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Rajput Vocabulary of Violence

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to reflect on certain keywords of the Rajput world shaped by the "predominantly masculine martial culture" (Kasturi 2002: 12). Those keywords are crucial to understanding the phenomenon of violence in the Rajput milieu, violence that is perpetrated irrespective of *kshatriyahood* and outside the battlefield. Keeping in mind that violence cannot be identified with a particular community, but certain types of aggressive acts can be associated with certain social classes or groups (Kasturi 2002: 20), this article seeks to demonstrate that terms such as *vair*, *bāroṭiyā*, *dacoity*, and *bhomiyāvat*, reveal the mechanisms of collective violence in the socio-political practice of the Rajputs. This will be useful in understanding the cultural background of specific regional patterns of violent behaviour in contrast to the colonial stereotype of a Rajput as primitive, violent, but brave.

KEYWORDS: Rajasthan, Rajputana, Rajputs, Rajput banditry, Thugs

The Rajput warriors of Rajasthan, who established themselves as the political elite of the region, created a world that can be described as predominantly masculine and martial, and a culture which, constructed in this way, manifests itself as rife with violence. This specific culture may be included in the widespread phenomenon of "male" landholding cultures, where institutionalised aggression was formalised in

sports, war and feuds, as described by Malavika Kasturi (2002: 20). Viewed thus, the Rajput culture provides a rich area for the study of violence, which is a broad semantic concept that can be approached via different dimensions and examined from various perspectives. For example, by studying the worship of Jhunjhars (*jū̃jhār*; literally “a battle-doer”)—warriors who are venerated after their violent deaths and often depicted as headless trunks still fighting (see, for example, Harlan 1995: 269–280). Another aspect to consider is the linguistic portrayal of the Rajput world and its depiction in literary descriptions of warfare.

An analysis of the literary style of the Marwari language, commonly known as Dingal, might provide rich material. Dingal was predominantly created by Charan poets who were exclusively associated with the Rajputs. The Charans made outstanding contributions to the creation of the ethos of the *Rajputhood* (*Rājpūtī*) and grounded it well in literature. Marwari, particularly Dingal, developed several unique genres, such as *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, to depict the world of the Rajputs. Notably, the most advanced synonymy in Dingal relates to warfare, specifically the vocabulary of bywords for “warrior-hero,” “battle,” “army,” and “sword.” Treatises on poetry and prosody in Dingal, traditionally referred to as “garlands of words” (*nāma mālā*) or dictionaries (*Ḍiṅgaḷa kosa*) contain extensive lists of war terminology. These compendia were used by Rajasthani poets to master eloquence in poetry and praise their Rajput patrons. For instance, the *Ḍiṅgaḷa kosa*, composed by Murārīdān of Būndī in the 19th century, is one of the last treatises of this genre produced in Rajasthan. It contains the largest number of words (7000) and provides a list of fifty synonyms for the word “sword” (see verses 62–65), thirty-nine for “battle” (verses 465–469), seventy for “horse” (verses 80–83, 442), and fifty-five for “elephant” (verses 74–77, 443–444) (Bhāṭī 1978: 174–175, 212, 214). The animals mentioned were also used in warfare. Equally impressive is the stock of synonyms for certain types of weapons.[1] Additionally,

[1] For example, the author uses 9 synonyms for the general term “weapon” (verse 449); 16 for “bow” (verses 451–452); 7 for “bow-string” and 14 for “arrow”

the work includes a vocabulary of thirty-two words for the act of killing, some of which overlap with the nine verbs denoting "to cut; to wound; to make suffer" given in the last two lines:

> (Say:) *māraṇa*, *gajaṇa*, *māriyā*, [and] in this place *hacato*.
> *Bhāja*, *vihaḍaṇa*, *bhājiyo*, *ghātaka*, *jokhama*, *ghāta*,
> (use) [the terms]: *khaḍaṇa*, *haṇai*, *siṃhāra*, *khapa*, *ālabhana*, *vadha*.
> At first [the words] *nāsa*, *khapāṇū*, *jhūjha*, then *jhāṛa*,
> *Māra* (and) *hiṃsā*, *mārato*, *bhāgaṇa*, *daḷai*, *vibhāṛa*.
> *Bāḍhaṇa*, *carajaṇa*, *bāḍhiyo*, *kāṭaṇa*, *kaṭiy*o, *kāṭa*,
> *Baḍhiyo*, *vehara*, *bāḍhiyo*, *trāchaṇa*, *mūchaṇa*, *trāṭa*.
>
> (verses 240–243 in Bhāṭī 1978: 191)

