The Padmavat and Nal-Daman Transcending Hindu-Muslim Categories and Challenging Contemporary Understanding of Religious Boundaries

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The Padmavat and Nal-Daman Transcending Hindu-Muslim Categories and Challenging Contemporary Understanding of Religious Boundaries

Abeer Rehman

I've spent my life, my heart
And my eyes this way,
I used to think that love
And beloved are different.
I know now that they are the same.
I was seeing two in one. -- Rumi

Love. Love is a word encaging a boundless world of meaning and mystique. Duly so, it has been examined, investigated, and explored over the ages by each individual, from kings to peasants, rulers to ruled, Hindus to Muslims, and Africans to Caucasians. Such is the expanse of this emotion and so deeply is it instilled in the very core of human nature that it would not be wrong to assert that every human being who has treaded upon this earth has been incapable of escaping the clutches of love. For every cup of death drunk by a person, a cup of love has preceded it. Time has witnessed the confessions of lovers of various types and forms over the ages. Like a snowflake, a melting beauty, love is crystallized water for each lover but for each it also holds a unique form. There have been numerous tales of love documented over the ages, each one unparalleled in its depth, trials, and tribulations. While there are some love stories, which add vibrant color to the canvas of time, there are others that make up the canvas itself. Two of the most iconic Indian love stories that transcend time and age are the Padmavat and Nal-Daman. Malik Muhammad Jayasi wrote Padmavat in 1540 and Nal-Daman was written in 1594 by Abu al-Faiz (known commonly as Faizi). Nal-Daman was an attempt by Faizi to, “bring ‘secular’ [Hindawi] stories into Persian, of which the Nal-Daman narrative is a central example.” Jayasi originally wrote the Padmavat in Hindi. It was immensely popular and was translated and retold over the years by numerous scholars and poets in Persian, crowning the Hindi literary canon with Persian retellings of the

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1 Abeer Rehman is a recent University of Toronto graduate who majored in Psychology and Exceptionality in Human Learning with a minor in the History of Religions. Hailing from a strong South Asian background, Rehman finds it intriguing (and pertinent) to discover more about the historical and religious factors that helped shape the various present-day cultural fabrics of South Asian countries. This essay was the culmination of an ambitious foray into one such topic.


Padmavat which came to be known as the Padmavat text tradition. Padmavat and Nal-Daman are venerated not only because of their content, which was highly distinguished from the previous poetic inscriptions, but also for their literary prose, masterful narrative, and fresh transformations and interpretations of the original tales. They are valuable additions to the library of published poetic understanding and methodology of the Mughal era.

The composition and subsequent interpretation of these texts was influenced by many factors of the time such as the historical, cultural, and political contexts, the role of the reading audiences in and outside the realm of the story and even the individual experiences of the reader. The Padmavat is often interpreted by scholars and intellectuals as one deeply rooted in, and accordingly, reflecting the religious-political clash between Hindus and Muslims through the portrayal of Muslims as champions and Rajputs as valiant soldiers. Similarly, Faizi’s Nal-Daman employs a primarily religious, and particularly Sufi, theme of love and passion that transcends the Hindu-Muslim binaries of deity-human, outer-inner, drunk-sober, and manifest-veiled love. As literary forms, Nal-Daman and the Padmavat transfer the cultural or communal ideals of ‘right religion and way of life’ while simultaneously serving as documented accounts of the trials and tribulations faced by both Hindus and Muslims, often on account of one another. These texts can not be interpreted solely through the lens of political and religious differences between two communities; they are much more than one-way communication between the author and reader, because they not only indicate the historical, political, and cultural atmosphere during a time and endorse the views of the author and state, but they also promulgate and reinforce to the masses valued lessons, morals, qualities, and aphorisms that were meant to ensure a placid and happy life for all. The Padmavat and Nal-Daman are texts intended by their authors to be intrinsically felt, lived, and remembered by the reader. The texts were meant to be a ‘mystical’ experience, engaging the writers’ and reader’s mind, body, and soul and anchoring them to the metaphors of the stories. Thus, it is not unusual that both works are built upon the themes rendered in the ‘mystical’ dimension of Islam called Sufism. Sufism is central to the discussion of the transcendence of Nal-Daman and Padmavat because Sufism’s themes of Ishq (love), Junun (frenzy), and Husn (beauty) are overtly visible in the two narratives and aid in bridging the gap that stems from the differences in the core beliefs of Hinduism and Islam. Therefore, a reading of these works necessitates a basic understanding of Sufism. In addition to a number of factors, the themes prevalent in Sufism allow the Padmavat text tradition and Nal-Daman to transcend the categories of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ and challenge our contemporary understanding of religious boundaries.

