

Women in Rajput, Jain and Gujjar Literary Tradition: A Note on Rajasthan

..NANDINI SINHA

Dept. of History, PGDAV College
Delhi University, Delhi

This essay highlights perception of women in the royal epigraphic records, literary traditions of the Rajputs and Jains, and a bardic-epic of a Gujjar community in the historic setting of Rajasthan. The sources of this study are drawn from the epigraphic records of the Guhilas of Mewar (South Rajasthan), Chandbardai's *Prithvirāja Rāso*, Malik Muhammad Jayasī's *Padmāvat*, Uddyotana's *Kuvalayamālā* and Haribhadra Suri's *Samarāiccakāhā* and a bardic-epic, *Bagdāvat Devanārāyaṇa Mahāgāthā*. If Gujjar depiction of a heroine is understandably different from that of the Rajput, adaptations of motifs by the Gujjars from the Rajput social system is equally significant to note.

A historiographical note¹ on women's studies, ranges from Altekaranian brand of women's history² to R.S. Sharma's analysis of the varna, economic and kinship dimensions of the eight types of marriage and equation of women with property and sudras.³ Recent writings such as those of Vijaya Ramaswamy's on women saints of Tamilnadu⁴ open up a new dimension.

Studies on status of tribal women⁵ continue to be an important topic of discussion on north-eastern India. However, it is equally important to situate the gender studies in the context of social formations. Alice W. Clark points out the essentiality of gender analysis to the whole field, rather than keeping it removed from the mainstream in a women's studies category.⁶ Gender analysis ought to be seen as essential to the field for the following overarching reason. Studies of gender and political economy are not to be done as studies of women in isolation; they are, more broadly systems studies which see gender as integral to systems of social relationships.⁷

Royal records from southern Rajasthan refer to women of the royal households as queens, patrons, and builders between the seventh and fifteenth centuries. As early as the eight century the Guhila king Kadāchi's queen Vonna figures as a patron of a Śiva temple in a royal inscription. She granted forty drama coins for the maintenance of this temple at the instance of her preceptor, Kutukkācārya⁸. Queens became important

for the Guhila state of Mewar in the tenth century because of their lineage affiliations. The Huṇa princess Hariyādevī from Harsuada, the Rāṣtrakūṭa princess Mahālakṣmī from Hastikundi (Marwar), Cāhamāna and Paramāra princesses and a Caulukyan princess Mahimā, figure as queens in a tenth century royal record in the context of their lineages.⁹ Even some of their fathers' names figure in the same record.¹⁰ Hence, queens figured in some of the royal records because of their political importance. Similarly, subordinate allies of the Guhila rulers also mentioned their queens in their own records. Two inscriptions of AD 1000 and AD 1008 refer to the two wives of Guhila Mahāsāmantādhipati of Nagda as Mahārājñī Sarvadevī, daughter of a mahāsāmantādhipati of the Suryavaṁśī family and mahārājñī Jajukā, daughter of a mahāsāmantādhipati of another Suryavaṁśī family of Bharukachha.¹¹ In fact, the Paramāras and Kalacurīs also mentioned their matrimonial alliances with the Guhilas to highlight the political importance of these marriages.¹²

The queen mother Jayatalladevī figured as patron of Bhartṛipuriyagacha (a Jain monastic order) in a record of her son, Mahārāval Samarsimha. She built a temple of Śyāmparśvanāth in Chittaur at the instance of ācārya Śrī Praddyumna Suri in AD 1278.¹³ The search for political allies in the fifteenth century necessitated the Guhilas to eulogize the Baghelī queen Gaurambikā at great length.¹⁴ A tank was constructed in her memory.¹⁵ An interesting instance of self-perception of a Rajput princess is provided by the Guhila Princess Rāmābāi's Zawar inscription. This inscription records the construction of a Viṣṇu temple at Zawar by Ramabai in AD 1497. Although she issued this record in her own right, she provided lengthy eulogies for her father, Mahārāṇā Kumbha and her husband, Rāya Māṇḍalika, the Yādava ruler of Junagarh.¹⁶ It is important to note that there is hardly any eulogy of the builder of this temple, Rāmābāi. She referred to herself as the daughter of Mahārāṇā Kumbha and wife of the Yādava ruler.

