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Individuality Versus Collectivity

Pragmatic Goals of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* Literary Compositions

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Abstract This article aims to reflect on the genre of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* – commemorative poems which form the bulk of indigenous middle Marwari literature in *Ḍiṅgaḷ* (sixteenth–nineteenth centuries) – and to show the poems as works composed to immortalize certain individuals, ordinary beings first of all, such as Rajput warriors, petty lords, landowners, and to praise their acts, deeds, or achievements. The existence of a large number of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* stands in contrast to a generally held opinion that the notion of collectivity encompasses almost all aspects of life in India. The genre of panegyric poems has been placed in the wider sociopolitical context of the Rajput world, which was inextricably linked to the land. In this fashion the notion of individuality and the function of the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* as a way to achieve realistic goals for a certain individual person can both be discerned. The *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, together with Rajput chronicles (*khyāt*) and genealogies (*vaṁśāvalī*), served locally oriented Rajput politics in their own ways as attempts to confirm someone’s individual rights to rulership in the *jāgīrdārī* and *zamīndārī* systems of land distribution. However, although they present highly sophisticated poetry, aesthetics was not the ultimate purpose of the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, but only the way to obtain pragmatic goals, namely to improve reputation and with this to legitimize power.

Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt are strophic poems, highly elaborated for metrical purposes, and intended for recitation. They are composed in *Ḍiṅgaḷ*, a literary style of middle Marwari (sixteenth–nineteenth centuries) mostly used in poetry. This genre was created to commemorate particular events, but more importantly, to immortalize certain individuals, ordinary beings, such as Rajput warriors, petty lords, and landowners (*bhomiyaṣ*), and to praise their acts, deeds, or achievements. Although *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* can be linked to other literary traditions known as *carit kāvyas* that record the names and deeds of certain warriors, as, for example, *rāso* compositions, *virudāvalis*, or in the form of stories in prose like *vāta* and *vartā* (cf. Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 65), it is this genre that formed the bulk of indigenous middle Marwari literature in *Ḍiṅgaḷ*. Some questions are crucial in this context: why did this particular genre become predominant? Nowadays, it is almost forgotten; only a relatively small number of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* have been preserved and published;¹ and they are hardly ever read, or recited, because of their archaic and difficult language, as well as contextual obscurities. And with regard to the content of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, what was behind this great impulse to commemorate so many individuals, ordinary men, who were negligible in the wider discourses of politics or history? Without going in great detail into the poetics and rhetoric of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, which is remarkably developed (for more, see Svāmī 1948), it is the aim of this chapter to discern the purpose of such compositions, and what message remains after examining the figurative metalanguage and aesthetics. The term ‘metalanguage’ refers here to the verbal imagery that draws inspiration from the repertory of the so-called Great Tradition of India. As for this metalanguage, one is reminded of the words of Tessitori that every skirmish becomes a Mahabharata: in the eyes of a Rajasthani poet, every warrior is a giant or Bhīma, or Arjuna, and, in general, the tendency is to see the world through a magnifying glass (Tessitori 1917: 228).

People of the Soil

What, then, remains in the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* apart from their aesthetic function? One should look for clues in the construction of the Rajput world and in the fact that it was inextricably linked to the land. It is very

1 See, for example, twelve volumes in the series *Prācīn rājasthānī gīt* 1956–9, or *Rājasthānī-vīr-gīt-saṅgrah* of the series *Rājasthān purāṇa granthmālā* 98.1, 100.2, 1968, and 116.3, 1972.

significant that the land was permanently an object of conquest, defence, protection, cultivation, and also glorification. In Rajasthan, Rajputs formed a political elite but, essentially, a landed class with their exclusive rights to land. The appropriation of land mainly for the Rajputs can also be discernible in the motto *vīr bhogya vasundharā* by which the region of Rajasthan has been frequently described in the sphere of the Rajput milieu. According to this romanticized phrase, originally from the *Bhagavadgītā*, only warriors, hence brave heroes, have the right to exploit (enjoy) the resources of the earth.

The Rajput hierarchy consisted of landlords, with kings and princes at the top and masses of ordinary landholders (Hindi *bhomiya*; Rajasthan *bhomiyo*) at the bottom. The term *bhomiyo*, literally 'one of the soil' (*bhom / bhūm*), reflects the Rajputs' strong attachment to the land. *Bhomiyo* was a holder of land at the local, village level, exempted from paying any tribute. In fact, the terms 'Rajput' and *zamīndār*, or *jāgīrdār*, were synonymous in Rajasthan and such people were addressed with respect as 'Lord' (*thākur*) (Sharma 1998: 39, 63). Those who died fighting for the protection of their land were idolized as *Bhomiyaīs* and venerated in the local communities from which they came.²

Rajputs were sustained by the land which provided the means to conduct warfare. A warrior's strong tie with land and its soil is nothing new or special in agrarian societies; likewise it is well attested in the culture of Rajasthan. This motif has a long tradition in Indian literature as well. Farming activities that connote warfare and vice versa have been especially popular metaphors and similes used in classical Sanskrit poetry. A soldier who extirpates, or uproots, enemies is at the same time a farmer carrying out his field work, as in the following example from the Sanskrit poem *Padyacūḍāmaṇī* of Buddhaghoṣa:

Having reaped crops of rival kings with his swords,
having threshed [them] with his cavalry columns,
having winnowed [them] with elephant ears as fans,
he heaped up the rice of his glory in battle.
(tr. Franceschini 2019: 71)

This kind of imagery can also be discerned in Rajasthani literature,³ and one of the most beautiful literary examples of the connection of

2 A *Bhomiyaī* can be also worshipped for his death in a battle fought for the protection of cattle, Brahmans, or religion.

