texts were performed in ritual contexts and were
intended to be beneficial for performers and audiences, and so were thought to act upon
and to affect the circumstances in which they were composed and performed. A third set
of questions therefore are: How should a historian consider these circumstances of composition and performance? Changes in texts over the period of their production may help us to look for changes in their ritual contexts and purposes. I argue, however, that most attempts to treat both individual texts and the history of the genre as a whole have considered their ‘religious’ purposes too narrowly. The ameliorative purposes of mangal-kabya, the problems to be solved and the disorders to be treated, included economic, social, and political problems and disorders, as well as individual, somatic and psychosomatic ones. Both studies of the texts in isolation from their ritual contexts, and narrowly religious studies may not discover the full range of problems to be solved, why particular remedies were deemed important, and how and why both problems and remedies changed in the course of time.

A fourth set of questions are: How can a historian think about changes in the genre? What kinds of changes can be observed? How can they be explained? Despite the important and conservative role of performative traditions in shaping written texts of mangal-kabya, sometimes the plots of a single sub-genre changed over time. For
example, in the eighteenth century some episodes of *Candimangal* came to be treated in a much more perfunctory way, and on the contrary other episodes received a much more elaborate development. A second kind of change shifted the balance between didactic and ritually beneficial purposes on the one hand, and performative pleasures on the other. In the eighteenth century, erotic and comic pleasures began to shape the plots of *mangal-kabya* narratives composed in courtly settings. At the same time comic narratives also were introduced into *mangal-kabya* composed outside of courtly settings for popular entertainment and worship. I certainly do not suppose any simple causal relation between texts and their settings. Individual artists produced distinctive texts in a process that must be mysterious. Still, these three broad kinds of change in the genre are more than individual variations. Understanding them again requires that we develop a better historical understanding of the changing circumstances in which *mangal-kabya* were composed and performed.

A good historian should be a good reader of the texts of *mangal-kabya*, and someone who can imagine performative possibilities of texts which mostly are no longer
performed. Good research strategies usually require reading and comparing several similar
texts, to understand contextual comments embedded in intertextual material. Finally,
research strategies may require investigating changing historical contexts of the texts to
understand patterns of change that go beyond individual variation. Certainly the essays
collected in this volume are imperfect judged by these standards. Of course, good
scholars also will find other purposes for reading mangal-kabya, and will define other
standards for their research. My hope must be that these essays will help mangal-kabya
find a new audience, and so help to develop further research.


4 ‘It is only as bundles that these relations [i.e., the mythemes] can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning’. Lévi-Strauss, ‘The Structural Study of Myth’, *Structural Anthropology* 1: 211.

For this and other criticisms of the structural method of reading myths, see Edmund Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), pp. 53-86.

Cf. his odd idea that even the most clumsy translation would still preserve completely the meaning of a ‘myth’, Lévi-Strauss, ‘The Structural Study of Myth’, *Structural Anthropology* 1: 210. No one who has tried to translate Mukunda’s text could subscribe to this view.

Cf. Lévi-Strauss, ‘The Structural Study of Myth’, *Structural Anthropology* 1: 207-08: ‘If a given mythology confers prominence on a certain figure, let us say an evil grandmother, it will be claimed that in such a society grandmothers are actually evil and
that mythology reflects the social structure and the social relations; but should the actual
data be conflicting, it would be as readily claimed that the purpose of the mythology is to
provide an outlet for repressed feelings).

9Mandakranta Bose, ‘Textual Confrontations with Female Transgression in the
Behula Legend’, in The Banyan Tree (Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference
on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages, Venice, 1997), 2 vols., edited by

10Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal’, in Literary
Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley:

11In stressing the relation between purpose and form, and in distinguishing
provisionally between didactic purposes and purposes of providing pleasure, I follow in
general the ‘Chicago school’ of criticism. See Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern,


13 On the ‘virtue’ (*punya*) or ‘bliss, welfare, prosperity’ to be gained by listening to the texts, see BMKI, p. 15; Zbavitel, *Bengali Literature*, p. 156.

14 For the influence of this work see Asit Bandyopadhyay, *Bamla Sahityer Itibṛṛta,*
dvitiya khanda, *Caitanyakug*, pp. 59-60.

15Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal’, *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring, 2004), pp. 654-82; phrases quoted are on p. 677. I am grateful to Gautam Bhadra for calling my attention to this article and to his essay in the following citation, and for providing me with copies.


17I have had access to Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, 2nd edn. (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1954).

18Dinesacandra Sen, *Brhat Banga, 2 khanda* (Kal’kata: D’ej Pabalism, 1993; 1st pub. 1925) 2: 883-6. Havell had arrived in Calcutta in 1896 to become Principal of the Calcutta Government College of Art. He also avoided distinguishing between the fine arts and folk handicrafts, and called instead for a revival of traditional Indian handicrafts, where


26 Aditya Behl, ‘The Magic Doe: Desire and Narrative in a Hindavi Sufi Romance,


28 For a discussion of contrary examples see ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: Candimangal after British Dominance’, in this volume.

29 Plot functions of mangal-kabya as a class are described in BMKI, pp. 27-8.


31 See the analysis in ‘Proppian structural terms’ by of the ‘Dhanapati paradigm’ very commonly found in mangal-kabya: Clint Seely, with Fredrika V. Miller, ‘Secular and Sacred Legitimation in Bharatcandra Ray’s Annada-mangal (1752 C.E.)’, Archiv orientální, (Praha, Czech Republic) 68 (2000): 327-58. For Dharmamangal, compare France
Bhattacharya, ‘Ruparam’s *Dharma mangal: An Epic of the Low Castes?*, *Archiv orientální* 68: 365-66, also an analysis which uses the ‘terminology of Propp and also Griemas’.

32 Cf. Ralph W. Nicholas, ‘The Goddess Sitala and Epidemic Smallpox in Bengal’, in *Fruits of Worship: Practical Religion in Bengal* (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2003), pp. 166-91. Nicholas notes that an etiology explaining smallpox as the ‘gift’ of the goddess did not prevent variolation, and the simultaneous explanation by infection of the blood with a ‘seed’ of the disease. Indeed in the stories of *Sitalamangal* Sitala spreads diseases by giving away her many kinds of peas and lentils. Nicholas suggests that ‘while the treatment of a person suffering from the disease was the work of a physician, an epidemic was a divine affliction of the whole kingdom against which doctors were helpless’ (p. 191).

Nevertheless, he also presents textual evidence for worship to free those ‘afflicted by fever’ from the ‘dreadful fear of pustules’ (p. 179, quoting the *Sitalastakastotra*).

33 BMKI, pp. 15-16, 40-41.
For an invaluable study of the most contentious dates, see Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay, *Madhyayuger Baula Sahityer Tathya o Kalakram* (Kalikata: Bharati Buk St al, 1993).


Mukunda, the late sixteenth century author of *Candimangal*, refers to Manik Datta, from whom he received an introduction to the ‘procedure of the song’ (git-path-paricay). Similarly, several authors of *Dharmamangal* have mentioned that Mayur Bhatta was the first poet of this kind of text, but the assignment of texts to both figures remains problematic. See BMKI, pp. 473-81, 726-32.

Ralph W. Nicholas, with Aditi Nath Sarkar, ‘The Fever Demon and the Census Commissioner: Sitala Mythology in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Bengal’; see also Ralph W. Nicholas, ‘The Goddess Sitala and Epidemic Smallpox in Bengal’, and ‘Sitala


39Cf. Ramya Sreenivasan’s analysis of the different audiences addressed by different manuscript traditions of the *Padmavat*; see ‘Sufi tale and Rajput heroism in Medieval Avadh’, in *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in Northern India ca. 1500-1900*, forthcoming.

Calcutta University volumes cited in footnotes 2 and 3 give the shorter version. Sen notes that longer versions are not necessarily the more recent ones. Indeed, variant readings used in the Calcutta University edition are almost always simpler, and presumably therefore more recent, than those in the editions above by Sukumar Sen and Pancanan Mandal.


44 See ‘Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier: Kalketu’s story in Mukunda’s *Candimangal*, in this volume.

45 The suggestion is particularly strong in Ghanaram’s version. For one example:

‘You are the son of a god, foremost of heroes, you are the descendant of a lineage of
kings. You are a partial *avatar*, come to the circle of the earth. Some add, this is the
Supreme Spirit who has taken the form of a human by *maya*. Ghanaram Cakrabarti-

biracita, *SriDharmamangal*, Piyus Kanti Mahapatra sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata

46 Ramadas Adak biracita, *Anadi-mangal ba Sridharmmapuran*, Basantakumar
Cattopadhyay sampadita (Kalikata: Bangiya-Sahitya-Parisad Mandir, 1345 B.S. [1938]),
pp. 155-6; CM, *pad* 127, pp. 75.

47 BMKI, pp. 27-55, and for a concise list of ‘characteristic thematic material’ see
also Clint Seely, with a contribution by Frederika Miller, ‘Secular and Sacred Legitimation’,

48 BMKI, p. 28.


50 BMKI, p. 50.
This motif is the basis for the opening episode of the narratives about Vidya and Sundar in Bharat’candra’s Annadamangal, and in other Kalikamangal which tell the story of Vidya and Sundar. For a translation of this episode in the former text, see The Thief of Love: Bengali Tales from Court and Village, ed. and trans. Edward C. Dimock, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 38-42. It also is an important motif in the romance of Madhab and Sulocana. See ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: Candimangal after British Dominance’, in this volume.


Dhanapati in the next episode of the story, threatens to punish his senior wife for a much more serious offense, but does not in fact punish her. See CM, pad 291, p. 165.


Hiltebeitel, *Draupadi among Rajputs*, p.46. The terms quoted in this passage are taken from Homi Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
For an example, see ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: Candimangal after British Dominance’, in this volume.


Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 7.

Ibid., p. 20.


Ibid., p. 16.

For examples in the history of *Candimangal* texts, see ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: *Candimangal* after British Dominance’, in this volume.

Dimock, *The Thief of Love*, pp. 18-28. The erotic element has evoked many negative judgments; for a summary and criticism of them see BMKI, pp. 811-12.

Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier:

Kalketu’s Story in Mukunda’s *Candimangal*•

**Introduction**

This essay examines a sixteenth century Bengali text in which novel ideas about a more pacific style of kingship are related to expansion of peasant agriculture north and west of the Bengal delta, and to a degree of commercialization of agrarian relations on that internal agrarian frontier. It contributes to studies of commercialization, and to debates about changes in state formation and in ideologies of kingship in early modern Bengal.

*An early version of this paper was presented to SACPAN (South Asia Colloquium of the Pacific Northwest), University of Washington, March 2, 1996; I wish to thank Prof. Frank Conlon for this opportunity. I also wish to thank the American Institute of Indian Studies for a fellowship in 1982-83 which allowed me leisure to begin the translation upon which this essay is based.*
Since the publication of C.A. Bayly’s study showing how a buoyant commercial economy in eighteenth century north India facilitated British imperial expansion, a number of historians have re-examined processes of commercialization of the agrarian economy, changing relations between rulers and merchants, and the political culture of non-European merchants in eighteenth-century Bengal. The choice to analyze the eighteenth century, however, continues to be based primarily on the availability of European records, and especially records of the English East India Company, and implicitly to assume that European trading companies were the primary agents for change. This essay confirms the need to study precolonial commercialization in Bengal over a period lasting at least three centuries, rather than in the eighteenth century alone, and to study endogenous processes of commercialization throughout that period. Second, this essay suggests that some processes of commercialization may have been experienced more intensively on the agrarian frontier than in the long-settled regions of the western delta, where European trade often was concentrated.
This essay suggests that care should be taken in describing markets and market transactions. In Sudipta Sen’s important work, the common assumption that buying and selling was or should have been an autonomous activity occurring in a politically protected and economically neutral space is replaced by an image of fluctuating, overlapping and contingent ‘passages of authority’ in eighteenth century Bengal, through which rulers taxed and redirected both marketed commodities and the transient people of marketplaces. This essay also provides evidence that the authority exerted by rulers over marketplaces, commodities, and vendors changed the meaning of buying and selling, by sometimes making them subject to force and fraud, as well as to normative uses of authority. But it also notes ways that forcible expropriation in markets was resisted, and it suggests change in the contrary direction, for commercialization of agrarian relations also seems to have changed state formation and ideologies of kingship, especially on the agrarian frontier.

Therefore this essay also contributes to debates about state formation and ideologies of kingship in early modern India. It argues that labor markets with a degree at least of commercialization and competition characterized state formation on the agrarian
frontier. It further argues that royal virtues could be seen as multiple and multivalent, and that it was precisely the multivalence of royal virtues which made possible their re-evaluation and repositioning in a new hierarchy where more pacific royal virtues became more important than the codes of honor of warrior-rulers. Finally, it argues that more pacific virtues came to be seen as more important because of a role for markets, commercialization, competition and choice in state formation.

The Text and its Tropes

This essay is based upon Mukunda Cakrabarti’s *Candimangal*, a text written in the second half of the sixteenth century, before the Mughal conquest of Bengal was completed, but apparently towards the beginning of a period of long-term economic buoyancy. To be sure, middle Bengali devotional literature has long been read by Bengali social historians for ‘facts’ about Bengali society. Instead of attempting first to isolate social ‘facts’ in literary garb, I read Mukunda’s *Candimangal* as a dramatic representation of a complex argument. Therefore, initially, I approach this text with two reading strategies. The first is to examine its explicit rhetoric. Mukunda’s text analyzed
economic and political problems of his own society, and presented solutions which would have required both human and divine agency, and institutional as well as individual change. In particular, he argued for a more pacific alternative in place of kingship based primarily upon the virtues of *ksatriya* status, of an individual’s martial capacity, and of his adherence to a code of masculine honor. We can examine the rhetoric by which he supports this position. The second reading strategy is to analyze assumptions implicit in this rhetoric. In particular, Mukunda’s depiction of more pacific royal virtues both describes and makes assumptions about buying and selling, about markets, and about agrarian relations between local kings and their subjects, relations which displayed at least a degree of commercialization. Although it is not possible to distinguish them with finality, I will try to note what seem to be assumptions and descriptions in Mukunda’s narrative.

The author was a Brahman who had left his home village near the southeastern boundary of Burdwan (Bardhaman) District, West Bengal, in the heartland of Brahman settlements along the Bhagirathi, Hugli, and Sarasvati rivers. According to a widely accepted text found in some manuscripts, he had departed because the Muslim governor
in his locality began to exact taxes more rigorously from local landholders.¹³  He moved south, and found a patron in the prince of ‘Brahman’bhum’, a little Hindu kingdom probably located in undivided Midnapur (Medinipur) District, West Bengal, and in what then was in a frontier zone between Bengal and Orissa.¹⁴  His narrative of agrarian expansion which this essay discusses apparently drew its inspiration from the contemporary clearing of forests to the northwest of this kingdom of Brahman’bhum, in the rolling peneplain which rises out of the Bengal delta and which lies between it and the Chota Nagpur plateau.¹⁵

Although this narrative is placed in the distant past, at the beginning of the Kali age, its hero belongs to a base-born (antaja) group from this peneplain, and the subjects of this hero’s kingdom belong to the familiar Hindu and Muslim castes and elite Muslim lineages of deltaic Bengal. Therefore we may locate his text in relation to two frontiers, for it was composed in a little kingdom which lay between the Muslim Sultanate of Bengal and the usually Hindu kingdom of Orissa, and it is situated between in the Rarh, between the western Bengal delta, long-settled and a center of Brahmanic culture, and the wild forests and ‘tribal’ peoples of the Chota Nagpur plateau.
Richard Eaton has shown that in the seventeenth century, in the active delta east of the Rarh, populations began a long-term process of conversion to Islam as the land simultaneously was put to the plough and brought under Mughal control. But neither Islamization nor a ‘Hindu’ reaction to it was a problem for Mukunda’s text, and it is not clear whether the more pacific style of kingship which his text advocates should be read as implicitly supporting peaceful accommodation to Muslim rulers of Bengal.

Mukunda’s explicit problem was how to create a more peaceful political order in the context of a local, untouchable raja, a ‘little king’ on the agrarian frontier; his solution, ultimately, was to integrate this raja into a more encompassing (but still local) polity subject to a high-jati Hindu king. Nevertheless, his text betrays no interest in or familiarity with the special beliefs and practices of indigenous, untouchable groups in the peneplain as they came under the influence of peasants, traders, and Brahmans from deltaic Bengal. For example, the wedding of this man, accomplished well before he became a raja, is described with rites typical for the higher jati of deltaic Bengal. Mukunda was concerned, instead, with the abstract terms of his problem. In the course of exploring
them, Mukunda represented ‘hunting’ as the fundamental cause of conflict and war. At its simplest, the trope of hunting depicts two classes in human society: predatory warriors, and the people who are their prey. Hunting is the result of a martial capacity of warrior elites which others do not have. Warriors, however, can be made kings, and can thus enter into pacific relations with their subjects.

As it represented more pacific kings and polities, Mukunda’s text was concerned with the requirements for being a king and with the nature of royal virtues. It described how royal virtues appear in three ranked, logically distinct, and collectively comprehensive transactions in human societies. The least ordered and most disruptive of these transactions he called ‘hunting’; and the royal virtues associated with hunting were the ones of yasa, a warrior’s strength, martial skill, valor and renown.  For Mukunda the crux of the problem with kingship was the unavoidable, double-edged sword of military power, which always could be used by military elites against their own subjects. A king, however, could not be a king without the martial virtues of a hunter.
The second kind of transaction found in human society, more well-ordered than hunting, was ‘buying and selling’. This essay argues that the royal virtues Mukunda associated with ‘buying and selling’, considered expansively, were related to a king’s maintaining possession of sri (a word with a very wide range of meanings, including auspiciousness, wealth, beauty, fertility and purity), possession of which always was temporally unstable. While some virtues related to sri enable interpreting omens and judging the compatibility of proposed actions with their temporal settings, others supported rational, calculative self-discipline in expending wealth.  

The third and most well-ordered transaction is a particular kind of gift exchange: ‘giving benefaction’ by a superior, after receiving a less valuable gift from an inferior, and after hearing and judging his or her supplication. I argue that generosity on the part of the superior is one of the most important royal virtues in Mukunda’s text. But I also argue that for him gift exchange has a potential for entropy, because relations based upon it remain vulnerable to the ‘calculative dimension’ usually found in buying and selling. Ultimately
for Mukunda, pacific kingdoms are possible only by means of the ordinary, unheroic, and sympathetic virtue of ‘mercy’.

By elevating buying and selling and pacific royal virtues, Mukunda opposed many of the ideals of contemporary martial sub-cultures in Bengal. In an important passage Georg Simmel suggests why pejorative views of buying and selling often are found in aristocratic, martial cultures, which instead value violent expropriation:

This [preference for robbery over honest payment] also is understandable; for in exchanging and paying one is subordinated to an objective norm, and the strong and autonomous personality has to efface himself, which is disagreeable. This also accounts for the disdain of trade by self-willed aristocratic individuals. On the other hand, exchange favors peaceful relations between men because they then accept a supra-personal and normative regulation.
In Mukunda’s text, force and fraud were not assumed to be absent from Bengali markets. I suggest, therefore, that any ‘objective norm’ governing market exchanges may have been experienced as intermittent or weak. Nevertheless, according to Mukunda’s poem, conditions of labor scarcity on the agrarian frontier made it necessary, or at least at times advantageous, for rulers to protect ‘tax-free’ markets and to compete for subjects in market-like transactions. I argue that there is an important correspondence between Mukunda’s elevation of the pacific virtues of ‘buying and selling’ and of gift exchanges, and his criticisms of ‘hunting’, and of martial cultures and their excessive concern with masculine honor.

**Hunters, Kings and War**

The metaphor of ‘hunting’ within human society is introduced and secured by a reciprocal metaphor, the peaceable ‘kingdom of the animals’ which Candi established immediately after she had built her first temple and introduced her worship in the city and kingdom of Kalinga on the banks of the Kamsa river at the end of the Third Age. Hundreds of animals of Biju [desolate] Forest begged for her intervention because they
were afraid of the tiger and other predatory animals. Candi granted them the boon of freedom from fear, instituted her worship among them, and along with her worship, established their ‘kingdom’, and promised them freedom from predation.\textsuperscript{25}

Candi made the lion king of this kingdom. Similarly, she appointed all the predatory and powerful animals officers of the realm: the hyena (\textit{taraksu}) was told to hold the royal umbrella; the tiger, bear, wolf, wild boar and rhinoceros were to be the king’s five chief ministers (\textit{mahapatra}); and both the elephant and pairs of horses his royal mounts. There were roles for other animals as well: the \textit{sarabha} (a mythical creature with eight feet and a single horn) was appointed royal \textit{purohit}; the mongoose became the royal doctor whose medicines would preserve the animals from snakebite. Troops of monkeys would fan the king with chowries; the jackal (\textit{bheur}: ‘one who follows’ and eats the carrion of the tiger) would be the royal panegyrist and genealogist. The kingdom’s wild buffalos were made chiefs of thousands in the royal army and the palace doorkeepers; and jackals again (\textit{srgal}, also a pejorative term for someone clever like a fox) the city’s guards and their prefect of the police (\textit{kotal}, P. \textit{kotwal}).\textsuperscript{26}
Candi could establish the kingdom of the animals only because she also abolished hunting by the predatory animals; in fact, these two statements are almost synonymous, for the predatory animals became members of the kingdom’s ruling elite. The kingdom of the animals can be read as associating kings with divine power when it makes the goddess’s lion-mount the king. But it also can be read as a satire of the rapacity of thoroughly human royal officers when it calls the lion’s royal ministers wolves, tigers, and bears, and both his panegyrist and his commander of the guard jackals. Thereby it provides an all too convenient excuse for kings when their administrations fail to rule justly.

Candi then arranged for a prince in Indra’s court to be cursed to suffer human existence. By his own self-description Kalketu, the human male thus born, was a Cohar by *jati* whom no one would touch. At the beginning of the Fourth Age he hunted the animals of Biju Forest, and his wife Phullara sold their flesh, horns and fur in periodic markets, where she also purchased rice and other foods which the family consumed. To protect their subjects the lion king and his ministers in turn went to war against Kalketu.
When Kalketu defeated them, they appealed to the goddess, and she determined to put an end to Kalketu’s hunting by making him a king.

Again, therefore, the problem posed by the narrative is ‘hunting’, and again the solution is establishment of a kingdom to be ruled by a former predator. Candi gave Kalketu great wealth and commanded him to use it to establish a kingdom. He bought regalia, arms, and provisions, cleared the forest where previously he had hunted, secured divine assistance to build a temple and city, and attracted subjects to Gujarat, his new kingdom, by offering them favorable terms. But martial prowess remained necessary for Kalketu’s kingship. Despite Candi’s command to abandon (teja, imperative) his bow and arrows, in order to fell the forest of Gujarat, Kalketu had to hunt and slay its man-eating tiger. Later, when he had to defend his kingdom against the army of Kalinga, Kalketu displayed an indomitable will and a heroic martial prowess, both of which virtues the poem celebrates while it also makes them subordinate to the goddess’s own power and purposes. At the end of the narrative we are told that the inferior ‘lords of the soil’
(bhua raja) worshipped him; that no raja was able to make war with him; and that after
they had been defeated, other rajas ‘gave him taxes’ (kar).32

The dilemma of human polities is that rulers and their agents are usually powerful
men, ‘hunters’ by nature; paradoxically their duty is to protect subjects from the ‘hunting’
that in other circumstances they themselves do. Weaker humans, like the weaker animals
who are preyed upon, cannot aspire to rule because they cannot perform the warrior’s duty
of protection. Vulnerability to ‘hunting’ therefore is built into kingdoms, even though
kingdoms are constituted in order to negate ‘hunting’. Initially, this dilemma seems to have
been avoided through Candi’s divine gift of wealth to Kalketu, which both defined a
transaction opposite to the violent expropriations of hunting, and was itself so generous
that Kalketu could have had no need to hunt thereafter. But of course Candi’s gift of
wealth to Kalketu did not suffice to end ‘hunting’. Rather, his use of this wealth had to be
guided by royal virtues which would support a new, royal dharma, different from that of a
hunter. We now may turn to this complex of themes, as we examine Candi’s gift of
wealth.
Sri, Sovereignty, and Wealth

In this section I argue that in Mukunda’s text sri is associated with the second of his three transactions, ‘buying and selling’, and that the virtues which concern a ruler’s relation to markets have been elevated above those of ‘hunting’. A theme of ambiguous omens, auspicious and inauspicious, and of Kalketu’s inability to read them correctly, is broached when the goddess first appeared to Kalketu in the form of an iguana (godhika), whose common name, cow-snake (go-sap) indicates a conjunction of opposites. But this theme immediately is replaced by an ambiguous promise of wealth, another dimension of sri, in the following episode. After a fruitless search for animals more common in a Bengali hunter’s diet, finally a beautiful deer appeared, golden like the iguana. Not ignorant of the Ramayana, Kalketu understood that this magic doe (mayamrgi) was like Marica, that evil ‘treasury of magic’, who once had taken the form of a bejewelled deer to deceive Rama; and therefore Kalketu feared that its purpose was to ‘deceive’ him also.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Rama had argued that the bejewelled deer was ‘all the wealth a man could ask for...riches enough to swell his coffers... ’. And he had enclosed
this thought with the following two general truths: ‘In the deep forests [kings do] gather riches with determination, precious metals of all sorts, veined with gems and gold’, and second, the science of *artha* teaches that ‘a man in want of something should go and get it without hesitation’. Kalketu also decided that the magic doe, with its hooves of silver, antlers of gold and bejewelled body, would put an end to his ‘net of sorrow’ if he were to get its gold and jewels, or to sell it for provisions for his household. Elsewhere the poem quotes (but does not quite approve of) the following proverb: ‘Fish in a dry pond, a wandering woman, gold and silver in the deep forest—seeing these even a sage’s heart is enticed, for no one leaves aside what can be got without effort’. Nevertheless, as Kalketu feared, the deer herself appeared and disappeared at will, and so could not be hunted. More interestingly, recognizing the divinity of her magic, Kalketu could not even aim his arrow when he saw her face. Kalketu saw that the doe was divine and that the apparent potential to seize a fortune in the forest was deceptive. In this way his prowess as a hunter is marginalized by the story, just before he returned to the border of the forest, tied up the iguana, and took her home.
We now return from the forest to Kalketu’s hut, where, as the iguana, Candi broke free from her bonds and changed her appearance again, to become a beautiful, sixteen-year-old Brahman woman wandering alone. This appearance introduces still a third opposition, that of a beautiful but apparently unchaste woman, and this opposition also is linked to wealth and to the temptations of greed, because this beautiful sixteen-year-old promised Kalketu’s wife Phullara that she would deliver the couple from poverty and suffering by giving them an unimaginable fortune, if she could live with them. Phullara was not tempted by the offer of her wealth, and went to complain to Kalketu. To his wife Kalketu denied that he had brought the woman home; to the woman he argued that she should return to her husband before she was dishonored by the people of her own family, or punished by the king of Kalinga for defiling her jati by staying with a family of untouchables.38

One may see an analogy between the magic doe bearing great wealth in the forest and a ‘wandering woman’ to be had ‘without effort’. Perhaps in her erotic beauty and teasing puns we also may see a divinity playing with the figure of the king’s devadasi,
never widowed and therefore always auspicious, the ‘moving Laksmi’ whose rituals of
erotic dance assure a kingdom rains, fertility and prosperity. 
Nevertheless, the story
comically emphasizes Kalketu’s conjugal fidelity, rather than any royal capacity to enjoy
many wives. But perhaps simplicity and fidelity are virtues not irrelevant to kingship; for,
if kingdoms are to be conceived as autarkies, kings have a primary obligation to the well-
being of their ‘own’ people, as a husband does to his wife.

This story does not repeat the misogynist language frequently found in Indian
martial cultures, for example in stories which tell how beautiful women seduced Gorakh
Nath renunciates or celibate wrestlers and warriors, and so made them lose their semen
and therewith mental and bodily powers. Nor did Kalketu either reject the woman’s
proposal because she seemed already to be impure, or see through the disguise of the
goddess, and reject her advances because he knew she was testing him. 
Despite the
seductive beauty of the goddess, neither the dangers of beauty nor the value of sexual
purity receives further emphasis as an aspect of sri. Instead, Mukunda has shaped this
episode to suggest alternative royal virtues to those of a warrior’s valor (yasa), by relating
improper sexual desire to desire for wealth and luxury, rather than to loss of semen and resulting injuries to male health and bodily strength. Apparently, to deserve the great wealth the goddess was about to give them, Kalketu and Phullara should not desire wealth and luxury at the expense of their own marital bond. The ambiguous potential of wealth for good or for ill is the one dimension of sri which is consistently emphasized in this episode.

Gifts of Wealth and Dharma

To end Kalketu’s hunting, Candi then gave the couple great wealth, in the form of a jewelled ring as well as pots of siver rupees, and with this wealth she also gave them a new dharma. As part of his new dharma, Candi commanded that Kalketu should ‘break’ the ring (that is to say, take it to a money changer and exchange it for money), cut down the forest of Gujarat, give hundreds of people homes together with a capital of cowries, husked rice and paddy seed, and nurture all his subjects as he would his sons.43

Immediately, Kalketu responded with a cogent objection to Candi’s command:
My birth is in an extremely debased lineage; by jati I am a Cohar. No one can touch me. People call me a ‘savage’. What Brahman will ever be my priest? Does getting any kind of wealth ever make the base-born high?

But Candi replied, ‘Your priest will get sight of me. The highest Brahman will accept gifts from you’.

At least on this frontier of Bengali agrarian settlement, Candi intended that her temple worship should dissolve the expected links between jati and kingship. She reconstituted a political order in which kingship would be based on wealth and devotion to her, rather than on any kind of qualification by birth, conquest or heroic self-sacrifice.

Of course, in Mukunda’s time leaders from low-born, ‘tribal’ peoples had become kings on the agrarian frontier below the Chota Nagpur plateau. We may take as an example the Malla kings of Vishnupur, who begin to be visible to historians during the reign of Akbar, but who claimed a much more ancient royal lineage. Stories which legitimate the Malla lineage, despite its apparent relation to the ‘base-born’ (antaja) jati of Bagdis, narrate that Adi Malla, founder of the lineage, was born to a Rajput king and
queen from north India; that he was abandoned at birth, and raised as a foundling by a poor Bagdi family; that a Brahman nevertheless recognized signs of royalty in the young boy, and took him to his house to educate; and finally, that after the death of a neighboring king that king’s royal elephant seized the boy in his trunk and set him upon the throne. Kalketu’s story in Candimangal in contrast is inevitably comic, because he is without a royal lineage, signs or qualifications. Indeed, exactly while relating how he came to be a king, Mukunda satirizes Kalketu’s simplicity and ignorance as a base-born hunter.

It also is a comic story because Candi initiates Kalketu’s transformation by the gift of a ring worth an immense sum of money, and she directs him to ‘break’ the ring for money. Are we not meant to understand a reduction of the ring (a symbol of wholeness, of sri, and thus of Candi’s selection of Kalketu to be king, and of her divine gift of sovereignty) to the function of money as a store of value for the instrumental purpose of buying things? If so, we do not have a story about a divine fetish which must be carefully guarded as ‘sacred’ to attest to the allegedly ‘eternal’ sacredness of a temporal political order.

Candi’s divine gift nevertheless would both authorize and make possible lesser royal gifts
to constitute and display Kalketu’s kingship through his personal relations with his subjects.

But Kalketu’s gifts also were not precious objects to be safeguarded as fetishes, but utilitarian tools, animals, paddy seeds, and cowries, a local money. We have a story which thoroughly and comically integrates a money economy into the constitution of kingship.

Kalketu’s first item of purchase was a covered palanquin, at once throne and conveyance, ornamented with golden crests set with diamonds, with jewels and strands of pearls, with a seat of sandalwood, and with a cover of splendid silk. Elephants, Arabian horses, and mountain ponies were other insignia of kingship bought in the marketplace; they also were necessities for a royal army. His personal weapons simultaneously served as regalia: a suit of armor, a helmet ornamented with jewels, and a curved, broad-blade sword (taripatra taroyal) with a golden handle. Otherwise, Kalketu purchased only the minimum of ornaments for himself and his wife, together with a golden chest for their safekeeping. It is worth noting that Kalketu did not purchase saffron or sandalwood to anoint his body, nor a chariot and sandalwood throne, nor a white umbrella, the royal
‘honors’ that properly would come only later as royal gifts and by ritual investiture (abhisek) by an overlord. He concentrated instead on weapons of war. Among weapons we can note matchlocks (tabak; A. tupak), battleaxes, several kinds of swords, also spears, pikes, slings, elephant goads, maces, bows, arrows, daggers and shields.

Kalketu finally completed his purchases in the market by buying large stocks of food, apparently for both his army and his subjects. Reduced to purchasing power, sri allowed Kalketu to purchase men and weapons for a military force, so that his individual virtues as a warrior and a hero could be extended to leadership of an army. A story that suggests that one could become a king by means of wealth also implies a degree of commercialization of the instruments of kingship: in Mukunda’s account, men willing to engage for a price in military service, accountants to manage expenditures, the basic regalia of a conveyance, of personal armor and weapons, and of royal ornaments; the stock of common weapons needed by an army, and a store of food all could be purchased in a market.
Moreover, as we watch Kalketu exchange the ring for money and then purchase some of the insignia and instruments of kingship, we are shown vices and virtues which attend market transactions: among vices, the greed and dishonesty of the pawnbroker and money-changer Murari Sil, and the simple-mindedness of Kalketu in bargaining with this man, and later, in bargaining with the Kayastha headman Bharu Datta; and among virtues, the numeracy of Kayastha accountants who recorded and paid for Kalketu’s purchases, and Kalketu’s self-restraint in not purchasing many luxurious accoutrements for himself and his wife.  A story which at the same time says that Kalketu’s wealth was the gift of Candi draws a veil over more ordinary sources of the wealth by which ‘hunting’ men might have become kings.  (But one of the accusations which the king of Kalinga later would bring against Kalketu is that he had obtained his wealth by killing and robbing some merchant.51)  In making new wealth the gift of Candi, Mukunda both mystified the acquisition of wealth and failed to provide any human escape from the zero-sum logic of ‘hunting’.  A zero-sum logic similarly is visible in the way Kalketu’s kingdom was settled: indigenous people of the forest did not become new peasants; rather, Kalketu had to
attract existing peasants to his kingdom from the kingdom of Kalinga, and therefore the
king of Kalinga had to lose all those whom Kalketu gained as his subjects. Finally, this
zero-sum logic is visible in Kalketu’s royal gifts to his subjects, for they are given out of
the vast treasure that Candi had given him. Should it not also apply to transactions of
buying and selling? If so, to Mukunda whatever profit a merchant gained must be
equivalent to a loss sustained by someone else. Although Mukunda realistically portrayed
expansion of settled agriculture on the agrarian frontier, and a degree of commercialization
of the instruments of kingship there, he did not observe, let alone attempt to find a human
explanation for, a general and secular growth of the economy.

Gifts of Pan and a Redistributive Economy

Although one could buy many of the instruments of kingship, apparently one could
not simply buy a kingdom. Kalketu cleared the forest with hired laborers, but to build a
city and a temple for Candi and to find settlers he had to ask for divine assistance.

Having received these further divine gifts, Kalketu in turn made gifts to people who had
come to settle his new land, and thus by receiving and giving he moved beyond
transactions of ‘buying and selling’. Nevertheless, Mukunda’s narrative implies that his
gifts and the relations which they constituted had a ‘calculative dimension’ as Kalketu
bargained for settlers on the agrarian frontier.

Compared to other authors of *Candimangal*, Mukunda complicated the story of
settling Kalketu’s kingdom. Candi, in his account, did not simply advise the headman
Bulan Mandal in a dream to relocate with his subjects for the sake of tax-free lands, or
threaten him with floods if he should choose to remain in Kalinga. Rather, in his account
Bulan Mandal and his peasants actually lost their stores of wealth in the flood Candi sent,
had no savings with which to pay the king’s revenue demand, and would have had no
income until weeks after it was due. In this situation Bulan went to see Kalketu to
negotiate more favorable terms.

Mukunda thereby outlined problems of village headmen and of kings on the agrarian
frontier. In a situation of labor scarcity, village headmen used their authority over other
peasants and their mobility to negotiate for better terms from alternative rulers. Crucial to
their interests were: an initial period of tax free possession to allow clearing and
cultivating forests or bushy fallows, security of title to the land they would cultivate,

permanency of settlement of the land revenue demand, absence of labor taxes or

additional cesses or taxes in kind, and their own control of agency for tax collection from

their dependants and subleasers (rather than tax collection by the king’s officials).54

Village headmen also considered the procedure for assessing the land revenue demand

(more strictly, by measurement of the land, or more loosely, per plough), its remission for

harvest failures, the schedule of its installments relative to the times of harvest, and the

security held for and the rate of interest assessed on unpaid installments of the land

revenue.55  According to Mukunda’s narrative, a ruler should satisfy generously the

demands of village headmen coming to his city with their dependants, and at the same

time he should establish direct and permanent relationships with those same dependants.

Kalketu constituted his relation to his new subjects by a royal ceremony giving pan
to all of them. （Pan are ‘betel leaves’, Piper betel, but the text suggests gifts of prepared

‘rolls’ of pan, containing ground areca nuts, catechu, a lime paste made from sea-shells,

and perhaps spices as well.) Royal gifts of pan commonly were used to honor subjects.
In addition, at least in this poem, royal gifts of *pan* were ‘taken’ in a courtly ceremony in order to indicate that a subject voluntarily had accepted a royal command.\(^5^6\) Kalketu did not accompany these gifts of *pan* with any commands. Were Kalketu’s gifts of *pan* represented only as royal honors to all his subjects, or did their ‘taking’ the gifts of *pan* also mean that they voluntarily had entered into a new relationship with Kalketu as their ruler? If the latter is the case, then a ceremony of ‘taking’ *pan* simultaneously acknowledged his subjects’ capacity to choose their ruler.

When Kayastha headmen came to settle Kalketu’s kingdom, they brought gifts (*bhet*) of food—curds, fish, and ghee in clay pots—to initiate a relationship. They promised to settle their dependants (*prajagan*), and requested that Kalketu give them and their dependants *pan*, along with good lands well delimited, houses, paddy seed, and money to buy bullocks; and that he delay requiring them to repay loans.\(^5^7\) Kalketu’s acceptance of the gifts of food are matched by their acceptance of gifts of *pan*, and both signify acceptance of a relationship.
The narrative suggests in several passages that Kalketu gave _pan_ to all his subjects, both Muslim and Hindu, and both high-born and low-born. Gifts of _pan_ thus became socially and religiously neutral symbols of inclusion in a kingdom which contained very different kinds of subjects. They initiated other, more valuable royal gifts of land which would be tax free for an initial period (or in the case of Brahmans, in perpetuity), of interest-free loans, of paddy seed, of houses, and of ‘beautiful clothes’. In turn these royal gifts were to be reciprocated by his subjects’ gifts of taxes after the revenue-free period had expired, and in the case of Brahmans, by their ‘judgment’ of _sastras_, and by the intangible gifts of their blessings. Finally, in Kalketu’s city _pan_ growers ( _barui_ , ‘who continually gave the hero _pan_’) also could count on a special relationship with him. He promised them that no one would take goods from them by force without their being able to call upon the king to intervene, and that he would impose no unjust regulation upon them. In this narrative gifts of _pan_ from the king mark out the autarkic boundaries of royal redistribution, and by synecdoche gifts of _pan_ from _pan_-growers to the king also
suggest the other side of a redistributive economy, gifts of taxes from non-Brahman
subjects to the king.

Mukunda’s text proposes a direct relationship between king and subjects, even
though it also specifies a mediating role for labor-controlling Kayastha headmen over their
dependants. Gifts of *pan* both sealed and veiled bargaining about the specific terms
offered to settlers, a process which Mukunda’s text represents as intensely competitive,
suggesting conditions of labor scarcity on the agrarian frontier. Therefore, behind the gifts
of *pan* we may imagine a price, or a series of prices, more or less freely and mutually
agreed upon, as a frontier king divided his lands among subjects who were valuable to him
in different ways and in different degrees; and as they in turn came to terms with him
about the taxes most of them eventually would have to give, and computed both the
economic value of his terms of settlement, and the degree of honor he would show them.

In this text the ‘poison in the gift’ was not the capacity of some ritual gifts to transfer
inauspiciousness. Rather, precisely because they were voluntary, gift exchanges and
relationships constituted by them had a ‘calculative dimension’ through which they became
vulnerable to the entropy of competitive self-interest. Through calculations of self-interest ‘hunting’ would be reintroduced to the moral economy of Kalketu’s gift-centered and autarkic realm, which, because of Kalketu’s great wealth and exemplary generosity, otherwise might have been a peaceable kingdom, invulnerable to predation.

Markets and ‘Hunting’ within a Redistributive Economy

Before Bulan Mandal and Kalketu could seal their agreement, a rival headman appeared who complicated the bargain. This man’s name was Bharu [cheater] Datta. Also a Kayastha, he nominated himself as Kalketu’s ‘minister’ (patra) by giving the king an exaggerated account of his own lineage and family honor. Mukunda satirizes Bharu Datta’s transparent attempts to claim more honor than was his due, the greed which motivated him, and Kalketu’s simplicity in failing to discern either his character or his intention. Proposing himself as minister, Bharu advised Kalketu:

There is no fear in speaking what is right. To win the love of your dependants (jinete prajar maya, a pun also meaning, ‘to defeat the deception
of your dependants’) take a ledger (chiya, A. siyaha) of their deeds [of
land], so that they keep to their own plots. When the winter harvest ripens,
you should set upon them a deep stratagem (bisam phanda). Distrain the
grain of the poor. Thus no one will flee while indebted to you, and in the
end you will not suffer from fraud.64

In this way Kalketu would have insured that peasants could not sell the standing grain,
pocket the profits, and flee without paying taxes due to the king. Bharu further advised
Kalketu to make that ‘peasant’ (casa) Bulan Mandal his ‘headman of peasants’ (desmukh)
while making Bharu ‘chief’ (mukhya) of all the Kayasthas. And to justify both of these
steps he quoted the following proverb, which clearly applies to himself: ‘In the hands of a
servant a sword, and in the possession of wives a treasure—they [both] cause great
sorrow in the end’.65

A process of negotiation brought settlers to Kalketu’s new kingdom, partly because
Kalketu had to offer better terms than his rival, the King of Kalinga. Negotiations
proceeded, and became more complex, because the redistributive economy which he
thereby instituted could have had either of two conflicting goals. The king and his agents
could employ the redistributive economy to ‘nurture his subjects like sons’, or alternatively,
they could keep subjects firmly in their place, like servants or wives, without weapons and
without wealth, so that they would not ‘cheat’ the king of his taxes, or bring him ‘great
sorrow in the end’. Through the tigerish minister Bharu Datta and his ‘deep stratagem’ of
distraint of the main winter rice crop before harvest, and through the alleged ‘deception of
dependants’ which it would have counteracted, Mukunda’s poem can be read to suggest
how force and fraud, endemic to competition in Bengali marketplaces, also entered into
strategies of tax collection and tax resistance, and therewith into the redistributive economy
of local kingdoms.

Moreover, a market economy intersected the redistributive economy instituted by
Kalketu. The poem’s list of jatis of people who settled his kingdom no doubt was meant
to indicate all the services and products which a kingdom must have, in order to be able
to produce and reproduce itself, to be an autarkic whole. Although the poem clearly
states that Kayastha families brought with them their own dependants, families of artisan
and serving jatis, we are told nothing of non-market, customary ‘jajmani’ exchanges
between households of these patrons and their clients. Instead, to allow for the
exchange of goods and services among his subjects, as well as for trade with other lands,
we are told by Mukunda that Kalketu founded a ‘tax-free market’ (bebaj hat, bebaj
bajar). In founding a market for his kingdom which, by the absence of taxes, would
attract ‘merchants from various lands’, and which would allow subjects to buy and sell
without being taxed, Kalketu apparently fulfilled one of the duties of kings and safeguarded
his subjects’ wealth.

Bharu, however, treated Kalketu’s market vendors as a hunter treats his prey, by
‘looting their wares and loading his baskets and giving not a cowrie for all the things he
took’. He involved the vendors in mutual quarrels, for the resolution of which his dhuti
swallowed bribes of silver rupees. His knavish son and his widowed sister took a ‘tax in
kind’ (tola) of greens, brinjals, radishes, clay pots, rice, and even of areca nuts and pan.

The vendors complained to Kalketu in a body, and threatened to leave his kingdom. When
Kalketu summoned Bharu for trial and judgment of their complaints, another kind of fraud also was alleged. Kalketu himself claimed that Bharu took ‘interest’ (*kalantar*) on loans to others, despite his paying none for the loans of paddy seed given him by Kalketu, and despite his living upon gift lands and in a house built for him at the king’s expense.

Bharu, in his defense, explained all his demands as his ‘headman’s tax in kind’ (*mandaliya tola*), and claimed that Kalketu was trying to cheat him, after having got the benefit of his work, for ‘all the dependants who were my servants came here at my word’. Without being told, auditors of Mukunda’s poem know that this last claim is false; Kalketu’s city already had been settled before Bharu arrived.

Mukunda’s poem suggests that royal agents, ‘ministers’ and ‘headmen’ like Bharu Datta, were well placed to exploit subjects by force and fraud, and we can understand the calculations of short-term self-interest behind such exploitation. Force and fraud in collection of taxes inserted the most entropic and predatory relations of ‘hunting’ and ‘buying and selling’ into relations that had appeared to be based upon exchanges of gifts.
Dismissed from Kalketu’s service, Bharu immediately presented himself with offerings (bhet) to the king of Kalinga, and gave him the news of Kalketu’s upstart kingdom within his territory, and the king of Kalinga determined upon a policy of war. The plot of the poem therefore inscribes a circle, from Kalketu’s hunting upwards to his sale of Candi’s ring and his purchases of men, regalia, and instruments of kingship, upwards again to the gifts of pan, homes, land and capital by which he attracted subjects, and the gifts which they promised in return, but then downwards to the appearance of force and fraud in Bharu’s tax collection in his marketplace, and downwards again to war. But it also inscribes a complication in the argument, for through the plot we see more clearly the potential for conflicts of interest within ruling elites as well as between them and their subjects.

**Battle and a Warrior’s Honor**

David Schulman has alerted us to the ‘symbolic activity’ of battle in literature of the Chola kingdom, ‘in which [symbolic activity] the unwieldy and disharmonious fragments of the kingdom combine in a moment of institutionalized breakdown and release’. In Tamil
poetry war was imagined as surreal, ludic, vividly sensual, and at the same time frenzied and grotesque; descriptions of death in battle made war into a carnival feast for Kali’s minions, a ghastly ‘demon sabbath’. Mukunda, no warrior himself, often relied on stereotypes to convey the battle between Kalketu and the army of the King of Kalinga, and in these passages his poem seems to have attracted the interpolations of lesser talents as well. It is clear, nevertheless, that he meant to convey some of the same links between war and a ‘wilderness of comic chaos’, a wilderness dominated, however, by Kalketu’s heroic will.

Kalketu’s will is emphasized by the contrast between his simple bow and arrows and the weapons of the army of the King of Kalinga, with its cannons carried on ‘hundred of thousands of wagons’, and with its war elephants that seemed like vermilion clouds, they were so huge. Indeed, the plot of Mukunda’s account of their battle progressively strips Kalketu of all weapons, until he had to fight only with his fists, but so strong was his will to conquer, and so great his prowess in battle, that even then he could not be defeated, until Candi caused him to lose his ‘intelligence and power’ (balabuddhi). But
battle is not seen as without any value; it too has a divine dimension. As is the case with
the other battle described in this poem, Candi’s ghouls joined the fray, and happily drank
the blood of the slain in a carnival feast.76

At a crucial moment in the battle, however, the heroic contest is called into
question, and temporarily is made comic and inconsequential. After the army of Kalinga,
led by the commander of the guard, had suffered a convincing defeat, Bharu goaded the
commander of the guard into resuming his attack. Kalketu’s wife Phullara then recalled an
episode from the Ramayana. Before their second and crucial battle, Valin was challenged
by his brother Sugriva, despite already having defeated Sugriva in combat. Sugriva,
however, challenged his brother this second time only after securing an alliance with Lord
Rama, and only because he counted on Rama’s secret and unchivalrous promise to come
to his assistance in what should have been single combat between heroes. Phullara also
recalled that Valin’s wife, Tara, suspecting some such plot, had advised her husband to
submit to Sugriva this second time, and that she had witnessed Rama kill her husband by
treachery when he failed to accept her advice. Phullara concluded that she also should advise her husband Kalketu not to resume the battle.

Valin, we must recall, had replied to Tara as follows: ‘For invincible heroes who never turn back in battle, to endure insolence is worse than death, timid woman’. Thus he made the masculine honor of a warrior his ultimate value. Indeed, in proposing the challenge, Rama had counted on the fact that heroes like Valin do not tolerate insults, ‘particularly when their women are present’. Kalketu, on the contrary, listened to his wife’s good advice and at once hid in the granary. Nor was his opponent, Kalinga’s commander of the guard, any more heroic in Kalketu’s sudden absence. Convinced that somewhere Kalketu was lying in ambush, he halted; his body became covered in goose-flesh, and his mouth could give voice to no sound, while he strained to hear some slight noise indicating Kalketu’s location. In the heart of the account of the battle, one finds this comic image of two warriors each hiding from the other.

We are never told that, like Valin’s, Kalketu’s honor depended on fighting whenever challenged, even to the death, and ‘particularly in the presence of women’. Later, when
freed from his shackles and released by Candi from the Kalinga prison, Kalketu would be quite indifferent to her promises that on the morrow the king would honor and reward him. Instead, he wanted only to escape while he could with his bow and three arrows. The whole episode suggests a pragmatic orientation to issues of war and peace. Indeed, we will see that a solution to war must involve, among other reforms, replacing the codes of honor which require victory or death from both men and women in warrior lineages.

*Tej, Stuti,* and Mercy

Kalketu announced a theory of his kingship when brought before the King of Kalinga to be tried and punished for his upstart kingdom. Prompted by the king, who evidently expected that Kalketu either would admit his usurpation or would identify a rival overlord as his protector, Kalketu in fact claimed that Mahes Thakur (Siva) was the king (*raja*) of his kingdom, that Candi was the ‘administrator’ (*adhikari*), and that he himself was her ‘chief minister’ (*mahapatra*) holding her ‘tej’ (energy), and the ‘executor of her commands’ (*ajnakan*). In Mukunda’s time and place an ideology declaring that the king was only the delegate of a divine ruler would have been associated with the region of Orissa or
'Kalinga'. It first had been announced in Cuttack by the Ganga king Anangabhima III in the years 1230-38, who declared himself the 'deputy' (ravuta) and 'son' of Purusottama. More recently the theory had been revived and elaborated by Kapilendra (r. 1435-1467), who usurped the Gajapati throne and founded the powerful Suryavamsa dynasty in Orissa. 

Despite the familiarity of Kalketu's theory, however, Mukunda did not represent it as persuasive to the king of Kalinga. Denying any divine and spiritual authority to Kalketu, the king was interested only in how a vile hunter had acquired so much wealth, and in the various kinds of dishonor he, the king, had suffered in consequence of the upstart little kingdom within his realm. Kalketu asserted that Candi had given him her own wealth. This claim seems to have enraged the king, precisely because of its violation of the hierarchical principles of jati. Kalketu's claim that he ruled as a delegate by 'holding Candi's tej' therefore is an assertion that complements his claim to rule by her gift of wealth. Does it refute the claim that jati order had been violated by his possession of a kingdom, or by the prior acquisition of wealth which made that kingdom possible?
In Bengali *tej* has a range of meanings which tend to emphasize the expression of ‘radiance’, ‘heat’, or ‘energy’ in mental or spiritual ‘power’, ‘physical strength’, ‘valor’, ‘courage’, or ‘heroism’. Taken in any of these senses, Kalketu’s *tej* already had been demonstrated in battle. Are we to understand that a commitment to truth and dharma, or a moral teleology in general is inherent in this term? Of course, in other *mangal-kabya* there are stories of kings or warriors who became invincible through divine gifts. We may mention the character of Ichai Ghos in *Dharmamangal*, a rebel against proper authority and a protégé of the goddess, who received from her a deceptive assurance of invincibility.

Lau Sen, the hero of this story, succeeded in battle against Ichai Ghos by the intervention of Lord Dharma, and with the help of other male divinities. In Vipradas’s *Manasa-vijaya*, for another example, Cad for a time was invincible as a king because of Siva’s gift of gnosis (*mahajnan*), concretely embodied in gifts of an ascetic’s uncut hair, a ‘pouch of siddhi’ (hashish), and most important, a ‘victory scarf’ which allowed him to raise the dead to life. But again divine gifts of invincibility did not prevent Cad from committing grave mental errors (*kubuddhi*) in his dealings with Manasa. In Kalketu’s case, what particularly
refutes the king’s claim that *jati* order had been violated is Kalketu’s counter-claim that he was only the executor of Candi’s commands. The king’s ministers, whose minds were not clouded by rage, noted that Kalketu showed no fear of the king, because his mental and emotional attention (*bhab*) was fixed upon Candi. Because he was marked by participation in the divine, they refused to consent to his execution, and without their consent the king relented and had Kalketu imprisoned. Apparently Kalketu’s devotional absorption in and dependence on the goddess had given them some evidence that he ‘held Candi’s *tej*.’

No purification rituals could have cleansed Kalketu of the impurity which was his by birth. Although Candi intervened to release Kalketu from prison, and made sure he received investiture from the king of Kalinga, she did not arrange for elaborate royal rituals to infuse in him more of her own *tej*, except as that virtue might have been present in gifts of regalia and unguents from the king of Kalinga. Kalketu’s theory of his kingship, which identifies the divine basis for his authority as holding Candi’s *tej*, is not emphasized in
subsequent events of the narrative; in fact the phrase appears nowhere else in Mukunda’s text.

Instead of extraordinary royal rituals, the text emphasizes a common devotional practice as the means by which Kalketu could reverse an entropic flow towards hunting and war. This practice was stuti, a prayer for divine intervention. It could be performed by all regardless of jati, and by men and women alike. The virtue by which Candi herself responded to stuti to save Kalinga and Gujarat, and which she awakened in both of her kings to save them from an endless cycle of hunting and war, was the anti-heroic and non-hierarchical virtue of mercy (karuna, krpa).

Stuti, at least as Kalketu modeled it at the crux of the narrative, was an emotionally multivalent, devotional hymn which praised the goddess, mentioning all her names, attributes, and salvational actions in the world, and which questioned her indifference to, and abandonment of him. At the same time, it gradually became an act of moral reflection, a reckoning and judgment with respect to his own life. Kalketu punctuated his verses of praise (given us in an improbably Sanskritized Bengali, and using verses also
used by all her other worshippers) with entirely personal interjections in colloquial Bengali.

