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EPIC AND COUNTER-EPIC IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

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MUSLIM IMPACT AND RULE in India generated two literary growths: a Muslim epic of conquest, and a Hindu epic of resistance and of psychological rejection. The two literary growths were planted in two different cultures; in two different languages, Persian and Hindi; in two mutually exclusive religious, cultural and historical attitudes each confronting the other in aggressive hostility. Each of these two literary growths developed in mutual ignorance of the other; and with the rare exception of eclectic intellectuals like Abu'l Fazl in the 16th century, or the 17th century Urdu poets of the Southern courts of Bijāpūr and Golconda, their readership hardly ever converged. The Muslim and the Hindu epics of Medieval India can therefore hardly be described as "epic" and "counter-epic" in the context of a direct relationship of challenge and response. Yet one of them was rooted in the challenge asserting the glory of Muslim presence, and the other in the response repudiating it. In this sense one may perhaps use the term "counter-epic" for the Hindi heroic poetry of Medieval India as I have done. Also, the contrast between these two literary growths is not confined to what is classified in Western literatures as full-blown epic, but to the epic material in general.

Muslim Epic of Conquest

The Muslim epic of the conquest of India grew out of the *qaṣīdas* (panegyrics) written on the occasions of Indian campaigns by the Ghaznawid poets at Ghazna and Lahore, and later by the poets of the Sultanate like Nāṣirī and Sangrīza in Delhi. Amīr Khusrau's *Miftāḥ al-futūḥ*¹ is the first war-epic (*razmīya*) written in Muslim India. It celebrates four victories of Jalāl al-dīn Khaljī (1290-96), two of them against Hindu rājās, one against the Mongols and one against a rebel Muslim governor.

The next historical narrative of Amīr Khusrau, *Khazā'in al-futūḥ*,² was written in prose, but the

¹ In Amīr Khusrau, *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl*, B. M. Add. 25,807.

² Amīr Khusrau, *Khazā'in al-futūḥ*, Eng. tr. by M. Habib, Madras 1931.

epic style and formulae were retained as well as the thematic emphasis on the glorification of the Turk against the Hindu. The concentration is on style in the tradition of Ḥasan Nizāmī's *Tāj al-ma'āthir* rather than on history;³ and the stylist's effort to make use of the artifices of prose composition Khusrau had recommended in his treatise on rhetoric, *I'jāz-i Khusrawī*,⁴ is manifest throughout the work as a continuous *tour de force*, unfolding itself in extended images, parallelisms, stylistic deductions, conceits and analogies. For instance:

"... the Rāi became *hot* at their words and thus disclosed the *fire* that *burnt* in his breast: 'Our old and respectable *fire-worshippers*, the *lamps* of whose minds *burnt bright*, have said clearly that never can the Hindu stay before the Turk, or *fire* before water.'⁵

In the *Khazā'in al-futūḥ*, the glorification of the Khaljī conquest of the Deccan exults in irrepressible bravado of iconoclasm:

"There were many capitals of the *devs* (meaning Hindu gods or demons) where Satanism had prospered from the earliest times, and where far from the pale of Islam, the Devil in the course of ages had hatched his eggs and made his worship compulsory on the followers of the idols; but now with a sincere motive the Emperor removed these symbols of infidelity . . . to dispel the contamination of false belief from those places through the muezzin's call and the establishment of prayers."⁶

Read as epic all this makes sense as a historical attitude rather than as history. Historically, as the English translator of the epic points out, the "Deccan expeditions had no clear object—the acquisition of horses, elephants, jewels, gold, and silver . . . Of course the name of God was solemnly pronounced. The invaders built mosques wherever they went . . . This was their habit.

³ Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amīr Khusrau*, Calcutta 1935, 223.

⁴ Amīr Khusrau, *I'jāz-i Khusrawī*, Lucknow 1876, *passim*.

⁵ Eng. tr. and italics of Wahid Mirza, *op. cit.*, 224.

⁶ *Khazā'in* (Habib), 49.

