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Studies in Literary and Cultural Landscapes of Rajasthan

1. On the history of Rajasthan studies

Collective publications devoted exclusively to the region of Rajasthan remain relatively few—and that, too, despite growing recognition among the scholars of South Asia regarding region’s significant contribution to the history, culture, and literature of North India. The two-volume collective work, *The Idea of Rajasthan* (1994), still stands out as a unique project that brought together studies from diverse fields, all dedicated solely to Rajasthan. The publication was the product of scholarly research by an informal, interdisciplinary Rajasthan Studies Group with an international profile. It brought together an impressive cohort of eminent researchers working on Rajasthan, both in India and abroad. Moderated by David Magier, a distinguished South Asian studies librarian and linguist (see Magier 1983), the group begun its work in the early days of the Internet; scholarly exchange took place only through the occasional circulation of emails else face to face interactions at international conferences held in Rajasthan in

collaboration with the Institute of Rajasthan Studies in Jaipur. Even today the published proceedings of these conferences are viewed as monographs of great value and a crucial source of information on the late 20th- and the early 21st-century research on Rajasthan (see Singhi and Joshi 1995; Joshi 2002; Bapp et al. 2002; Joshi and Singh 2009).

The field of Rajasthan studies gave rise to two principal research streams—the indigenous and the international—which over time intermingled and complemented each other. The first owes its existence to Rāmkaṛaṇ Śarmā Āsopā (1857–1943) who is viewed as the pioneer figure in the field of collecting manuscripts containing literary works from Rajasthan. Besides being an editor, publisher, and historian, he was also the author of the first grammar of Rajasthani language, composed as early as 1896 (Bhāṭī 1980: 200–204; see also Āsopā 1975 [1896]). Moreover, he initiated work on Rajasthani dictionary and prepared a substantial wordlist of Marwari and Dingal, the literary style of Marwari used mostly in metrical compositions, comprising altogether some 60,000 entries. Unfortunately, he could not complete his work, let alone publish it (Bhāṭī 1980: 203).

The early phase of the research benefited greatly through the work of other Rajasthani scholars such as Narottamdās Svāmī (1905–1981), Sūryakaraṇ Pārīk (1902–1939), Rāmsinh (1902–1975), Agarcand Nāhtā (1911–1983), and Manohar Śarmā (1915–?), to name a few. In the early years of the 20th century, the first two, Svāmī and Pārīk, received scholarships from the kingdom of Bikaner with the specific purpose of pursuing higher education at Indian universities beyond Rajasthan. They became pioneers of Rajasthan studies, combining intimate knowledge of their own regional culture and traditional Indian methodologies with the newly acquired methodological training of modern scholarship. They undertook the difficult task of preserving region's centuries-old literary heritage, initiating, during the first three decades of the 20th century, that is, still under the British rule in India, the first editorial work on Rajasthani manuscripts.

The fact that this was also the period that witnessed India's struggle for independence had a significant impact on the selection of source texts chosen for analysis and publication. Preference was given to works

supporting the idea of Rajasthani identity—literature deeply rooted in local traditions and regional patriotism—with a view of instilling pride in creative output arising from an indigenous culture. At the same time, efforts were made to translate many of the works, composed mainly in Marwari, into (Khari Boli) Hindi and thus make Rajasthani literary tradition accessible across larger parts of India. As a result, the first printed editions of the original Rajasthani works begun slowly to appear. With no printing press operating yet in Rajasthan, they were initially published in Calcutta, mainly by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, but soon also in Allahabad and Varanasi.¹ Among the earliest such publications were: the edition of *Krisana rukamañī rī veli*, a 16th-century masterpiece composed in Dingal (Rāmsinh and Pārik 1931; cf. Turek 2023: 130–138) by a Bikaner poet Pṛthvīrāj Rāthor (1549–1600); compilation of works by Bāṅkīdās Āsiyā (1781–1833), the principal poet of Jodhpur court and one of the first in Rajasthan to articulate anti-British stance in his works, the publication of which was made possible by the aforementioned Āsopā (Dūgar et al. 1931; cf. Turek 2024: 222–230); or, an old Marwari poem, *Ḍholā mārū rā ḍūhā*, edited on the basis of seventeen extant manuscripts and representing the essence of Rajasthani-ness (Rāmsinh et al. 1934; cf. Szyszko 2012: 44–48).