It is important to note that Indian languages often exhibit extensive synonymy and polysemy, and this is also true of Marwari. The inclusion of vocabulary related to warfare in the compendia for the bards of the Rajputs indicates the widespread presence of violence in their culture.

However, this article aims to clarify specific keywords in the Rajput vocabulary that are essential to comprehend the occurrence of collective violence carried out by Rajputs, irrespective of the concept of *kshatriyahood* and outside the battlefield. It should also be borne in mind that violence cannot be identified with any particular community, but some specific types of aggressive acts can be associated with certain social classes or groups (Kasturi 2002: 20), and as we shall see, some of these terms also have colonial overtones. Examples of this type of violence are not found in ancient history, but rather in the early modern period. This is due to two reasons: firstly, the 19th century is much better documented, providing more extant material; secondly, the story of violence in the 19th century presents slightly different overtones than those previously attested to in Rajput culture and literature.

(verses 453–454); 19 for the small dagger known as *kaṭārī* (verses 458–460); 20 for "spear" and "lance"—*bhālā* (verses 461–462); 5 for "small spear" or "javelin"—*barachī* (verse 463); 4 for "gun" or "small cannon" (verse 465); and 16 synonyms for "armour" (verses 446–447) (Bhāṭī 1978: 212–214).

This is largely because the rules of the game have changed quite drastically due to the colonial presence (cf. Vidal 1997: 13). In response to European colonisers, violence in India had also escalated. The understanding of violence in India, specifically in the interesting us period, has, moreover, been influenced by colonial discourse.

Blood feud

One noteworthy keyword in the vocabulary of collective violence from the precolonial world of the Rajputs is *vair/bair*, a Sanskrit word that generally means "enmity" or "hostility" in most North Indian languages. However, in the Rajput vocabulary, it has a more specific and narrow meaning: the debt of vengeance owed upon the murder of a member of a Rajput brotherhood, known as *bhāībandh*[2] (Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 84, 264). Accordingly, *vair* refers to collective violence in the form of the Rajput vendetta or a blood feud. Muhaṇot Naiṇsī (1610–1670), considered one of the most trustworthy native annalists of Rajasthan, provides numerous examples of the practice of *vair* in his historical accounts (in *Naiṇsī rī khyāt* and *Mārvāṛ rā parganāṃ rī vigat*) (Sakariyā 1960–1967; Bhāṭī 1968–1974; see also Saran 1978). For instance: between the Rāṭhoṛs of Jodhpur and the Devṛos of Sīrohī; between the Jeso Bhāṭīs and the Mālhaṇ Cauhāns, and between the Śekhāvats and the Gauṛs. There were conflicts between the Cāvros of Īḍar and the Rāṭhoṛs of Jodhpur, as well as between the Rāṭhoṛs and the Solankīs, and between the Paṃvārs of Cāṭsū and the Rāṭhoṛs, etc. (Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 61–62, 74, 145 and 2001.2: 31, 41, 47, 53). These conflicts included both sporadic fights as well as collective raids on the territory of a Rajput clan, which were carried out to avenge someone's death. Additionally, personal combats were also common.

[2] "Literally, "bound as brothers"; a brotherhood; those related through ties of male blood to a common male ancestor. Among Rajputs, membership in a *bhāībandh* included all males sharing common descent, unmarried daughters, and wives, who became members through the act of marriage" (the definition of *bhāībandh* given by Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 248).

