

Portrait of a Raja in a Badshah's World: Amrit Rai's Biography of Man Singh (1585)

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Abstract

A wealth of Old Hindi texts in the Rajasthani and Brajbhasha dialects survives from the early modern period, but they remain an underused archive of Mughal history. The *Māncarīt* ("Biography of Man Singh," 1585) of Amrit Rai, one of the earliest known examples of Rajput literature about a Mughal *manṣabdār*, provides fascinating perspectives on Mughal power, as seen from the perspective of the court of Man Singh Kachhwaha, one of the leading regional kings of Akbar's day. Amrit Rai was as much a poet as an historian, which makes the *Māncarīt* and the many Rajput texts like it challenging to interpret, but the possibility of gaining alternative perspectives on Mughal state formation makes such a hermeneutic enterprise essential.

Bien qu'il existe un riche corpus de textes en vieil hindi (dans les dialectes rajasthani et brajbhasha) datant de la période de la première modernité, ceux-ci demeurent une archive sous-exploitée de l'histoire moghole. Le *Māncarīt* («Biographie de Man Singh», 1585)

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d'Amrit Rai, un des plus anciens exemples de littérature rajput concernant un *manṣabdār* moghol, offre de fascinantes perspectives sur le pouvoir moghol du point de vue de la cour de Man Singh Kachhwaha, un des principaux royaumes régionaux de l'époque d'Akbar. Amrit Rai était autant poète qu'historien, ce qui fait de l'interprétation du *Māncarīt* et des nombreux textes rajputs lui ressemblant une tâche épineuse. Parce qu'elle peut permettre d'accéder à des perspectives alternatives sur la formation de l'État moghol, une telle entreprise herméneutique est toutefois essentielle.

Keywords

Rajputs, Mughal empire, Hindi literature, Man Singh Kachhwaha, Akbar, Amber, Jaipur

Hindi Historical Texts from the Mughal Period

Along with the incorporation of Rajputs into the Mughal imperial system—in fact, exactly contemporaneous with it—came an explosion of Hindi historical literature that contributed substantially to the aesthetic and political program of regional Indian kings. Dozens of such works are available in the Old Hindi dialects of Rajasthani and Brajbhasha (often in some combination of the two),¹ but they have remained underused by early modern historians. In the last couple of decades several scholars working in various regions of India have been opening up the category of history to include a greater diversity of texts, allowing for signs of historical understanding that look different from those of post-enlightenment Europe, in which the modern discipline of history arose.²

Whether Hindi historical texts qualify as “history” in the conventional sense is debatable, as they were primarily poetic creations rather than annalistic accounts of contemporary events, but they command our attention because they are significant attempts by regional court poets to record encounters with Mughal power for their local audiences. Throughout the

¹ There is a parallel corpus of similar texts in Sanskrit, such as the *Surjanacarita*, sponsored by the Bundi court c. 1590. See C. Talbot, “Justifying Defeat: A Rajput Perspective on the Age of Akbar,” in this volume.

² See, for instance, S. Guha, “Speaking Historically: The Changing Voices of Historical Narration in Western India, 1400-1900.” *American Historical Review* 109/4 (2004): 1085-90; V. Narayana Rao, D. Shulman, and S. Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India* (New York: Other Press, 2003); R. Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India c. 1500-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); C. Talbot, “The Mewar Court’s Construction of History.” In *Kingdom of the Sun*, ed. J. Williams (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2007): 13-33; P.B. Wagoner, *Tidings of the King* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

1560s and 1570s, many Rajput polities in western India were drawn into the ambit of Mughal rule through military conquest and the strategic brokering of marital alliances. Several leading regional kings—from Amber, Bundi, Bikaner, and beyond—became Mughal officials, taking up important roles in Badshah Akbar's (r. 1556-1605) administration and mustering their troops and military expertise to the imperial cause.³ Much of this political history has been reconstructed from the Persian chronicles of Akbar's and later periods. Bringing the lesser-known Hindi sources from the margins of Mughal historiography to the center is critical, because they were produced at the Rajput courts themselves and have much to contribute to our understanding of the processes of political and cultural dialogue that helped to underwrite Mughal hegemony. They also shed light on the tensions that attended these interactions.

Emblematic of the early modern historical genres in Hindi and the primary focus of this article is Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt* ("Biography of Man Singh," 1585), also called *Māncarīt rāso* ("Ballad of Man Singh's Deeds"), a pioneering example of the new poetry of history that began to emerge from Rajput courts in the sixteenth century.⁴ It is not surprising to find evidence of such a significant historiographical development at the court of the Kachhwahas of Amber, the first of the Rajput clans to align themselves closely with Emperor Akbar. Although alliance-building with the Mughals began under Raja Bharmal (r. 1547-74),⁵ the Hindi literary-historical record dates from the ascendancy of his grandson Man Singh (r. 1589-1614), a leading general of Akbar, the future Raja of Amber, and the principal subject of Amrit Rai's biography.⁶

³ Badshah (also Padshah/Padishah) is a Persian and Hindi word for emperor that had wide currency in early modern India.

⁴ A second, more extensive, *Māncarīt* was written approximately a decade later by one Narottam Kavi. I discuss this work in the larger context of the investment of Rajput maṅṣabdārs in Hindi literary patronage in "The Classical Past in the Mughal Present: The Brajhasha Rīti Tradition." In *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Sanskrit Literature*, ed. Y. Bronner, G. Tubb, and D. Shulman (forthcoming). Both extant *Māncarīts*, as well as a few shorter collections of Hindi poems about Man Singh, have been published in G. Bahura, ed. *Māncarītāvalī: āmber ke suprasiddh rājā mānsiṅh ke carit se sambandhit pāñc rājasthānī racnāom kā saikalan* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1990).

⁵ A detailed account is R.A. Khan, *The Kachhwahas under Akbar and Jahangir* (New Delhi: Kitab Publishing House, 1976): 1-13.

⁶ The literary-historical record of this court needs more attention, but a useful overview is G.N. Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur with an Index to the Register*

Amrit Rai's account is far more than a factual narration of the life story of Man Singh. One of his critical concerns is to demonstrate the Kachh-waha clan's status, both in its own right and in the context of the new Mughal imperial order. In some places, the poet's focus is on matters that could be seen incontrovertibly as an historian's mandate: genealogy and the cataloguing of specific people, places, and events. In others, Amrit Rai seems to be taking his cues from the Indian poets' guild. (There is no reason to believe that he himself saw the two approaches as separate.) At any rate, even in the more demonstrably literary sections of his work, a sensitive reader can glean much that is historically significant from his language registers, imagery, emphases, inclusions, and omissions, as well as his overall narrative strategies. Particularly illuminating is to parse Amrit Rai's various treatments of imperial rule and Mughal service.

This is not the place for a lengthy critique of the tired colonial accusation that Hindus critically lacked the historian's gene.⁷ I will, instead, stress the diversity of historical texts in Mughal India and the need for a broader definition of what can be accounted as history. Far more interesting than the posing of anachronistic, culturally exogenous, and potentially irrelevant questions about the Hindi textual past—such as whether Old Hindi texts meet the modern criteria of history—is the close study of the structure, style, and motifs of specific works with a view to accessing and understanding alternative models of historical discourse that were generated in other places, times, and thought-worlds. Hindi writers expressed their historical sensibility in a range of genres. If some texts, such as Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt*, are more literary in their orientation, other early modern Hindi sources are brimming with documentary elements.⁸ Many authors tack

of *Manuscripts in the Pothikhana of Jaipur* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1976).

⁷ A good overview of some of these debates is Guha, "Speaking Historically": 1085-90; also see K. Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009): 4-12.

⁸ On the *vigat* literature of Rajasthan, R. Saran says, "following the chronicle entries, the sections each contain a mass of descriptive and statistical information. All the villages of the *parganos* [districts] are listed. Nearly every village is described in a brief note following its name, accompanied by statistics giving the yearly revenues produced by the village between V.S. 1715 and 1719 (A.D. 1658-59 to 1662-63). The *kasbos*, or main towns, of the *parganos* are discussed in more detail, with a census of households according to *jāti* [caste] given for every *kasbo* save Jodhpur city. Besides all this, the sections have a variety of miscellaneous data: lists of taxes, information about local fairs, administrative classifications of villages, etc.": "Introduction to the Translations." In *The Mertiyo Rāthors of Merto, Rājasthān*:

between historical and literary objectives.⁹ The rich bardic traditions of western India also contributed in significant ways to the preservation of the past.¹⁰ Amrit Rai may himself have been from the Bhat community, a class of bardic professionals who were traditional custodians of history in Rajasthan.¹¹

The following is a close reading of Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt*. Much of the methodology, including the mode of analysis, can be applied more generally to Mughal-period Hindi *kāvya* (formal poetry), one of the principal genres through which historical consciousness was expressed. This is not to say that the *Māncarīt* lacks elements of documentary significance. For instance, Amrit Rai clearly dates his biography, he records the genealogy of the Kachhwaha ruling house and their Shekhawat kinsmen, and refers to many specific kings and military personnel by name. And yet, in the manner of most premodern Hindi writers, Amrit Rai preferred verse to prose and was highly conscious of participating in a long-established tradition of *kāvya*. The opening to his work suggests a serious investment in the classical literary apparatus, when he invokes the features of traditional *kāvya* and proclaims his work to be *nava rasa sarasa kavitta* ("enjoyable poetry in accordance with the nine *rasas*").¹² His inclusion of stylized poetic tableaux, such as descriptions of the harem and royal pleasure, as well as lengthy accounts of the bazaars, gardens, stables, and other attractions of Man Singh's realm, are in keeping with what Sanskrit critics called *kathāvastu* ("narrative elements").¹³ Even some of the real-life battle scenes conjure up the literary past rather than the heated political reality that

Select Translations Bearing on the History of a Rajpūt Family, 1462-1660, trans. R.D. Saran and N.P. Ziegler (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Centers for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 2001):8-9.

⁹ This is the case in Keshavdas's *Vīrsimhdevcarit*, discussed in A. Busch, "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium: The Historical Poems of Keśavdās." *South Asia Research* 25/1 (2005): 37-45. Similar cases have been noted among the *karanams*, a class of early modern historians active in South India. See Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*.

¹⁰ For a recent study of Bhats and other bardic communities, see J. Kamphorst, *In Praise of Death*, PhD diss., Leiden University [2008].

¹¹ The mostly Prakrit and Apabhramsha (classical and medieval Indian literary dialects) writers whom Amrit Rai invokes in an ode to past poets in v. 6 lead Bahura (*Māncarītāvalī*: 89) to suppose that he was a Bhat.

¹² Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*, in *Māncarītāvalī*: v.7.

¹³ See S. Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out." In *Literary Cultures in History*, ed. S. Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press): 43-4. Pollock here draws on Dandin's *Kāvya-darśa*, chap. 1.

was an inescapable part of the writer's present. Occasionally, Amrit Rai also digresses into expansive Rajasthani verse forms that were governed by conventions from the domain of oral performance.

