

## A Historian's Introduction to Reading *Mangal-kabya*\*

### Preface

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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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 found 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 . . .}, one should expect to find, later in the myth, repetition of one or more similar series {a',b',c',d' . . .}, {a'',b'',c'',d'' . . .} 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'' . . .}, and {b, b', b'' . . .}, 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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'?<sup>10</sup> If not, how can we know when representations in the narrative were meant to be 'realistic'? Certainly, when *mangal-kavya* 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.<sup>11</sup>

*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.<sup>12</sup>

Taken together, the initial question, how should a historian read *mangal-kabya*, and the definition of the genre to which scholarly consensus has arrived, suggest three further questions. First, *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 *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. *Mangal-kabya* texts apparently were so named because they were thought to bring auspiciousness and well-being (*mangal*).<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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’.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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'.<sup>19</sup> 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'.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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*'.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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’.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

#### **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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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 *mangal-kabya* texts represented social groups who historically had joined in worship or who had resisted worship.<sup>30</sup> This method presupposed that, consciously or unconsciously, authors of *mangal-kabya* represented historical processes of conversion, a historicity for which we have little direct evidence. Still it seems reasonable to suppose that many *mangal-kabya* narratives accurately represent the reluctance of high status men to worship local deities associated with lower *jati*.

Two scholars recently have provided another approach to the relations between didactic and ameliorative purposes of *mangal-kabya*. Using Proppian terms of analysis, France Bhattacharya and Clint Seely independently have observed that the plots of many *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.<sup>31</sup> 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 *rajās*, '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?<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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-

1770) 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).<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> Different manuscript traditions for texts which became widely circulated might be studied to discover the influence of performance upon texts,<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

*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 *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.<sup>43</sup> 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 *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.<sup>44</sup> 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 a new version of Rama's epic in and for the Kali Age.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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 *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 *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 *mangal-kabya*, and they only begin to explore this rich topic.

**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.<sup>47</sup> Some of these ‘characteristics’ were required by the role of reciting texts as part of a ritual; for example, the introductory invocation of deities,<sup>48</sup> the ‘vigil recital’ (*jagaran pala*), performed throughout the night of the penultimate day of the ritual, and containing the climactic events of the narrative,<sup>49</sup> and on the final day of the ritual, a recital of the benefits of having listened to the whole performance.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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.<sup>52</sup> 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<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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 *Dharmamangal*. 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.<sup>56</sup> But Guriksa, who will be a go-between, is in fact is 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'.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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

sheep! You'll rub your limbs with sandalwood paste and wear the garland of  
delight. Lord, your mind has no words of its own! Remember mine!

Sen says, 'Ram, Ram!' and covers his ears.<sup>59</sup>

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*).<sup>60</sup> 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 '*qadl*', 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?*<sup>61</sup>

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.<sup>62</sup>

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*)<sup>63</sup>:

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?<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup>

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.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, we may come to suspect that even if Durbala had been caught, she might have been threatened but would not have been punished.<sup>68</sup> 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'.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> Hildebeitel 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'.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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.

**Story-telling, Persian 'Romances' and Comic Narratives**

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). I

acknowledge my indebtedness to Tony K. Stewart, who has translated several of these narratives and written a stimulating introduction to them.<sup>73</sup>

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.<sup>74</sup> 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.’<sup>75</sup> 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 ensorcell 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.<sup>76</sup>

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'.<sup>77</sup>

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.<sup>78</sup> 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'.<sup>79</sup>

We can add that comic fictions were taken into or created for the narratives of a number of other kinds of *mangal-kavya*. 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.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> At the same time comic narratives also were introduced into *mangal-kabya* composed outside of courtly settings for popular entertainment and worship.<sup>83</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *Journal of American Folklore*, 68 (1955): 428-44; reprinted with modifications in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobsen and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, 2 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 1: 206-31.

<sup>2</sup>Kabikankan Mukundaram Cakrabarti-biracita, *Candimangal: Dhanapati Upakhyān*, Bijanabihari Bhattacharya sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1966), p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Kabi Mukundaram-biracita, *Kabikankan-Candi*, pratham bhag, Srikumar Bandyopadhyay o Bisvapati Caudhuri sampadita, nutan samskaran (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1975), p. 362-63.