The following example is taken from *Naiṇsī rī khyāt*, which recounts the story of the founder of Jodhpur, Rāv Jodhā (Raj. Jodho Riṇmalot; r. 1439–1489). In this account, Rāv Jodhā sends his son, Dūdā (Dūdo Jodhāvat), to settle a long-standing *vair* by killing the Rajput Meghā (Megho Narsiṅghot):

> Rāv Jodho had lain down. The storytellers were conversing. They were telling stories about those who rule. One said: "The Bhāṭīs do not have a single *vair* remaining [unsettled]." [Another] one spoke up: "The Rāṭhoṛs have a *vair.*" [A third] one stated: "One Rāṭhoṛ *vair* remains [unsettled]." [Someone] said: "Which one?" They said: "The *vair* of Āskaraṇ Satāvat remains [unsettled]. The *vair* of the time that Narbadjī captured Supiyārde." Then Rāv Jodhojī heard the conversation. He asked them: "What are you saying?" They said: *"Jī*, nothing at all." Then he spoke up: "No, no! Tell [me]!" Then they said: *"Jī*, Āskaraṇ himself had no son, and Narbadjī also had no son. Thus this *vair* remains [unsettled]." Hearing this statement, Rāv Jodhojī kept [it] in mind.
>
> In the morning, when [Rāv Jodhojī] was seated in the *darbār*, Kuṃvar Dūdo came and paid [his] respects. The Rāvjī was displeased with Dūdo. The Rāvjī said: "Dūdo! Megho Sīndhaḷ should be killed." Dūdo performed *salām*.[3] The Rāvjī spoke: "Dūdo! Narbadjī captured Supiyārde; in exchange, Narsiṅghdās Sīndhaḷ killed Āskaraṇ Satāvat. Narsiṅghdās has a son, Megho; go and kill him." (*Naiṇsī rī khyāt* 3:38 in Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 188)

Retaliatory violence was culturally sanctioned in the socio-political practice of the Rajputs, and the *vair* was commonly accepted. For example, Dūdā received a horse and a rich gift of *sirpāv*[4] from his father for eliminating Meghā (Saran and Ziegler 2001.2: 337).

An effective method of resolving the *vair* was an exchange of women in marriage alliances (Kolff 1990: 100–101). Such a solution is found, for instance, in the early 19th-century poetic treatise

[3] The performance of *salām* is an act of obedience.

[4] *Sirpāv* or *siropāv*—literally "from head to toe"; a very prestigious and generous gift of material goods and cloths from an emperor or a king.

Raghunāth rūpak by the poet Mañch or Maṃsārām Sevag (1773–1835), which theorises the Dingal poetic figure known as *vayaṇ sagāī* using the concept of the *vair*:

> If there is a situation of fierce family feud arising from a murder [of kinsman],
> By giving a word of engagement [between such families], no feud remains any further.[5]
>
> (transl. Dalpat Rajpurohit 2022: 384)

Rebels for the sake of land

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction to some other elementary concepts of the Rajput world. In Rajasthan, Rajputs had established themselves as a landed class with exclusive rights to land, and therefore much of the Rajput culture revolves around land and soil. The most common term for a Rajput at the local level is *bhomiyā* (Raj. *bhomiyo*), which means a landholder (literally: "one of the soil"). The strong attachment to the land in Rajasthan has given rise to various ideas, such as the worship of heroes like *Bhomiyājī*, who died protecting the land, (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3453)[6], and the belief that the blood shed by Rajputs in battle drains into the soil and the souls of dead warriors return as rain, fertilising the land of Rajasthan. The Rajputs commonly describe their motherland with the motto taken from *Bhagavadgītā*: *vīr bhogya vasundharā*, which means that only brave heroes (*vīr*) have the right to enjoy (*bhogya*) the resources of the earth (*vasundharā*). This refers to sustaining oneself through the land and, more precisely, consuming the land (Raj. *dhartī bhogṇo*).

5 *Khūṃna kiyā jāṇau khalaka, hāḍa baira jo hoya,*
Baṇai sagāī vayaṇa to, kalpata rahai na koya. (v.1/20; Cāraṇ 2019: 43).