3 'Rajasthani' is a general but handy term. In this chapter it is used primarily to denote the Marwari language.

battle with field work against the backdrop of changing nature is found in *Krisana Rukamaṇī rī veli*, a poem in Ḍiṅgaḷ composed in 1580/vs 1637 by Pṛthvīrāj Rāṭhoṛ (1549–1600).⁴ The passage describing a battle and subsequent stages of the fight (*yuddh varṇan*), by means of the use of the figure of speech, *śleṣa*, depicts at the same time the seasons according to the agricultural calendar (verses 117–29; Rāmsiṁh and Pārik 1931: 182–9). The army gathers like congeries of rain clouds in the sky; the rumble of the sky during the monsoon season is also the sound of artillery together with a rain of arrows; water channels are overflowing, and so is the battlefield with a mire of blood full of floating skulls which also take the form of bubbles on water. This image also contains the typical Rajput projection that the blood of the Rajput warriors shed on a battlefield fertilizes the soil of Rajasthan. The end of a fierce battle is the season of (vicious) harvest when a farmer's threshing floor also serves as a storage space for dead bodies collected from the battleground (verse 128; *ibid.* 1931: 188). However, the strongest correlation of a fighter with a farmer, and a weapon with agricultural tools, is in the figure of Balarāma, also known as Haladhara, literally 'that one who holds a plough'. Indeed, the plough can itself be a weapon, which is clear from the following fragment containing two inseparable images:

Then Balarāma barracks his companions:	Then a farmer encourages his companions:
'Until now the enemy ranks are unbroken.'	'Until now [the soil-like] enemy is unploughed.'
After the rain [of arrows] is a proper time for attack,	After rain is a proper time for ploughing,
Who will now use [his armed] hands to achieve the victory?	Who will now use a plough to reap the harvest?
Having forgotten what has passed, seeds of glory should be sown,	Having finished [ploughing] for the second time, ⁵ seeds of glory should be sown,

4 For more information about the poem and its author, see Tessitori 1919; Rāmsiṁh and Pārik 1931.

5 The exact meaning of the phrase *bisariyā bisari* is cryptic, and was a puzzle for the commentators; there are therefore different interpretations. Tessitori admits that he was unable to guess, although from the general sense it should be something like 'after doing the ploughing' (Tessitori 1919: 105). Svāmī's translation looks plausible because ploughing twice is a common farming practice (Svāmī 1971: 64). Rāmsiṁh and Pārik propose another meaning: 'having forgotten what has happened'. Then the verb *bisari* stands for 'to forget' (from the infinitive *bisarno*; maybe also from the verb *sarno*, 'passed by, spent [as time]'). A similar use is found in Braj Bhasha (the verb *bisārnā* from Sanskrit

For enemies [this time] will be pun-
gent like poison.’
Limbs [of the enemy] fall away [like]
roots [of weeds] that crack,
[When] Balarāma attacks [with his]
weapon.

[This is the ultimate time for] wicked,
poisonous [leftovers of] dry stems.’
Limbs fall away, roots [of weeds]
crack,
[When] the farmer turns the field
with a plough.⁶

A Rajput, even when cultivating his land with the labour of other subordinate groups, he maintained a profound and enduring connection with the soil. The imagery of the aforementioned fragment appears to be well grounded in the culture of North India which was formed to a large extent by an armed society (Kolff 1990: 7); the phenomenon of mobile, militarized peasantry recruited as soldier-peasants who could achieve the status of a Rajput by gaining fame in battles completes this picture (for more, see Kolff 1990). The hero of the third *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* studied in this chapter has in fact more in common with those ordinary soldiers in an agrarian society.

Such a strong emphasis on ties with the land might have had something to do with the fact that the Rajputs emerged as the (titular) owners of land that first they had to conquer, or capture. Territorial expansion of Rajput lineages – for example, in unpopulated territories or controlled by a non-Rajput population, or at the expense of another Rajput clan – was another principle of the Rajput world (Saran 1978: 87, 91). An integral part of the conquest and colonization (a subject that was thoroughly studied by Saran) was the phenomenon of disinherited sons who migrated to conquer their own territories, which in the course of time came to form separate domains claimed to be independent (Saran 1978). The frequent result was overcrowding due to the growth of extended Rajput families and conflicts inflamed by their demand to gain access to the land. There were therefore many who claimed shares or rights to the land. Study reveals that ‘[p]rosperity as much as poverty deeply influenced

vismṛt), e.g. in a verse from Bihārī Lāl: *surati śyāmadhana kī surati bisarehū bisaraina*; Rāmsiṁh and Pārīk 1931: 454.