The Padmavat and Nal-Daman transcend the political, historical, and religious boundaries of Hinduism and Islam for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Padmavat and Nal-Daman were both written by Muslim authors as retellings of the original vernacular narratives of the love between Hindu characters Padmini and King Ratnasena in the Padmavat and Nala and Damayanti in the Nal-Daman. Both stories, prior to their retelling by Jayasi and Faizi and subsequent introduction to the vast Persian-speaking world, had already been widely told in Hindi, Sanskrit, and Hindawi for the majority Hindu population in India. These stories were representations of some of the finest Indian stories circulating among the Hindu population and were a manifestation of Indian patriotism propagated by Akbar. Faizi’s Nal-Daman and Jayasi’s Padmavat, along with the subsequent retellings of these already retold stories, was an attempt
by Akbar to give the Persian-speaking world access to literary works with a “characteristically Indian flavor.” For it was through such attempts to translate the Hindu scripture (Ramayana and Mahabharata) inspired tales that Akbar and his courtiers were able to celebrate and accredit the rich cultural heritage of the Hindus and include the Muslims and Hindus alike under the encompassing umbrella of “Indian” culture, a theme that was already resonating in Akbar’s court at the time.

Secondly, in the retellings of Nal-Daman and Padmavat by Faizi and Jayasi, respectively, both female protagonists, Daman and Padmavati, become Sati. In Hinduism, Sati was the practice of the wife burning herself on the pyre of the husband was a ritualistic practice. Just as the flame consumes a moth, so are the lead female characters in Nal-Daman and the Padmavat consumed by the objects of their desire, their beloveds. The practice of Sati in Hinduism was seen by Hindus of the time as the ultimate edifice of love due to its passion and frenzy. The theme of passion and frenzy visible in the act of Sati also bore striking resemblance to the element of Suz (burning) and Junun (frenzy) in the mystical dimension of Islam called Sufism. The Sufi (follower of Sufism) brimming with love and fascination for his beloved, is thought to suffer immense pain, agitation, and distress over separation. The slightest distance from the object of reverence perturbs the true worshipper greatly. So monumental is the anxiety and restlessness that man becomes frantic and incapable of peace until in close proximity with the beloved. The Sufi theme of Suz was distinctly visible when Nal, prior to his death, was separated from Daman in the course of the narrative. Nal found himself in deep emotional turmoil and sinking by the minute further into darkness thus designating Daman as the candle of his life, the warmth and light that can rescue him from the cold, unyielding, enveloping darkness. In Nal-Daman, as Daman sat on Nal’s pyre, she spontaneously combusted into flames:

the lover was drunk with the last drops of wine, while his idol held the cup in her hand...They sat in each other’s fire, and grew hotter than the pyre itself...The idol was burnt from love of the Brahman, its body now charred like its burnt-out heart. If the moth was afire on this evening of sorrow, the candle too burnt from top to toe.

Through the practice of Sati, Daman established their love as eternal and the cause of light and love in her world. Padmavati, like Daman, also enacts the practice of Hindu Sati by burning at the pyre of her husband, Ratnasena. Because Islam forbids any form of suicide, including setting oneself on fire, Sufis were fascinated by the practice of Sati and the devotion such an act entailed toward the object of desire. When analyzed literally, the practice of sati visible in the two narratives has no basis in Sufism and Islam. But through analysis on a deeper level, it can be ascertained that the emotional bases underlying many of the distinctly Hindu yogic, religious, and ascetic practices are also present in Islam and Sufism. Thus, it is through the last defining act of love and devotion in the form of Sati by Daman and Padmavati that these stories transcend Hindu-Muslim religiosities and categories.