<sup>4</sup>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.

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<sup>5</sup>Asutos Bhattacharya, *Bamla Mangalakabyer Itihas*, paribardhita sastha samskaran (Kalikata, E. Mukharji ayand Kom. Praibhet limited, 1975), pp. 452-53 [hereafter cited as BMKI]; Sukumar Sen, *Bangalar Sahityer Itihas*, sastha samskaran (Kalikata: Istarn Pab'lisars, 1978), pratham khanda purbardha, pp. 508-09.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>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’.

<sup>9</sup>Mandakranta 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 Mariola Offredi (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 1: 157-66.

<sup>10</sup>Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal’, in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 517-18.

<sup>11</sup>In 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*,

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ed. with introduction by R.S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952). For an important criticism of the distinction, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

<sup>12</sup>Asit Bandyopadhyay, *Bamla Sahityer Itibrta*, 4 khanda, dvitiya khanda, *Caitanyayug* (Kalikata: Madarn Buk Ejensi Praibhet Li., 1962), p. 60; BMKI, p. 11; J.C. Ghosh, *Bengali Literature* (London: Curzon Press, 1976, 1st pub. 1948), pp. 32-4; Dušan Zbavitel, *Bengali Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), pp. 135, 156-59. In some disagreement with this consensus, Sukumar Sen, *Bangala Sahityer Itihas*, pratham khanda purbardha, pp. 111-13, emphasizes the performative dimensions of *mangal-kabya*, and therefore classifies them as '*pancali*' poems.

<sup>13</sup>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.

<sup>14</sup>For the influence of this work see Asit Bandyopadhyay, *Bamla Sahityer Itibrta*,

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dvitiya khanda, *Caitanyayug*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>15</sup>Dipesh 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.

<sup>16</sup>Gautam Bhadra, 'Itihase Smrti, Smrtite Itihas', *Bisvabharati Patrika* (Sraban-Asvin, 1401), pp. 134-43.

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

<sup>18</sup>Dinesacandra Sen, *Brhat Banga, 2 khanda* (Kal'kata: D'ej Pabalisim, 1993; 1<sup>st</sup> 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

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he thought Indians' genuine national artistic sensibilities were still alive. Cf. Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 127, 246-51.

<sup>19</sup>Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History*, pp. 157-61.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 674-77, 766.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 527-37, 674-83.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 528, 683.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 529.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. his comments on the 'sad history for Hindus' of the borrowing of Arabic and Persian words for administrative functions and articles of luxury; *Ibid.*, pp. 333-4.

<sup>25</sup>Dipesh Charabarty, 'Romantic Archives', p. 657.

<sup>26</sup>Aditya Behl, 'The Magic Doe: Desire and Narrative in a Hindavi Sufi Romance,

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circa 1503', in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, edited Richard M. Eaton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 181, 205.

<sup>27</sup>Behl, 'The Magic Doe', pp. 180-183, discussing Indian Sufi 'romances'.

<sup>28</sup>For a discussion of contrary examples see 'Lost Meanings and New Stories: *Candimangal* after British Dominance', in this volume.

<sup>29</sup>Plot functions of *mangal-kabya* as a class are described in BMKI, pp. 27-8.

<sup>30</sup>T.W. Clark, 'Evolution of Hinduism in Medieval Bengali Literature: Siva, Candi, Manasa', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 27,3 (1955), pp. 503-18.

<sup>31</sup>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

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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'.

<sup>32</sup>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*).

<sup>33</sup>BMKI, pp. 15-16, 40-41.

<sup>34</sup>For an invaluable study of the most contentious dates, see Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay, *Madhyayuger Bamla Sahityer Tathya o Kalakram* (Kalikata: Bharati Buk St al, 1993).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahabharata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 32-46.

<sup>36</sup>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.

<sup>37</sup>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

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and the Art of Printing: The Transmission and Propagation of the Myth of the Goddess of Smallpox in Rural West Bengal', all in Ralph W. Nicholas, *Fruits of Worship*, pp. 105-211.

