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Rosina Pastore
rosina.pastore@ugent.be
(Ghent University, Belgium)

The Portrayal of Maharaja Jaswant Singh I and his Philosophical Activities in the Posterior Literary and Historical Sources

ABSTRACT: In the geopolitical landscape of the 17th-century North India, Jaswant Singh I of Marwar (r. 1638–1678) was an influent political figure, close to the imperial Mughal court. Viewed from the cultural perspective, he was well-known as the author of scholarly works on Vedānta, the aspect of his intellectual activity understudied to this day. Current paper intends to examine how his philosophical and intellectual endeavors were portrayed in the later dynastic sources. With this in mind, I first consider the portrayal of Jaswant Singh in the *Sūraj prakās*, text composed by Kaviyā Karṇīdān, the court poet of Maharaja Abhai Singh Rathor (r. 1724–49). Thereafter, I analyse one of the poems on the royal lineage from among those penned by the Nāths during the reign of Maharaja Man Singh Rathor (r. 1803–43). My investigation suggests that rather than transmitting a univocal image of Jaswant Singh as the protector of a well-defined Hindu *dharma*, the philosophical and religious elements in Jaswant Singh's later portrayals respond to the diverse agendas of their authors, bringing to light multiple historical representations of the Rajput ruler.

KEYWORDS: Jaswant Singh, kshatriya, Rajasthan, Rajput, Vedanta

Introduction

> In vs 1727 [there was] a brahman who was affected by leprosy, and he [was one that] worshipped Baijanāth a lot. Then in a dream he was ordered: "King Jaswant Singh of Marwar is a part of me, so eat *pān* chewed by His Highness; in this way the leprosy will go away." Following this [incident] the brahman narrated all that had transpired to the Maharaja and asked him for a half-chewed *pān*. The venerable lord gave him a half--chewed *pān* with his own hand and said: "Eat it. It is God's command that by eating [this] *pān* [your] leprosy will go away." The brahman chewed the *pān* and [his] leprosy disappeared.[1]

This anecdote is integral to the chronological account given in the *Jasvant siṅgh rī khyāt* composed by Tīvarī Purohit, arguably during the reign of Takhat Singh Rathor (r. 1843–1873).[2] However, the episode is not mentioned, for instance, in the *Jodhpur rājya kī khyāt* (Siṁh and Rāṇāvat 1988: 203–272), composed sometime between the reigns of Man Singh and Takhat Singh.[3] Interestingly, the editor of the *Jasvant siṅgh rī khyāt*, Rāvat Sārasvat, provides a reference to a verse of the *Ajit vilās*, genealogy composed for Jaswant Singh's son, Ajit Singh (1679–1724). In the *Ajit vilās* we find mention of Jaswant Singh becoming king at the age of twelve, and this information is followed by two lines relating how Shiva willed the act of healing to happen and handed *pān* with his own hands, thus possibly shifting the

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1 संवत् १७२७ में विरामण कौड़ीयौ थो सु वैजनाथजी री घणी पूजा करी । तरै सुपना में अज्ञा हुई मारवाड रौ राजा जसवंतसिंघ मांरौ अंस छै सु उण रा पान रो पीक खाजाइजे सो कोड जातो रहसी । तरै वीरामण श्रीजी नुं सारी हकीकत कही नै पीक मांगीयो । तरै श्री जी पान रो वीड़ो हात सुं दियो, खाय जा । श्री री अज्ञा है सो तौ पान रो बीड़ो सुं ही कोड जातो रैसी । सु बीड़ौ बीरामण चाबीयो नै कोढ जातो रहो । (Sārasvat 1987: 42). The inconsistencies in the text and punctuation are reproduced after the published edition. The source presents a translation in Hindi at pages 76–77. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are mine.

2 The editor, Rāvat Sārasvat (1987: 7–8), compares the language of this *khyāt* with that dedicated to Man Singh and finds it largely similar. Therefore, he surmises that Tīvarī Purohit's chronicle has been composed at the same time or slightly after Man Singh's.

3 For a discussion of its dating, see Siṁh and Rāṇāvat 1988: 14–15.

task of healing to Jaswant. The last line mentions how, following this, a leprous man was purified (i.e. healed) immediately.[4] The sense of these last two lines remains partially obscure to me. One can imagine, however, that the lines could serve as an inspiration for the anecdote found in Tĩvarī Purohit's account. Or that it was a story already known to the prospective audience of the text.

Overall, these terse lines point to several aspects apparently absent in the present-day portrayals of Jaswant Singh, usually centered on his political persona. Colonel James Tod in his *Annals of Marwar* (1957: 36), first published in 1832, praises Jaswant Singh's erudition and then describes fratricidal battles fought for Shah Jahan's succession. His portrayal of the Jodhpur ruler, cast in his narrative as an opponent of the tyrannous Aurangzeb, is admiring and triumphant:

> The life of Jeswunt Singh is one of the most extraordinary in the annals of Rajpootana… Had his abilities, which were far above mediocrity, been commensurate with his power, credit, and courage, he might, with the concurrent aid of the many powerful enemies of Aurangzéb, have overturned the Moghul throne. (*ibid*.: 40–41)

Notwithstanding the biased nature of Tod's account, where his antipathy towards Aurangzeb seems to overshadow the fact that the Rajput kings may have fought him out of their loyalty for Shah Jahan,[5] the political relationship with the Mughals dominates the representation of Jaswant's life and actions.