Thirdly, even though the Padmavat and Nal-Daman were retold in Persian by Muslims, the astonishing fact, which is probably a causal factor in their transcendence was the depth of allegorical detail present in their accounts. The depth of the allegorical detail in light of the religious affiliation of the authors

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4 Ibid., 208.

5 Ibid., 240.
Jayasi and Faizi was astonishing because it demonstrated their deft knowledge of Hinduism, Hindu scriptures, the stories of the Hindu deities and the cultural fabric of India. The Padmavat is essentially a Rajput epic with a twist. It chronicles the defeat of King Ratnasena of the Rajput capital of Chittaur by the forces of Turkish Emperor Ala al-Din Khalji whose:

> desire for Chittaur converges with his lust for its legendary Queen Padmini (later known as Padmavati), wife of King Ratnasena. It is not mere political ambition, then, but the infinitely more titillating theme of the illicit desire of a Muslim for a married Hindu woman that animates this narrative. Ala al-Din’s victory, however is Pyrrhic, for hearing of her husband Ratnasena’s death on the battlefield. Padmini ritually burns herself to death.\(^6\)

The *Padmavat* has numerous embellishments that provide indirect reference to the Ramayana, one of the great Indian Hindu epics. Shantanu Phukan focuses on the *Padmavat* text tradition and relates that in Jayasi’s *Padmavat*, “Padmavati is a Sinhala (her paternal kingdom) princess held captive by her oppressive father, much as Sita (Indian goddess) had been held by Sinhala King Ravana. Jayasi not only presents Padmavati as a second Sita, but also dispatches Hanuman (Indian God) to send her a message from Ratnasena who, though in Chittaur, falls promptly in love with her upon hearing descriptions of her incomparable beauty.”\(^7\) Thus, it is observable that Jayasi incorporated Hindu religious elements to supplement the plot in the Rajput story. In addition to the Hindu elements, he also employed Natha yogic cosmology and a famous incident of Sufi martyrology, that of the execution of a 9th century Sufi named Hallaj (who was martyred for his unorthodox theological views). The use of allegory and indirect references indicate Jayasi’s meticulous efforts in crafting a story that would appeal to the Hindu and Muslim masses. Such accurate historical and religious accounts were also aimed to encourage cross-religious understanding. To that end, *Nal-Daman* was penned in Persian which was the common language for literature at the time, and the *Padmavat* was written in Hindi and translated in later retellings by Mughal poets like Aqil Khan Razi into Persian.\(^8\) The language of these texts allowed them to be read not only in the Mughal court but also by the Hindu literati who might not have been well acquainted with Persian.\(^9\) That the *Padmavat* was written in Hindi and *Nal-Daman* in Hindawi indicates that Muslim scholars were often conversant in Persian and Hindi and that they were also well accustomed to Indian mythologies, which was a strong indication of a dynamic yet coalesced cosmopolitan society.

The fourth way in which these texts transcended Hindu-Muslim boundaries, is their use of a number of underlying themes of Sufism to bridge the communal cultural, religious, and political chasms between Hindus and Muslims. The Sufi themes of *Ishq* (love) and *Husn* (beauty) are portrayed as love for the divine accessed through a human medium. In both stories a female form is the embodiment of divine beauty and viewed as the exalted creation of God. Consequently the lead male characters in both stories

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\(^7\) Ibid., 42.

\(^8\) Ibid., 41; Alam and Subrahmanyam, 206.