Of anything like an idealistic, even a fanatic religious mission the Deccan invasions were completely innocent.”⁷

And yet as an unconscious rival of the Hammīr epic, the *Khazā'in al-futūh* offers some interesting parallelisms. It boasts, perhaps as unhistorically as the Hammīr cycle, of the massacre of thirty thousand Hindus at Chitore,⁸ and describes the self-destruction of Rājput warriors and self-immolation of Hindu women with a gesture of heroic contempt: “Everyone threw himself, with his wife and children, upon the flames and departed to hell.”⁹

Amīr Khusrāu's next epic 'Āshīqa¹⁰ was courtly (*bazmīya*) in theme, relating the romantic story of the love of 'Alā al-dīn Khaljī's son Khizar Khān for the Hindu princess of Gujarat, Dewal Rānī, setting the pattern for a recognised type of Indian Muslim love story in which the hero is invariably a Muslim and the heroine a Hindu, asserting the conqueror's right not only to love but to be loved, in an attitude of romantic bravado which was antithetical to the more hysterical sexual jealousy in the medieval Hindu legend. The atmosphere and sensuous reactions in this beautiful epic of Khusrāu are indigenous, quite unlike the imagic atmosphere and sensuous appraisal in the Persian *ghazal* written in India; but the glorification of India is there as a consequence of the Muslim supremacy. “Happy Hindustan, the splendour of Religion, where the (Muslim holy) Law finds perfect honour and security . . . The strong men of Hind have been trodden under foot and are ready to pay tribute. Islam is triumphant and idolatry is subdued.”¹¹

Amīr Khusrāu's *Nuh Sipīhr*,¹² combining stylistic variations and elements of the war epic and the court epic, was a command performance, written to celebrate the victories of Quṭb al-dīn Mubārak Khaljī and his general Khusrāu Khān in the Deccan, before the latter murdered his master and turned apostate in 1320. The thematic em-

phasis is again on the Turk's destiny as conqueror who is decreed to hold the Hindu in subjugation, though the commander of the Turkish army in this case was a convert from Hinduism.

Amīr Khusrāu's last epic narrative *Tughluq Nāma*, had a real epic scope, the re-establishment of Muslim power in India by his hero Ghiyāth al-dīn Tughluq and the defeat he inflicted on the apostate Khusrāu Khān; but though the poem is full of religio-political fervor, it lacks in epic magnitude. Amīr Khusrāu, now old and failing in genius, concentrates on the historical narrative and the equation of incident with image, but the opportunities of heroic emphasis are missed.

'Īsāmī's *Futūh al-Salāṭīn* is directly in the tradition of Amīr Khusrāu, though it claims inspiration from Nizāmī and Firdawsī.¹³ Its heroic emphasis is traditional, glorifying the rôle of Maḥmūd of Ghazna who made the Muslim conquest of India possible.¹⁴ It emphasizes throughout the epical superiority of the Turk over the Hindu.¹⁵ Essentially a historical narrative, told as a *razmīya* (war epic), it hardly ever misses a chance to weave in the *bazmīya* (court epic) elements of romance, such as the fanciful account of a Rājput princess's representation to Muḥammad bin Sām Ghūrī,¹⁶ or the famous love story of Khizar Khān and Dewal Rānī.¹⁷

Versified history, with epic elements fading out, continued to be written in Muslim India until the middle of the 17th century. Āzurī, a poet who had earlier been connected with the court of Shāh Ruḳh in Central Asia, took service under Aḥmad Shāh Bahmanī (1422-36) and composed the *Bahman Nāma*, a history of the Bahmanids in verse. The last considerable effort in this genre was Muḥammad Jān Qudsi's verse rendering of the *Bādshāh Nāma* of Lāhorī during the reign of Shāh Jahān.¹⁸

The motif of a war waged to protect or avenge the honor of Muslim women, similar to the motif “rape of Helen” in Greek epic and historiography, originally an epic theme, lends itself again and again to Muslim historiography in India. The

⁷ Habib, Introduction to *ibid.* xv; cf. N. Venkataramanayya, *Early Muslim Expansion in South India*, Madras 1942.

⁸ *Khazā'in*, 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*; cf. M. L. Mathur, “Chitor and 'Ala-ud-din Khalji,” *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Calcutta, XXVII (1951), 52-69.

¹⁰ Amīr Khusrāu, 'Āshīqa in B. M. Add. 25, 807.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, tr. from Elliot, III, 546.