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[4] सिवजी हुकुम कीना, हाथ सेति पान दीना, कोड़ी नकळक कीना, ब्रिमा कुं पलक मई । (Bārhaṭ 1984: 21). "The venerable Shiva so willed and gave the *pān* with his hand. He [Jaswant] healed the leprous brahman immediately."

[5] "In the case of the War of Succession of 1658–9, many Rajputs fought prince Aurangzeb in support of the reigning emperor, Shah Jahan, rather than out of any personal animosity toward Aurangzeb himself. This is particularly true of Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur and his subordinates, since the emperor's mother was the sister of the Maharaja's paternal grandfather and Rajputs were expected to extend military support to their relatives through marriage" (Talbot 2018: 463, n. 10).

The later, secondary sources on Jaswant Singh, influenced by the Hindu nationalist movement, interpret his conflict with the Mughals as a clear-cut opposition against a foreign invader, where the overreaching goal is to defend the Hindu *dharma*. For example, one may consider Brajratnadās's publication titled *Yaśvantsiṁh tathā svātantrya-yuddh* (1988), or the small volume edited by Nārāyaṇsiṁh Bhāṭī, *Yugpuruṣ mahārājā jasvantsiṁh* (1984). In the article included in the latter, Vikramsiṁh Gūndoj stresses that Jaswant Singh did not allow even a single temple to be destroyed in the name of the *dharma*-blind policy of a fanatic government (*kaṭṭar śāsak*) such as Aurangzeb's (*ibid*.: 5). Another article, authored by Rāmdatt Thānvī and titled *Dharm evaṁ rāṣṭrpremī mahārājā jasvantsiṁh*, evaluates Jaswant Singh using terms and concepts that are resonant with the modern Hindu nationalism. It evokes "Hinduness" (*hindutva*), locating it in the *Upaniṣad*s, and makes Jaswant Singh an ideal protector of the indivisibility of Bhārat (*bhārat kī akhaṇḍatā*) (*ibid*.: 62). How did such an image of the Rathor ruler emerge? The *Jasvant siṅgh rī khyāt*, where Jaswant is projected as being a part (*aṁś*) of Shiva, inspires many possible avenues for exploration of his persona, to my best knowledge, a field of study untouched by modern research. Was a connection with the divine sphere a regularity in his representation?[6] How was the profile of

[6] The anecdote in the chronicle by Tīvarī Purohit resembles also an episode found in Priyadās's *Bhaktirasbodhinī* (1712). There, however, it concerns king Prithviraj (r. 1502–1527), a devotee of the famous *vaiṣṇava* ascetic, Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī. Priyadās relates how a blind brahman prayed to Baijanāth to heal him. In a dream, Baijanāth instructs him to clean his eyes with the cloth Prithviraj uses to dry himself with after his ablution in the Gomti river. The god Krishna through the voice of the king's guru orders him to bathe there. The brahman approaches the king and explains his intention. Prithviraj is at first perplexed but then consents to give him his drying cloth. The brahman touches his eyes with the cloth and is instantly cured. Priyadās further comments that when the people get to know about this greatness of bhakti, they become happy. Interestingly, Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāla*, upon which Priyadās's work comments and expands, does contain a stanza on Jaswant Singh, but it does not refer at all to this episode. For the story on the brahman and Prithviraj, see Śarmā and Gosvāmī 1990: 722. For the *chappay* stanza on Jaswant Singh, see *ibid*.: 853. See also Gonda 1969: 10–11.

Jaswant Singh and his role in history understood over time? Can we trace a continuity in perceiving him as an exemplary Rajput? What constituted his Rajputness? Keeping the above in mind, and in a vein similar to Cynthia Talbot's analysis of the so-called Rajput Rebellion (2018: 463), this paper seeks to explore how "… certain images and assessments of Indian historical figures continued to be repurposed time and again."

The paper's aim is thus to present the Maharaja's portrayal from various perspectives. Since studies on the reception and interpretation of his persona—beyond his political role—are a desideratum,[7] I will explore several examples drawn from two texts associated with his own royal lineage or remaining close to it. First, I will look at *Sūraj prakās* (*Light on the Sun*) composed by Kaviyā Karṇīdān, the court poet of king Abhai Singh Rathor (r. 1724–1749), and then the compositions on the royal lineage penned by the Nāths, the *śaiva* ascetics who held power at the Jodhpur court during the reign of the subsequent ruler, Man Singh Rathor (r. 1803–1843). These texts are crucial because they dedicate significant space to Jaswant Singh as an individual endowed with spiritual and philosophical knowledge. Karṇīdān even refers to him being an author of compositions dealing with spiritual insights.[8] However, his persona surfaces in different ways from the two sources I use. This leads me to interrogate the agendas of the authors connected to the Jodhpur crown.