\(^9\) It should be noted however that the *Padmavat* text tradition, which followed later, complied with the formal literary discourse at the time as it was written in Persian.
(Nal and Ratnasena), were amazed by the sheer allure and excellence of their beloveds. The presence of beauty paved the path for love and through love and suffering for their beloved, Nal and Ratnasena’s pining for the divine Haqiqat (a Sufi concept denoting divine essence of God and His attribute of love itself) was observable. The love toward the creations of God acted almost as a predecessor for the love of God, for only through acknowledgement of beauty of the created could there be a veneration of the beauty of the Creator. The themes of love, beauty, passion and internalized meditation all resonate among humans across time, era, and age. Because these Sufi themes are synonymous with the metaphysical experiences and realities of humans, modern and premodern, they allow the Padmavat and Nal-Daman to transcend time as well as the “Hindu” and “Muslim” divide. Whether these themes are shrouded under the cloak of Sufism or are attributes of general human nature, they aid in integrating the reader into the two texts and synchronize them with the hearts of the characters.

While they are perceived by some to transcend through time as tales of tolerance, love, and acceptance the Padmavat and Nal-Daman, especially the former, are also literary proof of the strident and tumultuous relations between Hindus and Muslims. Many of the strident relations stem from the war and conflicts initiated during the Mughal era when the Muslim Turks fought battles with and seized different kingdoms. The Muslim Turks joined the kingdoms under one national umbrella and formed a holistic Indian identity over which the Mughals ruled for many centuries. This is demonstrated in the Padmavat in the physical encounter between the Hindu Rajput Ratnasena and the Muslim Ala al-Din Khalji. The Padmavat is not only a story of a Muslim ruler besotted by the beauty of a married Indian woman and his attempts to gain her, but it is also the story of the ensuing battles between two warring factions in India, the Hindu Rajputs and the Muslim Turks. The battle between Hindus and Muslims in the text resonates within the minds of modern Hindus and Muslims because, even though many adherents of Islam and Hinduism choose to look past there differences, the conflict between the two groups still persists in the modern era in countries like India and Pakistan.

Readers of the Padmavat and Nal-Daman actively engaged with the texts and infused their own interpretations into the broader meanings of each work. These stories are written in poetic dialogue, and it must be remembered that poetry was exchanged in the medieval times like currency. Every occasion and encounter demanded appropriate poetic greetings and dialogue that it had become an ingrained part of the cultural fabric. The poetic greetings and various couplets were daily exchanges and were sometimes composed spontaneously as a response or retort while at other times quoted directly from famous stories, prose, or ballads. Famous texts of the Mughal era such as the Padmavat and Nal-Daman became part of daily conversations and language. In the Padmavat text tradition, such poetic fragments were invoked by the translators, written in the margins, and likely influenced their interpretation and subsequent retelling of the original texts. The poetic dialogue in the medieval times resulted in a world much more sonorous than in modern times. These texts have transcended through the ages because they have constantly been reinterpreted, they have aided in understanding the aural and oral atmosphere in the Mughal era when these texts were first penned in Persian as well as the subsequent eras of the retellings, and there are now being collectively interpreted by the modern readership in light of present-day experiences, events, cultural reference points, and knowledge.

10 Alam and Subrahmanyam, 210; Phukan, 42.
Padmavat and Nal-Daman enabled Hindus and Muslims to share a culture and bond over the poetic echoes, poetic reminiscences, and the luxury of various interpretations of the works over time. Through the Mughal poet Aqil Khan Razi’s inclination to follow the Sufi-lyric paradigm when documenting the Persian translation of Padmavat (comprising the Padmavat text tradition) it can be seen that Sufi prose, encompassing what Sufis consider deliciously fantastic concepts, particularly those of kufr (disbelief in the fundamental principle’s of Islam), fanaa (death) and sati, transcend the Hindu-Muslim religious boundaries because these concepts are found in both religions with differing perceptions; in Hinduism they are considered a norm whereas in Islam they are heretical.\(^{11}\) Lastly, the presence of underlying (Sufi) concepts that effect all humans such as Ishq (love), husn (beauty) and fanaa (death) in Nal-Daman paired with the cultural references, nuances and poetical language of the Mughal era recorded in that text aid it in transcending through the ages.