The culture of political assassinations in the fifteenth century court of Mewar evident from bardic traditions,¹⁷ undoubtedly points towards involvement of the queens in the court-intrigues. However, it was the institution of polygamy and the consequent problem of rivalry over succession which involved the queens in competing for power for their sons. Although scholars have highlighted the political role of the queens behind purdah,¹⁸ the terms of reference in the royal records of the fifteenth century have been ignored in analysing the actual situation.

Except for the reference to the Baghelā queen for obvious political reasons, queens no longer figured in the royal inscriptions of Mewar in

the context of their lineage identities between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries. It actually indicates the decreasing importance of the queens in the political processes of the regional state of Mewar in this later period.

Series of memorial stones from early medieval Rajasthan¹⁹ recording acts of *sati* committed by the wives of Rajput chiefs, highlight one more important aspect of an 'ideal' Rajput womanhood. The wives hardly had any identity of their own except with reference to their husbands and lineages in these memorial records. The reason as to why none of the royal records from Mewar between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries makes any reference to acts of *sati* or *jauhar* committed by queens, is again political. No royal record would reveal military defeats in the past by mentioning actual acts of *sati* or *jauhar*. More importantly the institution of *sati* had an important economic aspect. No widow was supposed to contest her rights to property against her kinsmen. Hence, a Rajput woman had to sacrifice her life on the funeral pyre of her husband in the garb of an ideal wife to relinquish her claims to any maintenance and join her 'lord' in his heavenly abode.

The genealogical list in the seventeenth century inscription Rājaprasasti Mahākāvyaṃ (AD 1680) excludes the names of the mothers of the Guhila Kings²⁰ upto Rāṇā Karṇasimha. Interestingly, Rāṇā Rājasimha mentions his grandmother, mother and son-in-law to highlight Guhila social links with the Rāthours and Hāḍās in the face of the declining political image of the state of Mewar in the seventeenth century.²¹ Rāṇā Rājasimha's grandmother Jambuvatī figures more as a great patron and a religious personality in this record.²² Raṇachōḍa Bhaṭṭa's *Amarakāvyaṃ* once again mentions the mothers of all the Sisodia kings of the Guhila dynasty with reference to their lineages²³ for obvious political reasons in the context of seventeenth century Rajasthan.

Increasing rigidity of social values including institution of *sati* and *jauhar* giving rise to an extremely puritan image, became the set pattern for women in the Rajput royal households. And the Chāran poets undoubtedly drew inspiration from the Rajput patriachal system to compose literary traditions about ideal Rajput womanhood in the background of military traditions of this region. A brief note of the depiction of Prthvirāja Chauhan's three queens by Chandbārdāi provides us with a literary representation of an ideal image of Rajput woman. The description is based on an edited version of the oldest manuscript of Prthvirājaraso composed around VS 1642 (AD 1584).²⁴ Chadbardāi devotes much space to the beauty, loyalty and faithfulness of Īnchhanī, Śāsivratā and Saṃyogitā, the three queens of Prthvirāja. If Īnchhanī's beauty is

stunning, Śaśivratā's youthfulness is compared with the season of spring²⁵ and a freshly flowering bud.²⁶ Īnchhanī, in her bridal fineries is demure and nervous to meet her lord, while the first meeting of Śaśivratā with Pṛthvīrāja is more romantic. Even in a romantic situation, Sasivrata is said to be aware of her conduct towards her elders.²⁷ Īnchhanī is an epitome of auspicious signs. Chandbardāi further inflates the romantic potential of the situation in the first meeting between Pṛthvīrāja and Saṃyogitā. Pṛthvīrāja meets her on the bank of the Ganges at Kanyakubja. Saṃyogitā had already made the Chauhan king her ideal man and was determined to marry him. She too is an exquisite beauty with fine qualities. She is loyal and assists her lord.²⁸ But when Pṛthvīrāja wants her to mount his horse she hesitates with shame.²⁹ She is not expected to forget her feminine codes. Saṃyogitā adorns the clothes of an ideal widow and mourns for her lord as the news of his imprisonment by Muhammad Ghorī arrives.³⁰

Three different forms of marriage are described here; a typical traditional marriage with all its rituals for Īnchhanī, Gandharva for Śaśivratā and Saṃyogitā conducting her own Svayamvara and marrying Pṛthvīrāja before eloping with him. (Later king Jaichand is supposed to have formalized their marriage by sending dowry to Pṛthvīrāja's court). These are means to glorify the Chauhan King Pṛthvīrāja, as a hero who is capable of achieving success in all the matrimonial ventures. The idea was not to eulogize Śaśivratā and Saṃyogitā for their courage.