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[7] In terms of sources, it is difficult to access works presenting contemporary perspectives on the Rathor king coming from his own court, apart from the chronicles (*khyāt*) composed by his *dīvān* Muṁhatā Naiṇsī. One of Jaswant's court poets, Dalpati Miśra, composed a *Jasvant udyot* in 1648. The text, also known as *Jasvant vilās*, is a genealogy of the Rathor lineage up to his patron, but the text survives only in manuscript format. One copy is located in the private collection of Bikaner's ruling dynasty, the Anoop Sanskrit Library. See Nāhṭa 1947: 95–96.

[8] The majority of Jaswant Singh's compositions in Braj Bhasha display Advaita Vedānta leanings. Their titles are: *Ānandvilās*, *Anubhavprakāś*, *Siddhāntbodh*, *Siddhāntsār*, *Prabodh nāṭak*, *Aparokṣ siddhānt*. He has also rendered in Braj Bhasha the *Bhagavadgītā* and its *Māhātmya*, and commented on the former text, always in Braj Bhasha. The texts have been collected, edited, and published in Miśra 1972.

Jaswant Singh in the *Sūraj prakās*

The *Sūraj prakās*, composed in Dingal by Kaviyā Karṇīdān, is a long poem of 7500 stanzas in several metres such as *chappay*, *kavitt*, *dohā*, *vaitāl*, etc.[9] The author is remembered by tradition not only for being a leading poet but for possessing an all-round profile, being as he was, a part of the royal retinue: expert well versed in politics, music, astrology, and competent in several languages (Lāḷas 1961: 1, 5). The genealogy of Abhai Singh occupies one-third of the whole text and starts with the description of the mythical origins of the dynasty, beginning with prince Rama of Ayodhya.[10] The importance of his lineage for the 18th-century Rathor ruler is underscored by the extensive descriptions dedicated to his ancestors, with the longest dedicated to his father, Ajit Singh (1679–1724). Within the narration of Abhai Singh's reign, the place of honour is taken by his campaign against Nawab Sarbuland Khan (*ibid*.: 3) in 1730.[11] A rel-

[9] For a short overview on Dingal language and literature, see Menāriyā 1960: 16–19. Many of the meters employed by Karṇīdān are more common in Pingal, the Braj Bhasha variant used in Rajasthan. This may point to the influence of Braj Bhasha on Karṇīdān's Dingal, noted by Maheshwari (1980: 77). On the *Sūraj prakās*, see also *ibid*.: 69–70.

[10] According to Sreenivasan (2002: 287) the presence of the genealogy in this textual genre is justified since: "… heroism was defined and celebrated as a continuing tradition, as an essence transmitted by hereditary lineage. In other words, when a ruler or a chieftain demonstrated valour in battle in these Rajasthani narratives, he merely displayed and confirmed the heroic essence inherent in his lineage. The revelation of such lineage-essence confirmed the right of the king or chief to rule. Thus, it is that the heroic traditions of the region begin by tracing the lineage of their protagonists."

[11] Sarbuland Khan was the Mughal-appointed governor of Gujarat from 1723 to 1730. When the imperial crown decided to replace him, Sarbuland refused to resign and attempted to gain independence for his province. The king of Marwar then marched against him and defeated him. Kesri Singh (1999: 140–143) has translated some passages from the *Sūraj prakās* describing Abhai Singh's brave confrontation with the governor. The Rathor maharaja commissioned two other poets of his, Vīrbhāṇ Ratnū and Bakhtā Khiṛiyā, to compose a work on the Ahmedabad battle against Sarbuland (Lāḷas 1961: 3–5).

atively considerable space is also given to the portrayal (*varṇan*) of Jaswant Singh, Abhai Singh's grandfather.

Jaswant Singh's portrayal starts in stanza 9, with the description of the prosperity of his reign. Using a play on words referring to his name, Jaswant (someone possessing *jasa*, that is, glory, fame), the poet calls him *jasarāja* ('the king of glory'). Jaswant Singh is naturally knowledgeable in the ways of *dharma* and *nīti* ('political wisdom'). Moreover, during his rule the members of the four *varṇa*s are happy and there is respect for the best poets at court. In stanza 10 he is called *ratirāja* ('the lord of passion') and thus compared to Kāmadeva for his beauty, and *mragarāja* ('the king of forest animals,' 'lion') due to his physical strength. Consistent portrayal employing the word denoting a king (*rāja*) continues when he is compared to the Kaurava "king" Karna for his generosity, and for his self-gratification—to Indra, the king of the gods. According to the concluding verses, the enemy kings are terrified as Jaswant Singh's *tapa* ('fiery energy') makes Jaswant Singh the *graharāja* ('the king of the planets,' or 'the sun'). There is no other king like the *jasarāja*. Stanza 11 develops further the topos of kingship by evoking epithets such as *girarāja* ('the king of the mountains,' or the Himalaya), the *rasarāja* ('the king of *rasa*s,' *śṛṅgāra*), the *paṇḍavarāja* (probably the Yuddhishthira of the Mahabharata) as well. It closes with a verse praising Jaswant Singh's wisdom: "The King of Fame, whose wisdom [is equal to that of the] brahman's [in the] world, conquered [other] kings."[12]