- 6 बेली तदि बळभद्र बापूकारे
सत्र साबतौ अजे लगि साथ।
वूठै वाहवियै आ वेळा
हल जीपिस्यै जु वाहिस्याइ हाथ॥
बिसरियां बिसर जस बीज बीजिजै
खारी हाळाहळां खलांह।
त्रूटै कंध मूळ जड़ त्रूटै
हळधर कां वाहतां हळांह॥

Verses 123–4; Rāmsiṁh and Pārīk 1931: 186.

lineage strategies for social advancement and prestige and relationships between kin' and, therefore, economic determinants played a crucial role in status and rank hierarchies among Rajputs (Kasturi 2002: 13).

A specific vocabulary for conceptualization of the world constructed in this way was also necessary. It is interesting to note the organic and agricultural aspect of the terminology as '... there existed a perception of a Rajput clan as an organic body, a bamboo shoot (*vaṁs*), which had branches (*sākh*), twigs (*khāṇṇ*), and tips (perhaps 'buds' would be better)'. This imagery extends even further: a lineage sometimes was believed to have been founded by a Rajput with a symbolic name, such as *bīj* ('seed') or *mūl* ('root'). A lineage needed a place to grow, a *mūlsthān* ('place for the root') or a *pagṭhor* ('place for the foot'). Without such a place, the Rajput was said to be hungry (*bhūko*), i.e., landless; once he obtained territory, he and his descendants would 'consume' it (*dhartī khāṇo*, *dhartī bhogṇo*). Sustained by the land, the lineage would 'prosper (*vaḍhṇo*)' and 'get nourishment from the soil (*bhog*)' (Saran 1978: 87–8). If the land was fertile and, hence, secured a clan's prosperity, the land was succulent or tasty (*ras paṛiyo*) (Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 113). 'The loss of territory was perceived as loss of nourishment, of the proper "food" for the Rajput *jāti*.' (Saran 1978: 102).

Pragmatic Goals of the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*

The worldview outlined above obviously had a significant impact on the indigenous literature, particularly on Marwari literature, in which a superregional pan-Rajput form of the peculiar style of *Ḍiṅgaḷ* was created that was exclusively linked to the Rajput milieu. At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the segmentation process of Rajput families coincided with the emergence in Rajasthani literature of a great number of such genres as *vaṁsāvalī* (genealogies) and *khyāt* (chronicle), which include, among other things, long lists of Rajput warriors. Literature of this type also had pragmatic goals: it served Rajput politics as another means of confirming someone's individual rights to rulership in the *jāgīrdārī* and *zamīndārī* systems of land distribution in the face of both locally oriented chieftains and their Mughal overlord. According to Ziegler, Mughal concerns about ancestry and precedence, and Rajput attempts to emulate the traditions of the imperial court for political advantage, also had an undoubted impact on the forms and content of local compositions in vernaculars, as well as on genealogies and *khyāts* (Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 66). The genre of commemorative poems, commonly known as *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, came into

existence, in greater numbers, in the sixteenth century. It happened more or less at the same time as the development of *khyāts* and other genres of genealogical and historical accounts.

It should be remembered that this was a very dynamic and violent world in which people were frequently uprooted; only a few would not have been skilled in the use of arms (Kolff 1990: 7), and ‘to rule ideally required a pristine right to enjoy or “consume” territory; therefore, defeated ruling groups left their lands with their people, while conquerors entered with theirs’ (Saran 1978: 114). It becomes evident that in such dynamic circumstances of mass migration, there was a constant need to confirm, guarantee, and secure one’s authority over the land. Literature was one of the means that served those purposes. If the genre of panegyric poems is put in the context detailed here, the notion of individuality and the function of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* as a way for an individual to achieve very pragmatic goals by improving his reputation and, as a result, legitimizing his power, can both be discerned. To be considered *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, a poem had to be composed according to well-defined rules that included mentions of personal information, such as the name of the warrior-hero, the name of his father and the name of his notable ancestor, the designation of his Rajput clan, branch (*vaṁś*, *sākh*, *khāp*); and the name of his homeland or his main lineal roots (for more, see Sārasvat 1986). In poetry expressed with fine artistry but in prominently conventional language, an individual is therefore brought to the forefront.⁷

Let me illustrate this with some *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*. The examples have been selected with the intention of representing a common man, or a chieftain from the periphery. A good example is provided by members of the brotherhood of Śekhāvat Rajputs from the estate of Śīkar (Śīkarvāṭī) in the region commonly known as Shekhawati (Śekhāvāṭī).