¹² Amīr Khusrāu, *Nuh Sipīhr*, ed. by Wahid Mirza, Calcutta 1950.

¹³ 'Īsāmī, *Futūh al-salāṭīn*, ed. by A. S. Usha, Madras 1943, 17, 114.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 230-6, and *passim*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 322-33.

¹⁸ Ghulam 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Sarv-i Āzād*, I. O. Pers. Ms. 1852 (Éthé) 683, ff. 29b-30a.

official *casus belli* in the case of Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf's expedition against Sind reads in al-Balādhurī very much like the first few pages of Herodotus; the expedition was claimed to have been in response to the appeal of Muslim women captured by the pirates of Debal, and since their release could not be obtained by negotiation, it was accomplished by war and conquest.¹⁹ One of the expeditions of Sulṭān Bahādur of Gujarat (1526-37) against a Hindu chieftain was to avenge the dishonor of two hundred and fifty Muslim women whom he had captured. Sher Shāh Sūrī's expedition against Pūran Mal, the Rājā of Rāisīn, was undertaken on the complaint of some Muslim women: "he has slain our husbands, and our daughters he has enslaved and made dancing girls of them." Pūran Mal was defeated and slain and his daughter was given away by Sher Shāh to some wandering minstrels who might make her dance in the bazars.²⁰

Outside the epic proper, the impressions of Central Asian Muslims freshly arrived in India and recorded by them in historical or autobiographical writing have something of that interesting raw material of antagonism on which epic generally draws. Kamāl al-dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq, the ambassador of Shāh Rukh to the Hindu courts of the Deccan, regarded the Hindus at first sight as a curious tribe "neither men nor demons," nightmarish in appearance, almost naked, incomprehensibly matriarchal and, of course, idolatrous.²¹ It was only after he had lived for some time in the highly cultured atmosphere of Vijayanagar that he discovered the beauty and the symmetry of Hindu civilization and paid it glowing tribute.²² More familiar is the damning tribute of Bābur:

"Hindustan is a country that has few pleasures to recommend it. The people are not handsome. They have no idea of the charms of friendly society, of friendly mixing together, or of familiar intercourse. They have no genius, no comprehension of mind, no politeness of manners, no kindness or fellow-feeling, no ingenuity or mechanical invention in planning or executing their handicraft works, no skill or knowledge in design or architecture; they have no horses, no good flesh, no grapes or muskmelons, no good fruits, no ice or cold water, no good

food or bread in their bazaars, no baths or colleges, no candles, no torches, not a candlestick."²³

Hindu Epic of Resistance

The main intellectual resistance to the Muslim power did not come from the Brahmins. In the beginning they believed in Medhātithī's thesis: "Āryavarta was so called because the Āryas sprang up in it again and again. Even if it was overrun by the *mlechchas*, they could never abide there for long."²⁴ The faith in this thesis dwindled as the Muslim power came to be more and more firmly entrenched in the sub-continent. "With the Yamīnīs, the successors of Mahmūd, continues K. M. Munshi "firmly established in the Punjab, the *Āryāvarta-consciousness* lost whatever significance it had. The belief that *Chaturvarṇya* was a divinely appointed universal order, characteristic of the land, was shaken; for now a ruling race in the country not only stood outside it, but held it in contempt and sought its destruction."²⁵ Hindu reformers passed over the question of Muslim domination in silence as the fruit of *karma* without making suggestions for its overthrow.²⁶

The literary reaction that echoed the psychology of Hindu resistance and reaction was popular rather than learned. It was mainly represented by the bardic tradition of Rājputāna and in such works as *Prithvī Rāj Rāsō*, the epics of the Hamīr cycle and the history of Bundelkhand composed by Lāl in the 17th century. This bardic literature embodies tales of Rājput struggle against the Muslims as well as internecine chivalric warfare among the Rājputs themselves as specifically treated in the *Ālha Khand*.