At this point there are two stanzas in *vaitāḷ* metre which provide a glimpse of the intellectual profile of the king and the cultural environment of the court:

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[12] जसराज ज्ञांन दुजराज जग, जिकौ राजपति जीपियौ (Lāḷas 1962: 15). The term *jaga* could also mean 'sacrifice' and 'a state of burning, blazing, shining, flaming up' (see Lāḷas 2013. 2: 1034). Following the former sense, the sentence could be translated also as: "Wisdom [to] the King of Glory [was like] a sacrifice [to] brahmans; he conquered [other] kings." Instead, if we consider the latter interpretation, the translation could be: "The King of Glory [was] a blazing [among] brahmans [in] knowledge, he conquered [other] kings."

The King of Glory, expert in the knowledge of *brahman*, obtained merit through severe asceticism.
The leader Jaswant composed a variety of books, best among the *śruti* texts and the like.
[Like] Brahma, Shiva, Sanaka and the others,[13] excellent among the sages, [he] always focuses the mind [in] meditation.
[His] heart dwells on the three *guṇas*,[14] his own self [dwells] in the King of Glory's kingdom. (12)[15]

The wise acquires higher knowledge, the poet studies poetry,
The warrior learns [about] war, [which] is the science of weapons.
The minister learns [about] diplomacy, the connoisseur studies music,
All social classes learn about *dharma* [but] the king learns [about] the customs [as well].
All the *paṇḍit*s learn the Vedas, the benefactors [learn various] ways [of distributing] gifts around.
All-knowing and renowned [for his] unparalleled wisdom, king Jaswant, the world's teacher! (13)[16]

The first stanza highlights asceticism and qualities associated generally with brahmans (like Sanaka and so on) such as the knowledge of *brahman*, meditation, and authorship connected to the proficiency in

[13] Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra are the four *ṛṣi*s, held to be Brahma's sons, present in the *Purāṇa*s and the Mahabharata. See Vettam 1975: 682.

[14] *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*–the *guṇa*s are the constituents of material nature (*prakṛti*).

[15] ग्यांन ब्रह्म जसराज गुण, पुन उग्र तप करि पाविया । सार जसवंत आदि स्रुतिवर, विविध ग्रंथ वनाविया । ब्रह्म सिव सनिकादिँ मुनिवर, ध्यांन नित प्रत चित धरै । त्रगुण पर उर वसै निज तत, राज मझि जसराज रै ।। (Lāḷas 1962: 16). This verse is not easy to interpret. It can be understood as: Jaswant meditates on the three *guṇa*s and, although this is no better specified in the text, this kind of meditation helped to distinguish one's true nature, pure consciousness, from the phenomenal world or the unreal according to Advaita Vedānta. That Jaswant's own nature or innermost self (*nija tata*) is said to reside in his domain may allude to the Upanishadic teachings. Like the Supreme Self pervades the universe, which is his body, Jaswant is the self within his reign. See Dasgupta 1922: 48–49.

[16] ग्यांनी सीखै ग्यांन, कवी सीखै कविताई । सीखै खत्री संग्राम, सस्त्र विद्या सरसाई । मत सीखै मंत्रवी, राग सीखै रसचारी । सीखै ध्रम कुळ सकळ, रीत सीखै छत्रधारी । सीखंत वेद पंडत सकळ, दाता दांन विध दसदसौ । स्रबजांण उतम विद्या प्रसध, जगतगरू राजा जसौ ।। (Lāḷas 1962: 16).

the Vedas. What's more, it is claimed that he composed works that can compete with the Vedas, presumably in soteriological validity. The second stanza underscores even further Jaswant's exceptional wisdom. Karṇīdān lists first the domains of knowledge connected with various courtly figures making us thus infer how Jaswant's knowledge surpasses that possessed by all of them. When treating Jaswant's death, in the last line of a rhyming couplet (*dohā*) of the *Sūraj prakās*, the poet says that the King of Glory, the pure gander among kings, or the pure royal gander (*pavitra rājahaṁsa*), attained the Supreme Self (*paramahaṁsa miḷiyau*). Why would this spiritual aspect be important to Karṇīdān's patron, Abhai Singh?