<sup>38</sup>Stuart H. Blackburn and Joyce B. Flueckiger, 'Introduction', in *Oral Epics in India*, edited by Stuart H. Blackburn, Peter J. Claus, Joyce B. Flueckiger, and Susan S. Wadley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 1-11.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Ramya Sreenivasan's analysis of the different audiences addressed by different manuscript traditions of the *Padmavatī*; see 'Sufi tale and Rajput heroism in Medieval Avadh', in *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in Northern India ca. 1500-1900*, forthcoming.

<sup>40</sup>Sukumar Sen, 'Bhumika', Kabikankan Mukunda-biracita, *Candimangal*, Sukumar Sen sampadita (Naya Dilli: Sahitya Akademi, 1975), p. 5 (hereafter this edition is cited as CM). This edition, and Mukundaram Cakrabarti biracita, *Candimangal*, bhumika o sampadana Pancanan Mandal (Kal'kata: Bharabi, 1992) give the longer version; the

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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.

<sup>41</sup>Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History*, pp. 346-7, 682-3.

<sup>42</sup>David L. Curley, 'Battle and Self-Sacrifice in a Bengali Warrior's Epic: Lau Sen's Quest to be a *Raja* in *Dharmamangal*', forthcoming.

<sup>43</sup>See 'Marriage, Honor, Agency, and Trials by Ordeal: Women's Gender Roles in *Candimangal*', in this volume.

<sup>44</sup>See 'Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier: Kalketu's story in Mukunda's *Candimangal*', in this volume.

<sup>45</sup>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

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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, *SriDharmmamangal*, Piyus Kanti Mahapatra sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1962), p. 548.

<sup>46</sup>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.

<sup>47</sup>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', pp. 330-31.

<sup>48</sup>BMKI, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup>Sukumar Sen, 'Bhumika', CM, pp. 18-19.

<sup>50</sup>BMKI, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup>BMKI, pp. 29, 42-3.

<sup>52</sup>BMKI, p. 31; Seely, 'Sacred and Secular Legitimation', p. 331.

<sup>53</sup>BMKI, pp. 30-31, 34-40, 44-5.

<sup>54</sup>BMKI, pp. 40-41, 49.

<sup>55</sup>BMKI, pp. 32, 41-2.

<sup>56</sup>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.

<sup>57</sup>David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 223, 236-7.

<sup>58</sup>Ghanaram Cakrabarti, *SriDharmmamangal*, pp. 260-74.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 286-8.

<sup>60</sup>Saqi Must'ad Khan, *Maasir-I-'Alamgir: A History of the Emperor Aurangzib-'Alamgir* (Reign 1658-1707), translated by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1947), p. 14; John F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India*, I.5, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 174-5.

<sup>61</sup>Ghanaram Cakrabarti, *SriDharmmamangal*, p. 287.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 291-303.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>66</sup> CM, *pad* 272, p. 155.

<sup>67</sup> CM, *pad* 273, p. 155.

<sup>68</sup> 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.

<sup>69</sup> Alf Hildebeitel, *Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits: Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44-7.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952). See especially the sections contrasting Bentham, Marx and Carlyle, pp. 90-123, and 'A Metaphorical View of Hierarchy', pp. 137-42.

<sup>71</sup> Hildebeitel, *Draupadi among Rajputs*, p.46. The terms quoted in this passage are taken from Homi Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

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<sup>72</sup>For an example, see 'Lost Meanings and New Stories: *Candimangal* after British Dominance', in this volume.

<sup>73</sup>Tony K. Stewart, *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>74</sup>Stewart, 'Introduction', *Fabulous Females*, p. 5, citing Jonathan Culler, 'Presupposition and Intertextuality', *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976): 1380-96.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42, citing Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Gerrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978).

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>80</sup>Dimock, *Thief of Love*, pp. 19-28.

<sup>81</sup>For examples in the history of *Candimangal* texts, see 'Lost Meanings and New Stories: *Candimangal* after British Dominance', in this volume.

<sup>82</sup>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.

<sup>83</sup>Stewart, 'Introduction', *Fabulous Females*, pp. 7-9.