In the latter he insisted on his innocence before some charges (he never was a ‘thug’ [t hag]; he never had misbehaved with another’s wife) and admitted to others (he had been a hunter; he had been guilty of greed in taking Candi’s wealth, and such greed in general leads to lascivious conduct). For ‘grievous faults’ (darun dos) thus gradually identified, Kalketu’s stuti finally asked for Candi’s forgiveness, while at the same time he begged Candi to ‘fly quickly to deliver her servant’.  

Candi’s emotional involvement in Kalketu’s stuti is most interesting. She came at once, ‘without tying up her hair’, felt herself ashamed to see Kalketu bound in prison, and sorrowed to see his weeping face. She freed him from bondage, and insisted that he should remain in Kalinga to be invested and to receive from the king a royal umbrella, along with other ‘honors’ and ‘rewards’. An unmotivated act of mercy immediately follows: she freed, not Kalketu alone, but also all the prisoners in the king’s prison, and had her ghouls seize the weapons of all the prison guards, who fell unconscious and in disarray.
But it is following Kalketu’s investiture that we see the most extraordinary acts of mercy. The first occurred as Kalketu was returning to his kingdom. On the road he saw the wives of the soldiers he had slain. They were preparing to immolate themselves upon their husbands’ funeral pyres. Kalketu’s ears were filled with their weeping, and he acknowledged his responsibility for their fate in a way contrary to the code of masculine honor for a warrior: ‘In shame and fear he kept his head downcast’. Candi understood his silent wish, and promised to restore the soldiers to life. Hearing this promise, Kalketu forbade the women the rite of anumarana, and Candi revived the slaughtered soldiers, who danced in a carnival of joy that reversed their experience of the carnival of battle.93 We must note at once that here Kalketu reciprocated an earlier act of mercy, by which his own wife had been spared suicide or immolation, when he had been captured by the commander of the guard of Kalinga. That man, inspired by the goddess, had promised Phullara that he would speak to the king and save Kalketu’s life.94 Finally, this episode corrects the model for heroic action enacted by Lord Rama, who had raised to life only his allies, the dead monkey soldiers of Sugriva.
Kalketu’s treatment of Bharu Datta was even more extraordinary. The latter, by one final set of falsehoods, attempted to regain his old position as minister, but Kalketu judged him and found him guilty, and the whole town joined in giving him disgraceful punishments. A barber wet him with a horse’s piss, scraped his hair and beard with a dull razor, made streams of blood soak his garments, and left only five long strands of hair on his head. People of the town marked one of Bharu’s cheeks with white lime and one with lampblack as a sign of his disgrace. The commander of the guard poured whey upon his head. They gave him a garland of ‘China roses’ (oramala), and drove him from the town, beating him on all sides, while boys taunted him along the way, and even the shyest brides pelted him with blackened cooking pots. Nevertheless, despite the undoubted justice of these punishments, ‘seeing Bharu’s dishonor (laghabe) the hero felt great sorrow, and taking mercy (krpa karî), gave him back his house and home’. We are meant, I think to contrast unfavorably Rama’s rejection and banishment of Sita, not for any real misconduct, but merely because some of his subjects had been gossiping about her. In the midst of victory, the ordinary, unheroic, and sympathetic human emotions of shame
for his own deeds, fear for their consequences, and sorrow for others allowed Kalketu to ‘take mercy’ and to make peace out of victory.

Conclusion

This essay has analyzed the rhetoric and assumptions of a sixteenth century Bengali text, which argued for a novel and more pacific style of kingship on the agrarian frontier, where peasant agriculture was expanding north and west of the Bengal delta. It has argued that Mukunda’s Candimangal is a rich historical source for our understanding of two, related topics. The first topic is commercialization on the agrarian frontier: an increasing role for markets and market-like transactions, especially in state formation. The second topic is a change in the ideology of kingship, involving a re-evaluation of royal virtues, to give more importance to those which would make possible a more pacific polity, and less importance to martial prowess and masculine honor.

In his rhetoric portraying the proper characteristics of a frontier kingdom ruled by a local, base-born, untouchable raja, Mukunda’s vivid details suggest direct observation of the role of markets and trade on the agrarian frontier in sixteenth century Bengal.
Mukunda gave unusual importance to wealth, to buying and selling, and to marketplaces.

As a gift Kalketu received from Candi a vast treasure, not sovereignty itself, nor any precious symbol of sovereignty or of his relation with her. He received that wealth only after demonstrating that he was not ‘lascivious’ (but to some extent he was ‘greedy’), and he used her gift of wealth to purchase soldiers, numerate and literate servants, laborers, a minimum of regalia, weapons for himself and an army, and a stock of food. In bargaining for settlers on the agrarian frontier he entered into market-like transactions by offering them more attractive terms than the neighboring, high-jati king had done. He founded a central, tax-free marketplace in his kingdom to serve his own subjects and to attract foreign merchants. Finally, through his scheming minister Bharu Datta, competitive self-interest and force and fraud entered tax collection in that market and threatened the redistributive ‘moral economy’ of Kalketu’s little kingdom.

Mukunda’s sixteenth century text suggests that commercialization in early modern Bengal should be studied in the longue durée, over the course of at least three centuries, not just in the eighteenth century. It also suggests that processes of commercialization
may have been experienced most acutely on internal agrarian frontiers, rather than along the axis of the Bhagirathi, Hugli, and Sarasvati rivers.  

In this narrative Candi promised to end both hunting of animals, and ‘hunting’ in the sense of exploitative predation in human society. Mukunda’s text developed ideas about a more pacific kingship and the royal virtues such a kingship would have required. Nevertheless, this essay has argued that, according to Mukunda, in order to protect their subjects kings must have the very martial virtues that make predation possible. By representing martial virtues through the trope of ‘hunting’ Mukunda’s text de-emphasized them, but did not altogether deny them a role.

At the same time it elevated to a middle position those virtues which relate broadly to the possession of sri, always temporally unstable, and which relate narrowly to buying and selling. For buying and selling it valued shrewdness in bargaining, instrumental rationality in choosing what to purchase, and an absence of greed for luxury, sensual enjoyment, and many wives. Mukunda’s text differs with those views of kingship which emphasized the king’s divine capacity for sensual enjoyment (bhog), lavish generosity, and
elaborate and expensive royal rituals, views in which the fluid capitals of cash crops and
market economies are reflected in royal rituals of feeding Brahmans and other displays of
conspicuous consumption. Probably Brahmans like Mukunda would not have regarded
any ostentatious expenditure as virtuous in a base-born raja on the agrarian frontier, but
nothing in his text suggests a different standard for judging expenditures of higher ranking
kings.

Ultimately, as this text imagined them, more pacific kings and polities had to be
based upon royal gifts, gifts which originated from and were modeled upon a divine gift of
wealth to the king. As did authors of most other versions of Candimangal, Mukunda
made Candi require a fatherly generosity in the royal dharma of giving to the king’s
subjects. Mukunda’s emphasis, however, was less upon transforming ‘wealth into alms’ in
order to give ‘moral value’ to what otherwise would be a ‘raw material, itself neutral’, and
more upon constituting a redistributive economy in order to attract subjects to Kalketu’s
new kingdom. By narrating a story in which Candi’s divine gift both authorized and made
possible further gifts from Kalketu, Mukunda veiled human sources of new wealth on the
agrarian frontier, and mystified the economic growth that must have been experienced as
settled agriculture expanded into the forested peneplain north and west of the Bengal delta.

Mukunda both preserved a logical distinction between ‘buying and selling’ and
‘hunting’, and developed an entropic pattern of causation by which ‘buying and selling’
easily can be reduced to ‘hunting’. Perhaps the ‘super-personal and normative regulation’
which makes markets free of force and fraud was known to him, but was experienced as
intermittent or weak. Of course, with a zero-sum logic, any profit may have appeared as
the result of ‘hunting’. Further research is needed to clarify whether and how a distinct
domain of ‘buying and selling’ sometimes appeared in marketplaces, despite fraud, and
despite multiple and overlapping ‘passages of authority’ which intervened to redirect both
marketable commodities and vendors.

Mukunda’s account devalues the royal virtues proper to hunting and war. In its
emphasis on individual character rather than jati, its de-emphasis, if not disapproval, of
lavish royal gifts and expenditures, and its openness to seeing some royal virtue in
calculative, rational transactions of ‘buying and selling’ and gift exchange, Mukunda’s
narrative of Kalketu can be compared to one medieval Jain text on kingship from Gujarat. 99

Both suggest multiple and multivalent royal virtues. The Jain text does give unusually important roles to merchants, and narrates alliances between them and the king. At the same time it denigrates luxurious and sensual royal entertainments, and upholds a calculative rationality. The Jain text, however, does not devalue ‘hunting’ and war; its paradigmatical Jain king begins his career as a thief, and secures the treasure needed for kingship by robbing the tax collections of a neighboring king.

To model a more pacific kingship Mukunda had to re-evaluate both models of heroic masculinity and the expectations of martial culture for wives of warriors and kings. Mukunda’s text was opposed to the masculine codes of honor of young men training to be soldiers, of wrestling akharas, and of Gorakh Nath renunciates. In all three arenas one could find in sixteenth century Bengal attempts to perfect and make invulnerable the celibate male body; and in Bengal as elsewhere a widely shared misogynist discourse was associated with all such disciplines. Mukunda’s text, on the contrary, is relatively free of both misogynist and misogynist discourse. Here also this study suggests an avenue for
comparative research, to develop more detailed contrasts with contemporary martial subcultures in Bengal.

Twice Mukunda’s narrative represented ‘mercy’ as a preferable alternative to the code of honor which required ritual immolation of the wives of defeated warriors. The royal virtue of mercy provided alternatives to a warrior’s code of masculine honor, and made peace possible. Mercy is supported by *stuti*, the devotional practice which the poem most frequently upholds. At least as Kalketu modeled it at the crux of his story, *stuti* was punctuated by individual, moral self-reflection, and by the ordinary, unheroic human emotions of sorrow, shame and fear, and it concluded with a prayer for Candi’s forgiveness of ‘grievous faults’. Having experienced forgiveness of his goddess, Kalketu could act with mercy for others.

No doubt the self-effacement required for this virtue is related to Kalketu’s lowly status by *jati* and to that simplicity of character which Mukunda satirized in earlier episodes of the narrative. But I argue that it also is related to the king’s submission to norms of exchange, in both buying and selling and in gift exchanges, to his calculative rationality in
expenditures, and to the large role which Mukunda’s text gave to markets and to commercialized agrarian relations in his kingdom. In all these cases we can see normative limits placed upon the ‘strong and autonomous’ personality of a warrior king.

In discussing Kalketu as a raja the words ‘king’ and ‘kingship’ may be problematic, because he came to acknowledge the superior authority of a maharaja, an overlord. I use them nevertheless because in this text because it has no different account of what would constitute right rule by a maharaja. Cf. Rahul Peter Das, ‘Little Kingdoms and Big Theories of History,’ Journal of the American Oriental Society 117 (1997): 127-34.

C.A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sushil Chaudhury, From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995); Kumkum Chatterjee, Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India, Bihar: 1733-1820 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Rajat Datta, Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialization in Rural Bengal, c. 1760-1800 (New Delhi: Manohar,
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5 Dutch records make it clear that production for export of raw silk, of silk and cotton textiles, and of rice and other foodstuffs already was well established in Bengal by the middle of the seventeenth century. See Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal 1630-1720* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 149-72. Richard Eaton’s brief but very important discussion of the economy of pre-Mughal Bengal suggests an even earlier commercialization of at least some manufacturing sectors of Bengal’s economy, when European agency could not have been predominate. See Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal*

Eaton’s description of the expansion of settled agriculture in the eastern Bengal delta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also emphasizes endogenous processes of commercialization on a different agrarian frontier which seems to have opened later than the one this essay will suggest; the processes, however, were similar, and Eaton makes use of the text I will discuss in this essay. See Eaton, Rise of Islam, pp. 194-227.


Literature on medieval and early modern state formation can be approached through The State in India, 1000-1700, ed. Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). This literature has focused on three models: ‘feudalism’, and the ‘segmentary state’ for the medieval period, and a ‘patrimonial-bureaucratic empire’ for the Mughal period. In none of these models do markets, commercialization or rational choice
in market-like relations play an important role. For this and a more general criticism of the static character of ‘models’ see the important review by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘The Mughal State—Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter IESHR), 29, 3 (1992), pp. 291-321. For a noteworthy exception to the tendency to make commercial relations irrelevant to ideologies of kingship see Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

9I have cited throughout as CM the following edition: Kabikankan Mukunda-biracita, *Candimangal*, Sukumar Sen sampadita (Nay Dilli: Sahitya Akademi, 1975). For variant readings I have consulted the Calcutta University edition: *Kabikankan-Candi*, pratham bhag, Srikumar Bandyopadhyay o Bisvapati Caudhuri sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1975), hereafter cited as CMUC 1. This is a much shorter text, and its readings, when they differ, are frequently simpler and later than those of Sen’s edition. I
also have consulted Mukundaram Cakrabarti biracita, Candimangal, bhumika o sampadana Pancanan Mandal (Kalakata: Bharabi, 1992), hereafter cited as CMPM.

10Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay summarizes the controversies about Mukunda’s dates; see Madhyayuger Baml Sahityer Tathya o Kalakram (Kalikata: Bharati Buk St.al, 1993), pp. 121-35. Sen (‘Bhumika’, in CM, pp. 28-9) argues for a date of 1555/56 when Mukunda’s poem first was sung; most other scholars favor a date towards the end of the century.


Sen, ‘Bhumika’, in CM, pp. 19-24, discusses the more certain information about the poet’s life which is distributed among signature lines in his poem, and the much less certain information to be found in an account of his life, included in some MSS as an explanation of how he came to compose the poem. This account is at CM, *pad* 6, pp. 3-4; variants are provided in the appendix, ‘Pathantar o mantabya’, pp. 310-13.


The only possible textual reference to the Sultans of Bengal is an episode involving the ‘raja’ of Gaur, for Gaur had been their capital city, but use of the word ‘raja’
suggests instead a Hindu king of Bengal in the distant past. See CM, *pad* 219, pp. 126-7 ff.


18 CM, *pad* 70-73, pp. 42-44.

20 My discussion of this virtue and of royal virtues in general has been guided by Alf Hiltebeitel’s analysis of ‘all the virtues’ of a king in *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahabharata* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 193-228, and for *yasa* in particular, pp. 215-16, 220. But I find somewhat different royal virtues in Mukunda’s text, and different relations among them, compared to Hiltebeitel’s analysis of royal virtues in the *Mahabharata*; I am not suggesting that there is an enduring ‘essential’ identity of content or structure of ideas between the two texts.


23 Cf. Ghanaram Cakrabartti-biracita, SriDharmamangal, Piyus Kanti Mahapatra sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1962). In this early eighteenth century text, Ichai Ghos, a similarly upstart local king whose power also had been obtained by worship of Candi, had to be killed to re-establish peace and good order. Of particular interest in this text is the theme of ‘virility’ (paaurusya), a word never used in Mukunda’s text, and the
theme of celibacy, one of the bodily disciplines necessary for a young man to prove himself as a warrior.


25 'As the result of worshipping me, the tiger never again will eat you'. CM, *pad* 40, pp. 30-31.

26 CM, *pad* 50, p. 31.


29 CM, *pad* 107, p. 64. For notice of Cohars as ‘tribals living in the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore’ in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when they were employed as soldiers by local zamindars and briefly by the English East India Company, see Aditee Nag Chowdhury-Zilly, *The Vagrant Peasant: Agrarian Distress and Desertion in Bengal 1770-1850* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), pp. 130-6.

30 CM, *pad* 113-14, pp. 76-78. Candi’s command to abandon his bow and arrows is at *pad* 105, p. 62.

31 CM, *pad* 146-59, pp. 87-93.


35CM, pad 88, p. 52.

36CM, pad 316, p. 180: *sukhanar matsya ar narir bhraman, tepantare pay yadi* rajat kancan, ayatne paile iha chare kona jan, dekhile bhulaye ithe munijanar man.

37CM, pad 88, p. 52.

38CM, pad 102-103, pp. 61-2.


CM, *pad* 107, p. 64.


For example, Kalketu’s simplicity is satirized at CM, *pad* 107, pp. 63-4, when he and his wife receive, not just the ring, but also seven jars of treasure, in response to Phullara’s thought: ‘Lest some desire arise from the one ring—lord you will not ever be able to remove the ill-name of wealth’. Immediately, however, Kalketu began to worry that
Candi would take one of the jars for herself.


49 Kalketu’s investiture is described at CM, *pad* 170, pp. 100-01.


51 CM, *pad* 162, p. 95.

CM, *pad* 126, p. 75.

CM, *pad* 127, p. 75: the terms Kalketu proposes to the headman Bulan Mandal.

CM, *pad* 126, p. 75: the complaints of Bulan Mandal against the King of Kalinga.

See also *pad* 129, p. 76: the harsher treatment of subjects proposed by Bharu Datta, a rival headman.

For one of many examples, CM, *pad* 331, p. 188: ‘Feeling oppressed at heart, the merchant does not take the roll [of pan], and the king’s eyes become red with anger. So, understanding what was expected (*karyyer gati*), the merchant Dhanapati takes the pan and, with the *anjali* gesture, touches his head’. See also “Voluntary” Relationships and Royal Gifts of *Pan* in Mughal Bengal’, in this volume.


‘All the Musalmans’ included ‘ten or twenty lineages’ (*biradhari*) of men who ‘continually read the Qur’an’, and various *jati* of Muslim artisans who ‘know neither the fast
nor daily prayer’ (CM, *pad* 130, p. 77). ‘All the Brahmans’ who received *pan* similarly included both *kulin* lineages and lowly genealogists, astrologers, and various renunciate beggars (*pad* 132, p. 77). ‘All the dependants’ of Kayasthas, to whom Kalketu was requested to give *pan* (*pad* 134, p. 80), apparently included several untouchable *jati* and his town’s prostitutes (*pad* 136, p. 81).

59 For the gift of revenue free land to Brahmans, see CM, *pad* 127, p. 75, and for other gifts to them, see *pad* 132, p. 78. For mention of Kalketu’s gifts of houses and ‘beautiful clothes’ to all see CM, *pad* 136, p. 81.

60 CM, *pad* 132, pp. 77-8.


Although himself only a Datta, he claimed to have overcome the norm of hypergamy; his two wives were daughters of the superior, *kulin* [noble by descent] ‘Ghos and Baus’ [sic., Basu] lineages. I am indebted to Aditi Nath Sarkar for the relevant comment that the progenitor of the Dattas himself had been judged not a *kulin* because of his overweening pride.

*Bhattacharya, ‘La déesse et le royaume’, pp. 41-2.*

*Raychaudhari, Bengal under Akbar, p. 84,* notes that in the absence of dominant peasant *jati* in Bengal, ‘jajmans’ were landlords, who ‘mediated the distribution of rural income’ only by land grants. He concludes: ‘Subsistence agriculture, based on customary arrangements, does not in fact appear to have been the chief characteristic of Bengal’s

68CM, *pad* 137, p. 82, *pad* 139, p. 83. Most other authors of *Candimangal* do not include founding the market in their narratives, but Bharu Datta does enter the market to demand his taxes or gifts. Compare Dvija Madhab racita, *Mangalcandir Git*, pp. 65-74; Dvija Ramadeb-biracita, *Abhayamangal*, pp. 74-84. Ramananda Yati, however, does not even include this episode of unjust taxation in the market; see Ramananda Yati-biracita, *Candimangal*, Anilabaran Gangopadhyay sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay,
This duty perhaps forms the basis of the following proverbial expression of an untimely destruction: *hat nir’muinu, besaite na painu, harila bidhi sampad* [‘We founded the market but did not get to do business; Fate destroyed our wealth’]. CM, *pad* 76, p. 46.


CM, *pad* 146, p. 87.

CM, *pad* 159, p. 93; other MSS read ‘caused the hero to lose knowledge and right there to become speechless’ [*harila birer jnan abol seikhane*], CMPM, p. 104; or,
simply, stripped him of his ‘power’, CMUC 1: 408, text and variant in fn. 2.

76 CM, pad 149, p. 88; compare pad 475, pp. 267-8.


78 CM, pad 154, p. 91.

79 CM, pad 155, p. 92.

80 CM, pad 166, 167, p. 99.

81 CM, pad 162, p. 95.

Kapilendra claimed that Jagannatha had elected him to be king. He called himself a servant (sevaka) of Jagannatha, and claimed to consult the god for important decisions, whose help in battle he also claimed to have received. See Hermann Kulke, ‘Jagannatha as the State Deity under the Gajapatis of Orissa’, in *Cult of Jagannatha*, ed. Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, pp. 204-08.


CM, *pad* 163, p. 95.
Kalketu’s *abhisek*, performed by the king of Kalinga, was the minimal ritual allowed by Muslim overlords, marking the forehead with a *tilak*, not an elaborate bath in ‘luminous waters’. He also received from the king presents of regalia: a white umbrella, a sandalwood throne, a chariot, and unguents of saffron and sandalwood to ornament his body. See CM, *pad* 170, pp. 100-01; and compare Inden, *Imagining India*, pp. 233-9.


CM, *pad* 170-172, pp. 101-02. *Anumarana* is the rite by which a woman is
burned as a *sati* when she cannot be burned upon her husband’s funeral pyre, and so must ‘follow his death’.


95CM, *pad* 175, p. 104.

96Cf. ‘“Tribute Exchange” and the Liminality of Foreign Merchants in Mukunda’s *Candimangal*, in this volume.


Introduction

This essay discusses women’s gender roles as they were imagined and debated in a Bengali text written towards the end of the sixteenth century. Efforts to reexamine precolonial gender roles and debates about them are important for three reasons. First, that large body of research on gender which begins with the colonial period often has

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observed elements of continuity between colonial and precolonial discourse on gender in South Asia, and often exaggerates or misstates both the degree of consensus about gender in the precolonial period, and the nature of change in the colonial period. By attending to precolonial debates about gender, this essay will help to clarify continuity and change in colonial gender debates in Bengal. Second, when scholars have examined precolonial gender roles, often they have chosen to investigate only elite women, or only those issues which became subject to debate in the colonial period. This essay attempts to examine as a whole gender roles and dress and modesty codes for all grades in a status hierarchy of women in late sixteenth century Bengal, and it includes issues that were not debated in colonial times. Finally, existing scholarship on gender in precolonial South Asia has focused on the nature of gender roles, but not on how gender itself was constituted. This essay suggests that there may have been a fundamental change in the way gender was constituted in Bengal if, influenced by British gender discourse, Bengali reformers and nationalists began to use binary, opposite and mutually exclusive terms to describe what should be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.
As do most scholars working on gender in South Asia, I define gender as culturally constituted and subject to change, rather than as naturally determined. I use the term ‘gender forms’ to mean the whole complex of kinship, age and occupational roles, and associated dress and modesty codes appropriate for men or for women in different jati and at different stages of life. I assume that ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ gender forms were mutually defined and must be studied in their mutual relations; that they were related to ideologies of power and honor and were implicated in other social and political hierarchies; and that they were maintained in processes of contestation which included the use of force and violence, as well as ideological debate and various strategies of resistance.2

As they are reflected in middle Bengali literature, debates about gender forms often were debates only about women’s dharma, about what should be regarded as right conduct for women as genus (stri-jati). In part, these debates may have been a reaction to patterns of seclusion, dress and modesty codes in elite Bengali Muslim society,3 and to participation of some elite Hindu families in the culture of the Mughal empire. But seclusion, dress and modesty codes were only one set of topics debated in middle Bengali
literature. Other issues included the propriety of consummation of marriage before a bride had reached puberty, and the capacity of women to defend their own honor in their families and in jati councils. Some debates about women’s dharma seem to have been related to debates about the validity of a martial code of honor for Hindu Bengali males, but the latter is a topic that I explore more fully elsewhere. This essay attempts to clarify positions in debates about gender roles and dress and modesty codes for women. It also shows that the terms of these debates excluded women of the lowest jati and economic status in sixteenth-century Bengal. At the lowest levels of Bengali society, women who labored outside already were invisible, long before Western orientalists and Indian nationalists began imagining an ancient golden age for elite ‘Aryan’ women.

The sources I will use for this paper are mangal-kabya, a genre of middle-Bengali devotional verse narratives, and within that genre, Candimangal, verse narratives which justify worshipping the goddess Candi. To be sure, middle-Bengali devotional literature has long been mined by social historians for ‘facts’ about Bengali society. Instead of attempting to isolate social ‘facts’ in literary garb, I read Candimangal as dramatic
representations of arguments, one of which was about proper gender roles for elite Hindu women.

Among Candimangal, I will concentrate on a single version, that by Mukunda or Mukundaram Cakrabarti,\(^7\) a man widely acknowledged to have been the best author of all Candimangal, if not of all mangal-kabya.\(^8\) Mukunda’s Candimangal probably was written towards the end of the sixteenth century.\(^9\) During the period of Mughal rule in the following century and a half, it became well known and widely copied throughout Bengal. Although new Candimangal continued to be composed in this period, many later poets closely followed Mukunda’s model, at least in the region of Rarh, the deltaic plains south of the Ganga and west of the Bhagirathi rivers.\(^10\) Mukunda was a Brahman who had left his home village near the south-eastern boundary of undivided Barddhaman District, West Bengal, in the heartland of brahmanical settlements along the Bhagirathi, Hugli, and Sarasvati rivers; according to a widely accepted story, he had done so because the Muslim governor in his locality was oppressive.\(^11\) He found a patron in the prince of ‘Brahman’bhum’, a little kingdom in undivided Medinipur District, West Bengal, and in what
then was in a frontier zone between Bengal and Orissa. Perhaps his poem similarly moves away from some of the central categories of brahmanical thought.

One of the narratives of Candimangal tells the story of the second marriage of the merchant Dhanapati. The honor and shame of men and women in Dhanapati’s family are central themes of this narrative. An elder wife destroys the honor of her younger co-wife, and thereby she enables attacks upon the honor of Dhanapati her husband. The younger co-wife, supported by the goddess, restores her own honor and her husband’s as well.

I approach this text with three reading strategies. First, I read the poem for the rhetoric which persuades the reader or auditor to make particular judgments about particular characters and their actions. In the case of female characters, this is a rhetoric based upon distinguishing between true and false honor and between virtuous and unvirtuous action, and it is developed in the narrative by the aligned characters of the goddess Candi and her heroine Khullana, and by Khullana’s unvirtuous antagonist, her elder co-wife Lahana. Mukunda’s poem affirms the agency—the knowledge, power and freedom to act—of both wives, while it distinguishes between the virtues of the one and
the vices of the other. Second, I will read the poem for its implicit assumptions. I argue
that, making possible the argument in favor of the agency of virtuous women, and at the
same time limiting its scope to women of high status and to a narrow range of actions, are
implicit assumptions which link gender, economic status, and jati in related hierarchies of
power and honor. Finally, I will read this poem for its acknowledgment of counter
arguments. I argue that Mukunda’s poem seems most concerned to refute counter
arguments expressed by the female antagonist of its narrative, counter arguments thus
located within women’s culture.

A Household Economy, and Gender Roles in a ‘Scale of Transactions’

In this section I argue that in Mukunda’s poem gender forms were not constituted
by means of binary, opposite, and mutually exclusive terms. I therefore avoid the term
‘gender categories’. I argue that ‘gender forms’ were scalar; for example, both masculine
and feminine ‘gender forms’ included multiple occupational roles, and those roles were
ranked by their degree of ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’, and therefore by their
appropriateness for different kinds of men or women. Further, some occupational roles—
buying and selling, for example—were shared by masculine and feminine gender forms, rather than belonging exclusively to one or the other. Finally, men and women were imagined as having the capacity to shift among roles within their respective gender forms, and therefore as having mutual relations which could change. A ‘scale of transactions’ which defines multiple and ranked gender roles in a household economy is introduced in the poem’s first human narrative. This narrative tells the story of Kalketu, a ‘base-born’, ‘rude’, and ‘untouchable’ hunter in forests of the Chota Nagpur peneplain west of the Bengal delta. To support his family Kalketu hunted the animals of Biju (‘desolate’) Forest. His wife Phullara in turn sold meat, hides, skins, tusks and other animal products in local periodic markets, and with the cowries received in payment she purchased daily provisions for their household. Phullara’s buying and selling also transformed the conditions of that hunting, making it possible for Kalketu to exploit the animals of the forest without limit; for by themselves they could not have used the animals he hunted so prodigiously.

‘Hunting’ (byadh) and ‘buying and selling’ (kena-beca) therefore can be seen as mutually
dependent, and gendered economic roles of this household; ‘hunting’, a ‘masculine’ role, was complemented by the relatively ‘feminine’ role of ‘buying and selling’.

The animals therefore supplicated Candi, and the goddess in turn hid the animals from Kalketu. When Kalketu could find no animals in the forest to hunt, his family was confronted with an economic crisis, for they had no store of provisions, and except for Kalketu’s bow and three arrows, no valuable articles to pawn. In this crisis Kalketu temporarily assumed Phullara’s role in the marketplace to sell what was left of his previous day’s catch. He told Phullara to visit her friend, to give this woman siuli flowers as an ‘offering’ (bhet), and to ask her for a loan of broken rice grains and salt. This extraordinary shift in household economic roles defines a third kind of transaction: making an offering, bhet, which acknowledges the superiority of the one to whom bhet is given, and then petitioning and receiving assistance from that superior.

When there is a clear distinction, superior roles in this scale of transactions are more ‘masculine’ ones, and inferior roles are more ‘feminine’ ones. In hunting, the superior, usually a male, seizes and expropriates an inferior. In the transaction initiated by
bheth, the inferior gives an offering and makes a petition, and the superior, here a female

but usually a male, responds by giving something of greater value than the bheth

received.\textsuperscript{20} The superior’s role in the transaction initiated by bheth therefore is the opposite

of his role in ‘hunting’, and the two suggest, respectively, the exploitive and beneficent

roles of a ‘masculine’ ruler.\textsuperscript{21} ‘Buying and selling’ seems to occupy a middle position,

perhaps neutral with respect to power, hierarchy and gender, or, more likely, with potentials

for either forcible expropriation or beneficent gift. In any case the couple’s joint shift to

new roles in their household economy shows us that ‘buying and selling’ is not a role

unmarked by gender. It is a feminine role with respect to ‘hunting’, and nevertheless a

masculine one with respect to the role of giving bheth, petitioning, and receiving benefaction.

The whole scale of transactions has an aspect of gender, because in it roles which have

superior power in a relationship are gendered as more masculine.

In the scale of transactions no role can be identified as exclusively masculine or

feminine. In Mukunda’s poem one woman, Lahana, is described by a metaphor which

suggests the cruelty of a huntress\textsuperscript{22} (but only with respect to another woman); both men
and women buy and sell in markets; men as well as women offer bhet to superiors (but men only offer bhet to other men); and two women, Phullara’s friend and Lahana’s friend, receive bhet and offer assistance (but only with other women). Finally, in this household economy the relation between masculine and feminine roles changes when characters jointly change positions on the scale of transactions. Kalketu, in the role of buying and selling, is still ‘masculine’ relative to his wife Phullara, in the role of offering bhet, but he must be ‘masculine’ in a somewhat different sense than when he was a hunter and she bought and sold in the market. Because this scale of transactions structures much of the poem’s plot, we will have occasion to notice it in the poem’s second human story, that of the merchant and his wives.

If we turn to the merchant’s family whose narrative will be the focus of this paper, again we see shifting gender roles in a household economy. Dhanapati twice was summoned by his king to go on a mission of royal trade. Journeying abroad to engage in trade for his king was a more martial and more masculine activity for a merchant than trading at home on his own account, and merchants who stayed at home as if in seclusion
were called ‘wives’. We must imagine a permutation of the scale of masculine gender roles we found in the household of Kalketu, that is, from ‘buying and selling’ at home to something more like ‘hunting’ abroad. Dhanapati’s wives also shifted gender roles during his first journey abroad. The senior wife, Lahana, assumed management of his household and its economy, and forced her junior co-wife to assume the role of a servant laboring outside. Again the relation between masculine and feminine roles changed as characters shifted to new roles in the merchant’s family; and again we see a middle position on this scale, managing the economy of a merchant’s household, which could be performed either by the family’s senior male or by its senior female, as circumstances required or allowed.

Throughout the analysis of this text I will suggest that women’s agency was imagined, at least in part, as a capacity in extraordinary circumstances to shift to roles which overlapped with those ordinarily assumed by men. The connection to agency makes it important to look for multiple and ranked gender roles, for some gender roles which were shared by masculine and feminine gender forms, and for a capacity to shift to new gender roles, rather than looking for binary, opposite and mutually exclusive terms constituting ‘gender
categories’. We now may turn to the fundamental problem represented in the narrative of the merchant’s family.

Patriarchal Ideology, Subaltern Agency, and Khullana’s Problematic Marriage

As the narrative of the merchant’s family begins, we are told that the goddess changed her purpose from introducing her worship in kingdoms and among men to introducing her worship among women. In arguing the benefits to be derived from worshipping Candi, Mukunda’s text, unlike many other Bengali mangal-kabya, locates problems which the goddess will solve not in malign acts by the goddess herself, but in human agency, and this is true of both men and women. It should be no surprise that for women the problems which worship of Candi can solve are located in relationships of marriage and family. We can identify in the narrative of family problems an ideology of patriarchy which the poem assumes. At the same time Mukunda’s poem portrays women’s ‘subaltern agency’ resisting the patriarchal hierarchies which his poem upholds.

To arrange the actions of this narrative Candi summoned a heavenly dancing girl who would become its mortal heroine, contrived a ‘fault’ in her dance, and condignly
cursed her to life as a human girl, Khullana by name, born to a merchant family. Her family’s Gandhabanik jati was linked to trade in costly unguents and other royal insignia.

Almost immediately we also meet this child’s husband-to-be, Dhanapati, a wealthy merchant from the river port of Ujain, on the Ajay River in Bardddhaman. Khullana’s natal and affinal families were Sudras, but wealthy and ‘pure’ Sudras; people, that is, for whom Bengali Brahmans could perform sacrifices and from whom they could accept water.

Because it treats a second wife in a family of Sudras, this narrative cannot focus on requirements for a wife’s performance of Vedic sacrifices with her husband. Rather, its problems are the mundane ones of happiness, power, honor, and love in a polygamous family.

Her father, pressed for time by Khullana’s advancing age (she was ten), hastily arranged her marriage to a groom already married to Khullana’s ‘cruel’ cousin, Lahana. Khullana’s mother compared marrying Khullana into a polygamous family with Lahana, to giving a tiger the offering of a deer as bhêt, an image which immediately suggests the problems of violent expropriation in Kalketu’s narrative. Her father replied that the
astrologer had discerned in his daughter signs that she would become a widow. 30

Widowhood, of course, might threaten unhappiness and shame greater than those of
having a cruel co-wife in an unhappy marriage. At least with a co-wife the onus for a
husband’s death which attached to widows would be shared ambiguously between this
groom’s two wives. 31

After they had completed the rites at Khullana’s father’s house and passed the first
night of the wedding, the new couple went to Dhanapati’s house for the wedding’s second
day. 32 On the morning of the third day Dhanapati went to the king’s assembly, whence he
was sent directly to Gaur in the king’s service before this day’s wedding rites at his house
could be performed. 33 The omission of the third day’s rites is crucial. Khullana was
neither introduced to nor accepted by Dhanapati’s assembled kin, who ordinarily would
have approved the marriage by accepting cooked food from the new bride on the third day.

Nor was the wedding completed by sexual relations between husband and wife, which
could have happened only on the third night or thereafter. 34 By her husband’s abrupt
departure Khullana’s status in the household was left ambiguous: sons born to her might
not be accepted as sons of Dhanapati’s lineage. Khullana’s hasty, ill-considered and incomplete wedding raised questions of honor and shame for the bride which a proper and complete wedding ought to have resolved.

Having established Khullana’s marriage as the locus of its problem, the plot of the narrative then uses three devices to open a space for the agency of its female characters within a patriarchal Bengali family. First, it depicts a minimal family, consisting of a husband, two co-wives, and one maidservant, a family apparently without living members of the generation of the husband’s parents, without brothers of the husband and their families, and initially one without children. Second, it arranges for a prolonged absence of the husband, leaving the senior co-wife to run the household on her own. Third, by the device of an incomplete wedding it makes the two co-wives more unequal in status and power than a first and second wife inevitably would be. These plot devices make it possible for Candi to intervene in problems which arise among women, and initially she acts authoritatively, as a good mother-in-law would, to restore the wives of this family to harmonious relations.
Mukunda’s poem does not suppose that harmonious relations were impossible when a woman ruled a household of women. Initially Mukunda depicts the co-wives’ relation in Dhanapati’s absence as one of love and harmony. The plot carefully makes Dubala, the household’s scheming maidservant, responsible for introducing discord. Because Dubala believed her own self-interest was threatened when these co-wives did not quarrel, she contrived to cause the elder wife, Lahana, to doubt her future position in the household upon the merchant’s return: would not her young and beautiful co-wife steal his affections? Certainly this plot device is a representation of Dubala’s ‘subaltern agency’, and it suggests as well an ‘economic’ calculation of self-interest as Dubala’s motive for acting, but her agency is represented only vis-à-vis other women, and is condemned by the poem. Therefore the poem’s representation of Dubala’s subaltern agency may be understood to support hierarchies of patronage and patriarchy. Maidservants like Dubala, of course, may have listened to this story in a rather different way.

Lahana then became obsessed with a similarly self-interested calculation of her own happiness in marriage. According to Lahana the happiness of a wife required her
husband’s affection, and that in turn required youth and beauty. Her own happiness therefore seemed to be as fleeting as youth. Nevertheless, we immediately learn that youth and beauty might not be necessary for a wife to secure her husband’s affection. ‘Charms’ or potions might suffice, but the best charms were smiling while serving a husband, not being loud and quarrelsome (mukhar), and not being given to unpleasant speech (apriyabadani). Lahana, however, did not want to have anything to do with modest speech (binay bacan). She was accustomed to being independent (svatantra) and to having her husband under her own control (adhin). She used to rebuke him and he used to submit. Despite the loss of her youth and the presence of a co-wife to compete for Dhanapatī’s affection, Lahana hoped to retain that independence and control. Again we may regard her plans as a ‘subaltern agency’ with respect to her husband, and one which the poem condemns. Apparently, by the ideology of patriarchy which the poem assumes, a wife should get happiness in marriage not by seeking power over her husband, but by speaking modestly and sweetly instead. Nevertheless, we already have seen a variety of ‘charms’ in the women’s rites of Khullana’s wedding, charms designed, in part, to insure
the bride’s power over her husband because of his sexual desire (kam) for her.41 Again we must imagine different ways of hearing this story.

Lahana turned to an easier stratagem than gathering rare ‘charms’, one by which she could destroy Khullana’s beauty, and so prevent Dhanapati’s future affection for this rival.42 To remove Khullana’s beauty, Lahana planned to remove her ‘luxuries’ (upabhog), and to do this Lahana had to find some ‘fault’ (dos) in Khullana to be a pretext for her ‘dishonor’ (apaman). As a punishment for Khullana’s fault, the removal of luxuries would cause loss of honor, loss of beauty, and loss of affection. But by the poem’s ideology of patriarchy, only her husband could decide to dishonor a wife; Lahana could not appear to implement her plan’s first and crucial step.

Therefore, she arranged for a forged letter from Dhanapati, which alleged that a fault in Khullana’s horoscope had caused the merchant to suffer an economic disaster in Gaur. The forged letter directed Lahana as follows:
Take Khullana’s eight ornaments. Take all her adornments, and employ her in herding goats. Give her a flaxen cloth and a coarse shawl to wear. Give her the husking shed to sleep in. Have her herd the goats for one year. Allot half a *seer* for her daily provisions. I tell you, dear, observe my commands! If you do not truly observe them, I shall shave your head.

The girl is a night-prowler, she has great faults. The planets will be appeased by her dishonor.\(^{43}\)

As one might guess, the forged letter soon would become evidence in proof of Lahana’s deceit, turn her stratagem against herself, and re-establish Dhanapati’s authority. Relying on it as a two-sided plot device, Mukunda’s poem reinforces the two assertions of patriarchal ideology that we have identified: that for women happiness and power in the marriage relation are in conflict, and that a woman by herself does not have the authority to bring dishonor upon a co-wife. Any married woman in Khullana’s jati should have had both honor and signs of that honor: ornaments of her hair, neck, arms, wrists, and ankles,
silk saris, comfortable quarters, and luxurious food. All these Lahana finally removed, by
force alone rather than by authority, leaving Khullana only the iron bangle that barely
indicated her married state, and a coarse flaxen cloth (khuya) to wear.44

Women’s Status Grades and Dress and Modesty Codes

It is necessary here to analyze the dress and modesty codes which Mukunda’s poem assumes, for Khullana was dishonored, in part, through the violation of proper dress and modesty codes for a woman of her jati. The coarse flaxen cloth given her in exchange for her sari covered only the lower body.45 An eighteenth-century version of Candimangal by Ramananda Yati suggests more directly that the short cloth (khadi) given her shamed Khullana by leaving her naked.46 Mukunda, who in contrast seems to have cared less about nudity of a woman’s upper body than did Ramananda Yati, locates the offense to Khullana more in the occupation of goatherd, her wandering in the forest, and the dangers of death and loss of jati to which she thereby was exposed.47 Still, after Khullana had returned from her first day of herding, when Lahana came out to give her a
meal, Khullana put her hands to her breast (*buke diya hat*), apparently in a self-conscious gesture of modesty.⁴⁸

There is evidence that, when Mukunda’s poem was written, in Bengal neither men nor women who labored in the fields usually wore garments on their upper bodies.⁴⁹ The dress and modesty codes which this poem assumes distinguish between those women who labored outside and whose upper bodies were uncovered in public, and those women who wore saris. Of course, as a goatherd Khullana also was given other articles of the ordinary costume of women who labored outside, including a basket-like hat (*dal*) to wear on her head, as well as the particular instrument of her new occupation, a cane stick (*chat*) for driving the goats.⁵⁰ Both the flaxen loincloth, the sign of violation of Khullana’s modesty, and the cane stick, the sign of her outside labor, would later serve as evidence of Lahana’s mistreatment of her co-wife.

In this story of a wealthy merchant’s family from the Rarh, we meet no women whose ordinary course of life required them to labor outside and to wear only a loincloth. It goes without saying that such women would have belonged only to the lowest jati. At
the lowest levels of the jati hierarchy in Mukunda’s world, the dharma of field laborers and
other ‘untouchable’ women inverted the dress and modesty code for high-jati women,
requiring the former to appear in public in a way that would have been immodest for the
latter.

Lahana forced Khullana to labor beyond the agricultural fields, in the uncultivated
‘forest’ used by villagers and townfolk as a common pasturage. This ‘forest’ is depicted
as a site of hunting, and Khullana is imagined in the forest as subject to hunting by
predatory animals as well as by men. Khullana also is described as having ‘cane in
hand and basket on head, like a mad person’ (pagal), and as wearing a ‘begger’s dress’
(kangaler bes). Mukunda’s poem suggests that below the lowest level of women who
labored outside there were women who were ‘mad’ or who had been reduced to begging.

Labor in the fields or, worse, in the ‘forest’ beyond them, and an inverted dress and
modesty code constituted social invisibility for women of the lowest jati status, and an
absence of personal identity almost equal to that of utter destitution and madness. The
sign of this social invisibility was a coarse cloth worn only on the lower body, the *khuya* or *khadi*.

The poem defines two other statuses and dress and modesty codes for women, and links each of them to distinctive locales. At the opposite end of the status hierarchy were ‘lineage wives’ (*kul’badhu*) of wealthy and high-jati families. We see lineage wives in the kitchens, sleeping rooms and courtyards of their affinal homes, and in the courtyards of their friends, but at least on the occasion of special celebrations we also see them in town and village lanes.\(^{55}\) Mukunda’s poem does not insist that wealthy wives of high status always should stay in seclusion. Neither is there mention in his poem of veiling the face. A strict modesty code for high jati women is contested in a later episode of the poem, when Khullana believed her son had disappeared, searched the village for him, and even addressed his Brahman teacher to find out news of him. On this occasion Lahana gossiped maliciously about her co-wife’s behavior when in public.\(^{56}\) As violations of a strict modesty code for high-jati women, Lahana emphasized not binding and covering the hair when in public,\(^{57}\) not being careful to cover the breasts before ‘commoners and elders’
(ganagarbita), and habitually visiting public places like the town market square (nagar catar) ‘dressed like a prostitute’. Khullana, however, effectively countered this gossip by asking: ‘What kind of anger is this, and from what kind of shame are you speaking out? Because in the society of Ujain it is well known what my intentions are and that I am a virtuous woman!’ For Mukunda a wife’s virtue was more important than strict observance of modesty codes.

Dubala, the household maidservant, belonged to a status midway between lineage wives and women who were outside laborers. Unlike lineage wives, she was sent outside the household on a variety of errands in the town. In particular, she performed the household’s marketing, and so went both to the town bazaar and to a local periodic market (hat). Attached to a wealthy household, Dubala wore saris; in fact, when she went to market, she wore one made of wild silk (tasar). Her status as a household servant was visibly different from those women of the lowest jati who labored outside. Still, a few details are meant to represent her relative immodesty, appropriate to her status below that of lineage wives: going to market, she chewed catechu to stain her lips red, and
vigorously swung her arms to show off her ornaments. Perhaps the public locale of her duties necessarily caused her behavior and status to approach those of the ‘public wives’ (bar badhu) who sold themselves in the market. Mukunda’s poem suggests no gossip about a dress and modesty code for household maidservants comparable to the gossip about the behavior in public of lineage wives. Their exclusion from such gossip, and their relaxed modesty code may have constituted a degree of social freedom, without the social invisibility of women who labored outside.

Women who had to work in the forest were subject to ‘hunting’ by wild animals and by human males. Female household servants regularly appeared in the public markets, and engaged in buying and selling as part of their duties. Perhaps themselves sold into service, they could be regarded as similar to prostitutes, who sold their own bodies to men. Finally, lineage wives in courtyards were given protection by men of their affinal families, to whom they themselves came as gifts in marriage. Seen comprehensively, the status hierarchy for women and the dress and modesty codes for each status grade are another permutation of the ‘scale of transactions’; for women were related to men by
hunting, or by buying and selling, or by the gift of protection in return for their gift in
marriage. In extraordinary circumstances lineage wives may have had to shift positions on
this status hierarchy; thus Khullana made the most extreme shift possible when she
became an outside laborer. We will see that when this was the case, according to
Mukunda’s poem, no dishonor should have been imputed to lineage wives, so long as their
virtue itself had not been compromised.

A Child-Bride’s Agency: Sexuality and Rhetoric

Like being hunted, offering *bhet*, petitioning, and receiving judgment and benefaction
is a subordinate role, and therefore one that is part of the poem’s feminine gender form.

Usually, the most valuable offering a woman can make to a man is that of her own body.

The same root, *bhet*, is used in the poem as a verb, *bheta*, meaning to meet and
welcome, or to give auspicious offerings to a superior. Dressing and ornamenting herself
in preparation to meet her husband was itself one form of a wife’s offering of *bhet* to her
husband. Moreover, following an offering of *bhet*, the art of rhetoric used in making a
petition to a male superior might include a woman’s sexuality and all the arts used to
enhance it, for powers of sexual attraction could be used to help secure a favorable response to her petition. For women, the art of rhetoric in a narrow sense and the arts of sexual attraction were complements in a larger rhetorical whole. In this section I argue that Mukunda’s poem tends to affirm Khullana’s sexuality while it diverts attention away from a potential for women’s agency based on mastery of rhetoric in a narrow sense.

Mukunda’s poem symmetrically represents the problem of Khullana’s dishonor, which arose because of her own incomplete wedding and her co-wife’s desire for both power and happiness in marriage; and the solution of this problem by the grace of the goddess Candi, by the re-imposition of Dhanapati’s authority, and by the completion of Khullana’s wedding. Left without recourse when Lahana stripped her of her wifely ornaments and forced her to herd the goats, Khullana learned to worship Candi. In return Candi rebuked and threatened Lahana, who restored her co-wife to a position of honor in the household. Summoned home by Candi, Dhanapati arranged for Khullana to feed his friends and relatives, thus completing one of the elements of the third day’s wedding rites hitherto not accomplished. Later that evening their lovemaking for the first time completed
Khullana’s incomplete wedding, and was the final step of Khullana’s transformation to a ‘lineage wife’. An erotically charged and beautiful description of their lovemaking ends the portion of the poem recited on the fifth night. Therefore, the plot resolves the conflict of this narrative, which had originated through Khullana’s hasty, ill-considered, and incomplete wedding, by divine intervention of the goddess, and by the sexual competence of a child bride.

Before the resolution of her problematic marriage, Khullana used sexuality and rhetoric in the emotional display of *abhiman* to insist that Dhanapati hear and judge her complaints against her elder co-wife. Using *abhiman*, a woman may insist on the importance of her honor to a man who has dishonored her, at the same time refusing his sexual advances, so that the man by whom she has been dishonored will have to hear and acknowledge his own wrong-doing. Successful use of *abhiman* thus depends on the sexual attraction felt for her by the very one who has dishonored her.

In the subsequent ‘trial’ Khullana proceeded as a plaintiff, detailing her charges and submitting direct evidence (*pratyaksa*) to support them: the cane staff she had used, the
flaxen loincloth she had worn, and most damning of all, the forged letter. Khullana did not simply accuse her co-wife of having mistreated and dishonored her. For rhetorical purposes, she also pretended to treat the letter as genuine, associated Dhanapati in a conspiracy to dishonor her, and impugned his character as judge:

> Whoever is an honest person, fearing no one at all, assigns punishments after discerning faults and virtues. But your method is to strike your wife by another’s hand, without having thus discerned. Everything of yours is contrary.67

When Lahana first had produced the letter, Khullana had inspected its signature and called it a forgery.68 By no means, therefore, was her rhetoric in this ‘trial’ a straightforward representation of the evidence. Rather, by the emotional display of abhiman, and by treating the letter as genuine she fashioned a position which put Dhanapati on the defensive.
Dhanapati responded in a masterful and very funny act of rhetoric in which motives of self-defense vied with those of seduction. He swore by Siva that the letter was Lahana’s forgery, and asked for Siva’s punishment if this were not the case. Not for the sake of punishment, however, did he ask her to put ‘ten thousand and one arrow [glances] to her eye-corners, and pierce the deer of his heart’. Rather, he assured her that she was a ‘lineage wife’ and ‘virtuous’ (punyaban), and he asked her to put aside her anger, to abandon (parihara) her abhiman, and to ‘bear him upon her two breasts across the [river] of the night’. As a further inducement, Dhanapati offered to allow Khullana to impose the same conditions of outside labor upon Lahana which she herself had endured.

Was this a responsibility which she properly could have accepted?

Khullana’s skill in rhetoric can be located in her awareness that her powers to persuade were enhanced by Dhanapati’s unsatisfied desire for her. Maintaining her abhiman, while ignoring both the offer to allow her to punish Lahana and the pleas for her embrace, Khullana replied with a song about her year long suffering while herding the goats: her exposure to sun, rain, and cold, to hunger and sleeplessness, and to all the
hazards and difficulties of herding. Nevertheless, the verse describing her eleventh month of suffering ends ambiguously:

In Caitra the swallow begs water from the raincloud,

Pairs of bees welter in the nectar of the lotus,

And love (madan) torments the limbs of man and wife.

My limbs were tormented by the fire in my belly.

Cruel the faults of my own fatality,

The god of fate cheated me, you were not at home.\(^7\)

Indeed the poem already has portrayed Khullana, when a goatherd, afflicted with springtime’s longing for union with her absent husband.\(^7\)

Subsequent arguments of this ‘trial’ take place between Dhanapati and Lahana, and resume a debate about the propriety of his having sexual relations with a child bride, a debate already begun between Lahana and Khullana. How we think about women’s use of
rhetoric in this poem must be colored by Lahana’s use of rhetoric, and by our opinions of Lahana’s character and motives. Lahana’s arguments also deflect attention from Khullana’s use of rhetoric, by returning to issues more directly concerned with sexuality as the ground for any feminine agency.

Lahana’s objections to Khullana’s lovemaking are opposed by the central role of Khullana’s sexuality in the poem’s plot and by the ways the poem’s eroticism was enjoyable for Bengali audiences. Moreover, Lahana’s own language invites the audience to discount her objections as hypocritical. Nevertheless, her two, somewhat different arguments deserve serious attention. The most interesting was directed to Khullana. In this context Lahana emphasized the merchant’s ‘merciless lust’, increased by the long period of separation, Khullana’s ignorance of the ‘arts of love’, and her physical immaturity.

You do not have the fault to enjoy the deep pleasure of eros (srngar). Great will be your sorrow on the ocean of eros. As the hare doing battle with an elephant, as the frog the snake catches, as the lion, lord
of beasts, held in the elephant’s trunk, as the fly the little monkey catches,
as the rat the mongoose catches, and as the fish the kite takes, so, co-wife,
is your lovemaking.\textsuperscript{74}

The ‘fault’ (\textit{dos}) which Khullana lacked was that she had not begun to menstruate.\textsuperscript{75}

Lahana argued that because Khullana was physically immature, lovemaking for her would be like an act of hunting or battle, and she would be its victim and suffer injury. Khullana responded, in a speech which authoritatively uses divine examples from the Puranas, that wives do not die from their husbands’ lovemaking, no matter how great the male’s ‘strength’ (\textit{bal}) or ‘energy’ (\textit{pratap}).\textsuperscript{76} Precisely because Mukunda’s poem both discounts Lahana’s argument by the judgments of self-interest and hypocrisy which it leads us to make of her character, and then refutes her through the ‘voice’ of the immature girl Lahana claimed to protect from being a victim, I suggest that Mukunda did not invent Lahana’s argument. Rather, it seems to me likely that Lahana’s argument echoes women’s objections to pre-pubertal sex with child brides in Mukunda’s society, so that
refuting it had a hegemonic purpose in and for his society, as well as one within the plot of his poem.