Of these the *Prithvī Rāj Rāsō* is attributed to the authorship of Chānd Bardai, Prithvī Rāj's minister and poet-laureate, who is reported to have died fighting against the Muslim invaders in 1193. It might be assumed that the nucleus of the poem was composed soon after the events it narrates, but additions, interpolations and polishing continued until well into the 17th century as the epic has about ten per cent Persian vocabulary

²³ Bābur, *Tuzuk* (Leyden and Erskine), II, 241; cf. *ibid.*, II, 201.

²⁴ Medhātithi on Manu, II, 22, quoted by K. M. Munshi, Introduction to R. C. Majumdar (ed.) *The Struggle for Empire*, Bombay 1957, x.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii.

²⁶ K. M. Ashraf, "Life and Conditions of the People of Hindūstān (1200-1550)," *JRASB*, Calcutta 1935, Third Series, I, 142.

¹⁹ al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, Cairo 1932, 423.

²⁰ 'Abbās Khān Sarwānī, *Tārikh-i Sher Shāhi*, relevant section tr. in Elliot, IV, 402-3.

²¹ Kamāl al-dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Maṭl' al-Sa'dayn*, B. M. Or. 1291, ff. 204b-205a.

²² *Ibid.*, ff. 208a-210b.

and mentions the use of artillery.²⁷ As such its anti-Muslim epic-content goes far beyond the tragic situation of a single historical event, and weaves around it an accumulated arena of heroic resistance spreading over several centuries and anachronistically telescoping within the time and space of Ghūrīd invasions the eponymous representatives of later ethnic groups of Muslim invaders, as the names of Muslim generals in the epic like Tātār Khān, Khān Mongol Lalarī, Khān Khurāsānī Babbar, Ūzbek Khan and Khildai (Khālji? Ghilzai?) suggest. The poem abounds in heroic similes of considerable emotion and sensitiveness:

“The warriors in columns are like a line of devotees of the Yogā; the comparison the poet has devised. Abandoning error, illusion, passion, they run upon the gleaming edge (of the sword) as to a place of pilgrimage.”²⁸

“As the infidels with a rush greedily fall (upon the Hindus) they resemble pigeons, which, turning a circuit settle down.”²⁹

“The Hindus, catching the *mlechchas* by their hands whirled them round, just as Bhīma did to the elephants; (but) the comparison does not do justice (to the fight).”³⁰

Another epic of the Prithvī Rāj cycle is *Prithvī-rājā Vijaya*, probably composed by the Kashmiri Jayānaka between 1178 and 1200.³¹ The poem accuses Muslims of confiscating charity lands and oppressing Brahmins. The *Turushka* (Turkish) women are condemned for bathing in the sacred lake while in their menses.³² The epic seems to confuse Maḥmūd of Ghazna's invasion of Gujarat with the Ghūrīd invasion of Ajmer. The victory of a Hindu hero Anorāja is celebrated who compelled the defeated Turks to retreat, who in their plight in the desert had to drink the blood of their horses to survive,³³—obviously an exaggerated echo of the plight of Maḥmūd's army in the desert of Sind after his sack of Somnāt. Equally confused in historical perspective is the joyful news of the defeat of Ghūrī at the hands of the “Rājā of

Gujarat,”³⁴ while Prithvīrāj was planning to destroy Ghūrī and the *mlechchas*, “the fiends in the shape of men.”

The unhistorical epic legend³⁵ of Rājā Hammīr Dev's (c. 1300) gallant fight against 'Alā al-dīn Khālji, and his heroic death, was celebrated in bardic literature of several Indian languages.³⁶ Chief among these are *Hammīr Rāyasa*, and *Hammīr Kāvya* by Sarang Dhar, a bard of mid-fourteenth century.

In the middle of the 15th century Naya-chandra Sūrī rewrote this legend in his *Hammīr Mahākāvya*. Though a Jain, he invoked the blessings of Hindu gods on this epic, because of its Hindu chivalric theme and because of its anti-Muslim content.³⁷ The epic weaves in the heroic history of the Chauhāns from Prithvī Rāj to Hammīr, and has a section of Prithvī Rāj's exploits. Rājput rājās gather in gloom round Prithvī Rāj to tell him of Ghūrī who is accused of burning Hindu cities and defiling Hindu women, and who is said to have been sent to this earth “for the extirpation of warrior caste.”³⁸ Then follows the legend of Prithvī Rāj taking Muḥammad bin Sām Ghūrī a prisoner in Multan, presumably after his victory at Tarā'in, and later setting him free. Unable to defeat Prithvī Rāj in open battle, the Ghūrī invader has recourse to a ruse; he sends some Muslim minstrels in disguise in the Rājput army, who enchant the Rājput hero's horse Nātyarambha with their music, and Prithvī Rāj is himself so enthralled with the dancing of his horse that he forgets to fight and is taken prisoner by the Muslims.³⁹