The first poem, composed by Ūmed Sādū, the Cāraṇ poet, extols Samrath Singh, the son of the ruler of Śīkar, the notable Śiv Singh (r. 1721–1748), who has been remembered in history as the chief who put an end to one of the last two Muslim (Kāyamkhānī) rulers over Shekhawati by conquering Fatehpur in 1731. Śiv Singh thus contributed to capturing the region entirely for Śekhāvat Rajputs (Miśra 1984: 192; Hooja 2009: 412; Ārya 2013: 60). His heir, Samrath Singh, has been commemorated in the following way:

7 It is also worth noting that the authorship of the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* compositions is usually well-known. Thus, the stress on certain individual poets is set against an anonymous collectivity. The poems circulate with the following formula, usually treated as its title: ‘the poem about xxx composed by xxx’ (*gīt xxx rau xxx rau kahyau*).

The Poem about Samrath Siṅgh, the Son of Śiv Siṅgh of Sikar

Mount Sumeru is the abode of the gods, and the lake Mānasarovar, that of the geese,
And the imperishable banyan tree of Prayāg gives shelter to birds.
In the same way, there is no other support for poets and bards in the Kali age
But your singular patronage, oh son of Śiv Siṅgh.

Just as in this world, the lotus provides refuge to the bees,
We, the devotees, call Śrī Rām their shelter.
In the same way, as the Kali age proceeds, there is no other shelter on earth,
Than our reliance on you, the chieftain⁸ Samrath Siṅgh.

The *cakorās* depend on the moon, and the *cakvās*, on the sun,
Peacocks depend on the rain clouds,⁹
And the ocean gives shelter to fish big and small,
In the same way, the great king Samrath Siṅgh assures the Cāraṇ poets of his protection.

The magnificence and fame of rulers proved false,
With the ocean unfordable, and the indifference of the Kali age growing.
When the Satya age departed from this earth and went to the gods,
Rāo Śekhā gave true protection.¹⁰

8 The cryptic word *dalāhara* is probably a compound noun, literally ‘the holder of an army’, combined from the words *dala* (*daḷa*; ‘army’) and the ending *-hara* (the Ḍiṅgaḷ variant of the ending *-dhara*).

9 The word *pulanda* (‘Indra’) implies rainy clouds.

10 गीत राव सम्रथसिंघ सिवसिंघोत सीकर रौ
सुरां ओठभण मेर हंसां जिहीं मानसर,
प्राग तरवर तिकै ओठभ पंखाळां।
ओठभण कळु मझि न को पातां यळां,
ओठभण तूं हीज सिवसिंघ वाळा॥
जगत विसरांम जेम भंवरां जळज,
भगत विश्राम श्रीराम भाखां।
कवियणां न को विसरांम वधतै कळु,
दलांहर सधर विसरांम दाखां॥
चकोरां चंद आधार दुडिंदं चकां,
पुलिंद आधार मोरां पिसातां।

Each four-lined stanza of the above poem is based on a key-word: *oṭhambhaṇa*, *visarāma*/*viśrāma*, *ādhāra*, and *saraṇa* respectively. Although the words are translated in different ways in English, they all fall within the semantic range of ‘shelter’, ‘refuge’, ‘abode’, ‘support’, ‘trust’, ‘patronage’, and ‘protection’. All of these aspects of support and patronage, especially patronage of poets, are typical domains of a ruler, for only one who can afford to be generous and powerful enough to guarantee protection is a legitimate ruler. Focusing on these aspects of rulership reveals the stages of a political transition that the hero of the poem goes through in order to create his image as an ideal king. However, a paratextual analysis is useful to find something else, for example, the pragmatic intentions of this composition rather than the mere flattery expressed in highly figurative and conventional language by a poet probably well-paid by Samrath Singh for carrying out this task.

Śiv Singh of Sikar had five sons, and Samrath was the oldest heir (see the genealogical tree below). Due to the chronic absence of Śiv Singh in Sikar, since the chief preferred to stay at the court of Jaipur in relation to which his estate was a tributary, Samrath Singh effectively wielded power in Śikarvāṭī. In the quest to ensure full power and also unrestrained access to the resources for himself, Samrath Singh eliminated his two brothers – Kīrat Singh and Med Singh – who were next in the line of succession (this fratricide offers a significant contrast to the poet’s statement that ‘the magnificence and fame of rulers proved false’ when Samrath Singh appeared). Maybe this tragedy persuaded Śiv Singh to change his mind, so that he disowned Samrath Singh and appointed his youngest son, Cānd Singh, as his successor (Hooja 2009: 693; Śarmā 2015: 44; Kālīpahārī 2014: 213). Sources are equivocal as to whether Samrath Singh accepted his father’s decision and proclaimed his own accession,¹¹ or whether it was Cānd Singh who subsequently usurped power (Śekhāvat 1991: 376); in any case, Samrath Singh ruled over Sikar as its king for only six years (1748–1754). If the aforementioned poem is put in the context of the tragedy of bloody feuds within

मह समंद आधार जेम त्रमंगल मछां,
 सुपह आधार समरथ सुपातां॥
 राव राणा असत हुवा मह तेज रज,
 अथध जळ कळु वधती उपेखा।
 सत प्रथी छोड जातौ हुतौ सुरमंडळ,
 सत सरण राखियौ राव सेखा॥
 Śekhāvat 1991: 208–9.