Raghunandana Bhattacaryya, Mukunda’s near contemporary and then the foremost smṛti commentator in Bengal, had authorized in the Samskaratattva a couple’s first sexual relations after rituals of the third night of the wedding, rather than later, after the bride’s first menstrual period and the rituals of the ‘second wedding’. In this opinion he differed from contemporary non-Bengali commentators on Dharmasastra. For example, Kamalakara Bhatta forbade intercourse before a wife’s first menstrual period because she would cause a ‘waste of semen’. In the late nineteenth century, avoiding a possibility of intercourse with pre-pubertal brides became the most important reason for supporting the Age of Consent Bill of 1891. But in debate about the Bill only a few Bengali women spoke in support of protecting immature brides from injury by raising the minimum age of marriage. It is all the more important, therefore, that we give due notice to Lahana’s argument that intercourse before puberty would injure Khullana, as an argument that in the late sixteenth century may have belonged to women’s culture in Bengal.
Lahana’s second objection to lovemaking with a child bride was directed to her husband, to whom she used the insulting tui forms for ‘you’. Intending to put him on the defensive, as Khullana already had done, she brought a new complaint against Dhanapati.

This accusation approached, but did not quite repeat, the ‘waste of semen’ argument of Dharmasstra commentators who opposed sexual relations with child brides. We can note that in any proper legal proceeding, Lahana’s accusation summarily would have been rejected as improper, for a defendant should not be allowed to raise a counter claim (pratyabhiyoga) as long as she has not answered the charge of the plaintiff, and it is so rejected in Mukunda’s poem. Lahana’s failure to follow correct legal procedures probably would have confirmed suspicions in a male audience that women are likely to abuse their rhetorical powers. In any case, Dhanapati simply handed Lahana the letter, declared it a forgery, and dismissed her, with a threat that he would beat her with his shoe and break her teeth.

Already found guilty, Lahana finally turned her attention to Khullana, by charging her with shameless displays of sexuality. Lahana’s speech intimately links shame with sexual
desire and pleasure, and asserts a modesty code for pre-pubertal brides which denies any proper occasion for expression of sexual feelings. Mukunda’s poem, however, apparently assumes that a child bride’s sexual feelings for her husband are natural and proper.\textsuperscript{84} It constructs a narrative of divine and human agency based upon Khullana’s sexual desirability and competence, the divine intercession to which she gains access as a devotee of the goddess, and her rhetorical and negotiating skills. In very difficult circumstances, the child bride of this narrative was able to restore her own honor, but the narrative consistently subordinates her rhetorical virtues to her sexuality as the ground for Khullana’s successful agency.

Jati Councils and Trials by Ordeal

New and more serious allegations against Khullana were raised soon after the celebration of her first menstrual period, on the occasion of Dhanapati’s father’s \textit{sraddha}. With them we turn from patriarchal authority, partially and occasionally shared by the senior female in the family, to the authority of jati councils. Mukunda’s poem admits the authority of jati councils to decide disputes regarding jati status, denying that authority to
the Hindu raja of Dhanapati’s locality. But it makes their judgments problematic, and

criticizes excessive and egotistical concerns about the honor of women. At the same time

Mukunda’s poem affirms the agency of elite Hindu women in contesting unjust decisions of
jati councils, by asserting their competence to undergo trials by ordeal. When Khullana
undertakes trials by ordeal, her role in them may be a ‘feminine’ substitute for a
‘masculine’ role of fighting in battle: ultimately in both cases one’s life may be staked for
the sake of honor. But as the result of divine intervention by Candi, Khullana triumphs in
her ordeals without suffering self-mutilation or self-sacrifice.

This new episode begins with a dispute about honor among Dhanapati’s fellow
Gandhabanik merchants. Dhanapati had invited one hundred Brahmans and the merchants
of his jati to join in his father’s sraddha. Following the rite, Dhanapati gave presents
(sampradan) to the Brahmans, including gold, silver, cloths and cows, ‘fulfilling the hopes
of everyone, whatever he desires’. After carefully honoring the Brahmans, in the order
corresponding to their own well-ordered ranking, Dhanapati filled golden platters with
sandalwood paste and garlands and undertook to ‘worship’ with these lesser gifts his own relatives. But unlike the Brahmans’ ranking, theirs was not well ordered.

Dhanapati selected Cad, the Gandhabanik merchant whose story is told in *Manasamangal*, to worship first as ‘chief of the lineage’, and when challenged he defended this choice by the argument that Cad had ‘seven storehouses of silver rupees in his outer yard’. An uproar followed, for honor should not have been made a function of wealth.

The complaining merchants asserted that Cad had behaved basely and had been dishonored in his dispute with the goddess Manasa; and Cad defended himself—improperly by legal standards—by lodging counter accusations against his most prominent accusers.

Dhanapati himself could not escape the mud-slinging. An elder merchant replied to a fine speech recalling Cad’s destitution at the hands of Manasa as follows: ‘One who is destitute has (brought) no shame to his jati. But a wife who herds goats in the forest—that is a fault!’

At the end of the *sraddha* rite the Gandhabanik merchants would have been invited to partake of Khullana’s cooking; those who felt slighted by Dhanapati’s choice of Cad as
chief of the lineage implied by allegations against Khullana that they would partake of
Khullana’s imputed ‘faults’ by accepting food cooked by her.\textsuperscript{88} They refused to do so,
unless Khullana could prove her ‘virtue’ by trial by ordeal.

For precedent the merchants cited Lord Rama and had a Brahman recite the story
of Sita’s return and Rama’s rejection of her. In this retelling Rama said to Sita, ‘I know
you as one knows a deer that has eaten food from the hands of a tiger’;\textsuperscript{89} that is, survival
in such circumstances involves a presumption of guilt. Similarly, no particular offense
would be charged against Khullana, beyond the indisputable fact that she had ‘wandered’
in the forest. It could be presumed that someone had taken advantage of her: ‘Fish of a
drying pond, and the wandering of a woman: if one gets gold and silver in the deep
forest, who leaves them aside if he gets them effortlessly?’\textsuperscript{90} Moreover, in this retelling of
Rama’s story, Rama himself ‘mercifully’ invited Sita: ‘Take the Fire Trial, if it is your
desire to stay with me, and if you are a virtuous woman (\textit{sati}).’\textsuperscript{91}

We may well pause to wonder whose \textit{Ramayana} this is.\textsuperscript{92} It is not Valmiki’s, nor
even the familiar Bengali version of Krttibas, for in both of these \textit{Ramayanas}, without any
‘invitation’ Sita herself proposed to enter fire to commit suicide, and thus to remove her ‘dishonor’.\textsuperscript{93} Worse, although their own altered version implies only that it was the prerogative of a husband to require ordeals of his wife, the merchants have asserted that prerogative not for Dhanapati but for themselves. Immediately afterward, they also suggested an alternative: if Khullana would not take the test, Dhanapati should pay a fine to them of a hundred thousand rupees.\textsuperscript{94} Of course, both the slipperiness of the terms of their argument and the disclosure of their greed can be enjoyed as a satire of any pretensions of merchants to honor.

Khullana’s father, naturally in attendance, proposed yet a third alternative, an appeal to King Vikramkesari, the Hindu \textit{raja} of Dhanapati’s locality, to ‘make a proper judgment’ in this dispute. Because we already have every reason to doubt that the merchants themselves could render a ‘proper judgment’, this alternative must seem attractive, but it was rejected by the merchants, for the reason that although a king may ‘take’ one’s wealth and life, only relatives (\textit{bandhujan}) may both ‘give and take’ one’s jati. For failing to recognize this basic division of authority and so proposing to ‘make relatives suffer royal
power’, Khullana’s father was called ‘mad with royal power’ and ‘conceited with royal
vainglory’. According to the complaining merchants, if relatives are ‘affronted and angry’,
even a king must withdraw his authority to punish.\textsuperscript{95} Again one may enjoy this as a satire
of merchants, and read their fine argument ironically, understanding that they themselves
have become ‘mad with royal power’. Mukunda, however, presents no counter-argument
to their position.

The alternative of paying a fine was rejected by Khullana. Khullana argued that the
complaining merchants were motivated by greed, that quarrels and rivalries were inevitably
a part of the Gandhabanik merchants’ assemblies, that as an ‘important person’ (\textit{bara lok})
Dhanapati would continue to be the target of such quarrels, and that therefore payments of
money never would suffice to remove the allegations of her dishonor. Against the
possibility of such dishonor, Khullana also proposed suicide exactly as Sita had.\textsuperscript{96}

Conflicts about honor must be resolved by ‘tests’ (\textit{pariksa}), that is to say, by the ‘divine
evidence’ (\textit{divyatattva}) of ordeals, and if they are not so resolved, the only honorable
alternative is suicide. Khullana had to undertake trials by ordeal both for the sake of her
own honor, and for the sake of her husband’s wealth. In Mukunda’s poem, therefore, one sees among Gandhabanik merchants a fetishism of signs of honor, making honor and its signs independent of political responsibility; a rather chaotic disagreement about proper rank; their refusal to allow the local Hindu king to decide questions of jati for them, as opposed to questions of wealth and life; and their greed for the payment of a fine as a substitute for undergoing ordeals.

We may infer from Raghunandana’s practical treatise on them that ordeals then were used in Bengal to judge disputes ‘for matters not to be decided by human evidence’; that is, not by documents and witnesses. Further, Raghunandana, unlike most other commentators on Dharmasastra, argued that ordeals were permissible even when ‘human evidence’ was available, provided both parties to the dispute agreed. These two provisions opened a wide arena for the use of ordeals.

By the rules of legal procedure Khullana could not have been expected to use human evidence to establish a negative claim. Legal procedure for ‘human evidence’ specified that the burden of proof belonged with the party seeking to ‘claim some positive
or affirmative point’; in this case with the plaintiffs, who had claimed that Khullana somehow must have sinned in the forest.101 ‘Divine evidence’, on the other hand, was thought to establish both positive and negative claims. The ordinary procedure, therefore, was for the defendant to undergo the ordeal, to establish a general, rather than a specific innocence; and ordinarily the plaintiff in return assumed an obligation to ‘partake in the punishment ordered for the matter under dispute (if he is proved wrong)’.102 ‘Divine evidence’ could be advantageous to a defendant seeking to establish the falsity of non-specific allegations or of multiple accusers. Nor, in the case of multiple accusers, was it absolutely necessary for them to agree to be punished if the ordeal should prove their accusations false.103 In Khullana’s case, however, all these ordinary procedures were contradicted by the ‘general rule’ that women were not supposed to undergo ordeals. In disputes between a man and a woman, the man should have undergone the ordeal, regardless of who was the defendant. Raghunandana himself allowed only one kind of ordeal for women, the ‘balance’, and that only when both parties to the dispute were women.104 The practical intent of so limiting women’s competence to undergo trials by
ordeal might have been to limit general, irrefutable allegations of dishonor to those which complaining men were willing to prove by undergoing ordeals themselves. Had the complaining merchants known and respected these judgments of Raghunandana, perhaps they would have dismissed the very possibility of ordeals! But historical records of ordeals show that women did undergo them to re-establish their honor when it had been impugned.\textsuperscript{105}

With the assistance of the goddess, Khullana therefore undertook a series of increasingly more dangerous ordeals, all but the first of which followed the procedures which Raghunandana outlined. Why a series? In each case after her success the complaining merchants alleged that the ordeal could be defeated ‘if she has cast a spell’ \textit{(barile)}. Their expectation seems to have been that a more dangerous ordeal would be harder to subvert by magic power, and therefore more conclusive. In the last of this series Khullana carried a red-hot piece of iron in her cupped hands for a distance of sixteen feet, and then threw it into a heap of grass, which was ignited by the iron’s heat. No burns
appeared on her hands, but even this ‘divine evidence’ did not satisfy the complaining merchants.\textsuperscript{106}

The ‘House of Lacquer’ Ordeal, Divine Intervention, and \textit{Sati}

The merchants insisted again on the authority of what they claimed had been Rama’s and Sita’s example. Khullana should undergo the ‘test’ (\textit{pariksa}) which Sita had passed, a test they began to describe as ‘entering’ the ‘house of lacquer’. Of course, this also would be a fire ordeal: the lacquer house would be set alight with Khullana inside.

Their argument has three contexts to which we briefly must allude.

The first is the story of how Duryodhana attempted to murder the five Pandavas by luring them into a ‘house of lacquer’, the fire trap which he prepared for their residence in Varanavata.\textsuperscript{107} By (falsely) linking the motif of a ‘house of lacquer’ to Sita’s ordeal, the merchants inadvertently reveal their own intent, as murderous as Duryodhana’s. The second context is the story of Sita’s rejection and her fire ordeal, already recounted. In the merchants’ rhetoric the ‘house of lacquer’ replaces the funeral pyre which Sita mounted to reclaim her honor. By insisting on the authority of Sita’s example to impose
their ‘house of lacquer’ ordeal, the merchants exceeded the ordeals allowed by smrti; in fact, Sita’s fire ordeal does not meet the ritual requirements for ‘lawful ordeals’ set out in Raghunandana’s treatise, nor is it mentioned therein. Of course, this ‘excessive’ fire ordeal also serves as a contrast to the ‘lawful ordeals’ already portrayed, by which Khullana already should have proved her virtue.

The third context is the story of Sati, divine model of a virtuous and perfectly devoted wife. In immediate succession the word sati is used three times in the episode to call Khullana a virtuous wife. These uses of sati recall the story of Sati, divine daughter of Daksa, a story the poem itself already has recounted during the first day’s recitation.

As related by Mukunda, Sati’s story emphasizes suicide as a means of preserving honor: Daksa, Sati’s father, refused to invite her husband Siva to his sacrifice; and Sati in response decided to commit her body to destruction in its internal fire by means of yogic meditation. Mukunda also emphasizes ‘egotism’ and its exaggerated and excessive concerns for wealth and external signs of honor in his retelling. So, justifying her suicide, Sati argued that by calling Siva’s poverty dishonorable, her father had become ‘utterly
stupefied by wealth’ (*sampade bimurhamati*). She resolved to punish him and to take
revenge for his ‘egotism’ (*ahankar*) by taking her own life.\textsuperscript{110}

Taken together, all three stories suggest a theme criticizing ‘murderous’ suicide:
suicide that has been coerced by false, one-sided or unproved accusations of dishonor.
When more ordinary means failed, only suicide could refute such accusations by its
insistence that honor was more valuable than life. The emphasis given by Mukunda’s
poem to this theme suggests that women in his society commonly found it necessary at
least to threaten suicide to refute allegations of dishonor.

I think Khullana’s ordeal in the ‘house of lacquer’ almost calls to mind as well the
ritual of *sati* burning, the immolation of a virtuous widow on her husband’s funeral pyre, or
on a fire kindled at some later time to substitute for it. Was Sita’s fiery trial, the text the
merchants claimed as their authority, already associated with and used to justify immolation
of the *sati*?\textsuperscript{111} In any case, Mukunda’s description of the burning of the ‘house of lacquer’
with Khullana inside may recall ritual immolation within a funeral pyre, which sometimes
was constructed so that the woman entered rather than mounted it.\textsuperscript{112} Nevertheless,
Dhanapati had not died, the ‘house of lacquer’ was not a funeral pyre, and Khullana did not commit suicide, but triumphed. The episode does not represent a widow’s ritual immolation, but, like Siva’s rampage following Sati’s death, it may be a systematic reversal of the motifs of satī burning. Representing a triumph that could not have occurred in ordinary life, is such a reversal only ‘useful for inscribing women’s ideological self-debasement?’

Earlier in the poem women twice had approached self immolation, but they were allowed to avoid it through the mercy of men who refused to follow blindly a martial code of revenge. When the leader of the army of Kalinga finally captured Kalketu, he promised Kalketu’s wife Phullara that Kalketu would not be executed, so that Phullara would not immolate herself. Later, Kalketu, returning home to be invested as a raja subordinate to the king of Kalinga, met on the way the many women whose husbands he had slain in battle. They were preparing for the rite of anumarana (entering a pyre built after disposal of their husbands’ bodies), but he felt overwhelmed by pity for them, prayed to Candi, and she stopped their preparations and raised their husbands from the dead. Although
Mukunda did not explicitly criticize sati burning, he narrated ways to avoid it, by providing ‘merciful’ alternatives to the martial code of revenge, a code complemented and reinforced by the self-immolation of widows of the defeated.

The ‘house of lacquer’ ordeal explicitly represents Khullana’s triumph in her suicidal ordeal by divine grace, secured by Khullana’s worship of Candi. In fact, all of her actions to restore her honor, from the point when she learned to worship Candi while herding goats in the forest, were preceded by worship, and throughout she had been surrounded by a nimbus of divine power. Until the ordeal of the ‘house of lacquer’, however, Khullana’s actions might have remained within the expansive limits of human agency, as Mukunda’s audience understood those limits. But only divine power could explain her triumph in this ultimate ordeal.

As in other episodes, here Mukunda’s poem recommends human and institutional changes to solve a problem which arose out of flawed human agency. After Khullana’s triumph, the merchants fell at her feet and begged her to forgive and not to curse them. They recognized her as a sati, a perfectly virtuous wife, and as more than human. More
important, they agreed to receive her cooking without any signs of honor and ‘at once’
(ek’bare); that is, without the distinctions of rank constituted by sequential distributions.\textsuperscript{116}

Of course, the poem thereby teaches us the power of Candi’s intercession. It also
explicitly represents a lesson taught the complaining merchants. The merchants
recognized that their unspecific and unproved allegations against Khullana, and their
repeated refusal to accept the ‘divine evidence’ of lawful ordeals were ‘sins of egotism’
(ahankar pap), sins that might provoke a sati’s curse.\textsuperscript{117} One moral of this episode
complements that of the former episodes; it portrays the humbling of men who have
insisted on dishonoring a woman regardless of reason and evidence, and who thereby
have put her life at risk.

Mukunda’s text expanded the agency of women by not questioning their
competence to undergo trials by ordeal. At the same time it registered discomfort with
false accusations against women and with the potential for ordeals to result in ‘murderous’
suicide. To obviate this potential, however, it proposed no changes in the way chaste
women were signs of patriarchal honor, nor in the competence of jati councils to decide
disputes about a woman’s honor. Instead it proposed replacing the ‘fetishism’ of rank in Dhanapati’s jati council with a rule of solidarity and equality, so that, after having been humbled, everyone might agree to eat ‘at once’.

Conclusion

This essay argues that Mukunda’s Candimangal did not constitute gender by means of binary, opposite, and mutually exclusive terms. Instead in Mukunda’s text masculine and feminine gender roles were imagined as multiple and ranked within each gender form.

Much of Mukunda’s narrative is structured by a ‘scale of transactions’ which defines and genders economic roles within a household economy. The scale of transactions includes ‘hunting’, ‘buying and selling’, and the gift of bhet in exchange for benefaction from a superior. Roles in the scale of transactions are gendered because more powerful roles are more masculine ones. ‘Hunting’ was a more masculine gender role, offering bhet and petitioning for assistance was a more feminine role, and ‘buying and selling’ were roles filled by men or women as circumstances required or allowed. We noticed a permutation of this scale of transactions in the roles within the merchant’s household when Dhanapati
had to journey abroad on the king’s business, and became something like a warrior, and
his senior wife assumed management of the merchant’s household economy, and his junior
wife became vulnerable to hunting as a goatherd. Both men and women had the capacity
to shift to new roles, and for women, the capacity to shift to roles ordinarily assumed by
men was an important aspect of their agency.

This essay raises questions for further research. Was this poem’s assumption of
multiple, ranked and overlapping gender roles for each gender form common to middle
period debates about gender throughout South Asia? Did Indian reformers and nationalists
begin to use binary, opposite and mutually exclusive terms to define gender categories
instead? Gender categories are suggested, for example, by the series of gendered
dichotomies which Partha Chatterjee has identified as the ‘ideological framework within
which nationalism answered the women’s question’: material/spiritual, outer/inner,
world/home and Western/Indian. Or did Indian reformers and nationalists continue to
use scalar gender forms, by which ‘buying and selling’ could be gendered as either
masculine or feminine? Scalar gender forms might better explain both the entry of Bengali
women into middle-class employment, and the very limited roles which were opened to
them; for it hardly seems true that ‘in this construct [the material/spiritual dichotomy]
there are no specific signs which distinguish men from women in the material world’.\textsuperscript{119}

Another permutation of the scale of transactions can be seen in the status hierarchy
of women assumed by the poem, for women might be related to men by being hunted, by
buying and selling, and by being given in marriage. Mukunda’s poem assumed inverted
dress and modesty codes for women who labored in the fields, codes which constituted
social invisibility for laboring women. It assumed relaxed modesty codes for maidservants
who did the marketing for elite families, allowing them relatively public roles and relatively
immodest behavior. It assumed strict dress and modesty codes for lineage wives, but,
unlike in north India, lineage wives were not required either to be secluded or to veil their
faces in public. Moreover, Mukunda’s poem suggested that women should be allowed to
adopt more lenient dress and modesty codes, if circumstances made such a shift
necessary, without being dishonored. At the same time it portrayed intense gossip about
the behavior of lineage wives in public places, gossip which in social life must have
encouraged strict seclusion. Mukunda himself favored an emphasis on virtue rather than on such external signs of honor. But the gossip which his poem portrayed may be taken as a sign of contested modesty codes for lineage wives. His poem did not represent similar gossip about the conduct of maidservants or women who labored outside. They already were excluded from the debates about women’s dress and modesty codes which his poem portrays. Mukunda’s poem helps us see and ask about an important subsequent change. When, where and how laboring women came to wear sari should be as important a topic for social historians as the introduction of new dress codes for middle class Bengali women in the nineteenth century.¹²⁰

In Mukunda’s Candimangal female characters, like male characters, were given capacities of reason, will and action. Moreover, both women and men could learn to worship the goddess, and both could acquire by devotion a nimbus of divine power which allowed them to transcend ordinary human limitations. Nevertheless, in this poem the ordinary capacity of women to act tends to be located in offering bhêt to a superior and in petitioning for benefaction. Women’s rhetorical skills in turn were both linked to and limited
by their sexuality and the sexual attraction men felt for them. As an example of a wife’s
capacity to act within her affinal family, this poem celebrated the sexual competence of a
child bride, not her mastery of the art of rhetoric. Was women’s use of rhetoric usually
represented as without virtue, or less important than her sexuality? Further research is
needed to clarify links between the art of rhetoric and feminine gender roles in Bengali
culture. Finally, because Mukunda’s poem denied any legitimacy to Lahana’s argument
that pre-pubertal sex is dangerous to child brides, I suggest that arguments like hers
probably were a persistent feature of women’s culture in Mukunda’s time. This suggestion
also requires further research.

Mukunda’s poem gave to jati councils sole authority to decide disputes about jati
status and family honor, denying that authority even to local Hindu rajas. Without a raja to
judge for them and to link their rank to royal service, in this poem Dhanapati’s
Gandhabanik jati continually were engaged in disputes about the rank implicit in their own
sequential distribution of signs of honor. In such disputes the honor of a family’s women
was equated with the honor of the family itself. In Khullana’s case multiple and
nonspecific allegations of dishonor were irrefutable by human means. The ‘divine evidence’ of ordeals was necessary.

_smrti_ commentators had argued that ordeals should be undergone by the one upon whom the burden of proof would lie in an ordinary trial (ordinarily the plaintiff), unless the parties agreed otherwise. Raghunandana further had argued that women were competent to undergo no ordeals except the ordeal of the balance, and the balance should be used only in cases of disputes between women. Without noticing either of these arguments, Mukunda’s poem asserted the competence of women to establish their honor in jati councils by the ‘divine evidence’ of trials by ordeal, and by the divine assistance of the goddess. Whose account of women’s competence in ordeals reflected Bengali social practice, Raghunandana’s narrow one or Mukunda’s expansive one?

A woman’s suicide for the sake of honor could be seen as a kind of ordeal. Directly in the case of suicide, and perhaps obliquely in the case of _sati_ burning, Mukunda’s poem registered discomfort with fraudulent and escalating allegations made by men, and with the resulting pressure upon women to undergo suicidal ‘ordeals’. It
proposed, however, no changes in the way chaste women were signs of patriarchal honor, or in the competence of jati councils to decide disputes about a woman’s honor. Instead, Mukunda’s poem proposed solidarity and equality within Dhanapati’s jati council to minimize their disputes about honor, after they had been humbled by Khullana’s triumph.

In this way also it supported the institutions of patriarchy which it marginally had criticized.

1997) pp. 7-12.


4See ‘Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier: Kalketu’s Story in Mukunda’s *Candimangal*, in this volume, and ‘Battle and Self-Sacrifice in a Bengali Hero’s Epic: Lau Sen’s Quest to be a *Raja* in *Dharmamangal*, forthcoming.

5Uma Chakravarti, ‘Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Das*?’ in *Recasting Women*, pp. 27-87.


7I have cited throughout as CM the following edition: Kabikankan Mukunda-biracita, *Candimangal*, Sukumar Sen sampadita (Nay Dilli: Sahitya Akademi, 1975). For variant

This is a much shorter text, and its readings, when they differ, are frequently simpler than those of Sen’s edition. I also have consulted *Candimangal: Mukundaram Cakrabarti biracita*, bhumika o sampadana Pancanan Mandal (Kal’kata: Bharabi, 1992).


9Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay summarizes the controversies about Mukunda’s dates; see *Madhayyuger Baml Sahityer Tathya o Kalakram* (Kalikata: Bharati Buk Stal, 1993), pp. 121-35. Sen (‘Bhumika’, in CM, pp. 28-29) argues for a date of 1555/56 when Mukunda’s poem first was sung; most other scholars favor a date towards the end of the century.

1 (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1978), pp. 60-2 lists more than 60 dated and complete manuscripts, and more than two hundred undated and/or partial manuscripts. For a discussion of Mukunda’s influence on later authors of Candimangal, see Asutos Bhattacarya, Bamlia Mangalakabyer Itihas, sastha samskaran (Kalikata: A. Mukharji and Co. Private Limited, 1975), p. 540.

Sen, ‘Bhumika’, in CM, pp. 19-24, discusses the more certain information about the poet’s life which is distributed among signature lines in his poem, and the much less certain information to be found in an account of his life, included in some MSS as an explanation of how he came to compose the poem. This account is at CM, pad 6, pp. 3-4; variants are provided in the appendix, ‘Pathantor o mantabya’, pp. 310-13.


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16 CM, pad 73, p. 44.

17 For example, Phullara ‘sells baskets of ivory tusks at wholesale as peasants sell radishes’. Some passages indicate the ‘social’ nature of demand: horn players buy the horns of wild buffalo; boys buy tiger claws; pilgrim sannyasins dressed in ocher garments buy tiger skins; and Brahmans buy rhinoceros horns to make ancestral offerings.

Nevertheless, the scale of Kalketu’s own consumption of the animals is heroic; see CM,
pad 74, 75, pp. 44-5.

18 CM, pad 73, p. 44.

19 CM, pad 92, p. 54. *Siuli* is *Nyctanthes arbor tristis*.

20 Phullara ‘begged a loan’ [*magila udhar*] of two measures of rice, promising to repay it the next day, but she also received a ‘gift’ of parched rice. See CM, pad 92, p. 54.

21 Important examples are: Kalketu gave royal favors after receiving *bhet* from Bharu Datta, who petitioned to become his ‘minister’, CM pad 128, p. 76; Kalketu gave tax free land to other Kayasthas after they have given him *bhet*, pad 134, p. 79; and the king of Simhala did not give permission for the exchange of tribute goods, despite the receipt of *bhet* from Dhanapati, pad 361, p. 203.

22 CM, pad 197, p. 115, Khullana’s mother to her husband: ‘You have not considered these words, that in a house where Lahana is co-wife there are the same
customs as where a tigress has eaten. But blind in judgment, you have bound her feet to her neck, and have given away Khulana the deer, as bhet.’

23See ““Tribute Exchange” and the Liminality of Foreign Merchants in Mukunda’s Candimangal,’ in this volume. To indicate Dhanapati’s new status as a royal minister, the king gave him ‘a horse to mount, armor and a two edged dagger’, as well as money for investment in trade and ornaments for his body; see CM, pad 331, p. 188. Stay-at-home merchants are called ‘wives’ at pad 329, p. 188.

24While it is clear that Lahana assumed this role, the poem does not explicitly say that Dhanapati deputed to her more than responsibility for taking care of her co-wife. Compare CM, pad 221, p. 128 and pad 231, p. 133, the forged letter ostensibly from Dhanapati: ‘The responsibility of my household falls upon you, dear’.


The status of Gandhabaniks has been contested especially in the period of the censuses by caste. I give the view of Brahmans; see History of Bengal, Vol 1, Hindu Period, ed. R.C. Majumdar (Patna: N.V. Publications, 1971; 1st pub. 1943), p. 573.

Contrast The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman according to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan, introduction and translation by I. Julia Leslie (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).


Unfortunately, in his haste her father also paid insufficient attention to unfavorable astral conjunctions for the date of the wedding. See CM, pad 204, p. 118.

CM, pad 212, pp. 122-3. The text makes no mention of wedding rites for this day, beyond stating that Dhanapati’s relatives gave the new couple ‘wedding presents’ (jautuk), and he in turn feasted them and distributed gifts to them; but nothing more would
have been necessary for a wedding to a second wife. For rites performed with a first wife of a twice-born couple, see Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 44-50.


34Inden and Nicholas, *Kinship*, pp. 50-1.

35CM, *pad* 221, 222, p. 128.


37Compare Janaki Nair, ‘On the Question of Agency’, p. 93. We never are told Dubala’s jati.

38CM, *pad* 225, pp. 130.


40CM, *pad* 228, pp. 131-2.
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43CM, *pad* 231, pp. 133-4. ‘Half a seer’ was approximately one pound of dry grain.


45See CM, *pad* 287, p. 163, where Khullana calls it *khuya dhuti*, a flaxen loincloth.

See also the illustration labeled ‘*Dhire dhire rama laiya chagal, Ram’jay-samskaraner citra*’, CM, facing p. 259. Khullana, wearing a loincloth and a small short cloth over her shoulders herds the goats. Below it, an illustration from the same source shows Bhabani, the goddess disguised as an old Brahman woman, wearing sari.


‘Give me a cloth, elder sister, and prevent my shame’ [*bastra diya kara didi lajja nibaran*].
Khadi, the term here translated ‘loincloth’, is defined both by its coarseness and by its small size.

47CM, *pad* 253, pp. 145-6, Candi to Lahana.


51For a description of Khullana’s route through agricultural fields, and then across the Ajay River to the forest, see CM, *pad* 238, p. 137.


53CM, *pad* 238, p. 137; and *pad* 253, p. 145, the goddess (Parbati) to Lahana.
For a more general discussion of the relation between madness and the inability of the destitute to regulate interactions between self and environment, see Deborah P. Bhattacharyya, *Pagalami: Ethnopsychiatric Knowledge in Bengal* (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1986), pp. 149-66.

For a conspicuous example, see the women’s rites celebrating Khullana’s ‘second wedding’ following her first menstrual period, CM, *pad* 296, 297, pp. 168-9.

See CM, *pad* 393, 396, pp. 218-20. In a seventeenth century version of *Candimangal* from Chittagong, however, she also insists upon seclusion of lineage wives in courtyards. See Dvija Ramadeb biracita, *Abhayamangal*, Asutos Das sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1957), p. 303, Lahana’s complaint to Khullana: ‘Which lineage wives go outside the courtyard? But when one explains, you don’t understand the facts’.

CM, *pad* 396, p. 220; Khullana’s hair is described by the opposite term, *adur*, unbound and uncovered.
Compare CM, *pad* 265, p. 152, Dubala falsely describing Khullana’s behavior to Lahana: ‘With commonfolk and elders looking, she doesn’t put a cloth to her breast’. The line is repeated by Lahana to Dhanapati, *pad* 291, p. 165; and the accusation is made absolute after Khullana searches the town for her son, *pad* 396, p. 220: ‘She does not [ever] put a cloth upon her breast’.

The clearest expression of a great difference in status between household maidservants and outside laborers is found in Dvija Ramadeb, *Abhayamangal*, p. 153, Khullana to Lahana: ‘I cannot, elder sister, I cannot herd goats. Put aside your anger, keep me in the house, and I will do the work of a maidservant’.

Dubala’s marketing is described at CM, *pad* 271, pp. 154-5.

CM, *pad* 262, p. 150: Dubala to Khullana on Dhanapati’s arrival: ‘Take a vase of
auspicious water to offer [bhetibare] to the merchant’. See also pad 265, p. 152, Dubala to Lahana: ‘She goes to meet [bhetibare] the merchant without your permission’. In both cases Khullana’s special dress and ornaments are described.

64CM, pad 293, p. 166.


66For other examples of abhiman see: CM, pad 203, pp. 117-18, Lahana to Dhanapati; and pad 296, p. 168, again Lahana to Dhanapati.

67CM, pad 286, p. 162.

68CM, pad 233, p. 134.

69CM, pad 288, pp. 163-4.

70CM, pad 288, p. 163: kuler banita tumi kulabati jaya. This statement implies that Khullana’s sons will be recognized as sons of the lineage because she comes from a good
lineage herself, her conduct has been without flaw, and she has been properly married.

71CM, *pad* 289, p. 165.

72CM, *pad* 241-5, pp. 139-41.

73CM, *pad* 279, p. 159: ‘Listen friend for life [*praner saj*], I speak to you without deceit [*akapate*], I know about our lord’. One must recall that Lahana’s forged letter earlier had been described as a ‘deceptive stategem’ [*kapat prabandh*]; CM, *pad* 231, p. 133.

74CM, *pad* 280, pp. 159-60.

75Mention of this event is at CM, *pad* 293, p. 166: *ayas alas ghume, premalape basadhame, kutuhale gela ek mas/ sadhu sange sahabase, purus-paras’rase, svayambhu kusum parakas/ /* [In exhaustion, lethargy and sleep, in conversations of love and an abode of perfume—thus one month passed in pleasure. In dwelling with the merchant, and by the nectar of a man’s touch, her self-born flower appeared.]

P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5 vols. in 8, 2nd edn. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968-75) 2, part 1, p. 446, fn. 1159, citing Kamalakara Bhatta’s *Nirmayasindhu* (dated 1612). Kane summarily rejects the idea that child marriages ever were consummated before puberty: ‘Besides it must be remembered that when marriages of girls of tender years took place they were purely a sacrament. There was no question of consummation which took place only after puberty’.

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78P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5 vols. in 8, 2nd edn. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968-75) 2, part 1, p. 446, fn. 1159, citing Kamalakara Bhatta’s *Nirmayasindhu* (dated 1612). Kane summarily rejects the idea that child marriages ever were consummated before puberty: ‘Besides it must be remembered that when marriages of girls of tender years took place they were purely a sacrament. There was no question of consummation which took place only after puberty’.
Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 170; Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 126-9. On the other hand, the way Mukunda framed Lahana’s argument was similar in one way to masculine debate on both sides about the Age of Consent Bill. Lahana also denied Khullana a voice in ‘consent’, by making her suitability for marital intercourse a function only of her physical maturity.

CM, *pad* 290, p. 165: ‘You play upon an [unopened] flower bud... You are like a blind and greedy bee that sits on a silk-cotton tree, having failed to discern its nectar’s scent... For its dignity (*gaurab*) is removed from a swallow who begs water from rainless clouds’. Bees proverbially avoid the silk-cotton tree (any of several trees of the family of *Bombacaceae*); compare *pad* 227, p. 131.


CM, *pad* 291, p. 165.
As a goatherd Khullana met ‘Indra’s daughters’ after being oppressed by separation from her husband amid springtime’s signs of renewed sexuality. These celestial women rejoiced in her beauty, and taught her to worship Candi for the sake of the return of her husband; CM, pad 242-245, pp. 139-41; pad 248, p. 142; pad 250, p. 143.

85CM, pad 307, pp. 174-5.

86CM, pad 308, p. 175.

87CM, pad 308, p. 175.

88Inden, Marriage and Rank, pp. 142-3.

89CM, pad 311, p. 177.


91CM, pad 311, p. 177.
In Valmiki’s version Sita commands Laksmana to build the pyre, and Rama silently indicates his consent. See Ramayana, Yuddhakanda, 119. In Kṛttibās’s Bengali version as it has been elaborated, Sita proposes suicide, and Ram explicitly agrees, giving his brother the command to prepare the funeral pyre: ‘There is no purpose in Sita’s life, brother. Light the fire and let her die. And let my shame depart’. Somewhat contradictorily, this version does also let Ram ‘know in his heart that Sita judges, “Fire will witness that [I am] pure”.’ See: Kṛttibās pandit biracita, Ramayan, sampadana o bhumika Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay (Kalikata: Bharabi, 1980), p. 302.

CM, pad 311, p. 178.

CM, pad 312, p. 178. The text says: ‘If relatives are affronted and angry, Garuda’s feather falls out.’ Indra struck Garuda with lightning as he was stealing the
gods’ elixir, and one of Garuda’s feathers fell out. Seeing this inauspicious sign, however, all the gods acclaimed Garuda as divine, and even Indra had to ask for his friendship.


The poem portrays no awareness of the principle that women should not undergo ordeals. Despite the consistent judgments of *smṛti*, there are historical records of women undergoing ordeals in disputes with men. Lariviere (‘Introduction’, p. 25) records an interesting account of a woman of Mithila, who in 1313 successfully underwent the fire ordeal only after modifying the statement she wished to prove from, ‘I have not been with an impure man’, to ‘With the exception of my husband I have not been with an impure man’.

The series of ordeals are described at CM, *pad* 318, pp. 181-2.

*I am indebted to Vidut Aklujkar, who reminded me*
of this context and its murderous implications.


109 Before entering the ‘house of lacquer’, Khullana praised Candi to secure her assistance. In this prayer, she said of herself, alluding to a ‘virtue’ which perhaps included devotion to Candi: ‘This one who thinks of you with pure intent is a very virtuous wife [mahasati]. Preserve virtuous wives [satijan] as your ornament’. Candi responded to her praise by summoning Fire, whom she commanded to prevent Khullana’s fear. Fire answered, ‘Seeing a virtuous wife [sati] I become supremely cool. Your command specifies the utmost good’. CM, pad 322, p. 184.


112 Dorothy K. Stein, ‘Women to Burn: Suttee as a Normative Institution’, Signs 4,2

CM, pad 160,161, p. 94.

CM, pad 170,171, pp. 100-01.

CM, pad 325,326, pp. 185-6.

CM, pad 325, p. 185.


Ibid., p. 131.

Himani Bannerji, ‘Textile Prison: The Discourse on Shame (Lajja) in the Attire of
Introduction.

This essay is about the way merchants and their activities have been imagined in a Bengali poem of the sixteenth century, *Candimangal* by Mukunda, probably written in the second half of the sixteenth century.¹ The author was a Brahman. Mukunda wrote with the patronage of the Brahman ruler of Brahmanbhum, in what now was undivided Midnapur.

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(Medinipur) District, West Bengal, and then was a frontier region in the northernmost
marches of Orissa. The poet himself, however, came to Brahmanbhum from a village near
the town of Burdwan (Barddhaman), some 30 miles west of the Hugli River, in the heart
of the long-settled country of the Rarh.²

Mukunda’s poem became well known throughout Bengal. For three centuries it was
recited, and in the process added to and revised, in the courts of ‘little kingdoms’³ and in
the courtyards of important families on the occasion of the annual celebration of Durga-
puja. Merchants play a central role in Mukunda’s poem, especially in its final narrative.
Before the journey to his patron’s frontier kingdom, he may have known something about
trading activities along the axis of the Hugli/Bhagirathi river complex, and, after that
journey, in the Orissan port of Hijli, but Mukunda cannot be said to represent merchants
from their own point of view, and his poem conveys little practical mercantile knowledge.
Nevertheless, the way this poem imagines merchants and their activities should help us
see how people in the courts of local rajas—‘little kings’ whose authority generally was
qualified by their allegiance to an overlord—saw them, at least some of the time, and their
perceptions in turn were part of the world at least of local Hindu merchants. Finally, Mukunda himself seems to have been concerned in part with contemporary economic conflicts and with divinely arranged resolutions to them in the first ‘human’ narrative of his poem, which tells the story of how the goddess Candi transformed a lowly hunter into a little king. Merchants are involved in the conflicts of this narrative, although they are not central to it. Are economic problems similarly the concern of his final narrative, in which merchants have central roles?

Mukunda’s final narrative is concerned with the ambiguous potential of merchants to ‘hunt’ and to ‘be hunted’, where both terms indicate predatory relations in human society. It seems to be concerned with conflicts relating to honour and dishonour in the conduct of merchants’ affairs. Are we to understand that conflicts of honour and dishonour are different from ‘economic’ conflicts over wealth? Most of all, the poem is concerned with problems that arise not in market trade on a merchant’s own account, but in a kind of transaction I call ‘tribute exchange’. How does ‘tribute exchange’ differ from market trade?
Although Mukunda’s poem portrays Hindu merchants of the Bengali Gandhabanik jati, it emphasizes their liminality as ‘foreign’ (bidesi) merchants, who journey abroad, and who on behalf of their ‘own’ raja, engage in barter for royal ‘honours’ with a strange king.

By definition foreign merchants do not belong to the kingdom in which they appear as strangers, and, according to Mukunda’s poem, they should not establish a permanent residence therein. They carry both wealth and weapons. Reactions to them accordingly are ambivalent: they are both desired and feared. In all these respects they are liminal.

Their state of ‘not belonging’ makes foreign merchants more vulnerable to the king in whose land they are strangers. It also seems to provide them access to a new, and ‘contrary’ (biparit) vision of Goddess Candi. Their vision of the goddess shares with the poem’s merchants themselves some of the same dimensions of liminality. Finally, as solutions to merchants’ conflicts, Mukunda’s poem prescribes new affinal relations between merchants and rulers, relations guaranteed by the goddess. Can we specify more exactly the narrative logic which relates the conflicts in which the merchants of these poems participate, the divine manifestations which they see, and the marriages which resolve their
stories? If so, perhaps we then will be able to understand the plot of this narrative, and something about its relation to the changing worlds of Hindu merchants and rulers in sixteenth-century Bengal.

The Trading World of Bengal in the Sixteenth Century

Perhaps it is best to begin with what is known about merchants from Bengal who engaged in seaborne trade in the sixteenth century. We may begin with the difficulty of suppressing piracy in the many river channels of deltaic Bengal; perhaps they were divided between ‘zones of endemic warfare and plunder, and zones surrounding trading emporia, where piracy was kept more or less under control’, as James D. Tracy describes littoral Southeast Asia when Europeans arrived.\(^5\) At the beginning of the century the only true emporia for seaborne trade in Bengal were Chittagong (Cattagram), linked by the Padma river to the capital at Gaur, and Satgaon (Satgao or Saptagram), on the Sarasvati River, a westward distributary of the Bhagirathi.\(^6\) In the 1540s trade shifted somewhat from Chittagong to Satgaon, which latter place plays a small role in Mukunda’s poem.\(^7\) Inscriptions indicate Satgaon’s prominence as an administrative center from the early
fourteenth century, one where a mint was located from 1346. Two inscriptions record the
construction of a Jami‘ mosque in 1530 by an Ašraf notable, ‘the asylum of the Sayyids
and the glory of the descendants of Taha (the Prophet)’. Tomé Pires had heard that it
was a ‘good city and rich’ with a population of about 10,000. In 1565 Cæsar Frederici
found Satgaon still a ‘reasonable faire citie for a citie of the Moores’, and reported that its
markets were ‘abounding in all things’. Away from these emporia, foreign trade was fluid
and thin. It shifted from place to place in response to slight advantages, creating
temporary markets and then abandoning them, and simultaneously enriching or
impoverishing local producers, merchants and rulers.

One can see the relative position of Bengali emporia in a hierarchy of markets in
the Indian Ocean by noting the prominence in Bengal of ‘foreign’ merchants from western
India and the Red Sea. Similarly, one can note where merchants ‘from Bengal’ did not
have influence. Duarte Barbosa does not mention them in his descriptions of the important
and prosperous ports of Gujarat, and of the Konkan and Malabar Coasts. He does
mention merchants from Bengal in the lesser ports of Sri Lanka and the Coromandel
Coast. By the late sixteenth century, trade between Coromandel and Bengal, however, ‘was carried on overwhelmingly by merchants based at these [Coromandel] ports’.

Similarly, Pires records the ill repute of merchants of Bengal in Melaka, and at the same time their political influence in the lesser emporium of Pasé.

Nevertheless, Portuguese surveys of Indian Ocean trade by Pires and Barbosa reveal widespread activities of Muslim merchants ‘from Bengal’ at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the east, they traded to Melaka, to Cosmin in Pegu, and to lesser ports around the Malay peninsula. They carried sugar, preserved fruits and pickles, and rice for ballast, but Bengal’s fine textiles were their principal exports. Bengali cloth, in the words of Pires, fetched a high price in Melaka ‘because it is a merchandise all over the East’. (Showing his disinterest in practical details, Mukunda barely mentions this export of textiles.) For return voyages from Southeast Asian ports merchants from Bengal purchased spices of the Spice Islands, sandalwood, Borneo camphor, Chinese silks and porcelains, and a variety of metals.
To the south they traded to Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and ports on the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts, carrying the same exports. They purchased in return cinnamon, elephants, and areca nuts in Sri Lanka, pepper in the ports of the Malabar Coast, and cowrie shells in the Maldives. Finally, goods from Bengal were carried to ports on the Konkan Coast and in the Gulf of Cambay, and perhaps to the Red Sea as well. Again textiles probably were among the principal exports, and aromatics, carpets and horses must have been among the principal imports, but the commodity composition of this trade is less clear, and neither Pires nor Barbosa described it as conducted by merchants and ships ‘from Bengal’.

It is much more difficult to say who these Muslim merchants from Bengal were. None of the traditional Bengali Hindu merchant castes produced merchants engaged in large-scale overseas trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; rather, when Dutch trade in Bengal favored Hindu merchants in the latter century, they were migrants from Gujarat. On the other hand, Muslim merchants from Bengal were still a ‘powerful overseas trading group’, as they had been much earlier.19 Pires, observing from Melaka in the early
sixteenth century, had noted ‘domestic’ merchants of Bengal who had large fortunes, were ‘brought up to trade’, and were all reputedly ‘false’. There also were ‘a large number of other merchants, Parsees, Rumes, Turks and Arabs, and merchants from Chaul, Dabhol and Goa’ who resided in Bengal. He added that merchants from the Konkan ports of Chaul, Dabhol and Goa, ‘form[ed] their companies in Bengal’ for the Melaka voyage, after bringing goods to Bengal from the Red Sea ports and from the west coast of India. All merchants with ties to Bengal competed with merchants whose Indian trade was centered in Gujarat, who all together had ‘the main Malacca trade’. They also competed with Malabar Muslims, and with ‘Kelings’ from the Coromandel Coast. The last group, Hindu merchants from the Coromandel coast, also were particularly important in the trade from Bengal to Melaka.

Of the merchants ‘from Bengal’ one therefore must not assume a ‘Bengali’ identity. Relatively heterogeneous Muslim merchants did not form distinct Muslim merchant communities in Bengal, unlike the Khojas and Bohras in Gujarat, or the Mappilas in Malabar. Instead, they seem to have been undifferentiated from Aṣraf Muslims, who all
claimed foreign descent. Persians were particularly important in the emporium of Chittagong, and in the routes from Chittagong to the west. In the period before the Mughal conquest of Bengal, the independent Sultans of Bengal and members of their courts were themselves involved in seaborne trade; Mughal governors continued this pattern. One can assume that the conduct of Muslim rulers was a model for lesser notables. Hindu merchants were not excluded from foreign trade, but probably most of them were to be found at the margins of trade networks in the Indian Ocean, where they served as local collectors and distributors, or as merchants trading to and from lesser ports and in the less prestigious commodities.

The Portuguese, who by the 1530s appeared regularly in Chittagong, and who shifted their attention to Satgaon in the 1540s, competed with but did not supplant Indian merchants from Bengal in trade to Southeast Asia. Concerning Bengal’s trade to the south and west, the picture is less clear. By the end of the century much of the pepper trade from the Malabar Coast to Bengal was controlled by private Portuguese traders, but some Bengali Muslim merchants circumvented the Portuguese by clandestine trade to the
Maldives, where they traded with Malabar Muslims, and where they also could meet Gujarati ships carrying goods from Acheh.\textsuperscript{28} Throughout the sixteenth century merchants from Bengal continued their trade to ports on Sri Lanka’s west coast.\textsuperscript{29} Still, despite their limited success, the Portuguese brought with them special anxieties both for the rulers who had to contend with their occasional military threats, and for competing Indian merchants.\textsuperscript{30}

Finally, we may consider the nature of transactions in seaborne trade, and the nature of relations between merchants and rulers. Europeans trading in the Indian Ocean imagined themselves in a realm beyond law, where ‘anything afloat is a prize’ and all states supported themselves by plunder of one kind or another. No doubt such anxieties reflected both actions sometimes taken in concert against them, and the ‘fragility of their own position in a vast and alien world’. At the same time Europeans engaged in a compensatory rhetoric to justify their own reliance on privateering, selling protection, and monopoly trade. We no longer may take contemporary European views of the coercive nature Indian Ocean trade at face value.\textsuperscript{31} James Tracy concludes that ‘direct control of
trade by state functionaries—whether the prince or his officials—was a ‘reaction to European presence in Southeast Asia, not a condition that the Europeans found on their arrival’. He notes that goods given as tribute from peripheries to centers were used for state ritual ‘as a means for attracting and maintaining state support’, and that flows of tribute were ‘separate from the mechanisms of market exchange’.32 Were conditions different in the Bay of Bengal? In several essays Sanjay Subrahmanyam has described, at the courts of the Sultans of Bengal in the period 1342-1532, ‘entrepreneur-notables’ who dominated overseas trade, perhaps with participation by the Sultans themselves. In these arrangements at the court Subrahmanyam identifies a ‘Persian’ form of mercantilism, but his case is stronger for the Qutb Shahi court of Golkonda and the port of Masulipatnam in the period 1560-1670, where an anti-Portuguese trading alliance was organized with Acheh and with ports in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.33 Perhaps both Tracy and Subrahmanyam suppose a view of the ‘state’ which is too circumscribed. For the seventeenth century R.J. Barendse notes, ‘In the Arabian Seas the state was not the only actor to sell protection rent’. Rulers competed with many kinds of people, from
thieves to local landlords, in selling protection and collecting taxes, and merchants in turn spread their risks by becoming tax collectors themselves, and ‘playing politics as well as trade’.  

One view of trade in the sixteenth century therefore is based on implicit paradigms for ‘economic’ transactions in markets. It assumes that merchants responded to prices, and organized flows of goods in response to price differentials in relatively ‘free’ markets. With perfect consistency this view also can notice transaction costs of doing business in markets, including ‘protection costs’ imposed by Europeans and by local rulers. It notices other risks, and measure taken to reduce them, and ideally would attempt to calculate overall rates of return.  

Another view describes as ‘mercantilism’ the pervasive ‘rent-seeking’ of people who used claims to legitimacy and power for the sake of securing profits in trade. Such people included both rulers and merchant-officials. Both views seem to have been present in Indian Ocean ports themselves. Together they reflect ambiguities and conflicts in the roles of both rulers and merchants.
‘Mercantilism’ of course produced conflict. Potential conflicts between merchants and rulers should take into account the organization of merchants trading in any given port into largely self-governing ‘natio’—descriptive groups with either ‘formally instituted or informally recognized’ structures of authority. To belong, one had to be accepted by a natio; criteria for belonging included religion, ethnicity and the port one traded from, as well as a merchant’s personal character. Natio provided merchants with procedures for resolving disputes among themselves without recourse to the port’s ruler, and with an organization through which they collectively could petition a ruler for redress. We will see that Mukunda knew of merchants’ groups and called them dal, ‘parties’, but his Bengali merchants denied belonging to any ‘party’ when they arrived in Sri Lanka.

Whether we think of merchants as engaged mostly in ‘free’ trade, or as victims, or willing partners in mercantilism, Mukunda does not seem to care about any of these descriptions of ‘economic’ transactions. His poem is about merchants, but they usually do not seem to be engaged in market trade as we understand it. The jati of Bengali merchants that he describes as central to ‘tribute exchange’ is never mentioned in
scholarly accounts of seaborne trade in sixteenth century Bengal. The goods for which they journeyed abroad were not the most valuable goods of this trade. Was his *Candimangal* thus merely an archaic folk-tale, transmitted orally for generations before he gave it literary form, anachronistic and therefore without relevance to contemporary conditions?

**The Initial Problem: Hindu Merchants Who Do Not Venture Abroad**

Mukunda’s narrative begins with a statement that because his merchants had not ventured abroad for twenty years or more, and because foreign merchants had ceased to arrive as well, the *raja* of Ujain on the Ajay River in Baroddhaman lacked certain necessary goods. His storerooms were empty of sandalwood and conch shells, needed for royal Vaisnava worship. The poem elsewhere names conch shells together with sandalwood as the goods a Bengali merchant should seek in Sri Lanka. The king’s storerooms also lacked other insignia of royal wealth, consumption and honours: elephants, horses, spices (asafoetida, cloves and nutmeg), perfumes and medicinal unguents (saffron, musk, and aloeswood), imported cloths, rugs and carpets, jewels, and chowries. One must
emphasize that all the goods listed in this passage were imported, but not from Sri Lanka, and not even by sea.\textsuperscript{41} Equally pertinent: the passage does not list cinnamon, Sri Lanka’s most important export. The common quality of all these goods is not their availability in Sri Lanka, but their use in royal worship and as insignia of royal honour and wealth.

This statement of the initial problem does coincide with one dimension of our summary of Bengal’s seaborne trade. Most Hindu Bengali merchants probably were local collectors and distributors in this trade, ‘residents’ who depended on the ‘foreign’ trade of others, or who confined their foreign trade to lesser ports and to products of marginal importance.

Mukunda’s narrative also lets us ask, why did Hindu merchants not venture abroad? There are two passages which suggest answers to this question. First, reporting a lack of royal ‘wealth’, the keeper of the raja’s storeroom charged that the raja’s merchants ‘who used to be your debtors, now have become wealthy, engrossed and drunk with riches’.

One merchant used to engage in trade to Sri Lanka, but he died twenty years ago, and
the rest ‘have become wives’. To obtain wealth for his storerooms the raja commanded the merchant Dhanapati to undertake a sea voyage to Sri Lanka. To indicate Dhanapati’s new status as a royal minister, commanded to trade on his behalf, the raja gave Dhanapati ‘clothes belonging to the raja himself, a horse to mount, armor and a two-edged dagger as a mark of his favour, as well as a hundred thousand silver coins (taka) as ship’s treasure, and ornaments for his body’. In any case Mukunda’s text suggests quite clearly that although the raja had suffered from his merchants’ failure to undertake seaborne trade, his Hindu merchants had not; indeed, their wealth and their abandonment of seaborne voyages were associated. The raja should have kept his merchants poorer.