Another anti-Muslim hero in Nayachandra Sūrī's epic is Viranarāyana who turns down Jalāl al-dīn Khālji's offer of alliance,—alliance with the *mlechchas* would have been disgraceful betrayal of Rājput chivalry—as also does Vāgbhata who seizes the throne of Mālwa, and whose son Jaitra Singh has a beautiful queen Hīrā Devī, who is at times “possessed with a desire to bathe herself in the blood of Muslims” during her pregnancy, “a desire which was often gratified by her husband.”⁴⁰ The

²⁷ Maḥmūd Sherānī, *Punjab meñ Urdū*, Lahore 1930, 122-3.

²⁸ Chānd Bardai, *Prithvīrāj Rāsō*, Part II, Vol. I, ed. and tr. by A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, Calcutta 1886, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

³¹ Har Bilas Sarda, “The Prithvīrāja Vijaya,” in *JRAS* 1913, I, 260-1.

³² *Ibid.*, 262.

³³ *Ibid.*, 273.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 279-80.

³⁵ Mathur, *op. cit.*, 52-7.

³⁶ G. A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, Calcutta 1889, 6.

³⁷ Nayachandra Sūrī, *Hammīra Mahākāvya*, ed. by N. J. Kirtane, Bombay 1879, 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

child she gave birth to was the last great hero of the Rājput epic, Hammīr.

The Hammīr epic narrates the legendary story of 'Alā al-dīn Khaljī's expeditions against Hammīr, the Rājā of Ranthambore, who had ceased to pay tribute to the Muslim Sultan. Bhoja, a formerly vanquished foe of Hammīr takes refuge in 'Alā al-dīn's court. The first Khaljī expedition led by the Sultan's brother Ulugh Khān wins an inconclusive victory because of the treachery of a Rājput noble, the second is defeated by the Rājputs, who also capture some Muslim women who are forced "to sell buttermilk in every town they pass through."⁴¹ Significantly, the Mongols are in alliance with Hammīr against the Khaljī Sultan, though Hindu chiefs all over India ally themselves with him against Hammīr.⁴² 'Alā al-dīn offers three alternative terms for peace to Hammīr, to resume paying tribute, or to hand over the four Mongol chiefs who had taken refuge with him or to give his daughter to 'Alā al-dīn in marriage. As Hammīr rejects all the three alternatives, 'Alā al-dīn personally undertakes the siege of Ranthambore. One of 'Alā al-dīn's (Hindu) archers kills by an arrow a Hindu courtesan Rādhā Devī defiantly dancing on the wall of the fort, but Hammīr gallantly forbids his archers to shoot at 'Alā al-dīn when they have a chance. Finally 'Alā al-dīn wins over Hammīr's minister Ratipāla, by permitting him to seduce his younger sister—humiliation of Muslim women being a recurring theme in the Hammīr cycle of epics. Ratipāla as well as Hammīr's wives urge bestowing the hand of Hammīr's daughter on 'Alā al-dīn to put an end to the hostilities, and the girl herself requests her father to "cast her away like a piece of broken glass," but Hammīr regards giving his daughter away to an unclean *mlechcha* "as loathsome as prolonging existence by living on his own flesh." Hammīr's womenfolk, including his daughter, throw themselves into flames to escape dishonor at the hands of the Muslims, and Hammīr himself performing *jawhar* throws himself on the Muslim army, but "disdaining to fall with anything like life into the enemy's hands, he severed, with one last effort, his head from his body with his own hands."⁴³

Neither this,⁴⁴ nor other legends about Hammīr

have any sound historical foundation. Another equally fantastic Rājput heroic legend describes Muḥammad bin Tughluq's defeat and imprisonment at the hands of Hammīr.⁴⁵