One of the first non-Indian authors to write about Rajasthan was undoubtedly James Tod (1782–1835) who, for some twenty-two years,

¹ Regarding the dissemination of Indian literary works in print, it is worth noting that among the earliest publications were works produced in Rajasthan under the patronage of local rulers. E.g., *Bihārī satsaī*, a masterpiece of *rīti-kāl* literature, composed by Bihārī Lāl (1595–1663) in Braj Bhasha at the Amer/Jaipur court was brought into the realm of print culture; excerpts from this masterpiece became part of the 1814 anthology *Selections from the Popular Poetry of the Hindoos* by Broughton, regarded as the first published collection of Hindi poetry (Busch 2011a: 206–207). Further excerpts from Rajasthan—though in Braj Bhasha, often classified by scholars under the label of “classical Hindi,” rather than Marwari—appeared in print in 1828 through the initiative of the Fort William College in Calcutta, an institution that trained officials of the British East India Company (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, this points to the significant contribution of Rajasthani literature to the literary culture of North India, and highlights its popularity and inclusion in the earliest print culture.

between 1800 and 1823, served as British political agent in Rajputana, primarily in Mewar. Despite the fact that he drew much of his knowledge from local bards and was even accused by his superiors, the East India Company, of an excessive sympathy for Rajasthanis and an untoward enthusiasm for indigenous culture, it is nonetheless difficult to call him a *bona fide* scholar whose contribution to the understanding of the language and literature of the region was truly seminal (cf. Tod 1997 [1829 and 1832]).²

The international stream of Rajasthan studies was triggered off much later, at the beginning of the 20th century, when in 1909, an Indian Sanskrit scholar, Hara Prasād Śāstrī (1853–1931)—at the behest of the Asiatic Society of Bengal—undertook first systematic attempts to collect Rajasthani literary works and historical records (bardic manuscripts). For this purpose, he contacted authorities of the princely states in Rajputana (also in Gujarat) and received permission to travel the countryside, accompanied by local experts. His project was precipitated by way of the 1904 letter of George Abraham Grierson to Lord Curzon, requesting funds for a preliminary survey and eventual editing, publication, and translation of bardic chronicles, viewed at that time as Hindi texts (Shāstrī 1913: 1). Śāstrī also initiated a large-scale copying undertaking at Jodhpur. The results of his three field expeditions were compiled in the 1913 report written in English (see *ibid.*). The report was translated into Hindi only after 1947 and published in parts (Bhāṭī 1980: 192).

Śāstrī's report spurred further work, this time by the Italian scholar Luigi Pio Tessitori (1887–1919), an expert of Apabhramsha, another founding figure of Rajasthan studies. After completing his higher education at the University of Florence, he was invited by George A. Grierson (1851–1941) to undertake “Bardic and Historical Survey of Rajputana” under the project of “Linguistic Survey of India.” Prior to his arrival in India in 1914, Tessitori had already published *Notes on*

² For the post-colonial deconstruction of Tod's work, see D'Souza 2015; see also the reissue of Tod's work fully annotated and edited by Norbert Peabody (Tod 2024).

the Grammar of the Old Western Rajasthani, one of the earliest works of its kind produced outside India. He remained in Rajasthan for five years, working extensively on manuscripts, and within the fields of linguistics and archaeology. In his study of Rajasthani literature, he was guided and supported by distinguished local bards and scholars. His tutor in the Rajasthani language was, for example, Āsopā (Bhāṭī 1980: 201). During Tessitori's celebrated but brief career, he catalogued bardic manuscripts (Tessitori 1917a; Tessitori 1917b), edited works such as the already mentioned *Krisana rukamaṇī rī veli* (Tessitori 1919), and carried out archaeological explorations, including the early surveys at Kalibangan—a venture that contributed to the later discoveries of Indus Valley sites. Tragically, he succumbed to influenza in Bikaner in 1919. At the time of his death Tessitori was working on a substantial number of Rajasthani literary texts; unfortunately, these materials are extant only in the form of his handwritten notes, unfinished and unedited to this day (see Freschi 1999).