All of this makes for a lively biography of Man Singh by a skilled Hindi writer, but does it make for history? If Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt* does not conform to modern expectations of history this is no failing of the poet. He had grander ambitions than to concern himself solely with quotidian fact. His was a tale of an exemplary man, and it was best told in the kind of rich, ornamented language that could do rhetorical justice to the task.¹⁴ In its very literary makeup, the text embodies its own layers of historicity: Amrit Rai encoded his *Māncarīt* in the genres that had currency in his day and made specific choices about language, mostly using a combination of Brajbhasha and Rajasthani but also occasionally gesturing to the new Persianate order in select scenes (a couple of which are discussed below), a kind of codeswitching that speaks to the historical reality of negotiations with Mughal power. Amrit Rai's perspective is also valuable as that of a contemporary historical observer who was conversant with the career of the future king of Amber, four years before he acceded to the Kachhwaha throne, and who could take the pulse of the body politic at precisely the moment that Man Singh was rising to power, but without the hindsight—or, arguably, distortions in perspective—that would be possible for a later chronicler. Man Singh had not yet built his eastern court in Rohtas (in modern Bihar). He had not yet undertaken the conquest of Bengal or Orissa. He had not fallen out of favor with Jahangir for supporting Prince Khusraw on the eve of Akbar's death. The year was 1585, not 1605. Amrit Rai's lens is fixed on a particular moment in history. We can glean something about how Mughal power appeared just after it was firmly consolidated, and it is instructive to study the poet's various conceptualizations of it. In short, works like the *Māncarīt* afford an extraordinary opportunity to study the Mughal Empire from the point of view of the Rajput regional powers that made it possible. Yet another theme explored in this article is the potential to uncover signs of historiographical dialogue between the Persian and Hindi traditions. Since the Mughal state itself came about in alliance with Rajput powers, it makes good sense that there would be some traces of textual encounters, as well.

¹⁴ Amrit Rai's work is, in this respect, not so different in its mission from the *Akbarnāma* of Abu al-Fazl, the renowned biography of Akbar that was begun shortly after the *Māncarīt* was completed (see below).

Situating the Work

Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt* is a virtuosic historical kāvya, comprising 284 stanzas on diverse topics, written in a stunning variety of poetic meters. It can be divided loosely into four main sections. The first fifteen stanzas set the stage for the work, at which point the writer turns to a lengthy account of Kachhwaha genealogy. The third part focuses on Amber with an elaborate poetic tour of the city that draws inspiration from the classical Sanskrit genre known as *nagaravarṇana* ("description of the city"). This naturally affords a good opportunity to project the glory of Man Singh's court and his royal persona. The last section opens onto a wider vista with some poetic reflections on Akbar and his courtiers and the travails of contemporary political life; here Amrit Rai also briefly showcases two Mughal battles in which Man Singh demonstrated exemplary military prowess.

Amrit Rai's opening stanzas shed light on how he conceived his mission as a writer. He begins, predictably enough, with an invocation to Ganesh, along with Sarasvati, the refuge of premodern Indian poets since at least the classical period. But in the verses that immediately follow he dons his historian's hat:

Jampaum jalālasāhī saṃvatu saṃpuṇṇa avaṇi uṇatīsā
Manahara māncaritto kavi aṃvṛtarāi kavva kathayammi

Saṃvatu solahasaya 'ru bayālā, madhura māsa ravi divasa rasālā
Pukkḥita punnima parabu pavittahā, muṇaū mahīpati māna carittahā¹⁵

At the close of the twenty-ninth regnal year of Akbar on this earth
I, Amrit Rai, tell the enchanting life story of Man Singh in poetic form.

On a joyful Sunday during the pleasant month of Chaitra, on the auspicious occasion
of the full moon in the year 1642, I recount King Man Singh's biography.

While not a universal practice of Hindi poets, dating became fairly routine by the early modern period and may stem from a changing historical sensibility.¹⁶ But note how Amrit Rai dates his *Māncarīt* in two different ways, first in imperial time, to the twenty-ninth regnal year of Akbar, and then, according to the Indian *Vikram* calendar, to the year 1642 (1585 CE),

¹⁵ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 3-4.

¹⁶ Cf. N.P. Ziegler, "The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārvāṇa: A Study in the Evolution and Use of Oral Traditions in Western India." *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 127-53. Sanskrit writers of the classical period were, in contrast, generally far less concerned with temporality.

with a special emphasis on a salutary lunar moment. Both conceptions of time evince a belief in history as a sequence of non-repeatable events (that is, progressive, not cyclical mythic time)¹⁷ although it is significant that the contemporary and classical methods of marking it are juxtaposed in consecutive verses as though they each merited equal weight.

Another notable juxtaposition from the opening page is the blending of Mughal and Indian political conceptions in the poet's praise address to Akbar, the reigning Badshah. Amrit Rai invokes the historicity of Akbar's Timurid and Chaghatay ancestry, while inserting the Mughal emperor into a more mythic Hindu paradigm of power (the two approaches are apparently not incommensurable):

Timaravaṃsahā teu tihupuraha hammāūsāhī sua mahāvīrādhivandana
Avaṇi aṃsa avatāra paramapuruṣa paraḍḍḥkhanikandana
Ucita cagattā cakkavai saba pṛthvī pratipāla
Jahāṃgīra juga juga jivau jagamaṇi sāhi jalāla.¹⁸

Born in the lineage of Timur, the son of Humayun [i.e., Akbar]
is revered in the three worlds by heroic men.

He is a portion of the supreme being descended to earth
to destroy the suffering of others.

He is the rightful universal emperor of the Chaghatay clan,
a protector of the entire earth.

Long live Shah Jalal al-Din [Akbar], the world-conqueror,
the jewel of the world!

This verse too strikes both classical and more contemporary notes. Amrit Rai on the one hand adduces a traditional conception of a Hindu emperor, the *cakravartin* (vernacularized as *cakkavai*, "turner of the wheel" of royal authority),¹⁹ a choice no doubt driven partly by the word's pleasing assonance with "Chaghatay," the Central Asian house from which the Mughal rulers hailed. The idea that kings are an *aṃśa*, or portion, of god also stems

¹⁷ Sumit Guha has noticed such instances of "cross-dating" in the Marathi Bakhar texts, a historical genre of early modern western India. Cross-dating, he asserts, is evidence of "neutral commonplace linear time" and "implicit in such cross-dating is the idea that time has a single flow, and that different markers are arbitrarily placed." See "Speaking Historically": 1096.

¹⁸ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 2. This verse (and v. 14, excerpted next) is in the *vastuka* meter, which has a long history in Apabhramsha. I am grateful to Andrew Ollett for advising me about Prakrit and Apabhramsha metrics.

¹⁹ This trope is later repeated in Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 213.

from ancient Indian political theory, and to speak of a king descending to earth as an *avatāra* is to use a Hindu idiom of divine embodiment. At the same time, some of the poet's rhetoric might also be taken in a more topical light, suggesting that Amrit Rai knew of recent developments at Akbar's court. Is it possible that the Brajbhasha term *parama puruṣa*, here translated "supreme being," is a calque on the Persian *insān-i kāmīl* ("perfected man") and thus consistent with the Illuminationist theory that was an integral part of the court's construction of Akbar?²⁰ Also noteworthy is the poet's use of a Persian register to refer to the Mughal emperor: he gives Akbar's regnal title "Jalāl al-Dīn" (albeit in the Brajbhasha form "Sāhi Jalāla") and accords him the epithet "Jahāngīr" ("world conqueror," which Akbar's son would later adopt as his own regnal title). Poets are nothing if not careful about their choice of words. Amrit Rai's verse suggests the critical interplay between Persianate and Sanskritic modes of expressing power. Hindi was the perfect medium for such conceptual experimentation because it was inherently mixed; as a vernacular, it was open to lexical borrowings from both classical languages.²¹ Although there is no reason to suppose that Amrit Rai was well-versed in Persian, he may have been assimilating some elements of contemporary Mughal political culture,²² while remaining connected to his own, more local textual past.

It is also possible that Amrit Rai's apparent awareness of elements of Mughal political vocabulary stems from time spent at the imperial court—

²⁰ On the *ishraqī* or Illuminationist philosophy that undergirds the writings of Abu al-Fazl, Akbar's dear friend and chief court intellectual, see the *Ā'in-i akbarī*, ed. D.C. Phillott and trans. H. Blochmann (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1994): 1: 50-2; P. Hardy, "Abul Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah: A Political Philosophy for Mughal India—Or a Personal Puff for a Pal?" In *Islam in India, Studies and Commentaries*, vol. 2, *Religion and Religious Education*, ed. C.W. Troll (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985): 114-37; C. Asher, "A Ray from the Sun: Mughal Ideology and the Visual Construction of the Divine." In *The Presence of Light*, ed. M.T. Kapstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 168-71. J.F. Richards, "The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir." In *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. J.F. Richards (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998): 296-305.

²¹ The same flexibility characterizes the lingua franca of India today, although the more Persianized form is now known as Urdu.

²² Abd al-Qadir Badauni mentions that the idea of applying Ibn Arabi's concept of the *insān-i kāmīl* to rulers was proposed by a visitor to court in AH 986 (1578-9 CE), so the idea would have been much in vogue at the time Amrit Rai was writing. See *Muntakhab al-tavārikh*, ed. W.N. Lees (Calcutta: College Press, 1865): 2:259. I am grateful to Audrey Truschke for the reference.

or, at least, such is the poet's own self-representation, when he reports the circumstances that led him to write his work:

Ikka vārahā boli kaviyaṇahā ivā hukamu hajarati kiyau
 Kachavāhe kula kalita kevaḥā
 Kavaṇa puruṣa parimāṇa kavaṇa kavaṇa bhāṃti utapatti devahā
 Kihā desa āṇa uddita avaṇi grāma nāma garavatta
 Yaha vicitra jiya jāṇi vidhi varaṇaū mānacaritta.²³

One day His Highness summoned the poets. His command was this:
 [Tell me about] the noble Kachhwaha clan.
 Who is its scion? What is the clan's extent?
 What is the basis for its divine origin?
 In which region of the earth did the Kachhwahas establish themselves?
 Which are the settlements that take pride in their fame?
 Keeping in mind Akbar's remarkable injunction,
 I now proceed to recount Man Singh's biography.

It is difficult to assess whether Amrit Rai and his fellow poets—for he uses the plural, *kaviyaṇahā*—were actually granted an audience with the emperor. Perhaps he intended merely to lend his account of Man Singh's life more authority by suggesting it stemmed from an imperial mandate. It is arresting, however, that Amrit Rai projects a Mughal interest in Rajput ancestry as the very *raison d'être* of his *Māncarīt*, for much has been made of the new emphasis on articulating genealogical purity and aristocratic descent among the Rajput houses in the early modern period, in an attempt to capitalize on new opportunities for advancement in the Mughal political system.²⁴

Waves on the Ocean of Mughal Power

The introductory verses also serve to introduce some important historical themes of the *Māncarīt*. One, unsurprisingly, is Mughal power. These themes are often best unveiled through the techniques of literary criticism, as when Amrit Rai frames imperial might as a formidable ocean:

²³) Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*. v. 14.

²⁴) See D. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1990]): 72-4.

Jalanidhi sāhi jalāla dalu, ati avigati parimāna
Meru mahīpati jāṇiyai, tāṃkī maujai māna.²⁵

Shah Jalal (al-Din)'s army is a fathomless ocean.
Know Man Singh, preeminent among kings,²⁶ to be its waves (martial zeal).