The *Sūraj prakās* belongs to a genre of narrative poetry composed by poets to glorify their royal sponsors. Allison Busch provides us with a slightly earlier example of Lāl Kavi, the author of *Chatraprakāś* in Braj Bhasha (c. 1710). He was the court poet of Chatrasal Bundela of Pannā, a ruler of Rajput descent whose integration in the Mughal system of *mansabdārī* was full of ups and downs. As proposed by her, the title *Chatraprakāś* can be understood as the "Light of Chatrasāl (…) to reflect the brilliance cast by the king's actions in the world" (2018: 420). Such panegyrical interpretation is possible also for the *Sūraj prakās*, where "Light of the Sun" would refer to the radiance shining from the sun-related (*sūryavaṁśī*) dynasty, the Rathors.[17] Another rendering of the title of Karṇīdān's work is also possible, as, for example, *Light [thrown] onto the Sun*, where the author, as the poet, illuminates the sun or Abhai's lineage. This explanation leads us to a paradox: is it possible to shed light on the sun? Through the title itself, the poet seems to exalt his patron even before the poem begins.

That the text of *Sūraj prakās* is composed in Dingal may indicate it was intended for local circulation, for an audience that could understand the language. As remarked by Melia Belli Bose (2015: 191), Abhai Singh probably wished to rehabilitate his reputation as

[17] For references to other works of Rajasthani literature employing the term *prakās* in their title, see Maheshwari 1980: 67, 71–72, 74, 206.

the legitimate successor of Ajit Singh. He was not only guilty of parricide—a fact excluded from the *Sūraj prakās* (Maheshwari 1980: 70)—but also of forging once again relationship with the Mughal crown, by which he was well rewarded. Belli Bose's study of the commemorative architecture of the Rathors (2015: 192) reveals how the styles adopted by them may reflect the shifting relationships with other Rajput rulers of the region and with the empire. The grandeur of the *deval* commissioned by Abhai Singh for his father, built in a style reminiscent of Ajit's important association with the Sisodias of Mewar, contrasts with the paintings commissioned by Abhai, which display an unequivocal Mughal influence.[18] We can consider the extended space devoted to Jaswant and his gnoseological proclivities in the *Sūraj prakās* as corresponding to a similar intent of restating both Abhai's legitimacy as a Rathor ruler and the connections with the Mughal empire through a shared imagery of kingship.

When reading the treatment of Jaswant Singh in the text, it appears to me that we see there at play a vocabulary of images that could appeal to the kshatriyas: glory, courage, loyalty, kinship, conquest. At the same time, there seems to be an overwhelming presence of an effort of placing Jaswant at the level of the Mughals or at least in a comparable position, perhaps with the aim to project the Rathors as potential leaders among the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The first element pointing to this is the mention of the prince Karna of the Mahabharata. This is not a unique occurrence, as Karna's generosity is referred to in the portrayal of Jaswant Singh's father Gaj Singh as well (Lāḷas 1962: 8). For the lineage of Jodha the example of Karna is even more significant because he is the son of the Sun god.

The Mughals themselves were not ignorant of Karna's figure and the connection between Karna and Surya. Karna's donations to everyone who entered his house, especially brahmans, is mentioned in the *Razmnāma* (1582, *Book of War*), the Persian translation of the

[18] A *deval* (lit. 'temple') is a commemorative structure reminiscent of Hindu and Jain temples of Western India. On their distinctive features in comparison with another funerary form widespread among the Rajput dynasties of Rajasthan, the *chatrī* ('umbrella'), see Belli Bose 2015: 137–138.

Mahabharata commissioned by Akbar (r. 1556–1605; cf. Truschke 2011: 517).[19] Worth of note is the link with the Sun god, transformed by the Persian translators to suit the legendary birth of Akbar and the Mughal dynasty. As noted by Truschke, in the *Razmnāma* Kuntī's pregnancy is due to a ray of Divine light, and not to a god like Surya as given in the Sanskrit epic (*ibid*.: 519). This recalls the description of the origins of Akbar's lineage elaborated by Abū'l Faẓl (1551–1602) in his *Akbarnāma*. There, inspired by Sufi Eshrāqī (illumination) language, Divine light impregnates a Mughal princess and in this way God's light permeates her descendants, among them Akbar, so that "… divinely revealed light is handed down from one divinely inspired philosopher to another" (Asher 2004: 170).

While such an expansion on Karna's birth and role in the verses of the *Sūraj prakās* I have analysed is absent, the resonance with discourses current within the political milieu of the times emerges from the appellative "Teacher of the world," given to Jaswant in the last line of stanza 13. In a Persian letter addressed by the Maratha leader Shivaji (1630–1680) to Aurangzeb, the former protests the imposition of the *jaziyā* tax by reminding the emperor of his illustrious great-grandfather Akbar. Shivaji argues that through the policy of *ṣulḥ-i kull* ('universal civility')[20] "in relation to all religious sects (…) [t]he aim of his liberal heart was to cherish and protect all the people. So, he became famous under the title of the world's spiritual guide (*jagat guru*)."[21]

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19 For a study of Karna's character in the epic, see McGrath 2004.

20 On the meaning of the term and its use in Mughal contexts, see Kinra 2020. On the overlap between *ṣulḥ-i kull* and Vedānta, see also Rajpurohit 2022.