Mukunda’s description of Saptagram supports this line of reasoning. It suggests the town’s role in the trading networks of the Indian Ocean by a list of all the ‘cities’, including Sri Lanka, whose merchants came to Saptagram to trade. After this list of cities the poem continues:
All the merchants who dwell in all these cities come with their boats and ships to Saptagram for trade. The [Hindu] merchants (banik) of Saptagram do not go anywhere; they stay in their homes, and happiness and many kinds of wealth, together with liberation, come to them.\textsuperscript{44}

Apparently, this nearby emporium in Bengal, because it attracted ‘foreign’ merchants, had made trading voyages appear unnecessary to Hindu Bengali merchants. They could get ‘many kinds of wealth’ without the risks of sea voyages.

**Market Trade and ‘Tribute Exchange’**

But if Sri Lankan merchants brought their goods to Saptagram, why could not the raja of Ujain send his merchants to trade with them there? Even more puzzling is a suggestion made by Dhanapati’s younger wife, who opposed the voyage. She suggested that Dhanapati give the raja the goods he needed from Dhanapati’s own stores, receive in return the raja’s favour (prasad), and reside happily with his wives.\textsuperscript{45} If Dhanapati had been able to acquire sandalwood and conch shells for his own treasury without having
journeyed abroad, why should he journey abroad for the sake of supplying his raja? One simply cannot answer these questions using assumptions of market trade. Perhaps at this point the poem fails to make sense. On the other hand, suppose that the raja of Ujain could obtain ‘honours’, goods proper for use in royal worship and as royal insignia, only through an exchange relation with some king. Lack of royal honour, as well as lack of royal insignia, then would have been the crux of the raja’s problem, which his wife-like merchants had created by staying at home.\textsuperscript{46}

Mukunda’s poem does suggest that Dhanapati’s trade for the king of Ujain would be different from trade on his own account. Culturally patterned gestures, exchanges and speeches unambiguously reveal Dhanapati’s role as a servant of his raja. All merchants on earth, or at least all the Gandhabanik merchants of Barddaman, may have been members of the raja’s ‘family’ (paribar), but Dhanapati was this raja’s ‘minister’ (patra).\textsuperscript{47}

When Dhanapati objected that journeying abroad would leave his young wives without guard or protection, the raja’s other ministers and courtiers (patra-mitra) advised Dhanapati that he should not lament; and that there could be no ‘offence’ (against his familial duty to
protect his wives, one assumes) incurred in doing the *raja’s* work. One exclaimed, ‘How many desires do you obey? You dwell in the *raja’s* land eating his maintenance and his gifts’ (implying that because he received these gifts Dhanapati was subject to the *raja’s* commands). The position of being a merchant ‘minister’ to the *raja* involved both privileges and responsibilities. One problem for him would be that although Dhanapati was a ‘minister’ of the king of Ujain, sent to do his *raja’s* work, he was not a minister of the king of Sri Lanka. What would be their relation?

Meantime, Dhanapati also was a merchant who traded ordinarily in markets for profit on his own account. Another problem would be whether and how to combine trade on his own account with trade in service of his *raja* during the sea voyage to Sri Lanka. Lahana, Dhanapati’s greedy first wife, suggested that Dhanapati could follow the example of her father, who ‘prepared seven ships to import sandalwood and conch shells, and by buying and selling became a rich man’. Given Lahana’s generally disreputable character in the poem, we perhaps can assume that Mukunda’s audience would have recognized conflicts of interest in combining these two roles, as we do. Still, Lahana argued correctly
that gain is necessary for a merchant. Even if his wealth were like Kubera’s, like the sands of a river, it eventually would be exhausted if a merchant traded without getting an income.\textsuperscript{49} To Lahana at least, trading in the raja’s service would not provide her husband with an income. Apparently Dhanapati agreed, for he followed her advice.

As minister of the king, Dhanapati would not trade with his own capital, and he would not trade for his own profit. But there is another reason to distinguish what he would do on behalf of the raja of Ujain, and his own ordinary business as a merchant. Mukunda’s poem initially represents trade between the Sri Lankan king and Dhanapati, agent of the raja of Ujain, as an ‘exchange’ (badal) without money. In the verse which describes this exchange, the merchant suggests that the king give ‘horses (turanga) in exchange for deer (kuranga), conch shells in exchange for coconuts, cloves (labanga) in exchange for biranga (a Bengali medicinal plant), silver coins in exchange for dried ginger’, etc.; that is, for each commodity to be received from the king the merchant proposes to give a separate, reciprocated commodity in return, one markedly lower in
value.\textsuperscript{50} (Without any indication of arbitrage, one perhaps may infer the merchant’s intention to profit by deceit.)

\textit{Badal}, ‘exchange’ therefore was a kind of exchange of gifts between rulers, with perhaps an element of barter. How might ‘exchange’ have been differentiated from ‘buying and selling’? In particular, was the most important difference the apparent absence in ‘exchange’ of money, either as a physical medium of exchange, or as a money of account? Of course, even without money there could have been implicit prices, the potential for gain or loss, and the possibility of economic motives and calculations in the exchange.\textsuperscript{51} In the argument that follows I will assume that one issue for kings was the receipt of ‘honours’, concretely embedded in goods needed for temple worship, and in other rare and valuable presents from distant kings as well. By this assumption kings sought, among other things, increased prestige in an accounting of royal honours, but this goal might have been different from the goal of ‘gains’ in an accounting of monetary value, because ‘honour’ for a recipient derives from the identity of the giver as well as from the nature of the gift. This assumption makes it possible to explain why Dhanapati could not
provide his *raja* with the goods he sought by purchasing them in market transactions:

such goods would not be ‘honours’ from another king. In order to indicate this assumption

I will use ‘tribute exchange’ to translate *badal* in this episode, and to indicate thereby a gift

exchange of royal ‘honours’, with perhaps associated economic motives as well.

Dhanapati’s suggested terms of exchange do seem to express the hope that in ‘tribute

exchange’ gifts of what was commonplace and of little value in his country might be rare

and valuable in Sri Lanka. If so, goals of honour and profit sometimes might coincide.\(^{52}\)

The term ‘tribute exchange’ deliberately suggests cultural and political contexts of
gifts of ‘tribute’ beyond those particular to the imagined local, and mostly Hindu statecraft

of this poem.\(^{53}\) Thereby it suggests ambiguities inherent in gift ‘exchanges’ of royal

honours in sixteenth century Bengal. Because of them economic motives might have

coloured the exchange of goods used for royal honours, and a clear hierarchy might not

have been established between two kings through their exchange. We can trace these

contexts and ambiguities for the Sultans of Bengal, if not for contemporary Bengali *rajas*.

Because of the Ming voyages under Zheng He, in the early fifteenth century Sultans of
Bengal had become familiar with a Chinese model for gifts of ‘tribute’ to the Chinese Emperor as the superior ruler. This model for ‘tribute’ had an explicit requirement of obeisance, and often an implicit promise of profitable trade in return, but the Sultans of Bengal seem to have been as interested in securing Chinese military support for their regimes as in trading with China. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries merchants from Bengal continuously traded to Southeast Asian emporia, where the gift and receipt of ‘tribute’ continued to define relations of inferiority and superiority among non-Chinese kingdoms, as their gifts of ‘tribute’ to the Chinese Emperor continued to define their relations as inferiors to China. Did sixteenth century Sultans of Bengal also expect that gifts of ‘tribute’ would establish hierarchical relations and would be rewarded by profitable trade? We can say at least that an alternative model also was present. Nusrat Shah, Sultan of Bengal from 1519 to 1532, expected that rulers should exchange rare gifts which they would ‘enjoy’, or ‘in which they could take pleasure’, and he seems to have thought or hoped that such exchanges of gifts need not establish hierarchical relations.
Nothing positively indicates that Mukunda knew of these wider contexts of Indian Ocean statecraft. Nevertheless, the ‘tribute exchange’ at Sri Lanka, in which Dhanapati almost engaged, seems to have been similarly ambiguous, promising or threatening, but not quite defining hierarchical relations between the king of Sri Lanka and the raja of Ujain.

Absent a clearly defined ranking of the two, can we suppose that the party who received the more rare and valuable presents in ‘tribute exchange’ would win in an accounting of both royal honour and royal profit? But if exchanged goods were not to be reduced to their monetary ‘value’, how could one know with certainty which party had won, or how the exchange would appear to others? In any case, in the following sections of this essay, my interpretations of the poem will be guided by the assumption that the initial problem of its merchant was to obtain in gifts of ‘tribute exchange’ the ‘honours’ of royal insignia from another ruler, without the prior existence of clearly defined hierarchical relations between the two rulers.

The Liminality of Merchants and the Epiphany at Kalidaha
Candimangal tell the story of two merchants, the father, Dhanapati, and his son, Srimanta. Dhanapati disapproved, interrupted and countermanded his wife’s worship of Candi on his behalf, just before undertaking his voyage to Sri Lanka, which voyage was marred at its outset by hosts of inauspicious signs. Near where the Adi Ganga met the sea, he lost six ships in a storm on the Magara (Porpoise) River, as punishment from the goddess, but his own ship was spared for the sake of her purposes, and he then followed the coast south to Tamilnadu. En route, he encountered a series of ‘deeps’ (daha), each of which tested his capacity as a merchant. Having reached the Palk Strait, he struck out across the trackless Ocean, and mid-Ocean, at Kalidaha, the ‘deep of Kali’, he saw an ‘inverse’ or ‘contrary’ (biparit) epiphany of the goddess. When Dhanapati related this vision to the king of Sri Lanka, his inability to prove the truth of his account became the crux of his conflicts with the Sri Lankan king, and finally an excuse or occasion for his imprisonment.

Twelve years later, in search of his lost father, Dhanapati’s son Srimanta, born months after Dhanapati’s departure and falsely accused of being a bastard, followed the
same path in search of his father, except that he was careful to worship the goddess, and
his little fleet suffered no shipwreck in the Magara River. He met the same series of
‘deeps’, with the same tests of his capacity. At Kalidaha the son saw the same vision,
and similarly came to grief after describing it to the king of Sri Lanka.

Does the mid-Ocean ‘deep of Kali’ with its contrary epiphany have anything in
common with the lesser ‘deeps’ and their various tests? Kalidaha itself is a site of
boundlessness. The Ocean is difficult to cross and immeasurably deep, unlike coastwise
travel it offers no landmarks and no place to rest. This site without boundaries
immediately before Sri Lanka suggests liminality, a place and period of transition, and the
unstable, indefinite or potential condition of the merchant in transition, as he passes
temporarily through an ‘essentially unstructured’ phase. In Sri Lanka, what will his status
be?

The prior and lesser ‘deeps’ fall into two categories. In the first the father traps
and the son learns to trap conch and cowries for their valuable shells. In the second the
merchants learn to escape being hunted themselves by powerful predators. A sixteenth
century author of another *Candimangal*, Dvija Madhab of Nadiya, describes, among these predators, leaches the size of palm trunks, mosquitoes the size of pigeons, and crabs the size of ‘great creatures’, all of which the merchants somehow must evade. Merchants potentially are both hunters and hunted. They are situated liminally between these two categories, but to be successful they must learn to hunt and to avoid being hunted. In this crucial lesson their clever helmsmen are their teachers.

In his description of the epiphany at the ‘deep of Kali’ Dvija Madhab describes a condition which negates the ordinary relation between hunting and being hunted: tiger and deer, boar and hare, lion and elephant, jackal and goat, falcon and pigeon, mongoose and snake, and cat and mouse all meet, reside, converse, or play together, and ‘no one does violence to another’. In Mukunda’s poem, does the whole epiphany at Kalidaha represent, as Dvija Madhab’s account suggests, a condition negating predation?

Mukunda does not use any of these images of a ‘peaceable kingdom’ in the world of animals. On the other hand, both he and Dvija Madhab represent the central epiphany at Kalidaha as an act of predation in which the roles of hunter and hunted are reversed.
In Mukunda’s account Candi appears at Kalidaha as a beautiful sixteen-year-old woman in
the midst of a blooming lotus garden. Smiling at the merchant, she grasps a mighty bull
elephant in her left hand and swallows it. She then regurgitates the elephant, which
struggles but can not escape her grasp. Again she swallows and regurgitates. She is not
ashamed at being seen by men. She swallows the elephant effortlessly; her jaws do not
move, nor does the color of betel leaf and catechu leave her lips. She dances gracefully.

Among many signs of contrariness, predation in this image is somewhat ‘contrary’ to
nature, for the woman is the hunter. Further, in this image predation cyclically is both
represented and negated, for the woman repeatedly slaughters and swallows, and
regurgitates and revives the elephant. The whole image with its coincidence of opposites
suggests a state of liminality between ordinary and inverse predation and between
predation and non-predation. The merchant, who potentially is both hunter and hunted,
sees an image which both reverses and negates ordinary predation, and simultaneously,
with another image of hunting, he is smitten with the ‘flower arrow’ of this beautiful
woman, and swoons. I propose that he sees this divine vision because as a merchant he
participates in the liminality which he sees.

A modern scholar has compared this vision to two alternative icons, and implicitly
he has linked it to two interpretations. The first is of Gaja-Laksmi, in which the auspicious
goddess of wealth is lustrated by a pair of elephants. This comparison, which identifies
Candi with Laksmi or Sri, depends too much on the mere presence of the elephant(s) in
both images, and too little on the very different actions by which the elephant(s) are
related to the goddess, but it does capture the initial attractiveness of Candi’s erotic
appearance to the merchant and her embodiment of sri, a word with a very wide range of
meanings, including wealth and auspiciousness. The second icon is of Visnu’s Maya, who,
‘skilled in appearance and non-appearance’, swallows and then recreates the whole
universe of gods, demons and men. Is the elephant a symbol of the whole cosmos in the
process of creation and destruction? Of course, with a tantric theory of creation, the
erotic elements of this vision also can be related to the role of desire in the ‘play’ of
creation, which in turn should be understood as inseparable from destruction.
Finally, neither the clever helmsmen nor any of the sailors saw anything of this epiphany. According to the helmsmen, each merchant had seen it because he was blessed with divine knowledge (dhanya dibya-geyan), the friend of all learning, and an ocean of countless virtues. Nevertheless, both merchants did not understand the divine woman’s character (caritra), and suspected that perhaps Bidhi (Fate) had dumbfounded them. (In the case of the father, Dhanapati, we in the audience are allowed to know that it was the goddess who had dumbfounded him, and given his prior treatment of her, we cannot entertain any idea of his ‘divine knowledge’.) Each merchant asked the helmsman to be his witness, despite the fact that the helmsman had seen nothing, and already plainly had said so. Each promised to tell the ‘contrary’ thing he had seen to the king of Sri Lanka and his court, for they might know its cause or purpose (karan). Each took pen and ink and wrote an account. Each merchant, then, was located as much between knowledge and ignorance in relation to this epiphany as he was between the categories of hunter and hunted. Revealing herself in this new and contrary form, the goddess finally
secured her worship by the king of Sri Lanka and the raja of Ujain. Dhanapati, however, eventually learned to worship her in quite a different form.

Oaths, Forfeits and Trials

If Dhanapati’s passage to Sri Lanka culminated in a divine vision located liminally between predation and non-predation, his arrival quickly led to abrogation of the somewhat dubious ‘gifts’ of ‘tribute exchange’. That abrogation in turn led to mutual promises and forfeits under oath—a contract, that is, but one which apparently was not about the terms of ‘tribute exchange’. Dhanapati’s failure to perform the acts he had stipulated in turn led to the enforcement of the forfeits he had sworn, and thus to confiscation of all his wealth.

Mukunda’s story thus takes us on a downward progress, from a form of giving open to self interested calculations of profit and honour, to a contract only apparently insulated from the material interests potential in tribute exchange, and then to a kind of forcible expropriation which was peculiarly lawful.

Arriving at Sri Lanka, Dhanapati swiftly became embroiled in a dispute with the king about his ‘honesty’, because he related to the court this vision of the goddess seen mid-
Ocean. Leading up to this incident, Mukunda’s poem simultaneously discloses and forecloses problems which have to do with relations both between the king and his rivals, and among members of his court. The ‘gifts’ of ‘tribute exchange’ must not threaten these relations. Was Dhanapati a member of the Sri Lankan king’s ‘own party’ (ghar’dal) or of the ‘opposing party’ (par’dal)? If the former, he would be shown favor; if the latter, driven out. But Dhanapati claimed that he was neither; he was a ‘foreign’ merchant.\(^7^0\) Had he given the king and his court enough presents (bhet) to secure the privilege of ‘tribute exchange’? The king’s Brahman had been left out of the distribution of Dhanapati’s presents, but although greatly angry with the king, he did not demand more presents from Dhanapati. Instead he asked the merchant for an account of his voyage, and the merchant then described his vision. Therewith implicit problems of honour became explicit.

The king and his courtiers ridiculed Dhanapati’s account of his vision, and when he offered to show it to them, they called him an imposter (bhanda), and said he was not fit for their assembly.\(^7^1\) Of course, if Dhanapati was not fit for their assembly, the king would receive dishonour from Dhanapati’s gifts in ‘tribute exchange’. It therefore had to be
stopped immediately, and Dhanapati’s raja of Ujain himself would receive dishonour by this abrupt treatment of his merchant emissary, instead of the royal ‘honours’ he had sought in ‘tribute exchange’.

Needless to say, Dhanapati insisted on proving his veracity. Dhanapati and the king then bound themselves by mutual oaths to forfeits. Dhanapati swore that he would take the king and his court to see this vision, and if he failed, he would forfeit his wealth and go to prison for twelve years. The king in return swore that if Dhanapati could prove he had told the truth, he would give the merchant half his kingdom. Both of these sworn forfeits were written down to make an adjudicable contract. Dhanapati failed to show the king his vision of the goddess. More important, in the ‘trial’ which followed, when Dhanapati appealed to his helmsman to bear witness in his support, the helmsman truthfully said that he himself had seen nothing of woman, elephant and lotus. The king judged this speech to be a confirmation of Dhanapati’s untruthfulness, confiscated all of Dhanapati’s wealth, and threw the merchant in prison. Twelve years later, his son Srimanta also failed at the same self-imposed task, but this time the king’s forfeit was to
be his daughter, given in marriage to Srimanta, and the merchant’s son’s forfeit his wealth and his life.74 Despite a final plea for mercy, Srimanta was led to the cremation ground to be executed. To save Srimanta from execution Candi herself led her demons into battle with the king’s army. Candi’s forces routed them, and her ghouls ate their slaughtered bodies. In Srimanta’s case the downward progress is extended in a final step from plunder to war.

In executing or attempting to execute the forfeits promised by oath when the merchants ‘lost’, did the king of Sri Lanka do anything contrary to lawful procedure? After Candi had routed the king’s armies in battle, saved Srimanta from execution, and demanded as victor the marriage of the king’s daughter to Srimanta, the king answered with a spirited defence of his conduct. He accurately argued that he had taken account of Srimanta’s youth and had offered the boy clemency if the latter would acknowledge his ‘dishonesty’ in recounting the vision,75 and that at every step he had proceeded with the advice of learned Brahmans. Some texts say that Candi herself was shamed by this defence.76 Of course, the king’s position in each ‘trial’ was anomalous nevertheless, for
he was simultaneously plaintiff and judge. In any case, Candi immediately proposed a
new ‘contract’: she herself would show the king the vision, and having seen it, he would
give Srimanta his daughter in marriage. Let us suppose, therefore, that the king had done
nothing explicitly contrary to lawful procedure. Does this mean he was without ‘fault’
entirely? Some manuscripts of Mukunda’s text contain a passage that condemns the king
for attempting to execute Srimanta, asking: ‘for what fault?’ More interesting was
Srimanta’s belated and unavailing submission, following his sentence. Here, without
admitting that he had lied about the epiphany, Srimanta argued that victory and defeat are
determined by fate. He asked, since the Lord (Bhagaban) is the cause of fate, ‘therefore
what are honour and dishonour?’ Srimanta continued, possibly addressing both the king
and himself: ‘Anger at dishonor is called “false”; do not be controlled by anger’. Srimanta
concluded from this premise that for the king ‘causing so much disaster (pramad) for such
a slight offense (laghu dose) is not correct (ucit)’. Finally, he offered to become the
king’s slave, but because of a ‘fault of fate’, the king did not take mercy upon Srimanta,
after this submission in which the merchant’s son had acknowledged no fault of his own.78
Apparently, we are being shown inherent defects in the relation between the king and foreign merchants like Dhanapati and Srimanta. The crux of the problem, if we take Srimanta’s submission seriously, is a contest of ‘honour and dishonour’, to be won or lost by dictates of the Lord and of fate. Both king and merchant have experienced dishonour: the king because an untruth seems to have been spoken in his court, and the merchant because he has been charged with lying. In their subsequent contest for the sake of honour one party must fatefully ‘lose’ not just honour, but in the merchants’ case wealth, and either freedom or life, and in the king’s case half his kingdom or his daughter. The terms of these forfeits introduce a kind of predation, for greed for wealth seems to be one of their motives. No relation exists between king and merchant to moderate the terms of their contest and to restore proportion between the offenses to honour and the respective forfeits. Finally, in this atmosphere of contested honour, the king is both the plaintiff and the judge, whereas the merchants have no standing except as defendants and signatories to the contracts between them and the king. In these ways the problems of contested honour are exacerbated by the merchants’ foreignness.
These episodes repeat the theme of a contest of honour, which we have assumed ‘tribute exchange’ involved. They intensify that conflict, and they shift its location, so that the primary conflict comes to be between the merchant and the king to whom he is a foreigner, rather than between the two rulers. Although their ‘contract’ comes to be about the truth of an alleged vision of the goddess, rather than about the terms of ‘tribute exchange’, it results in a kind of plunder of the merchants’ goods, and ultimately in war.

The condition which makes this downward progress possible is the merchants’ foreignness. Precisely their foreignness will be removed by the marriage of Srimanta to the king’s daughter. Candi will insist on the marriage to resolve this conflict.

Transformed Bodies

Before it describes this marriage, which creates a relation between the merchant and the king, the poem narrates incidents which show how one’s body can become the site of Candi’s transforming power. In the first instance Srimanta’s body becomes impervious to all weapons, and Srimanta himself is given some of the insignia of royal
honours. In the second, the king’s army is slaughtered and the soldiers’ bodies are butchered and bought and sold at market.\textsuperscript{79}

At the cremation ground Srimanta asked his guard for a delay in the execution so that he might worship; this request being granted, he both praised and blamed Candi in a way so disturbing that she felt compelled to intervene. Candi assumed the form of an ancient Brahman woman, came before Srimanta’s guard, who held the office of prefect of police, and asked him for a gift of the life of Srimanta, this child whom she identified as her grandson, in return for her blessings of long life and great wealth to be given to the prefect. The prefect replied that he himself was merely the king’s servant, that the king had commanded Srimanta’s punishment for speaking falsehood in his court, and that if he (the prefect) were to defy the king’s command and spare the king’s ‘enemy’, the king would slay both himself and his family.

The prefect then attempted to execute Srimanta as the king had commanded, but he saw all his soldiers’ weapons break against the boy’s ‘adamantine body’ (bajra kay), immediately made invulnerable by Candi’s power.\textsuperscript{80} Contemporary followers of the Naths—
like adherents of various other Siddha and alchemical cults—thought male yogic adepts
could seek an ‘immutable body of perfection’, invulnerable to injury, death and decay, as
one fruit of their mental and physical disciplines. Srimanta apparently had pursued no
yogic disciplines. Candi’s grace alone gave him a body which could not be attacked.

Frustrated, the prefect attacked the old Brahman woman instead, and, as the goddess, she
summoned her terrible troops and slew all his soldiers. The prefect then fled to warn the
king, who despite this warning led his army to the cremation ground, where they also were
destroyed by the goddess’s demons and witches. When victory had been won, Srimanta
was mounted as a raja upon an elephant and given a white chowry and a white
umbrella. He also had not sought these royal insignia; they were Candi’s gifts on the
battlefield. The adamantine body and the royal insignia transformed Srimanta from
merchant to someone like a raja, so that a new relation between him and the Sri Lankan
king became possible.

The bodies of the king’s soldiers simultaneously had undergone an opposite
transformation. They were hunted relentlessly by Candi’s demons.
Horses and elephants swam in rivers of blood. Finding no place to stand, charioteers dove in and died. The demons, who had had no battle in the Kali Age, took turns in the slaughter. The demons picked out and swallowed living men, as a peasant catches fish from the incoming tide . . .

Immediately after the battle, selling the dead bodies became a business for Candi’s ghouls, who quickly assembled to create a market of flesh:

They buy and sell meat cooked and raw. Someone buys human heads and ties them up like ripe cocoanuts. The ghouls, male and female, sell elephant tusks at wholesale, and fingernails like water chestnuts for the price of twenty cowries.
Their wares are horse tongues for bananas, human knee-caps for

flatbread, and bones are their cups and bowls. One ghoul knave plays catch

with a testicle, and boys buy them by the pair.

Ghost weavers market their wares: shawls woven of entrails, saris

made of elephant skin, silky stuffs made of leather. They measure

ornamental belts made of horses’ veins and charge a cowrie per yard. 84

Of course, in the ordinary world periodic markets regularly treated animals as

marketable products. Mukunda’s poem itself describes how the hunter Kalketu’s wife sold

the various parts and products of animals hunted by her husband. 85 Candi elevated

Srimanta from one condemned to execution to one with an immutable, perfect body and

the insignia of a raja. In the same way she slew the king’s powerful warriors, stripped

their bodies of all honour, and treated them as sheer economic products, just as human

hunters treat the bodies of hunted animals. These are exactly opposite transformations

within the field of predatory relations. Within that field the roles of the hunter, the
victorious warrior and the ruler define one pole, and the roles of hunted animals, of an
enemy defeated and slain, and of a prisoner condemned to execution define the other
pole. (Of course, we also cannot neglect the pleasure this litany of horrors must have
been designed to give audiences of the poem, a pleasure at least in part linked to seeing
the mighty humbled.)

Finally, only the king and his minister survived. By the latter’s advice the king
signaled his submission by tying his sword to his throat, by prostrating himself, and by
singing praises to the Brahman woman as a deity, but one whom he could not recognise
(he prudently asked for an introduction). The king agreed to Candi’s offer to show him
the vision herself in exchange for the marriage of his daughter to Srimanta. Thus the king
saw and worshipped the goddess in her new epiphany as the lovely woman on the lotus
who swallows and regurgitates the elephant. In order to remove the king’s grief (and his
death impurity, which made a wedding impossible), Candi, having received the king’s
worship, promptly determined to raise all the dead Sri Lankan soldiers back to life. We
can pause to contemplate one image in this magical erasure of all the terrible fruits of the
action narrated thus far: ‘Those people who had died in battle and whom the demons (raksas) had swallowed came forth from their mouths by the energy (tej) of her medicine’. Each slain soldier’s bodily parts found their proper places and were rejoined in a restored corporal whole, and then the dead were restored to life.

By losing the battle, submitting, seeing the new epiphany and worshipping the goddess, the king himself was transformed. He recognized the goddess as the divinity who moves kings through cycles of creation and destruction. He recognized the merchant’s son as the ‘servant’ of this goddess, and agreed to give him his daughter in marriage. These transformations all together, one assumes, would keep him from acting in future as a hunter towards the two merchants.

Srimanta’s adamantine body has another analogue. Imprisoned for twelve years, Dhanapati also suffered bodily transformations. As the ‘fruit’ of Candi’s anger, he contracted elephantiasis, cataracts and skin disease. These bodily imperfections made him loathsome, because his body ceased to be properly bounded. His right foot was swollen, his skin flaked and constantly itched, and the pupils of his eyes became clouded
and discolored. \textsuperscript{88} Clouded eyes and an unbounded, diseased body are the physical correlatives of Dhanapati’s faulty understanding, for throughout his imprisonment he resolutely refused to worship Candi. His diseased body also is the middle term between the polar opposites of a perfect, masculine, and royal ‘adamantine body’ on the one hand, and a dead body treated as sheer economic product on the other. He too will have to learn to worship Candi so that he can be educated and restored to health. But he will not worship Candi in the form of the lovely woman on the lotus. Instead, he will learn to worship her as Ardhanarisvari, Siva and the goddess combined as an androgyne. \textsuperscript{89}

This episode repeats the theme of a merchant’s liminality between hunters and the hunted, a theme we noted in the merchants’ progress through the ‘deeps’ on their way to Sri Lanka, and in Candi’s new icon shown to the merchants, wherein she swallows and regurgitates the male elephant. At the same time it enriches the meaning of the opposition between hunting and being hunted. It defines hunting as royal and masculine compared to being hunted, and it associates being hunted with treatment as an economic product, to be bought and sold in the market. Finally it substitutes a ‘contract’ between the goddess and
the king for the earlier ones between the merchants and king. Is it surprising that the
goddess will fulfill her obligations under this ‘contract’, and so force the king to become a
wife-giver and an inferior to Srimanta? Before we can take up this question, we need to
consider in more detail the transformation of Srimanta’s ambiguously gendered body and
his liminal roles.

Merchants as Androgynes

In this section I will argue that although they do not understand the divine vision of
the goddess given to them, and certainly cannot control her appearance to the king,
merchants do participate in many features of that vision. We may begin with the relatively
‘feminine’ nature of merchants.

To say that Srimanta must be transformed in his body to survive battle and to
become suited for royal marriages is to say something about the prior weakness and non-
royal nature of his body. By contemporary assumptions, his extraordinary ‘adamantine
body’ may be understood as masculine in its freedom from ‘change, death and decay’.90

Ordinary merchants in their conduct and characters, if not in their bodies, are given
dimensions of femininity in Mukunda’s poem. We already have seen stay-at-home merchants compared to ‘wives’ in seclusion. Merchants who venture abroad also can be compared to women who do so. Merchants, like women, entice rulers and expose themselves to attacks on their wealth and honour when they wander unprotected abroad.

For women the clearest statement of the temptation they pose is found in a proverb repeated by the poem: ‘Fish of a drying pond, and the wandering of a woman: if one gets gold and silver in the deep forest, who leaves them aside if he gets them effortlessly?’ When they visited Sri Lanka, the two Bengali Hindu merchants of this poem also were wandering alone, and it is alleged that they evoked a similar desire to possess their wealth in the heart of the Sri Lankan king.

Candi, in an earlier narrative in the poem, also had appeared as a beautiful woman wandering alone. In this very guise she had offered Kalketu the hunter a gift of great wealth that allowed him to cease hunting and to found a kingdom. Motifs of established order threatened by a wandering woman’s attractiveness, of hunting negated and a kingdom established, and of royal theft from merchants’ wealth all appear in this earlier
narrative. Note especially that when news of Kalketu’s new kingdom reached the ears of
his own erstwhile king, resulting in war between them, one of the king’s false accusations
against Kalketu was that to escape his low estate as a hunter Kalketu had ‘slain some
merchant and escaped with much wealth’. These same motifs are repeated both in the epiphany of goddess, elephant and
lotus, and in the story of Srimanta’s deliverance. In the narrative of Kalketu Candi’s
beauty was a threat to the moral order of Kalketu’s marriage, and particularly to the
position of Phullara, his wife. Struck by Candi’s beauty, and yet fearful of desiring or
seeming to desire her, Kalketu asked the goddess to leave, and attempted to force her to
depart when he could not persuade her to do so. Similar to her appearance as this lovely
sixteen-year-old, Candi, when appearing to the merchants as the woman on the lotus, also
is described in stereotypical similes which eroticise each aspect of her face, body and
ornamentation; especially when she swallows the elephant, she is called a kamini, a ‘lovely
woman’. At first sight, the merchants felt desire for her. At once, however, their desire
became fear and horror when the merchants saw the goddess swallowing and regurgitating
the elephant. But unlike Kalketu’s honest but mistaken attempt to force the goddess to
leave, the merchants sought to show Candi to the king and to help him possess her.

In the narrative of Kalketu Candi made the hunter into a new raja, and destroyed
and then restored to life the army of an existing king. In the epiphany she holds the
elephant captive and repeatedly swallows him. The elephant, of course, is an instrument
of the martial power of kings, and a sign of kingship generally. The acts of swallowing
and regurgitating also have a clear set of references in this poem. We already have seen
Candi’s ghouls swallowing the bodies of the Sri Lankan king’s soldiers, and regurgitating
these same bodies, so that Candi can bring them back to life. In the epiphany Candi
symbolically moves elephants through cycles of destruction and re-creation without letting
them escape from her control, as she also did to the Sri Lankan king and his army in the
narrative of Srimanta’s deliverance.

Candi gave Kalketu great wealth and commanded him to found a kingdom, but his
own king falsely alleged that Kalketu got this wealth by killing some merchant. On the
other hand, the king of Sri Lanka in fact seized the merchants’ wealth as forfeits for their
failing to show him the epiphany of woman, elephant and lotus, and he was on the point of having Srimanta executed on the cremation ground when Candi intervened. He truly had intended to do what Kalketu falsely was alleged to have done.

Like wandering women and like the goddess herself, wandering merchants have a dual potential: they ambiguously promise profit and loss, the founding and the destruction of kingdoms, blessing and curse. When merchants appear in a foreign king’s port, they may advertise the martial capacity which their own king has given them as his servants, and they may in fact be his spies or thieves sent to pillage the foreign king’s land. At the same time, they carry great wealth, and it may disturb existing relations among members of the king’s court, and entice attacks upon the merchants themselves for the sake of the wealth they carry. ‘Tribute exchange’ itself may threaten honour by its ambiguity, either through the exchange of goods which are of unequal value, or through the receipt of goods from someone who himself is not honourable. Perhaps the safest course for a king would be to drive foreign merchants away, but this action would deprive the kingdom of the wealth they bring. Moreover, if merchants feel they have been mistreated, they themselves
can depart, individually or in a body, again depriving the kingdom of their wealth.¹⁰¹

Merchants maintain some connection to their own raja, who may think it necessary to
avenge any mistreatment of his merchants. Thus, when father and son were about to
return home, the Sri Lankan king anxiously asked Dhanapati not to tell about his
imprisonment to the court of his own raja of Ujain.¹⁰² Of all of the ways merchants
threaten a kingdom’s order in this poem, the possibility of properly androgyne merchants
acquiring ‘adamantine’ masculine bodies impervious to attack may be the most disturbing,
and the possibility which links merchants most closely to the erotic but predatory goddess
whose form they first see.

Merchants engaged in ‘tribute exchange’—indeed, merchants in general—are
situated liminally between being hunters and being hunted. Not themselves rajas, they
nevertheless are their own rajā’s representatives and carry martial forces with them, and at
the very same time their wealth and lack of relation to the foreign king may invite attack.
In Mukunda’s poem neither they nor the king to whose realms they come can presume the
existence of something like a ‘market’: those institutions of law and custom which exclude
force and fraud from gift exchanges, and so allow only those exchanges which are voluntary and mutually beneficial. One might suppose that a solution would be the guarantee precisely of something like a ‘market’ for the transactions of ‘tribute exchange’.

In fact, Mukunda’s poem seems to criticise one feature of ‘market’ transactions, adjudicable contracts mutually agreed upon by merchant and king, for the way they can be used by the king as instruments of predation. It will explore an altogether different kind of solution.

Transformed Relationships: Marriages, Wedding Presents, and Tribute

When his army had been restored to life, and Dhanapati had been released from prison and reunited with his son, the Sri Lankan king gave Srimanta his daughter in marriage, according to the terms of his oath with Candi. The king and his relatives then gave Srimanta wedding presents (jautuk) befitting his status as a daughter’s husband (jamata). These presents included the conch shells and sandalwood on behalf of which the raja of Ujjain originally had sent both father and son to Sri Lanka, and they also included a crown, golden and jeweled ornaments, pearls, corals, diamonds, and ‘various
wealth’ as ‘honours’ (*puruskar*, sic.) for Srimanta. With them Srimanta could return home honoured and successful in the king’s service. It is not the case that a marriage relation allowed the original ‘tribute exchange’ to proceed by bargaining in good faith for mutually honourable terms of exchange. Rather, for the king’s part, the gift ‘exchange’ was replaced by gifts only from him to Srimanta, gifts which were embedded in the marriage relationship itself. From his ‘wedding presents’ Srimanta in turn gave the conch shells and sandalwood, along with other gifts (*bhet*) that at first acknowledged his inferior status, to his own raja of Ujain to fulfill the purpose of his voyage. Moreover, much the same sequence of events was repeated in Ujain: the Ujain raja disbelieved the merchant’s story of the divine epiphany and demanded to see it for himself; in return for which, by instruction from the goddess, he gave Srimanta his own daughter in marriage, and with his daughter, ‘wedding presents’ that again honoured Srimanta as a daughter’s husband and superior.104

A merchant who trades abroad must be related to more than one ruler. We can imagine a triad, dual at its top, the two rulers, and singular at its base, the merchant. The
relation between merchant and ‘foreign’ king is problematic because it is undefined and unprotected, compared to his relation in ‘tribute exchange’ as ‘minister’ to his ‘own’ raja, or compared to his relation as subject of his ‘own’ raja in the case of ordinary trade.

Abroad, the merchant’s identity and purpose are ambiguous; he may be a merchant trading on his own account, or a spy or a thief acting on behalf of his ‘own’ raja, or an emissary sent for the sake of ‘tribute exchange’. Even in the last case the potential relation between the rulers themselves through the merchant is problematic because it is indirect, and because ‘tribute exchange’ may produce neither clear superiority of one ruler nor clear equality of both. Our poem proposes that, in the extraordinary case of Srimanta, the merchant’s unequal relations to his ‘own’ raja and to the ‘foreign’ king should be replaced by a single reiterated marriage relation, that of daughter’s husband (jamata) and superior to both rulers. Marriages between the merchant and the two rulers’ daughters are authorized by Candi in her new epiphany as the lovely woman swallowing and regurgitating the elephant, and Candi is worshipped by both rulers through this new image. Their novel worship unites both rulers to a common superior, the goddess. True, a problematic triad
then reappears within the merchant’s own family, for he must keep peace between his two
wives, the princesses, who are not to be considered equals. But this seems to be an
easier triad, for its apex, the merchant, is singular and its base is dual, rather than the
reverse.

By replacing the mutual gifts of ‘tribute exchange’ with marriage relations and their
one-way gifts, the poem proposes a structural solution to a structural problem. It replaces
the ill-defined, unequal, and potentially exploitative relation between ruler and ‘foreign’
merchant with a relation both more defined and more protected by ties of good will. The
relation itself, however, does not require, and in fact discourages permanent residence of
the once ‘foreign’ merchant at the ruler’s city: daughters’ husbands should return home,
as should foreign merchants. Establishing an affinal relationship moderates but does not
erase the distinction between ‘foreign’ merchants and those who belong to the ruler, either
specially as his ‘ministers’ or generally as members of his kingdom.

The two, symmetrical, affinal relationships between Srimanta and both rulers move
‘tributary exchange’ into the category of gift-giving on the occasion of marriage. I have
argued that in the status ambiguities of ‘tribute exchange’ one perhaps could win—in
calculations of both honour and profit—by obtaining more valuable goods than one gave
away. Candi, however, has removed status ambiguities from the relation between Srimanta
and the king. As a wife-giver the king will become Srimanta’s inferior. For him, marriage
gifts also are tokens of honour, with the feature contrary to goods bartered in ‘tribute
exchange’ that he will obtain more honour by giving more away to Srimanta.

Although they both are ‘fathers-in-law’ of a common ‘son-in-law’ (to use for
convenience an inappropriate terminology), in terms of Bengali kinship the two rulers have
no close relation to each other.106 The reiterated marriage relations to the merchant may
insulate the rulers from antagonistic relations to each other. If so, the marriages resolve
two structural problems: between ‘foreign’ merchant and king, and between the two rulers
themselves. Since these are structural problems, we should locate them, not just in the
relations between our Bengali merchants and the Sri Lankan king, but also between
Bengali kings and their ‘foreign’ merchants. With this final insight we may return to
Saptagram and to lesser markets on the Bhagirathi-Sarasvati-Hugli river axis, and to the
rajas and ‘little kingdoms’ around them.

Were there ‘foreign’ merchants with whom it was difficult for rajas to deal and to
whom they might have become wife-givers? It is easy to find evidence for marriages
between Portuguese and Dutch men and daughters of merchants in India, but not between
them and daughters of rulers. Mukunda’s description of the blessed Hindu merchants of
Saptagram, who could reside by the sacred site of Tribeni without venturing abroad, also
names the ‘foreign’ cities whose merchants came to Saptagram and made residence at
home possible for its Bengali Hindu merchants. With the exception of merchants from Sri
Lanka, all these ‘foreign’ merchants probably came from elsewhere in India. One cannot
find evidence that he had in mind merchants from outside an Indic cultural zone. Nowhere
in his poem does he mention the Portuguese or any Europeans. He does include Ašraf
Muslim notables in a list of the members of Kalketu’s little kingdom, but Mukunda does
not allude to their trade. It would be completely consistent with this statement to suppose
that for Mukunda what we have called ‘tribute exchange’ was peculiar to a Hindu pattern
of statecraft. His initial problem, after all, was a raja who did not have goods needed for royal temple worship.

Conclusion

In its final narrative Mukunda’s Candimangal locates the most serious of merchants’ problems not in market trade but in the gifts of ‘tribute exchange’. These problems simultaneously involved conflicts about wealth and conflicts about honour, for in ‘tribute exchange’ receiving goods of greater value seems to have meant receiving greater honour.

Problems arose primarily in the relation between the ‘foreign’ merchant and the king to whom he was a stranger. The liminality of foreign merchants made relations with them difficult and unstable. Foreign merchants could be armed. They could be thieves or spies in disguise, as well as emissaries of their own rulers. If treated unfairly, foreign merchants could invite retaliation from their own rulers. Foreign merchants brought wealth to kingdoms, and gave presents (bhet) to members of the court to secure the privilege of ‘tribute exchange’, but the jealousies evoked by this very wealth could threaten existing relations within the court. Foreign merchants might seem weak, and subject to arbitrary
confiscations by the ruler in whose land they were strangers, but by the aid of the goddess Srimanta acquired an ‘adamantine body’, impervious to attack. In short, even more than most merchants, they occupied an ambiguous, middle position in a field of predatory relations: they could both hunt and be hunted, they could bring either honour or dishonour, and they could cause either profit or loss. Mukunda seems to have thought that the most serious problems involving foreign merchants arose in their thoroughly ambiguous role as emissaries sent to engage in ‘tribute exchange’ on behalf of their own ruler. How would it change our view of Bengali merchants of the sixteenth century if we were to adopt this perspective? We would have to understand some foreign trade, ‘tribute exchange’, as a diplomatic game in which both royal honour and precious goods, insignia of royal ‘honours’, were at risk, a game therefore which invited acts of predation.

As conceived in Mukunda’s poem, Candi’s purpose was to remove foreign merchants engaged in the mutual gifts of ‘tribute exchange’ from the entropic threat of predatory relations. The customs and institutions of a ‘market’—contractual agreements and correct legal procedures—would not suffice to accomplish this purpose. Market
relations may have been dishonourable in themselves, but they also offered no guarantee against predation. ‘Tribute exchange’, although formally a gift relationship, could be like market relations, because potential conflicts over honour in relations between rulers and foreign merchants were so entangled with potential conflicts over wealth. In this poem care for honour, unreasoning anger at being dishonoured, anxiety over terms of ‘tribute exchange’ which might turn out both unfavorable and dishonourable at once, and greed for wealth to be obtained only at the other’s expense, all together drove both foreign merchants and rulers into escalating disputes about honour, in which the forfeits demanded to restore honour bore no relation to the amount of dishonour experienced. Good formal legal procedure could not rectify the terms of bad agreements. Instead, the foreign merchant and the ruler had to establish new, affinal relations, converting the foreign merchant to a daughter’s husband, and replacing the ruler’s side of ‘tribute exchange’ with one-way marriage presents from the king to his daughter’s husband, presents which at the same time were the merchant’s appropriate ‘honours’. Finally, the merchant and his own raja also had to establish the same affinal relations, to secure the two rulers’ common
relation to the goddess, to insulate the rulers from any potentially dishonourable relation to each other, and to reverse the hierarchy of relations between the merchant and both rulers.

Candi’s epiphany as the lovely woman on the lotus who swallows and regurgitates a male elephant secures these new, affinal relations between rulers and merchants. Rulers see and worship Candi in this form and are transformed. They understand that she holds them in her power and can move them through cycles of creation and destruction by the ‘play’ of her desire. More important, they learn to see merchants, and especially foreign merchants sent for ‘tribute exchange’, as servants and representatives of Candi herself, as if through the merchants she herself were coming to them, appearing as she had to Kalketu in the provocative guise of a wandering woman. Rulers must admit these merchants into their kingdoms, as Kalketu once had to admit the goddess to receive the blessing of her wealth. By enacting, reversing and negating hunting, her epiphany enacts the liminality of merchants, who both hunt and are hunted. More importantly, its liminality suggests that relations between rulers and these merchants may and should be moved
away from the field of predatory relations, in which wealth and honour are ultimately at risk. In the story of Srimanta’s deliverance, this movement is accomplished. Before new affinal relations can be established, Candi completely, if temporarily, reverses the roles of hunter and hunted. She reduces the army of the king of Sri Lanka to economic products bought and sold at market, and elevates the merchant to someone like a raja, with an ‘adamantine body’ and royal insignia. Finally, she arranges Srimanta’s wedding to the king’s daughter. With the king’s gift of a royal bride Srimanta receives the ‘various wealth’ of other ‘wedding presents’, which also are his ‘honours’, and the ‘honours’ he will pass on to his own king.

Dhanapati, however, does not receive royal honours. Despite the possibility of new, affinal relations to replace the predatory relations of ‘tribute exchange’, most merchants would continue to be mere merchants, trading on their own account, as Dhanapati may have done after finally leaving Sri Lanka. By worshipping Candi Dhanapati acquired a cleansed and healthy body, but not a perfect, masculine one, immune to injury, death and decay. He retained the liminal characteristics of ordinary merchants, who are both hunters
and hunted, and both masculine and feminine. Fittingly, he learned to worship the
goddess in the form of Ardhanarisvari, Siva and the goddess in one body.

To be sure, this is only one way to read Mukunda’s narrative. Throughout I have
selected interpretations which seem to me to be most consistent with the story as a whole,
but no poem and no reading can be completely self-consistent. There is, for example, an
ambiguity in what I have called the liminal situation of merchants. Because merchants
generally seem to be located between hunter and hunted, the problem of the poem might
concern merchants generally and their ordinary trade for profit. The solution of the poem,
on the contrary, seems to resolve problems with ‘tribute exchange’ in particular, rather than
problems with trade in general. This ambiguity may allow for readings with different
emphases. Because he focused on problems of ‘tribute exchange’ in Sri Lanka, Mukunda
missed novel problems for merchants who had to cope with mercantilist, rent-seeking
strategies, both of local rulers and their officials and of the Portuguese, all of whom were
motivated more by profits than honours. Later authors of Candimangal either did not
understand or did not see the relevance of his choice of problem in this narrative. By
locating the solution to problems of ‘tribute exchange’ in extraordinary affinal relations between the ruler of Sri Lanka and the merchant’s son Srimanta, and by supporting this solution by novel worship of Candi, Mukunda both suggested a utopian solution to his problem, and opened the way for a predominately religious understanding of his solution, one which emphasizes knowledge of and devotion to the goddess, and which is unrelated to particular conditions and problems of merchants.¹¹¹

Also open to different interpretations is the new epiphany through which Candi both reveals herself and resolves the problem of the plot. Although it enacts, reverses, and negates relations of hunter and hunted, it also can be understood to suggest the play of desire in divine and cosmic processes of creation and destruction. We can be sure that Indian audiences did not understand either the image or the poem itself in a single way; nor are they likely to have confined themselves to self-consistent meanings in their interpretations. Indeed, Mukunda’s narrative of the merchants’ voyages and of Srimanta’s deliverance now cannot be reduced to a single, authoritative text, because it so often was added to or altered. Moreover, this narrative became a kind of model for other, later
narratives, describing new epiphanies of the goddess, revealed to new characters, who had undertaken sea voyages or journeys of some kind, but who were not always merchants.

Again these later narratives have little to do with the peculiar problems of merchants. To investigate the many ways Mukunda’s poem has been understood by its audiences and by the audiences of poems modeled upon it must be beyond the scope of this essay.
24-9. Sen argues for composition between 1544 and 1556. Pancanan Mandal, however, casts doubt on his evidence, and favors a date of 1586; see ‘Bhumika’, in CMPM, p. jha.


I take this term from Bernard S. Cohn, ‘Political Systems in Eighteenth-Century India: The Benares Region,’ in Cohn, An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays, introduction by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 489-92, but also draw attention to the dissatisfaction with the expressions ‘little king’ and ‘little kingdom’ expressed by Rahul Peter Das, ‘Little Kingdoms and Big Theories of History,’ Journal of the American Oriental Society 117 (1997): 127-34. I have used the term raja to designate people who owed allegiance to an overlord, and ‘king’ to designate those who did not. I have used ‘ruler’ as a general term to indicate both rajas and kings.

See ‘Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier: Kalketu’s Story in Mukunda’s Candimangal’, in this volume.

In defining ‘emporia’ Chaudhuri emphasizes the way they were the ‘junctions’ for ‘three natural segments’ of the Indian Ocean trade, at which a variety of foreign merchants therefore could be found. Successful emporia offered merchants security first of all, from which could follow predictability and transparency in market transactions; see Niels Steensgaard, ‘Emporia: Some Reflections’, in Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400-1750, ed. Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), pp. 9-12.

Warehousing, currency and banking services, wholesale purchasers capable of clearing merchants’ imports, institutions for resolving disputes and enforcing contracts, and a political climate of limited taxation also influenced merchants’ choices of ports and markets.
The shift probably was a consequence of the siege of Gaur by Sher Khan Sur (1537-38), and of the expansion of the kingdom of Arakan to include Chittagong in the mid 1540s, severing the port’s connection to Gaur. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1700* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 108, 119-20. For Mukunda’s description of Saptagram, which emphasises the presence of ‘foreign’ merchants, see CM, *pad* 417, p. 231.


11 For example, note the temporary market found by Cæsar Frederici at ‘Butor’, when the Sarasvati River began to silt, and larger ships could not pass upriver to Satgaon. It was abandoned within fifteen years, when the Portuguese moved to Hugli. See Frederici, ‘Voyage and Travell’, p. 237; Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*, p. 121.


for ‘Coilam’ (Quilon), 1: 97, and for ‘Reynel’ (Rander), 2: 146. In both cases the trade was conducted by merchants of these ports, not by merchants of Bengal.

14 Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa* 2: 117, 123, 125; Prakash, *Dutch East India Company*, p. 29.


16 For the following discussion of trade routes and trade goods I follow Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*, pp. 100-03.

17 Pires, *Suma Oriental* 1: 92. Bengali textiles were sold in the ports of Burma, Siam, and Cambodia, in the Liu Kiu islands, in Banda and the ports of northern Java, as well as in Melaka, and in Pasé and Pidê on Sumatra. See Pires, *Suma Oriental* 1: 111, 112, 133, 139, 186, 207; 2: 217. At least one variety of Bengali textile, white cotton ‘baftas’ were known in China; see Haraprasad Ray, ‘Bengal’s Textile Products Involved in Ming Trade during Cheng Ho’s Voyages to the Indian Ocean and Identification of the Hitherto Undeciphered Textiles’, in *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs*, pp. 81-93.
The only mention I find is at CM, *pad* 337, p. 191, where Dhanapati lades his ships with ‘heaps and heaps’ of ‘various cloths’ (*nana bastra*).


Duarte Barbosa, who had lived for years on the Malabar Coast, reported vaguely of Bengal that, ‘Moors dwell in the seaports where there is great traffic in goods of many kinds’, and among them were ‘strangers from many lands, such as Arabs, Persians, Abexhis [Habasis, members of “various ethnic communities from the Abyssinian highlands and the immediately surrounding regions”], and Indians’; see Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa* 2: 135-9; Richard Eaton, *The New Cambridge History of India* I.8, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300-1761* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 105, fn. 2.

The merchants from Gujarat included foreigners—‘Parsees, Turks, Turkomans and Armenians’ who would ‘come and take up their
companies for their cargo in Gujarat’, and native Gujarati merchants as well, Muslim, Hindu
and Jain. The Kelings were Tamil and Telugu merchants, both Muslim and Hindu. The
word ‘companies’ probably refers to merchants sharing risks by hiring a common agent in
*commenda* contracts.


23 M. R. Tarafdar, ‘The Bengali Muslims in the Pre-Colonial Period: Problems of
Conversion, Class Formation and Cultural Evolution’, in *Islam and Society in South
Asia/Islam et Société en Asie du Sud*, edited by/études réunies par Marc Gaborieau
(Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1986; Collection


India, Volume I: c.1200-c.1750*, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 130-1, 136-7; Prakash, *Dutch East India
Company*, pp. 28-33.
Thus at the beginning of the seventeenth century Hindu Gujaratis traded from ports in Orissa to Sri Lanka, and imported conch shells as well as the usual Sri Lankan goods. See Prakash, *Dutch East India Company*, Table 2.1, p. 28, and p. 33.


Sinnappah Arasaratnam, ‘Ceylon in the Indian Ocean Trade: 1500-1800’, in *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, pp. 224-7. In the seventeenth century the Portuguese intensified their efforts to monopolize Sri Lankan cinnamon. By the end of this century, perhaps because of Portuguese hostility to Muslim shipping, Gujarati Hindu merchants
resident in the Orissan port of Balasore held most of the residual, non-Portuguese trade to
and from the island. See Prakash, Dutch East India Company, pp. 27-8, note 9.

\(^{30}\) The Portuguese envoy to Sultan Nusrat Shah in 1521 reported the following speech
by a Muslim nobleman and ship’s captain, present in the Sultan’s court: ‘We forget that it
is the poor merchants who travel the seas who have to pay for whatever happens. Your
Highness well knows that the Portuguese are so powerful here [in Bengal] that nothing
stands in their way. It would only need for the smallest of their ships to position itself at
the harbour bar of Chittagong or Satgaon and no other ship would be able to leave or
enter. If this were to happen, if the traders no longer sold the country’s goods, if
foreigners were no longer able to enter the country, the Governors would find it hard to
pay the allowances which are incumbent upon them. . . .’ See Voyage dans les Deltas
du Gange et de l’Irraouaddy, relation Portugaise anonyme (1521), éditée et présentée par
Genevieve Bouchon et Luis Filipe Thomaz, avec traductions Française et Anglaise (Paris:


33Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Persianization” and “Mercantilism”: Two Themes in Bay of Bengal History, 1400-1700’, in Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800, ed. Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (New Delhi: Monohar, for Indian Council of Historical Research, 1999), pp. 63-70.

34Barendse, Arabian Seas, p. 128.


36Subrahmanyam, “Persianization” and “Mercantilism”: pp. 47-85.


38CM, pad 328, p. 187. The particular ritual the king was unable to perform was the ‘gift of sandal’ to Hari during Harisamkirtan on the full moon of Jyaistha: ‘In the region of
Bharat whoever offers *Harisamkirtan* with sandal will have a successful life, and whoever does *Haripuja* with sandal becomes a king on earth for seven days.’