Maritime themes appear throughout the work and serve as a forceful tool for conceptualizing the new Mughal hegemony. In some respects, the image is one of complementarity: Man Singh is to Akbar's army as waves are to the ocean.²⁷ Even though the aggregate of the ocean is far mightier than mere waves, the whole cannot exist without its parts. Amrit Rai also perhaps intends to invoke a secondary meaning of the Perso-Arabic word *mauj* ("wave"), "martial zeal," strengthening the sense of interdependence between the empire and its vassals. At the same time, the ocean is not an entirely neutral standard of comparison in Indian poetry. And waves, while integral to oceans, can also be considered disturbances. When in rebellion, Akbar's vassals *made waves* in the ocean of Mughal power.

Other negative connotations are latent in the oceanic motif. After all, the ocean carries grave risk of drowning, so the image evokes a deep political anxiety. An anxiety-laden view of imperial service is attested in the *Mau'izah-i Jahāngīrī* of Muhammad Baqir, a Persian *akhlāq* (ethics) text produced during Jahangir's reign:

Know that imperial service is perilous and demanding. . . [The wise men] have also likened royal service to an ocean [and the employee] to a merchant embarking on a voyage—[the merchant] either accrues immense profit or becomes trapped in a whirlpool of annihilation.²⁸

It is possible that Amrit Rai was familiar with such Persianate constructions of royal service, but he would have had any number of powerful oceanic motifs ready to hand.

²⁵ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 9.

²⁶ By the epithet *meru mahīpati*, which appears frequently in the *Māncarīt*, the poet seems to intend "preeminent among kings" (cf. the usage in v. 137, note 64). The image may also imply that Man Singh can absorb the waves of the ocean in the manner of the cosmogonical Mount Meru. See Bahura, *Māncarītāvalī*: 45.

²⁷ A similar image occurs in Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 215.

²⁸ *Advice on the Art of Governance: An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes: Mau'izah-i Jahāngīrī of Muḥammad Bāqir Najm-i Ṣānī*, ed. S.S. Alvi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989): 72. I am grateful to Corinne Lefèvre for the reference.

The *Pañcatantra*, a Sanskrit wisdom text from perhaps the 4th century, contains the following admonition:

Serving any lord of the earth, therefore,
Is much like serving the lord of waters [the ocean];
it is always fraught with risks. . . .

The minds of kings, they are mercurial,
And they are difficult to comprehend;
Rules of service are a deep mystery,
Impenetrable even to yogis.²⁹

Another notion—and this had great currency in the sixteenth century—was that mankind is spiritually adrift in a great ocean. Such quintessentially *bhakti* (devotional) resonances seem present in this verse:

Jalanidhi sāhi pratāpa, nara narendra majjana karahi
Pikkhi pamukkahiṃ pāpa, tīratha kūramarāja bhau³⁰

The emperor's might is an ocean, in which kings and men immerse themselves.
One glance at the Kurmaraja [Man Singh], and they are freed, released from sin.

Note the loaded term *tīrtha* (“aid to crossing,” from the Sanskrit term for a ford), which is also used of Hindu pilgrimage places. Is the idea that Man Singh is really some transcendent power, who like a deity can help the seeker across the ocean or—hinting at the darker side of the Mughal imperium—is his power more terrestrial, inducing regional kings to submit to Mughal service?

There is also a long history of oceans occasioning dread in Puranic lore and the Indian sculptural tradition. Many an ancient king had been compared to Vishnu in his *varāha* (“boar”) incarnation, valiantly saving the earth from the deep floods. In a verse in which Amrit Rai likens the *kali-yuga* (the last of four progressively deteriorating epochs in the traditional Indian view of time) to an ocean, it is Akbar, not Man Singh, who is accorded the role of savior:

²⁹ Vishnusharman, *Pañcatantra*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 42.

³⁰ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 217.

Kali samudra vistaryau rañca maryāda na rakkhiya
 Loha lahari uchali vimohamaya pheṇa varakkhiya
 Bahi buḍḍata bahu loga joga juga jala bala poṣyau
 Tahā agasti vara vīra salila sūmattaṇa soṣyau
 Nikasyau asankha sukha satta maṇi muṇahi na amṛtarāja ivam
 Rakhyauta dhammu guṇa datta mahi jāta vasuha vārāha jivam³¹

The ocean of *kaliyuga* has extended its reach. All moral virtue has lapsed.
 The waves of greed leap up, the foam of error sprays.
 Those who depend upon its waters are floundering.
 Like the valiant sage Agastya,
 Akbar has now evaporated the ocean of baseness,
 extracting countless treasures and the gems of truth.
 How can Amrit Rai recount them?
 He has rescued dharma, virtue, and generosity from drowning,
 as Varaha rescued the earth.

These rich layers of imagery—again, the stuff of literature—here proclaim important political and historical points about how Mughal power looked and felt to a Hindi poet writing in 1585. Oceans are armies. Oceans carry the risk of drowning. Oceans can, however, also be managed. In other words, Mughal power is complicated. All must submit to it, the way water ineluctably flows downstream to merge in the ocean.³² At the same time, stalwart kings, such as Raja Man Singh and Badshah Akbar, can keep mankind afloat.

Narrating the Kachhwaha Lineage

By way of demonstrating the kingly authority of Man Singh, Amrit Rai devotes much of the opening third of the *Māncarīt* to narrating the history of the Kachhwaha clan. The genealogy begins with a praise address to Vishnu in his tortoise form. Here Amrit Rai exploits the phonetic similarity between “Kachhwaha” and “Kashyapa,” one meaning of which is “tortoise.”³³ Other parts of the early section of the genealogy are similarly

³¹) Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 185. (Very minor changes to the Hindi text, such as substituting “ba” for “va” or “kha” for “ṣa” are made here and elsewhere for greater clarity.)

³²) See note 71.

³³) This linking of Man Singh's ancestors with the tortoise avatar of Vishnu also makes sense because the Kachhwaha kings took the title *Kūrmārāja*. (Amrit Rai uses this designation in several verses cited below.)

linked to tales from Puranic cosmogony. The poet goes back to the dawn of cosmic time, when Vishnu reclined on the milk ocean and there first sprouted from his navel a lotus upon which sat Lord Brahma.³⁴ Amrit Rai subsequently turns his attention to the ancient solar race of Indian kings, tracing the Kachhwahas back to Rama and his son Kusha. The intermediate period, between the heroes of the ancient world and the sixteenth century, is only scantily filled in, but, as Amrit Rai approaches the present, he becomes more voluble and more specific.³⁵ It is instructive to study the poet's method, as well as his emphases and omissions. Formally, his predilection is for quatrains, which he uses with considerable artistry: depending on the perceived importance of the individual, he shines his spotlight on him for one or two lines, or for an entire verse, or, in exceptional cases, for multiple verses. His reports are at times quite selective, and revealing, precisely for being so.

Two notable sixteenth-century Kachhwaha kings are Man Singh's great-grandfather Prithviraj (r. 1502-27) and his grandfather Raja Bharmal (r. 1547-74). Amrit Rai says little about Prithviraj as a royal figure, instead stressing his religious devotion.³⁶ From other sources, we know that Prithviraj was a devotee of the Ramanandi sage Krishnadas Payohari of Galta, a relationship that prefigures the royal bhakti that would soon sweep through many of the kingdoms of western India as Rajput rulers began to embrace Vaishnavism (the worship of Vishnu).³⁷ (Man Singh himself would become famous as the patron of Govindadeva, a magnificent Krishna temple in Vrindavan, which bears many features of imperial architectural style.)³⁸

³⁴ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*. v. 20.

³⁵ It is difficult to reconcile the genealogy contained in Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*, vv. 37-40, with that reconstructed by the scholar R.N. Prasad on the basis of records from the Jaipur archives, the Jain chronicler Mumhata Nainsi, and the nineteenth-century historian Shyamaldas. Verses 41-4, however, conform better. See Prasad, *Raja Man Singh of Amber* (Calcutta: World Press, 1966): 1-3.

³⁶ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*. v. 44.

³⁷ See W.R. Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhdadas of Galta." In *Invoking the Past: the Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. D. Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1999]): 389-94.

³⁸ Amrit Rai foregrounds Man Singh's role in establishing this temple with the epithet "Govindamandira-sthitisthāpanācārya" ("presider over the establishment of the Govindadeva temple") in a *viradāvalī*, or string of royal epithets, on p. 2. The patronage of this temple is considered one of Man Singh's signal achievements. See C. Asher, "The Architecture of Rāja Mān Singh: A Study of Sub-imperial Patronage." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, ed. B. Stoler Miller (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 183-201;

Prithviraj's son Raja Bharmal was the first of the Kachhwahas to have a sustained relationship with the Mughal Empire and is thus of particular interest. A perceptive reader might have noticed a gap between the reigns of Prithviraj and Bharmal: there is a similar gap in Amrit Rai's text. The years intervening between Prithviraj's death and the accession of Bharmal were rife with dynastic struggles, and Amrit Rai apparently did not wish to sully his narrative with these details.³⁹ Here exercising a poet's prerogative *not* to record history, Amrit Rai conveniently skips directly to Bharmal.⁴⁰ In Bharmal's case, too, we find some interesting omissions. After he ousted his kinsman Askaran in 1547, Bharmal's hold over the Amber kingdom remained tenuous for many years, and it was only with Akbar's backing that he could decisively secure his territory.⁴¹ It was at this juncture, in 1562 at a meeting in Ajmer, that one of the most momentous events in Rajput-Mughal relations took place: Raja Bharmal gave his daughter Harkha in marriage to Akbar, initiating a practice of marital alliance that would soon become a widespread political strategy of the empire.⁴² There is not one word on the subject from Amrit Rai. Was this because royal *kāvya* had always been about royal glory, and this Rajput-Mughal inter-marriage was thought to diminish the prestige of the Kachhwaha house?⁴³

Govindadeva: a Dialogue in Stone, ed. M. Case (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1996).

³⁹ Differing accounts of this history are reconstructed in Prasad, *Raja Man Singh*: 4-5, and Khan, *Kachhwahas*: 2-9.

⁴⁰ R. Sreenivasan has noted that Bhats routinely both telescoped and elaborated the genealogies of their patrons. See *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen*: 81. As C. Lefèvre has demonstrated, Mughal genealogical practices evince their own distortions, "which, more often than not, represented the family's past through the lens of its dominant section at a given moment, and only exceptionally constituted a neutral archive documenting its lineage." See "In the Name of the Fathers: Mughal Genealogical Strategies from Bābur to Shāh Jahān," *Genealogy in South Asia*, special issue of *Religions of South Asia* 5/1-2 (2011), ed. S. Brodbeck and J. Hegarty: 421.

⁴¹ See Prasad, *Raja Man Singh*: 6-8. The historian Khan (*Kachhwahas*: 1), for his part, does not mince words, opening his monograph with the remark, "The Kachhwahas, before their alliance with the Mughals, were a non-entity among the ruling tribes of Rajasthan."

⁴² See R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 166-75; F.H. Taft, "Honor and Alliance: Reconsidering Mughal-Rajput Marriages." In *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, ed. K. Schomer et al. (Delhi: Manohar & American Institute of Indian Studies): 2:217-41.