The period of Tessitori and Grierson marks the dissemination and consolidation of the general term “Rajasthani” to denote the diverse linguistic forms spoken in the region under discussion. Given that the oldest and most developed literary tradition in Rajasthan belongs to Marwari, in the present volume the latter essentially remains synonymous with the term “Rajasthani”, unless otherwise specified. From a linguistic perspective, it was in fact Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* that distinguished Rajasthani from Western Hindi (particularly Braj Bhasha) and Gujarati (1968 [1908]: 1). It should be noted that while the cluster of regional languages of Rajasthan is closely related to Hindi, it is classified outside “Hindi proper.” Both Rajasthani and Hindi derive from Shauraseni Apabhramsha, though from its different forms: the latter from the *madhyadeśīya* form, and the former from the older *gurjara/gurjarī* variety of north-western India, which renders Old Rajasthani essentially identical with Gujarati up to the 15th century.³

³ The limited scope of this Introduction does not allow for an extended discussion on the complexities of these interrelationships, especially between Rajasthani, Gujarati, and Hindi. For further discussion, see Bangha 2018.

It was by no means without consequence that after the 1947 independence the universities established in Rajasthan had English and Hindi rather than Rajasthani as the primary medium of instruction. In many cases, teaching faculty were brought in from outside Rajasthan—primarily Hindi speakers who remained unfamiliar with region's rich and vast literary heritage, which is, in fact, older than the history of Hindi literature. Nevertheless, in the 20th century, some local pioneers of Rajasthan studies, together with their students and successors, mostly clustered around smaller institutions, organizations, and literary journals based in Rajasthan, succeeded in preserving and continuing scholarly activity focused on Rajasthan and its culture. Through their efforts, further work, aimed at deeper understanding of the cultural productions of the region, was sustained. A considerable contribution was made, for instance, by the Rajasthani Research Institute at Chopasni (Jodhpur), founded in 1955 under the leadership of Nārāyaṇ Singh Bhāṭī. The Institute, which also publishes *Vardā*, a journal of importance for Rajasthan studies, has been set up with the purpose of conducting systematic research into Rajasthani literature and culture, collecting manuscripts, preserving literary heritage, and supporting scholarly work. Over time, it gained nationwide prominence and is now recognized as the leading institution in guiding doctoral and postdoctoral research in Rajasthani language, literature, and medieval history.⁴

Throughout the 20th century, the ranks of scholars of Rajasthan grew noticeably, especially through presence of European researchers, many of them women. It is an interesting phenomenon that Rajasthan studies have been, and continue to be, shaped by a group of at least forty women scholars from various disciplines, including specialists in Jain studies. The first who must be mentioned is Charlotte Vaudeville (1918–2006). Her studies on bhakti, major works such as *Kabīr Granthāvalī* (1957), and seminal study titled *Les Duhā de Dhola-Mārū* (1962), were among the earliest translations of works from Rajasthan into French. Vaudeville educated and inspired

⁴ For more information, see *Chopasani Shiksha Samiti*.

successive generations of European scholars of the region, among them Winand M. Callewaert, who—at her encouragement—focused on *nirguṇa* bhakti manuscripts from Rajasthan. In doing so, he created one of the most valuable European collections of microfilmed manuscripts, which he later donated to the Heidelberg University Library, where it was subsequently digitized.