Sufism, also called Islamic mysticism, is difficult to define primarily because it can have multiple interpretations; ergo, a ‘standard’ definition for Sufism cannot be grasped due to varying individual perceptions and interpretations of the concept. The Padmavat and Nal-Daman contain many Sufi themes that resonate with the moralities of most, if not all, men and women irrespective of their religious affiliation. Due to the mass appeal and affect of these Sufi themes on the Hindu-Muslim populace, a definition of Sufism is necessary in order to further penetrate the Sufi themes and doctrines present in the two texts. One widely accepted interpretation of Sufism comes from Carl Ernst, an expert in the study of mysticism. Earnst defines Sufism as a practice of interiorization with Sufis “beginning with the broad path of the religious law (shariah), and proceeding via the path (tariqa) of the Sufis to the divine reality (haqiqa).”\(^{12}\) According to Earnst, in Sufism the practices and principles of Islam paired with the devotion and love for the God Sufis invoke are both two parts of a whole. In Sufism, one can attempt to “approach the divine, internal reality” only if the Islamic laws, practices and commandments that comprise “the external religious structure” are followed meticulously.\(^{13}\)

Earnst further elaborates on the distinction of Sufis:

while the ordinary believers must consult the religious scholars about the subjects of their various specialties, the elite Sufis, who concentrate exclusively on God, know the subject of ritual prayer better than anyone else. A similar attitude governs the Sufi treatment of the other Islamic religious practices (fasting, pilgrimage, alms, etc.): not only do the Sufis perform the literal requirements of the law, but also they fulfill it more perfectly than others do.\(^{14}\)

Earnst names repentance, asceticism, poverty, patience, trust in God, and satisfaction as some of the principles of Sufism.\(^{15}\) Complete, unadulterated and unconditional love for the Creator and the created

\(^{11}\) Phukan, 51.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 10.
is a major defining characteristic of Sufism and this was visible in Nal’s love for Daman as well as Ala al-Din Khalji’s madness (junun) for obtaining Queen Padmavati. These Sufi themes of love, asceticism, suz (burning for beloved) are echoed in the Padmavat and Nal-Daman.

In addition to the principles and attributes of Sufism, appreciation of beauty is one of the most prevalent themes. Beauty serves the function of eyeglasses to a person with weak eyesight. As one with weak eyesight is dependent on his/her glasses to view the world, the Sufi is dependent on using his/her perception of beauty, his ‘glasses,’ to view the world and all within it as the most beautiful, most perfect manifestation because it was created by the perfect Creator. In the Padmavat a description of Queen Padmavati’s paternal kingdom, Sinhala, illustrates this concept:

The royal palace was adorned like Kabilasa [home of Indra], all made of gold, from earth to heaven. Seven stories high was the palace built. Only such a King could construct it. The bricks were diamonds, the mortar, camphor. Studded with jewels, the palace reached heaven. All the patterns were depicted there, inlaid in mosaics, with various jewels. Everywhere there were diverse traceries. Pictures stretched out, row upon row. Pillars were encrusted with rubies and jewels. They blazed bright like lamps by day. Seeing the radiance of that royal palace, the sun, moon, and stars hid away in shame.16

In Sufism every literal, metaphorical being or object has a tangible manifestation. The metaphorical and literal level is called majazi and the majazi is always zahir (manifest). In this particular quote, the immense majazi beauty of the palace is strikingly visible and the grandeur portrayed is no less than that of perhaps one veritably built in heaven. The description of the palace is meant to evoke the spiritual House of God. There are seven stories to the palace, each of which could be indicative of the seven floors of heaven. Jayasi may have also been trying to allude to the Seven Chakras of Sufism which are subtle psychic centers. The seven floors of heaven could connote attainment of each Chakra coupled with ascension; each one a level closer to God, the beloved. The palace is inlaid with a multitude of jewels, an object of desire not only for the paupers but also the kings. The mosaic patterns consist of different colors perhaps signifying the variation within people and there are various jewels in them but together, as patterns laid out, each mosaic motif is similar and contributes to the overall pattern. Lastly, the mention of pictures indicates to one the capturing of moments, the encaging of time. It alludes that even time was still in that heavenly abode. The elements of the universe, the sun, moon and stars in all their glory were incomparable to the zahir, manifested, beauty of Sinhala.