⁴³ C. Lefèvre has noted a similar silence regarding marriage alliances in the Mughal sources: "if the Mughals' family connections with the Rajputs were actually acknowledged, albeit reluctantly and in a distorted way, they were never something the dynasty thought fit to

Signs of the new political alliance are more visible in the linguistic and formal profile of Amrit Rai's text, beginning with his account of the subsequent generation. Whereas Amrit Rai dispenses with Bharmal after just two lines, he devotes three entire verses to Bharmal's son Raja Bhagvantdas (r. 1573-89), the father of Man Singh and a leading *manṣabdār* (Mughal official) of Akbar.⁴⁴ In a text that is written largely in a combination of Brajbhasha and Rajasthani (with occasional archaicizing touches drawn from the Apabhramsha repertoire), the sudden eruption of Persian loanwords onto the Hindi page has a striking effect—a codeswitching that betokens unmistakably the incorporation of this dynasty into the Persianate Mughal order. Amrit Rai marks the king's first entrance with the epithet *sadar-i sāhi vajjīr [vazīr]* ("foremost of imperial ministers"), which is followed closely by *Hindu-panāh* ("shelter of the Hindus").⁴⁵ The language textures of the work thus repay close attention: here are telling instances of royal titles and the power dynamics that they encode.

These Persianized titles, *sadar-i sāhi vajjīr* and *Hindu-panāh*, also epitomize something important about the dual roles that many Mughal *manṣabdārs* served: they spent much of their time as imperial subordinates on military campaigns subduing those who resisted Mughal power, but as *rajas* they also had obligations to local constituencies in their *vaṭan jāgīrs* (home territories assigned for the collection of land revenue), a domain where Rajput rulers not only reigned as kings but often asserted their authority by invoking ancient models of Hindu kingship.⁴⁶ In his verses memorializing Bhagvantdas, Amrit Rai highlights especially the first element, Mughal service, focusing on a hair-raising battle during the campaign to subdue Gujarat in 1572. Akbar and his close attendants had found themselves vastly outnumbered by the forces of Ibrahim Husayn Mirza at the town of Sarnal, and Bhagvantdas performed a signal feat of bravery that was greatly appreciated by the emperor.⁴⁷

publicize, in any of the media they used for imperial propaganda, as something they could derive prestige or legitimacy from." See "In the Name of the Fathers."

⁴⁴ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 46-7, 52.

⁴⁵ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: v. 46.

⁴⁶ Cf. Asher, "The Architecture of Rāja Mān Singh": 191.

⁴⁷ According to Nizam al-Din Ahmad, the emperor rewarded Bhagvantdas (here called Bhagwan Das) with a banner and a kettledrum. The Sarnal episode is recounted in *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, trans. B. De (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1936): 2:377-81. Other renditions are in Abu al-Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, trans. H. Beveridge (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press,

As the hero of the work, Man Singh is naturally accorded extended treatment in the *vaṃśāvalī* (genealogy) in a complex passage of several verses that simultaneously elevates his regal status as a Hindu Rajput and stresses his indispensability to Akbar. Many of the themes are straight out of a Sanskrit textbook on expressing kingly authority: Man Singh has the regal grandeur of Indra, the king of the gods; he is learned, like Bhoja, a famous king of old; generous, like Karna; true to his word, like the Puranic hero Harischandra, etc.⁴⁸ But Amrit Rai also updates the poetic repertoire to reflect the new reality of Mughal service. A playful line uses the etymology of Man Singh's name—one meaning of *mān* in Hindi is “respect”—to make an argument about the imperial favor he commands:

Dillisi mānu mānahi diyau mānahi mānu kahijiyai.⁴⁹

The lord of Delhi gives Man Singh respect; that is why he is called “Man.”

The same verse praises Man Singh's willingness to do *svāmidharma* (“service to the overlord”), a concept with both a rich textual history in western India⁵⁰ and a powerful topical resonance in the context of Akbar's reign.

Some passages have elements of classical *praśasti* poems, the praise addresses typical of the Indian *kāvya* tradition. A major theme running through all of the stanzas is, understandably, military valor. Sometimes the imperatives of *kāvya* take precedence over historical reporting, as in this two-verse sequence that introduces Man Singh's son Jagat Singh:

Jagamagai jaga pari jugati siū śrījagatasīṅha sujāna
 Sunī khusī bhayau, khurasānapati khalabhala macī khurasāna
 Puṇi bhīra ati kaivara parī jaham māna meru mahīpa
 Paiṭhe paṭhāna su pavana jyaū ḍagamagiya, hindū dīpa

1912-15): 3: 17-22, and *Ma'āshir al-umarā* of Samsam al-Dawla Shah Nawaz Khan, trans. H. Beveridge (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979): 1:404.

⁴⁸ Karna is the character in the *Mahābhārata* whose unstinting generosity led him to give away his golden armor and earrings, even though these gifts would later ensure his own destruction. Harishchandra is a Job-like figure whose truthfulness and self-sacrifice are legendary. Also see note 72.

⁴⁹ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: v. 50.

⁵⁰ See C. Talbot, “Advocating Allegiance in Early Modern India: The Proto-Patriotism of Svami Dharma,” paper presented at the 38th Annual South Asia Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, 2009. Amrit Rai uses this and other similar terms frequently (as in v. 73, when a son of Raja Bharmal sacrifices his life for the emperor's cause at Sarnal, in Gujarat).

Tahā keharī jagatesu karavara khulyau kāla bhuyaṅga
 Tahā prabala pavana paṭhāna pala maū kie jihī juri jaṅga
 Ṭīkaiṭa ṭeka su hindu kī raṇa aṭala sūra subhāi
 Kūrammadhuja bala dāna kau paramāṇu kahyau na jāi⁵¹

It gives pleasure to know that clever Jagat Singh dazzles the world. The Lord of Khurasan raised a ruckus. A fierce engagement ensued in the Khyber pass. Stalwart Man Singh, protector of the earth, rushed to the scene. The Pathans [Afghans] entered the fray and scattered, as though blown by the wind. The Hindus shone like a lamp [i.e., in a windless place, steady and bright?]

Lion-like Jagat Singh took his sword out of its scabbard and unleashed his fury, like a serpent of doom. He engaged the mighty tempest-like Pathans in battle and killed them instantly. A courageous fighter by nature, Man Singh's heir apparent was the bulwark of the Hindus, unshakable in battle. The courage and generosity of that ensign of the Kurma clan defy description.

In these stanzas, Amrit Rai possibly refers to the week-long campaign in 1581 that was waged against Akbar's half-brother, Mirza Hakim (here hyperbolically styled "Lord of Khurasan"?),⁵² but he is manifestly uninterested in providing historical details, such as a date or a blow-by-blow account of an actual military engagement.⁵³ The passage is an action-filled but stereotypical account of victory-in-battle that packs a literary punch. Note the playful, poetic details, as in the opening phrase *jagamagai jaga pari* ("dazzles the world"), which creates a pleasing alliteration with "Jagat Singh," or the poetic vision of the flustered Pathans being scattered by the wind (*pavana*). Amrit Rai frames the battle in epic terms, as a struggle between Pathans and Hindus, and singles out Jagat Singh as protector of the Hindus. He strips away all evidence—this must have been deliberate—of Akbar or any other Mughal officer, creating the impression that Man Singh and his son were the heroes who saved the day.

Regardless of its occasionally kāvyaesque features, the genealogy remains one of the richest sections of the *Māncarīt* for positive history, because, in addition to treating Man Singh's immediate predecessors and sons, Amrit

⁵¹ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 63-4.

⁵² Strictly speaking, Mirza Hakim should have been styled "Lord of Kabul," but "Khurasan," which begins with an aspirated consonant, presumably enhanced the alliterative effects that Amrit Rai sought here.

⁵³ Man Singh took part in this campaign—some details are in *Akbarnāma*: 3:493-95, 502-47—but I have been unable, thus far, to find any mention of the role of his son Jagat Singh in a Mughal source. For more on Man Singh's military service in the northwest in regard to Mirza Hakim, see below and note 79.

Rai also provides a wealth of detail about the extended family of Kachhwahas and other select Rajput nobility. Ten or so verses celebrate important figures from the Shekhawat lineage, who were relatives and sometimes rivals of the Kachhwahas. A quatrain on Rai Sal Darbari, a distinguished Shekhawat who was appointed as the *darogha* (custodian) of Akbar's harem,⁵⁴ stresses his service ethic and trustworthiness:

Rāisāla ramañiava kivā salahijjiyai
 Datta satta sāmitta su kihā sama dijjiyai
 Samara sūra sāvanta sāhi mana māniyaĩ
 Parapavāda paratiya paradravya na jāniyaĩ⁵⁵

It is difficult to find the right words to praise handsome Raisal.
 In liberality, truthfulness, and service to the overlord he has no comparison.
 Brave in battle, he pleases his overlord the Shah.
 He knows nothing of calumny, nor does he covet the wealth and women of others.

The last epithet is especially necessary for an officer in charge of the harem. That Raisal merited an entire quatrain evidently marks his importance. In some cases, Amrit Rai accords just a single line to individual figures, as in this verse about other leading *mañabdārs* of the day:

Jagamañdana jagamāla pavāra parakkhiyai
 Rasaka rāu surajannu su hiyai harakkhiyai
 Candrāvata dina durga rāu raña raja liyaĩ
 Rāu rāisingha rañhaura subali vikrama hiyaĩ⁵⁶

Jagmal Panwar, ornament to the world, has been tested [in battle].
 Surjan Hada is a connoisseur, whose heart delights.
 Chandravat Durga Rao nobly gave his life one day in battle.
 Rao Raisingh Rathore is powerful and courageous.

The mode of description here differs from that of imperial chronicles like the *Akbarnāma* and *Jahāngīrnāma*. The verse form and the exigency of end rhyme constrain, to some extent, what Amrit Rai can say. But the net effect is a catalog, in an Indian idiom, of important real-life personalities from late sixteenth-century politics—and this in a way very unfamiliar from

⁵⁴ See R. Singh, *History of Shekhawats* (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 2001): 43.

⁵⁵ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 79. The idea of *sāmitta* is similar to *svāmīdharmā*.

⁵⁶ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 85.

the poetry, even the historical poetry, of earlier northern Indian literary traditions.

Although Persian chroniclers' mode of depiction often feels closer to modern annalistic history than that of the Indic *kāvya* styles, the impulse toward short biographical sketches of *maṅṣabdārs* in these texts is comparable and may well be a shared textual convention that grew out of a historiographical dialogue. Both Amrit Rai and the Persian writers stress imperial service, but the latter also include details about numerical ranks (*zāts*) in the Mughal hierarchy, as in this entry on Rai Sal Darbari, recorded under the year 1602 in the *Akbarnāma*:

At this time Rai Sāl Darbārī was raised to the rank of 2,500 *zāt* and 1250 horse. He was one of the old servants of the court. He was a good servant and one who jeopardized his life.⁵⁷

Three years later, Jahangir, in his memoirs, also devoted a couple of lines to Rai Sal Darbari, alongside Man Singh's nephew Madhav Singh, saying that they were "granted the privilege of banners, because they were at our court and were trusted Shekhawat Rajput servants of my father's. They were both promoted to the rank of 3000."⁵⁸ It is logical that the Mughal emperors were far more invested in the system of rankings that they had implemented than were the court poets of Rajput leaders. Ignoring those rankings in Hindi textual discourse may also have been a mildly subversive act, another way of effacing Mughal power, as these texts often do.