Īnchhanī is hurt as Saṃyogitā arrives as the Paṭṭarānī (the chief queen). Pṛthvīrāja spends all his time with Saṃyogitā. Īnchhanī feels neglected. She is jealous of Saṃyogitā. Īnchhanī sends her parrot, the messenger, to Pṛthvīrāja. Chandbardāi mentions Īnchhanī's complaints through the parrot's words in great details. The parrot registers her complaint with acumen; all that she has to say to her lord with tears in her eyes. Īnchhanī's parrot is successful and wins over Pṛthvīrāja. A truce is declared between Īnchhanī and Saṃyogitā. Thus, Pṛthvīrāja, the hero is again capable of deftly handling delicate situations to keep all his queens happy.^{30A} Queens are defined with reference to their beauty, femininity, loyalty and finally, their husbands. It is also strange that Chandbardai whose primary aim is to eulogize Pṛthvīrāja should not have devoted some space to the participation by his queens in his courtly affairs and hunting expeditions. But the bard does not deviate from the strict confines of the model of ideal Rajput womanhood. In fact, narrowing the focus proves our earlier point that the actual political importance of the princesses was declining.

An extension of the same 'ideal' image of a Rajput woman can be

gleaned from Jayasi's Padmavat, composed in AD 1540. Jayasī composes an epic on the legendary princess Padmavati in the setting of Chittaur of the thirteenth century. He devotes long chapters to the birth and auspicious signs of this princess, description of her father's palace in Simhala (Sri Lanka), Ratansi's visit to Simhala and his marriage to Padmāvati, Alauddin's siege of Chittaur, her chastity and loyalty to her husband, self-immolation, etc. She is compared with the rays of the sun and moon and lotus.³¹ Her physical beauty is described in detail.³² Her face is compared with the moon, her back with the Malayagiri mountain.³³ Comparison of Padmāvati with moon and lotus and Ratnasena with sun are a recurring motif.³⁴ Even the gods are stunned at her beauty.³⁵ Descriptions of her jewellery, clothes and a long meeting with her husband are meant to highlight typical feminine qualities. Jayasi describes four types of women: Hastinī, Simhanī, Chitrinī and Padminī and repeats all the physical attributes of Padminī in a separate chapter: Padmāvati Rūpa Charchā.³⁶ Her devotion to her imprisoned husband highlights her loyalty. She commits *sati* on the funeral pyre of her husband. The scene is made emotional to characterize an ideal Rajput woman who gave company to her husband in this and the other world.³⁷ When Alauddin finally sieged Chittaur, Ratnasena (Rāma) and Padmāvati (Sītā) had already left for their heavenly abode.³⁸

Jayasī also uses a motif of a eternal-love to highlight the bond between Ratnasena and Padmāvati. In fact, Jayasī makes physical beauty the chief inspiration behind eternal-love. Ratnasena is stated to have fainted on hearing of Padmāvati's beauty.^{38A} The path to the realization of eternal-love is made difficult and true-love is beset with sorrow.^{38B} Ratnasena, the hero is a true lover and therefore, immortal.^{38C} Since love is eternal, physical beauty, already attractive, is made divine. Hence, Padmāvati is divinely beautiful and Ratnasena has to become a renouncer to reach his goal. A long course of correspondance begins between the devotee Ratnasena and his divinity, Padmāvati.^{38D} They continue to be united after death. Interestingly, Alauddin Khalji is made to pick up a handful of ashes from the pyres of Padmāvati and Ratnasena^{38E} after the fall of Chittaur. Thus, Jayasī develops the idea of an ideal, pure heart that bleeds for the beloved. Ratnasena treads the difficult path of eternal-love and is rewarded.^{38F} Mahadeva appears before Ratnasena, and tells him that since he has borne the sorrow of separation for long he would meet his beloved soon.^{38G}