11 Śarmā writes that the rights of Cānd Singh to the throne of Sikar were declared by Śiv Singh in the presence of the Maharaja of Jaipur, so that it was he who would be recognised as the legitimate ruler; Śarmā 2015: 44.

the Sīkar family, then it becomes clear how passionately Samrath Siṅgh might have also sought confirmation of his status as a great (almost archetypical) ruler in a symbolic dimension buttressed by poetry. Being praised as a very generous patron produces measurable effects, especially when chieftainship is at stake. This method also proves efficient over the course of time when a man becomes a negligible in historical discourse and almost nothing remains after him but poems that commemorate him. The disownment of Samrath Siṅgh turned out to be fatal for Sīkar for generations. It also led to diarchy, with both Cānd Siṅgh and Nahar Siṅgh, the oldest son of Samrath Siṅgh, claiming the throne of Sīkar. Nahar Siṅgh managed to rule for only two years (r. 1754–1756; d. 1769). His rule was put to end when Cānd Siṅgh besieged Sīkar. Although the kinsmen and descendants of Samrath Siṅgh were given land (plots of land in perpetuity), they remained hostile to the ruling house of Sīkar for at least the next three generations, causing the most terrible depredations on the territory of Sīkarvāṭī, and thus creating the greatest threat and trouble for Sīkar in the subsequent nineteenth century.¹²

Keeping in mind what has been written above, it is interesting to see in contrast how Cānd Siṅgh (r. 1756–1763) sought to legitimize his rule through poetry. In this potlach-like race for power, an intention to surpass others might also have played a significant role. Cānd Siṅgh, for example, has been remembered as the king who in just one day granted fourteen villages to fourteen Cāraṇ poets (Śekhāvat 1991: 377). In this way, his generosity may well have overshadowed that of his deposed predecessor. Maybe Hukmīcand Khirīyā was one of them who, in return, composed the following *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*:

The Poem about Cānd Siṅgh, the Son of Śiv Siṅgh of Sīkar
Single-handed he dispersed his enemies, like Agastya who
drank all the ocean's waves.¹³

12 The situation was quite well recognized and the account described in great detail by the intelligence agents of the British East India Company, which in its own interest attached particular importance to the rights of succession and distribution of land. Kinsmen of Samarth Siṅgh, such as Ghumān Siṅgh, Zalīmī, Gyānjī, and Śyāmī, formed a marauding party and were named dacoits by the British. See the letter of N. Alves to W. H. Macnaghten, dt. 27.06.1835, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI).

13 The fact that Cānd Siṅgh acts easily, even with only one hand, has been emphasized in such a way that the poet makes reference to one of the stories from *Mahābhārata* about the miraculous deeds of the hermit Agastya when he brought the ocean into his palm and drank it easily. This enabled him to slay

Like Garuḍa who exterminated the snakes all by himself,
Like Indra who destroyed all the mountains with a single
thunderbolt,¹⁴
Cānd Siṅh single-handedly defeated all his enemies.

With his threatening cry, Agastya crushed the ocean's pride,
With his ferocious anger, Garuḍa reduced the snakes to ashes,
With his wrath, Indra destroyed the mighty mountains.
In the same way, the heroic son of Śiv Siṅh destroyed and scattered his enemies.

Roaring furiously, thirsty Agastya subdued the ocean,¹⁵
With a raised pennant of victory, Garuḍa attacked the king of snakes,
Hurling his thunderbolt through the sky, Indra cut off the wings of the mountains.
In the same way, the grandson of Daulat Siṅh destroyed the enemy's army on the battlefield.

The strength of Agastya threatens the ocean, and that of Garuḍa, the snakes,
Dadhīca's bone, made into Indra's thunderbolt,¹⁶ brings destruction to the wicked mountains.
In the same way, Rāysal Siṅh's descendant Cānd Siṅh was an obstacle for the army of his enemies

the enemies of the gods (Kālakeyas) who hid themselves at the bottom of the ocean (Mani 1975: 7). The verb *hiloḷiyā* suits this theme well and adds aquatic aspects too, because if it is not used with regard to an army, it also stands for 'to create waves', 'wash over by waves', 'to shake / stir up (water, ocean)'. See the entry *hiloṇṇau* in Lāḷas 1976–78. IV.3: 151.

14 Here is the reference to the story from Vālmiki's *Ramāyaṇa* that in *Kṛtāyuga* all mountains had wings and thus they posed a danger to the gods. Indra had to cut the wings off with his thunderbolt or diamond weapon, *vajra*; Mani 1975: 325.

15 The first line is cryptic, most probably because of scribal negligence. For the entry *pāthoda* ('ocean') Lāḷas also gives the meaning 'cloud' and provides this very line as an example but in a differing variant (*teja hāka-nīra pūra pāriyā pāthoda tasā*); cf. Lāḷas 1967–73. III.1: 2464.

16 This is another reference to *Mahābhārata* that Indra's weapon, *vajra*, with which he killed Vṛtra, was made from a bone of the hermit Dadhīca / Dadhīci; Mani 1975: 191.