Local Sovereignty in an Imperial Regime: A Dialogue with Mughal Power

Having attended to people, Amrit Rai turns to place in the third part of the *Māncarīt*, which is an extended *nagaravarṇana*, a description of the city of Amber. Here the poet uses a classical genre to take the reader on a tour of the Kachhwaha capital. Occasionally inserting himself into the narrative as a guide, he reports on elements of the built environment, such as the lush gardens and attractive water reservoirs, the bazaars bustling

⁵⁷ *Akbarnāma*: 3:1215.

⁵⁸ Jahangir, *Jahāngīrnāma*, trans. W.M. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 29.

with commercial activity, and the beauty of the city's women, all of which epitomize the ruler's glory. Several passages deal at length with Man Singh's *darbār* (court). There are also elaborate descriptions of Man Singh's elephant and horse stables, lively recitations by pandits, musical performances, and the city's stunning architectural grandeur.

The provenance of passages such as these is difficult to determine. Some of the tropes used in royal description no doubt have analogues in many literary cultures, but to leaf casually through the table of contents of Abu al-Fazl's famous *Ā'in-i Akbarī* ("Edicts of Akbar," 1596, a section of the *Akbarnāma*)—with its discussions of the harem, imperial stables, music and poetry, charity, and notices of leading members of the court, many of which are also featured in Amrit Rai's *nagaravarṇana*—is to suspect that some similarities may be more than a coincidence.⁵⁹ In a related vein, Sunil Sharma has noted that, beginning in the sixteenth century, "hyperbolic and flowery descriptions of urban places" underwent an efflorescence in Indo-Persian texts, expressed in the genre of the *shahrāshūb* (lit., "disturbance of the city").⁶⁰ Descriptions of the city are also common in Hindi texts from the same period.⁶¹

To be sure, Amrit Rai needed no Persian textual model to craft his *nagaravarṇana*. There is a long tradition of stylized descriptions of cities in Indian *kāvya*, and some of what Amrit Rai says is more or less what Indian *kavis* had been saying for centuries about their cities and courts. This was a genre that Amrit Rai knew well; he also self-identifies as a *kavi* and in a few places even announces that he is following poetic convention rather than describing his *contemporary* surroundings, as in these lines on the women of Amber:

⁵⁹ Other scholars have similarly noted interactions between Persian and Indic textual discourse. P. Hardy, for instance, following Benoy Kumar Sarkar, has pointed to elements shared by the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* and the *Arthasāstra*. See Sarkar, "The *Ain-i Akbari* as a Semi-Moslem and Semi-Hindu Arthasastra." *Calcutta Review* 56/1-3 (1935): 245-56, cited in Hardy, "Abul Fazl's Portrait": 130. The leading Mughal chroniclers do occasionally show evidence of familiarity with Rajput historical narratives. See Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen*: 83.

⁶⁰ S. Sharma, "If There is a Paradise on Earth, It is Here': Urban Ethnography in Indo-Persian Poetic and Historical Texts." In *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800*, ed. S. Pollock (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 240.

⁶¹ See Busch, *Poetry of Kings The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*. New York: Oxford University Press: 181-92.

Nagara nāyakā nikaṭa sunayana nirakkhiyaim
 Jhīṇa sukaṭi kāmīṇi kuca pīṇa parakkhiyaim
 Kavi varanaī varavayana ahira muha amiyamau
 Avaṇi amara nara hoṇa mahā mana magana bhau⁶²

Behold the women of the city with their large eyes.
 Such slender-waisted, full-breasted beauties!
 Poets elegantly describe their lips and mouths as steeped in nectar.
 Entranced by their celestial beauty, mortal men become gods.

Other segments appear to be taken not from classical kāvya but from oral tradition, as in these lines from a lengthy bardic-style sequence on the bazaar, brimming with alliteration and lively cadences:

Mahā maṇḍi māṇikka pekhī pravālī, kidhaṃ hīra hāṭakka dekhī divālī
 Jahām hi jarāvai rihū ropi rūpā, kahūṃ danta ānanta ope anūpā
 Kahūṃ kada mīśrī savāraiṃ kaṃdoī, miṭhāi banāi nidhāi na hoī
 Kahūṃ baiṭhi becaī basālū sugandhī, rasālū sugandhādi vidhi āṇi bandhī⁶³

Is this a capacious marketplace gleaming with rubies and coral? Or a celebration of Diwali with all of the glittering gold and diamonds? The jewelers are setting stones into silver, and some shops are piled high with lustrous ivory. Countless confections are being concocted, and sweet-sellers lay out their sugary delights. Those of refined taste have brought to market many types of fragrant scents and they sit in their shops, offering them for sale.

The point here is not to list methodically the produce and commercial transactions of the realm—as one might find in a Mughal source like *Āīn-i Akbarī*—but to create a poetic evocation of the marketplace, with all its colorful sights and smells. The combined effect of stanza after stanza delivered in this performative manner is to make an argument about plenitude and prosperity and, by extension, the successful Kachhwaha kings who rule over such a bounteous domain.

In fact, the entire nagaravarṇana is perhaps best seen as a carefully crafted poetic proclamation of Kachhwaha power. In an age when Akbar had recently consolidated his rule and built a spectacular new capital at Fatehpur Sikri (“the city of victory”), the Kachhwahas of Amber would understandably have sponsored a text that is, in much of its logic and focus, a celebration of their own royal status and refined urban culture. One verse

⁶² Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 101.

⁶³ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 112-3.

even goes so far as to imply that the expected courtiers of Badshah Akbar—whether highly-placed Muslim elites, Afghans, or Hindu scribal groups like Kayasths and Khattris—are actually serving Raja Man Singh instead:

Saiyada, mugala pathāna, khatrī, kāyatha vipra gaṇu
Meru mahīpati māna, dvāra tumhārahi dekhīyai⁶⁴

Eminent King Man, Sayyids, Mughals, and Afghans, Khattris, Kayasths, and Brahmins cluster at your doorstep.

For all of its apparent use of the traditional tools of Indian poetics, Amrit Rai's *nagaravaṇana* does evince a dialogue with a Mughal-period social and political landscape. These elements are developed more fully in the final section of the work.

Impressions of Akbar and Late Sixteenth-Century Political Life

The lengthy description of Amber is followed by the poet's fascinating treatment of Akbar and select imperial officers. The text tracks both positive and negative impressions of Mughal power and is a window onto the perceptions of dynastic change by local communities a couple of decades after the new regime had engulfed much of northern India. The poet also celebrates Man Singh's distinguished military service in two major Mughal expeditions. Amrit Rai, as always, continues to lace his poetry with history.

One passage contains an unusually sustained discussion of Emperor Akbar in a lengthy segment in the *rāsā* meter. Here are a few highlights:

Jattha sāhi jallāla vicitru virājaiya
Jāhā atula tapa teja tihūṃ pura sājaiya
Dala ananta dillisura daha disi dikkhīyai
Haya gaya paya nahu pāra puhumi pari pakkhīyai
Dhamma dharaṇa dharaṇisa dharaṇi dhua dhāraiya...
Jiha cirāka dina dinayara durita nikandaṇāu...
Guṇa payodhi ke pāra apāra pahuttayau
Sayala sudhamma samiddhi siddhi sanjuttayau
Kai lacchī hari hiyē nirantara vāsa dhura
Kai avalambīya aba akabara avaṇīpa ura.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: v. 137.

⁶⁵ Lines culled from Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 172-6.

The amazing Shah Jalal [al-Din] rules his realm.
 His measureless power adorns the three worlds.
 The armies of the lord of Delhi encompass the ten directions.
 Nobody can see to the end of his war elephants, cavalry, and infantry.
 The emperor upholds dharma. His rule stabilizes the earth . . .
 The sun is his constant lamp, cleanser of all sin . . .
 Acclaim for his virtue has spread to distant shores.
 He is magnificent, just, a man of great attainments.
 The goddess Lakshmi shares her time between Vishnu's embrace
 and nestling at Akbar's breast.

Amrit Rai's portrait of Akbar—typical of Rajput and other Indic representations from the period⁶⁶—is entirely favorable and in many ways consistent with centuries of Indian rhetoric on Hindu kingship, as when the poet-cum-historian emphasizes the emperor's concern with dharma or proclaims that his military might has spread to the ten directions, invoking the classical notion of a *digvijayī* (conqueror of the directions) king. To suggest that Lakshmi divides her time between Vishnu's and Akbar's embraces conjures up the idea of *rājyaśrī* (political luster), an ancient strategy of political legitimacy. This is a portrait that largely localizes (and Hinduizes) the Central Asian emperor, rather than emphasizing any kind of Muslim foreignness. At the same time, the poet prefaces his remarks with an acknowledgment that Akbar really stands apart. He is *vicitru* ("amazing, unusual"). The references to the sun and lamp (using the word *cirāka*, a Hindi derivative of the Persian *chirāgh*, "lamp") may also betray some knowledge of Akbar's predilection for Illuminationist philosophy.

A few Mughal administrators also receive special attention. The lengthy celebration of Akbar is followed immediately by a praise address to Todar Mal, the emperor's famous Khatri revenue administrator, a placement that evidently showcases his high status.

Jattha sāhi vajjira su ṭoḍaru pikkhiyai
 Udaya attha aba avaṇi kalama jihā likkhiyai
 Svāmidhama dhara dhīra sāhi anurañjanaū
 Gaḍha bhañjana rājāna baṛe sura gañjanaū.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See B.L. Bhadani, "The Profile of Akbar in Contemporary Rajasthani Literature." *Social Scientist* 20/232-3 (1992): 46-53; C.M. Naim, "Popular Jokes and Political History: The Case of Akbar, Birbal and Mulla Do-Piyaza." *Economic and Political Weekly* 30/24 (1995): 1456-64.

⁶⁷ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: v. 177.

Behold Todar Mal, the imperial vizier,
 Who with his pen records the proceedings of the world from dawn to dusk.⁶⁸
 He delights the emperor with his steadfastness in serving his overlord.
 He vanquishes the forts of kings and crushes even mighty enemies.

Another mark of the poet's high regard for Todar Mal is that he merits an entire quatrain, while other notables are allotted just one or two lines; he is also the only Hindu officer to be catalogued in this, more Mughal-focused, section of the work.⁶⁹ Again, we see an emphasis on imperial service (*svāmidharma*).⁷⁰ The poet also imagines that the kings and heroes of Akbar's realm "patrol the earth, as though they were the emperor's orders come to life." In another iteration of the ocean motif, Amrit Rai likens the various lesser kings to streams that merge into the imperial ocean (*milai sāhi samudra kaū*).⁷¹

Suggestions of Cynicism and Political Anxiety

A few passages of deep cynicism about contemporary politics mitigate, and complicate, the fulsome expression of royal glory that is otherwise the expected focus of texts in the *carita* or "biography" genre. In an extended sequence in the *candāyan* meter earlier in the work, Amrit Rai had decried the lack of *dānī* (generous) kings in his own day, harking back to the royal paragons of old:

Ajju vartamāna kali ko na kahū sujhaiya
 Dāna sanamāna huṇi guṇiya guṇa bujjhaiya
 Ajju vartamāna vikkamu na kahū dikkhiai
 Jāsu sakabandha udayattha mahū likkhiai
 Ajju vartamāna bhua bhoja bhuñcaka nahīṃ
 Dhīra dhārādhipati kitti maṇḍi mahī
 Ajju vartamāna nahi karanu suṇi lijjiai
 Prāta ravi taṇaya maṇi kaṇaya bharu dijjiai

⁶⁸ The poet here possibly refers to the *Ṭodarānanda*, an encyclopedia that Todar Mal patronized. I thank Audrey Truschke for the suggestion.