6 It should be added that *Bhomiyājī* may also be revered if he died protecting Hindu religion, Brahmins, or cattle.

The term *bāroṭiyā* (Raj. *bāroṭiyo*) connotes the Rajput identity as a landed class and as perpetrators of violence. It is derived from the Sanskrit words *bahis* and *vāṭaḥ*, meaning *ad litteram* "a banished/cast out person." It refers to a specific type of a rebel who, due to dissent, revolts against the authority or power of a king, or a state.[7] However, the dictionary entry does not provide sufficient context for a proper understanding of this term. It is important to note that not every rebel is considered *bāroṭiyā*. This term specifically applies to those who have been driven away by the confiscation of their property, leaving them landless and without a means of livelihood, which incites them to rebel.

Regarding traditional modes of protest in the Rajput milieu that require the use of force, or violence, one may also include the concept of *bāroṭiyā*s. Historical studies support this claim. For instance, Denis Vidal's research in the context of the small Rajput state of Sirohi highlights the significant role played by noble revolts (i.e. Rajputs), tribal rebellions, threats of migration, and collective suicide of Brahmins or bards in regulating society. Furthermore, incitements to rebellion were a significant factor among social and political forces in Rajasthan, both historically and in the 19th century. Disobedience and rebelliousness by nobles and landholders (*jāgīrdār*s) affected the administrative, political, economic, and social structures of the traditional state (Vidal 1997: 5, 33; Hooja 2009: 771).

After this brief introduction to the traditional world of the Rajputs, it is interesting to examine what occurred in the 19th century. As territorial expansion of Rajput lineages was no longer feasible due to the scarcity of land for further conquest and the emergence of new political supremacy of European colonisers, violence was also directed inwards. This resulted in raids and feuds among Rajput clans themselves, which escalated to a remarkable extent. The British, who mainly focused on revenue systems and succession rights, viewed Rajputs' behaviour as mere acts of aggression. They did not fully comprehend the cultural mechanisms and the empowerment at work

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7 The term has many variants, such as: *bāroṭiyau*, *bāroṭau*, *bāroṭhiyau*, *bāroṭhīyau*, *bārbāṭiyo*, *bāharṭiyo*, *bāharbāṭ*, *bāharvāṭ* (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3025).

behind it. At the beginning of the 19th century, the British still had insufficient knowledge of Rajasthan and lacked precise maps (Vidal 1997: 30). Like in other regions of India, they also remained generally ignorant of the society they were ruling (Bayly 1999: 167). In 1817, Colonel James Tod (1782–1835) was among the first officers of the East India Company to be sent to Rajasthan (known as Rajputana during colonial times) for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. His monograph on the history of Rajputana was one of the earliest regional histories ever written by a European in India. It undoubtedly shaped the way of viewing Rajasthan and its inhabitants, and contributed considerably to creating colonial knowledge of the area (see Tod 1997.1 [1829] and 1997.2 [1832]).[8] The post of a separate Political Agent to the Governor-General for Rajputana was created only in 1832, with Lt. Col. Lockett being the first appointee (Gupta and Bakshi 2008: 296). At that time, the British did not recognise acts of rebellion as a distinct form of opposition born in response to the drastic reshaping of reality by the colonisers.

It is important to consider the complexity of the factors at play during the 19th century. It is also significant to note that the colonial world was not simply divided into binaries, for example, into colonisers and the colonised, as some native groups also played a role in shaping the new reality alongside the colonisers (Loomba 2000: 105). This is particularly true for Rajasthan, as the region was never officially under direct European control and was therefore not included in British India, the Raj. The Treaty of 1818 obligated the rulers of the Princely States of Rajputana to cooperate with the British East India Company. However, many of their subjects, including the ordinary *bhomiyā*s, opposed their chieftains and waged bloody campaigns when their privileges or rights were questioned. Though after 1818, the native kingdoms were nominally autonomous entities under British protection, in practice, the British demanded loyalty, and intervened in the internal affairs

8 Tod's writings can serve as an exemplary work that can be used to demonstrate the deconstruction of colonial discourse. Bayly ironically described Tod's book as "an extraordinary neo-gothic monument" (in Vidal 1997: 24).

and politics of the region (for more information, see Singh 1973 and Kapil 1999). These factors contributed to outbursts of violence and the evolution of the term *bāroṭiyā*, which gained new currency.