21 Complete translation of the letter in Sarkar 1928: 286–290.
The title "Teacher of the world" was not new to royal appropriation. In his Dakani *Ibrahīmnāma*, commissioned by Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II in 1611, the poet 'Abdul says that this was the title given to the Sultan by his Hindu subjects (Husain 2011: 83). In the reign of the ruler of Bijapur there was a degree of "Hindu-Muslim syncretism" signalled, for instance, by the increasing presence of Maharashtrian brahmans in the administration of the dominium and the use of Dakani (Eaton 2015 [1978]: 91). This can make us think that the title in the case of the Sultan as well involves his policy towards the Hindus.

Why was Karṇīdān attributing this appellative to Jaswant Singh? Following the logic of Hindu nationalism, calling Jaswant *jagat guru* could be seen as trying to reclaim this appellative for a Hindu king, and thus juxtapose the persona of Jaswant as the spiritual guide of his times with Aurangzeb's notorious religious orthodoxy. After all the title was also used to refer to philosophical and religious figures of authority, not only the Hindus.[22] However, it is difficult to say whether the title "Universal preceptor" was inserted to proclaim a difference between Jaswant Singh and Aurangzeb in terms of religious policy and/or their personal deportment. As the content of the section on Jaswant in the *Sūraj prakās* suggests, the clashes between the two were numerous and violent. There is also an identification of the Rajput side as the *sura*s ('gods') and the Mughals as the *asura*s ('base beings who oppose the gods').[23] At the same time, there is little to no elaboration in the text in terms of seeing the conflict as religiously inflected. Moreover, there is also little comment on Aurangzeb's personal behaviour or character.

Considering the above, I argue that the representation of Jaswant's gnoseological proclivities in the *Sūraj prakās*, unmarked by precise sectarian connotations, may correspond to another way of bringing closer the imageries connecting the Rathors and the Mughals.[24] If the artistic production identified Abhai Singh as "far more Mughal in style

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22 Akbar himself would have conferred the title on the Jain monk and leader Hīravijaya Sūrī. See, e. g., Mitra 1939. Within Hindu traditions, the title *jagad guru* is particularly important for *advaitin*s. The leaders of the school are to this day known as *jagad guru*s, a conception articulated in the life-histories of its founder, Śaṅkara. See, e. g., Malinar 2001.

23 See Lāḷas 1962: 18, v. 16. See also, for instance, the beginning of the description of the battle of Ujjain (*ibid*.: 20, v. 21).

24 That the Mughal emperor was imagined as a spiritually advanced individual has been well studied. See, for instance, Moin 2012. An important religious tradition of Rajasthan, the Dādūpanth, presents their founder, Dādū, as a teacher to the "Turks" as well in their hagiographic tradition. Among the "Turks," there is also the emperor, Akbar. This, according to Rajpurohit (2022: 928), demonstrates the familiarity of the Dādūpanth with the "Mughal imperial paradigm" and their attempt to gain prominence among the religious traditions of the time by adopting it on their terms.

than indigenous Rajasthani" (Belli Bose 2015: 193), the *Sūraj prakās* in Dingal can still be understood as a message to Abhai's local and regional detractors. Through the representation of Jaswant, the author seems to point to the presence of two suns: the Mughals for the whole of the empire, the Rathors for the region. Even if not as developed as in Jaswant's case, asceticism and wisdom were integral also to the *Sūraj prakās*'s portrayal of Abhai Singh.[25]

The *Sūraj prakās* offers us also a bridge towards another representation of Jaswant Singh, one extending beyond the martial and political qualities. In the late 1820s, the chief of the Rathors and the ruler of Marwar was Man Singh (r. 1803–1843). During his rule, he commissioned an illustrated manuscript of the *Sūraj prakās*. Debra Diamond (2000: 28) interprets the decision to illustrate the long bardic poem as "an attempt to mediate the allegiance of the deeply fractured court by incorporating Naths into the Rathore past." The consolidation of the connection between the Nāths and the Rathor dynasty seems to have also had an impact on the representation of Jaswant Singh. However, his representation in Nāth works contrasts with that in the *Sūraj prakās*, evidently well-known to Man Singh and his entourage.

Jaswant Singh in the Nāth-related literature

The Nāths, also known as Nāth yogis, are the followers of a religious tradition whose founder is considered Ādināth, identified with the god Shiva. Other crucial figures of the path are the two historical gurus, Gorakhnāth, and his teacher, Matsyendranāth. The tradition has been associated with the practice of *haṭhayoga* and the worship of the formless (*nirguṇa*) Absolute.[26] They include, in their following, both ascetics

[25] He is said to be an ascetic like Shiva (*saṅkarasā tapasī*) and possess knowledge like Gorakhnāth (*gorakhasā jñāna*). See Lāḷas 1962: 177.