As noted above, it was usually individual scholars who engaged to establish and develop their specific schools of Rajasthan studies. In the American context, one of the first to stimulate scholarly interest in Rajasthan was Kali Charan Bahl (1917–2018), who in the 1960s joined the faculty of University of Chicago as an Associate Professor in both the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, and the Department of Linguistics. Known primarily for his foundational role in the development of Hindi studies there, he also initiated the emergence of Rajasthan studies. From the 1970s onward, an increasing number of research works by American scholars devoted exclusively to Rajasthan began to appear.⁵ In the 1990s, it was the Rudolphs, namely Lloyd Irving and Susanne Hoeber from the University of Chicago, who played formative role in establishing the already mentioned informal, international Rajasthan Studies Group and in promoting first collaborative volumes dedicated to Rajasthan.

Much has changed since the time of the first indigenous scholars of Rajasthan, or the international scholarship represented by Tessitori, Vaudeville, and the Rudolphs. The 21st-century researchers no longer restrict themselves merely to examining the most representative aspects of culture or the mainstream. They explore margins and peripheries, pursuing less obvious paths, and thereby bringing to light previously unknown or little-known issues concerning Rajasthan. Today we have access to a far greater body of knowledge about the cultural and literary landscapes of Rajasthan than, for example,

⁵ To be precise, as early as the late 19th century, the American Presbyterian missionary and linguist, Samuel Henry Kellogg (1839–1899), was working in Rajasthan. In his *Grammar of the Hindi Language* (1876), he incorporated Marwari dialogues and notes. He was later cited by Tessitori, and his data and observations contributed thereby to the foundations of early Rajasthani linguistics.

Rāmcandra Śukla had in the early 20th century, when he wrote his history of Hindi literature, which was bereft of any deeper or broader references to the already well-established literary traditions of the neighbouring Rajasthan and Gujarat (cf. Śukla 1997 [1928]). The need to revisit these questions—particularly in relation to Hindi—and to consider the fact that Rajasthani literature comprises works not only in Marwari but also in Braj Bhasha, has already been emphasized by Busch (2011b), Bangha (2018), and Rajpurohit (2022).

However, despite the growing awareness of the significance of Rajasthan and the fact that it would be difficult to find a scholar, particularly of the early modern period or the Jain studies, who has not drawn on works composed in this region or on manuscripts sponsored by the many local patrons based in Rajasthan—there are still too few collaborative studies devoted to this land.⁶

2. Conceptual framework of the volume

The present volume is the first collective publication dedicated exclusively to Rajasthan to appear in Poland. Among the seven papers dealing with the literary and cultural heritage of the region gathered in this volume, we have case studies that explore textual tradition going back to the 16th century or deal with the historical and literary production of the 19th and the 20th centuries, from and on Rajasthan. Over and above, we expand our chronological scope yet further, up to the 21st century, by way of a close reading of a contemporary poem in Marwari. Thanks to this arrangement, the reader of the volume may reflect on the significance of detailed studies on textual heritage to the complex understanding of the present-day literary discourse.

The eponymous landscapes are showcased through the exploration of various seminal concepts which represent current interests of

⁶ Worth noting is the International Rajasthani Workshop at the University of Warsaw, organized by Aleksandra Turek in 2015. Among the participants were also the contributors to the present volume: Monika Horstmann, who conducted several reading sessions, and Piotr Borek.

scholars focusing their investigations on Rajasthan. These concepts encompass more or less conventional re/framings of identity and gender, scrutiny of literary strategies of autocreation central to contemporary studies on the early-modern South Asia, and fluidity and hybridity that we consider not only interesting phenomena *per se* but also the essential prisms through which the culture may be viewed and understood in its complexity.

The prism, *in verbatim*, an optical tool used for scientific investigation, is first taken in hand in this volume by Monika Horstmann who, in her seminal article, studies closely the spectre of light of gnosis which falls on and refracts in Dādū's *sākhīs*. The paradigm of light pervading literary and religious discourse under scrutiny here, helps to identify passages of doctrinal or didactic weight and provide a more nuanced picture of hybridity and fluidity of religion in the 16th-century Marwar, locating the phenomena beyond the simple Hindu-Muslim divide. With this in mind, Horstmann, through a case study focused on Dādūpanthīs, tests Dominique-Sila Khan's (1997) hypothesis that Nizārī Ismailism shaped the sects of *nirguna* bhakti.

