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The Transition of *Nagaravarṇana* in Brajbhasha Literature. Exploring Genre and Patronage in the Eighteenth Century[1]

Abstract

The paper examines two mid-18th century poems, *Sujān vilās* and *Dīrghnagarvarṇan*, composed in Brajbhasha (Braj Bhasha) by Somnāth, at the then recently established court of the Jat rulers. It focuses on the description of the city, i.e. *nagaravarṇana* convention rooted in Sanskrit poetics and common in Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, further adopted by the authors belonging to the courtly ornate poetry of the Hindi literary tradition. In Somnāth's works which offer three instances of the *nagaravarṇana*, this convention sees its transformation into a fully-fledged literary genre. The poetics of the Brajbhasha literary production have been by then enriched to a considerable extent by Persian literary practices, with both courtly literary cultures, the Persian and the Brajbhasha, enjoying patronage of the Mughal center of power leading thus to diffusion of its various cultural practices, including the literary, to many neighboring states and dominions. The present inquiry situates Somnāth's works in this historico-literary settings with a view to define features of the *nagaravarṇana*s and thus trace the development of this literary genre and map its changing functions. Those functions, as argued here, point to disparate forms of patronage that underlie both compositions – probably a single, composite literary project.

Keywords: Deeg, Bharatpur, Hindi, Braj, Brajbhasha, nagaravarnana, genre, city, patronage, Somnath

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Introduction

1. Roots of *nagaravarṇana*

Nagaravarṇana,[2] understood purely as a description of the city, is one of the fundamental elements of Sanskrit *mahākāvya* (poetry of the major form). Daṇḍin, a 7th-century poet and one of the early theorists of Sanskrit literature, lists it in his literary treatise *Kāvyādarśa* as one of the elements constitutive of epics.[3] Scholars from Daṇḍin to Vidyānatha (13th–14th c.) put forward various definitions of *mahākāvya* which, according to them, should include a descriptive element of the city,[4] this being "[m]ostly, (…) the description of the capital city of its hero, usually the king".[5] None of the definitions tabulate *nagaravarṇana* as a full-fledged genre, nor do they outline its special functions in the text, but the usually idealized, often very disparate images of urban settings impel scholars to look for their special meaning. Shonaleeka Kaul, in her study devoted to various literary images of the city in the early Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, which besides *mahākāvya*, includes standalone genres such as *nāṭya* (drama), *kathā* (tale) and *ākhyāyikā* (biography), offers a large panorama of their features.[6] From this and various other studies of Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s, one may assume that, overall, the poets followed, and in some cases even anticipated, indications formulated by literary theorists. Many such works attempt to trace or reflect on possible functions the descriptions of the city might have played in the text. Milanetti for instance, writes that "a large number of narratives on cities from diverse cultural areas seem to have been born, or developed, with the aim of giving sense to the otherwise sacrilegious establishment of city – and/or the institution of 'new urban civilazation'" and such is the case with Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. There, he finds "elements of strong identitarian character – a strategy that is regularly recurred to in civilizational narrations."[7] Those are being introduced "through a double process: (…) the celebration of shared values and practices of social and political significance that enhance a sense of belonging and simultaneously define a strict social hierarchy", and "the process of

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[2] The present paper examines two literary texts belonging to the Hindi literary tradition, but it refers to various concepts originating from Sanskrit. All concepts and literary terms will thus be provided in IAST transliteration proper for Sanskrit. For Hindi, one needs to skip short vowel 'a' in final and some middle positions. This rule does not apply to the Braj poetry where short 'a' should be always kept for metrical reasons. Therefore, the above-mentioned principle of transliteration proper for Hindi will be applied only in case of authors, titles and subtitles of the compositions belonging to the Hindi literary tradition.

[3] Siegfried Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry. Sanskrit – Pali – Prakrit*, Wiesbaden 1984, pp. 161–162.

[4] See e.g. Anna Trynkowska, 'Definicje sanskryckiego dworskiego poematu epickiego (sarga-bandha, mahā-kāvya) w klasycznych indyjskich traktatach z dziedziny teorii literatury (alaṃkāra-śāstra)', *Studia Indologiczne* 8 (1998), pp. 91–209.