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39CM, *pad* 335, p. 190, Lahana’s description of her father’s trade. Towards the end of the seventeenth century conch shells still were imported from Sri Lanka; see Prakash, *Dutch East India Company*, Table 2.1, p. 28. White and yellow sandalwood (Santalum album and Santalum freycinetianum) were grown in the forests of the Western Ghats above the Malabar Coast, but the most aromatic of these ‘true’ sandalwoods came from Timor in the Sunda Islands. Only ‘false’ sandalwood (*Ximenia americana*) was a product of Sri Lanka, but Brahmans of the Coromandel Coast used its wood as a substitute for white and yellow sandalwood. Mukunda may have known of a trade in this substitute to Bengal. See George Watt, *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of India*, 7 vols. in 10 (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975, 1st pub. 1889-1896) vol. 6, pt. 2, *v.* ‘Santalum album’, pp. 461-7; vol. 6, pt. 4, *v.* ‘Ximenia americana’, pp. 319-20.

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The chowries would have been brought overland from the mountains between Nepal and Tibet, and in fact Bengali merchants exported them to the south. Similar arguments apply to some of the textiles: fine woolen shawls from Persian or Kashmir (sakallat), and silks from Bhutan (or perhaps woolens? pamari bhot).

CM, pad 329, p. 188: disi sadhu haila badhu.

CM, pad 329, p. 187; pad 331, p. 188: apan anger jora, caribare dila ghara, kabaj prasad jamadhar. laksa tanka dingar dhan, gay dila abharan, biday paila sadagar.

CM, pad 417, p. 231. The merchants are spiritually blessed by the fact that Saptagram is contiguous with the tirtha of Tribeni, from which they do not have to absent themselves.

CM, pad 334, p. 189.

For an analogous case of ‘emblems and honors’, especially ‘temple honors’ given from a greater to a subordinate lord in Tamilnadu, see Nicholas Dirks, The Hollow Crown,
2nd edn. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993). In this case also: ‘If the emblems of sovereignty are not gifted by an overlord somewhere higher in the political system, they are worth less, thereby providing the basis for a lesser claim to local sovereignty’ (p. 48).

47CM, pad 312, p. 178, a speech by the merchants of Barddhaman: raj’patra dhanapati, ara banya baise khiti, sakal rajar paribar [Dhanapati is the king’s minister; all other merchants who dwell on earth belong to the king’s family].

48CM, pad 330, p. 188: patra mitra bale bhai na kara bisad, karite rajar karyya nahi aparadh. sabhajan bale sadhu, kata sadh mana, baisaha rajar rajye khao ksem nana; probably a mistake for CMAK, p. 486: ksema dana, ‘maintenance and gifts’. CMPM, p. 189, reads ksem’sal, ‘weal and woe’. CMUC does not include the pad. Notice that there is no mention by Dhanapati of a dharmic injunction against sea voyages per se, or of ritual pollution therefrom; cf. M.N. Pearson, ‘Indian Seafarers in the Sixteenth Century’, in Coastal Western India: Studies from the Portuguese Records (New Delhi: Concept
Lahana argues that Dhanapati should not hasten to return; he first should ‘make gains’ (*labh karya*). A person who is subject to another (*paradhin*) is necessarily poor and unfortunate (*din*); he cannot distinguish between happiness and sorrow. Dhanapati will get travail (*kles*) in the king’s service; but he should make his breast firm and go nevertheless. By trading with his own goods he can come back a rich man.


Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p. 141: ‘Such trade as was conducted in a few monopoly
goods by the court was not primarily seen as a source of gain. This commerce was rather perceived as an asymmetrical exchange of gifts—amiable taxation—though admittedly, it was a thin line between bestowing gifts and bartering them for a profit’.

53 Cf. Philip B. Wagoner, “Lord of the Eastern and Western Oceans”: Unguents, Politics, and the Indian Ocean Trade in Medieval South India’, manuscript of a paper prepared for delivery at the 50th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., March 26-29, 1998. Wagoner argues that Vijayanagara kings attempted to monopolise unguents, not for reasons of profit, but because of their role as gifts of honour to favoured subordinates. Gifts of unguents were used to substantiate unambiguously hierarchical relationships of ‘incorporation’, as unguents received from the superior were used upon the bodies of inferiors.

54 Digby, ‘Maritime Trade’. pp. 131-9. For a description of pricing Chinese silks against pearls, and thereby exchanging ‘precious stones, pearls, corals, and other such things’ at Calicut, see Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-lan: ‘The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores’ (1433), translated from the Chinese text edited by Feng Cheng-Chun, with

55Probably for this reason in the years 1404-1439 Sultans of Bengal sent fourteen separate ‘missions’ to offer tribute to China, while they received only four return missions from the Chinese. See Haraprasad Ray, *Trade and Diplomacy in India-China Relations: A Study of Bengal during the Fifteenth Century* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1993), pp. 61-73.


57*Voyage dans les Deltas*, pp. 334-5. The Portuguese had given the Sultan a horse and armor. To indicate a reciprocal relationship the Sultan wanted to give the Portuguese suitable gifts for their king, and asked for suggestions. The Portuguese, on the contrary, to assert their superiority in the relationship, argued that their king already had all kinds of luxuries, and suggested that the only suitable gift would be duty-free trade in the king’s
ports.

58 So I interpret the many similar passages in Bengali mangal-kabya which express merchants’ hopes for advantageous terms of exchange. When Dhanapati actually negotiates with the king, however, he exactly reverses these terms; see CM, pad 363, p. 204.


60 These descriptions are found only in the account of the son’s voyage, CM, pad 432, p. 242: alankha [sic., alanghya; cf. CMPM, p. 200, and CMUC, p. 347] sagar rahite nahi sthal; and pad 435, p. 244: pramanik yojan gahir bahe jal.


Ibid., p. 241.

CM, *pad* 357-358, pp. 201-02; *pad* 432-434, pp. 242-4.


CM, *pad* 356, p. 201 for the father; and *pad* 433, p. 243 for the son.
This issue appears to depend on whether Dhanapati would recognize the king’s proclamation of authority (*dohai*). Without doing so Dhanapati gave the captain of the guard a present (*inam*) in place of the ‘guard tax’ (*digari*) which he had demanded as security for the merchant’s good behavior. Dhanapati claimed the status of a foreign merchant, stating he intended to reside if he found friendliness, but if not, to depart.

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The offer is at CM, *pad* 445, p. 249. A similar offer was not made to Dhanapati;
compare *pad* 368, p. 207.

76CM, *pad* 479, p. 270: *rajar bacane laj paila parbati*. CMUC, p. 423 gives an alternative reading of the verse: Parbati ‘laughed’ (*hasila*) rather than ‘felt shame’ at the king’s speech. CMAK changes the verse altogether to omit her reaction; see p. 700.

77CM, *pad* 478, p. 270. The passage is not in CMUC (see pp. 422-423). CMAK, p. 697, contains verses which describe the king’s offense even more explicitly: ‘When he came to your city, did he commit any theft or robbery? Why do you destroy him in life and wealth? . . . You strike, slay, or keep tied up all the merchants who come, and you steal all their wealth’.


79Was this a reflection or recollection of actual practice, rather than just a literary conceit? We know very little about scavenging battlefields in Mukunda’s age.


82 CM, *pad* 475, p. 268.

83 CM, *pad* 475, p. 268.

84 CM, *pad* 476, p. 268.

85 CM, *pad* 73-74 pp. 44-5.

86 CM, *pad* 484, p. 272.


For a comic description of the typically plump body of a merchant, with soft shoulders and pendulous belly, see ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: Candimangal after British Dominance’, in this volume.


So Candi suggests at CM, pad 478, p. 270: ‘Srimanta came in hope of trade to your country, and for what fault did you loot his ships? And having taken his wealth, you also take his life and dishonor him’.

CM, pad 93-107, pp. 54-64; see ‘Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier; Kalketu’s Story in Mukunda’s Candimangal, in this volume.

CM, pad 162, p. 95.


CM, pad 357, pp. 201-02, pad 435, p. 244.

See especially Dhanapati’s speech in pad 366, p. 206: ‘I would have bound and
brought elephant, lotus and lovely woman but for fear of you, crest-jewel of kings. Now
give the command, oh king, from your auspicious mouth, and I can shade your house with
the lotus blossom’. Srimanta invites the same command, without offering an excuse, pad
443, p. 248.

99For an example in the poem, see Candi’s creation of a ‘kingdom of animals’, CM,
pad 50, p. 31, where she appoints the elephant as mount of the lion-king. Compare pad
475, p. 268, where she has the ‘great merchant’ (sadagar) Srimanta mounted upon an
elephant as one sign of his new, royal status.

100For the act of swallowing, CM, pad 475-476, p. 268; and for regurgitation, pad
484, p. 272.

101In their initial interviews with the captain of the guard, Dhanapati threatens to depart
if he does not receive ‘affection’ (prît); and Srimanta if he does not receive ‘happiness’
(sukh). Cf. CM, pad 360, p. 203, and pad 437, p. 246. Merchants in Kalketu’s
kingdom threaten to depart in a body when one of his officials mistreats them; see pad
Srimanta assures his Sri Lankan bride that the Ujain king’s daughter will be her maidservant.

One might imagine that a dispute or contest between sons of two co-wives about division of their patrimony could lead them to call upon the support of their respective maternal families. By one law of inheritance which may have governed Bengali Hindu elites, however, all sons who are of the same jati and are born to properly married co-wives receive, only upon their father’s death, the right to an equal share of his property. Prior to his death they have no property right at all in the patrimony. In theory disputes between sons about property should not arise. See Ludo Rocher, ‘Introduction’, in


108CM, *pad* 417, p. 231; but perhaps *malaya des* refers not to the Malabar Coast, but to the Malay peninsula.

109CM, *pad* 130,131, pp. 76-7. Hindu merchants are described in *pad* 133, p. 79.

110Dhanapati’s continuing trade is mentioned in a single line at CM, *pad* 514, p. 290: ‘The merchant reached Tribeni, and after resting there, Dhanapati purchased various goods and loaded his ships’. Are we to imagine purchases at the neighboring emporium of Saptagram? The line itself, however, has several variants, some of which link his purchases not to Tribeni but to the market at ‘Nimaitirtha’, a place located near the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Sarasvati rivers. Compare CMPM, p. 278.

111See ‘Lost Meanings and New Stories: Candimangal after British Dominance’, in this
volume.

‘Voluntary’ Relationships and Royal Gifts of Pan in Mughal Bengal*

This essay explores ‘giving’ and ‘taking up’ pan as an ambiguous and changing system of signs through which a ruler and his subjects could enact political relations in the somewhat public space of a South Asian court. (Pan are ‘betel leaves’, Piper betel, but the texts I will study suggest gifts of prepared ‘rolls’ of pan, containing ground areca nuts, catechu, a lime paste made from sea-shells, and perhaps spices as well.) This essay focuses on the Mughal period in Bengal, and on the first half of the eighteenth century,

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when governors (*nawabs*) of Bengal became practically independent of control from the Delhi court.

This essay is based upon four premises that apply equally to royal gifts of *pan*, to *khil’at*, or robes of honour, and to many other royal gifts of honour in the Mughal period.

The first premise is that despite the development of some bureaucratic systems to enable rule over a vast territory, courtly politics in the Mughal empire continued to be based upon personal relations to the emperor, and this ‘patrimonial’ dimension of the empire was repeated at lower levels of courtly politics within it. The second is that to the extent that political relations in the Mughal polity were personal relations, they could be both represented by and constituted through royal gift-giving, because in general gifts from rulers ‘embody every bit as much the persons as their relations’. The third is that it is important to explore the rational, self-interested, ‘calculative dimension’ of gifts which so represented and constituted personal political relations; and that this ‘calculative dimension’ can be found in the two, potentially different perspectives of the donor and the recipient. Therefore, the public meaning of an act of gift-giving is subject to negotiation
and may remain ambiguous. The final premise is that to understand gift-giving in a particular context requires, as Stewart Gordon argues, a rhetorical analysis, first, of the changing relationship of the two participants, second, of the mediating artifact which they invest with meaning through the public encounter of giving and receiving, and third, of the audience for this encounter. 4

Royal gifts of *pan* were both like and unlike other Mughal royal gifts. Like many other gifts of honour in South Asia, royal gifts of *pan* participated in an asymmetrical symbolic process by which a ruler ‘marked’ the bodies of his subjects, thus both subordinating his subjects and honouring them in his polity. In some gifts of *pan*, however, there also was a special reciprocal gesture, ‘taking up’ *pan*, to indicate the acceptance of a particular command (or, possibly, of a new relation between subject and ruler). An expectation that ‘taking up’ *pan* was to be voluntary implied limits to the ruler’s authority, through the possibility, however remote, that *pan* might not be ‘taken up’ and the command thereby might be declined. This essay examines both historical accounts and Bengali literary narratives to attempt to trace changing uses of royal gifts of *pan*. It
suggests trends in the Mughal period to give more emphasis to more finely graded, elaborate and expensive gifts of honour, and to impose new courtly ceremonies which expressed the Mughal empire’s more absolute and bureaucratic authority. It will argue that the ceremony of giving and ‘taking up’ pan remained only marginally useful to the Mughals because, more than other gifting ceremonies, it signified personal choice on the part of the recipient. By attending closely to the politics of changing, ambiguous and contested meanings, this essay also shows where royal gifts of pan and the ceremony of ‘taking up’ pan were modified to express a more absolute authority, or were displaced towards peripheral, ephemeral or ambiguous relationships. It suggests a persistent thematic contrast between voluntarily ‘taking up’ pan in unofficial or improvised ceremonies, and the less conditional and sometimes coerced obeisance dramatized in official, imperial Mughal ceremonies.

**Gifts of Pan as Royal Honours**

In travelers’ reports, histories, chronicles and literature from late medieval and early modern India there are references to royal ceremonies of giving tambula, that is, pan
leaves (‘betel leaves’) prepared with lime, shaved areca nuts (‘betel nuts’), and spices.

Like gifts of robes of honour, gifts of tambula were used as signs of royal favour to
constitute political relationships. Such gifts can be documented in South and Southeast
Asia, and in both Muslim and Hindu courts.5

For example, gifts of pan and areca nuts concluded feasts arranged by Sultan
Muhammad Tughluq for his nobles and for foreign visitors, and these gifts were received
with expressions of homage.6 Ibn Battuta records the ceremony for this occasion:

It is their custom that the person to whom this [platter containing ‘betel’] is
brought out takes the platter in his hand, places it upon his shoulder and
then does homage with his other hand touching the ground.7

Similarly, gifts of pan and areca nuts were part of the ‘hospitality gifts’ of Sultan
Muhammad Tughluq when he arranged to supply food in kind and cash maintenance
allowances to favoured foreign guests upon their arrival at his court. Ibn Battuta’s
‘hospitality gift’ was fixed at 1,000 pounds of flour, 1,000 pounds of ‘flesh-meat’, and 1,000 ‘betel leaves’, together with sugar, tubers and areca nuts.\(^8\) Hospitality gifts of pan and camphor also are described at the court of Vijayanagar,\(^9\) and in a variety of Mughal courtly settings.

Both in courts and in wealthy homes gifts of tambula also were customary to honour guests at their departure. A Sanskrit witticism states, ‘Oh friend, there are a hundred-thousand good qualities of a tambula. It has, however, one great fault (mahandoso), viz. the sending away (of guests) after its bestowal.’\(^{10}\) At Ganjikota Jean Baptiste Travernier received such a gift of from Mir Jumla, the ‘Nawab’ [wazir] of Golkonda, after showing Mir Jumla jewels which Travernier hoped would be purchased by ‘Abdullah Qutb Shah, the ‘king’ of Golkonda.\(^{11}\) Peter Mundy, in India from 1628-1634, briefly mentioned gifts of pan to guests at parting, ‘soe that when they send for Paane, it is a sign of dispeedinge, or that it is tyme to be gon’.\(^{12}\) Nicolo Manucci (1653-1708) clearly described the etiquette of this practice:
It is an exceedingly common practice in India to offer betel leaf by way of politeness, chiefly among the great men, who, when anyone pays them a visit, offer betel at the time of leaving as a mark of good will, and of the estimation in which they hold the person who is visiting them. It would be a great piece of rudeness to refuse it.\(^{13}\)

Like robes of honour, gifts of tambula differed in value, and thus they could indicate how much the recipient was favoured by the donor. Gifts of pan could differ by the number of pan leaves included. A text of Dharmasastra suggests that 32 leaves were appropriate for a king, 24 for a tributary prince, 6 for an enemy, and 4 for a common person.\(^{14}\) Pan leaves themselves also were graded by color, taste, smell and tenderness to the tongue.\(^{15}\)

Moreover, tambula could include—in addition to the necessary ingredients of pan leaf, finely sliced areca nut, and lime made of oyster shells—a variety of very costly imported flavorings and ‘medicines’, among which we may list catechu, powder of lign-aloes,
ambergris, cloves, and rarest of all, camphor. Only ‘the rich’ used tambula prepared with these costly, additional ingredients.\textsuperscript{16}

Courts distributed and consumed large quantities of \textit{pan} leaves. In marginal notes to the travel account of John Huyghen van Linschoten, Bernard ten Broecke appends the following comment about the use of \textit{pan} by Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar:

\begin{quote}
It is said that [Nizam Shah] . . . spendeth yearly thereof, to the valew of above thirtie thousand Milreyes. This is their banquetting stuffe, and this they make a present of it to travelers, and the Kings give it to their subjects.

To the rich mixed with their own hands, and to others by their Servants.

When they send any man of Ambassage, or when anybody will travel; there are certain Silke Purses full of prepared Bettele delivered unto him, and no man may depart before it be delivered him, for it is a token of his passe port.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}
The *A’in-i Akbari* mentions bundles of *pan* of truly imperial dimensions: ‘A bundle of 11,000 leaves was formerly called a ‘Lahasa’ which name is now given to a bundle of 14,000’. Associated with using *tambula* and giving it to others were costly implements: jeweled boxes in which the *pan* leaves were stored, trays with compartments for lime, areca nuts, spices, camphor, or other substances applied to the leaves, elaborately decorated tools to cut areca nuts into small pieces, and, of course, spittoons. Sets of these implements also are found throughout South and Southeast Asia. Like gifts of robes of honour, royal gifts of *pan* must have required economic organization to insure supply of the necessary ingredients for *tambula*, and supply of the implements by which they were prepared and presented. Nevertheless, one *tambula* looks rather like another, and I assume that for the same expense a ruler could have given them to a much larger number of people than he could have given robes of honour.

Like gifts of robes of honour, royal gifts of *tambula* could change the bodies of subjects who received them by leaving a trace of the ruler’s own body; for the gift which carried the most honour was a *tambula* prepared for the ruler’s use, and better, given by
the ruler’s own hand, and it was to be taken into the subject’s mouth. We recognize an asymmetrical symbolic process usual to royal gifts of food, of perfumes and unguents, of robes of honour, and of tambula: ‘marking’ the subject’s body with that of the king, and thereby both including the subject with other subjects also so marked, and subordinating him to the king, whose body, on the contrary, usually remains ‘unmarked’ by the body of the recipient.

Royal gifts of pan may have differed from other gifts of honour in one way. Ordinarily tambula were valuable only when the pan leaves were fresh. One cannot imagine that they were displayed as enduring signs of royal honours, as were robes of honour and the writs (farman) which robes of honour often accompanied. Can we assume that the ceremonial experience of ‘taking up’ pan included its consumption, and the bodily and mental effects of that consumption, as the tambula was ‘enjoyed’?

‘Enjoyment’ (Bhog) and the Thirteen Properties of Tambula

Dharmasastra describe thirteen qualities of a tambula, ‘unobtainable even in heaven’. A tambula is:
. . . pungent, bitter, hot, sweet, salty, and astringent; it counteracts wind and
is a vermicide; it removes phlegm and destroys ill smells, is an ornament to,
and purifies the mouth; and it makes the fire of desire burn brightly.24

We may analyze this list of qualities as follows. A tambula contains each one of the six
flavors. Their balance gives it medicinal properties which act upon the three humors as
follows: counteracting ‘wind’, removing ‘phlegm’, and stimulating the elemental ‘fire of
desire’ and, we may presume, the humoral ‘bile’ associated with bodily ‘fire’.25

Consumption of a tambula therefore has specific benefits which the verse lists: good
breath and intestinal health, for example. More important, consumption of tambula also
has a general effect upon the humors and elements of the body. By counteracting ‘wind’
it shifts the balance of the humors away from the ‘incoherent states’, ‘unrestrainable
motions’ and ‘ignorance’ associated with an excess of this most problematic of the bodily
humors.26 By removing ‘phlegm’ and increasing ‘fire’ a tambula produces the benefits of
‘dry heat’. Among these benefits Arabic and European observers widely reported (or alleged) the effects of a digestive and aphrodisiac. In fact, *tambula* were forbidden to classes of people whose ‘fires of desire’ should not be increased: ascetics (*yati*), celibate students, people observing funeral obsequies, widows and others who were engaged in vows requiring chastity, and menstruating women, for example.

There also were mental consequences of consuming *tambula*, for understanding and intelligence also were thought to be more acute if one was in the condition of ‘dry’ rather ‘wet’ heat. An Arabic medical treatise lists among the benefits Indians experienced from the dry heat of *tambula*, that it ‘raises the intelligence’. This text continues:

The Indians use it instead of wine after meals, which brightens their minds and drives away their cares . . .. Whoever uses it becomes joyful, he has a perfumed breath, perfect sleep by reason of its aromatic, the pleasure which it brings, and its moderate odour.
An early European traveler also reported both mental and physical benefits: ‘In this way [by chewing areca nuts and pan leaves] the head and stomach are cleared, and the gums and teeth strengthened . . .’. Finally, there were social benefits of having good breath.

This same traveler, Garcia da Orta wrote:

Chiefly when men go to have an interview with some person of quality, they approach chewing [pan] in their mouths, so as to give out a pleasant smell.

Among these people it is so detested to smell bad or musty that common people put their hands before their mouths so as not to give out an unpleasant smell when in presence of a person in authority.

Because it causes bodily ‘fire’ to burn more brightly, while removing wind and counteracting phlegm, a tambula might have been both given and ‘taken up’ in order to produce the kind of person who could undertake a difficult mission, someone with the mental and moral qualities of intelligence and fortitude, as well as the physical ones of
good health and a capacity for passionate and energetic action, and someone who could
be introduced with pleasure to courtly society because of his sweet smelling breath. I
have found no Bengali text which explicitly provides this instrumental explanation for royal
gifts of *pan* as a ‘tonic and prophylactic’, but such explanations are given for robing in a
variety of contexts, because the donor’s ‘spiritual state’ was transferred by a garment he
had worn or touched.\textsuperscript{32} Perhaps the idea needed no emphasis.

‘Taking up’ *Pan*

Whereas making gifts of *pan* to show honour—to Hindus, Muslims and Europeans
alike, and to both subjects and visitors from abroad—was a custom widely practiced by
South Asian Muslim rulers, an apparently specialized ceremony associated with some royal
gifts of *pan* seems to have been regarded as an expedient for rallying non-Muslims, at
least in the period of the Delhi Sultanate. This was the gesture of ‘taking up’ *pan* in order
to symbolize acceptance of a particular command or assignment from the ruler. For
example, Barani reports that in 1290 rebellious Hindu warriors, the ‘rawats and paiks’ of
Hindusthan, ‘flocked around [Balaban’s nephew Malik Chhaju], and the most noted of
them received betel from him, and promised to fight against the standards of the Sultan’

[Jalal al-Din]. Other authors emphasize the action of ‘taking up’ the tambula, not just passively receiving it from the ruler’s hands, as the gesture signifying acceptance of responsibility for carrying out a particular, and often dangerous command. We will see that references to ‘taking pan’ can be found in middle Bengali narrative literature from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, and the idiom ‘taking up pan’ to mean ‘accepting a command’ also exists in Hindi. Of course, a latent possibility of the latter ceremony was its opposite: occasionally the subject properly might decline the ruler’s command, by declining to ‘take up’ the gift of pan. In this way ‘taking up’ pan recognizes a more limited authority than that of ‘fealty’, where the obligation to serve in theory was conditional (the ruler had to meet his obligations to provide a livelihood) but general. The voluntary dimension of ‘taking up’ pan—no doubt limited in practice—opens more space for negotiation between a ruler and his nobles, and the ceremony in court might have sealed a bargain the two already had reached. In the next section I will describe the way one Bengali text from the latter half of the sixteenth century extends the
ceremony of ‘taking’ pan, by developing a potential for gifts of pan to be distributed to a large number of people.

Gifts of Pan in Mukunda’s Candimangal

This section will examine royal gifts of pan in the long Bengali narrative poem, Candimangal by Mukunda Cakrabarti, a man widely acknowledged to have been the best author of all Candimangal, if not of all works in the genre of mangal-kabya. Mukunda’s Candimangal was written in the second half of the sixteenth century. During the period of Mughal rule in the following century and a half, it became well known and widely copied throughout Bengal. Although new Candimangal continued to be composed in this period, most later poets followed Mukunda’s model, at least in the region of Rarh, the deltaic plains south of the Ganga and west of the Bhagirathi rivers. One episode of this poem describes how Kalketu, an untouchable hunter dwelling on the agrarian frontier between the Bengal delta and the Chota Nagpur plateau, cleared the forest and established and settled a kingdom by the help of the goddess Candi. Mukunda’s version is unique in narrating that while founding his kingdom Kalketu gave pan to all subjects who came to settle.
I agree with Sukumar Sen that Mukunda Cakrabarti probably wrote his *Candimangal* before the first Mughal conquest of Bengal, which began in 1574, and ended with the Bengal army’s rebellion against Akbar in 1580. True, an account of the poem’s composition, found in some manuscripts, mentions the Hindu general and Governor responsible for later conquests, ‘Raja Man Singh, ruler (*mahip*) of Gaur, Banga and Utkal’ (north Bengal, east Bengal, and Orissa), and his departure from Bengal ‘as the fruit of sins of his subjects’. Raja Man Singh became *sipah-salar* (commander in chief) of Bihar late in 1587, and campaigned in Bihar in 1588-90, and in Orissa in 1590-94. He was made *subadar* (governor) of Bengal in 1594, and campaigned in east Bengal in 1594-98; in 1598 he received permission to return to his home in Ajmer and to govern by deputy. The verse in which Raja Man Singh is mentioned describes how and why, after the Raja’s departure, Mukunda fled from his home village in undivided Burdwan District, West Bengal, to the small Hindu kingdom of Brahmanbhum (probably somewhere in upland Midnapur District, and then at the border between Bengal and Orissa) where he received the patronage which allowed him to compose his poem. But unlike Mukunda’s near
contemporary Dvija Madhab, who composed his version of *Candimangal* in 1579, just prior to the Mughal rebellion against Akbar, Mukunda does not mention Akbar. Nor does he mention any other Mughal noble, or describe Raja Man Singh’s campaigns against the Afghans in Orissa, 1590-94, or the renewal of worship of Jagannatha at the Puri temple, which Man Singh’s Orissan victories allowed. These recent and important events presumably Mukunda would have heard of from eye witnesses, if in fact he had moved to and composed his narrative in Brahmanbhum only sometime after 1598. Sukumar Sen has questioned the authenticity of this verse, and he has proposed a period of composition ending in 1555/56. In any case, I think that if the important role this text gives to royal gifts of *pan* reflects Bengali practice, it must reflect pre-Mughal, not Mughal practice.

In his narrative of the founding of Kalketu’s kingdom, Mukunda outlines the problems of village headmen and rulers on the frontier of agrarian settlement in the Chota Nagpur peneplain. In a situation of labor scarcity, village headmen, who themselves were labor controllers, used their mobility to negotiate for better terms from alternative rulers. Crucial to their interests were: an initial period of tax free possession to allow
development of cultivation, security of title to the land they would cultivate, permanency of
settlement of the land revenue demand, absence of labor taxes, or additional cesses or
taxes in kind, and their own control of agency for tax collection from subleasers (rather
than tax collection by the ruler’s officials). Village headmen also considered the
procedure for assessing the land revenue demand (more strictly, by measurement of the
land, or more loosely, per plough), its remission for harvest failures, the schedule of its
installments, and the security held for and the rate of interest assessed on unpaid
installments of the land revenue due before the harvest had occurred. On the other
hand, a ruler’s problems were how to satisfy the demands of various labor controllers
coming to his territory with their dependants, given competition for scarce labor on the
agrarian frontier, and at the same time how to establish direct and permanent relationships
with those dependants (circumventing the mediation of village headmen). In Mukunda’s
narrative, Kalketu gives pan to show honour to all his subjects. I suggest that an
expanded ceremony presenting royal gifts of pan to all subjects, rather than only to those
receiving special honour or accepting a specific command, was recommended in this text in order to create direct links between a ruler and his subjects.

In this text, ‘taking’ a gift of *pan* always symbolizes a willingness to obey the superior who gives. Several instances of gifts of *pan* help us to see the ceremony in different contexts. Candi commanded Visvakarma, artisan of the gods, to build Kalketu’s city, and with the command, also gave him *pan*. Visvakarma ‘held Candi’s instructions upon his head’ (*sire dhare ades*). Her instructions of course were oral. I assume this idiom indicates the *anjali* gesture of settling a burden upon the head to indicate acceptance of a command. We also are told that Visvakarma ‘held Candi’s *pan* upon his head’ as well.\(^{51}\)

Gifts of *pan* could be made in the context of a particular command, or of an enduring relationship of fealty. When Visvakarma had built Kalketu’s city, Candi turned to the problem of providing it with settlers, and eventually asked Indra for assistance. Indra in turn commanded Drona to help Candi: ‘Take my *pan*, Drona. You will repay my salt. Quickly go with Candika.’\(^{52}\) Of course, salt was one of the wages of military service. To
be ‘true to ones salt’ meant to be loyal, and to ‘repay ones salt’ meant to perform the
duties or to fulfill the responsibilities for which one had been engaged as a military
retainer, in a relationship where a general fealty was expected of the inferior, and where
continued fealty depended on the superior’s ability to provide the salt of remuneration.53

Pan seems not to have been ‘given’ or ‘taken’ in relations of equality.54 But
Mukunda’s text suggests that the ceremony might be used beyond the context of a
particular command, wherever a relationship allowed for the subject’s choice, and
combined aspects both of fealty and of redistribution. Thus, we are told of Muslims, the
first group of settlers in Kalketu’s kingdom, ‘Having taken the hero’s pan, all the Muslims
settled; he gave them the western quarter.’55 Royal gifts of pan could serve as the
reciprocal of gifts of bhett given by potential subjects, gifts which in this text always
precede a petition requesting the superior for particular assistance or for a new
relationship. Thus, in Mukunda’s narrative when Kayasthas (the jati of writers) came to
settle Kalketu’s kingdom, they brought ordinary gifts of bhett—curds, fish, and ghee in clay
pots—to initiate a relationship. They promised to settle their dependents (prajagan), and
requested that Kalketu give them and their dependents *pan*, along with good lands well
delimited, houses, paddy seed, and money to buy bullocks; and that he delay requiring
them to repay loans.\footnote{56} Here the gifts of *pan* to Kayasthas closed the preceding bargaining
between them and Kalketu, reciprocated their gifts of *bhet* to him, and initiated a series of
much more valuable gifts from him to these honourable, literate and well-spoken subjects,
the ‘ornaments of his city’,\footnote{57} and to their dependants, gifts upon which their settlement in
his kingdom had been conditioned.

In the case of Brahman settlers, Kalketu provided gifts of *pan* without receiving from
then any initiatory gifts of *bhet* which might have indicated their inferiority to him.

Kalketu’s gifts of *pan* to Brahmans also initiated a series of much more valuable gifts, for
he had promised to give Brahmans houses and lands free of all revenue demands in
perpetuity,\footnote{58} and he conveyed these gifts to them after purifying his own hands with
mantras, *kus* grass, sesame seeds and water.\footnote{59} In the relationship thus initiated, Kalketu
did not expect to command these Brahmans, even at some future date; instead he had
promised to ‘be the servant of Brahmans, to fulfill the hopes of all and to accomplish the
honour of each one." Nevertheless, the gifts of _pan_ from the king to Brahmans also

instituted a redistributive economy. He gave them rent free land and houses, and from the

Brahmans Kalketu received not the tangible gifts of _bhet_, nor the promise of future taxes,

but their "judgment" of _sastras_, and the intangible gifts of their blessing.61

Mukunda’s narrative suggests that Kalketu gave _pan_ to all his subjects, both Muslim

and Hindu, and both high-born and low. Gifts of _pan_ were socially and religiously neutral

symbols of inclusion in a kingdom which contained very different kinds of subjects.62 In

one other place the text mentions gifts apparently distributed to all: ‘Dependants of various

_jati_ received houses as gifts (_imam_), settled, and were happy in the hero’s city. Kalketu

honoured them and gave them beautiful clothes. Singing and dancing filled every house’.63

Gifts of _pan_ mark out the autarkic boundaries of Kalketu’s royal redistribution. Finally, in

his city _pan_ growers (_barui_, ‘who continually gave the hero _puri_’) also could count on a

special relationship with him. He promised them that no one would take goods from them

by force without their being able to call upon the king’s intervention, and that he would

impose no unjust regulation upon them.64 By synecdoche gifts of _pan_ suggest the whole
redistributive economy of a little kingdom in both directions of redistribution, to and from
the king; and they properly precede the more valuable royal gifts of rent-free land and
houses, and the interest-free seeds and capital necessary to transform uncultivated land
into productive fields.

I find only one mention of something like robes of honour and the gifts associated
with them, and they were given only to a very specific set of recipients. To each of his
panegyrist (bhat), who of course would be responsible for keeping records of his own
honourable deeds, Kalketu gave ‘a pair of fine cloths (khasa jora) and a horse to mount’.
They in turn ‘thought continually of the hero’s well-being’. 65

Unlike the Mughals’ imperial gifts of turbans, sets of courtly clothing, robes of
honour, jewels, swords, and horses and elephants, gifts of pan were imagined in this text
as being given to all subjects, rather than being reserved for a nobility. They suggest a
direct relationship between king and subjects, even though the text also specifies a
mediating role for Kayastha headmen over their dependants. But if Mukunda’s
recommendation were put into practice, and gifts of pan had become commonplace, the
‘value’ of receiving them also would have decreased. Furthermore, as gifts they both sealed and veiled bargaining about the specific terms offered to settlers, a process which must have been intensely competitive, given general conditions of labor scarcity on the agrarian frontier. Therefore, behind the gifts of pan we may discern a price, or a series of prices, as the king divided his lands among subjects who were valuable to him in different ways and in different degrees; and as they in turn came to terms with him about the taxes he eventually had to collect, and computed both the economic value of his terms of settlement, and the degree of honour he would show them.

Alternatives to ‘Taking up’ Pan in Mughal Ceremony

Among the European travelers who describe the uses of pan, Bernard ten Broecke (a contemporary of John Huyghen van Linschoten who was in India in the years 1583-1589) seems to have been the last to notice its use in royal ceremony other than as a simple gift of honour, and his probably mistaken account of its use as a ‘passe port’ does not unambiguously refer to ‘taking up’ pan to indicate acceptance of a command.66 Later
European travelers described gifts of *pan* as tokens of honour but not ‘taking up’ *pan* as a ceremony to signify acceptance of a royal command.

One reason may be that although the Mughals gave *pan* as signs of honour, they apparently did not include ‘taking up’ *pan* among their imperial ceremonies. Abu’l Fazl, in a well known passage, describes ‘regulations for the manner in which people are to show their obedience’. Akbar himself had introduced two new forms of salutation: the *kornish* and the *taslim*. In the former, the implied limit to royal authority in the gesture of ‘taking up’ *pan*—the possibility that the command might be refused and *pan* might not be ‘taken up’—was replaced by an unconditional submission to imperial authority, made as soon as the subject entered the presence of the emperor, and before any specific commands could have been given.

The second ceremony of salutation, the *taslim*, is described as follows:

*[It] consists in placing the back of the right hand on the ground, and then raising it gently till the person stands erect, when he puts the palm of his*
hand upon the crown of his head, which pleasing manner of saluting signifies
that he is ready to give himself as an offering.68

Since this was a ceremony to be performed upon receipt of a new command and upon
taking leave, it can be compared to the gift of *pan* as a token of honour upon a subject’s
dismissal from court. Finally, for ‘disciples’ who would ‘look upon a prostration before his
Majesty as a prostration before God’, Akbar allowed an optional form, *sijda* or full
prostration, touching the forehead to the ground as in daily prayer.69

Mirza Nathan’s seventeenth century diary records how he used a combination of
taslim, ‘obeisance’, and *sijda*, full prostration, to receive *farman*, imperial writs, when they
were conveyed by a messenger from Prince Khurram. Mirza Nathan sent boats to convey
the imperial messenger in state to the place where he was to be met, having erected
velvet canopies there for a ‘ceremony of obeisance’ to be performed by himself and his
subordinate Khans and Rajas. Mirza Nathan continues:
At the aforesaid place where Yakka Bahadur [the messenger] was sitting under the *shamiyanas* (canopies) he [Mirza Nathan] and all others, high and low, dismounted from their horses and elephants and began to observe the rites of obeisance from a distance of one arrow-shot. Reaching near Yakka Bahadur, Shitab Khan, the author of this book [Mirza Nathan], made three obeisances and prostrations of gratitude (*taslim wa sijda*) and then he placed the Farmans respectfully with his two hands over his head and again performed the rites of obeisance and prostrations of gratitude, and put on the robe of honour. After offering royal salute for the third time, he took the Farman for Mirza Bahram [who had not willingly accepted the authority of Prince Khurram] and thrust it on the head of the aforesaid Mirza, and he was made to perform his obeisance with his face turned toward Jahangirnagar [where Prince Khurram was residing]. Then Raja Lakshmi Narayan and after him Raja Satrajit were made to observe the rites of obeisance.
Imperial writs, *farman*, embodied the presence of the emperor or princes of the Mughal
lineage, and were received with *taslim*, the obeisance which was reserved for the emperor;
optionally, they might be received with the full prostration of daily prayer. Mirza Nathan’s
diary also describes a Mughal noble taking an imperial *farman* ‘by both his hands, and
plac[ing] it on his head with great respect’. Others honoured *farman* by ‘placing them on
their heads and eyes’, before performing ‘the necessary formalities of obeisance’.

Compared to ‘taking up’ *pan*, Mughal imperial ceremonies for the receipt of *farman* reveal
the dynasty’s aspirations to display a more centralized and bureaucratic authority, by the
honour given to writs. In this passage Mirza Nathan also vividly confirms evidence from
Mughal paintings that coercion was used in courtly ceremonies to compel proper obeisance
from refractory subjects. The more absolute authority apparent in being ‘made to perform
obeisance’ should be contrasted with the voluntary acceptance of a new command or a
relationship which we often see in the ceremony of ‘taking up’ *pan.*
Equally important to Mughal courtly ceremony were a rich array of expensive gifts, including robes of honour, horses, riding elephants, jeweled swords, standards, kettle drums, turbans, and jewelry; gifts which conveyed new honours accompanying new titles and responsibilities. Expensive and finely graded gifts of honour, presented to selected nobles who had displayed conspicuous loyalty and ability in their service, reveal the dynasty’s concern to display more exactly hierarchical relations of honour, but to do so only among their noble subjects.

Replacements for the Ceremony of ‘Taking’ Pan in Bengali Literature

The following remarks are based on an initial sampling of Bengali verse narratives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I argue that in these centuries Bengali literature closely followed Mughal courtly ceremony and emphasized royal gifts of clothing, jewelry and horses to accompany royal commands, rather than royal gifts of pan.

‘Taking’ pan to signify acceptance of a command does not continue to have the same emphasis in Candimangal texts later than Mukunda’s. Mukunda, for example, gives a precise account of the how the merchant Dhanapati first declined pan, and then accepted
it under duress, when commanded by his raja to journey to Sri Lanka. Neither Dvija Madhab (1579) nor Ramananda Yati (1766) mentions the merchant’s ‘taking pan’ on this occasion. Dvija Madhab does write that Dhanapati ‘took the command upon his head’, suggesting only the anjali gesture. In the description of Dvija Ram’deb (1649) we see both ‘receiving’ pan, and ‘binding a favour’ to the head, but does ‘receiving’ pan still indicate acceptance of a command? Certainly pan is only the first of two ‘honours’ given to the merchant by the king.

[The merchant] gave presents and honoured the jewel of kings. He bent his knee to the ground and pressed his palms together. First, the merchant received a tambula made with camphor. Then his heart’s worries were greatly relieved.

No command to journey to Sri Lanka so far had been given. When it was given, Dhanapati objected at some length, until the king himself reiterated his command and
further ‘favoured’ (prasad karila) the merchant with a jeweled ring. Then the merchant ‘could not remain’. Apparently in a ceremony of taking leave, ‘the merchant bound the favour (prasad, apparently the ring just given) of the king tightly to his head’, and then departed. If the gesture of ‘binding the favour’ to the head still indicates acceptance of a command, the ‘favour’ itself no longer is pan, but the much more valuable present of a jeweled ring.

Very often in later texts gifts of turbans or robes of honour, together with other costly royal gifts, are described instead of gifts of pan to convey new honours which accompany new commands, or new relations or responsibilities. I have found no Candimangal written after Mukunda’s in which Kalketu distributes gifts of pan to his new subjects. Mukunda’s near contemporary, Dvija Madhab (1579), however, does also emphasize gifts of clothing which establish direct relations between Kalketu and all his dependants:
The headman went with all his dependants, and with his officers, advisors and Brahmans; they went to meet the hero [Kalketu] and he saw them.

The hero gave the headman a horse and palanquin, and wrapped the heads of all his dependants with silk scarves (*pater pachara*).\(^7\)

In contrast, Dvija Ram’deb (1649) restricts gifts of royal honours to the headman alone:

They arrived at the court [of the hero] in Gujarat. They offered presents (*bhetila*) before the hero, and bowed to him. The dependants looked on the hero with delight. He gave the headman a royal turban (*raj’pag’sir*) for his head. The headman received horses and a palanquin, and departed.\(^7\)

The mid eighteenth century author Ramananda Yati (1766) suggested the importance of written records by his mention of a royal clerk. Otherwise he elaborated upon the works of authors later than Mukunda by replacing *pan* with lavish royal gifts:
The hero spent money and established homes and homesteads, and
people came, and became his followers. The clerk wrote on papers, the
treasurer examined everything; maidservants and menservants ceaselessly
came and went.

Everyone tied his horse with a tether, and wore a turban and pair of
cloths, and had a mace-bearer to run before him. They had companions to
flatter them and hold umbrellas over their heads, and their watchmen
carefully stayed awake.

In plaster-walled houses learned Brahmans recited puranas; they had
beds and bedsteads, palanquins and litters, cloths and ornaments beyond
counting, and hundreds of embroidered carpets.

Qadis recited in Persian, while cavalry soldiers paraded Arabian
horses, and Turkish [ponies?] galloped by. Their old men and womenfolk
recognized Iraqi [and?] . . . horses, while army officers sat . . .
In the new city imagined by this author, everyone apparently received some extravagant honours, though learned religious elites, Hindu and Muslim, and cavalry soldiers are singled out for special favours.

When *pan* is mentioned, often the one who gives *pan* is less than a king. A seventeenth century author, Kabi Krsnaram Das, describes ‘taking’ *pan* in a context which clearly is not royal. In his *Ray’mangal* (written sometime after 1677) a merchant wished to build ships, but could not arrange it by himself. His helmsman and navigator (*karnadhar*) therefore gave *pan* to two shipwrights, Visvakarma and Hanuman in human disguises, and took them to the merchant, who in turn ‘satisfied’ them with unspecified ‘favours’. Later, we are told, the merchant gave the navigator a ‘head to foot’ set of clothing (*siropa*) as a sign of his favour when the ships had been completed. Here, not even the merchant, but only the merchant’s navigator gives *pan* to initiate a relationship of employment.
We may conclude with a few brief examples from Ghanaram’s *Dharmamangal*, an early eighteenth century text (1711). Pan is used to accompany commands and to show honour to relatively lowly people in this text. A minor, local *raja* gave hunters *pan* with the command to trap a man-eating tiger, for example. In a revealing case of its use, Lau Sen’s mother secretly gave wrestlers *pan* with the command that they break her son’s limbs in the ruse of teaching him wrestling, so that he would be unable to leave home to prove his masculinity and to win his fortune as a warrior. The wrestlers agreed: ‘Having tied the *pan* securely, the wrestlers did obeisance’ and went to find Lau Sen. Perhaps the most important case of giving and taking *pan* in Ghanaram’s text occurs when the evil minister Mahamad offers the royal army *pan* with the request that someone spy on Lau Sen’s city of Mayna in preparation for attacking and looting it. At first, no one takes up the *pan*, partly because they fear Lau Sen’s Dom soldiers, and partly because the minister’s plans contravene an explicit directive from their king Gauresvar. In these latter cases we are far indeed from gifts of *pan* in a public, courtly ceremony. A sign of voluntary acceptance is necessary because the accompanying command violates dharma.
In general in Ghanaram’s text kings give much more valuable honours to more important subjects. It will take us too far afield to trace all the gifts kings distribute to subjects who have accepted new responsibilities in this text, but gifts of clothing are conspicuous. For example, Gauresvar, the ‘lord of Gaur’, sent Som Ghos, who because of trust ‘ate pan from the king’s hand’, to collect taxes from the locality ruled by Karna Sen (Lau Sen’s father), who had failed to send regular remittances of his taxes. ‘He gave Ghos two shawls and a pair of turbans. As a present (bakshish) he again gave him a horse to mount, and a trumpet, a banner, and a written command. Gop [the jati title of Som Ghos] did obeisance and departed’. Similarly, the prefect of police, after falsely reporting to the king’s minister that he had killed the baby Lau Sen as ordered, received ‘a pair of shawls, a turban (sarband), and a set of clothing’ (siropa) from the minister.

In eighteenth century Bengali literature, sets of clothing, turbans, shawls, cloths embroidered with golden threads, rings and other jewelry, horses, palanquins, banners and trumpets all appear in various combinations as royal gifts which show royal ‘favour’ to subjects who have accepted royal commands and new responsibilities. Exactly as with
Mughal gifts of honour, this rich array of literary gifts makes it possible for authors to reflect the exact degree of honour being shown their recipients. Only Ramananda Yati maintains Mukunda’s dream that all subjects would be bound by gifts to their common king, but his text emphasizes expensive and luxurious goods as signs of the king’s favour.

Royal gifts of _pan_ to all subjects might have been possible, as Mukunda had described them, but in eighteenth century Bengali literature they usually suggest a small honour, because the degree of honour a gift carried depended upon its rarity and value.

(Alternately, they may suggest a command which one ought not to accept, from a person whose authority to give it ought to be doubted.) In Ramananda Yati’s narrative royal gifts were oxymorons, extremely valuable and conveying great honour, and yet given to all and so commonplace, and his description of them therefore was utopian.

**Mughal and Post-Mughal Gifts of _Pan_ in Bengal**

Turning from literature to narratives which at least claim to have a more direct relationship with contemporary events, one finds abundant references to gifts of _pan_ to show honour, but very few to ‘taking up’ _pan_ to indicate acceptance of a command. Still,
occasionally, gifts of *pan* continued to be ‘taken up’ to mark the affirmation of relationships and the acceptance of commands, despite the apparent absence of this gesture from official, imperial Mughal ceremony. In this section, I explore a few cases of ‘taking up’ *pan*, most of which occurred in Bengal. I will argue that the ceremony of ‘taking up’ royal gifts of *pan* often seems to have been either modified, or else displaced towards more peripheral, ephemeral or ambiguous relationships.

It is not surprising to find mention of giving *pan* to relatively peripheral people in the context of giving a directive which might have been declined, exactly as contemporary Bengali literature suggests. The *Malda Diary and Consultations* of the English East India Company, for example, records an instance of giving *pan* to Indian merchants in the context of such a directive. In 1681 when the English finally had paid bribes sufficient to receive permission to collect cloth from Indian merchants at their new factory at ‘Englezavad’, Jam Sher Beg, the Mughal ‘*Krori*’ (*karori*, the officer in charge of collecting revenue in a *pargana*, the Mughals’ lowest level of revenue administration), ‘called our Picars [merchants] giveing them Bettle and good words and bid them goe to us at our
new Factory and prize their goods to us &ca'. The word ‘bid’ and the gifts of ‘Bettle and good words’ suggest persuasion rather than, or as well as command, and some degree of choice on the part of the Indian merchants.

On the other hand an interesting example of modifying the ceremony of ‘taking up’ pan appears in Mirza Nathan’s diary, where the modification signified that the recipient of pan had no choice. The incident happened early in his career. Musa Khan, Masnad-i-‘Ala, was the son of ‘Isa Khan, who in turn was the leader of twelve, mostly Afghan ‘lords of the soil’ of eastern Bengal, with whom the Mughals contested for sovereignty early in the seventeenth century. At first, both son and father appeared to submit to the Mughals, and were treated with leniency by the Governor, Islam Khan. Shortly thereafter Musa Khan, the son, apparently gave secret support to a conspiracy against the Mughals among his own men. The leader of these rebels was Husayn Khan, who defeated a Mughal army sent by the Governor himself. Nathan relates how the Governor, Islam Khan, reacted when he heard news of his army’s defeat:
When this news reached Islam Khan, he sent for Musa Khan, Masnad-i-‘Ala, and administered a sharp rebuke to him which was in fact more painful than a wound inflicted by a sword, and said,—‘This is a rose sprung from your garden. Husayn Khan is your product and now you must exert yourself to dispose of him’. Musa Khan, greatly perturbed by these words, took a dao (big knife) and a piece of pan (betel leaf) from Islam Khan and sent 200 war boats belonging to himself and his own brothers, under the command of one of his tribesman [sic.] named Alu Khan Afghan, a trustworthy officer of Musa Khan.

Explaining the situation in turn to Alu Khan, Musa Khan made clear what the Governor had meant by adding the ‘big knife’ to the roll of pan: ‘There is no way out of it except victory or death’. Thereafter Alu Khan defeated and captured Husayn Khan, and Mirza Nathan concludes that as a reward for this service, ‘Islam Khan paid many tributes to Musa Khan and comforted him’.90 One senses that this was an embarrassing and perhaps a
threatening episode for the Governor. After all, his own leniency might have been blamed for his army’s loss. No written farman is mentioned; the order to Musa Khan seems to have been oral. Perhaps ‘taking up’ pan was used in this case to signify acceptance of an oral command given in a situation where neither the superior nor the inferior could have desired a written record and official scrutiny of what he had done, at least until after suppression of the rebellion. But the brilliant improvisation of adding a ‘big knife’ to the roll of pan clearly indicated the Mughals’ claim to unquestioned authority.

As Mughal power declined in the eighteenth century, however, precisely that aspect of the gesture of ‘taking up’ pan which had made it undesirable for Mughal imperial ceremony—the implicit recognition of the subject’s choice and agency—sometimes again seemed important to chroniclers. James Tod’s summary of the Annals of Marwar gives a vivid example from the decision forcibly to expel and replace Sarbuland Khan as Governor of Gujarat in 1730, after he both had used force to collect a variety of additional taxes from the merchants of Surat, and had concluded an unauthorized treaty with the peshwa Baji Rao. To find a noble willing to undertake this task, according to the chronicler, the
Emperor [Muhammad Shah] had a *beera* (roll) of *pan* placed upon a golden salver, which a court official ‘bore in his extended arms, slowly passing in front of the nobles ranged on either side of the throne . . . .’ At first, ‘no hand was stretched forth’ because courtiers feared they would be defeated by Sarbuland Khan. But after a long moment of imperial distress, Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur finally ‘stretched forth his hand, and placed the *beera* in his turban. . . .’ But was this scene of a subordinate noble’s sudden, heroic and honourable response only a literary device of the chronicler? It tells us nothing of the complex factional rivalries at Delhi and in Gujarat, rivalries which pitted Sarbuland Khan against his Mughal opponents at the court (and the *peshwa* against Maratha warbands he had agreed to help suppress). The chronicler does immediately add a list of imperial honours and payments made to Abhay Singh, prior to his setting out. It is hard to believe that they had not been the subject intense and prior negotiations.

In another incident giving and ‘taking up’ *pan* was transformed to mitigate the dishonour of having to relinquish an office. In 1748, after his decisive victory over a combined Afghan and Maratha force at Ranisarai, Nawab Alivardi Khan decided to give his
grandson Siraj-ud-daula the office of Governor of Azimabad (Bihar), and to make a
Bengali Kayastha, Jankiram, deputy governor, the person who actually would bear the
responsibilities of this office locally in Azimabad. 96 One of Alivardi’s nephews, Sayyid
Ahmad Khan, however, already held the office of deputy governor. Therefore, after Siraj-
ud-daula and Jankiram had been invested and given suitable robes of honour and other
presents, the Nawab improvised a ceremony by which Sayyid Ahmad Khan semi-publicly
and ‘voluntarily’ would relinquish his office to Jankiram:

. . . to regain Sayd-ahmed-qhan’s good will to this arrangement, as well as
to soften his mind, Djankiram received orders [from Alivardi] to wait upon
him, and to ask his consent in a respectful manner. Sayd-ahmed-qhan
graciously granted it, although highly humbled by a transaction that exposed
his character; and he gave him a Biry of Paan, according to the custom of
India, in token of that consent; his intention being to avoid everything that
might disoblige his uncle; and it is remarkable that Djankiram went by the
Viceroy’s [Alivardi’s] order, in company with Sadr-el-hac-qhan [Sadr ul Haq Khan, Darogha or supervisor of the Sadr ‘Adalat, the provincial judicial administration] to give more weight to his submission. 97

This improvised ceremony seems to have been useful precisely because Jankiram’s symbolic ‘submission’ to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, enacted by taking pan from him, partially veiled Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s loss of office, and the public exposure of his loss of favour with the Nawab Alivardi. This veiling was possible because the ceremony’s expected dramatization of a choice was displaced from the recipient of pan to the giver.

In the ambiguous and ambivalent relations of courtly politics at the end of Mughal rule, the meaning of gifts of pan could become problematic, even when they ostensibly were given to show honour or favour, without any context of command. During Siraj-ud-daula’s final months as Nawab of Bengal and Bihar in the spring of 1757, he was confronted with Clive’s victories at Calcutta and Chandernagore, with the increasing support for the English among members of his court, and with the demand by the English
that he deliver agents of the French East India Company to them. Hoping to retain a
relationship at a distance, in a ceremony of departure he gave the Frenchman Monsieur
Jean Law _pan_ from his own hand, before requesting him to depart from Murshidabad to
the northwest to escape the English. Nawab Siraj-ud-daula suggested that he would send
for Law ‘if there should happen anything new’; but Law is said to have told him plainly
‘that this is the last time we shall see each other’.\(^98\) A few days later, in a fit of rage
Siraj-ud-daula threatened the _vakil_ of the English (their legal representative at his court)
that he would extirpate their race from his kingdom, but later that day he repented this
rashness, and summoned the same _vakil_ and gave him _pan_, apparently in the vain hope of
veiling his own enmity and allaying theirs.\(^99\) No command accompanied either gift;
although both ostensibly were gifts of honour, the contexts were friendship in the former
case and enmity in the latter; but both suggest Siraj-ud-daula’s ambivalent desire for
relationships which he also thought had become impossible.