The concept of fluidity pervades also the three subsequent chapters (Rajpurohit, Pastore and Borek) of our volume. The poetry by Jān Kavi, referenced by Horstmann in her exploration of the paradigm of light in the regional Rajasthani context, is further analyzed by Dalpat Rajpurohit, whose article makes a significant contribution to understanding historical processes that led to the emergence of the Great Rajput Tradition during the Mughal period. Rajpurohit reads Jān Kavi to note the fluidity of *kathā* genre in the multilingual literary culture. He brings to light a poet who, despite composing in Braj Bhasha, is better known to the literary circles of Rajasthan than the literary histories of Hindi to which he nominally belongs. The socio-political world of the rising Rajput monarchy, which constituted itself in relation both to the Mughals and the localized political formations, was not a novelty in the literature of Rajasthan: Rajpurohit foregrounds this phenomenon by locating it within the broader literary context—including the Rajasthani chronicle of Mūnhatā Naināsī from the 17th century—which he draws for the purpose of his argumentation. However, Jān Kavi's

linguistic choices, and the subsequent projecting of the poetically-envisaged socio-political world onto the Mughal-Rajput framework must have served—as Rajpurohit reflects—the overriding goal of providing his works with a universal resonance.

Rajpurohit's analysis of Jān Kavi's *kathās* introduces yet one more conceptual thread of great interest to current scholarship on literatures of South Asia and enlarges our understanding of relations between politics of the state and literature by bringing to the fore the issue of literary strategies attending the act of autocreation. In case of Jān Kavi, the audience-oriented communication of an idealized picture of the Rajput world and the upwardly mobile Rajput-Muslim Kyāmkhānī dynasty to which the poet belongs is central when read in the context of their service to the Mughals and, moreover, in Braj Bhasha, a literary language pointing to the Mughal centre.

This conceptual thread gathers momentum, that, too, in relation to the early-modern Rajasthan but focused on a different example, in Rosina Pastore's article which introduces us to two texts that aim to project yet another dynasty, namely the Rathors, as potential leaders among the Rajputs of Rajasthan. In order to show specific conditioning and disparate goals underlying various literary portrayals of Maharaja Jaswant Singh I (r. 1638–1678) and his philosophical activities in the 18th-century *Sūraj prakāś* by Kaṇḍān Kaviyā and early 19th-century *ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* by the Nāths, or *śaiva* ascetics, Pastore sets them against “the present-day portrayals of Jaswant Singh, usually centered on his political persona” (Pastore). We may easily observe that conclusions drawn from her comparative investigation reinforce the already existing views of early-modern historiographies as being much less engaged with the communal tensions based on religious divide than, for instance, the 20th-century historically biased accounts focusing on the figure of Jaswant Singh I.

Conclusion similar to those that we draw above for Pastore's work may hold validity in case of the next article, by Piotr Borek. Although his article does not use the comparative method, it complements the picture by offering a different perspective through its focus on material from beyond Rajasthan. In this respect, the article predominantly