Beauty as depicted in Nal-Daman is also reflected in the beauty of Daman. Daman is described as:

a magical idol, an illusory idol, has destroyed patience the world over. A flower-like face, lovely, Daman by name, her tresses have cast a net on the garden. Her intoxicated eyes like an Indian idols temple, the very idols of Hind worship her. Hundreds of Brahmins are

bathed in their blood, when she visits the temple, idols shatter. Her palace has set Somnath aflame, each idol has rent its sacred thread.17

This description of her beauty implies that Daman is a manifestation of not only majazi (metaphorical) beauty but also haqiqih (essence) beauty. She is like an apparition, an idol who has captivated the idols themselves. They are besotted by and envious of her beauty. The beauty of actual idols is limited by their shapes and forms, thus, they are restricted by metaphysical and manifest (majazi) limitations so they are reduced to worshipping her. However, Daman has delimited beauty. She is entrusted with a divine beauty (husn) that surpasses any beauty on earth in any metaphysical form. She is an enchanting embodiment of divine beauty, synonymous with the beauty of God. Similar beauty is seen also in the description of Padmavati. Daman and Padmavati are delineated as embodiments of divine light, allure and fascination. As one is driven to the acknowledgement and worship of God, one is also driven to the acknowledgement and worship of Daman and Padmavati. Annemarie Schimmel, a renowned virtuoso on Sufism, states about beauty that, “to look at him [the beautiful beloved], to adore him from a distance, may induce the Sufi to truly religious ecstasy, and to contemplate his face as worship. Wherever beauty is revealed, there out of necessity love must grow.”18 Daman’s beauty is not only limited to her physical embodiment but also extends to the externalities surrounding her such as her palace which has exceeded the brilliance of Somnath. Daman is a beautiful idol and Nal, a Brahmin- the worshipper of that idol. Padmavati and Ratnasena also shared the relationship of idol and worshipper with Ratnasena as a devotee of Padmavati’s embodiment of beauty. The Sufi appreciation and understanding of beauty helps the two narratives transcend across time and cultures because acknowledgement and appreciation of beauty are an inherent part of human nature. This theme is also a didactic theme meant to reinforce the Sufi ideology of finding beauty and resplendence in all creation.

One of the most prominent and renowned themes of Sufism is that of Ishq (love). Padmavat and Nal-Daman centralize the theme of Ishq and the various forms it possesses. In addition to the two texts, Schimmel defines mysticism as,

love of the Absolute- for the power that separates true mysticism from mere asceticism is love. Divine love makes the seeker capable of bearing, even enjoying, all the pains and afflictions that God showers upon him in order to test him and to purify his soul. This love can carry the mystics heart to the Divine Presence “like the falcon which carries away the prey,” separating him, thus from all that is created in time.”19

Schimmel categorically declares Ishq as the defining characteristic of mysticism and emphasizes its importance in the spiritual art of mysticism. Parallels can be drawn between Schimmel’s definition of mysticism and the Padmavat and Nal-Daman; however, the characters in the narratives worship their beloveds not only as the creations of Divine, but also, perhaps as the Divine. Their love is concurrent to how a Sufi would worship and love the Divine, as a Brahmin would the idol, and as a moth does the

17 Alam and Subrahmanyam, 221.
19 Ibid., 4.
flame. However, a strange, almost uneven, combination exists between human and Divine love, for engagement in both involves contributions of human love for expression. Schimmel further adds that, “eventually, the nostalgia of the lover and the longing for union was expressed by symbols taken from human love; often a strange and fascinating combination of human and divine love permeates the verses of the Sufis.”