Still more ambiguous is the following incident recorded by Ghulam Husain Khan. In
1763 he began to believe that Nawab Mir Qasim was holding him ‘as a kind of pledge for
my father’s good behavior, and as an hostage for that of my brother’, both of whom had absented themselves from the Nawab’s camp. Too ill to move himself, and under suspicion for his extensive contacts with the English, Ghulam Husain Khan reports that he ‘was very near despairing of my life and honour’. Secretly he arranged that his one remaining brother also should depart the Nawab’s camp. Later, when he had recovered his health, Ghulam Husain Khan seized an opportunity to bow to the Nawab before Mir Qasim entered his private chambers. Nawab Mir Qasim gave him two rolls of pan from the Nawab’s own supply, and suggested ominously that it was a good thing he the Nawab had done to allow both of Ghulam Husain Khan’s brothers ‘to take some rest and enjoy themselves for a while’. Thoroughly frightened, Ghulam Husain Khan in turn feigned applause for the Nawab’s kindness and generosity, along with thanks for the great honour shown him by the gift of pan. Here the excessive favour shown by a gift of pan from his own hand veils the Nawab’s profound distrust, which is only hinted at verbally, and Ghulam Husain Khan’s expressions of gratitude similarly mask his sudden terror.
I have found no evidence from Bengal that *pan* was given or ‘taken up’ in order to constitute relations of fealty among rebels against Mughal rule. Although negative evidence never is conclusive, perhaps the late seventeenth century zamindari rebellion of Sobha Singh on the western frontier of Mughal Bengal can serve as an example. The most nearly contemporary Mughal history of the rebellion is silent about the procedures used to recruit followers.\(^{101}\) Gautam Bhadra’s analysis of origins of the rebellion emphasizes the ways the zamindar may have found a core of support among poor people from the *jati* of Bagdis in his zamindari in western Midnapur, to which *jati* his lineage apparently retained special ritual ties, and to which it once may have belonged.\(^{102}\) In contrast, Aniruddha Ray emphasizes the ways leaders of the rebellion attempted to project themselves as kings, and failed nevertheless to control looting of merchants by their peasant followers. About recruitment of peasants to the rebellion Ray astutely comments:

‘Peasants after the fall of a rebel would always point to the fact that they had paid [taxes] only to a king—and had, in effect, only approved the transfer of power that had effectively changed hands’.\(^{103}\) Perhaps their participation in a ceremony of voluntarily
‘taking up’ *pan* to join a rebellion would not have served peasants’ interests of self-protection in case the rebellion were to fail.

**Conclusion**

This essay explores ambiguous, changing and contested meanings in royal gifts of *pan*. Throughout South Asia, *pan* was given both in courts and in wealthy families to show honour to a great variety of recipients. Like gifts of robes of honour, some royal gifts of *pan* constituted relationships by changing the bodies of subjects who received them, leaving a trace of the ruler’s body in the subjects’ bodies. The gift which carried the most honour was a *tambula* prepared for the ruler’s use, and better, given by the ruler’s own hand, and it was to be taken into the subject’s mouth. By asymmetrically ‘marking’ subjects, royal gifts of *pan* from the ruler’s hand constituted them as inferiors in their relationship to him, while transferring to them some of the ruler’s virtue and authority. On the other hand, an apparently specialized ceremony associated with some royal gifts of *pan* seems to have emphasized the recipient’s independent agency. This was the ‘voluntary’ gesture of ‘taking up’ *pan* in order to symbolize acceptance of a particular command or
assignment from the ruler. Finally, because they were thought to cause ‘fire’ to burn more
brightly, while removing wind and counteracting phlegm, 
tambula might have been both
given and ‘taken up’ as a tonic and prophylactic, in order to produce the kind of person
who could undertake a difficult mission, someone with the mental and moral qualities of
intelligence and fortitude, as well as the physical ones of good health and a capacity for
passionate and energetic action, and one who could be introduced with pleasure to courtly
society because of his sweet smelling breath.

In Mukunda’s sixteenth century 
Candimangal we saw that by metonymy the
acceptance of a gift of pan could acknowledge entering into an enduring and generalized
relationship between subject and ruler. In this narrative gifts of pan marked out the
autarkic boundaries of royal redistribution. But behind the royal gifts of pan to all of
Kalketu’s subjects, we discerned a series of prices, as subjects and the king negotiated
terms of settlement on the agrarian frontier. Further, if gifts of pan could have become so
commonplace as to be given to all subjects, the ‘value’ of receiving them also would have
decreased.
Mukunda mentions ‘taking’ pan in a variety of other courtly settings, human and divine, to indicate acceptance of a royal command. In Bengali literature written after Mukunda’s poem, ‘taking pan’ is mentioned less frequently, and tends to be displaced to relationships more peripheral and ephemeral than those of a court. In this later literature kings use a rich array of gifts—including clothing, weapons, jewels, horses, palanquins, banners and trumpets—to show royal favour. This rich array of gifts usually is given to a few subjects who have accepted royal commands and new responsibilities, not to subjects in general. Because giving and ‘taking’ pan in general are not motifs necessary to the stories being told, variations in how and where these motifs are used are more likely to reflect changing customs than to have been made for literary or rhetorical purposes.

Evidence from texts more closely linked to historical events also suggests that royal gifts of pan probably became less important in the course of Mughal rule in Bengal. One reason seems to have been that, as Bengali literature suggests, gifts of pan were displaced by more elaborate, finely graded, and expensive gifts of honour, gifts which better conveyed the promised advantages of obedience to a few favoured subjects. But
another reason seems to have been that the ceremony of ‘taking up’ *pan*, and its implicit recognition of a subject’s ‘voluntary’ agency, often may not have served the interests of Mughal rulers, who organized courtly ceremonies to express a more absolute authority.

Mughal ceremonies for receipt of new offices or responsibilities privileged written *farman*, the writs of office which provided a permanent record of new responsibilities; whereas in the few records I have found of the ceremony in Mughal Bengal, *pan* appears to have been ‘taken up’ in the context of accepting oral directives. When ‘taking up’ *pan* was used in Mughal ceremony, sometimes the ceremony was modified to express a more absolute authority, as when the Governor of Bengal Islam Khan gave his refractory Afghan subject both *pan* and a big knife to indicate the choice of obedience or death. ‘Taking up’ *pan* to indicate voluntary acceptance of a directive seems to have been displaced towards more peripheral or ephemeral relationships, as when the ‘Krori’ (*karori*) Jam Sher Beg gave *pan* to silk dealers (*paikars*) while bidding them to supply the English East India Company at a new factory. Giving and ‘taking up’ *pan* sometimes were used in order to produce ambiguity in a relationship; as when Nawab Alivardi devised a ceremonial gift of
pan for one of his nephews, to indicate the nephew’s ‘voluntary’ relinquishment of an office from which he in fact had been removed.

Even without the context of a command and its acceptance, the meaning of a gift of pan depended on the relations which were its context, and on the motives of giver and recipient, as in the very different meanings of Siraj-ud-daula’s almost simultaneous gifts of pan to the Frenchman Monsieur Law and to the vakil of the English. So too with ‘taking up’ pan in the context of a directive: in that context, however, we persistently have noted some degree of choice to accept or decline to ‘take up’ both pan and directive. An expectation of choice on the part of the recipient remains, at least in the background, even when that choice explicitly was denied by a modification to the ceremony, or when it explicitly was displaced from the recipient to the giver. I do not argue that personal choice—and its concomitant negotiation of the price for obedience—was an essential and unchanging part of the ceremony of ‘taking up’ pan. I do suggest that the ceremony of ‘taking up pan remained useful because it usually signified personal choice on the part of the recipient, and that it remained marginally useful even though rulers in Mughal courts
gave much more emphasis to ceremonies which stressed a less conditional obedience to a more absolute authority.


7 Ibn Battuta, 3: 737.

8 Ibn Battuta, 3: 738.


Penzer, pp. 223-4, quoting from *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, 2 vols. (1885) 2:62ff. I have used Penzer’s corrections to the English translation. Was Bernard ten Broecke simply confused about the use of *pan* as a passport? It seems more likely that the gifts he noted were also part of a ceremony of departure. A *milreis* (1000 *real*) was a Portuguese money of account. If the *real* was equal to a *crusado*, then it also was equal to between 1 and 1.25 rupees. The alleged annual expenditure of about 30,000,000 rupees for *pan* is an astronomical amount.

Abu’l Fazl, 1:78.

Penzer, pp. 203-9; Rooney, p. 11; Henry Brownrigg, *Betel Cutters from the*

See Ibn Battuta 3:680, the account of Sultan Muhammad Tughluq’s reception of Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad, a descendent of the ‘Abbasid caliph: ‘He took betel-nut with his own hand and offered it to him; this was the highest mark of the Sultan’s consideration for him, for he never does that with anyone’. See also Penzer, p. 223, quoting van Linschoten: ‘... & this [the king’s chewing pan while giving an audience] is a great honour to the Ambassadour, specially if he profereth him of the same Bettele that he himself doeth eate’.


Penzer, p. 211, quoting Ibn al-Baitar: ‘. . .the leaves once dried go to dust for lack of moisture’; see also p. 219, quoting Tomé Pires: ‘Dry, it is good for nothing, for its virtue is so subtle that, when dry, it has neither flavour nor taste’.

Gode, ‘Studies in the History of Tambula: History of the Verse about the Thirteen Qualities of Tambula’, in *Studies in Cultural History* 1:145. The source is Jalhana, *Suktimuktavali* (1258); I have slightly changed Gode’s translation. A variant of the verse

25Mariott, p. 12.

26Mariott, pp. 12, 15-16.


31 Quoted by Penzer, p. 197.


34 Shahpurshah Hormasji Hodivala, Studies in Indo-Muslim History: A Critical Commentary on Elliot and Downson’s History of India as Told by its own Historians (Bombay: [Bombay Book Depot?] 1939), p. 265.
The betel quid became the symbol of a particular task or charge. “Who will take this up?” the ruler would ask, and the courtier who accepted the betel quid thereby committed himself to undertake the task in question. This practice still survives in the expression “pan ka birha uthana” (“taking up the betel”) which means the acceptance of responsibility.


I have cited throughout as CM the following edition: Kabikankan Mukundabiracita, *Candimangal*, Sukumar Sen sampadita (Nay Dilli: Sahitya Akademi, 1975).

Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay summarizes the controversies about Mukunda’s dates; see *Madhyayuger Bamlā Sahityer Tathya o Kalakram* (Kalikata: Bharati Buk Stal, 1993), pp. 121-35.


CM, *pad 6*, p. 3.


49 CM, *pad* 127, p. 75: the terms Kalketu proposes to the headman Bulan Mandal.
the complaints of Bulan Mandal against the King of Kalinga.

See also pad 129, p. 76: the harsher treatment of subjects proposed by Bharu Datta, a rival headman.

CM, pad 117, p. 70; pad 118, p. 71.

CM, pad 122, p. 73.


Candi, for example, did not attempt to offer her rival and co-wife Ganga pan when she attempted, without success, to secure Ganga’s assistance in settling Kalketu’s kingdom. See CM, pad 120, p. 72.

CM, pad 130, p. 77.

57 CM, *pad* 134, p. 79: *prasanna sabhar bani, likhapara sabhe jani, bhabyajan nagarer sobha.*

58 A promise made to the headman Bulan Mandal; see CM, *pad* 127, p. 75.

59 CM, *pad* 132, p. 78.

60 CM, *pad* 127, p. 75.

61 CM, *pad* 132, pp. 77, 78.

62 ‘All the Musalmans’ (CM, *pad* 130, p. 77) include ‘ten or twenty lineages’ (*biradare*) of men who ‘continually read the Qur’an’, and various jati of Muslim artisans who ‘know neither the fast nor daily prayer’. ‘All the Brahmans’ who received *pan* (*pad* 132, p. 77) similarly include both pure (*kulin*) lineages and lowly genealogists, astrologers, and various renunciative beggars. ‘All the dependants’ of Kayasthas, to whom Kalketu was
requested to give *pan* (*pad* 134, p. 80), apparently include several untouchable jati and his town’s prostitutes (*pad* 136, p. 81).

\[63\] CM, *pad* 136, p. 81.

\[64\] CM, *pad* 135, p. 80: *barui nibase pure, baroj nirman kare, mahabire nitya dei pan/ bale yadi keha nei, birer dohai dei, anucita na dei bidhan//* Is it odd that in the same *pad*, *tambuligan*, who assemble *tambula* from *pan* and areca nuts and who ‘continually give the hero rolls [of *pan*]’, were not given a similar promise? But we are told that they ‘receive no royal oppression (*raj’pira*)’.

\[65\] CM, *pad* 133, p. 79.


\[67\] For example, François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire AD 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed. revised by V.A. Smith (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint
Bernier describes in the imperial camp a separate tent for ‘betlé’ which Aurangzeb distributed ‘as a mark of royal favour’.

68 Abu’l Fazl 1:167.

69 Ibid.

70 Mirza Nathan 2:706.

71 Ibid. 1:215-16; 297.

72 Milo Cleveland Beach and Ebba Koch, King of the World: The Padshahnama, with translations by Wheeler Thackston (London: Azimuth Editions, Sackler Gallery, 1997), Plate 6-7, ‘The Submission of Rana Amar Singh of Merwar to Prince Khurram’, commentary, pp. 31, 34, and Fig. 17, p. 120.

73 Mirza Nathan 1:263, describing conveyance of the office of governor of Bihar upon Mirza Ibrahim Beg.
Feeling oppressed at heart, the merchant does not take the roll [of pan], and the king’s eyes become red with anger. So, understanding what was expected [karyyer gati], the merchant Dhanapati takes the pan and, with the anjali gesture, touches his head’.


Dvija Ramadeb, p. 261.

Dvija Madhab, p. 64.

Dvija Ramadeb, p. 76.

Reading tangan in place of taian.
I cannot understand two words in the last half of the last tripadi verse: \textit{irakhi eyabuseya [?], ghora cine buro meya, jamadhar basiya hain [?]} This final word might be emended to rhyme with \textit{tangan} if my emendation of \textit{taian} in the previous footnote is correct.]


\textsuperscript{84} Ghanaram Cakrabartti, p. 216.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 185.
86 Ibid., pp. 588-9.

87 Ibid., p. 30: ghosera dosa dila sar‘bandh jora/ bak’sis karen puna caranera
gora// nag’ra nisan dila likhan par’yana, biday haila gop kariya bandana.

88 Ibid., p. 132.

89 The Malda Diary and Consultations (1680-82), ed. Walter K. Firminger, in
Journal and Proceedings, Asiatic Society of Bengal (New Series), Vol. 14 (1918), nos. 1 &
2, p. 140, Englezavad Diary, entry for 12 Oct. 1681. The paikars were middlemen who
distributed advances to weavers and collected cloth from them.

90 Mirza Nathan 1:142, and for the complicity of Musa Khan in the attack of Husayn
Khan against the Mughal force, pp. 107, 121, 128, 132.

91 For summaries of this event see: Andrea Hintze, The Mughal Empire and its
ed. Jadunath Sarkar, 2 vols. bound in one (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation,
1971; 1st pub. 1921-2) 2:197-206.

92Tod 1:78-9.


94‘18 lacs of Rupees from the Treasury and fifty cannon of various sizes’, according to Irvine 2:205.

95Cf. Hintze, p. 271: ‘Only the promise of lucrative posts or the prospect of immediate enrichment could act as incentives for nobles to obey transfer or campaign orders from Delhi.’


100 Ghulam Husain Khan 2:451-2.


Nadiya was a little Hindu kingdom in Bengal, ruled by a line of Brahman rajas, who became zamindars under the Mughals and who lost much of their zamindari under the British. Nadiya was located along the eastern bank of the Hugli River, and at its peak extended from Plassey in the north to the shifting islands and mangrove swamps of the Sundarbans in the south. Its name was derived from the ancient center of Sanskritic education, Navadvipa, but like all Hindu zamindars of Mughal Bengal, the Nadiya Rajas also studied Persian, and became familiar with Persian courtly culture. Nadiya also was at

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the heart of a ‘contact zone’1 with Europeans, a zone which ran north and south between European factories and settlements along the Hugli River. Some of the parganas (the lowest territorial unit in Mughal revenue administration) belonging to Nadiya were near neighbors of the English settlement at Calcutta; the road north from Calcutta to the English factories of Cossimbazar and Maldah went through Nadiya; and the textile-weaving center of Santipur in Nadiya supplied fine cotton ‘mulmuls’ (muslins) for the European trade.2

Long before the English began to rule territory in Bengal, relations between them and Nadiya rulers involved calculations of mutual interest. In 1697 Ramakrsna, then Raja of Nadiya, deposited 48,000 rupees in Calcutta with the English East India Company, while Bengal was disturbed by the anti-Mughal rebellion of the zamindar Sobha Singh. Ramakrsna was ‘unwilling to be knowne to the Government to have mony as is the Custome of all the Rajahs and Jimmidars [zamindars] of the Country to keep their Riches private. . .’ and accepted interest of only 7.5%3 The same man is said to have accepted a temporary garrison of English trained soldiers.
Mid eighteenth century, relations between Nadiya rulers and the Nawab of Bengal became more uncertain, and the presence of the English more important. I will use works of art patronized by the Nadiya Rajas in the eighteenth century to explore their self-representations. In particular, I will examine family histories and temple architecture. I will argue that during the chaotic middle decades of the eighteenth century Raja Krsnacandra (1710-1782) constructed a more unitary and inclusive meaning for ‘Hinduism’ to support his novel claim to a more independent sovereignty in Nadiya as new threats and opportunities opened before him.

In eighteenth century Bengal, sovereignty had to be defended and maintained. The Nadiya Rajas’ symbolic ‘constitutions’ of sovereignty could not create an independent kingdom by themselves. By attending to how Krsnacandra identified and solved problems of religious identity and kingship, we also can begin to see strengths and weaknesses, both in his cultivation of historical knowledge, and in his practice of politics.

The First and Second Foundings of Nadiya
The *Ksitisavamsavalicaritam* is a Sanskrit genealogy and history of the forebears of Maharaja Krsnacandra of Nadiya.\(^4\) Two undated manuscripts are held by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (formerly the Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin), one written in Bengali characters and one in Devanagari. Neither has a final verse identifying the author or authors, the date of composition, or the copyists; the authorship may have been collective, and chapters may have been added serially. This text treats the lineage of Raja Krsnacandra from the forebear who first moved to Bengal during the reign of the legendary ‘King Adisura’ to the death of Krsnacandra’s father and his own installation in 1728, when the text abruptly ends. Its seventh, longest, and final chapter may have been written shortly after that event, or the whole may have been composed at some later period during Raja Krsnacandra’s reign. William Pertsch, who first edited and translated them, thought the manuscripts themselves probably were products of the late eighteenth century.\(^5\)

Whatever its date and authorship, the *Ksitisavamsavalicaritam* describes successes and failures of the Nadiya rulers in terms of an uneasy combination of Sanskritic and Persian roles and principles of legitimacy.
We may note, first, that this Brahman lineage had two founders. The first, Battanarayana, was one of five Brahmans invited from Kanyakubja to Vanga by the legendary Hindu sovereign Adisura to perform a homa sacrifice of the flesh of a vulture, whose inauspicious appearance upon his palace otherwise promised a future of misfortune; and in the Brahmans’ success despite the utter strangeness of the task thus set them we can read the superiority of their Vedic learning. In return Adisura settled the Brahmans in his own city, where they lived for one year. Desiring that Battanarayana continue to reside, Adisura then offered him a gift of some villages, but Bhattanarayana declined to demean himself by accepting any additional gifts, and instead offered to purchase the villages. Thereafter he and his descendants ‘enjoyed’ these villages ‘exempt from taxation’ for eleven generations and 322 years.6

Unfortunately, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, ‘coming from the land of the mlecchas,’ vanquished the ‘lord of Delhi’ at the same time that four brothers in the twelfth generation disputed the kingdom among themselves. One secured recognition from the Sultan, and thus an advantage over his brothers, by offering to pay taxes.7 Thus matters continued for
another five generations and 167 years, bringing us to the time of Emperor Akbar (one must appreciate the schematic nature of this history), when Raja Kasinath lost his life, and the lineage its royal possessions, for daring to slay one of Akbar’s royal elephants.\(^8\)

This almost brings us to history more properly speaking, and to the second founder of the lineage, a grandson of Kasinath, who at the age of 11 joined the service of an unnamed Muslim ‘minister’ sent by the ‘Sultan of Delhi’ (the Mughal Emperor Akbar). This grandson, Durgadas, ‘in a short while became adept in the meaning of all the Persian sastras,’ so pleasing his employer that he was appointed to serve in the office of qanungho daftar (land registrar) of the sarkar of Satgaon (an administrative level above that of the pargana), and given the title majumdar (Persian, majmu‘adar, a revenue clerk or accountant) and a new name, Bhavananda.\(^9\) By learning Persian, and by entering directly into the Mughal land revenue bureaucracy, Bhavananda secured revenue-collecting rights to some villages (but perhaps not to his patrimonial kingdom lost by Kasinath), and changed part of the royal culture of his lineage. Descendants are described as ‘saluting’ Mughal rulers ‘with the customary ceremonies’ and as being honored in return ‘with
gracious and friendly conversations’—all according to Persian courtly culture.¹⁰ When Bishop Heber visited Nadiya in 1824, he found the grandson of Maharaja Krsnacandra dwelling in one room of the ruins of his ancestor’s palace. Nevertheless, after the Bishop’s rank in English society had been ascertained, he was entertained in this man’s ‘court’, and for his audience with the Nadiya Raja the Bishop was supplied an interpreter, ‘since in strict conformity with court etiquette, the conversation passed in Persian’.¹¹

The crucial change in Bhavananda’s fortunes, however, is said to have occurred somewhat later. Raja Man Singh Kachwa (under Akbar the Mughal empire’s foremost Hindu courtier and general) had been sent by the Emperor to conquer Raja Pratapaditya of Yasohar (Jessore), the most powerful of ‘twelve kings enjoying their kingdoms exempt from taxation’ in Bengal. Bhavananda supplied Raja Man Singh with transport and food for his army when they were caught in a week-long rainstorm, guided him to Yasohar, a ‘kingdom’ neighboring Nadiya to the east, and at the crux of the battle, advised renewed attack, which met with success. In return, Man Singh took Bhavananda back to Delhi, told Emperor Jahangir about his assistance, and secured for him a sworn and signed document
(i.e., a *sanad*) granting him a ‘kingdom’ in the fourteen parganas originally held by his ancestors. The Nadiya genealogy emphasizes the honor received with Emperor Jahangir’s signature on this document.¹²

In short, the two founders of this royal Brahman lineage mastered two kinds of learning, Sanskritic and Persian, and defined two ways of relating to their respective sovereigns. Bhattanarayana ‘enjoyed’ his villages outright, and did not receive gifts from or pay taxes to the Hindu king Adisura. Bhavananda’s position was far inferior. In fact, if this genealogy has a single lesson, it is that from Bhavananda on, failure to collect, account for and pay the stipulated revenue demand of his ‘kingdom’ resulted in imprisonment.

It is necessary, however, to criticize this history of Bhavananda. The original *sanad*, now largely unreadable, is dated in 1606, six years before the conquest of Raja Pratapaditya, in 1612. A second *sanad* from Jahangir also has been preserved by the family. According to it, Bhavananda in fact was not given the title of ‘Raja’. Instead he became a *pargana caudhuri* and *qanungo* in the local land revenue system, with the duty
to present an ‘account of the receipts and arrears of the revenue’ (jama-wakil-baki) for all
his parganas, to protect the weak from the strong, and to ‘accomplish the weal and
prevent the injury of the whole region by whatever means.’¹³ A pargana was the lowest
level of the Mughal revenue administration in Bengal. The qanungo of a pargana kept
permanent records of revenue receipts, the area under cultivation, local revenue rates, and
records of revenue related customs and practices of the pargana. The caudhuri
usually was the most important zamindar of a pargana. He certified the revenue
assessments drawn up by the qanungo, and both organized and stood surety for their
collection. Both offices usually were hereditary, but for both succession required imperial
confirmation, and removal from office was possible.¹⁴ Receiving the office of caudhuri
indicates that Bhavananda had become a prominent zamindar. Since each of the two
offices was designed as a check upon the other, it is striking that Bhavananda was
appointed to both. Since he already had been employed as qanungo at the superior
administrative level of the sarkar of Satgaon, where he collected and supervised records of
the *pargana qanungos* under authority of the *sarkar*, it seems reasonable that his position as one of the latter in some way was achieved through the former office.\(^{15}\)

Second, Raja Pratapaditya was not conquered by Raja Man Singh Kachwa (who served as governor of the *suba* (province) of Bengal under Emperor Akbar from 1594 to the latter’s final illness in 1605, and briefly was reappointed by Jahangir in 1605 and then recalled in 1606).\(^{16}\) In April, 1601 Raja Man Singh did invest a ‘strong position’ of rebel Afghans ‘near Bushna and Jessore’. He could not attack because ‘on every side there were marshes and it was impossible to reach the place easily’, but he ‘appointed active people (to watch them) and addressed himself to opening out the country and increasing cultivation.’ No battle is mentioned, but eventually a number of Afghans ‘capitulated and came in’.\(^{17}\) Bhavananda may have helped the Raja during this investment, or in the plan to extend cultivation to the marshes, or the author may have conflated this event with the defeat of Pratapaditya in January 1612. If Bhavananda really confirmed his position by assisting in the defeat of Pratapaditya, he must have helped, not Raja Man Singh, but Ghiyas Khan and Mirza Nathan, whom the then governor of Bengal, Islam Khan, sent with
a strong fleet and ‘a number of tried and experienced officers’ in December 1611 to bring Pratapaditya to submission. After two day long battles, Pratapaditya submitted in January 1612, and was taken in chains to the capital of the suba, Jahangirnagar (Dhaka).  

Although the Nadiya family’s second sanad from Jahangir to Bhavananda is dated 1613, it also does not refer to Pratapaditya’s defeat. What are the consequences of so retelling the family’s history? If potentially embarrassing events are elided in this history, it also may minimize Bhavananda’s shrewdness, either in promoting himself by means of his bureaucratic position at Satgaon, or in materially assisting Muslim officers against a powerful, local Hindu raja.  

Conflicting Principles of Legitimacy  

Perhaps an ideal balance between the roles of Sanskritic king and Mughal zamindar may be taken from the life of Bhavananda’s grandson Raghava (reigned c. 1632-1683). Retaining undivided possession of the kingdom by Mughal custom, he gave his brothers funds for their maintenance ‘every month’. He also regularly paid the taxes due the ‘Yavana King’, and so became the latter’s ‘faithful servant’ (visvasapatra). He built a
huge tank, and a temple to Siva on one bank (the Raghavesvara temple at Dignagar, dated 1669) for the dedication of which he invited a ‘great assembly’ of learned Brahmans from all over India, and ‘kings, princes and ministers from various regions’ besides. For the dedication of this tank and of the temple’s Siva linga he is said to have spent 300,000 rupees.\textsuperscript{22}

It is easy to note tensions between Sanskritic and Persian cultural forms.

Raghava’s son, Rudra Ray (reigned c. 1683-1694), refused to take the drum upon his shoulder as part of the ceremony of receiving khil‘at (a robe of honour), and when attending ‘the Sultan’ he insisted on wearing an unsewn dhoti beneath his court robe instead of sewn pants. ‘Brahmans devoted to true conduct,’ he said, ‘wear such a garment as mine; but by sewn garments they incur a fault’.\textsuperscript{23} Rudra Ray remained in the governor’s good graces by his lavish distribution of bribes and presents. Comparing himself to a famous revenue official, he once acknowledged that, ‘as wealth is the root of this qanungo’s mastery of office [karmadhyaksata] so also it is the root of my kingdom.’\textsuperscript{24}
Rudra Ray was responsible for constructing the family’s palace and grounds at Krsnanagar. For this purpose he brought a Muslim builder from the provincial capital, Jahangirnagar, and secured permission from the governor to use battlements (kangura, P. kungura) in the design, and to fly banners and to beat kettledrums. The grounds included a gatehouse, a room ‘suitable for the playing of musical instruments’ (i.e., a naqqara khana), a three-storied public audience hall into which one could drive elephants, horses and conveyances on the ground floor, elephant and horse stables, and an antahpur (quarters for women of his family and their attendants) ‘like a palace of the goddess’.

Another detail gives us a glimpse of one possible source of his evident prosperity: he also built a high road from Krsnanagar to Santipur, which already was an important weaving center for the Dutch.

Rudra Ray had three sons by two wives. In the next generation, Ramacandra, who contested with his younger brother for the throne for several years following his father’s death in 1694, was a powerful wrestler and a prodigious eater, and won the affection of the Faujder of Hugli for his heroic qualities. He, however, neglected daily rites and
worship, ‘was adverse to good conversation with learned Brahmans’, and did not follow his father’s advice, for which reasons his father Rudra Ray gave the kingdom to Ramacandra’s younger brother Ramajiban. The Mughal governor, however, intervened on behalf of Ramacandra, and for a time the ‘kingdom’ was divided between them. Other descendants also had to balance the requirements of king and Mughal zamindar.

Ramakrsna (r. 1695 to 1715), half brother of Ramacandra, was a friend of Auranzeb’s grandson, ‘Azim-ush-Shan (governor of the suba of Bengal 1697-1712, but absent from 1703 on), entertained the provincial banker, the Jagat Seth, was on good terms with the ‘Chief of the mlecchas from the South’ at Calcutta, from whom he received 2500 skilled ‘soldiers’ (choldar) ‘to use as he pleased’, but died in prison of smallpox, having failed to pay Ja‘far Khan (then the provincial diwan or finance minister, a man who was given the title Murshid Quli Khan in 1702) the ‘acknowledged taxes due’. Ramakrsna’s son Raghuram (r. 1715-1728) proved his heroism in battle for Ja‘far Khan (who by this time was the provincial Nawab, uniting in his own person both military and fiscal responsibilities) and thereby redeemed his father from prison, but he himself subsequently was confined at
Murshidabad for failure to pay the taxes still owed. Even though imprisoned for debts to
the Nawab, he continued to distribute land to Brahmans; indeed, this single act reveals
the fundamental contradiction in his roles. Nadiya’s zamindar-kings in this account had
two distinct roles, one Mughal and Persian, and one Sanskritic. The two roles both partly
overlapped and partly were opposed to each other. Neither could be eliminated.

Therefore, in this narrative the succeeding possessors of the Nadiya throne, their actions
and passions, and their successes and failures are all arranged in a single field, like iron
filings around a bi-polar magnet.

The Maratha Incursions

We now may turn to the life of Raja Krsnacandra, and to two remarkable works of
art composed with his patronage a few years before Col. Robert Clive’s ‘victory’ at
Plassey, June 23, 1757. These works of art are the Annadamangal by Bharat’candra Ray,
first performed in 1751/52, and the Rajarajesvara temple at Sib’nibas, dedicated in 1754.

I will argue that these two works fundamentally change the field of kingship in Nadiya, by
means of a unitary understanding of ‘Hinduism’ and a concomitant assertion of Hindu
‘inclusivism’. I also will argue that both have as their occasion the almost annual Maratha incursions of 1742-50, and both preface Krsnacandra’s assertion of independent sovereignty.

Bharat’candra’s poem begins with the death of Nawab Shuja‘-ud-Din Khan on March 13, 1739, and the succession of his son, Safaraz, to the position of Nawab of the three _subas_, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. ‘Alivardi, deputy Nawab of Bihar under the father, staged a revolt, defeated and killed the son in battle and made himself Nawab in April, 1740. In Bharat’candra’s narrative, he then led his armies into the temple city of Bhubanesvar ‘in pomp and ceremony’ and over this sacred place in Orissa, Siva’s place in the world, ‘the tyrant Mughal practiced tyranny’. To punish him Siva called upon the ‘king’ of the ‘Bargis’ (Marathas), and thus, ‘for that sin the three _subas_ came to be like hell’.

Neither Nadiya nor Krsnacandra escaped ensuing difficulties.³²

We can add that relatives and partisans of the slain Nawab Safaraz invited Raghuji Bhonsle, the Maratha chief of Nagpur, to invade Bengal, while ‘Alivardi was campaigning in Orissa in 1742. Raghuji sent his general Bhaskar Ram in command of 20,000 cavalry
to collect the *cauth* from Bengal (the *cauth* was essentially a ‘protection tax’ demanded by the Marathas and set at one-quarter of the government’s land revenues). They surprised and surrounded ‘Alivardi in the neighborhood of Barddhaman Town, and while ‘Alivardi and his army fought their way back to Katwa, the Marathas looted the countryside, including parts of Nadiya. For a day they even entered the capital, Murshidabad, where they extracted 300,000 rupees from the treasury of the Nawab’s banker Jagat Seth Fatehcand.

Against all expectations the Marathas did not retire during the rainy season, and were not driven out until the following October. This period of the first invasion was remembered for the Marathas’ atrocities upon Bengali men, women and children, and it is what Bharat’candra describes as a kind of ‘hell’.33

I return to Bharat’candra’s account. Sometime during or shortly after the first invasion of 1742, Maharaja Krsnacandra was imprisoned at Murshidabad for failure to pay ‘Alivardi an extraordinary cess of 1,200,000 rupees. While in prison he worshipped the goddess. She took the form of Annapurna, who assures gods and humans their supply of food, and commanded him in a dream to establish her worship annually on the eighth night
of the bright fortnight of *Caitra*. She also told him to command his court poet Bharat’candra to compose her ‘auspicious song’, for which she would reveal the song’s narrative. This song the Raja should make known publicly. Finally, Bharat’candra concludes, according to this very command Maharaja Krsnacandra worshipped Annapurna and ‘crossed over that difficulty’.34 Sometime after 1742 the Raja relocated his capital about twelve miles east of Krsnanagar, to a fortified place he called Sib’nibas, where he apparently escaped further Maratha raids. ‘Alivardi and Rагhuji finally composed a truce in 1750, by which ‘Alivardi ceded all the surplus revenues of Orissa, and promised to pay 1,200,000 rupees annually as the cauth of Bengal.

To the ruler of Nadiya as to everyone else, the Marathas must have revealed ‘Alivardi’s weaknesses, even as ‘Alivardi increased his financial demands. Agents of Siva, the ‘Hindu’ Marathas themselves, however, seem to have offered plunder and rapine as the only alternative. Could Maharaja Krsnacandra still define himself in relation to both of the roles of his position, Sanskritic king and Mughal zamindar, as hitherto imagined and
practiced by the Nadiya lineage? In this situation, Bharat'candra retold the story of its second founder, Bhavananda.

Unitary Hinduism

Before examining this story, we must briefly describe the unitary Hinduism advocated by Bharat’candra’s poem in a previous section, which describes the re-education of the great seer Vyasa. Vyasa, we are told, was a fanatic Vaisnava. Together with his disciples he wandered from place to place, carrying with him loads and loads of books and almanacs, and engaging in various discussions on the sacred texts and their commentaries.35 By chance one day he met a party of naked Saiva ascetics led by Saunaka. The two leaders debated the merits of their respective deities, and came thus to Kasi, where Vyasa denounced Siva in his own city. For this impertinence he was struck dumb, until Visnu himself taught Vyasa Siva’s greatness, at which point, because of his ‘bad fate’, Vyasa became as fanatic a Saiva as he had been a Vaisnava, and recited yet another purana, the Kasi Khanda.36 The consequence is that Vyasa had to be taught by Annapurna herself that: ‘Hari, Hara and Bidhi [Visnu, Siva and Brahma] are my body.
The one who worships them without distinction is the judicious (dhira) devotee’. In 1766 Krsnacandra built a temple to Hari-Hara at Amghata, on the inscription to which we find this same doctrine expressed. Distinguishing Murari [Visnu] and Tripurahara [Siva] is called ‘the wrong notion of the foolish’, and the temple’s syncretic god, Hari-Hara, is identified as the ‘nondual Supreme Reality’ (advaita brahman). The unitary theology of Bharat’candra’s poem was Krsnacandra’s own theology. We will see that it seems to have been attractive because it composed differences within Hinduism so as to present a united defense against challenges from non-Hindus.

Jahangir’s Conversion and Hindu ‘Inclusivism’

Bharat’candra alters in many ways the account of the Ksitisavama svalicaritam. First, the storm which halted Man Singh’s army and during which Bhavananda’s supplies of food were critical for the army’s well-being, becomes, in his account, an act of the Goddess Annapurna, who supplies gods and humans with food, and who intends thereby to secure wider worship. ‘If you give sorrow with happiness,’ her attendant Padma advises, ‘then you will receive worship (puja).’ Second, Bhavananda worships
Annapurna, and teaches Man Singh to do so, and because of her grace the army can be fed (true, with Bhavananda’s own supplies). The storm then passes, and the conquest of Pratapaditya proceeds. Third, the contrast between Bhavananda and Pratapaditya is elaborated and the latter’s military resistance to the Mughal conquest is given a sacerdotal dimension. Whereas Bhavananda worships the gracious, pacific, and food-granting deity Annapurna, Pratapaditya worships Kali. (We should, however, note that Bharat’candra himself tells us that Krsnacandra also worshipped Kali.) Third, Man Singh requests from Emperor Jahangir a kingdom for Bhavananda, not because the latter fed the general’s armies from his own stores, but because he worshipped Annapurna, and thereby secured her assistance. Finally, and understandably, the Emperor expresses his opposition to so rewarding any infidel Brahman, and must be ‘converted’ before he will do so. The result of these interventions is that the poem brings the Mughal Emperor within the field of Annapurna’s authority, so that the Mughal sanad to Bhavananda may be derived, ultimately, from the goddess herself.
Emperor Jahangir’s ‘conversion’ proceeds in two stages. The first is a debate with Bhavananda about the relative merits of Islam and Hinduism, by which the superiority of a Hindu ‘inclusivism’ is established, although the Emperor remains intransigent. The second is a conclusive display of Annapurna’s maya, as a result of which the Emperor asks Bhavananda to direct him also in appropriate acts of Annapurna’s worship.

We may consider a few of the claims advanced in this debate, first in the rhetoric of Jahangir. Hindus worship ‘ghosts’, a fraud perpetrated by Satan; really the tailless monkeys eat the food offerings to these ghosts, and the Hindu sacred texts, too, are false, the deceptions of Satan. Hindu men shave their beards, which are a sign of God’s light. Hindus sacrifice goats, saying that God has eaten them, but the meat is not halal, and the taking of life therefore is unlawful. Hindus make a fault of accepting drinking water from others, to say nothing of cooked rice, but do not heed the qadi and the Prophet’s deputy (nayeb, the Islamic ruler). Hindu widows may not remarry, and the flower that blooms in them every month is wasted for want of seed, a great sin. Hindus make idols of clay, wood, and stone, and give them a soul; can something formed by a man and given a soul
by a man really save that man? Hindus do not keep concubines, calling it the sin of adultery; God seems to have created them for suffering. (In daily prayer, salat) human servants (of God) should touch the ground with their heads as a sign of worship; for by an act of mercy of the Merciful One, they have accepted responsibility (as servants; lit., diyache matha, ‘given’ [placed a burden upon] their heads). Failing to understand this, Hindus greet everyone they serve by touching the ground with their heads. Brahmans compose lying books and teach people to be kafirs. Jahangir’s desire is to give this and every Brahman he meets, not a sanad, but a sunnat (circumcision).42

Bhavananda’s strategy in response is to deny that Hindus worship a different divine being than Muslims do: ‘As there is one Lord (isvar) of Hindus, Muslims and all souls and living creatures, so there are not two creeds (mat)’. The fundamental unity of religions that he proposes, based on worshipping the one ‘Lord’, has the crucial feature that it gives priority to Hinduism: ‘For what creed is there in the Qur’an that is not in the Puranas? But consider, Hindus are prior and Muslims later’.43 The proposed identity of the deity worshipped by Hindu and Muslim is the ‘Formless Lord’ (nirakar isvar)—who
nevertheless can be known only through his ‘enformed’ (sakar) manifestations. Thus to
the crucial charge of idolatry, Bhavananda replies:

    Look, according to both the Puranas and the Qur’an, everything—
    clay, wood, stone, and so forth—is the Lord. One who forms an image and
    worships sees the Formless Lord enformed. But one who thinks of the
    Formless One without thinking of him as enformed is like someone who
    throws away the gold and then ties up the knot in the end of her sari. . . .
    Thinking of the goddess Hindus put vermilion on trees, but what good is
    done by daily prayer (namaz) in an empty room?"44

    From the rhetorically superior position of this Hindu inclusivism, Bhavananda then
can respond, in language as stereotypical as Jahangir’s, to the other charges the Emperor
has brought against Hinduism, not failing meanwhile to make counter accusations against
some of the beliefs and practices of Islam. A widow who remarries is like a cow that
leaves one bull for another. If the Veda, Purana, and Agama are the deceptions of Satan, why should one fear to call the Qur’an also a deception of Satan? If piercing a boy’s ears (to initiate a Hindu boy) is hoodwinking and knavery, circumcision is a terrible knavery. Hindus are not conscious of distinctions when thinking of what is beyond distinctions (abhed), so they touch their heads to the ground before everyone they serve, for the Lord is in all the forms of the cosmos. In the form of the Sun the Lord rises in the east. Facing east to worship, Hindus obtain the sunrise of knowledge—but Muslims say namaz facing west. A Brahman who knows Ultimate Reality (brahma ajnani brahman) is the deputy (nayeb) of Brahma; such a one neither heeds prohibitions against nor incurs faults of commensal eating and drinking.45

This last defense upholds the tantric adept’s immunity to commensal restrictions. He truly knows that the same Lord is worshipped by all creeds. Is not the claim implied that Bhavananda and Krsnacandra were such adepts? In comparison to Muslims, Europeans too are non-sectarian and rule-free: ‘They neither pierce their ears nor practice
circumcision, have no cleansing rituals, and eat whatever they get. Saying the Lord exists is their only duty’.\textsuperscript{46}

Comparing this debate to the roles of Nadiya kings in the \textit{Ksitisavamsavalicaritam}, one must note first that at issue is, not the competing roles of king and zamindar, but the ‘truth’ and ‘merit’ of Hinduism and Islam as systems of thought and practice. Second, the essential unity of different Hindu sects and of their particular deities is assumed throughout Bhavananda’s response, as it earlier was assumed in the narrative of Vyasa’s re-education. Third, Hinduism in this debate is given a position of supremacy to Islam, even though the ‘Lord’ ultimately worshipped by Hindus and Muslims is the same. Finally, in this narrative Bhavananda’s agency has been circumscribed even more narrowly than in the \textit{Ksitisavamsavalicaritam}, so that he regains his kingdom only by means of sacerdotal knowledge, not by any other virtues.

When the Emperor cannot be persuaded by reason and debate, Annapurna herself must intervene with a direct demonstration of her transforming power. By \textit{maya} she and all the gods recreate on a cosmic scale the Mughal Jahangir’s own court, with the goddess
herself as Emperor. This cosmic Mughal court then makes Bhavananda a Raja. Then the
goddess forms countless smaller replicas of Jahangir and makes these replicas beg
forgiveness of Bhavananda. Here we have an explicit representation of the relation
between the Mughal Emperor and Annapurna’s authority: the Mughal seems to be like a
tiny bit of planetary dust caught within the gravitational field of the goddess, entirely
dependent upon her even while he imagines his own independence in opposition to her.

But in the following acts of her drama the goddess shows us that she herself cannot be
imagined as a sun; she is not stable or unitary. She multiplies her images in ways more
and more novel and contrary until the Emperor ‘wants to praise the enchantment, but no
speech comes from his mouth’.47

Raja Krsnacandra’s Temple at Sib’nibas

Bharat’candra himself suggests that the unitary and encompassing understanding of
Hinduism, so displayed by Annapurna, would be given architectural and liturgical
expression at Raja Krsnacandra’s refuge at Sib’nibas. His poem concludes its account of
Bhavananda’s life with a ‘prophecy’ of the goddess, foretelling the lives of the Nadiya
kings (up to Krsnacandra she follows the sequence of rulers in the *Ksitisavamsavalicaritam* while adding details about rulers in the lineage who did and did not worship her aniconic representation, the winnowing fan⁴⁸). About the poet’s patron Krsnacandra, her ‘prophecy’ continues:

> At Kasi he will build the flight of steps to Jnana Vapi. He will reveal the temple (*mandir*) and icon (*bigraha*) of the form (*murti*) of Brahmanyadeva and reside there, making it Sib’nibas (Siva’s residence, the word suggests a second Kasi). There he will reveal the worship of my image (*pratima*).⁴⁹

Her ‘prophecy’ then recapitulates the poem’s account of the Maratha incursions, and of the poet’s own commission.

Jnana Vapi is the ‘Well of Wisdom’ to which pilgrims come ‘to sip the waters and take a vow of intention (*samkalpa*)’ before undertaking pilgrimages in and around Varanasi.⁵⁰ This well is associated with the introduction of Annapurna’s worship in
Varanasi from Kamakhya in Assam, so construction at this site continued Krsnacandra’s service to the goddess of food. The Raja’s construction took place in a context marked by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb’s desecration of the old Visvanatha (Siva) temple immediately north of the well, in 1669, and his replacement of its front façade with that of a mosque. The present temple of Visvanatha was not built until 1777, by the Maratha queen Rani Ahilyabai of Indore. Krsnacandra’s piety and self-assertion in building the flight of steps at Jnana Vapi would have been more conspicuous in his own time than it is now.

There are three large temples at Sib’nibas: a Rama-Sita-Laksmana temple built by his first wife and a Siva temple built by his second wife, both in 1762; and the large Rajarajesvara temple built by Krsnacandra himself in 1754. The date of this last temple, completed about two years after Bharat’candra’s poem, and the fact that it alone was built by Raja Krsnacandra himself, identify it and its deity as the poem’s ‘temple’, ‘icon’, and ‘form’ of ‘Brahmanyadeva’ by which Sib’nibas became ‘Siva’s residence’, a second Kasi.

The inscription of this temple reads:
King Sriyuta Krsnacandra, the crest-jewel among rulers, who, indeed, is born in Bharata like a Celestial Wish-fulfilling tree and a conqueror of the Guardians of the Quarters, having erected a temple whose tower touches the moon, in this learned town, installed Sambhu in the Saka year 1676.54

For the form of this temple one finds few precedents among eighteenth-century brick temples of Mughal Bengal (see Plate 1). It is a tall, octagonal structure surmounted by an elongated, eight-\textit{chala} roof.55 The east, south, and west façades have doorways set into cusped, pointed-arched entrances, and similar cusped pointed-arched niches are set into the remaining five façades. Above them two rows of rounded arched niches complete the decoration of each façade. There is no terracotta relief sculpture, nor any other figurative decoration, a feature which sets this temple apart from any of its predecessors built by the Nadiya Raj. At each of the eight corners engaged columns rise just above the peak of the curved cornices between them. Hindu observers have not failed to notice their similarity to
minara, or more precisely, to engaged turrets and columns found in many mosques built at the capital cities of Dhaka and Murshidabad. The characteristic spire-like roof of a Siva temple, however, towers above all elements derived from Persian Islamic culture which ornament the façades. From the outside, this seems to be an exact visual representation of the Hindu ‘inclusivism’ for which Bhavananda had argued in Bharat’candra’s poem.

Within, the temple has a high, domed ceiling carried on squinches which appear almost to correspond in height to the exterior cornices. Rows of arched niches in each interior façade approximately replicate the exterior design. The high, spacious interior easily accommodates a very large Siva-linga carved of black stone, 9 feet high and over 21 feet in circumference at the pitha. Only the linga indicates the ‘enformed presence of the formless Lord’ of Bharat’candra’s poem. The linga carries a separate inscription, which tells us that just as Siva came to be known as Ramesvara (Rama’s Lord) after being worshipped by Rama, so he became Rajarajesvara (Lord of the king of kings) because of being established by Sri Krsnacandra, the Brahman, doer of many good deeds, a king of kings on earth, which very title (rajaraja, ‘king of kings’) has been bestowed on
Krsnacandra by Siva himself. Raja Krsnacandra’s claim to being a ‘king of kings’ by the grant of Siva rather than by Mughal *sanad* accompanies the Hindu ‘inclusivism’ announced by his court poet Bharat’candra, and apparently replicated in the design of the great Rajarajesvara temple at Sib’nibas.

Krsnacandra’s *Vajapeya* Sacrifice

Was the title ‘king of kings’ a claim to independent sovereignty? The title, or rather, an augmented version of it, first was acknowledged not by any Mughal authority, but by an assembly of Brahmans whom the Raja invited to accomplish and witness both an *agnihotra* and his royal, Vedic *vajapeya* sacrifice, performed jointly sometime after Bharat’candra’s composition was completed in 1752, and after the Rajarajesvara temple was dedicated in 1754, but before Nawab ‘Alivardi’s death in 1756. The Vedic sacrifices seem not to have been contemplated in 1752, for there is no mention of them in the ‘prophecy’ which concludes Bharat’candra’s poem. Use of the *vajapeya* to secure recognition of, and in fact to augment, Krsnacandra’s new title seems to have been an improvisation. What inspired its performance and what did it mean to Krsnacandra?
The absence of any information about the date of this event is perhaps our most important clue. In 1754, because of complex and violent events in Dhaka, Raja Raj’ballabh, a Vaidya by jati who already had achieved both wealth and prominence in the Nawabi administration of Dhaka, was promoted by his patron, Nawazish Muhammad, to be the latter’s acting Deputy Governor of Dhaka, while Nawazish Muhammad attempted to ‘raise money and amass troops’ for a war of succession against Nawab ‘Alivardi’s designated successor, Siraj-ud-daula, should Nawab ‘Alivardi die.\textsuperscript{59} The same year Raj’ballabh dedicated a small Siva temple at Srikhanda in Barddhaman. (Srikhanda itself, the birthplace of Caitanya’s Vaidya follower Narahari, was a center of Vaisnava worship and of Vaidya prestige, and is about 40 miles west of Sib’nibas.\textsuperscript{60}) On the dedicatory inscription of this temple Raj’ballabh recorded the following claim: that he had performed the agnistoma, vajapeya and other Vedic sacrifices.\textsuperscript{61} The ‘others’ refer to the full series of seven one-day soma sacrifices.\textsuperscript{62} Raj’ballabh may have been following, on an appropriately more modest scale, the precedent of Sawai Jai Singh II, whose elaborate asvamedha sacrifice of 1741 had received wide and approving notice.\textsuperscript{63}
Two further details bring into focus the relation between Raj’ballabh and Krsnacandra. As a Vaidya, Raj’ballabh could not have secured Brahmans to officiate at Vedic sacrifices without already having secured recognition of his right to claim Vaisya rather than Sudra status, and to wear the sacred thread. This he did ‘at great cost’ on behalf of all Vaidyas, by assembling ‘Brahman Pandits from different parts of India’, who eventually, rendered the decision Raj’ballabh desired. Brahmans from Navadvipa participated in this decision, and no doubt were invited to the sacrifice itself. There is a doubtful tradition that Krsnacandra himself opposed Raj’ballabh’s claim to Vaisya status, and thereafter refused to admit Vaidyas to his court who wore the sacred thread. In any case, Krsnacandra seems to have arranged for his own agnihotra and vajapeya sacrifices (but not for the whole series of one-day soma sacrifices) after Raj’ballabh’s, in order to imitate on a still smaller scale this act of royal self-assertion by a man who was only a Vaidya, but who, because of his status as a high official in the Nawabi government, was far more powerful than Krsnacandra.
A retrospective biography of Krsnacandra, written by Rajib’locan Mukhopadhyay and first published in 1805, gives the only account of Krsnacandra’s agnihotra and vajapeya sacrifices, but it describes few details. The former sacrifice is a simple, twice-daily milk offering which emphasizes food and hospitality. It is interesting that a Ksatriya should not perform it, because he ‘eats impure food, plunders and kills’. Similar features of the vajapeya probably recommended it to Krsnacandra. Said first to have been performed by Brhaspati, it is therefore ‘the Brahman’s own sacrifice’. It produces ‘overlordship’ (samraja), and a claim is made that it is superior to the rajasuya sacrifice, by which the Ksatriya becomes an overlord. Second, one who offers the vajapeya is repeatedly said to win ‘food’, a substance analogically extended to include wealth, the earth, wheat, cattle, and peasants, ‘for peasants are food for the rajan’. The theme of control over ‘food’ that creates kingship links the vajapeya to Annapurna, and Krsnacandra to his forebear Bhavananda.

The central act of the vajapeya is a ritual chariot race. By ‘winning’ it the royal sacrificer wins soma, food of the gods. It is followed by an ascent of the king and his
queen to a symbolically constituted ‘heaven’. They return immediately, the king having won the ‘power’, ‘manhood’, ‘intelligence’, and ‘energies’ of the gods, whereupon he is seated upon a throne and acclaimed as king by the Brahman priests.71

Rajib’locan retrospectively narrates only that the sacrifices were chosen, and their requirements were ascertained by learned Brahmans; that learned Brahmans were invited from all countries to witness the rites; and that immense expenditures were required (2,000,000 rupees) both for the rites and for lavish presents subsequently distributed to the Brahman priests and to invited and uninvited guests. Having accomplished these rites, Krsnacandra was given by the assembled Brahmans the title: *agnihotri-vajapeyi-sriman-maharaja-rajendra*, the ‘prosperous, Indra-like king of great kings, who performed the *agnihotra* and *vajapeya* sacrifices’.72 Krsnacandra’s claim to sovereignty was not just acknowledged by the Brahmans assembled for this royal Vedic sacrifice; it was in some sense accomplished by the sacrifice. By patronizing Bharat’candra’s revisionary poem, by building the Rajarajesvara temple at Sib’nibas, and by performing the *agnihotra* and *vajapeya* sacrifices, Krsnacandra made himself an independent sovereign, whose authority
derived (equivalently?) from Annapurna or Siva or the Vedic sacrifice itself, not from a 

*sanad* of the Mughal Emperor. One notes in the first and last of these acts of self-
definition a consistent denigration of the martial prowess of Ksatriyas, a prowess which
both his father and grandfather had cultivated.