And destroyed his foes: a warrior there has never been like him
before on this earth.¹⁷

The second *gīt* develops the theme of heroism in war, which, along with generosity, is another typical characteristic of the ideal Indian ruler. Structurally, the poem is based on a simile: Cānd Singh's strength and omnipotence are compared (equated) with the power of mythical figures – Agastya, Garuḍa, and Indra – known for their potency. It is also worth noting that the structure of the piece perfectly meets the criteria for this type of composition: each stanza is a paraphrase of the same theme, or evoked image. Knowing the context in which Cānd Singh came to power, it also becomes evident why the greatest stress in the poem is put on the enemies and the strength needed to dispose of them. The story, narrated in a language that exploits Sanskrit epic tradition, has local overtones as the opponents were in fact close relatives of Cānd Singh. In reality, 'the heroic son of Śiv Singh destroyed and scattered his enemies' in a less bombastic way than the poet described. In the middle of the night, when everyone was asleep and Nahar Singh was away in Jaipur, he commanded an army to take possession of the fortress of Sikar. During the attack, the commandant of the fort (*kiledār*) and his twelve companions were beaten to death, and the wives and brother of Nahar Singh sent away from Sikar (Alves to Macnaghten 1835, NAI). The aforementioned imaginative poem has an unimaginative but pragmatic goal: to confirm that Cānd Singh won the race to obtain access to the resources. East India Company's intelligence thus noted:

17 गीत राव चांदसिंघ सिवसिंघोत सीकर रौ
हेळा आगथी सिंघ ज्यूं अके आच हूंत हिलोळिया,
धीस खगां अके ज्यूं वोळिया नाग धींग।
सुरांपती अके वज्र रोळिया पहाड़ सारा,
सारा खळां उतोळिया अके चांदसींग॥
वारधीस गाज जोम गाळिया त्रिकूट वासी,
राजचील जाळिया तारखी तेज रूस।
कुमंखी कुलेसां इन्द्र खाळिया पहाड़ काळा,
वीर सिवा वाळे सत्रां राळिया विधूस॥
तेज हाक मुनि पूर पाड़िया पाथोद त्रास,
नागस झाड़िया ज्यूं खगेस बंधे नेत।
पब्बै पंख विडोजै झाड़िया वज्र वोमवाट,
खळां थाट दूजै दौलै विभाड़िया खेत॥
तोयधी मुनिन्द्र पांण वचै व्याळ वैतेय,
दूठ अद्र वचै घांण जुआंण दधीच।
बरूथां सत्रां चा बाधा चंद रायसाल बीजै,
वीर खगां खाधा जे न लाधा भौम बीच॥
Śekhāvat 1991: 212–3.

The Seekur lands are to be divided into five portions, three of which to be given to Chand Singh and his brother Bood Singh, and the remaining two to Nahur Singh and Gooman Singh. Nahur Singh, as the oldest son of Sumrut Singh, got the district of Ballahran, containing 84 villages. Gooman Singh received 12 villages from Mungloona, which were very large and produced a revenue equal to those of Ballahra. By this arrangement, the claims of the lawful heirs, the sons of Sumrut Singh, were left aside, and the chieftainship of Seekur and its dependencies, were transferred to Chand Singh and Bood Singh. (ibid.)

Eventually, Cānd Siṅgh, praised by the poet as ‘a warrior there has never been like him before on this earth’ did not effectively destroy all his enemies. He died in 1763 poisoned by his other enemies (Kālīpahārī 2014: 214).

The third *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* extols the hero of the times of the next ruler of Sikar, Raja Devī Siṅgh (r. 1763–1795) who succeeded to the throne after his father, Cānd Siṅgh, at the age of ten. The poem presents a *bhomīyo*, Padam Siṅgh Śekhāvat, who was the *ṭhākur* of a unit of only twelve villages (with the headquarters in Baṭhoṭh village in the region of Sikarvāṭī), and related by blood to the royal house of Sikar (see the genealogical tree below). Padam Siṅgh was the son of the previously mentioned Kirat Siṅgh who was murdered by his brother (Samrath Siṅgh). The poem glorifies Padam Siṅgh’s heroism and the sacrifice of his life for the protection of the land by describing his fight with Pūranmall Siṅgh of Kāsli (12 km to the southwest of Sikar), which turned out to be fatal for the hero. It has been commemorated by a poet whose name has been lost in the mists of history:

**The Poem about Ṭhākur Padam Siṅgh, the Son of Kirat
Siṅgh of Baṭhoṭh Paṭodā**

On the order of Devī Siṅgh, he unsheathed a sword and began
to revolt for the land,
Strong and fearsome Padam Siṅgh does not step back.
The most eminent and valiant son of Haṭhī Siṅgh, [Pūranmall]
Siṅgh has come in the name of [his people]¹⁸ and unleashed
a rain of arrows,

18 The word *udhāro* is cryptic; literally meaning ‘he took out a loan’ or ‘he got into debt’. The present translation infers that the hero is indebted to others, meaning that he owes them something, and therefore he acts in their name. However, a more contextualized meaning cannot be ruled out, as it may have

While Padam, the son of Kīrat Siṅgh, appeared in the form of the archer Arjuna.