Padmāvati is no less an eternal lover. She knows from her parrot, Hīrāman, that Ratnasena truly loves her. But she is a woman. She has to

suffer more to achieve her goal. She is portrayed as burning with the fire of sorrow: this fire burns the realms of heaven and the nether world.³⁸¹ She also reaches her goal and is united with Ratnasena in marriage. She is no longer a heroine. She has to follow her husband. Nāgamatī, the first wife, sends her messenger, the parrot. The Parrot narrates Nāgamatī's sorrows. Ratnasena decides to return to Chittaur. He is filled with pride and wants to cross the seas from Simhala. Padmāvati follows her husband. But pride takes its toll. Their boat capsizes.³⁸¹ Both of them are swept across the coast. Ratnasena cannot find his beloved. At last, the god of the seas returns Padmāvati to Ratnasena. Nāgamatī, too, is portrayed with a pure heart. She is as chaste and loyal as Padmāvati. She also yearns for her husband and bears the sorrow. Padmāvati and Nāgamatī together commit *sati* in the footsteps of ideal Rajput women to unite with their husbands. Although Jayasī's Padmavat has been hailed as a landmark of medieval Sufi literature,³⁹ and symbolic of abstract thoughts or social values at similar levels,⁴⁰ its characters are representative of essential Indian values and systems.⁴¹ Thus women were portrayed according to the patriarchal standards.

It is interesting to note that the legend of Padminī was marginally incorporated into the royal records of Mewar in the seventeenth century. *Rājaprasasti Mahākāvyaṃ* refers to Padminī as the wife of Ratnasī and not as a queen. And it mentions that Allauddin be sieged Chittaur for Padminī only.^{41A} Raṇachōḍa Bhaṭṭa's *Amarakavyam* provides us with the Simhala story of Padminī briefly. Gorā stages a coup in which the army of the Mlechchhas is routed and Allauddin flees from the scene.^{41B} However, Padminī as an epitome of pristine beauty and chastity gets appropriated in the official records by the seventeenth century. But the purpose was purely political. Padminī was necessary to justify Chittaur's fall to Alauddin Khalji. Similarly, Saṃyogitā also becomes the chief distraction for Pṛthvīrāja on the eve of the battle of Terain in which the Chauhan king gets defeated.^{41B1} Saṃyogitā also becomes the necessary motif to explain the fall of the Chauhans before Muhammad Ghori.

Unlike the records of the Rajput royal houses and bards, Jain ācāryas preferred to perceive princesses as educated women and not simply as queens or royal donors or as an 'ideal' woman. It is important that Jain texts (Prakrit) of the eighth century from Rajasthan mention education and training in fine arts received by the princesses. Uddyotana's *Kuvalayamālā* offers a vivid description of instructions being imparted to a parrot by a princess in the knowledge of letters, and other sciences.^{41C} The above text refers to another princess adept in painting (ālekhyā), dancing (nartana), singing (gīta), grammar (vyākaraṇa), writing

(lekhana), reading (pustakapāthana) and playing the Vīnā.^{41D} Princess Kuvalayamālā excelled in the art of patracchedya (the art of cutting designs on leaves) and other intellectual pursuits.^{41E} Haribhadra Sūri's *Samarāiccakahā* refers to educated female attendants in the royal households who were proficient in the art of poetry.^{41F} These attendants were rewarded by the kings.^{41G} Avantisundari, wife of the poet Rājaśekhara, contributed towards the staging of the play *Karpūramāñjarī* (a Prakrit play written by Rājaśekhara in the late ninth century).^{41H} Rājaśekhara, interestingly, mentions his wife as a good poetess, and quotes her in his work *Kāvyamimānsā*.^{41I}

Jain ācāryas like Uddyotana^{41J} took interest in the various careers pursued by contemporary women. He refers to a woman *pratihārī* (door keeper) in a royal court. Rājaśekhara mentions Chowry, holders and betel-box bearers, bath-keepers, etc. They seem to have received military training as they are depicted with words, bows, arrows, and lances.^{41K} However, references to the importance of courtesans do not differ from those of Rajput records. Uddyotana takes note of the Vāravilāsins in the royal courts.^{41L} Haribhadra Sūri describes dancing girls in the bridal procession of a prince.^{41M} Interestingly, Haribhadra is sarcastic about the prostitutes (veśyas) because of their love for money.^{41N} But he protested against the profession of prostitution as a part of his reform movement.^{41O} Hence, the Jain ācāryas contributed more towards betterment of the lot of the prostitutes as they showed a more humane attitude towards these women.