Rajib'locan uses Krsnacandra’s sacrifice to preface his account of the Raja’s
relations with the English. In summary, he writes that Krsnacandra performed the Vedic
sacrifices, and then secured the assistance of the English at Plassey, in order to take
kingship away from the Mughal Nawabs, who he believed always had oppressed Hindus.
The English Chief, in return for the Raja’s help, awarded him the title ‘Maharaja Rajendra
Bahadur’, thus validating the award of the title given by the Brahmans who had witnessed
his Vedic sacrifice.73 Every element of this narrative must be questioned.

Krsnacandra and Plassey

Was ‘Maharaja’ Krsnacandra content to re-inscribe the nature of Hinduism and the
nature of kingship in relation to Mughal authority in text, temple architecture and ritual, or
did he also try to act politically in accordance with what he had redefined? Published
English records are almost silent about him in the months leading up to Plassey, but there
is one mention of him, in a letter from Mr. Roger Drake, Jr. (the leader who had
abandoned Calcutta in 1756) to Clive, dated 3 May, 1757. Drake reported that the Raja
had given ‘one of my emissaries from Muxadavad’ [Murshidabad] information about
‘discontent among the Nawab’s officers’. Drake, apparently continuing to convey news
from Krsnacandra, wrote in particular that Mir Ja‘far, ‘on being ordered to hold himself in
readiness’, complained that Nawab Siraj-ud-daula ‘had ruined his country, [and] was
destroying all mercantile affairs’, and that he, Mir Ja‘far, would ‘lift [his] hand against
him’. Drake’s letter concluded: ‘Kissenchund the Nueba Rajah has been long
discontented and used ill by the Nabob’. 74 Drake plainly supposed a conspiracy against
the Nawab in which Krsnacandra participated, and for which Mir Ja‘far would supply
military force. Of course, a conspiracy could not have been news to Clive. Ten days
prior, on April 24, Mir Ja‘far had sent a secret proposal to Watts that he would join the
English in opposing the Nawab and in setting another person on the throne; and on April
26 Watts advised Clive to ‘lay aside all appearance of war while we concert of measures
with the principal jumidars’ (jamadar, subaltern officers) and in the meantime to withdraw
the Company’s goods and servants from subordinate factories.  

Rajib’locan’s retrospective account of Krsnacandra’s life, written fifty years later,
gives an extraordinary version of the conspiracy, in which the Raja served as the principal
advisor both to the British and to the Indian conspirators. This narrative can only be
described as a ‘fanciful story’ that betrays ‘little or no knowledge of the actual events’ and
‘was mainly inspired by the desire to represent Krishnachandra as the main instrument in
effecting the great revolution in Bengal’.  

Nevertheless, Drake’s letter proves that
Rajib’locan’s account was not completely without factual basis. Before Nawab ‘Alivardi’s
death in 1756 Krsnacandra had tried to project his own sovereignty as independent of
Mughal authority. It is not surprising to find him in a very small role in the conspiracy
which led up to Plassey. Of course, the British themselves were interested in conspiring
‘only with those persons round the Nawab who might be of some use to them by virtue of
the position they held in the Durbar’ (court).  

They had no use for, and apparently took
no further notice of the Raja.
I ask again, what did Krsnacandra do to act in accord with the world he had imagined? For it may be one thing to ‘constitute’ a ‘world’ by poetic text, novel temple architecture, and lavish revival of Vedic ritual, but yet another to succeed in remaking one’s part of the world by human labor, work and action. If Rajib’locan can be trusted (but possibly he cannot), Krsnacandra spent Plassey itself in hiding at Sib’nibas, worried about what would happen to his life and jati if the Nawab were not defeated.78

**English Hegemony**

Within a year, the penetration of the English into the interior of Bengal began to cause Krsnacandra problems, as the English or their appointees alternately supervised or themselves managed collection of revenues in Nadiya.79 In January, 1758 Nawab Mir Ja’far, unable to meet the schedule of payments for his ‘debt’ to the English, assigned them the revenues of the zamindaris of Bardhaman and Nadiya and of the Faujdar of Hugli. Luke Scrafton, then the Company’s Resident at the Durbar at Murshidabad, was put in charge of managing the collection of these revenues. Receiving little cooperation
from Krsnacandra, Scrafton in July sent a party of 20 seapoys to Nadiya, and threatened
the Raja’s son, Sib’candra, with arrest. Scrafton reported to the Calcutta Council:

As the chief cause of the balance [due] is the Raja’s extravagance, it
therefore appears to me as the necessary step to send a trusty person into
his country, to collect his revenues for him, allowing him only Rs. 10,000
per annum, or whatever your honor, etc., may think proper for his expenses

It is a tribute to Krsnacandra’s adroitness that for ten years thereafter he usually kept
management of the revenue collection of his zamindari in his own hands.

At first Krsnacandra seems to have relied on alliances with Nandkumar and with
Amircand and his heirs; that is, with Indians directly involved in the conspiracy before
Plassey, people who could have been presumed to have influence with the British. Later
he relied as well on appropriate expressions of loyalty and good wishes.
In the conspiracy of 1760 by which Mir Ja’far was pressed to resign as Nawab and was replaced by Mir Qasim, Nadiya again escaped coming under direct British management of the revenues; its place was taken by the more lucrative prize of Chittagong, which Mir Qasim gave the British as one price of their support. Late in 1760 Krsnacandra appears to have resisted paying revenues to Mir Qasim’s administration. After negotiating the transfer of revenues of Nadiya and Barddhaman to the Nawab’s control, in December the Ray-i-rayan Umid Rai (the Hindu minister heading the Nawab’s revenue department) asked the British for assistance:

It is now two months the zamindar of Nuddea has put us off by saying first that his Dasharrah holidays were coming on, and afterwards that his Dewally holidays were at hand, and now he has complained to you that his wife is sick. . . therefore I beg you will write to the zamindar to proceed speedily to this city [Murshidabad] with the money for the two months revenues which he has not paid.
The following February Krsnacandra complained to the British that his son had been ‘carried away’ to Murshidabad, no doubt as security for payment of revenue arrears. In the summer months of 1761, one notes a continuous record of default, both to Mir Qasim and to the English.

Rajib'locan elides Krsnacandra’s efforts to avoid paying the full revenue demand. He also does not mention two crucial, subsequent events. Sometime during this period Krsnacandra was able to keep in his control enough revenues to resume his program of temple construction at Sib’nibas. Simultaneously, as English affronts to Nawab Mir Qasim’s honor increased, and their claims to private trading privileges threatened all integrity of his administration, the Nawab was pushed toward a break with them.

Inveterately suspicious of disloyalty, he set spies upon his leading zamindars. By the beginning of 1763 both Krsnacandra his son Sib’candra had been identified as supporters of the English and were being held as prisoners.

The Maharajnisvara and Rama-Sita-Laksmana Temples and Maharaja
Krsnacandra's Imprisonment

In 1762 Krsnacandra’s two wives dedicated two new, large temples at Sib’nibas to the east of the Rajarajesvara temple. The middle temple, dedicated by Krsnacandra’s second wife, is a four-sided Siva temple with a tall four-\textit{chala} roof. It simplifies but repeats design elements of the Rajarajesvara temple. The dedicatory inscription on the base of the \textit{linga} installed in this temple also cleverly repeats Krsnacandra’s title obtained at the vajapeya sacrifice: \textit{sriman adhigatya rajati maharaj-adi-rajendratam,} ‘to that prosperous one who, having attained the status of “Rajendra” preceded by “Maharaja”, shines forth’.\textsuperscript{88}

The Rama-Sita-Laksmana temple was dedicated by Krsnacandra’s first wife. It is more remarkable for many reasons (see Plate 2). It is architecturally more ambitious than the Rajarajesvara temple of 1754. Furthermore, it employs both design elements and techniques of construction that suggest a deliberate search for novelty. It consists of a square central tower, surmounted by a bell-shaped, four-\textit{chala} roof, and surrounded by an enclosed verandah. Interior arches allow entry from the verandah to the central tower,
where the images are kept. When Bishop Heber visited, a Brahman guide called his
attention to the use of a ‘vault’, sprung between each exterior wall of the verandah and the
corresponding wall of the interior tower, to roof each side of the verandah, and Heber
added: ‘... the Brahmin made me observe, with visible pride, the whole roof was “pucka”
or brick and “belathee” or foreign’. Comparing this temple to its neighbors, however, one
most notices the absence of curved cornices. The long straight cornices of the
verandah, the linear slope of the verandah roof, and the square tower and its straight
cornices all together present a rectilinear framework unmistakably ‘belathee’ (if not English)
in inspiration. The temple’s rectilinear design is softened by the ornaments of its façades.

These include Islamic elements like those of the Siva temples: the arches of the
verandah, and the arched niches of the tower façades. Curves in the brickwork on each
tower façade above the arched niches are offset by straight lines above them, which
repeat the lines of the cornices. Above all is the graceful, bell-shaped roof of the tower.

The temple’s dedicatory inscription describes Krsnacandra as ‘born in the family of
Brahman—yet royal—sages’, and praises him as the ‘Wish-fulfilling tree on Earth’ and the ‘ultimate beattitude’ of his first wife.\textsuperscript{92}

Can we attempt to compare this temple to the Rajarajesvara temple built eight years earlier? If representing a new ‘inclusivism’ were Krsnacandra’s purpose, one designed to demonstrate Hinduism’s capacity to subsume the English, the temple would appear to fail. In general, ‘foreign’ elements of its design threaten to overwhelm the Rama-Sita-Laksmana temple’s visual identity as a Hindu temple. Perhaps instead the Raja desired from Englishmen of his day an appreciative response (like that his descendants later received from Bishop Heber), and sought therefore an English architecture, as his forebear once had imported a Muslim builder from Dhaka to design the palace at Krsnanagar. In any case, I think, with this temple Krsnacandra publicly signed himself as an associate (and supporter?) of the English power; at the same time, of course, that he was avoiding paying them the full revenue demand.

Krsnacandra himself may already have been arrested by Mir Qasim for his identification with the cause of the English when these latter temples at Sib’nibas were
dedicated in 1762. He stopped writing to the Calcutta Council in February, 1761, and they to him the following June. In April, 1763 he and his son certainly were taken from prison in Murshidabad to Mir Qasim’s fort at Monghyr, and held there with the Jagat Seth, Maharaja Raj’ballabh, and with some other leading zamindars whom Mir Qasim suspected of treachery. Both father and son escaped the execution of prisoners which followed the loss of Monghyr to Major Adams on July 19, 1763. Did they remain captives? Apparently; both father and son were unable to return to Murshidabad until the following February, 1764. Mir Ja‘far, restored to the position of Nawab, also kept them in confinement in Murshidabad until May, 1764, when the English ordered them released.

Denouement

The British victory at the Battle of Baksar on October 23, 1764, and getting the provincial revenue office, the Diwani for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, on August 12, 1765 the following year made the English East India Company masters of Bengal in all but name. In 1767 they carefully arranged for Krsnacandra to receive a title from Shah ‘Alam II, the puppet Mughal Emperor. For them the title was a formality. It preserved a certain fiction
of the continuity of Mughal authority. For Krsnacandra it seems not to have been
meaningless, for the title he chose to receive, ‘Maharaja Rajendra Bahadur’, echoes that
given him more than a decade earlier by the assembly of Brahmans who had witnessed
his vajapeya sacrifice. Of course, contrary to the account of Rajib‘locan, his new title had
nothing to do with participation in the conspiracy before Plassey.98

Collection of the revenues of Nadiya seems usually to have remained in
Krsnacandra’s hands until 1769-70, when they were auctioned in ‘farm’ to a number of
speculating Calcutta merchants. On this occasion Governor Harry Verelst wrote
tendentiously:

Nadia. The Rajah having behaved very ill in retaining a large sum from his
malguzarry [revenue assessment], and (if the general voice is to be
credited) having neglected the good of his country, and distressed the ryotts,
we are of opinion the most eligible method to be pursued for the security of
our employers and the welfare of the ryotts [cultivating tenants] of these
districts, would be to deprive the Rajah of power, and let the country out to
farm for three years.\textsuperscript{99}

As the rains failed in 1769, these Calcutta merchants also defaulted, and collection of
revenues in Nadiya reverted to the Maharaja’s control during the famine year of 1769-70.
He was no more successful than the merchants had been, and the Nadiya revenues
again were ‘farmed’, this time for a period of five years, in 1771. Apparently, the
Maharaja himself successfully bid on at least some of his own zamindari, for in 1776 we
find Krsnacandra so far in arrears that his lands were to be sold at auction.\textsuperscript{100} In 1777
Philip Francis visited him at Sib’ nibas, and ‘saw an immense place in ruins, and the Prince
of the Country, a venerable old Man, lodged in one Corner of it in a State of Beggary and
Misery, not to be believed’.\textsuperscript{101} Since, as we will see, Krsnacandra already had removed
his residence from Sib’ nibas in 1774, and built a new home closer to Navadvip, no doubt
this is what Krsnacandra meant for Francis to see.
Despite the military and political supremacy demonstrated by the British since 1764, and closer to home, the auctioning of rights to manage some of his lands, Krsnacandra again had claimed the title *maharaja-rajendra* in his last temple, the Hari-Hara temple at Amghata. The dedicatory inscription of this temple explicitly records his accomplishment of the *vajapeya* sacrifice. This temple was dedicated in 1766. The temple itself is a small room surrounded by a simple, open portico carried on square pillars; it has none of the grandeur of the temples at Sib’nibas. Above it rise two, equal, pyramidal four-*chala* roofs, symbolizing, like the *murti* of Hari-Hara within, the unity of Siva and Visnu. The dedicatory inscription celebrates Krsnacandra’s intent to ‘destroy the wrong notion of the foolish who were sinking into a sense of difference’ between the two deities. The architectural form of the temple and its dedicatory inscription both suggest that Krsnacandra was withdrawing from an understanding of Hindu inclusivism that could subsume Islam. Nor was he any longer able or willing to use elements of a European architectural style to identify himself with the English. If Kartikey Candra Ray is correct about his having retired to pursue *moksa*, Krsnacandra may have taken this occasion to
give new emphasis to the unity of competing Hindu sects in a single structure of divine truth, which unity his court poet Bharat’candra long ago had asserted. He also for the first time in a temple inscription asserted his own religious authority, not only as a king who once had performed the vajapeya sacrifice, but also as one who was ‘given to pious deeds according to the instructions of the Sastras and the Vedas’.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Krsnacandra’s forebears had a bi-polar model of rulership. On the one hand they were zamindars in the Mughal system of authority, office-holders whose rights were given by sanad from the Emperor, and depended on their collecting, accounting for, and paying the stipulated revenue demand. On the other hand, they also were rajas, little Hindu kings, whose authority was constituted by acts of redistribution: giving revenue-free land to Brahmans and other worthy recipients, patronizing scholars and artists, building splendid temples and palaces, and performing ritual celebrations with lavish generosity. Ideally, they mediated between two worlds, cultivating both Sanskrit and Persian courtly culture, for
example, or developing the martial arts expected of a noble in Mughal society without
losing their taste or ability to converse with learned Brahmans.

The chaotic and destructive Maratha incursions of 1742-50, and the weakness of
Nawab ‘Alivardi which they revealed, suggested to Krsnacandra the possibility of a different
model of kingship. In Bharat‘candra’s *Annadamangal*, performed in 1751/52, and in the
great Rajarajesvara temple at Sib’nibas he patronized works of art which redefine both
Hinduism and kingship. Both represent a superior capacity of Hindu ‘inclusivism’ to
subsume and make relative the inferior truths of Islam. Both explicitly represent
Krsnacandra’s kingship as the gift of the one supreme deity, in the form of either
Annapurna or Siva, to a deserving devotee, either Bhavananda or Krsnacandra himself.

Bharat‘candra’s poem asserts that the Mughal Emperor Jahangir granted a *sanad* to
Krsnacandra’s forebear Bhavananda only because of the direct intervention of the goddess
and only after learning to worship her. Krsnacandra’s dedicatory inscription on the *linga* of
the Rajarajesvara temple suggests a claim to independence from the Mughals, for it
asserts that the title *rajaraja*, ‘king of kings’, was authorized by Siva himself because of
Krsnacandra’s devotion. Performance of the vajapeya sacrifice further constituted that independence, winning for Krsnacandra samraja, ‘overlordship’, and the augmented title, maharaja-rajendra, ‘the Indra-like king of great kings’, from the assembly of Brahmans who witnessed the sacrifice.

What may ‘independence’ have meant to Krsnacandra? We must at once recognize its qualified nature. Krsnacandra, like most other zamindars of eighteenth century Bengal, did not try to develop a military capacity able to compete with the new armies of drilled foot soldiers and rapid-firing artillery.105 In fact, compared to his father and grandfather, he seems to have withdrawn from military pursuits. We can recognize ‘independence’, nevertheless, in his limited participation in the conspiracy before Plassey to unseat Nawab Siraj-ud-daula, and in his continual efforts thereafter to avoid paying the full revenue demand, both to the English and to Mir Ja’far and Mir Qasim, the Nawabs whom they put on the throne at Murshidabad. ‘Independence’, that is to say, is written in the repeated complaints of the Raja’s ‘duplicity’ and ‘bad character’.
Krsnacandra’s practice of politics with respect to those who could exercise coercive power over him was ambiguous, devious, and adroit. In comparison, the performances and works of art by which he constituted a claim to independent authority seem relatively simple. Based on a unitary understanding of Hinduism, they assert, in various ways, the sacred, royal authority of a Brahman who knows ultimate reality, and who has divinely given powers over ‘food’: wealth, taxes and peasants.

In the practice of history, both by Krsnacandra’s poet and by those who later wrote about him, we note a similar erasure of complexity. Bharat’candra’s history of Bhavananda, by its emphasis on the actions of Annapurna, had reduced Bhavananda’s similarly adroit and ambiguous role with respect to the Mughals to one of providing correct sacerdotal knowledge. Again, in Rajib’locan’s retrospective account of Krsnacandra’s relations with the English, his ambiguous record of alliance, duplicity and contestation is replaced by one of constant loyalty and service.

To note coherence in most of the Raja’s self-representations is not to say that he simply reproduced pre-existing understandings of Hindu kingship. Creativity and novelty
mark Bharat’candra’s poem as they mark the Rajarajesvara temple. Nor do all of his self-representations repeat the same themes. His careful attention to the requirements of the Vedic vajapeya sacrifice, and his implicit claim, as a tantric adept, to immunity from faults of commensality; or again, his worship, perhaps at different times, of Siva, Annapurna, Kali and Hari-Hara, need further investigation, but they indicate Krsnacandra’s ability to re-imagine the sacred basis of his authority. Nowhere is this creativity more evident or more problematic than in the Rama-Sita-Laksmana temple of 1762. By employing elements of a foreign, European architecture, does it reassert and extend Hindu ‘inclusivism’ to them; or does it rather acknowledge the Raja’s alliance with and dependence on the English?

Events foreclosed this ambiguity; upon his break with the English Nawab Mir Qasim identified Krsnacandra as a traitor.

Pressure from the English, who insisted upon political hegemony, pushed Krsnacandra towards a final redefinition of his authority. He seems to have tried to preserve his authority with respect to the ‘religious’ life of Hindus. He probably withdrew from the cares and responsibilities of ordinary life to pursue moksa. He withdrew also
from attempts to represent Hindu ‘inclusivism’ in temple architecture; one sees in the
modest temple at Amghata neither Islamic nor European elements of design. At the same
time he gave new emphasis to the unitary supreme being of Hinduism, and to his own
pious deeds and exemplary fidelity to Sastras and Vedas.
Plate 1. Left to right: The Rajarajesvara Temple 1754; the Maharajnisvara Temple, 1762; and the Rama-Sita-Laksmana Temple, 1762, at Sib’ nibas.
Plate 2. The Rama-Sita-Laksmana Temple, 1762, at Sib’ nibas.

2National Archives of India, *Fort William-India House Correspondence and other Contemporary Papers relating thereto*, 21 vols. (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1949- ) vol. 1, p. 79, paragraph 36; and pp. 81, 317, 364, 393.


Ray’s edition and Bengali translation of this Sanskrit text, together with his edition of two Bengali histories of the Nadiya Raj, is cited as KVC. Ray notes that Pertsch’s English translation sometimes is unreliable; see ‘Prasangika Sampadakiya Tathya’, in KVC, pp. 297-9.


6. KVC, pp. 197-9, Bengali translation, pp. 239-41.


8. KVC, pp. 202, Bengali translation, pp. 244-5.

See the exemplary audience of Ramakrsna with Muhammad ‘Azim-ud-Din, KVC, p.228, Bengali translation, p. 270.


KVC, pp. 204, 207, Bengali translation, pp. 246, 250.

The first *sanad* has become largely unreadable; the quote is from the second *sanad* of 1613. With the exception of the first, the family’s remaining *sanads* were translated into Bengali by Kartikey Candra Ray, ‘*Parisista*’ [appendix], *Ksitisabamsabalicarita* (1st pub. 1875), re-edited by Mahit Ray, in KVC, p. 143.


16 This point is made by Mahit Ray, ‘Prasangika Sampadakiya Tathya’, in KVC, p. 294.


(Gauhati, Assam: Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, 1936) 1:131-8.


20For dates calculated on the basis of the Ksitisavamsavalicaritam see A.K. Bhattacharyya, A Corpus of Dedicatory Inscriptions from Temples of West Bengal (c. 1500 A.D. to c. 1800 A.D.) 2nd edn. (Calcutta: NAMANA, 1998), Appendix L, ‘A Note on the Nadia Raj family’, pp. 204-06.

21KVC, p. 211, Bengali translation, p. 254.

22KVC, p. 212, Bengali translation, p. 255. For images of this temple see Brick Temples of Bengal, From the Archives of David McCutchion, ed. George Michell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 213, and Plates 469-72. For its inscription see A.K. Bhattacharyya, Corpus, no. 38, p. 96. For other inscriptions of this Raja see also no. 41, p. 99 (the Raghavesvara temple at Srinagar, Nadiya, 1671), and no.
45, p. 103 (the Visvanatha temple at Srinagar, Nadiya, 1674).


24KVC, p. 216, Bengali translation, p. 258.


27KVC, pp. 218, 222; Bengali translation, pp. 260, 264.

28The rebellion of Sobha Singh is said to have occurred at the beginning of his reign; see KVC, p. 226, Bengali translation, p. 268. The chronology of the reigns of Ramajiban and Ramakrsna, however, is uncertain. See Sivanarayan Sastri, ‘The Forgotten Poet,’ pp. 51, 56 for evidence from the colophon of the *Rasacandrika* of Kavindra Madhusudhana that Ramajiban was reigning in 1695.

29KVC, pp. 228-30; Bengali translation, pp. 270-72. Ja‘far Khan (Murshid Quli Khan
I) was diwan or officer in charge of provincial revenues, of Bengal from 1700, of Orissa from 1701, and of Bihar from 1704. In 1707 he briefly was appointed deputy governor of Bengal, but was removed from all offices in Bengal and Orissa and absent from Bengal in 1708-1709. In 1710 he was reappointed diwan of Bengal, and deputy governor in 1713, and governor of Orissa in 1714. In 1717 with the death of the nominal governor ‘Azim-us-Shan, he was appointed governor of Bengal. From 1713 on until his death in 1727, because he combined both fiscal and military responsibilities, he effectively ruled Bengal and Orissa without any official check upon his decisions, and properly can be given the title ‘Nawab’. See History of Bengal, Vol. II, Muslim Period, pp. 398-402.

30KVC, pp. 230-33; Bengali translation, pp. 272-74.

31Cf. Catherine Asher’s summary of Raja Man Singh as governor of Bihar, and the two, quite different inscriptions in Persian and Sanskrit on his palace at Rohtas: ‘He thus played out his dual eole as the emperor’s agent and raja in his own right, a duality characteristic of the relationship between Akbar and those lesser authorities beneath him’.

32Bharatacandra Ray, *Bharatacandra Granthabali*, dvitiya samskaran, sampadak Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay o Sajanikanta Das (Kalikata: Bangiya-Sahitya-Parisat, 1357 Bengal era [1950]), p. 11. Hereafter this work is cited as BCG.


34James Grant mentions ‘extraordinary temporary exactions’ levied by Nawab ‘Alivardi in 1743-50 from the ‘principal zamindars, such as those of Rajeshahy, Dinagepoor, and Nuddeah, whose jurisdictions, situated for the most part to the east of the Ganges [i.e., the Bhagirathi-Hugli], were not liable to be ravaged’ by the Marathas. See James Grant, ‘Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal,’ in *Affairs of the East India

35BCG, p. 90.

36BCG, p. 100.

37BCG, p. 133.

38A.K. Bhattacharyya, Corpus, no. 100, pp. 164-6.

39BCG, p. 291.

40BCG, p. 12: ‘In the breast of the moon, blackness (kali) is only a stain, but in the heart of Krsnacandra Kali is always luminous’.

Denkform, ed. G. Oberhammer (Vienna, 1983).

42BCG, pp. 305-06.


45BCG, pp. 307-08.

46BCG, p. 308.


48BCG, p. 348. Other details also are different; for example, in this ‘prophecy’ Bharat’candra says that Ramacandra conquered Raja Sobha Singh, and he omits the period of divided and contested rule between the brothers Ramacandra and Ramajiban.

49BCG, pp. 348-49.

50Diana L. Eck, Banaras: City of Light (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983),
51 Eck, p. 162.


53 The site is described in *Nadiya Jelar Purakirti*, tathya-samkalan o granthana Mohit Ray, sampadana Amiyakumar Bandyopadhyay o Sudhiranjan Das (Kalikata: Purta Bibhag, Pascimbanga Sar’kar, 1975), pp. 98-100.


55 David McCutchion, *Late Medieval Temples of Bengal* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1972), p. 60, H(2)(c), and Plate 103. Interesting comparisons can be made to the simpler Naldanga Ganesa and Siva temples, H(2)(a), and to the more complex temple built by Rani Bhavani c. 1755, which has an inverted lotus dome and a verandah surrounding the entire structure; p. 61, H(6)(a), and Plate 94. The Naldanga Siva temple,
a 19th century structure, is illustrated in *Brick Temples of Bengal*, Plate 106. A *chala* is a face of a roof, rectangular when the roof ends in a ridge, triangular when it ends in a peak.


58 A.K. Bhattacharyya, *Corpus*, p. 10; no. 81, p. 143.


R.C. Majumdar, *Maharaja Rajballabh*, p. 90.

The seven, Agnistoma, Atyagnistoma, Sodasin, Vajapeya, Atiratra, and Aptoryama, are named and described as intended by Maharaja Raj'ballabh in *Raja-vijaya Nataka*, ‘evidently authored in 1755 by Krsnamohan Kabi’, Sanskrit MS no. 935C, folio 11b lines 1-2, in the Dhaka University Library. I am grateful to Professor Anisuzzaman for information about its author, and for locating this manuscript for me, and to Dr. Dulal Bhaumik for copying it for me.


Fifteen Brahmans from Navadvipa are listed as signatories of the decree that Raj'ballabh and other Vaidyas could wear the sacred thread; see Rasikalal Gupta, *Maharaja Rajaballabh*, pp. 145-6.


In formulating this argument I have been helped by the criticisms of Professors Binoy Chaudhuri and Rajat Kanta Ray. For relations between zamindars and Nawabi officials see Rajatakanta Ray, *Palasir Sarayantra o Sekaler Samaj* (Kal’kata: Ananda Pablisars Praibhet Limited, 1994), pp. 42-6.


*Satapatha-Brahmana* 5.1.1.11-13.

*Satapatha Brahmana* 5.1.2.9; 5.1.3.3,10; 5.1.4.4; 5.2.1.16, 24 and *passim*. See

71 *Satapatha-Brahmana* 5.1.5 and 5.2.1.

72 Rajibalocan Mukhopadhyay, *Sri Maharaja Krsnacandrarayasya Caritram* (Landonmahanagare capa haila, 1811; in the British Library), pp. 27-9. This Bengali biography also has been included in KVC, pp. 309ff.

73 Rajibalocan Mukhopadhyay, pp. 33-77.


Scrafton was replaced by Nandkumar as supervisor of collections for Nadiya, Barddhaman and Hugli in August, 1758. A few months later, Amircand and his heirs are reported as being ‘security’ for the Nadiya collections, so that Krsnacandra could resume their management. See Letter from Clive and Becher to the Court of Directors, dated 31 December 1758, in Fort William-India House Correspondence 2: 79. Nandkumar was

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76 R.C. Majumdar, Maharaja Rajballabh, p. 42.

77 R.C. Majumdar, p. 39.

78 Rajibalocan Mukhopadhyay, Sri Maharaja Krsnacandrarayasya Caritram, pp. 69-70.


dismissed in 1760 for ‘mismanagement’ of the collections, but Krsnacandra remained on
sufficiently good terms with Nandkumar that he married his daughter to the latter’s son in
1765. See A.M. Khan, The Transition in Bengal, 1765-1775 (Cambridge: Cambridge

82 Imperial Record Department, Calendar of Persian Correspondence, 3 vols. (Calcutta:
Superintendent of Government Printing, 1911) 1: 21, No. 327, dated Aug. 11, 1760, letter
to Vansittart offering congratulations on his appointment, with a nazr (gift) for the first of
many examples.

83 Abdul Majed Khan, Transition in Bengal, pp. 34-5.

84 Long, Selections from the Unpublished Records, p. 310, No. 522; Abdul Majed
Khan, Transition in Bengal, pp. 35.

85 Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1: 54, 55, nos. 868, 874.

86 Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1: 100, no. 1176, letter to Krsnacandra dated
May 24, 1761; No. 1177, letter to Mir Abu’l Qasim [Collector of Nadiya revenues under
Mir Qasim], dated May 24, 1761; No. 1178, letter to the Ray-i-rayan (Umid Rai), dated
May 25, 1761, and p. 156, No. 1277, letter to the Ray-i-rayan, dated July 26, 1761.

87Ghulam Husain Khan, Tabatab’ai, Siyar-ul-Mutakherin: a history of the Mohammedan
power in India during the last century, trans. Haji Mustapha [pseudo.], 4 vols. (Lahore:


89Heber, Narrative of a Journey 1:120-1.

90I am indebted to Aditi Nath Sarkar for this observation.

91An interesting comparison can be made to the twin Siva temples at Lalbagh,
Murshidabad, each of which has an inverted lotus dome above a first story marked by a
straight cornice. If built by Amircand, they must antedate the Rama-Sita-Laksmana
temple. See McCutchion, Late Medieval Temples, p. 57, and Plate 93. The overall
effect, however, is much less rectilinear and foreign. The same must be said of temples with multiple *ratna* towers above first stories with straight cornices (Plates 72, 73) and temples with a variety of traditional superstructures above first stories with flat roofs (Plates 117-120); and in any case most of these appear to be 19th century temples.


93 The last letter received from Krsnacandra was written to congratulate the Company on the fall of Pondicherry, dated February 15, 1761. See *Calendar of Persian Correspondence* 1:62, no. 928. The last letter to him was written in June to complain of nonpayment of an assignment of his revenues to the English. See p. 107, No. 1222.


.Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1:281, no. 2045, from Raja Krsnacandra, dated Feb. 2, 1764, advising that he and his son have arrived safe in Murshidabad.


Krsnacandra’s letter thanking the Governor for his receipt of the new title is dated March 9, 1767; see Calendar of Persian Correspondence 2:44, No. 154. Compare Rajibalocan, Sri Maharaja Krsnacandrarayasya Caritram, pp. 76-7; Kartikey Candra Ray, Ksitisabamsabalicarita, in KVC, p. 79.


Firminger, p. 313 (cccxv).

Journal entry 15 May 1777, quoted by Ranjit Guha, A Rule of Property for Bengal

102 A.K. Bhattacharyya, Corpus, no. 100, pp. 164-66.

103 A.K. Bhattacharyya reads the chronogram recording the dedication as 1688 Saka [1766]; see no. 100, pp. 164-65, fn. 7. This must correct Kartikey Candra Ray, who explicitly states that Krsnacandra built a new residence at Gangabas a little before the end of 1774, and thereafter he also built the temple in which he installed the deva-murti of Hari-Hara; see Ksitisabamsabalicarita, in KVC, p. 91.

104 A.K. Bhattacharyya, Corpus, no. 100, p. 164.

105 McLane, Land and Local Kingship, pp. 43-44
Lost Meanings and New Stories: *Candimangal* after British Dominance

This essay is about changes in *Candimangal* texts which can be observed near the end of their period of textual production, a period that had endured for over three centuries. It is an attempt to discover the contexts of textual innovation. It deals with two authors, Ramananda Yati, who wrote in 1766, and Lala Jay’narayan Sen, whose only securely datable text was written in 1772. Both authors thus wrote after the events of 1757, when Col. Robert Clive conspired with disaffected officials in the provincial government of Bengal and Bihar to overthrow and replace Nawab Siraj-uddaula; both wrote after the Battle of Baksar in December, 1764, when the English East India Company (EEIC) established themselves as the dominant military power in north and northeast India.

Only Jay’narayan Sen suggests the experience of a period of misgovernment, during which merchant officials of the EEIC both contested the authority of Indian officers of the provincial government, and expanded the scope of their own power and authority. By increasing their power English officials of the EEIC claimed they would increase the
revenues of the Company, but they also served their private enrichment, as individual
officials, together with private Englishmen, established coercive trading monopolies in the
furthest reaches of the Ganga and Brahmaputra valleys.¹ There seems no reason to doubt
that over-taxation and coercive trade contributed to the very high mortality of the famine of
1769-70.² Only with the intervention of Parliament in the Regulating Acts of 1773 did the
EEIC begin to separate its mercantile functions from its governmental responsibilities. We
will see that in his work of 1772 Jay’narayan depicts Bengal as a land without a king.

Ramananda Yati and Jay’narayan Sen are two authors among a number of others
who wrote Candimangal in the second half of the eighteenth century.³ I have chosen
Ramananda Yati because he explicitly criticized and ‘corrected’ Mukunda’s Candimangal.
His version,⁴ although idiosyncratic in some respects, also reflects changes in the tradition
which had become broadly accepted in the eighteenth century. I will consider four such
changes. First, he ceased to be interested in the specifically ‘economic’ problems and
solutions of Mukunda’s great text. Second, he emphasized divine action on the one hand,
and human devotion of the other, and reduced the scope for human agency allowed his
characters, by giving them a child-like character in times of crisis. Third and paradoxically, he used an economic metaphor for devotional relations between devotees and the deity. This metaphor describes the power of the devotee in terms of the ‘indebtedness’ of the deity for his or her worship, and a corresponding divine obligation to repay the devotee. In the bulk of his Candikamangal, apparently his earliest writing, Jay‘narayan Sen also reproduced these same features. By comparing different stories from the two authors’ Candimangal I hope to show relations among these three features of their texts. None of them seems to be a response to the novel experience of British dominance in Bengal.

On the other hand, Jay‘narayan Sen is more interesting for two radical innovations to the stories of Candimangal, innovations produced by associating them with the more fluid eighteenth century tradition of texts devoted to Satya Narayan or Satya Pir. In one case he incorporated references to Candimangal stories in his version of a Satya Narayan text, his Harilila of 1772. Although this text remains focused on divine action and human devotion, it also develops an analysis of ‘present time’ in Bengal as separated from the past by a profound rupture. In his last work, the story of Madhab and Sulocana,
Jay’narayan re-examined human agency, and represented morally neutral qualities of successful human action. These qualities include staking one’s life on success, courage and boldness, intelligence, and cheating, trickery and beguilement. Through the figure of a remarkable heroine he provided an alternative to the child-like character of ideal devotees, but his plot also carefully confined success by these radical means to high *jati* actors, by portraying a usurping servant and his exemplary and brutal punishment.⁶

I will argue that both Jay’narayan’s analysis of ‘present time’ and his re-examination of human agency are related to the novel challenges of British rule, challenges more apparent in the 1770s than they had been half a decade earlier to Ramananda Yati. I argue that he began to recognize and to develop a set of means for dealing with these circumstances. This chapter suggests, therefore, that textual production of *mangal-kabya* remained engaged with both devotional and this-worldly problems after the beginning of British dominance, but that one author could respond to this-worldly problems of his own time only by means of new stories.

Ramanada Yati
Just after the establishment of British rule in Bengal, Ramananda Yati explicitly criticized Mukunda and his poem, and altered some important features of the traditional plot. His text gives us no biographical information, but fortunately appended to one manuscript copy is a short biography of the poet, written by his disciple, Dvija Krsnakanta. According to this biography Ramananda at the age of seven was adopted by a band of renouncers, and at the age of twelve he began to study first Agama and then Vedanta. After completing his study of the latter he was initiated as a sannyasi, and spent some time visiting sacred places in India. When he returned to Bengal, he observed that Mukunda’s Candimangal unfortunately was very popular: ‘By its heaps and heaps of vulgar stories (gramya katha) the simple are drowned and the whole land enchanted’. He decided to compose his own Candimangal for the sake of popular moral improvement (lok’hit hetu), by eliminating Mukunda’s ‘faults’ and his ‘taste for the debased (nic’ras)’. Ramananda himself did not write anything about the place where he composed, or give any description of events leading to its composition, nor did he mention receiving support from any patron. He did include a chronogram for the year when his composition was
completed, the equivalent of 1766 C.E.\textsuperscript{10} This was less than two years after the battle of Baksar, where the British had established themselves beyond doubt as the dominant power in Bengal and Bihar. Ramananda also mentioned Bharat’candra and his \textit{Annadamangal}, written in 1752, and his patron Maharaja Krsnacandra Ray of Nadiya,\textsuperscript{11} and although as a \textit{sannyasi} he would have had no fixed residence, these asides may suggest a peripatetic location somewhere near Nadiya, and therefore near the Hugli river and its ‘contact zone’ with Europeans.\textsuperscript{12} There is no evidence that his text ever found an audience beyond a very narrow circle of Ramananda’s disciples.\textsuperscript{13}

Ramananda’s text is a learned product, but not a product of elite, courtly culture. It contains verses in Sanskrit which he composed, and explicitly refers to many \textit{puranas}, as well as to other Sanskrit texts.\textsuperscript{14} It also freely quotes from Mukunda’s text, most often without attribution; probably he had this text before him as he composed.\textsuperscript{15} Many of his ‘corrections’ to Mukunda’s narrative reveal both his literalism and an idiosyncratic and rather prudish sense of propriety. For example, in one place he corrects Mukunda on the following points. First, Kalketu’s kingdom of ‘Gujarat’ evidently is not in Orissa, and the
‘fifty-six clans’ of Rarhi Bengali Brahmans whom Mukunda describes in ‘Gujarat’ could not have lived there. Second, there are no thorns in heaven, so the heavenly figure Nilambar could not have been pricked by a thorn while gathering flowers for Siva’s worship. Third, Visvakarma never would have offended Candi’s modesty by embroidering pictures of heroes on her bodice. Fourth, since she is beneficent, she would not have laughed loudly when ships of her human opponent Dhanapati sank in the ocean. In the process of criticizing and correcting Mukunda’s version, Ramananda altered the traditional plot of Candimangal in ways that obscure its fundamental architecture, and so erase much of its meaning. This is especially true in his version of Kalketu’s story, which receives a very condensed treatment.

The Meanings of Hunting

Ramananda’s story of Kalketu is remarkable for a number of omissions and alterations to the traditional plot. Ramananda chooses not to tell Mukunda’s fabulous story about the ‘kingdom of the animals’ and their successive reactions to Kalketu’s
overwhelming prowess in hunting. Of course, to Ramananda the animals literally could not have had a ‘kingdom’; therefore, in his version they do not appeal to their lion ‘king’ to protect them; nor do they gather together to worship Candi and to pray for her intervention after their king has been defeated by Kalketu. As in the traditional plot, so also in Ramananda’s account, Kalketu’s success at hunting does bring about Candi’s intervention.

Ramananda, however, complicates her motivation by making her simultaneously feel ‘sorrow’ both for Kalketu’s own condition, and for the hunted animals, who were ‘weeping ceaselessly’. At the same time he omits the story that Candi became a golden deer that Kalketu could not catch or kill, with its rich mythic associations, and he also omits the story of her hiding all the animals of the forest from Kalketu.18 Her liminal relation between being hunted and being unhuntable is erased. She simply comes to the forest and assumes the form of a golden iguana, and Kalketu finds her, ties her up, and brings her to his hut.19

Eliminating the fabulous and mythic elements from the story’s opening does not just miss the way Mukunda ‘revealed with deep sympathy a picture of oppression of the weak
by the strong in the society of his own age’, although this certainly is one consequence, revealed in the diffusion of the goddess’s sympathy for hunter and hunted alike.

Ramananda also makes the meaning of ‘hunting’ strictly literal. The problem which elicits Candi’s intervention is hunting animals, not a metaphor which also can refer to predatory exploitation within human society. In Mukunda’s version ‘hunting’ continually reappears in human society despite efforts to create peaceful relations based immediately upon buying and selling rather than hunting, and based ultimately upon generous gifts from superiors.

In Ramananda’s version, eliminating hunting, understood literally, is relatively easy. We can see the contrast immediately. In Mukunda’s story Kalketu had to violate his own oath to the goddess to give up hunting, in order to kill a tigress that was terrifying his laborers hired to clear the forest. In Ramananda’s version both these same laborers and Kalketu himself add to their own merit (punya) by saving and nurturing animals of the forest they are clearing: deer, rhinoceros, and even tiger cubs.

Like most authors of Candimangal other than Mukunda, Ramananda does not develop ‘buying and selling’ as the middle term between hunting on the one hand, and
giving and receiving gifts on the other. In fact, Ramananda omits some of the stories about buying and selling found in the traditional plot. Thus, when we turn to Kalketu’s founding a kingdom by clearing the forest of Gujarat, we find that although Kalketu does exchange Candi’s ring for money in Ramananda’s version,\(^ {22}\) he does not acquire settlers because they have become dissatisfied with their own king’s policies of taxation, and there is only the briefest indication that Kalketu has offered his settlers better terms.\(^ {23}\) More startling is the fact that in his version Bharu Datta does not insert himself as ‘chief minister’ and re-establish oppression by collecting supererogatory taxes from the traders in Kalketu’s central market. Therefore there also is no punishment of Bharu Datta by expulsion. Consequently, war between Kalketu and the established king of Kalinga cannot be caused by Bharu’s warning to that king that his kingdom is threatened with depopulation. In fact, in Ramananda’s narrative, the established king of Kalinga, Kesari Simha Ray, does not attack Kalketu because his subjects have departed and his land has become depopulated. Without the ‘kingdom of the animals’, without the development of ‘hunting’ as a metaphor for human exploitation, and without ‘buying and selling’ as a
potential site for predatory exploitation, the war between Kalketu and the king cannot be seen as an effect for which ‘hunting’ is the cause. Instead Ramananda must find another way to motivate this war. Mukunda had used ‘hunting’ as a metaphor to suggest that expropriation of material resources motivates violent conflict, but Ramananda’s revisions eliminate this ‘economic’ motivation.

Devotional Topics

We can see Ramananda’s purposes more clearly by noting that where he provides new stories, and where his account is most elaborate his topic is devotion. One striking novelty occurs in the story about how Candi discloses herself to Kalketu and his wife. We must remember that in his previous, heavenly existence Kalketu had been Nilambar, son of Indra; Phullara his wife also had been an *apsari* in heaven. We may join the story as Phullara goes to the market, and complains to her husband about the presence of a new ‘co-wife’ (the goddess in disguise) whom he has brought to their home. Kalketu, of course, knows about the iguana, but nothing about a co-wife, and goes home himself to see whether Phullara is telling the truth. On the way, however, in Ramananda’s version
people already are talking about the brilliant form of this strange woman who has just
appeared among them. The poet continues:

When he heard this much, the hero fell to the earth. From time to
time Kalketu recovered his wits. By the power of his earlier asceticism he
remembered through meditation, and as he wept, he said: ‘Woman, are you
that virtuous one? Will I get to see the form of Mother whom Brahma and
the other gods never saw in meditation?’ But again and again he forgot
because of maya, because excessive maya caused him to hold fast to his
human body. Weeping, Kalu said, ‘Tell me the truth, woman!’

Phullara saw him and cried, ‘Mother, Mother!’ Weeping, the anxious
woman’s heart was pierced. ‘Alas, I have upbraided the hero so much, I
didn’t know the secret truth. I am most sinful and ignorant. And Mother
also! How much ill I spoke of her. I called her unfaithful and caused much
strife.’

25
The idea that Kalketu could recognize Candi through memory of his prior existence in
heaven is completely original. It leads naturally to familiar topics related to devotion: the
power of *maya* which obscures experience of the deity, consciousness of failings in relation
to the deity, and the suffering experienced with love in separation (*biraha*) from the deity.

Immediately after his ‘memory’ Kalketu also rehearses his ‘sins’ and considers how
much this beautiful woman must suffer in coming to his hut. The goddess tells him to
close his eyes; then he will see everything.

When he heard this, hunter’s son closed his eyes. He saw the whole
marvelous prior story of his life, that by a curse of Siva Nilambar had come
to the earth, and had been born as a hero in the house of a hunter, and
that Mother had come to see him. Seeing this he arose and cried in a loud
voice. ‘You threw me away, Mother, how is it you now are in my house?’

26
In Ramananda’s version Kalketu’s memory of his prior, heavenly existence, and the devotional practices which follow that memory replace the traditional image of Kalketu taking up his bow and arrow in a futile attempt to drive away the goddess. In the traditional plot she appears to be a woman dangerous to him because of her tempting beauty, wealth, high jati status, and her apparent willingness to defy codes of moral behavior for a woman. In Ramananda’s version she is Mother, and her sexual allure is replaced by Kalketu’s filial longing for her, and the affective, devotional practices of remembering, expectant waiting, weeping, and confessing, and the interior ‘sight’ of meditating upon her.

Wealth and Weeping

While Candi reassures Kalketu that she eventually will take him back to heaven, she also gives him the following command:

Perform the customary conduct of your own jati. Chant prayers and make offerings (jap puja karyo) and I will be pleased. I do not judge jati and
lineage, I do not take [account of] customary conduct; I hold to bhakti only.  

She then gives Kalketu the sacred sounds and symbols (mantra-yantra) of her worship, and her one-hundred names to chant as a prayer for his well-being (mangal). To be a devotee is the new dharma which the goddess gives to Kalketu, not to be a king.

Nevertheless, devotion has instrumental value and produces this-worldly benefits. When she gives him the ring Candi promises Kalketu that in his wealthy kingdom there will be people ‘worth tens of millions’, and that ‘many splendid things will be produced in your city, and all those things will go abroad’. Kalketu, however, replies that he ‘wants no other wealth than the feet of Hara and Gauri’ (Siva and the goddess). To counter this completely correct idea, Candi must ‘give’ him maya again, so that he ‘suddenly forgets’.  

Although at critical moments of the story Kalketu will remember that wealth is ‘worthless’ (char), and to the very end that ‘enjoying’ his kingdom means being ‘trapped in the net of maya’, this-worldly benefits of devotion cannot be foresworn. Thus, after going a short
way, Candi turns and explains to Kalketu, ‘Take this wealth as the fruit of worshipping
Siva. Take this wealth and make me free (khalas) concerning all the fruit and the bilva
leaves which you gave to his feet’. She explicitly states that what she has given him is
‘repayment of a debt’ (dhar sodh). According to this striking image one can accumulate
assets through devotion, assets which are liabilities to the deity and which must be repaid
by this-worldly benefits.

In Mukunda’s version Kalketu immediately had taken up his new responsibilities to
clear the land, to build a city, and to settle a new kingdom where he would rule like a
father over his subjects. In Ramananda’s version, Kalketu reacts to Candi’s departure by
falling unconscious, and then weeping day and night for three days.\textsuperscript{30} Being overcome by
weeping becomes the characteristic response to feeling love in separation; and
consciousness of separation is the knowledge to which a devotee awakens when he is
freed from the grip of \textit{maya}. Devotional practices remove Kalketu from this-worldly
concerns; indeed, the repeated images of weeping and losing consciousness infantilize the
model for an ideal devotee’s conduct.
I have argued, first, that in the story of Kalketu Ramananda elided economic motives in favor of devotional ones, and thereby simplified the traditional story which Mukunda had drawn upon. Second, I have argued that in treating human agency Ramananda highlighted practices of devotion, and that the devotional relation of child and Mother produced child-like models for an ideal devotee. Third, I have suggested that, in some tension with these developments, Ramananda also used the economic metaphor of indebtedness to describe the instrumental value of devotion and an obligation to accept its this-worldly benefits.

Lala Jay'narayan Sen

Compared to Ramananda Yati, Lala Jay'narayan Sen was much more closely connected to the courtly culture of Hindu elites. He was born to a wealthy Vaidya (physician) family in Japsa village, in the ancient locality of Vikrampur south of Dhaka. His grandfather ‘Dewan’ Krsnaram was famous for his wealth, as was his father Lala Ram’prasad for his ‘extensive charity’. His elder brother wrote a learned Bengali book about yoga called *Mayatimir Candrika* (Moonlight for the Darkness of Illusion), which
according to Dinesh Candra Sen is ‘difficult for many readers to understand because of all
its complexities’, and a commentary in Sanskrit on the same subject, called Yoga-
kalpatika. Jay’narayan’s younger brother Raj’narayan wrote a book in Sanskrit on devotion
to the goddess, called Parvati-parinaya (The Marriage of Parvati). Both his sister Ganga
Devi and his niece Anandamayi were authors as well, and the latter also was an
accomplished Sanskrit scholar.31 Moreover, his family were agnatic relations of Maharaja
Raj’ballabh Sen, a man who in the 1740s and 1750s had used his positions in the
Nawabat government of Dhaka to assemble the vast zamindari estate of Raj’nagar south of
Dhaka. In events leading up to Clive’s conspiracy of 1757 Raj’ballabh briefly and without
success attempted to protect himself by means of a limited relationship with the English at
Calcutta. After again being employed in very high offices by Nawab Mir Ja‘far’s son,
Miran, and then by the Nawab himself, Raj’ballabh came under suspicion with Mir Jafar’s
successor Nawab Mir Qasim, and was executed together with his eldest son by Mir Qasim
in 1763, for suspected support of the English.32
After his death Raj’ballabh’s estate was stripped of some of his more recent and legally more tenuous acquisitions, and the remainder, still vast, was managed by his son Gopal’krsna, until the latter’s death in 1787. Records of the Board of Revenue suggest conflict between Gopal’krishna and large talukdars (subordinate landholders) after Raj’ballabh’s death; some of the latter succeeded in separating their taluks from his zemindari, thereby obtaining direct possession under the British. Gopal’krishna, on the other hand, attempted to record at least some taluks as ‘nij’, property directly managed by the family, ousting men who as talukdars previously had collected the land revenues for these properties by arrangement with Raj’ballabh. In both cases the conflict seems to have been primarily but not exclusively with Muslim talukdars.33

Jay’narayan is the author of two works, Candikamangal, and Harilila. The latter, a Satya-Narayan text, includes a chronogram for its date of composition, the equivalent of 1772 C.E. Dinesh Chandra Sen suggested that the Candikamangal is an earlier work, and tentatively dated it c. 1763,34 but the only surviving manuscript is incomplete and now has no chronogram. Inserted into this work, however, is a romantic comedy about Madhab and
Sulocana, told to illustrate the sacred power of Sagar-Sangam, the pilgrimage site of the confluence of Ganga with Ocean. This story mentions Jay’narayan’s own Harilila,\textsuperscript{35} and so must postdate 1772. It may have been composed separately from the rest of the Candikamangal, as a tradition noticed by Asutos Bhattacharya suggests.\textsuperscript{36} Because the Candikamangal’s argument does not seem to take into account events during the first years of British rule, as the Harilila does, it may be that the Candikamangal, except for the romance of Madhab and Sulocana, was composed sometime before the Harilila, but the date of its composition is not essential to my argument. We now can begin to analyze the story of Dhanapati as presented in Jay’narayan’s Candikamangal. Again we will see that devotional themes replace the this-worldly problems and solutions of Mukunda’s text, in part because Jay’narayan understood the business of merchants in a way that Mukunda had not.

**Market Trade and Honest Merchants**

I have argued that Mukunda’s Candimangal makes sense if we assume his initial problem was not market trade, but what I have called ‘tribute exchange’ between rival
kings through the medium of a merchant’s voyage. The liminality of a foreign merchant engaged in ‘tribute exchange’ in Mukunda’s account had provoked two questions: did the merchant belonged to the ‘party of the king’s house’ or to the ‘other party’ of his enemies, and would the king use his position to confiscate the merchant’s goods for some trivial ‘crime’. Perhaps Mukunda’s concern with ‘tribute exchange’ already was anachronistic when he wrote; certainly it was in the eighteenth century. I will argue that Jaynarayan Sen had profoundly different understandings of the business of trade and of the nature of merchants’ profits. This is reflected in the image of the goddess which Dhanapati and his son Srimanta see while crossing the Ocean to Sri Lanka. Although she alternately swallows and regurgitates a male elephant, her image is suddenly made both playful and maternal: ‘One moment she throws him upwards, the next she catches him, and then, becoming still, as the enchanting woman on the lotus is swallowing the elephant—she kisses him as Mother kisses her elephant-faced son Ganes.’

Jaynarayan never suggests a barter of valuable goods between Dhanapati and the king of Sri Lanka. Rather, Dhanapati explicitly states that he has come ‘hoping for profit’,
and he describes something like arbitrage as the business of merchants: ‘I have passed this birth in going to many lands, and I receive a cordial reception from all great kings. I give whatever materials (upadan) that do not occur in each country, and getting them, kings honor me’. Bringing goods to lands where they do not occur naturally produces love and respect on the part of kings. Dhanapati tactfully does not say so, but such trade naturally produces profit for the merchant as well. For Jay%narayan buying and selling is not a zero-sum game. Although, as we will see later, a merchant may be tempted to cheat others, he has no need to do so to gain profits for himself. In his Harilila Jay%narayan suggests that a merchant does have to be knowledgeable about weights and measures, and about hidden flaws which alter the value of precious goods, so that he will not be cheated.

Merchants and kings are not involved automatically in a contest of honor.