On the other hand the Rājput epic of inter-cine chivalry is generally neutral to the Muslims. An outstanding instance of this genre is *Ālha Khand*,⁴⁶ which belongs to the counter-Prithvī Rāj cycle of Qannūj and Mahōba, and celebrates in Bundeli Hindi the exploits of Ālha and Uden, heroes of Mahōba. Muslim characters in this epic are merely decorative. Prithvī Rāj is confused with the Bādshāh in Delhi. Though the central theme of the epic, the rivalry between Prithvī Rāj and Jay Chand, is based on a twelfth century legend, additions seem to have been made by the reciting bards until as late as the middle of the 18th century, for there is a reference to the incursions of (Aḥmad Shāh) Durrānī.⁴⁷ Toward Muslims the epic occasionally shows an attitude of reconciliation, which had its historical basis in the assimilation of Rājput chivalry in the composite machinery of the Mughal Empire by Akbar.

The 9th century *Khumān Raysa* was recast in the 16th century, devoting a large section to 'Alā al-dīn Khaljī's sack of Chitore.⁴⁸ This and the Hammīr cycle are the closest parallels and probably relative sources of Malik Muḥammad Jāisī's *Padmāvat* (1540). The case of Jāisī in the history of anti-Muslim Hindu epic is a remarkable one. Himself a practising Muslim, saturated in the slightly heterodox rural version of the Chishtī Sūfī order as represented by his opium-eating preceptor Shāh Mubārak Bodlā, Jāisī seems to have had some familiarity with the Vedānta, though much less with the Purānas; shows strong influences of Kabīr, and an interest, extraordinary even for a Muslim living among the Hindus in a village like Amethī, in Hindu lore.⁴⁹ His patron Jagat Dev was a Hindu ally of Sher Shāh Sūrī. Among his friends was a Hindu musician Gandharv Rāj; and

⁴⁵ Mahdi Hasan, *Rise and Fall of Muhammad bin Tughlaq*, London 1938, 97-100.

⁴⁶ *Ālha-Khand*, Eng. tr. by W. Waterfield and G. A. Grierson (*The Lay of Ālha*) London 1923.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴⁸ Grierson, 1-2.

⁴⁹ Malik Muḥammad Jāisī, *Padmāvatī*, ed. by G. A. Grierson and Sudhārka Dvivedi, Intro. I; Jāisī, *Granthāvalī, Padmāvat, Akhrāvat and Akhrī Kalām*, ed. by Ram Chandra Shukla, Allahabad 1935, 49; Kalbi Mustafā, *Malik Muḥammad Jāisī*, Delhi 1941, 29-30, 34-7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35-6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29-47.

⁴⁴ Mathur, *op. cit.*

he had studied Sanskrit grammar and rhetoric under Hindu pandits.⁵⁰ Under all these influences and away from the Muslim-orientated atmosphere of cities, where the Muslim élite was developing an insular anti-Hindu literature, Jāisī accepted in all simplicity, at a non-sectarian level, the bardic legends of Rājput heroism against ‘Alā al-dīn at their face value, and moulded his Ratan Sen on Hammīr.

The story of Jāisī’s *Padmāvat* falls in two parts. The first deals with the love-quest of Ratan Sen for Padminī (Padmāvati) the princess of Ceylon, inspired by the pandering wisdom of Hīrāman the parrot (allegorically the wise preceptor, the Hindu ‘gurū,’ the Sūfī ‘pīr’), and with the adventures that befall the hero on his return journey to his capital Chitore. This part of the story is straightforward romance, without any epic element; and the legend of the wise parrot was popular in the oral tradition of Avadh,⁵¹ as well as in Sanskrit anti-feminist literary story. This early part borrows elements from such earlier versions as Udayana’s *Padmāvati* and the *Ratnāvati*.⁵²