⁶⁹ Other figures mentioned include Khan Azam, Narang Khan, Baz Bahadur Khan, Sharif Khan, Vazir Khan, Muhibb Ali, Shahbaz Khan, Zayn Khan, Shaykh Jamal, Sadiq Muhammad Khan, Bakhshi Shaykh Farid. See Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 178-81.

⁷⁰ See notes 50 and 67. *Svāmidhama* is a variant of *svāmidharma*, as is *sāmitta* (see note 55).

⁷¹ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 182-3.

Ajju vartamāna bali rāu nahi taraṇi tali
 Āṇi maṅgyau su vrajarāi bāvanna chali
 Ajju vartamāna pṛthu veṇa haricanda nahi
 Satta anuratta dina datta pratipatti mahi
 Ajju vartamāna jagadeu jāḷā na kali
 Haṭhī haṃvīra puṇḍīra ari mānu mali
 Ajju vartamāna jayasindhu nahi jāṇiyai
 Tāsu kali kitti ajahūṃ su bakhāṇiyai
 Ajju vartamāna vara varana varanai na chavi
 Jagati na jajāti nṛpa kahā daddhīca chavi⁷²

In today's world—the *kaliyuga*—generosity and respect are
 nowhere to be found,
 gone is the appreciation for virtue.
 In today's world, no Vikramaditya is seen,
 whose fame reaches the eastern mountains.
 In today's world, the earth sports no Bhoja,
 a steadfast king whose fame adorns the land.
 In today's world, nobody hears of a Karna,
 the sun's son, who gave a wealth of jewels and gold.
 In today's world, there is no King Bali under the sun, whom
 the Lord of Braj [Vishnu] approached in the form of a dwarf and tricked.
 In today's world, gone are Prithu, Vena, and Harischandra,
 lovers of truth, accomplished and generous providers.
 In today's world, there is no Jagdev. The kaliyuga sports no Jaja.
 Bold Hammir is lost to us, as is heroic Pundir, crusher of enemy pride.
 In today's world no Jai Singh [Siddhraj] is known,
 whose virtues are still celebrated in the *kaliyuga*.
 In today's world, there is no luster of Yayati.
 Where has Dadhichi gone?

As a court poet hoping for unstinting recompense, Amrit Rai is not a dispassionate commentator on the subject of *dāna* (“generosity”). And these verses build a crescendo of anguish, only to be capped with a couplet acknowledging that there is, in fact, one exception to this pattern of utter kingly inadequacy: the poet's patron.⁷³ Despite this panegyric aspect, the insistent repetition of the phrase *Ajju vartamāna* (lit., “today, in the present”) nine times in alternate lines conveys an ominous discomfiture about a world where Vikramaditya and Bhoja, revered kings famous for both their valor and their learning, and a host of other Puranic and historical figures have passed away for good, the likes of whom are never

⁷²) Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*. vv. 89-93. My translation draws on the modern Hindi rendering of G.N. Bahura.

⁷³) Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*. v. 94.

to return. While couched in archetypal imagery about the kaliyuga,⁷⁴ it is hard not to sense the poet's deep concern about real historical change. In fact, there is no reason to believe this imagery, archetypal though it was, did not provide an historically true mental framework within which to conceptualize that change.

This feeling of unease surfaces again in two striking passages toward the end of the work. However typological the language, when Amrit Rai says that all the kings of today are flawed (*sakalañk*), except for Man Singh, who is stainless (*nihakalañka*, i.e., *niškalañk*), he addresses a perceived problem in contemporary political life, a theme he develops over several related verses:

Mai carace cita cāhi, nara narinda rājā sabahi
Manu lāgai chinu jāhi, aisau kou na dekhiyai

Keī kūḍa kāmī su nikkāma dekhe
Keī sūma samsāri bhūpāla pekhe
Keī rāga rasa rañga nīke na jāñai
Keī kavva kallola hīyai na āñai
[Ti] kuddesa kussīla kañgāla keī
Virūpi kurūpi anūpi na teī
Keī dāna sanamāna, jāñai na bheyā
Keī mūḍha gaviṭṭha dekhe adeyā

Eka liya nṛpa kalañkī kaliyalu kiya karahi kāva mukha majjhe
Tahaṃ nihakalañka pikkhiau kummesura meka maṇi māna⁷⁵

I have tried in my heart to speak of various lords of men and kings.
Not one have I found worthy of sustained attention.

Some appear corrupt, lustful, and indolent.
Many kings are fawning and immersed in worldly pleasure.
They lack connoisseurship and have no understanding of the fine arts.
The delights of literature leave them unmoved.
Some rule over utterly evil lands, others are penurious or of poor character.
Evil, ugly—no paragons these. Foolish, vainglorious, and miserly,
they know nothing of honor or charity.

And there are those flawed kings of the kaliyuga who turn away from poetry.
I see only the Kurma king, Man Singh, who is, gemlike, flawless.

⁷⁴) The *Kaliyuga varṇana* (description of the evils of the *kali* age) is a common motif in Indian poetry.

⁷⁵) Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 245-8. The “ti” (for *ati*, “utterly”) inserted at the beginning of the seventh line is a conjectural emendation of the editor, G.N. Bahura, to rectify a problem with the meter.

Court poetry is often thought to be unrelentingly panegyric and court poets mislabeled as “either frustrated artists unable to cast off the restrictions of courtly protocol and write freely as they wish, or second-rate hacks who sell their inflated and insincere verses to the highest bidder.”⁷⁶ Here Amrit Rai proposes that kings actually have to deserve their poetry—among contemporary kings, Man Singh is the only one who does.

Perhaps the most disconcerting lines of all are in a passage that speaks of deep disenchantment.

With the gods themselves. Again, the ostensible subject is Man Singh’s exemplary *dāna*, before which even the gods are humbled, but Amrit Rai’s suggestion that the gods have gone into hiding may also betray a profoundly pessimistic view of worldly power:

Rahi caki jācaka jāṇi, kaunu kalijjugi jāciyai
Deve ko ḍaru māni, darasa na dehī devatā

Kalpattaru takkita jyau akulāi
Rahyau amaresura kai grha jāi
Su dekhata deva taje animeṣa
Su jācaka āgama jāṇi viṣeṣa
Yahai lakhi hoi nahīm paratacchi
Rahī chapi kṛṣṇa hṛdai mahī lacchi
Su pāvāsa māsa yahai chala jāi
Pai soi rahai jala mā jādurāi
Māṅgai kou kabahūṃ maṇi sāja
Su jāi payāli chape phaṇirāja
Jācaka jāṇi kiyau asa pheru
Rahyau kari oṭa pahārana meru
Jācaka jācana kou ḍara pāi
Joga dharyau gavaresura jāi⁷⁷

Supplicants are alarmed. In the Kali age there is nobody to approach.
Out of fear that they will have to give, the gods have stopped giving *darśan* (lit., “vision,” the engagement between a devotee and a divine presence).

Alarmed, the wish-fulfilling tree fled to Indra’s abode.
Fearing the advent of supplicants, the gods lost their composure.
Lakshmi does not appear anymore.
She remains hidden at the breast of Vishnu.

⁷⁶ See J.S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): 41. Although Meisami refers specifically to Persian court poetry, the attitude is widespread.

⁷⁷ Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 238-41.

And Krishna hides in the ocean during the rainy season.
 Fearing that somebody would request his jewel,⁷⁸
 Sheshanaga went and hid in hell.
 Meru, also fearing a request for charity,
 Turned around and hid in the mountains.
 The same fear led Lord Shiva to take up yoga.

It is risky to try to read contemporary beliefs when they are filtered through typological imagery, but Indic literary representations generally leave us little choice other than to try. Do we hear, however obliquely, in Amrit Rai's description of an unsettling breakdown in the divine order some kind of commentary on recent political changes during the poet's generation?

Man Singh's Exploits at Haldighati and in Kabul

In the concluding verses of the *Māncarīt* these intimations of despair are tempered by two celebratory vignettes of Mughal campaigns in which Man Singh acquitted himself well: the battle against Rana Pratap of Mewar at Haldighati in 1576 and the suppression of the revolt of Akbar's half-brother Mirza Hakim, which became a source of grave concern to the Mughal state in the early 1580s.⁷⁹ Amrit Rai was seriously engaged with recent history in these passages, but, for him, history was not about chronological precision and the adducing of detailed evidence about the vicissitudes of combat on a particular day under a certain commander. He was more concerned with presenting a generalized picture of his patron's valor. Poetic flourishes were of the essence, because they redounded to the honor of Man Singh; moreover, outstanding opportunities for the expression of *vīra rasa*, the heroic sentiment much valued in traditional Indian literary representation, were not to be missed. Here *kāvya* becomes particularly interesting as history. Or, perhaps it is better to say that history becomes the stuff of *kāvya*.

⁷⁸ Sheshanaga, the cobra who supports the earth in Hindu cosmogony, is believed to have a jewel in his hood.

⁷⁹ See M.D. Faruqi, "The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48 (2005): 487-523; S. Subrahmanyam, "A Note on the Kabul Kingdom under Muhammad Mirza Hakim (1554-1585)." *La Transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman périphérique, Lettre d'information* 14 (1994): 89-101.

The battle of Haldighati has a special significance in western India. In an age when all of the Rajput clans were being convinced of the benefits of submission, the Sisodia dynasty of Mewar was a holdout against Mughal power. After a major assault in 1576, Rana Pratap Singh was finally humbled, an incident that the colonial historian, Colonel James Tod styled Mewar's "Thermopylae."⁸⁰ Man Singh played a major role in leading the troops, which, for Amrit Rai, must have made it a natural choice of episodes, because it showcased his hero's authority and the indispensability of his military prowess to Akbar. The brief episode begins with a short couplet, in which the emperor offers up *pān* (betel nut) and looks for volunteers to lead the charge against the Rana. Man Singh eagerly accepts the challenge, at which point Amrit Rai launches into seven stanzas in a bardic style, which encapsulate the campaign in expressive, action-packed language. The aural effects, especially the complex, highly structured assonances, are indispensable to the poet's reporting style:

Caḍhe saina sarvaṅga cauraṅga line,
 Su kai kopa kūramma karvāra kīne
 Caḍhyau saṅga le mīra masnanda bhāri,
 Jahāṃ [hī] tahāṃ jāni phaujeṃ saṃvārī
 Tahāṃ bhau bhāratthu khamnauri bhārau,
 Mahā jhūka dal jhampi jūjhe jujhārau
 Pareṃ juddha jhakjhora jūjhe apārā,
 Mahā soṅa parvāha naddiya nārā...⁸¹

The entire army departed in a fourfold formation.
 Enraged, the Kurma hero [Man Singh] took up his sword.
 He set out to war, accompanied by distinguished mirs
 who commanded royal authority.
 He mustered troops from all over.
 There at Khamnaur [a nearby village] a fierce battle ensued,
 with crowds of soldiers leaping into the fray, eager to fight.
 Many troops were struck down with fierce blows.
 Great rivers of blood began to flow...