However, the Jain ācāryas perceived the institution of *satī* similarly to that of their Rajput or Brahmanical contemporaries. Uddyotana in *Kuvalayamālā* extols a woman who ends her life on the death of her husband.^{41P} He draws a comparison between an evening and a dutiful wife, like the sun, who follows him into the sea.^{41Q} Haribhadra observes that a queen who follows a husband to his funeral pyre is united with him in her next birth.^{41R} Princesses are described as preparing themselves to join their husbands in heaven on hearing rumours of their husbands' death.^{41S} Perhaps the popularity of the institution of *satī* in the contemporary Rajput society was responsible for its respectability among the Jains as well. This is an interesting observation in view of a progressive and liberal attitude towards women evident in Jain texts. If the institution of *sati* had become popular among the prosperous traders, the ācāryas could not antagonise their patrons. In fact, the ācāryas perceived widowhood in a similar manner. Haribhadra advises the widow to take solace in the teachings of Jina as suffering is an integral part of worldly existence.^{41T} Hence, the ācāryas seem to have made the best out of a social

situation. If they had decided to eulogize the institution of *satī*, by encouraging the widows as lay devotees they sought to discourage suicidal acts. Broadening of social base and patronage for the monastic establishments were a natural outcome of such a policy. However, the conspicuous silence of acaryas on re-marriage of women once again points towards their passive support to the dominant Rajput culture. Uddyotana Sūri mentions the oft-repeated saying through a woman-character in his work, *Kuvalayamālā*. A woman separated from her husband addresses her newly born sons and mentions that a woman is protected by her father in childhood, in youth by her husband, and in old age by her son.^{41U} There is an interesting thesis about the origin of birth as a woman in the above text: a deceitful and untrustworthy man would always be born as a woman in the next birth. The birth of a daughter was an unwelcome event.^{41V}

Perceptions about housewives seem to have conditioned by contemporary brahmanical attitude. She is called *gṛhalakṣmī*^{41W} and 'devi'.^{41X} A queen is depicted as exercising influence on her husband.^{41Y} But Jain ācāryas are cautious about the actual position of wives. *Kuvalayamālā*, a princess and the heroine of the text *Kuvalayamālā*, waits on her future husband to accept her as a *dāsī* (slave).^{41Z} The king is portrayed as a refuge to his wife and husbands as gods for their women.^{41AA} A wife was expected to be chaste throughout her life even if her husband was lost and remained untraced.^{41AB} Haribhadra observes that a husband was always ready to turn an unchaste wife out of the house at the slightest suspicion.^{41AC}

Against the backdrop of Rajput ideal of womanhood and perception of the Jain ācāryas we shall now look at the characterization of Jaimitī, the heroine in *Bagḍāvat Devanārāyaṇī Mahāgāthā* (the epic is related to South-central Rajasthan of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries).⁴² Jaimitī, a human 'avatar' of goddess Durgā is born in a Rajput family to take revenge on the Bagḍāvat Gujjars. However, she grows into a beautiful woman and falls in love with Bhojā Gujjar. Although she is married to Rāṇā, king of Rāna, she is determined to get Bhojā as her husband and secretly marries his sword (*khaṇḍa* or *khaḍgavivāha*).⁴³ She goes to the palace to live the life of a queen. She hates her old and infirm husband who is always surrounded by flatterers and clowns. She is clever and manages to keep her bridegroom away. She is compared with a cat and the king with a cock in this scene. She hatches a conspiracy to elope with Bhojā. On her way to the palace in palanquin, she pleads with Bhojā's elder brother Tejā and younger brother Nīyā to take her away with them. Tejā refuses by reminding them of the grave consequences of such an act

while Niyā accepts her as his sister-in-law. Niyā also promises to bring her home on a suitable occasion.