The second part of Jāisī’s poem assumes the form of an epic with an allegorical clue. Raghu Chītan Pandit (the devil), a minister of the court of Ratan Sen (epically sublimated Hammīr, allegorically the human mind or soul) disgraced by his master for sorcery, tempts ‘Alā al-dīn (epically counter-hero, allegorically *māyā*, *majāz* (unreal) of the Sūfīs, illusion) with jewelled bracelet (symbol) and description of the beauty of Padmāvati (epically the Hindu heroine personifying honor, allegorically ‘intelligence’ or *fīrāsāt*, regarded as a supreme merit for a monarch and his courtiers in Muslim political philosophy). ‘Alā al-dīn demands of Ratan Sen to surrender Padmāvati, and when the hero refuses indignantly the counter-hero besieges the fort of Chitore (allegorically human body), but because of the Mongol pressure (an element also borrowed from the Hammīr cycle) negotiates for truce, and Ratan Sen (mind), against the advice of his trusted generals Bādāl and Gorā (heroic “twins” as Ālha and Uden in *Ālha Khand*) entertains ‘Alā al-dīn (illusion) who sees the reflection of Padmāvati (intelligence) in a mirror, falls in love with her and takes Ratan Sen prisoner by a treacherous

ruse. Gorā and Bādāl enter the imperial fort of Delhi by a counter-ruse (which is a parallel to the “Trojan horse” motif) and rescue Ratan Sen (mind), who returns to Chitore and fights against Deopāl (character and episode of unestablished allegorical significance, borrowed from the cycles of Rājput internecine chivalry) who had insulted Padmāvati in his absence. Ratan Sen kills Deopāl but himself receives a mortal wound. His (mind’s) two consorts, Padmāvati (intelligence) and Nāgmatī (world chore) burn themselves to ashes on his funeral pyre. ‘Alā al-dīn (illusion) arrives and storms Chitore (body) only to find Padmāvati (intelligence) reduced to ashes with Ratan Sen (the mind). This allegorical epic of Rājput chivalry, written by a Muslim, ends with an anti-Islamic finale: “and Chitore became Islam.”

As the author is a Muslim, the array and might of the Turks is not belittled, though his sympathy lies with the Rājputs. He makes an open reference to Hammīr,⁵³ sees in the Rājput struggle something of the epic grandeur of Mahābhārata⁵⁴ and quotes without contradiction Gorā and Bādāl’s version of the inherent treachery of the Turks.⁵⁵ Much more remarkable is his complete self-identification with the sense of tragic intent in a Rājput epic-theme, and its view of his own culture and religion; for the outwardly simple phrase ‘Chitore became Islam’ signifies, in its allegorical equation, the unsubstantial victory of illusion.

Historically, the story of ‘Alā al-dīn K̄haljī’s love and pursuit of Padmāvati is not related by any Muslim historian before Abu’l Fazl, who has borrowed it from Jāisī⁵⁶ or from other cognate Rājput legends. None of the historians of the Sultanate mentions it, not even ‘Iṣāmī who hardly ever misses a chance to introduce romantic material, or K̄husrau who might have found in the story a theme more interesting than that of K̄hizar K̄hān’s love for Dewal Rānī.

An examination of the historical material of Jāisī’s allegorical epic yields interesting results.⁵⁷ Ratan Sen, (1527-32) the Rānā of Chitore, was a contemporary not of ‘Alā al-dīn K̄haljī, but of

⁵⁰ Grierson, introduction to his edition of *Padmāvat*, 2. Calcutta 1944, 287.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 361.

⁵² *Ibid*, 350.

⁵³ Kalb-i Mustafā, 105.

⁵⁴ For details see Ihtishām al-Ḥaqq, *Afsāna-i Padminī*, Delhi 1939; K. S. Lal, “The Myth of Rānī Padminī and ‘Alā-ud-dīn K̄haljī,” *Annual Bulletin of the Nagpur Historical Society*, I, 1946.

⁵⁰ Grierson, introduction to his edition of *Padmāvat*, 2.

⁵¹ Kalb-i Mustafā, 100.

⁵² Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, 18.