From a rebel to a dacoit

The British attitude towards the natives was ambivalent and contradictory. This is reflected in the creation of categories such as "martial races," "criminal tribes" (for more information, see Piliavsky 2015; Gayer 1910),[9] and even "feminine races" like the Bengalis who were regarded as feeble and spineless, but clever (Metcalf and Metcalf 2006: 112). In addition to "othering," there was also romanticisation of certain communities. The British expected the Rajputs, as landed aristocracy, to collaborate with the colonial state. However, this led to the idealisation of the Rajputs as "a romantic band of adventurers, reminiscent in some ways of the Highland clans of Scotland because of their clanship and their intense love and admiration for the blood feud" (in Kasturi 2002: 19). Presentations such as these, which echo intellectual framing of James Tod, have contributed to the stereotype that the Rajputs are representatives of the martial race: brave but primitive and violent. Similarly, local Rajput banditry has been attributed to pride, laziness, and poverty (*ibid.*: 200).

Contradictions in the approach towards the indigenous people of India can also be observed in the fact that certain groups of society were romanticised or admired while simultaneously being criminalised. As Vidal notes, the British attempted to marginalise or demilitarise groups with military traditions, such as the Rajputs and certain tribes, who could pose a threat to European business interests. Meanwhile, the trading castes of Rajasthan (later known as the Marwaris) were among the first groups to be included in the new commercial and financial networks established in British India. Therefore, groups

[9] Grayer's work is available at https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.03665/page/n5/mode/2up (accessed on 20.02.2023).

that had previously and traditionally relied on force to control inter-regional trade were left with no choice but to defend their established privileges related to land revenue (Vidal 1997: 11).

In this context, the phenomenon of rebels fighting for land intensified in the 19th century. Let us come back to the proper understanding of the term *bāroṭiyā*, a rebel whose property has been sequestrated so that he becomes a bandit, a plunderer (*ḍākū*, *luṭerā*),[10] who summons his people and "carries on his depredations with impunity" (cf. the entry *bahirwutteea* in Crooke 1993 [1903]: 50). The coining of a separate term for this category of outlaws implies that it was a prevalent practice for a warrior to transform himself into a marauding rebel during early modern Rajasthan. This is further implicitly supported by the existence of a rich variety of synonyms for the term "bandit" in the vocabulary of the aforementioned 19th-century treatise *Ḍiṅgaḷa kosa*:

> The word 'bandit'
> Learn [the words] *dhāṛī*, *ḍākū*, *dhāṛvī*, *dhāṭi*, *parāt*,
> Repeat established [terms] *jhokāyat* [and] *dhāṛāyat*
> (verses 470 in Bhāṭī 1978: 214)

Kasturi studied the phenomenon of the so-called Rajput banditry outside of Rajasthan, specifically in Bundelkhand. Although she does not use the term *bāroṭiyā*, she confirms the existence of an identical a phenomenon. She writes:

> Indeed, an analysis of most stories relating to Rajput bandits suggests that blood feuds, enmities, rebellion against the state for confiscation of rights, loss of land and economic hardship appear to have been the commonest causes for banditry. (Kasturi 2002: 200)

[10] The term's meanings as an adjective provide additional context: "scattered," "disorganised," "perturbed," "broken," "ruined," and "destroyed" (Raj. *bāharābāṭ*, *bāharāvaṭ*, *bāharūvaṭ*, *bāharābaṭ*; H. *titar-bitar*, *ast-vyast*, *vichinn*, *naṣṭ bhraṣṭ*, *barbād*, *anāth*, *āśrayhīn*) (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3022).