One night, the Gujjars led by Bhojā, camp at Navalākhā garden to facilitate Jaimitī's escape. Jaimitī manages to send her husband away on a hunting expedition and feigns illness. Her best companion, Heerā (maid) gives her options: if the queen chooses a life of comfort she should continue to stay in the palace; Bhojā Gujjar, however prosperous, can only offer porridge for food. Jaimitī opts for her hero and eulogizes simple living in support of her love. Jaimitī gives away her clothes and jewellery to Heerā and goes out to meet Bhojā on the excuse of drawing water from the garden well. Bhojā and Niyā welcome the queen. Jaimitī helps Bhojā in drawing water from wells and other chores. She pleads with him not to return her to the palace in case of an invasion by the royal army. They promise that they would fight to the last to protect Jaimitī. Her sister-in-law Netu (Niyā's wife) for instance taunts Jaimitī for praising the royal army and advises her to wait and watch the way her husband and the other Bagḍāvats would fight for her. Netu's son Jodhā and Jagarup get killed in this battle. In fact, Jaimitī provokes the Bagḍāvats to fight to the finish. She too joins Bhojā on the battlefield and attains martyrdom. Thus, the entire family of the Bagḍāvats gets annihilated. The womenfolk of the Bagḍāvats commit Jauhar. Jaimitī or (Jelumātā) is deified and worshipped at Rāṇa (a village in Ajmer district).⁴⁴ The image of Jaimitī wears a garland of twentyfour heads including those of twentythree Bagḍāvāt brothers and one sister, Deep Kunwar.

Sāḍumātā (Bhojā's first wife) and Deep Kunwar (Bhojā's daughter) are the next two women characters worth mentioning. Sāḍu is also the mother of Bhojā's posthumous son, Devanārāyaṇa, an avatār of Kṛṣṇa. Sāḍumātā is a symbol of self-respect, familial ties, kindness, and is an ideal and dutiful wife. As a wife Sāḍu was against the idea of bringing Jaimitī home as Bhojā's co-wife. Once Jaimitī arrives Sāḍu welcomes and respects her as a queen. She is kind to her rival. She convinces her sister-in-law Netu to behave properly with Jaimitī as she happens to be a queen. Sāḍu does not commit *sati* as she has to bring up the posthumous son Devā (Devanārāyaṇa). She brings him up with great difficulties. She guards the cattle-wealth of the Bagḍāvats and hands them over to her son. In the Padha (painted cloth) she is shown mounted on a black horse with bow and arrows, always protecting her son against the enemies.

Deep Kunwar was married to a Gujjar in village Rayla. Many Rajput chiefs joined the king of Rāṇa in the battle against the Bagḍāvats. One of the chiefs Talavat Khan coveted Deepkunwar. Rājā Durjanshāl hatched a conspiracy and promised Deepkunwar to Talāvāt Khan. Durjanshāl

laid siege to Rayla. Deepkunwar mounted a horse and with a spear left for the battlefield. She asked Durjanshāla (mounted on his elephant) for Talāvāt Khan. Durjanshāla with folded hands prayed for his life. Deepkunwar withdrew her spear and died fighting. There is a memorial (platform) commemorating her death at Rayla. She is still worshipped. Interestingly, one of the twenty four heads in the garland that Jaimitī wears is that of Deepkunwar.

Netu, the wife of Nīyā Bagḍāvāt, interestingly is portrayed on the pattern of an ideal Rajput woman. She is devoted to her husband and follows him in all his ventures. She is proud of his chivalry. She visits Guru Rupanāth along with Nīyā to seek permission and blessings from him for the battle. When Nīyā makes a parting visit to Bhojā and Jaimitī, Netu points out that Jaimitī was guilty of her ensuing widowhood. Netu has to bear the loss of her two sons, Jodhā and Jagarup in the battle. She is brave in facing the losses of her sons and husband and performing the funerary rituals. She is made to perform a miracle before she becomes *satī*. She takes out her premature baby from her womb, offers it to Guru Rupanāth and jumps into the funeral pyre. She is a mother. She prays to the guru to bring her son up but not to make him a Kānphata yogī (of the sect of Guru Gorakhnāth).^{44A} In fact, her departure from the guru before she becomes *satī* is sung in a very melancholic way to highlight her motherly affections.