⁸⁰ As noted by L. Rudolph and S. Hoerber Rudolph, "Writing and Reading Tod's *Rajasthan: Interpreting the Text and its Historiography*." In *Circumambulations in South Asian History*, ed. J. Gommans and O. Prakash (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 268.

⁸¹ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 252-3. The particle "hī" in line four is Bahura's metrical emendation. On the special form of assonance, known as *vaiṅa saḡāi*, that characterizes certain types of bardic poetry, see Kamphorst, *In Praise of Death*: 89-108.

Amrit Rai is not as interested in recounting the prosaic facts as in conjuring up vividly the mood of battle with words and sounds carefully chosen to make an impact. He was *performing* history, bringing it alive for his audience, capturing what was timeless (and thus truly important) in the time-bound events that were making history around him. The passage is infused with excitement but also evokes disgust (*bībhatsa* was one of the classical sentiments in Indian *rasa* theory), when the poet goes on to give a graphic description of heads rolling and corpses lolling. Shiva arrives on the scene to augment his skull garland, and Kali dances in the midst of the carnage. Severed limbs are likened to fish swimming in a pool of blood. Man Singh's victory is summed up in one crisp line: "The Rana was defeated in battle, having put his foot on the shoulder of death."⁸²

The performance of history was, for Amrit Rai, in some important sense, a literary performance of Man Singh's power, with all the accoutrements of *rasa* in play. The episode celebrates Man Singh's exemplary adherence to a Mughal service ethic. When Akbar offered up *pān*, it was Man Singh who took it, thereby taking up a challenging commitment to serve the emperor. The offering of *pān*, as with the bestowing of *khil'ats* (gifts of cloth) and royal titles, symbolized the incorporation of the vassal into the body politic.⁸³

The *pān* motif is also an important element in the Mirza Hakim episode, which, in Amrit Rai's work, follows closely upon the battle of Hal-dighati. As the poet recounts it, a great tumult ensues at the court when Akbar hears of the treachery of his half-brother in the northwest. Amrit Rai mimics the Persian-speaking milieu in a highly atypical idiom:

Macyau gheru darabāri, bhayau mālama khaumḍa ālamahim
Sindhu nadī kai pāri, mānāi hukama hakīma kau
Tahaṃ ataggiya bahuta vitthariya puṇi mahidī khāna
Mahiti puṇi tega turaka mā bandhī⁸⁴

An intrigue was causing a tumult at the court. The lord of the world [Akbar] had found out that, across the Indus, Hakim's command holds sway. Akbar's half brother and his men had expanded their authority. Mahdi Khan and the other Turks were armed to the hilt.

⁸²) Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 254-9.

⁸³) See D.L. Curley, "'Voluntary' Relationships and Royal Gifts of Pān in Mughal Bengal." In *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-colonial and Colonial India*, ed. S. Gordon (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003): 50-79.

⁸⁴) Amrit Rai, *Māncarī*: vv. 260-1.

Amrit Rai cavalierly modifies Persian expressions such as *ma'lūm* (“found out”) and *khāvind-i 'ālam* (“lord of the world”) to meet the metrical and phonetic needs of his Brajbhasha verse. His choice of register reflects a linguistic dialogue between Persianate and local milieus, as well as hybridization through the type of lexical borrowing that contributed significantly to the development of Hindi as a lingua franca in premodern times. It may also be that the colloquialization of the refined language of the Mughal overlord had a humorous effect on his Rajput audience, as did a pedestrian assonance such as *hukama hakīma kau* (“Hakim’s *hukm* [command]”) or the use of *atag[giya]*, a term of Turkish origin for “milk brother” (also applicable to half brothers). When Akbar again offers up the imperial pān, looking for a volunteer, there is an awkward silence: “All the khans and mirs remained seated. The rajas and rays just stood there.”⁸⁵ Only Man Singh rose to the occasion.

In this case, too, the actual depiction of the event takes the form of a stylized literary set piece from *kāvya* rather than a realistic account of the battle with the Mirza. Amrit Rai used the technique of metrical variation to interesting effect, and here a long sequence in the *muttiyadām* meter carries the narrative forward. Man Singh and his army are charging off to Kabul, and the reader is swept along with them—like any historian worth the name, Amrit Rai wants to tell a good story, too. The poet stresses the rumbling of the earth as it was trampled by horses’ hooves, and the clouds of dust that rise to darken the sky. Man Singh has turned day into night, and the enemy is likened to a day-blooming lotus that will now wilt and die. In an interesting poetic reversal—one entirely appropriate to the climax of the work—here it is Man Singh’s military might, not Akbar’s, that is described as the ocean.⁸⁶

The work concludes with a tour de force of hyperbolic bardic style, in which Man Singh’s victories are so extensive that not just Kabul and Khurasan but all the western lands, including Thath, Badakshan, Ghazni, Samarqand, Kirghizstan, Isfahan, Tabriz, Hormuz, Baghdad, Egypt, Merv, and many others are brought under Mughal rule, with Man Singh earning Akbar’s undying gratitude (*ciru kṛpa sāhi jalāla*).⁸⁷ The final message is delivered in a concise Brajbhasha couplet:

⁸⁵ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 263. Here and elsewhere Amrit Rai sometimes makes subtle distinctions between Muslim and Hindu factions, as in v. 137, excerpted above (note 64), where each occupies a separate half of the tightly structured *sorathā* couplet.

⁸⁶ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 276-9.

⁸⁷ Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 280-2.

Sāhiba akabara sāhi, e saba saraṇāgata bhae,
Rahai mahā ḍaru tāhi, je na caraṇa parasana karaiṃ⁸⁸

All became the dependents of our master emperor Akbar.
Those who did not touch his feet passed their days in fear.

This couplet epitomizes the choice that many Indian kings faced: to participate or not in the formidable new regime, to sail in Akbar's boat or drown in the ocean of Mughal power.

Traditions of Memory in Dialogue

Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt* is, both stylistically and substantively, a special blend of kāvyā and history. As kāvyā, it demands to be read according to certain literary protocols. Its core themes are easy to identify: Mughal power is relentless; it is also dangerous, as the persistent use of the ocean metaphor throughout the narrative underscores. If notes of pessimism are distinctly audible, some solutions are also offered: oceans are dangerous but navigable. For Man Singh and the Amber court, as for many Rajput houses, embracing Mughal service was the key to navigating the political waters of Akbar's period. Mughal power may be difficult to ignore in his text, as it was in northern India during this period, but here it is *rhetorically* relegated to the margins, recast in a manner that puts the local raja at the very center of the story. Amrit Rai pays due attention to the reigning sovereign with various praise addresses, but the real argument of the *Māncarīt* is that the heroic Man Singh is indispensable to Akbar—a stalwart general leading the Mughal troops steadily from victory to victory. Amrit Rai also makes several potent arguments about political complementarity. On multiple occasions, he conceptualizes the Rajput participation in the Mughal administration in terms of svāmīdharmā. Moreover, if Mughal power is an ocean, then one way to construe it positively is to say that Man Singh and other Indian rajas are the rivers that flow into it or the waves that are integral to it. And the ocean of Mughal power could not exist without the “waters” of regional powers—the military infrastructures of local rulers who threw in their lot with empire.

The *Māncarīt* is also centrally about carving out a domain of local sovereignty within an imperial system. The poet foregrounds Amber, not Agra, in his nagaravarṇana. And the tales of Mughal battles are generally

⁸⁸) Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 283.

presented in a deliberately decontextualized manner: Man Singh is not just one of many Mughal commanders—the perspective of imperial histories recorded in Persian—he is the only king besides Akbar who really counts. A text like the *Māncarīt* is a construction of power from the periphery, which is also a move to make the peripheral less peripheral. A vision of local sovereignty for Rajput rulers was also, of course, best expressed not in Persian, but in Hindi, which clearly bears upon the burgeoning domain of vernacular historiography during precisely this period.⁸⁹

Man Singh, who came into contact with the Mughal court at a young age, commanded considerable resources and engaged in multiple forms of cultural and political expression. His architectural legacy, which is far better studied than his literary patronage, contained both imperial and Indic elements. As noted by Catherine Asher, the Persian and Sanskrit epigraphical records at Man Singh's headquarters in Rohtas (in today's Bihar)—which was constructed after Amrit Rai wrote his *Māncarīt*, during a period when Man Singh took a leading role in some of the campaigns to subdue eastern India—are completely different in both their messages and rhetorical styles. The Persian record proclaims the greatness of Akbar, whereas the Sanskrit proclamation says nothing at all about Mughal power.⁹⁰ In the Hindi *Māncarīt*, Amrit Rai likewise made careful choices about what to say—and what not to say. As noted, in his otherwise historically accurate account of sixteenth-century Kachhwaha genealogy, he suppresses problematic succession struggles in the period immediately preceding Raja Bharmal. And, when he recounts the defeat of Rana Pratap Singh, he provides a circumscribed tale of unequivocal victory. In this respect, Amrit Rai was hardly alone among premodern Indian writers, who often sought not merely to record history but to improve upon it, for which *kāvya* techniques were especially well suited.⁹¹ In contrast to Persian chroniclers, for

⁸⁹ It is also possible to find expressions of local authority in the Persian tradition, if one looks beyond the mainstream chronicles to those commissioned by powerful subimperial officers. See note 101.

⁹⁰ Asher, "The Architecture of Rājā Mān Singh": 191 (she notes a similar omission of Mughal authority from the Sanskrit portion of a bilingual inscription on a gate built during Jahangir's reign in 1607 on pp. 193-4).

⁹¹ C. Talbot has noted that improving upon history was one of the strategies of the *Prthivīrājāsō*. See "The Mewar Court's Construction of History": 25. See also her article in this volume, which presents a dramatic instance of how a Sanskrit *kāvya* from the Bundi court reinterprets and even suppresses Mughal political reality.

instance, he conveniently fails to mention the nontrivial fact that, at Haldighati, the Rana was not killed or taken prisoner by Mughal forces but instead managed to escape into the surrounding countryside.⁹² Another complaint heard in Mughal chronicles but omitted by Amrit Rai is that the army went hungry, because Man Singh would not let the soldiers pillage the Rana's territory.⁹³ Badauni even claims that Man Singh fell out of favor with Akbar for a while, whereas no such disgrace is allowed to mar the pages of the *Māncarīt*.⁹⁴ Whereas Amrit Rai's account omits several telling facts, the very same Persian accounts just referred to can hardly be considered neutral concerning the battle of Haldighati. They have an imperialist agenda and reveal their own distinctive interplay between facts and sweeping rhetorical gestures. Muzaffar Alam's assessment of the *Akbarnāma* of Abu al-Fazl, the Mughal chronicle par excellence, is applicable here:

While he does not neglect . . . the truth, the basic duty of a historian, his portrayal of the developments of the earlier years in several cases is influenced by the particular ideology and concerns of this late phase of Akbar's rule. We also know that he was not a mere chronicler. He had his own philosophy of life and social order, and propounded, promoted and defended the ideology of this dispensation. He wrote history with a mission.⁹⁵

Amrit Rai, too, wrote history with a mission.