Both of them are hired soldiers in powerful armies,
 These victorious lion warriors, came to confront each other.
 The grandson of Rām Siṅgh said: 'It's up to you to attack, oh grandson of Śiv!'
 Śiv's grandson replied: It's up to you to attack first, oh grandson of Rām Siṅgh!'

Brave and never surrendering like ferocious lions,
 Both warriors, with hearts ablaze, began to attack for the sake of the land.
 Pūranmall started an assault and endured the sword slash of Lord Padam,
 Lord Padam attacked and held on to the Pūranmall brand.

Rajput dynasties of Rāthorṣ, Sisodiyās and all people state happily
 That Padam Siṅgh is the best of all the brilliant and glorious thirty-six branches.
 The one [who] wins fierce battles has returned to his own estate,
 The body of the grandson of Śiv Siṅgh was heavily wounded and attained salvation.¹⁹

referred to land grants in the feudal system or taking a monetary loan in a new fiscal reality that emerged in the eighteenth century. The next stanza repeats the same term in the adjectival sense (*udhārī*), which is glossed as 'one who fights for the others'. Therefore, it also implies being indebted to do something. Cf. Śekhāvat 1991: 272.

- 19 गीत ठाकुर पदमसिंघ कीरतसिंघोत बढोठ पाटोदा रौ
 लागो धरा रौ देवा सुं वेध ऊनागो दुधारो लीधां,
 करारो कदम पाछा न धारै कदम।
 उधारो वरारो वूठि हठीसिंघ बाळो सिंघ,
 पाथ रूपी आयौ उठि कीता रौ पदम॥
 उधारी खाटवा राइ अफारी घड़ा में उभै,
 तेग धारी मुंहमेदां हुवा जैतसिंघ।
 वीजौ रामसिंघ कहै सेवा वीजा सेल बाह,
 सेवौ बीजौ कहै वाहि वीजा रामसिंघ॥
 केहरी खिजाया जांग मारकां अनम्मी कंघ,
 उभै भड़ा जंमी आटे लागा हिये ऊक।
 रोळै आय पूरा तणै पदमेस झेली रूक,
 रोळै पदमेस तणी झेली पूरै रूक॥
 कमंधां दीवाणां रीझ आरदासां जणां करै,

The poem refers to the events in 1784 (Śekhāvāt 1998: 220), or in 1785 (Kālīpahārī 2014: 194), when the king of Sikar, Raja Devī Singh, was annoyed by the constant attacks and plunder by Pūranmall Singh of Kāslī, and consequently, the king annexed five villages that belonged to the Kāslī jurisdiction. Padam Singh had been appointed to govern the territory and to protect the border: ‘On the order of Devī Singh, he unsheathed a sword and began to revolt for the land.’ This was the reason why Pūranmall began to fight with the *thākur* of Baṭhoṭh. The *gīt* is constructed as a parallel: the duel between two warriors is presented as if they were mirror images (especially the second and third stanzas). Concrete imagery has been used here through analogy to convey the meaning that they are equal fighters worthy of each other. This claim is further reinforced by the repetition of the word ‘both’ (*ubhai/ubhe*). The use of such a literary device becomes more apparent when we consider that this is actually a duel between kinsmen who are close relatives from the same clan of Rāysalot Śekhāvats. They both exhibit heroism and valiance, with a strong focus on defending their land. Thus, the poem presents the idea that both parties are equally willing to die and shed blood for their land in a compelling manner. They are also like ferocious lions – the animals that are strongly associated with the Indian warrior spirit. The lion aspect is deliberately used in its double meaning, both in the literal sense (*jaitasiṅha* ‘victorious lions’) and as an epithet adopted by every Rajput warrior (as, for example, *Haṭhī Siṅha vālo Siṅha* ‘[Pūranmall] Singh of Haṭhī Singh’ or ‘the lion of Haṭhī Singh’).

According to the genealogical tree, it appears that Pūranmall Singh had the legitimate and undisputed right to possess Kāslī for at least five generations. During the duel, he defended his property and he was so desperate that he was ready to act against the rules of the code of chivalry. As we read, during the sword fight Padam Singh was wounded and ultimately received a rifle shot while surrounded by Pūranmall and his men. Pūranmall Singh incurred the wrath of the ruler of Sikar and he refused to compensate for killing Padam – by giving two villages to the family of the deceased – despite attempts at mediation. As a result, Raja Devī Singh of Sikar marched with his army to Kāslī and seized the entire Kāslī region, which formed the unit of eighty-four villages, from him after three days of resistance. Pūranmall Singh lost his ancestral land and was forced to flee to Marwar (Śarmā 2015: 52–4). In this way, the stronger one

उजाळा बिरद्दां साखां छतीसां उजाळा।
 अक तौ भाराथ जीतै आप रै ठिकाणै आयौ,
 बीजौ देह भांजि गयौ साजोत विचाळ॥
 Ibid.: 272–3.

won. This account also demonstrates that in the late-eighteenth century, Rajput conquests often came at the expense of other Rajputs, including their own relatives, for example, from the same brotherhood (*bhāūbandh*).