In the early 19th century, the term *bahirwutteea*, *baroutiah*, or *burouteea* (spelt variously in English sources) was frequently used in letters of political British agents for Rajputana and in other writings (see, for example, Alves to Macnaghten, dt. 27.06.1835; *Delhi Gazette*, 07.07.1847). Over time, this local term got colonial superstructure and was replaced by the more colonially meaningful *dacoit*, along with the term *dacoity* (Raj., H. *ḍakaitī*), which denotes collective banditry. The British defined the same as an act committed by a gang of at least five men (see the entry *dacoit*, *dacoo* in Crooke 1993 [1903]: 290). Although the term *dacoit* was derived from the Indian word *ḍākū*, which was also used in Bengal, it was later incorporated into the Penal Code (*ibid.*). However, its meaning in the nineteenth century may have also encompassed the concept of a western Indian brigand—*bāroṭiyā*. The criminalisation and demonisation of Indian subjects in colonial propaganda was influenced by the phenomenon of collective raids by the Rajputs.

Therefore, the term *dacoit* carries a significant colonial connotation and cannot be understood as interchangeable with the vernacular term *ḍākū*. It is also evident that indigenous and colonial discourses have influenced each other, but have used the same narrative to justify different concerns (Kasturi 2002: 18). It is interesting to note that the *dacoit* label was not applied equally to all, and in fact such a practice has not changed in modern historiography to this today. To illustrate this point, let us consider the case of George Thomas (approx. 1756–1802). During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, he earned a living through plunder, raids, and violence. He was even able to capture some land and establish his own small state in present-day *Hariyana*. He declared himself ruler of the region from 1798–1801 and even minted his own coins (Dalrymple 2004: 32). In the years 1798–1799 George Thomas raided the territory of Rajasthan—for example, the region of Shekhawati—with the purpose of looting (Śarmā 2015: 58; Cooper 2014: 81, 161; Hooja 2009: 682–683). Despite his actions, he is never presented as a dacoit, but rather as an Irish adventurer, an adventurous soldier-of-fortune, mercenary, sailor. This highlights the biased language used to describe European plunderers, who

are often given more palatable classification label than their Indian counterparts, who are referred to as dacoits. It is important to note that Rajputs who collaborated with the colonial authorities or did not pose a threat to the Company, despite continuing their careers as freebooters, were still considered native allies. An example of such a person is Amir Khan (1765–1834), a Pindari freebooter who managed to carve out a separate state of Tonk in Rajputana. He was rewarded by the Company for his support in the British victory over Bharatpur in 1805 (Bhāṭī 1956: 140) and was later, in 1817, recognised as a Nawab (ruler) by the British (Hooja 2009: 779). However, those who carried out similar depredations and land-grabbing, but were not specific British allies, were labelled as dacoits. Thus, forging such delicate distinctions followed inconsistent template in the colonial creations of the Other. Similar mechanisms can be observed in the creation of criminal castes or tribes, where all groups or communities whose activities were deemed suspicious or incomprehensible to the colonial power were grouped together. This article only provides a general overview due to limitations of space, however, it is relevant to note that all groups that were not inclined to collaborate were classified as dangerous (for more information, see Sinha 2008).

Bhūmiyāvat

The term *bhūmiyāvat* also suggests a collective violence and savagery associated with land-grabbing, as defined by the colonial era. It refers to "a general plundering, or more correctly a fight between neighbouring Zamindars about landed property" (Elliot 1869: 236).[11] This term appears to describe behaviour similar to that of *bāroṭiyā*s in Rajasthan, but it is a Hindi word with evidently colonial undertones. This word is likely of recent origin, possibly from the 19th century, and was most probably newly coined because it is not attested to in any dictionaries, whether Rajasthani or Hindi. The Rajasthani language

[11] It is available at https://archive.org/details/dli.csl.7554 (accessed: 19.09.2022).