keeps close to the internal evidence offered by a 17th-century Braj Bhasha poem, *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, composed in the Deccan by Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī and focused on the figure of Shivaji (r. 1674–1680), considered today, both in popular culture and historiographical accounts, as the paragon of Hindu-ness. But, as Borek notes on the margins of his paper, a comparable picture of Shivaji Bhosle happens also to emerge from a 19th-century paratext of an early edition of Bhūṣaṇ's 17th-century poem. Interestingly, Borek's reading of the original poem supports none of the posterior paratextual accounts. Conversely, it offers a picture of the ruler's fluid identity—although possibly only discursive—as it arises from Bhūṣaṇ's poetical treatise, commissioned by Shivaji on the eve of his royal consecration. If being a Rajput did not have to be a matter of birth, as suggested by Dirk Kolff (1990), then Shivaji must have discursively asserted Rajput identity to claim legitimacy and imperial status. In building his argument, Borek goes beyond the internal evidence of the poem and reflects on the significance of introducing Braj Bhasha to certain Deccani courts of Shivaji and his predecessors, while simultaneously engaging with the broader interpretation of the term *rājapūt*, extending beyond the specifically Rajasthani prism. The choice of “language whose geographical contours were increasingly expanding during Jān Kavi's time” (Rajpurohit) and Bhūṣaṇ's time, as we may add, had a similar political purpose of subscribing to Mughal-Rajput framework, both in case of the Kyāmkhānī and the Bhosle dynasties. In case of Bhūṣaṇ, the political centre and potential Rajput allies have been addressed by adopting specific, Rajput-centered literary culture with its language, its literary conventions, and *rīti* as its flagship genre.

The next two articles, by Heidi Pauwels and Richard D. Williams, take us from the Mughal period to the early modernity of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Both texts emphasize the importance—besides purely literary endeavours—of art, aesthetics, and performativity in the act of self-creation.

The dialectical process of establishing power, also touched upon in Borek's article, becomes the main subject of Heidi Pauwels's case study focused on the Rathor house of Kishangarh in the first half of

the 18th century. Pauwels's article extends the scope of media viewed as a means of expression explored in the volume by adding paintings, next to poetry, as the main source for analysis. The study, grounded in a methodology that draws upon "a synoptic approach attentive to interocularity and interaurality" (Pauwels) as well as intertextual connections, expands the range of sources necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways in which kingship may be articulated. It further highlights the role of affect and emotion in the processes of legitimation and illegitimation of kingship. Particularly compelling is Pauwels's explication of how rulers situated themselves within specific affective moods conveyed through performance. The article also contributes significantly to the scholarly discourse on gender. Although the objectification of women in court performances—and, in some cases, their visual erasure in the paintings under consideration—cannot be overlooked, Pauwels nevertheless examines their significant roles as agents, especially in projects of legitimation.

Gender, as a conceptual framework, remains significant to Richard D. Williams's study of the early 19th-century Hindi poetic chronicle of the rulers of Jaipur—*Jayavamśa mahākāvya*. Like Pauwels, he draws attention to the objectification of women. Williams notes close entanglement of women and sexuality with learning, refinement, and pleasure, but also explores the question of historico-literary relation between the significance of women figures in Jaipur's politics and the prominent roles that "queens, *satīs*, courtesans, and domestic slave-companions" (Williams) play in the text. However, this study must be also viewed—in line with Rajpurohit's and Borek's essays—in terms of contribution to literary theory, as it demonstrates that the literary genre and conventions under discussion did not serve merely to display artistic skills of the poets as much as to respond to political needs within the cultural and social milieux of the time. Here, one of such needs—to which Williams devotes several considerations—is the use and reworking of historical memory by the poet, "and his casting back the present into the halcyon days of a century before" (Williams).

Religious, literary, historical, and political landscapes outlined in those contributions are complemented by way of a more *verbatim*

or quotidian understanding of the landscape in the paper we decided to offer to the readers of our volume at its end as a sort of coda. The literal grip of the landscape in Aleksandra Turek's article relies on the exploration of the cultural and literary significance of a plant endemic to Rajasthan—*phog*. The only paper in the collection to draw on the analysis of a source text that does not fit the historical boundaries of the early modern period, it showcases the centre-stage poem, *Phog ikīsī* by Girdhardān Ratnū, as deeply rooted in the Rajasthan's nearly five-hundred-year-old vernacular literary tradition. The poem expresses a profound sense of Rajasthani identity—or Rajasthani-ness which has already been discussed, for example, in Borek's paper—by combining traditional elements of the early-modern literary discourse with features specific to the contemporary literary production. Turek's contribution operates here as a postscript—grounded in the reading of a poem representing the 21st-century literary activity of Rajasthan, it simultaneously provides a glimpse into the current state of Dingal poetry.

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