[26] For an introduction to the Nāthpanth, see Mallinson 2018. Gorakhnāth, the first references to whom are dated to the 12th century, is credited with works both in Sanskrit and early Hindi and is considered a master of *haṭhayoga*.

and householders and in Rajasthan they have been particularly close to the bhakti religious tradition of the Sants.[27]

Jālandharnāth was the chief Nāth in Jodhpur, at the time when the Nāths rose to political relevance during the reign of Man Singh who believed that his accession to the Jodhpur throne was the fruit of the grace of Ayas Dev Nāth. Man Singh resided at the Jalor fort, in the area of Jodhpur. His main political rival, his cousin Bhim Singh (1793–1803), besieged the fort and gave him an ultimatum. Ayas Dev Nāth suggested to Man Singh that he should wait until a certain date before responding to his cousin. As it happened, Bhim Singh died suddenly a few days before the date set by Ayas Dev Nāth. In this way Man Singh won ascendency over his cousin. From then on, the Nāth and his family acquired considerable political power in Jodhpur (Gold 1995: 124).

This course of events spurred Man Singh's interest in the *Sūraj prakās*. Karṇīdān traced the mythical origins of the Rathor lineage not only to the solar dynasty of Rama, but also to the princes of Kannauj. One of them, Punja, had thirteen sons and their stories narrated in the text are often filled with depictions of their sacrifices and worship of a goddess or Shiva, else help received from a yogi or a Nāth. Among the Nāths mentioned by name in the *Sūraj prakās* are Jālandharnāth, Gorakhnāth, and Nemnāth.[28] The illustrated manuscript of the *Sūraj prakās* commissioned by Man Singh concentrates at length on the stories of Punja's thirteen sons. In this way, the status of the Nāths as validators of the Rathor dynasty came to be supported by two important

[27] The close connection of the Nāth yogis and the Sant tradition has been demonstrated, for instance, by Monika Horstmann's study of the Dādūpanth textual tradition (2021). The Dādūpanthī codices transmitted within their own corpus the Nāth texts in early Hindi.

[28] Busch (2018: 420) notes how the narrative of Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś* is populated with gods and goddesses. She observes that in the genealogical section of the text, Chatrasal's ancestor Pancham is represented as a great devotee of the local goddess Vindhyācal Devī. In the *Sūraj prakās* (Lāḷas 1961: 7–8) Pancham is identified as one of the thirteen sons of Punja, and the goddess Vindhyācal is mentioned as well. However, in the story told by Karṇīdān, Jālandharnāth seems to have supplanted the goddess. For a summary of the stories of Punja's thirteen descendants in the *Sūraj prakās*, see *ibid*.: 6–12.

cultural traditions of Marwar, bardic genealogy and court painting (Diamond 2000: 28). During Man Singh's period there was a flourishing of Nāth scholarship: the king sponsored compositions of Nāth texts, composed them himself and further collected Nāth texts. In his fort in Jodhpur, he founded a library—housed there to this day—where most of the extant manuscripts date from his period.

Moreover, many manuscripts in the library contain also other compositions that attempt to connect the Rathor lineage with the Nāths perhaps in different ways than the bardic poetry and painting. An example of the intellectual project brought forward through the writings by the Nāths is constituted by manuscripts in vertical format containing a high number of miscellaneous compositions.[29] These manuscripts present several examples of *ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* on Man Singh's ancestors, such as Gaj Singh, Jaswant Singh, and Ajit Singh.[30] Manuscript 1510 n. 2ka (circa 19th c.) contains a panegyric poem on Jaswant Singh which mentions his battles against Aurangzeb. However, its conclusion takes another turn:

> … he [Jaswant] protected the honour of the Hindu *dharma*. He was devoted to Sadāśiva; he behaved according to the viewpoint of the venerable Śaṅkarācarya in the ascertainment of knowledge. He was an enormously wise, virtuous king, skilled in the field of knowledge and always took pleasure in the company of learned poets.[31]

We can see, in this case, how the few lines quoted above are distinct from the profile of Jaswant we find in the *Sūraj prakās*. Here god,

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[29] These manuscripts are unpublished and largely unstudied to date. Therefore, my understanding of their content and subject is limited to the data I collected during my fieldwork in February 2023. In the catalogue, the digitised manuscript I partly examine is called *guṭkā* 1510 n. 2ka. However, its orientation is vertical, like an Islamic codex (*kitāb*). For a general description of the features of *guṭkā*s, see Couvrat Desvergnes 2023.

[30] On the genre of *ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, see Turek 2024: 216–219; Ziegler 1976: 222; Menāriyā 1960: 211.