dictionary only lists the masculine noun *bhomiyāvaṇṭ*, alternatively *bhūmiyāvaṇṭ*, as a term for "a custom of land distribution as equal shares among members of a Rajput lineage" (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3453). The *Hindī śabdsāgar*, first published between 1916–1928, does not include this word at all. Even in the *Hobson-Jobson* colonial glossary, the term *bhūmiyāvat* cannot be found. The trail appears to lead to William Henry Sleeman (1788–1856), an ambitious officer of the East India Company, "an eminent self-publicist" (Wagner 2007: 7), who is primarily remembered as the Commissioner for the Suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity. From the perspective of postcolonial studies, the existence of the Thugs, described by Sleeman as a fraternity of ritual stranglers and religious fanatics who prayed on travellers who were then used in human sacrifices to the goddess Kālī (*ibid.*: 1–2), has been deconstructed and questioned. This is because all information about the Thugs comes solely from testimonies of arrested and interrogated men accused of being Thugs (see, e. g., Woerkens 2002; Wagner 2007). Sleeman's collection and analysis of the language used by the Thugs revealed it to be a slang used by the working-class in northern India (Bayly 1999: 173; see Sleeman 1836). The term *bhūmiyāvat* was thus popularised by Sleeman with the aforementioned meaning, as he wrote:

> Though, no doubt, it is very similar to our ancestors during the middle ages, this is a thing happily but little understood in Europe at the present day. Bhoomeeawut, in Bundelcund, signifies a war or fight for landed inheritance, from Bhoom, the land, earth, & c.; Bhoomeea, a landed proprietor.
>
> When a member of the landed aristocracy, no matter however small, has a dispute with his ruler, he collects his followers, and levies indiscriminate war upon his territories, plundering and burning his towns and villages, and murdering their inhabitants, till he is invited back upon his own terms. During this war, it is a point of honour not to allow a single acre of land to be tilled upon the estate which he has deserted, or from which he has been driven, and he will murder any men who attempts to drive a plough in it, together with all his family, if he can. (…) Such a marauder has generally the sympathy of nearly all the members of his

> own class and clan, who are apt to think that his case may one day be their own. He is thus looked upon as contending for the interests of all. (Sleeman 1844: 318–319)[12]

Thus, the term *bhūmiyāvat* can only be properly understood in the colonial context in which the Rajputs restored to collective violence after being deprived of their land, power, and privileges due to the entry of new colonial institutions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the existence of a lexicon of terms that describe collective acts of aggression resulting in harm to others is a strong evidence of institutionalised violence in the Rajput community. It is not surprising, therefore, that the lexicons of Rajasthani have been expanded to include entries such as those listed and analysed in this article. Particularly remarkable are the obvious links between aesthetics and violence: the theoretical exploration of high poetry through the examples of Rajput social phenomena related to the perpetration of violence. This is a method used in Dingal's poetic treatises where one finds the juxtaposition of the literary with the social, which has been illustrated here using as examples terms *vair* and *ḍākū*. The amalgamation is further developed by mixing it with the religious, as these elements are woven into the structure of the narrative that frames the story of Rāma (see also Rajpurohit 2022: 383).

In this article, an attempt has been made to specify certain keywords by analysing various types of agents of violence in Rajput society. Terms such as *bāroṭiyā*, *ḍākū*, *dacoit*, and *thug*, which may appear to have similar meanings when translated, have been differentiated. This contextual clarification leads to a better understanding of Rajput

[12] It is available at https://archive.org/details/ramblesrecollect01sleeuoft (accessed on 19.10.2022). The term *bhūmiyāvat* has been used with the same colonial meaning by Kolff (1990: 125) and the Hindi dictionary (McGregor 2016: 772).

male violence. The main point of this paper is that not all rebels are *bāroṭiyā*s and not all *bāroṭiyā*s are dacoits.

The violence in focus is thus closely linked to the land and deserves further study. Current paper drew special attention to the colonial milieu that resulted in British colonial rule re-evaluating Rajput violence, as well as genesis of terms such as *dacoit* and *bhūmiyāvat*. Both these terms were colonial and ethnographic inventions that have since become part of the common vocabulary, as has the creation of categories such as "martial races" and "criminal or predatory tribes."

Therefore, it is important to exercise caution as the vocabulary associated with violence in India is often clouded by the Orientalist slant and Western constructions of the Other. One must remember that colonialism not only inflicted its own violence but also altered and redefined the pre-existing nature and meaning of violence in Rajput culture (cf. Vidal 1997). Recognising this is particularly important today as one of the colonial, romanticised ascriptions of a particular kind of bravery to the Rajputs—brave flowers of chivalry—has not come to an end but has been re-used in modern Hindu nationalist discourse.

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