Pātu Kālāl, the liquor-manufacturer, is another important character in this mahāgāthā. She seems to have received recognition from the state for her large-scale enterprise. She is listed as one of the leading liquor-manufacturers. She has an excellent sense of business in maintaining the registers, lists of permanent and temporary customers and other matters. She is a good employer and employs women at her workshop. The Bagḍāvats are among her prospective customers and accept her as their sister. Pātu is loyal to her Bagḍāvāt brothers and helps out the new generation of the Bagḍāvats long after their fathers died fighting against the Rajputs. Sāḍu mātā refers to her as nanand Pātu (Pātu, the sister-in-law)^{44B}.

Similarly, Gujjar attitude to a dancing girl is different from that of the Rajputs and Jains. Bijorī Kanjrī is a folk-dancer. She entertains people and kings with her art of balancing seven pots on her head. She is liberally rewarded with jewellery by the Bagḍāvats. She is known to have accepted no gifts from the kings as she admires her real patrons, the Bagḍāvats. She helps Mehadu, the young son of Bhojā in the time of battle and blesses him.^{44C}

Perhaps, the most obvious attempt of the Gujjars at affiliating

themselves with the Rajputs but retaining social distance, is reflected through the character of Tārāde, the daughter of the king of Rāṇa. Khandērāo, one of the Bagdāvats' younger sons is kidnapped by the Rāṇā. Khandērāo and Tārāde are brought up together like brother and sister, Tārāde is very protecting towards her brother. She unveils the conspiracy hatched by her parents and husband and saves Khandērāo's life.

Finally, Heerā, the royal maid also enjoys a prominent place in this Mahāgāthā. She is portrayed as the childhood friend of Jaimitī and follows her like a shadow. She is patient, intelligent, shrewd and courageous. Jaimitī executes her plans successfully only with the help of Heerā. She is a royal maid and knows the politics and tactics of a royal household. She saves many a situation for Jaimitī and herself in ventures of escapades from the palace. She continues to serve Sāḍu and Devanārāyaṇa long after the annihilation of the Bagdāvats.

The strands of social mores which can be distinguished in the above narration can perhaps be analysed broadly under the themes of individual freedom for a woman and her right of choice, revolt against the Rajput patriarchal system, and the adaptations from the socio-cultural world of the Rajputs.

A brief introduction to the status of Jat and Gujjar women may perhaps enable us to understand the Gujjar perception of Jaimitī in the Bagdāvat Devanārāyaṇa Mahāgāthā. The social status of the women among the agropastoralists of western India is better than among the Rajputs. Although the Jats and Gujjars do not treat their women equally with men, they are more liberal towards their women than Rajputs. Gujjar women like the Jatnis share agricultural work with their men in the fields.⁴⁵ Female infanticide, common among Rajputs, 'is practically unknown among Jats, and is rare among Gujjars, as for all work in the fields, girls are almost as valuable as boys'.⁴⁶ The girls are not unkindly treated.⁴⁷ Second marriage is permitted among the yadavas (pastoralists) under conditions of infidelity on part of the wife while the divorced wife is entitled to remarry.⁴⁸ The yadavas have mostly been polygamous but polyandrous also in some parts of Uttar Pradesh along the banks of Yamuna.⁴⁹ The widows among the Jats and Gujjars mostly have to remarry through the institution of Karāo, Kārewā or nātrā: on the death of a man his younger brother has first claim to the widow, then his elder brother and after them other relations in the same degree.⁵⁰ However, Kārewā cannot be performed while the girl is a minor, or without her personal consent. This type of marriage can only take place at least after a year of widowhood.⁵¹ These marriages can be solemnized between different

castes and Jats and Gujjars.⁵²

Jaimitī's revolt against her husband, the king of Rāṇa and the royal palace, and preference for a Gujjar husband symbolises a Gujjar woman's right to personal preferences. Right to exercise her choices begins at the time of her marriage when as a bride, she tells her parents to fetch her from Bhojā's village and not Rāṇa. She coaxes Bhojā's brothers to take her away. No man can simply be imposed on her. She along with Heerā makes a caricature of the old king of Rāṇa. He is stated to be one hundred and twenty years old who has completed his lifespan on this earth.⁵³ He is clownish and has no sense of justice. In contrast, she loves and admires her hero, Gujjar Bhoja. He is a handsome youth with admirable qualities. He is honest, kind and helps the poor. He works hard to get rich. He owns thousands of cattle and horses. Hence, Jaimitī has a right to get attracted towards him as she detests the luxurious life of a palace.