[31] (…) हींदू धर्म री मार्जाद राषी श्री सदाशिव रौ इष्ट रह्यौ निरणै ग्यान श्री संकराचार्य रा मतानुसारी आचरण रयौ बड़ा ग्यानी सतपुरस राजा हुवा विद्या रै विषै आप निपुण रया आर पंडितकविलोकां सुं रिझवारी रही । (Manuscript 1510 n. 2ka: folio 179 verso).

guru and even Hindu *dharma* are precisely mentioned. The anonymous Nāth narrator makes Jaswant a devotee of Shiva and a follower of Śaṅkara (8th century), the famous Advaita Vedānta teacher. In this case there is no explicit mention of Jaswant being an author of philosophical works. However, the author must have been aware of Jaswant's Braj Bhasha writings, for a manuscript copy of them, dated to 1812 (vs 1869) may be found in the library. Moreover, one of the texts by Jaswant Singh, the *Ānandvilās*, has Śaṅkarācarya as the main protagonist (Miśra 1972: 115–134). The mention of the Hindu *dharma* or Hindu religion deserves a careful consideration and should not be easily conflated with the positioning of Jaswant as upholder of *hindutva* by the modern literary critics and historians. Though the critics and historians were acquainted with some of the sources such as those analysed in this paper, we cannot ignore that Hindu *dharma* here seems to point to the *Śaiva dharma* as practiced in the region.

The meaning of Hindu *dharma* as contextual and, moreover, reflecting a *śaiva* interpretation, is supported by other texts included in the compilation. Examples of these are the Nāth *stuti*s (eulogies) but also compositions such as the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati concerning the nature of the Lord (*nāth*) and a story narrating how the Pandava prince Arjuna became a wandering Nāth.[32] There are several short texts summarizing doctrines in mixed forms of Rajasthani and Braj Bhasha (with occasional Sanskrit) such as *Śaṅkarācarya siddhānt*, *Rāmānuj siddhānt*, *Tantr rau siddhānt*, *Vedõ kā siddhānt*, *Pūraṇ kā siddhānt*, *Upaniṣadõ kā siddhānt*. It appears that with these compositions the Nāths were not only trying to insert themselves further into the history of the dynasty but—as the portrayal of Jaswant points out—that they were also making attempts at an appropriation of brahmanical knowledge and figures, many of which connected to Vedānta.[33] As with Shiva and Parvati discussing if the Lord "possesses qualities"

[32] Some Nāth legends make also Aurangzeb a devotee aspiring to Nāth wisdom, belying his uniform representation as temple-destroyer. See Bouillier 2018.

[33] This seems a development which deserves further study. About the connection to Vedānta as texts, we know that the Nāths placed themselves in the tradition of the *Atharvaveda*, to which the Yoga *Upaniṣad*s are attributed (Horstmann 2021: 86).

or is "without any qualities" (*saguṇa* /*nirguṇa*), or is an active agent or an inactive entity (*kartā* /*akartā*), several of the texts in the manuscript concern philosophical debates or topics. The Nāths appear to be trying to make sense of the various doctrines surrounding them, reinterpreting them in a *śaiva* (*Advaita*?) framework, for instance, by saying that in each of the four *sampradāya*s the god is Sadāśiva.[34]

Conclusive reflections

This paper may be viewed as an attempt to historicize the portrayal of Maharaja Jaswant Singh I, especially in relation to his being an author of philosophical texts and an individual in possession of spiritual insights. While modern historiography projects him largely as a protector of Hindu *dharma* against a Muslim invader, where identities of the players are rigorously crystallised, the sources analysed in this paper show a different picture. Both the *Sūraj prakās* and the *ḍiṅgaḷ gīt* by a Nāth author represent the ruler as a *jñānī*, yet the elements highlighting his philosophical and spiritual proclivities vary. In the case of the *Sūraj prakās*, Karṇīdān seems to reflect his patron's, Abhai Singh's, preoccupation with his own reputation of being the legitimate successor of Ajit Singh and propagating the same among his peers. On the basis of this and other similarly artistic productions that Abhai Singh had patronized, I suggest that Jaswant's composite portray that emerges therewith displays his closeness to the Mughals, which was deliberately downplayed by his father Ajit Singh. Hence, Jaswant Singh is portrayed as an individual practicing ascetic activities and competing with brahmans for knowledge, yet without his precise religious identity being clearly spelled out. In addition, though the element of religious antagonism is present in the text, it is underplayed and the portrayal of the Mughals as individuals appears to be not developed either. On the other hand, the Nāth source concerning Jaswant portrays him as an *advaitin* devoted to Shiva. In this case, Hindu

[34] The texts are found in folio 155, Mahārāja Mān Siṁh Pustak Prakāś, Jodhpur.

dharma is mentioned but seems to coincide with *śaiva dharma* rather than with a unified conception of diverse beliefs. The Nāth representation of Jaswant is couched in a way that could be resonant with their sectarian beliefs and simultaneously articulate their wish to improve their credentials as royal actors. Both these cases alert us to the fact that the Rathor dynasty itself offers a picture of his member that is not monolithic but complex and multilayered (Talbot 2018: 464). Memory is contextual and transformed (Sreenivasan 2002: 276) and, to be sure, the sources show us that philosophical and spiritual proclivities were a proper occupation for a kshatriya. In this sense, the analysis of Jaswant's case contributes also to our understanding of how a "Hindu dharmic" identity might have been interpreted in the early modern period by the Rajput rulers of North India (Horstmann 2006: 11; Okita 2014: 21–40) and helps us nuance modern understanding of the same.

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