Although both Rajputs are equally skilled warriors, the poem under study only monumentalizes the fight and the death of Padam Singh. It is also possible that poems praising Pūranmall Singh for avenging his loss and thus killing Padam Singh, may have been composed in the circles of the Kāsli line but have not survived due to oral transmission or the demise of the bardic tradition. The purpose of this *Diṅgaḷ gīt* is to receive public validation for a newly minted landholder, Padam Singh. The final stanza emphasizes the need to gain public recognition in the eyes of the whole Rajput community, symbolized by the mention of the list of thirty-six Rajput clans accepted by tradition, with some of the most influential mentioned by name. The heroic deeds performed by Padam Singh for the land are confirmed by the most eminent Rajput dynasties, thus affirming this event. This poem, although formulated in a standard way, serves as a measure of legitimacy for the *jāgīr* of Kāsli for Padam Singh's descendants, which was also sealed with his blood.

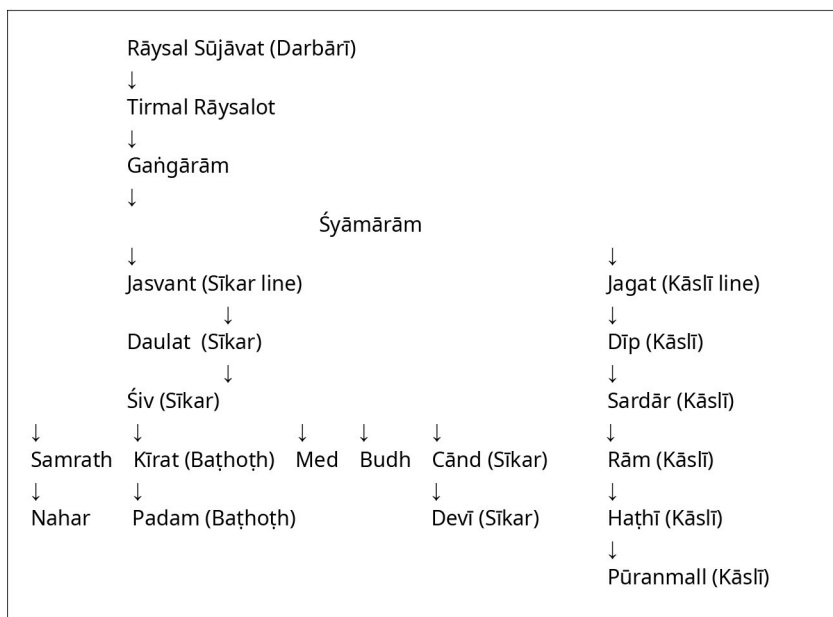



Figure 14.1 Genealogical Tree of Sikar and Kāsli Lines of Rāysalot Śekhāvats²⁰

20 The genealogy is based on information given in Śekhāvat 1998: 219–20 and Kālīpahārī 2014: 189–95. The genealogy of the Sikar line is also recorded in the chronicle of Bākīdās (*Bākīdās rī khyāt*); Svāmī 1956: 128.

Conclusion

To sum up, the linguistic picture of the Rajput world is determined by the Rajputs' style of life, which seemingly is connected chiefly with warfare, but nonetheless firmly grounded in its relatedness to land and soil. The abundance of poetic compositions in early modern Rajasthan – many of them literary masterpieces – eulogizing certain ordinary beings, stands in contrast to a more or less general opinion that the notion of collectivity encompasses almost all aspects of life in India. The preponderance of the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* in Rajasthani literature suggests that aesthetics was not the ultimate purpose of the poems, but that they were rather an artistic package of more down-to-earth messages. Any analysis of their content is indeed inseparable from the local context and the local milieu in which certain *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* were composed. Only then can the pragmatic intentions be discerned; otherwise, such poems may appear as merely a large stock of ready-made images of a pan-Indian literary tradition. However, the language used in these compositions should not be dismissed as mere hyperbole or clichés. Rather, it is a tool that allows to connect ordinary men, certain individuals with tradition and history, also linking them to their ancestors. The uniqueness of the *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* lies in the phenomenon that they bring into focus individuals from the collectivity of the Rajputs and present featured characters despite their stereotypical and unindividualized language. With regard to the relationship between the aesthetical frame of the poems and their content, we can use a comparison from the natural world to better understand this phenomenon. In a tropical jungle, exotic flowers are found in a larger number than is usually the case. Due to the very tough competition for hugely rich flora, the flowers develop more and more desirable and unique features to survive by attracting attention. Similarly, in the dense forest of Rajput collectivity, individuals – in their race to gain access to resources and power – can attract attention like those flowers by giving themselves sophisticated and artistic expression in the form of *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* to achieve pragmatic goals. Such a strategy secures their livelihood.

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