Dhanapati’s purpose is ordinary market trade, and market trade by itself does not involve conflicts of honor between the merchant and the king. In fact, Jay%narayan has some difficulty motivating conflict between Dhanapati and the king of Sri Lanka, partly because
he also represents the king as generally virtuous. Thus, without any provocation or challenge from the king or his minister, Dhanapati simply tells the court the story of the strange woman he has seen mid-Ocean, as he first introduces himself. The king listens to this story, and ‘when the honesty and purity of the merchant had been understood’, he dismisses Dhanapati with the words, ‘Go to the city; do that work for which you have come’. Dhanapati himself, ‘while the goddess is making him stupid (bimatite)’, insists that he will show the woman on the lotus to the king, and he repeatedly swears an oath to this effect, promising to forfeit his life and his wealth if he should fail. For the first time the king then openly questions his honesty. After failing at this self-imposed task, Dhanapati defends himself as an honest merchant. He tells the court how skilled he is at ascertaining the value of precious goods with hidden defects. As a skilled and successful merchant, he has no motive ever to be dishonest.41

Srimanta and Devotion

Dhanapati is only the foil for his twelve-year-old son, who is a proper devotee of Candi, and comes to Sri Lanka looking for his father. Srimanta re-enacts his father’s story
with very different results, seeing the same vision of the woman mid-Ocean, telling the
king about her, offering forfeits, and failing to prove the truth of his account. Unlike his
father, Srimanta is led to the cremation ground to be executed. Because Srimanta is a
faithful devotee, Candi then appears as an aged Brahman woman, and saves him first
from the executioner, and then also from the chief of the king’s guard and the entire royal
army.

For Mukunda restoring Srimanta’s honor had required two congruent transformations
which changed the nature of the relation between merchant and foreign king. The first
was that Candi gave Srimanta the adamantine body of a yogic hero, invulnerable to attack,
and at least some of the insignia of a raja, a ‘little king’. Srimanta thus was prepared for
the second transformation, marriage between Srimanta and the king’s daughter. For
Mukunda the inherently problematic relation between a merchant who was engaged in
‘tribute exchange’ and a foreign king was resolved by converting it to a relationship of
affinal kin, and in turn, becoming kinglike was necessary for Srimanta to be eligible to
marry the king’s daughter. The king’s wedding gifts to his new ‘son-in-law’ replaced the
goods both Dhanapati and Srimanta had hoped to acquire for their own *raja* of Ujain through barter in ‘tribute exchange’. Srimanta in turn used some of these gifts to supply his own *raja* with the goods needed for royal worship for which Dhanapati long before had been sent on the mission of ‘tribute exchange’.

Jay’narayan, as we have seen, understood that the business of merchants is market trade, not gift exchange in a kind of diplomacy. In market trade, both buyer and seller may expect to benefit. Therefore in his version of Srimanta’s story, the logic is lost which had required a marriage and its gift relations to resolve the inherently problematic relation of diplomacy between merchant and foreign king. Shared expectations of his audiences required him to tell the story of this marriage, but it occurs as an afterthought, when the fundamental resolution of the plot already has occurred. We will see that in his *Harilila* he eliminates the marriage altogether.

Moreover, because market trade is not inherently problematic for Jay’narayan, he somewhat awkwardly must contrive to introduce conflict between Srimanta and the king, and small alterations of the plot are needed to carefully balance the responsibility of each
party. In the initial encounter with the king, when Srimanta describes his vision of the
goddess, the king remembers Dhanapati, tells Srimanta how Dhanapati had been punished
for lying, and suggests that Srimanta looks like the son of that earlier merchant.

Jay’narayan makes it clear that it was by Candi’s own wish that Srimanta, instead of
heeding this warning, replied with an adult’s assurance (praudhi) which the king thought
completely unsuitable for a mere boy. Again, it was by Candi’s wish that Srimanta readily
agreed to forfeit both his wealth and his life if he failed. In a speech that only can be
called effrontery, Srimanta then asked whether the king would hide the elephant’s tusks
when he returned with them.\footnote{42}

On the other hand, in Jay’narayan’s version when Srimanta fails to show his vision
of the woman to the king, the king alleges that Srimanta has plotted to bring him to the
middle of the Ocean in order to kill him. This suspicion is completely mistaken. Srimanta
is given no opportunity to say anything in his own defense; he simply is handed to the
chief of the guard for execution.\footnote{43} The king’s earlier innocence in treating Srimanta is
replaced by an abrupt and unmotivated misjudgment.
Like Ramananda, Jay'narayan also introduces the motif of the child-like devotee.

When Candi appears on the cremation ground as an ancient Brahman woman, she tells Srimanta not to be afraid, and takes him on her lap; this image is repeated in the course of the battle, and we are told that she caresses his limbs and soothes his fear. Thus Srimanta is protected from the surrounding battle through his relation as a child to the goddess, not by a hero’s adamantine body. The image is repeated again when the king himself comes to the cremation ground to do battle. Seeing the ancient Brahman woman holding Srimanta on her lap, and wiping his face with the end of her sari, the ‘wise king’ recognizes her as the goddess, and dismounts from his elephant, bows to her, and begins to offer her his worship.

Since the king already has recognized her, and offered his worship, the goddess offers to show the king the strange vision of herself at the same time that she commands him to give his daughter to Srimanta, ‘without slighting [Srimanta] in your heart as a merchant by jati’. No further bargaining is needed; the king simply agrees. He regards her words as an obligatory (sirodharyya), and Srimanta as his lord (thakur) because Srimanta
is a child of the goddess, whom she has taken on her lap like her sons Ganapati (Ganesa)
and Guha (Karttika). Srimanta is a suitable groom for the king’s daughter precisely
because of his devotional relation of child to Mother.

Again like Ramananda, Jay’narayan uses language of indebtedness to describe the
relations of devotion at the same time that he makes the ideal devotee child-like.

Immediately after the king submits, the goddess explains that she is indebted to Srimanta
from his prior birth. Candi also explains to Srimanta that she is very much indebted
because of his mother Khullana’s love and devotion (bhab bhakti); otherwise Srimanta
never would have seen the vision of her mid-Ocean.

In their respective versions of Candimangal Ramananda and Jay’narayan treat
economic motives very differently. For Ramananda wealth ultimately is worthless.
Accepting it requires ‘forgetting’; enjoying it means being caught in the net of maya. For
Jay’narayan on the contrary accumulating wealth is a natural consequence of the proper
business of merchants, bringing goods to places where they do not occur, but it also is a
blessing of the goddess. On the other hand, to secure her worship she also can arrange to
strip a merchant of everything he possesses.

Nevertheless, we have found common features in the way these two poets treat
devotional topics and the scope for human agency. Neither was interested in the this-
worldly problems and solutions of Mukunda’s text. Both poets instead stress devotional
themes. At crucial points in their stories both motivate their characters’ actions, and
especially their mistakes, by referring to the inspiration or the moving presence of the
goddess. Both also emphasize a child-like model of dependence on the goddess as
Mother. Finally, both use the economic metaphor of ‘debt’ owed by the goddess to
describe the possibility of accumulating devotional assets which become obligations for the
deity.

Analysis of other eighteenth-century Candimangal texts is necessary, but perhaps we
can suggest that by the mid-eighteenth century their textual and performative traditions had
changed in a way that made it difficult to use Candimangal to think about this-worldly
problems of the ‘present’. Rather, the increased emphasis on devotional themes (which
always had been present in Candimangal) seems to have located their stories in the distant past when ideal devotees still could exist. In the next section we will turn to Jay’narayan’s Harilila written in 1772. This text explicitly treats the ‘present’ as a condition of enduring chaos, and in this way it seems to respond to the novel conditions of British dominance when Jay’narayan wrote it.

The Harilila and the Kali Age

The Harilila opens by recounting the nine past avatars of Visnu. Switching to the future tense, it then refers to Kalki, whose ‘nature’ the Lord will ‘become’ in order to ‘destroy the outcast barbarians’ (mlecchas). Between the ninth and the tenth avatars, it then inserts a new and paradoxical manifestation of Visnu, whom it calls Satya-Narayan: ‘Afterward [following the ninth avatar], when an age passed, the Lord considered in his heart and came himself to release Kali; for an age of untruth Hari [Visnu] became Truthful (satyaban).’ Immediately the Harilila narrates the first act of this new manifestation of Visnu, which was to retrieve Yudhisthira from heaven, where apparently he had existed since his journey to heaven at the end of the Treta Age, and to take him to earth as a trick
(chale), to Bali’s city, ‘in order to free Kali and to make known [Satya-Narayan’s] own name as Merciful’. Satya Narayan’s deeds thus are located in a more recent past, and the program for worship which those deeds reveal are effective for the present, when Kali has been ‘released’. In this way the Harilila opens the ‘present’ as a duration of time between the ninth and tenth avatars, and between the ancient past and the distant future, a duration to be marked not by the Kali Age, which had begun long before, but by Kali’s release and full development of the disorders of the Kali Age.

Yudhisthira, thus accompanying Narayan (Visnu), sees in Bali’s city a ram bound as if for sacrifice at the gate of the palace. After hearing the ram’s piteous lament that he has been bound for a long time, but that death never comes, Yudhisthira, always compassionate, asks Bali to set it free, and in a moment of forgetfulness Bali agrees, only to remember that the ram is Kali himself, now released upon the world with predictable, immediately visible, and chaotic consequences. Speaking to Yudhisthira Narayan lists them: dharma and virtuous deeds will disappear, sin and evil customs will fill the earth, Brahmans will become ignorant, and by sacrifices the low-born (hin) will possess the earth.
In homes devotion will be given to women (as superiors), which will make people lose their reason, and mothers their faith. Mantras will have no effect, the earth will not bear fruit, and the gods will become comatose. Cows will give only a little milk, and will perfectly faithful women still remain or not? Brahmans carefully will make their daughters thrive, keeping them at home, while brothers will separate. Wives will scold their husbands and drive them away. In the midst of this vivid description Narayan suggests the reason he has tricked Yudhisthira into producing this disaster: ‘Cruel Kali will become strong, he will take away your kingship, and cause all to drown in their want of judgment’.  

Unlike more traditional Bengali texts which describe the full appearance of the Kali Age as a prophetic warning to their characters before taking them up to heaven, the Harilila describes its chaos as present reality for its characters. Like later colonial narratives of the Kali Age, this is a story of ‘modernity’ in a sense, for the present can be related to the past only through a series of ruptures. As one would expect, the Harilila locates these ruptures in reversals of the disciplined and hierarchical relations of family and gender, of jati, and of ruler and subject. In the last of these reversals we expect that righteous
Ksatriya rulers should lose power; and low born Sudras, foreign Muslims (*yavana*) or outcast barbarians (*mleccha*) should take their place. There is, however, an important difference to be found between Narayan’s description of the Kali Age as fully released, and descriptions in earlier Bengali and *puranic* texts. When we turn to the principal narrative of this text, we will see that a practical absence of kings, rather than Sudra, outcast, barbarian or foreign kings, marks Bengal in the Kali Age of the ‘present’.

Understandably, Yudhisthira is distraught. Narayan assures him that Kali will be a blessing in one way. As usually is the case with descriptions of Kali’s release and ensuing chaos, the *Harilila* ties this break with the past to new forms of worship, forms of worship which are appropriate to the new, ‘modern’ present, and through which devotees may surmount the problems which newly confront them. The *Harilila* promises direct, tangible benefits to people who listen to its narratives and worship Hari in the form of Satya-Narayan by the simple rites it prescribes. Although birth of children and survival of husbands also are named as benefits of worship, for men the overwhelming emphasis is on economic gain, and the material comforts and security of being wealthy. A second
dimension of the ‘modernity’ of this text therefore is its focus on rewards of wealth. With wealth, however, comes the increased temptation to forget or ignore the divine source of wealth. The merchant hero of the text forgets to worship because he is ‘drunk with the liquor of wealth’.

The poet’s own comments are particularly pertinent:

In various ways [Satya-Narayan] causes distraction through the delights of wealth.

In the course of time you will be struck with a terrible calamity. Brother, do not cheat Hari after gaining the taste for wealth. It is not anyone’s own; by devotion alone one has power.

If in a moment a rich man may suffer financial ruin and dishonour, it also is true that a poor man may be elevated to unimagined conditions of prosperity and respect.

Together with this theme of economic uncertainty there also is an unusual emphasis on the obligation of the rich to practice charity. For example, when the merchant’s wife and daughter have been reduced to begging during the merchant’s imprisonment in Sri Lanka,
the merchant’s wife supposes that her husband must be punishing her by staying absent for so long. The only fault she can remember is her own harsh treatment of a begging woman during their earlier period of prosperity:

‘When I was lying on the flower bed (of her wedding), remembering how carefully I had tasted all the flavors of love, I did not give heed to an unfortunate woman (abhagini nari). How there is the wealth of a husband, how there is each flavor of love, of this I had no knowledge at all, only the lassitude of sleep (nidray alas) and therefore I had spoken to her with great anger.’

Perhaps because of the ruptures of Kali’s release there are opportunities as well as risks in the ‘present’. In the Harilila’s central story, which concerns a merchant and his family, Jay’narayan relates the theme of the present to economic motives and to human and divine agency.

A Second Dhanapati
The principal narrative of the text concerns another, later merchant who also is named Dhanapati, his daughter Sunetra, and his resident son-in-law Candrabhan. This merchant and his son-in-law undertake a trading voyage and are blown off course, by the design of Satya-Narayan, because after an initial period of faithful worship, Dhanapati had become neglectful. Unexpectedly and without intent, therefore, the merchant arrives at the kingdom of Sri Lanka.

Upon arrival the merchant hears from a resident merchant a description which portrays Sri Lanka as an ideal kingdom with an ideal king. The kingdom is naturally blessed by sandal-scented breezes, singing birds, flowering forests, seers, sages, and musical Vidyadhars. Its women are beautiful, its army is invincible. It is filled with Brahmans who keep Vedic fires and are engaged in sacrifices. The king himself is described as a son of Dharma (so a second Yudhisthira), a worshiper of Siva, one who nurtures his own kingdom without acts of terror (bhim kanda bine), but is victorious over his Ksatriya enemies by the strength of his own arms (ksatrikulodbhab ripu jai bahu bale). The king’s precept is performance each year of the Agnistoma, Vajapeya, and all other sacrifices
(evidently the full series of one-day soma sacrifices, the sapta-samstha, performed just once by Maharaja Raj’ballabh). Other kings of the south recognize his authority. In the Harilila Sri Lanka seems to represent at least some aspects of the past before Kali’s release, for Dhanapati finds there none of the disordered features of the Kali Age with which the Harilila describes ‘present’ time in Bengal. Time, in another familiar trope of modernity, has been mapped onto space.

In Sri Lanka Dhanapati finds disaster because the merchant himself, ‘drunk with the liquor of wealth’, had forgotten to worship Satya-Narayan. To ‘trick’ and punish his lapsed devotee, Satya Narayan takes the form of a human thief, and in an act which is unheard of in Sri Lanka, the deity steals a jeweled necklace and a jeweled sword from the queen’s own room in the palace. The next morning the king summons his court and takes a written agreement (mocalaka) from the chief of the guard that he either will find the thief within a week or he will have his head cut off. The king’s harshness naturally introduces a flurry of activity among his guards, spies and messengers, and the poet produces a small storm of Persian words to describe the court, its officers and their actions. These Persian words
immediately bring Sri Lanka into the recent past, by placing it in relation to familiar offices and practices of the Nawabat government of Bengal which the British were replacing when Jay’narayan wrote.

The thief (appropriately disguised as the servant of a merchant who has been absent for long time on a trading voyage, and whose wife is in distress) then finds Dhanapati and his son-in-law, and offers to pawn the necklace and sword with them. Dhanapati’s son-in-law calculates the value of the necklace at 330,000 silver rupees, and the deity/thief/servant agrees to a pawn of only 75,000, given the fact that one might argue about a lack of proof of ownership! The next morning Dhanapati and his son-in-law are caught with the goods and imprisoned by the chief of the guard. Jay’narayan carefully records the king’s mercy in deciding not to execute the merchant. Indeed, as soon as he examines Dhanapati, the king easily sees that he has none of the visible characteristics of a thief, and all of those of great merchant. Instead, he decides to imprison the merchant and to confiscate all his goods.
Meantime, in the long course of Dhanapati’s imprisonment the merchant’s wife and
daughter, as we have seen, are reduced to begging. One day they happen to see a
Brahman worshipping Satya-Narayan, and they themselves remember to eat as prasad the
special left-over food which has been offered to him, and to pray for their husbands’ return.

Satya-Narayan then appears to the ‘clear-sighted’ daughter Sunetra in a dream, and
reassures her that her husband will return. The women faithfully continue to worship ‘the
lord who is strength of those who have no lord, wealth of those without wealth, and the
resort (sambal) of the powerless (nirbal).’ In short order Narayan also appears to
Dhanapati in prison with a similar reassurance, and to the king with a warning that he has
imprisoned the merchant unjustly.

When Dhanapati is brought before the king of Sri Lanka, the king naturally asks for
the merchant’s name and place of residence. Informed that his name is Dhanapati, and his
residence Gaur, the king remembers that once at an earlier time another Dhanapati had
come to Sri Lanka. The king retells the story of this earlier Dhanapati, the story which is
narrated in Candimangal. This is the final device the Harilila uses to locate the ‘present’.
The earlier Dhanapati and the forebear of the king provide a model enacted in the past for
the present king of Sri Lanka, but a model which is altered in two crucial details. In
retelling this story the king omits both Srimanta’s first failure to show the king the vision he
has seen, and his final wedding to the daughter of the king. In the still simpler re-
enactment of this basic story in the Harilila, the second Dhanapati does not have to be
rescued (and has no son to rescue him), and of course no marriage is arranged between
the king’s daughter and the either the second Dhanapati or his son-in-law. Instead, after
receiving the warning from Satya-Narayan, the king easily can accept the merchant’s
explanation for how he came to possess the stolen goods, and he can clear the merchant
of all guilt. The king gives the merchant the very sword and necklace that Dhanapati had
taken as a pawn, returns all his confiscated goods, and with these signs of honor and
stores of wealth the merchant and his son-in-law return home to Bengal.

Returning to Bengal, perhaps Dhanapati returns to a more problematic ‘present’.

Once again, there is a failure to worship. The daughter Sunetra, in her rush to meet her
husband, drops the deity’s prasad (left over food offerings) on the floor instead of carefully
eating it, and her husband’s ship promptly sinks in a sudden storm just as it was coming to
their own river-landing. This final disaster provides the poet with an opportunity to describe
devotional practices of child-like emotional surrender and loss of consciousness on the part
of the suddenly bereaved Sunetra. (Of course she runs back, finds the prasad and eats it,
and her husband is raised from the Ocean with only an indistinct memory of great
happiness.) Before this happy resolution, however, the poet also momentarily questions
Satya-Narayan’s mercy, and concludes that one cannot understand his lila.67

In its conclusion the Harilila describes the position of the merchant, living in luxury
by means of the great wealth obtained from his voyage to Sri Lanka, as king-like:

In this way each day’s delight has many flavors, and the merchant’s son daily does
what he wishes. The lord (bhagaban) made him like a king (raj’tulya) in the world,
and in accord with righteous precepts he enjoyed whatever happiness occurred to his
heart. He served Narayan as prescribed each day. The quantity of his wealth was
that of a second Kubera. His elephants, carriages, and the power of his four-limbed
army were fit for a king. Hari had given them all to Dhanapati for his devotion.

Thousands and thousands of servants did his labor. In trade with various lands

(nana desi byapare) he was a ‘great king’ (maharaj).68

The inflation of the last title, maharaj, seems deliberately ironic, given its qualifying
delimitation to a merchant’s business. Elsewhere there is only the briefest mention of the
king of Gaur.69 Unlike mangal-kabya narratives of other merchants who journeyed to
southern ports and found some manifestation of divine power, this Dhanapati never interacts
with a king in Bengal after his return. In the entire narrative of the merchant’s story in the
Harilila, the nearly complete absence of kings in Bengal, rather than the presence of
foreign, outcaste, or barbarian kings, is the feature that most clearly distinguishes its
‘present’ from puranic descriptions of the Kali Age.

In the Harilila the merchant and his family suffer sudden dishonor and
impoverishment because they have forgotten to worship Satya-Narayan, and punishment is
withdrawn just as suddenly after they again remember to worship this manifestation of Visnu
in the Kali Age. The *Harilila* deals with problems which are created by the deity to obtain worship, and then resolved by the deity once he has been worshipped: ‘Hari himself is the snake and Hari himself is the antidote’.70

The function of the deity, Satya-Narayan, is to guide humans to worship him by manipulating them through their desires, but the deity is equally bound by the worship of his devotees. As Candi was described in Ramananda Yati’s *Candimangal* and in Jaynarayan’s *Candikamangal*, Satya-Narayan is made ‘indebted’ (*mi*) by worship, which indebtedness he ‘repays (*sodhe*) a hundred-thousandfold’.71 Satya-Narayan is suited for the Kali Age because he understands human limitations, and materially rewards and punishes his devotees. In the stories of the *Harilila* these rewards and punishments are completely consistent with the record of worship by devotees. Therefore, the deity’s punishments can be understood, and their cause rectified. Of course, in ordinary human life such a causal connection may be difficult or even impossible to discern, but again we see devotion described as the one effective human agency, and in Sunetra we meet an ideal devotion which includes child-like emotional surrender. Making a merchant’s family the story’s
central characters is appropriate to the limitations of the Kali Age. Without kings one must
turn to merchants. Jay’narayan fully recognizes the economic motivations of his merchants
and the connection between their desire for profit and desire more generally as a purpose
of life. Indeed, rich descriptions of love-making frame the story, suggesting all a good life
can be when Kali has been released and Yudhishira’s kingship has been destroyed.

In Jay’narayan’s last story, about Madhab and Sulocana, the poet considers kinds of
agency which are human rather than divine, rational and independent rather than childlike,
and morally ambiguous rather than righteous. This story’s plot assumes that even when
problems are caused by fate or by divine action, more than devotion will be required to
solve them.

Madhab and Sulocana: The Plot

Sometime after writing the Harilila Jay’narayan composed the story of Madhab and
Sulocana, and placed it within his Candikamangal. The story is told to Dhanapati by the
merchant Cando (Manasa’s antagonist in Manasamangal). Jay’narayan explains that after
his encounters with Manasa, Cando has resettled at Sagar-Sangam, the confluence of
Ganga with the Ocean. Dhanapati meets Cando on his voyage to Sri Lanka, and hears from him the story of Madhab and Sulocana, as a proof of the exalted nature (mahatma) of this sacred site. Cando explains that when one forms a willed intention for worship (kalpa, samkalpa), and ritually offers himself as a sacrifice to the crocodile infested waters of the confluence, Ganga will give him in his next life whatever wish was expressed in and by that ‘intention’. In fact, Cando adds, some people have submerged themselves in the waters of the confluence and obtained their wishes in the same life. One was Madhab, a prince.

Because Jay’narayan’s text exists only in manuscript and has not often been summarized by historians of Bengali literature, I briefly will outline its plot.

Once Madhab went hunting, became separated from his companions, and met a beautiful woman with whom he instantly fell in love, and whom he attempted first to seduce and then to ravish. The woman was Candrakala (Digit of the Moon), married to a Gandharva. She attempted to restrain him by reason, and when this failed, she told Madhab about Sulocana,72 a maiden on Plaksa Island, unmarried, a princess, one hundred times more excellent and beautiful than she. Candrakala also told him about a magical
horse in his father’s stables with the ability to fly across the ocean, and she explained how
he might contact Sulocana, once he had reached Plaksa Island, through a garland maker
named Gandhini. Madhab vowed to ‘get’ Sulocana, or to renounce life and die. Again
therefore we have a story centered on desire as a purpose of human life. We know from
the Indo-Persian traditions within which this story is situated that it will be a ‘romance of
deferring desire’, with a series of trials for the lovers which will be resolved comically by
their wedding at the story’s conclusion.73

Madhab located the horse, and he and his servant Pracesta (Effort) flew to Plaksa
Island. There, as Candrakala had predicted, he met Gandhini the garland maker, who was
employed by the king to supply Sulocana with flowers. Gandhini, however, told him that
that very day had been set for the prenuptial ritual of the adhibas for both the groom and
bride, the ritual which ‘begins the process of transforming their two bodies into one’.74

Sulocana’s wedding to the groom, a prince named Vidyadhar, would take place on the
following day.
Madhab wrote a letter to the princess, introducing himself, and explaining his vow to ‘get’ her or to die, and he sent it to her by means of Gandhini. Sulocana, realizing that she must be a fatal disappointment either to Madhab or to her intended groom, and that there would be only one moment during the wedding when she herself would be free to decide between them, wrote a reply setting Madhab an apparently impossible condition. At the moment of the wedding ceremony just before the bride and groom first see each other’s faces, she would raise her left hand. If Madhab could seize it and ‘steal’ her from the sky, then ‘certainly I will welcome you as my groom’. To her great surprise, Madhab accepted her challenge.

Sulocana began to doubt that he was a human. She decided to see for herself, and on the pretext of bathing, went with her companions to a pond behind Gandhini’s house. Their eyes met, and Sulocana and Madhab fell in love. Madhab explained the powers of his flying horse, and then and there, Sulocana formally welcomed him as her groom despite having been promised by her father to Vidyadhar, and despite having had the latter’s prenuptial adhibas.
The following day in a fateful error, Madhab fell into a deep sleep after keeping vigil all night. Pracea, his servant, decided to take his place. He mounted the horse, seized Sulocana by her left arm, and flew away with her. Humiliated by his own failure and by the conduct of his servant, and bound by his vow to forfeit his own life, Madhab became a renouncer and departed.

Meantime Pracea took Sulocana across the Ocean to the famous city of Kanci, where he rented a house, revealed his identity, bragged to her about his prowess, and asked her to have sex with him. Sulocana asked for a ‘Vedic’ wedding first (of course, without parents no such thing is possible), and sent him with her gold bracelet to the market to purchase goods needed at least for some kind of wedding.

In his absence, she recalled that once the sage Narada had given her a magic formula by which she could change her appearance. She became ‘a handsome young man, though her own nature was feminine’, dressed herself as a man, took up Pracea’s arms, mounted the flying horse, and decided not to return home to Plaksa Island and disgrace, but to go to Sagar Sangam, where Madhab must come to fulfill his vow of
suicide. There she introduced herself as Bir’bar (Best of Heroes), and was welcomed by
the sonless King Susen and installed in his palace.

Soon a calamity befell King Susen’s kingdom, in the form of a dangerous rhinoceros.

With the help of her flying horse Bir’bar killed the rhinoceros, cut off its horn, tongue and
tail, and presented them to the king. King Susen in return insisted on marrying Bir’bar to
his daughter Jayanti. While admitting to herself the utter strangeness of taking this step,
Bir’bar consented, reasoning that if she did not, she would not be able to stay at Sagar
Sangam, and so would never intercept Madhab. The wedding was celebrated, but the two
women slept with Bir’bar’s sword between them (Bir’bar explained the need for this restraint
as a vow he had made as a valiant man). Bir’bar carefully hid anything that might reveal
her true sex.

With his new authority as the king’s son-in-law, Bir’bar then set guards upon the
boat landings of Sagar Sangam, with the command that any foreigner who arrived with the
intent of drowning himself should be arrested and brought to him. The first disappointed
lover to arrive was Pracesta. He intended to sacrifice himself and so get Sulocana in his next life. Bir’bar confined him in prison to await punishment by Madhab.

Next, her abandoned groom Vidyadhar arrived from Plaksa Island (having acquired the power of flight from the divine meddler Narada). His intent was the same. Bir’bar persuaded him that dying for a woman is completely improper conduct for a man; rather, women die for men (in the rite by which wives become sati). Disparaging the character of women in general, and of Sulocana in particular, Bir’bar persuaded Vidhyadhar to ‘be at peace’, to return home and to marry someone else.

Finally Madhab himself arrived (also having acquired the power of flight from Narada). He had taken the name Sulocan Giri, and was dressed as a Vaisnava renouncer, ‘chanting the mantra of perfection, and recalling the name of Sri Hari’. He also intended ritual suicide at Sagar Sangam. Unlike the others Madhab actually descended into the water before Bir’bar’s guards seized him and brought him up to the shore, and then to Bir’bar. She recognized him at once but did not reveal herself. Instead, after arguing in
vain with him that it is improper for a renouncer to die for the sake of any desire, let alone for desire for a woman, Bir’bar insisted that he delay his suicide for a day.

Bir’bar then went to King Susen and confessed her true identity. She proposed a double wedding of herself and Jayanti to Madhab. The king readily agreed. She used her magic formula to return to her own natural form, and had Madhab brought to her. Madhab then could recognize her, and the two shared their stories of separation and grief, and Sulocana also revealed Pracesta’s treachery. She then wed Madhab in the informal rite of Gandharvas by garlanding him as her groom, and the two made love.

The next morning King Susen made Madhab king in his place and gave him Sulocana and Jayanti in a double wedding. The following day Madhab decided Pracesta’s punishment. His head would be cut off, his limbs severed, and care would be taken that no part of his body would fall into the sacred waters of the Ganga. The following day King Susen died. Madhab then ruled righteously for many years. Jayanti bore him a hundred sons, and Sulocana bore him ten. Eventually he and his two wives went to heaven. We may conclude, as Jay’narayan does, with the benefits of listening to this story:
Whoever listens to the account of Sulocana and Madhab is freed from sin and dwells in Vaikuntha (Visnu’s heaven). Listen, everyone to the narrative (itihas).

Regard it with hearts made firm [in faith]. Whoever hears the story of Madhab’s crossing the Ocean never will be bound by the ocean of existence. Any woman who has suffered for a long time from separation from her husband quickly will obtain him, and she always will dwell in happiness, and join with him in intercourse.76

Human Agency in the Story Of Madhab and Sulocana

As Dhanapati says, in an interruption to the telling, this is a ‘wonderful story, jewels strung on a fine cord . . . gold joined with perfume, a story about dharma with much secret meaning (marma), ivory inlaid with gold.’77 Unlike any of the other narratives considered in this essay, the story of Madhab and Sulocana also is a sustained comic action. Much of its pleasure derives from the uncertainties of its outcome, as Sulocana boldly solves each new problem facing her, and each solution brings with it a new and more complicated problem.

Both as a comic action and as a romance, the story is related to Indo-Persian story-telling
traditions; indeed, the motifs of a flying horse, a princess disguised as a warrior, her
conquest of a rampaging rhinoceros, her threatened marriage to the king’s daughter, and a
double marriage to resolve the plot all are found in at least one Satya-Narayan
manuscript. Unlike most of the comic stories taken from the Satya Narayan or Satya Pir
texts which Tony K. Stewart has translated, however, Jay’narayan’s comedy also develops
its two main characters, so that both come to deserve their happy ending, after an equally
deserved period of suffering. By the time he has become the Vaisnava renouncer Sulocan,
Madhab has learned a clear purpose for his life, mental stability, composure, and patience
(dhairyya), the very qualities he most had lacked in his encounter with Candrakala. The
poet also shows us that Sulocana must suffer for her decision to flout her father’s purpose
(when she welcomed Madhab as her groom after performing the adhibas with Vidhyadhar’s
materials). Sulocana is the central character and true hero of this story, and most of the agency
in its plot belongs to her. Sulocana’s transformation is profound when she becomes Bir’bar
and then negotiates a thoroughly ambiguously gendered role. Precisely the fabulous
character of her gender transformation may have been reassuring to conservative men. We can imagine different gradations of sympathy for her as a model for virtuous action. More important for our purposes than her gender transformation is her repeated change from an initial emotional and passive reaction to ‘mental firmness’ and the active choice of a bold solution. We can take as an example Sulocana’s response to Pracesta when he revealed his true identity and claimed his right to possess her:

Sulocana heard this, and her life came to her eyes—she was borne away, floating in their streams of water. At this astounding speech her mind trembled; the faithful woman was like a dove fallen into the talons of a hawk. Like a doe caught in the net of a hunter, her eyes rapidly looked about in all directions. Then the clever woman made her mind very firm. Knowing the Sastras, she became resolute (sthir) and endured time passing. Knowing that patience is the vessel in which to cross an ocean of danger, the young woman crossed it by her cleverness.82
She then devised the ruse for sending Pracesta to the market-place with her golden bracelet. Moreover, Jay’narayan supplies authorial commentary so that we are sure to judge correctly how well she had understood Pracesta’s character: ‘She increased the greed of a greedy person when she put gold in his hands. The woman played a fine hand (bhalo khela kheli) and fooled him for the moment’. As soon as he has departed we see her again succumb to emotion, and again she ‘makes her heart firm’ and uses her intelligence to contrive a means, this time by taking the much more radical step of transforming her body into a man’s. In the absence of a protective deity, the transformation of Sulocana’s body into a man’s and her decisive actions as Bir’bar replace the child-like emotional surrender we have seen in ideal devotees, including Sunetra in the Harilila.

Throughout the story characters employ morally neutral ‘agencies’: skills, powers, or qualities of effective action. For example, both Madhab and Sulocana take vows which stake their lives upon the success of their actions; surely their singularity of purpose and determination are virtues. Note, however, that after failing to achieve success with Sulocana, both Pracesta and Vidyadhar also resolve to commit ritual suicide at Sagar
Sangam to ‘get’ her in a subsequent life. Similarly, throughout the story boldness and courage are recommended for success. Candrakala tells Madhab, ‘Laksmi worships the man with boldness (sahas), and the boldness of a woman finds fault with delay (in a man)’. Madhab follows this advice when he proposes to Gandhini that Sulocana’s prenuptial ceremonies are for himself—an outrageous idea because she already has bathed with Vidyadhar’s left-over preparations. Gandhini says to Madhab: ‘You would make an adhibas for another into something else? Your courage is impossible for anyone else’. Is not Pracesta equally bold in deciding to take the place of his comatose master? Consider his thoughts, and the author’s commentary: ‘“Sleep is the ruin of action, no wise person who knows the dharma of the Sastras worships it.” He understood that because of Fate Madhab never would be a groom fit for this virgin. “For this reason he is sunk in sleep, while my fate is wakefulness. Plundering has become necessary”’. Of course, Pracesta’s ‘understanding’ proves false in the end.

An even more problematic agency is ‘cheating, trickery, beguilement’ (chal, chalana), words that also are used to mean ‘cheating’ a woman of her virtue by having sex with her,
even by force. Both virtuous and wicked actions are described as *chāl*. In an age of moral chaos even virtue must be armed with deception.

Throughout one must be impressed by Sulocana’s intelligence. She agrees to be abducted from the sky only in the one moment of the wedding ceremony when a girl no longer belongs to her father, and has not yet been seen by her groom, when she therefore is independent. Having taken control of the flying horse, she chooses not to go home, where she would meet with certain disgrace, but to Sagar Sangam, where Madhab must come to carry out his vow of suicide. Her speech to Vidyadhar, persuading him to forget her, to return home, and to marry is a brilliant and tricky piece of rhetoric, and the comic irony developed in this scene depends on our consciousness of difference between its explicit moral lessons of the worthlessness of women, and the implicit lessons of her own story and of Madhab’s demonstration of faithfulness to her:

‘No man gives up his life because of a woman. A woman dies for her husband; the husband doesn’t die. Look over the entire world and judge in your own heart.
Grasp patience, listen to what is eternal, make your heart steady—*which* valiant man, *which* hero has died for a woman?  

As agencies, can knowledge and intelligence be used for both good and evil purposes?  

Candrakala’s final advice to Madhab had been, ‘All learn knowledge for the sake of wisdom. If someone does not, everything (he does) is futile; (although) he may speak like a learned Brahman with his mouth, for him everything in his conduct is otherwise, and he is the more at fault because of his learning’. According to her, even learning and intelligence can be used for purposes other than wisdom, but in Sulocana’s wonderful example the three gradually become united.  

Finally, the sacred power of Sagar Sangam also seems to be morally neutral. Apparently, if anyone forms his ‘intention’ properly, and dies in the waters of Ganga, in his next life he will acquire whatever he wished in that intention. Ganga equally could have granted Sulocana to Madhab, Pracesta, or Vidyadhar. Divine agency therefore offers no solution.
Pracesta’s allegorical name, ‘effort’, suggests that we might read his role in the story in a way that looks beyond the requirements of a comic plot. By taking the place of his master Pracesta enacts the most familiar of the disruptive roles of Sudras in the Kali Age.

We can imagine, but not quite supply, performative signs to give Pracesta a local, topical referent: a local upstart? The talukdars who we know were attempting to escape taxation by the Raj’nagar zamindar? Or the most prominent of all usurping servants, the English East India Company’s officials themselves? Sulocana makes it clear that Pracesta’s crime is usurpation: ‘You attempted to do your lord’s deed yourself. You stole that which was meant for your lord’s enjoyment . . .. You murderer of trust, now it is right to behead you’. In fact, severing his limbs at their joints suggests obliteration, and care is taken that no part of his body will transmit to his next life the saving power of Ganga’s water.

Jay’narayan seems to supply an excessive punishment to cathect anxieties provoked by this character. Unlike the familiar image of moral chaos resulting from Sudras’ authority in most descriptions of the Kali Age, here one must ask, How exactly is Pracesta’s theft different from Madhab’s? Pracesta’s ‘effort’ displays boldness and courage; he stakes his own life,
and he uses intelligence and trickery to achieve his ends. One might consider him a reflection of Madhab; in fact one might be tempted to blame Madhab as the inspiration for his boldness. The plot cannot restore the natural hierarchy of master and servant; rather, to preserve our sense of the virtue of the master the servant must be destroyed in rhetoric ‘eulogistic of conflict’.94

Although Sulocana might have been understood as a transgressive character as well, Jay'narayan’s story does not cathect anxiety about her by providing her with an exemplary punishment. Instead, he allows her to restore herself to her ‘own’ nature and to her proper role as a wife. She does not enact the chaos of ‘woman on top’ in the Kali Age, a theme which a century later became prominent in colonial Bengal.95 (Of course, as a comic romance, the story does not show us what happens to her heroism after her wedding.)

The conventions of a plot of deferred desire require a story ending with a wedding, and its rhetoric eulogistic of harmony allows the audience to take satisfaction in a couple who will reflect each other’s heroic virtues within a proper patriarchal order. Men also may be reassured by the familiar fictional pattern of a hero with one wife who is (or at least was) a
... heroine, and another who always is perfectly submissive. Because of Sulocana’s own return to femaleness and femininity, at the same time that Jay’narayan’s audience could take delight in her marriage they also were allowed to approve everything masculine and heroic which she once had done as Bir’bar. Thus, by a double plot resolution, and a rhetoric which eulogizes both conflict and harmony, Jay’narayan erases his expansive inventory of human agency from low-jati characters, and limits readings subversive of patriarchal order while centering agency in a heroic woman.

Conclusion

In their stories of Kalketu and Dhanapati both Ramananda Yati and Lala Jay’narayan Sen ceased to be interested in the ‘economic’ problems and solutions of Mukunda’s

*Candimangal*. Ramananda erased the meaning of ‘hunting’ as a metaphor for predatory exploitation in human society. Without the ‘kingdom of the animals’, and without buying and selling as a potential site for exploitation that is like ‘hunting’, the war between Kalketu and the king Kesari Ray cannot be seen as an effect for which ‘hunting’ is the cause.

Instead in Kalketu’s story Ramananda emphasized relations of devotion. The new dharma
which Kalketu receives from Candi is that of a devotee, not that of a king. Candi’s gift of
wealth threatens a proper devotional relationship, and Kalketu must be made ignorant again
in order for him to accept it. Kalketu’s kingship is ‘enjoyed’ and this enjoyment means
being trapped in maya. On the other hand, devotional relations make this-worldly concerns
irrelevant. Descriptions of weeping and losing consciousness as a result of separation from
the deity make Kalketu and Phullara child-like, further reducing the scope for human
agency.

Jay’narayan’s story of Dhanapati and Srimanta in his Candikamangal similarly de-
emphasizes the problematic relations of honor between a merchant in a foreign port and its
king. Dhanapati’s only purpose is profitable trade; he does not represent his own king of
Gaur. His initial description of the woman on the lotus, although disbelieved, is not
interpreted as an attack upon the honor of the court, and Dhanapati at first is dismissed to
complete his business in the city. Although Dhanapati himself pledges his life as a forfeit if
he cannot show the woman to the king, when he fails, the king mercifully alters his
punishment from death to imprisonment.97 Similarly Jay’narayan’s story of Srimanta
minimizes the issues of contested honor. The king recognizes Candi when she appears as
the old Brahman woman holding Srimanta on her lap. He submits to Srimanta as a ‘son’
of the goddess, not as a potential king with royal regalia and an adamantine body,
impervious to his army’s attacks. Without any negotiation he agrees to marry his daughter
to Srimanta.

Although he is not interested in problems of honor, Jay’narayan is interested in
economic motivations. In both his Candikamangal and his Harilila the business of a
merchant is getting profit (labh), and the method is described in terms close to arbitrage:
taking goods to places where they are not produced.

As for Ramananda, so also for Jay’narayan, the crux of the story is a devotional
problem: how to recognize the goddess in her many appearances. Devotional problems
require devotional solutions. Like Ramananda, Jay’narayan infantilizes Srimanta as the
ideal devotee. Like Ramananda, he also describes devotional relations in terms of the
trope of indebtedness, which paradoxically emphasizes the power over the deity of a
devotee who completely subordinates his will and action to the deity.
If we had only Ramananda’s *Candimangal* and Jay’narayan’s *Candikamangal*, we would not be able to see any response to the chaotic conditions of the first decade and a half of British dominance in Bengal. In two separate innovations to the tradition of *Candimangal*, however, Jay’narayan made the nature of his ‘present’ time a theme, and found a story about human agency which completely escapes the constraints of a child-like devotionalism.

Jay’narayan’s *Harilila* of 1772 carefully explores the meaning of the ‘present’ by means of the image of Kali released and the Kali Age fully manifest, and by the plot device of a second Dhanapati, one who enacts a simplified story for the peculiar risks and opportunities of the present. The *Harilila* creates an image of ‘modernity’ in Bengal as a land suffering a rupture with the past, in part through the practical absence of kings. It maps ‘modernity’ onto space by having its merchants return to a more ideal past in Sri Lanka, a kingdom still ruled by a mostly ideal king. For unprecedented economic uncertainties of the ‘modern’ age of the present it commends both acquiring and giving away wealth. Primarily through acquisition and loss of wealth Satya Narayan rewards
devotees for faithful worship and punishes them for lapses, but in the practical absence of kings, merchants replace kings as ideal devotees. Again we have the description of devotional relations in terms of the trope of indebtedness, but to this a proverbial statement is added giving agency to the deity: ‘Hari is the snake, and Hari is the antidote’. Human agency still is a matter of maintaining regular worship, rather than becoming ‘distracted through the delights of wealth’. Perhaps love-making resolves the plot because in the debased conditions of the present, fulfillment of desire is that goal to which most humans still can aspire.

Finally, Jay'narayan’s story of Madhab and Sulocana takes up Indo-Persian storytelling traditions to completely re-examine the question of human agency, this time without a devotional problematic. We have noted that especially in the character of Sulocana Jay'narayan explicitly contrasts the reaction of becoming emotionally overwhelmed to making ones mind firm and steady, grasping patience, and then finding a creative solution. Jay'narayan’s narrative emphasizes morally neutral agencies: skills, powers, and qualities of action which may be required for success. These agencies include clarity of purpose,
staking ones life, boldness, courage, and intelligence, and trickery, deception and beguilement as well. Sulocana demonstrates them when she becomes Bir’bar, and valiantly achieves reunion with her beloved. She negotiates an ambiguously gendered role, defined in part by acute emotional sensitivity on the one hand and by mental firmness and resolute action on the other. But on a reduced scale and for debased purposes, the same agencies are implicitly present in the actions of Pracesta, the wicked servant.

Because she accepts the need to return to her ‘own true nature’ as a woman, and because, after the informal Gandharva ceremony, she also is properly married to Madhab, in a rhetoric eulogizing order Sulocana can be taken back into the proper hierarchal relations between husband and wife. No such restoration is possible for Pracesta. His reflection of Madhab’s own morally questionable agency is too similar, and his threat to hierarchical order too serious,. Pracesta’s allegorical name ‘effort’ suggests a topical referent for this character which performance easily could have made clear. In any case, in rhetoric eulogistic of conflict, he must be obliterated.
One can imagine different kinds of responses to this comic romance. If the tradition is correct that Jay’narayan composed it at the instance of his niece and daughter, we may suppose that elite women could take pleasure in the transgressive exploits of Sulocana as Bir’bar, while precisely her fabulous character may have been reassuring to elite men.

Those in authority may have found Jay’narayan’s morally neutral vision of human agency liberating, while his punishment of Pracesta at the same time cathedcted anxieties evoked by that same vision. Disaffected servants and subordinates may have heard this story with a rather different set of feelings.

By describing eighteenth century changes in the tradition of Candimangal I have tried to place both the Harilila and the story of Madhab and Sulocana in a narrative and performative context. By tracing development within Jay’narayan’s works, I have tried to suggest his innovations, as he brought into relation with Candimangal both a new story, the Harilila, and a different kind of story, a comic romance. In both of these innovative texts Jay’narayan drew upon the more fluid narrative traditions of texts devoted to Satya Narayan and Satya Pir. Tony K. Stewart has made it possible for English readers to appreciate the
variety of comic tales from Indo-Persian story-telling traditions in these texts, but he has
separated them from the contexts of the more ordinary, and more didactic stories also told
in these texts. By attending to a changing tradition of didactic contexts in *Candimangal* I
have tried to suggest that Jaynaratyan used his narrative innovations to think about the
nature of his ‘present’ and the new requirements for effective human agency, given the new
problems and opportunities of that ‘present’. I have tried to show how his new stories
disrupt the eighteenth century textual and performative traditions of *Candimangal*. I hope
that this essay suggests that with his innovations *mangal-kabya* continued at least for a
time to be a genre through which one could think about this-worldly problems of the
present, but that such thought required both new stories and a different kind of story, in
order to escape the devotional constraints of eighteenth-century *Candimangal*. 


3Others include Muktaram Sen, c. 1741-59, Akincan Cakrabarti, c. 1770-1800, and Bhabanisankar Das, 1779. See Asutos Bhattacarya, *Bamla Mangalakabyer Itihas*, paribardhita sastha samskaran (Kalikata: A. Mukharji ayand Kom. Praibhet Limited, 1975), pp. 563-7, 571-82. [Hereafter this work is cited as BMKI].


5Jayanarayan Sen pranita, *Harilila*, Dinesacandra Sen o Basantarpanjan Ray sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1928). [Hereafter this edition is cited as JNHL]. I am grateful to Professor Clint Seely for making a copy of this work available to
me.

6 Lala Jay’narayan Sen, *Candikamangal*, Manuscript No. 4348, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. [Hereafter this MS is cited as JNCM]. I am grateful to the Asiatic Society for permission to copy the second half of this manuscript.

7 BMKI, p. 557.


11 BMKI, p. 551.

12 See ‘Maharaja Krsnacandra, Hinduism, and Kingship in the Contact Zone of Bengal’, in this volume.

13 BMKI, p. 555.

15BMKI, p. 551-2.

16The passage is quoted in BMKI, pp. 558-60; I have followed Asutos Bhattacarya’s explanatory notes.

17RYCM, p. 155.

18Cf. ‘Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier: Kalketu’s Story in Mukunda’s Candimangal’, in this volume.

19RYCM, pp. 155-6.

20BMKI, p. 554.

21RYCM, p. 178.

22RYCM, pp. 176-7.

23RYCM, p. 178: Kalketu would not take any tax for a year, and he gave settlers their houses (ghar-barī) outright.

24Kesari Ray attacks because he has become worried about missing forest tribute, the deer and elephants he used to receive from the forest which Kalketu has cut; moreover,
this is represented by Ramananda as a foolish concern. The king’s minister of revenue wisely counsels that a settled countryside will yield more taxes than a forest, so he should not be upset. RYCM, pp. 185-6.


26RYCM, p. 170.

27RYCM, p. 171.

28RYCM, p. 174.

29RYCM, pp. 202, 209.

30RYCM, p. 175.


This should be supplemented by Rasikalal Gupta, *Maharaj Rajaballabh Sen o Tatsamakalabarti Bangalar Itihaser Sthula Sthula Bibaran*, dvitiya samskaran (Kalikata: Rayend Kompani [n.d., c. 1902]).

33Dacca District Records, Miscellaneous letters received, Bundle 1, No. 1, Harrington, Subsecretary of the Board of Revenue to Day, Collector of Dacca, dated 17 July 1787, with enclosed proceedings of the Sudder Dewanny Adaulat, 21 December 1786; and Cowper et al., Board of Revenue to Day, Collector of Dacca, 3 August 1787; at National Archives of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

34Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History*, p. 316.

35JNCM, p.118a, the advice of Sulocana to Vidyadhar: ‘Call on Narayan, listen to the *Harililamrta.*’ The same passage also mentions as enlightening both the work of ‘Narayan’s elder brother’ the *Mayatimir Candrika*, and the work ‘by his younger brother’ the *Parbbatir [sic.] Parinay*.

36BMKI, p. 571.
37 See “Tribute Exchange” and the Liminality of Foreign Merchants in Mukunda’s *Candimangal*, in this volume.

38 *JNCM*, p.136a.

39 *JNCM*, pp. 130b, 131a.

40 *JNHL*, pp. 109-10.

41 *JNCM*, pp. 130a-130b.

42 *JNCM*, p. 138a.

43 *JNCM*, p. 138b.

44 *JNCM*, p. 140a, 140b, 142a.

45 *JNCM*, p. 143b.

46 *JNCM*, p. 143a. Candi then states the traditional accusation that the king has got a child (*sisu*), and after tricking him, would have cut off his head; but the narrative itself has not supported any evidence of trickery on the part of the king. Of course the king’s suspicion of a plot to murder him was completely mistaken.
For example, the final ‘Sarga-arohan pala’ of Dharmamangal texts give such a prophetic warning to Lau Sen and his family and supporters.


The merchant first worships Satya-Narayan for a child, JNHL, p. 29; and the last act of worship is for the resurrection of his daughter’s husband, pp. 119-26.
See especially the short narratives of the poor Brahman and the woodcutter, narratives which precede that of the merchant, JNHL, pp. 19-27, and the list of benefits given the merchant when he first learns to worship after returning from a trading voyage to China, p. 29.

JNHL, p. 77.

JNHL, p. 61.

See especially the poet’s prayer which concludes the first section of the poem, JNHL, pp. 75-6.

JNHL, p. 99.

JNHL, pp. 78-9.

JNHL, p. 79; Rasikalal Gupta, Maharaj Rajaballabh Sen, pp. 184-92.

JNHL, pp. 83-4: karar, a promise, agreement or settlement; dastakhat, a signature; harkara, a messenger or courier; tainat [sic. for tainat], reproof, criticism; and karnis, a form of salutation introduced by the Mughal Emperor Akbar.
The merchant has long arms, a long nose, fat shoulders and chest, straightforward and honest speech, and a pendulous belly. Compare a similar description of the merchants Dhanapati and Cando in JNCM, pp. 93a-93b.

When Dhanapati introduces himself to the king of Sri Lanka after being released from prison: ‘Dharmaraj (the king) in the kingdom of Gaur is a home to those who have no lord; listen excellent king, my name is Dhanapati’. JNHL, p. 109.
The name suggests both beautiful eyes (and therefore a beautiful woman) and clear sight, and its similarity to Sunetra in the *Harillis* may be intentional.


This ritual begins the long process of making a bride into the ‘half-body’ of her husband. Inden and Nicholas describe it as follows: ‘After bathing, the body of the groom . . . is anointed with a preparation of turmeric in oil. A portion of the preparation with which he has been anointed should then be sent to the bride . . . whose body in anointed with it after her bath. This action seals out undesirable substances from their bodies and begins the process of transforming their two bodies into one . . .’ Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 41.

The Erstwhile Bride and Her Winged Horse’, in Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal, trans. Tony K. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 149-71. His translation is from Manohar phasarar pala: satyanarayan pancali, 10th ed. (Kathai, Midnapur: Nihar Press, 1313 BS [1906]). The ‘heavily edited printed edition’ in turn appears to derive from Rasamay, Galakata phasyarar pala, of which there is a manuscript dated 1857 in Dhaka University Library. See ibid.,
Compare JNCM, p. 96a: ‘Candrakala understood Madab’s character, that his heart would not be turned away by the elephant-goad of anyone’s speech; she advised him, “Sit, settle yourself, and listen; do not be agitated.”’ Compare p. 119b, the description of his arrival at Sagar-Sangam: ‘That day, fasting, staying on the shore, feeling happiness, Madhab had taken up the renouncer’s garments. He sat the whole night, thinking of the moon-like face of Sulocana, and at dawn he quickly arose. He abandoned all hope. In his heart was only the desire to wed Sulocana. Wearing a garland of tūlsi, and recalling Hari with his lips, he composed the formal intention (for ritual suicide) in his heart.’

See Bir’bar’s reflections when she meets her erstwhile groom Vidyadhar, pp. 116b-117a: ‘He did the wedding rite of the First Sight (mukh candrika), but has not seen my face. I cannot forget this grief in my heart: being inclined to evil, I deceived him, and Fate has given me the fruit joined to that (action)’.

As Stewart comments about a similar text, the ambiguity of Bir’bar’s gender is
more easily represented in Jay’narayan’s text than in any English translation, because

Bengali third person singular pronouns are not gendered; see *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs*, p. 245, note 8.

82 JNCM, p. 110b.

83 JNCM, p. 111a.

84 Sulocana does so just before she attacks the rhinoceros; JNCM, p. 114a.

85 JNCM, p. 97a: *sahasete laksmi bhaje puruse/ narir sahas dhirete dose*.

86 JNCM, p. 101b.

87 JNCM, p. 108b. Neither ‘boldness’ nor ‘courage’ is used in the description of Pracesta’s ‘plundering’, which always is called ‘wicked’.

88 For example, JNCM, p. 96b, Candrakala to Madhab: ‘You are a god. I am a young woman, alone. By physical strength would you “cheat” one of the weaker sex?’

89 Candrakala’s speech ‘beguiles’ Madhab, when she describes the beauty of Sulocana, and the sin of having sex with a married woman (p. 97b). Pracesta’s abduction
of Sulocana ‘cheats’ Vidyadhar and by means of it Fate also ‘cheats’ Madhab (p. 110a).

Sulocana’s disguise as a male ‘tricks the horse with a fine trick’ (p. 112a).

90JNCM, p. 104b, Sulocana’s letter to Madhab: ‘I am not independent, what good does it do to think uselessly? There is no assembly for a bride’s choice (of a groom), that I might become independent. My father and mother are the masters (kartta) now, so when and by whom is anything possible? You know it, when a girl becomes independent’.

91JNCM, p. 117b.

92JNCM, p. 97a.

93JNCM, p. 116a.


Splitting the roles of a hero’s wives, by giving a hero one wife who enacts a perfectly submissive and obedient role, and another who is or becomes a valiant heroine is a familiar pattern in oral epics; and in Dharmamangal compare the two wives of Lau Sen, Kalinga and Kanara. Cf. Lindsey Harlan, The Goddesses’ Henchmen: Gender in Indian Hero Worship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and David L. Curley, ‘Battle and Self-Sacrifice in a Bengali Warrior’s Epic: Lau Sen’s Quest to be a Raja in Dharmamangal’, forthcoming.

JNCM, p. 138b.
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