The commissioning of new forms of Hindi texts, of which the *Māncarīt* is but a single example, has to be viewed as a serious Rajput historiographical enterprise that began to coalesce during the early days of alliance-building with the Mughals. The Kachhwahas played an important role in shaping a new political dialogue with the Mughal state. This development is also reflected in a textual dialogue, as Mughal and Rajput traditions of memory, each in its own language and each with its distinct logic and emphases, evolved in tandem. While the memorializing of Mughal power dates back to Babur—the emperor himself wrote his memoirs in Chaghatay Turkish—the Mughal *tārīkh* (historical) tradition came into

⁹² Abd al-Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab al-tavārikh*, trans. W.H. Lowe (Karachi: Karimsons, 1976): 2:241; cf. Abu al-Fazl, *Akbarnāma*: 3:247.

⁹³ Nizam al-Din Ahmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*: 2:493; cf. Badauni, *Muntakhab al-tavārikh*, trans. Lowe: 2:240-1.

⁹⁴ Badauni, *Muntakhab al-tavārikh*, trans. Lowe: 2:247.

⁹⁵ M. Alam, "The Mughals, the Sufi Sheikhs, and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation." *Modern Asian Studies* 43/1 (2009): 164.

its own during Akbar's reign. Abu al-Fazl's extraordinary *Akbarnāma* is only the most famous of the works produced under Akbar's patronage; he also took a keen interest in preserving the memory of his father and grandfather. In a series of imperial decrees beginning in 1588, he called upon elders of the royal family, as well as others with knowledge of imperial affairs, to contribute to the process. Aside from the *Akbarnāma*, several other important chronicles were composed in this period, such as the three surviving memoirs of Humayun composed by his sister, Gulbadan Begum, and Jawhar and Bayazid Bayat, Humayun's ewer-bearer and a Mughal soldier, respectively.⁹⁶ Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan, like Man Singh a leading Akbar-period general, undertook a translation of Babur's memoirs into Persian, bringing it to a wider audience.

The nature of the interactions between Persian and Hindi textual communities is difficult to assess. Tessitori (1887-1919), a pioneering scholar of western India, felt certain that the Mughal model had been decisive for the development of a sustained interest in historiography among Rajputs; that may be too simplistic a vision.⁹⁷ For instance, what should we make of the fact that Amrit Rai's *Māncarī* was written in 1585, several years *before* the famous Persian chronicle of Akbar by Abu al-Fazl?⁹⁸ It can be no accident that Amrit Rai's *Māncarī*, the first major textualization of the life of a Rajput manṣabdār, should be written in precisely the period when Akbar himself was engaged in a massive commitment to the consolidation of an imperial tāriḫ tradition in Persian. Abu al-Fazl's was a work of both documentary history and imperial propaganda on a much grander scale, but some convergences between the texts are striking. Both, for instance, combine passages of high rhetorical flourish with detailed reporting of facts about manṣabdārs and expatiations on the salubriousness of imperial service. Persian writers followed the literary conventions of their day, whether by crafting ornate sentences in rhyming prose or peppering their texts with

⁹⁶ See W.M. Thackston, *Three Memoirs of Hodayun* (Costa Mesa CA: Mazda, 2009): viii.

⁹⁷ Ziegler, "The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārṣara": 133 and note 36.

⁹⁸ There are earlier Akbar-period histories, such as *Nafā'is al-mā'āshir* by Mir Ala al-Dawla Qazwini (c. 1565-75) and the *Tāriḫ-i Akbarī* of Muhammad Arif Qandahari (c. 1580), but none has the same stature or significance as the works from later in his reign. On the Akbar-period historiographical tradition, see S.A.A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign, with Special Reference to Abu'l Fazl, 1556-1605* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975): 223-99; H. Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography During the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976).

quotations from Hafiz and Sadi, whereas Hindi writers often adopted the classical norms of Indic kāvya.

Both Rajput and Mughal historiography continued to develop during Akbar's period and beyond. A literary successor to Amrit Rai, Narottam Kavi, wrote yet another *Māncarīt* at the end of the sixteenth century, and the Amber court remained interested in preserving the *Māncarīt* and in writing new royal biographies in the years to come.⁹⁹ Other manṣabdārs, notably Raja Bir Singh Deo of Orccha (r. 1605-27), perhaps influenced by developments at the Amber court, commissioned their own caritas.¹⁰⁰ Here, too, the possibility of historiographical dialogue confronts us if we follow the lead of Corinne Lefèvre and pay greater attention to subimperial traditions of Persian historiography. During Jahangir's reign, prominent Mughal noblemen such as Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan and Khan Jahan Lodi commissioned massive biographies that, while obviously different in language and register from the Hindi caritas, perform strikingly similar rhetorical tasks. On the one hand, Nahawandi and Nimatallah (authors of the *Ma'āṣir-i raḥīmī* and *Tārīkh-i khān jahānī wa-makhzan-i afghānī*, respectively) are keen to stress that their patrons were ideal Mughal administrators. On the other hand, the very act of textualizing voluminously the glory of high-ranking manṣabdārs would simultaneously have been a potentially subversive challenge to imperial authority, for Rahim was a powerful Mughal leader with a longstanding presence in the Deccan, and Khan Jahan Lodi hailed from the Afghan elite, a community whose

⁹⁹ See note 4. As evident from the colophon, Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt* was recopied in 1613, the year before Man Singh died; see Bahura, ed. *Māncarītāvalī*: 43. Mirza Raja Jai Singh (r. 1621-67), the great-grandson of Man Singh, ordered a copy of Narottam's work; see Bahura, "Prāstāvik paricay": 34. Subsequent Amber rulers also contributed to the perpetuation of Kachhwaha history. A portion of a later eighteenth-century kāvya on the life of Sawai Jai Singh II (1688-1743) by Atmaram, *Savāijaysimhcarit*, has also been edited by Bahura (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1979), as has the life of Pratap Singh; see *Pratāpprakāś* of Krishnadatt (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1983). There is also a later, more general *Kūrmavilāsa* ("Play of the Kurma Kings," c. 1854) by Chand Kavi, ed. G.S. Sharma and S. Swami (Bikaner: Rajasthan State Archives, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ Keshavdas, *Vīrsimhdevcarit* ("Biography of Bir Singh Deo," 1607), is even grander in conception than either of the caritas produced for Man Singh; see *Vīrsimhdevcarit*, ed. Kishorilal (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1997). And the carita is only one of many Hindi historical genres patronized by Rajput elites during this period, spurred in part by Mughal contact. See Ziegler, "The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārvāra": 131-5; Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen*: 80-4; Busch, *Poetry of Kings*: chap. 5.

aspirations for ruling India had not entirely vanished.¹⁰¹ As with the Rajput sources epitomized by Amrit Rai's *Māncarīt*, these Persian texts exhibit tensions between asserting loyalty to the emperor and making a claim about regional authority.

If a textual dialogue between the Persian and Hindi traditions in the realm of royal biography and historiography seems likely during the Akbar and subsequent periods, it is also important to identify dialogues that did not occur. One notable such non-dialogue is religious. The *Māncarīt* was composed within a few years of the first Jesuit mission to the Mughal court. Although Amrit Rai describes a few Mughal court scenes, there is no mention of the European visitors. Nor does the 'Ibādat-khāna, the famed venue in which Akbar encouraged religious debates, occasion any treatment. In fact, it is remarkable how little attention is devoted to any question of religion or Rajput-Mughal religious differences. Man Singh's patronage of the Govindadeva temple in Vrindavan is briefly highlighted, along with a praise address to the Vaishnava deity.¹⁰² A couple of Kachh-waha scions are praised for their bhakti.¹⁰³ As noted, there are many references to Hindu legends and cosmogony. Bharmal is titled "Hindu-panāh" when first introduced, and two quatrains from the genealogical portion of the text memorialize Man Singh's son Jagat Singh, with some attention to upholding the dignity of Hindus and countering the Pathan menace. But these few allusions seem largely generic; overall, little of significance can be gleaned from this text on the subject of interacting domains of religious discourse.

Amrit Rai may have ignored the Jesuits at Akbar's court, who were more peripheral to his era, but the striking fact is that he was not really concerned with Muslims, either. When it comes to Muslim figures in the work—and he mentions many—the only categories that seem to matter to him are political titles such as mir or khan, or whether the person is friend or foe. (Man Singh, like Akbar, waged war against Muslims *and* Hindus.) The poet never refers to Islamic practices of any kind; no mulla or mosque—Man Singh did commission several mosques—is mentioned. There are

¹⁰¹ C. Lefèvre, "Pouvoir et noblesse dans l'empire moghol: Perspectives du règne de Jahāngīr (1605-1627)." *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 62/6: 1295-6, 1299-1305.

¹⁰² See Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: v. 11 and note 27.

¹⁰³ See Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*: vv. 44, 69, 72.

trends toward a Persianized register of Hindi in Mughal darbār scenes, but that is a linguistic proclivity and has nothing to do with matters of faith. Akbar is not associated with Muslim markers beyond his regnal title, Jalāl al-Dīn. He is, on the contrary, frequently likened to Vishnu. We can perhaps explain this with recourse to genre: many things are not discussed in this text because they were not relevant to a carita about Man Singh. The *Māncarīt* is a tale of Rajput military prowess that follows the protocols of kāvya as much as history. But textual silences can in themselves be instructive and historically meaningful. For Amrit Rai and the court he represented, the issue at the forefront was political, not religious dialogue.

Conclusion

The historical poetry of Rajput courts has barely been tapped as an archive and has much to teach us if we are up to the epistemological challenges of exploring alternative truth regimes to those of mainstream history. Although centuries-old texts of this type are not easy to interpret, they repay the effort. A close reading of this literary material, both on its own terms and in a comparative framework that factors in contemporary Persian sources, can contribute important regional perspectives to Indian history. And the Hindi kāvya tradition has far more to commend it as an archive than can be gleaned from the work of Amrit Rai that has been the primary focus here. Amrit Rai wrote just one of two extant *Māncarīts*, and both are drops in the bucket (or, perhaps more aptly, waves in the ocean) of a much larger domain of Rajput historical literature in vernacular languages and Sanskrit. But even an exploration of this one text enriches our perspective on Rajput-Mughal political dynamics. I have drawn attention to largely factual genealogies and catalogues of Mughal and Rajput nobility, which are interspersed with elements of pure kāvya in the work. The rhetorical strategies of Amrit Rai bear critically on processes of Rajput incorporation into the Mughal Empire. We see instances of pride in Mughal service but also attempts to articulate the authority of a local raja from within the confines of imperial power. Too often the Hindi voice is overlooked in Mughal historiography. The near simultaneity of the *Akbarnāma* and *Māncarīt* suggests that genres of Mughal and Rajput history and political expression were profoundly dialogic. This dialogue is still accessible to scholars today, allowing for a more nuanced, layered historiography of early modern India.

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