A Gujjar woman is brave. Jaimitī is adventurous and plans her elopement with Bhojā entirely on her own. She is intelligent. She is able to mislead the most detestable man in her life, her husband (king Rāṇa) to execute her plans successfully. A Gujjar woman is happy with her life in the fields and on the banks of lakes. Understandably, it was atrocious for a Rajput woman or a housewife to run away with a man of a lower caste and opt for a second marriage. Condemnation for a twice-married woman was widespread in early medieval and medieval Rajasthan.⁵⁴ That is why Jaimitī continues to figure as a characterless woman in the Rajput circles till today.⁵⁵

Adaptations of motifs from the Rajput traditions and social system are perhaps the most important part of this narration. The frame of reference for the Bagdāvat Gujjars was certainly the Rajput society and their elite culture. Jaimitī is a Rajput woman and not a Gujjar woman. She is a Rajput queen. Gujjars attempt to socially associate themselves with the royalty through Jaimitī. But they describe Jaimitī in a Gujjar mould. Her characterization does not fit a Rajput princess, but points to the superimposition of social mores of the Bagdāvat Gujjars on a Rajput woman. There are instances of tribal groups who had claimed social links with the royal dynasties in their traditions.⁵⁶ The idea is not simply to pay respect to a queen but reflects upon Gujjars obligations to women of the Rajput society.

Jaimitī may have married a Gujjar man but she still continues to be essentially a Rajput woman. Gujjars expect her to be as valiant as any other woman of the Rajput royal households. Hence, she is a Virāṅganā. She dies along with the Gujjars on the battlefield. Between the polarities of self-effacing wife and all-powerful mother lies an overlooked and yet

important alternative paradigm of Indian womanhood the Virāṅganā the woman who manifests the qualities of *Vīrya* or heroism. She demonstrates her martial skills and courage by direct participation in combat, at the risk of her life.⁵⁷

Gujjars appropriate the image of Virāṅganā for Gujjar woman as well. Bhojā's daughter Deepkunwar attains martyrdom while fighting with Rājā Durjanshāla. It has already been noted that there is a small structure in village Rāyla commemorating the death of Deepkumar. The institution of *sati* is also appropriated. Except Sāḍu, women of the Bagḍāvata family jump to death on the funeral pyres of their husbands.⁵⁹

Jaimitī is not only a Virāṅganā but is also as pure as Sītā, divine as Pārbatī, Rādhā and Rukmiṇī.⁶⁰ She is also an avatār of Mahādurgā⁶¹ and Draupadī.⁶² Mahādurgā particularly is a recurring motif. Imagining Jaimitī as Sītā and Pārbatī are once again attempts at adopting divine motifs from the great traditions, indicating juxtaposition of Rajput image of women over Gujjar women. It is also noted that Sāḍumātā, the mother of Devanārāyaṇa, the deity, is as docile and dutiful as any other Rajput wife and mother. While socially relating with the Rajputs, Sāḍu, the Gujjar woman is relegated to the background. She does not revolt and accepts her husband's second wife Jaimitī gracefully, a feature of the polygamous Rajput society. She also brings up her son Devanārāyaṇa amid great hardships and protects him from enemies. Thus, Gujgars project their image of woman in the Gujjar mould but aspirations for higher social status transform their values considerably. Adaptations of values and motifs from the Rajput traditions indicate process of 'Rajputization' of the Bagdavat Gujgars. Although khyāt traditions like those of Nainsī mention folk deities such as Gogāji, it is difficult to point out influences of the little traditions on the great traditions of the Rajputs of Rajasthan. Finally, it is the male version of the Mahāgāthā which reflects upon the Gujjar attitudes towards their own women in the changing context of the ongoing process of Rajputization.

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