In a Persian retelling of the Padmavat, called Farah Bakhsh, the author Lachhmi Ram inserted a quote in the margins of the text. The quote related, “every edifice you see is prone to breakage, except for the edifice of love which is devoid of any cracks.” This quote implies the concept of haqiqih (essence) and majazi (manifest) love. Sufism promulgates the ideology that manifested love has two facets, metaphorical and literal, whereas haqiqih love of the Divine Essence is hidden or veiled (also called batin). Ishq, as seen in the Padmavat, can be a blessing but also a curse, for the veiled, batin, facet of Ishq in the Padmavat is shrouded in despair and destruction. This is exemplified by Padmavati burning herself for Ratnasena. Lachhmi Ram considers the idea that there are forces always stronger than the strongest edifice which render everything (mostly tangible) delicate, brittle, and fracturable; everything save the edifice of love. In Padmavat’s scene depicting the aftermath of the battle between the forces of King Ratnasena and Ala al-Din Khalji, Chittaur, once glorious and lively, lay burning, broken and in ruins, but it was in that state of utter defeat and despair that Chittaur was the edifice of love. What could have been an end of Chittaur was revived by Padmavati’s poignant sacrifice to commit sati for her husband. Therefore, death, self-immolation, and destruction are the crowning jewels of love and the ultimate proof of victory. According to Lachhmi Ram, Rajputs are seen as valiant and brave who heroically faced their opponents crowing them with a flimsy token of victory and in their defeat taking with them the greater victory and a final triumph of an ethic of love. Thus a lesson gleaned from the pages of the Padmavat attests that the victory of love sometimes lies in its defeat just as Padmavati’s interminable love for her husband persisted after their defeat. This couplet of Lachhmi Ram reflects his interpretation and, “formulation of Ishq, love, as a virtue demanding sacrifice.”

Love between two souls similar to the phenomena of moth and flame was also vividly represented by another addition to the Padmavat text tradition the greatly embellished, Sham’ va Parvanah. As Phukan states, “the moth conventionally appears as the enthralled lover circling its beloved, the flame. The dance of love, however, is doomed, for by dawn the flame inevitably scorches the moth, reducing it to a smear of ash.” Another interesting parallel can be drawn between the two sagas because Razi compared the Padmavat as the story of the moth and the flame and Faizi in Nal-Daman symbolically utilized a bird that proves instrumental in bringing the lovers together. The magical bird in Nal-Daman was able to speak and was yearning for it’s beloved. When encaged and when freed, the bird brought Nal and Daman’s hearts and souls together and foreshadowed the development of their love story. Jayasi, Razi and Faizi all used flying creatures as the personifications of the lover in efforts to illustrate the emotional elevation and exuberance that love provides.

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20 Ibid., 5.
21 Phukan, 44.
22 Ibid.
23 Phukan, 47.
Faizi, in *Nal-Daman*, also weaves the importance of *Ishq* for the sole purpose of becoming a generous and just ruler, for only when one loves his subjects will one be able to think of their welfare. Nal was initially illustrated as a good ruler, subsequently as a swayed ruler being swept up in temptation and *junun,* (similar to Ala al-Din Khalji) and lastly as an equilibrated ruler. *Ishq* is also critical for obtaining *Sulh-I kull,* universal peace, “a recipe for a sort of social harmony mediated by royal power...the ideal ruler must understand that to have power is a reflection of his good fortune, and hence make it his duty to be governed constantly by his intellect.”

24 *Ishq-I majazi* (love for the manifest) would be instrumental in ruling justly, generously, and having at heart the best interests of the populace. Therefore, *Ishq* in its various forms and varieties transcends the boundaries between Hindus and Muslims because all these forms of *Ishq* are seen and encouraged in both Hinduism and Islam irrespective of time and space.