Jāisī himself and of Sher Shāh Sūrī.⁵⁸ The ruse of warriors entering an enemy fort in women's palanquins, though a motif paralleled in epic and romance, had also some historical basis as it was used by Sher Shāh to capture the fort of Rohtās.⁵⁹ In 1531, nine years before the composition of *Padmāvat*, a case of mass *satī* by Rājput noblewomen had occurred in a Rājput fort sacked by Sultan Bahādur of Gujarat to avenge the dishonor of two hundred and fifty Muslim women held captive in that fort.⁶⁰ There might have been a conscious or unconscious confounding in Jāisī's mind of 'Alā al-dīn Khaljī with Ghiyāth al-dīn Khaljī of Mālwa (1469-1500) who had a roving eye, and is reported to have undertaken the quest of Padminī, not a particular Rājput princess, but the ideal type of woman according to Hindu erotology.⁶¹ Ghiyāth al-dīn Khaljī, according to a Hindu inscription in the Udaipur area, was defeated in battle in 1488 by a Rājput chieftain Bādāl-Gorā,⁶² multiplied by Jāisī into twins. It therefore seems that Jāisī, or possibly the transmitters through whom the changed version of the Hammīr legend reached him, incorporated several near-contemporary historical or quasi-historical episodes in the original legend. Jāisī himself confesses at the end: "I have made up the story and related it."

In Jāisī's legend 'Alā al-dīn Khaljī, the counter-hero is not exactly the villain of the piece; his imperial title is acknowledged, and though his unchaste love for *Padmāvati* is condemned, much of the Muslim tradition favorable to him has been woven in and he is complimented as a righteous and noble Sultān.⁶³ On the whole the allegory is loose and the epic strain second-hand and subordinated to the didactic. Jāisī's real intention seems to be to tell a good story which would appeal to his fellow-villagers, the large majority of whom were Hindus.

Long before the composition of *Padmāvat* by a Muslim, Hindu secondary epic occasionally adjusted itself to eclecticism as in the case of *Vidyapati Thakur's Purusha Pariksha*, which tells of

Hindu rājas coming to the aid of Muḥammad bin Tughluq against a fellow-Hindu *rājā* and *Kāfūr*.⁶⁴

The idealisation of Hindu women who preferred death to the embraces, conjugal or otherwise, of Muslims passed on from Rājput epic to popular song in other areas such as Bihar.⁶⁵ Sexual hostility produced on the popular Hindu mind curious juxtapositions such as the one describing Akbar as the illegitimate son of the Hindu poet Narharī Sahay, who was given, according to the legend, Choli Begum (The Lady Brassiere), a (non-existent) wife of Humāyūn, as a gift by Sher Shāh.⁶⁶

Anti-Muslim secondary epic burst into boiling fury in Maharāshtra, after Aurangzeb's reversal of Akbar's tolerant policies, especially in the *Granthāvalī* of Kavi Bhūshan whose idealisation of Shivājī as a hero has little in common with the tragic heroism of Rājput epic and is much more intensely religious.⁶⁷ It formulates the epic of revival, not of resistance: "The Muslims have destroyed all our temples; they are hoisting 'Alī's (Allāh's?) flag everywhere; rājas have fled; everywhere one sees (Muslim) *pīrs* (saints), and *payghambars* (prophets), nowhere Hindu *sants* and *sādhūs*; Kāshī has lost its splendor and there are mosques in Mathura. If there were no Shivājī everyone would have been circumcised."⁶⁸ According to Kavi Bhūshan Aurangzeb is the incarnation of Kumbhkarān (elder brother of *Rāmāyana's* villain Rāvana).⁶⁹ Shivājī is his antithesis. He is the arch-hunter, who chases Mughal generals who are like storks, Mughal amīrs who are like peacocks, Bangash Pathāns who are like herons, Balūchīs who are like ducks, whereas the horses of the Maratha hunter are like hawks.⁷⁰ The epic continues with obvious self-satisfaction: "The goddess Kālī has become fat eating the heads of the pig-tailless Muslims."⁷¹

⁶⁴ Maheshwar Prasad, *Purusha Pariksha of Vidyapati*, 20 et sq.

⁶⁵ G. A. Grierson, "The Popular Literature of Northern India," *BSOS*, I/3 (1920), 97-100.

⁶⁶ Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, 38-9.

⁶⁷ Kavi Bhūshan, *Granthāvalī*, Lahore 1937, 312-3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 310-11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 313-4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 347.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 344.

⁵⁸ Kalb-i Muṣṭafā, 111.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 112-3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 113.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 114-5.

⁶² *Ibid*, 116.

⁶³ Shirreff, 270-1.