The *Padmavat* and *Nal-Daman* challenge our contemporary understanding of religious boundaries in a number of ways. These are texts both authored in the same Mughal era just a few years apart, with each catering to the same demographic (the population of Hindus and Muslims in India) and each story was nurtured and influenced by different circumstances relative to the era. These narratives are chronicles whose retelling into Persian documents the values, customs, traditions, and the social and political atmosphere of the time in which they were told. These two texts were written by Muslims documenting the lives and loves of Hindu characters replete with their religious and cultural conventions, practices and norms. This detail, however minor it may seem, demonstrates the flexibility of religious boundaries. The masses, as a collective group, did not stop learning or being informed about one another simply because they believed in a God with different a different name and varying attributes. On the contrary, they were thoroughly informed about the different religions surrounding them. The authors of the texts managed to cover their personal religious affiliations with a veil of assimilation that allowed only the outlines of their religious orientation to be shown through the metaphors in the stories. The most remarkable factor about the public during the Mughal era was that the population refused to limit itself in such rigid religious boundaries as people are accustomed to doing in modern times. These texts have stood the test of time and survived with aplomb due to the many factors associated with them that aid in their transcendence across religions and through the ages. Some of these factors were the various different religious references that bound Hindus and Muslims, the languages, the translations of the texts into different languages to appeal to a wider audience, the various transformations of the texts (such as in the Padmavat text tradition) and references to the cultural, social and political influences of the era they were written which give modern intellectuals a taste of the simpler bygone days. In addition to these factors, the Sufi themes of *Ishq* (love), *Suz* (burning), and *Husn* (beauty) transcend the religious boundaries by appealing to and underlying various beliefs and practices of the Hindu and Muslim population. Lastly, these texts have survived and continue to survive due to the political tensions resonating between Hindus and Muslims today. The politically charged atmosphere of this century continues to shape the interpretation of these textual resources.

The primary defining feature of the *Padmavat* and *Nal-Daman* remains the emphasis on *Ishq* and its necessity to fashion a society and formulate an accepting culture on a macro scale and to value, interpret, and improve one’s personal life and interactions on a micro scale. These texts highlight the

24 Alam and Subrahmanyam, 223.
fact that the happiness and sorrow transcends race, nationality, ethnicity, color, culture and religion all of which in the modern day and age prove to be challenges for people to overcome. So restricted and rigid have the definitions of Islam and Hinduism become and so enshrouded are they in centuries old traditions, histories and customs that the task of reinterpreting, restructuring, and reorganizing society and culture has become immense. Razi, in the Padmavati offers a simple solution to overcome this challenge regardless of how intricate or magnanimous it may be: Razi advises one to “draw the mascara of Ishq upon heart’s eyes and take an earnest step within this house.”\textsuperscript{25} This quote can be construed as meaning that one’s perception influences interpretation and subsequent action. Thus, if all is perceived through Ishq then there will be a lot less thorns on the rose. The narratives challenge one to draw comparisons between modern and premodern times and ponder the causes of differences observed. The narratives also question the ethics of change that modernity has generated as well the tribulations induced by the conformity to outdated traditions and customs in an advanced modern context. The Padmavat and Nal-Daman navigate one toward reinterpreting Sufi themes as an isolated domain of Islam and applying it to broader inter-religious spheres. Padmavat and Nal-Daman proffer Sufism as a discipline and course of action to end social, political and religious strife. Akbar’s policy of Sulh-I Kull (universal peace) would be an instrumental mechanism of spreading love, acceptance, and harmony.

In conclusion, the Padmavat and Nal-Daman are “encompassing” texts. They integrate the reader into a separate world disengaged from the negative demarcations of religions and endow the reader with Ishq, Suz and Husn all three of which when applied lead to love, respect, compassion and tolerance. The contemporary interpretations of the Padmavat and Nal-Daman may differ from the premodern ones, but the message of Ishq within the texts is static and eternal. The two texts are like a pearl formulated by years of condensed layers of subjective interpretations of religion, society, culture, and tradition all encompassed by a shell. One merely has to open the shell to behold the beauty but the real question is whether the beauty of the pearl is diminished or enhanced if one is Hindu or Muslim? You be the judge.

\textsuperscript{25} Phukan, 49.