[5] Lidia Sudyka, 'The Vijayanagara City as Described in the Madhurāvijaya and Acuyarāyābhyudaya' in: Danuta Stasik and Anna Trynkowska (eds.), *The City and the Forest in Indian Literature and Art*, Warszawa 2010, p. 98.

[6] Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban. Sanskrit and the City in Early India*, Ranikhet 2010.

[7] Giorgio Milanetti, 'Between Enduring Urban Models and Shifting Cultural Trajectories: Unravelling Narratives on Ayodhyā and Bengaluru', *Cracow Indological Studies* 17 (2015), p. 5.

delegitimizing the negative values, habits and practices that are emotionally portrayed as typical of antagonist communities."[8] Earlier, Ramanujan looked on this "first poem" (*ādikāvya*) through Redfield and Singer's distinction between ortho- and heterogenetic cultural roles of the cities and suggested that the prevalence of the orthogenetic which may be seen in the "so-called unrealistic perfection of arrangements, both physical and social, has the symbolic function of projecting a metaphysical order."[9] Sudyka refers to the same theoretical perspective in her study on the Vijayanagara city as described in two 14th- and 16th-c. Sanskrit compositions. Although the historical literary background she draws on suggests that "all the kāvya cities tended to look alike" and seemed "more idealized than real,"[10] with both compositions under scrutiny thus being possibly deemed orthogenetic, they still may have the power of "creating of original modes of thought that have authority beyond or in conflict with old cultures and civilizations,"[11] symptomatic of the heterogenetic. Taken together with Kaul's detailed review of city images in early *kāvya*, these and similar studies devoted to the urban in Sanskrit literary production, support the assumption that such descriptions, indeed, had the status of a mandatory subject matter, or a binding literary convention.

2. Genre and its functions

Various realizations of the *nagaravarṇana* found in Sanskrit and vernacular compositions remain uneven in terms of length, content and nature, and some of them are subject to conceptual transformations or bear idiosyncratic meanings. Thus, despite its seemingly conventional and idealistic nature, the *nagaravarṇana* description has raised some interest among scholars who then attempted to explain its function, more so as the presence of the *nagaravarṇana* extended beyond the Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s. The *nagaravarṇana* template was eagerly adopted by vernacular authors, especially within the *rītigranth* (handbook of poetry) genre which drew heavily on the *alaṃkāraśāstra*, i.e., the rich tradition of literary science in Sanskrit. The frequent reuse of this convention in the early modern period seems symptomatic of at least two innovative features: an appropriation of certain elements characteristic of the adjacent Persian literary culture, and the *nagaravarṇana*'s changing status within the framework of poetics. Allison Busch, a historian of courtly Brajbhasha literature, calls it a genre, both when referring to the evidence in Sanskrit classical literature and in the Hindi literary tradition of the early modern period.[12] However, in her works, the *nagaravarṇana* is not yet a strictly formal genre, like a distinct

[8] Ibidem, pp. 5–6.

[9] Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan, 'Towards an Anthology of City Images', in: Vinay Dharwadker (ed.), *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, New Delhi 2004, p. 63.

[10] Lidia Sudyka, 'The Vijayanagara City as Described in the Madhurāvijaya and Acuyarāyābhyudaya', p. 99.

[11] Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, 'The Cultural Role of Cities', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3/1 (1954), p. 58.

[12] Allison Busch, 'Portrait of a Raja in a Badshah's World: Amrit Rai's Biography of Man Singh (1585)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012), p. 306.

class of literary texts, but one among many functional categories of passages accommodated within the frames of larger literary works and immediately identifiable by the audience. The notion of functional category could be crucial here; that some scholars choose to call the *nagaravarṇana* a genre notwithstanding the time of its composition is justified by the assumption that the description of the city is always more than just an image, be it realistic or imaginary. It has, undoubtedly, distinctive traits and functions. The first can be evaluated as a set of elements prescribed in the poetical treatises, some of which have been changed or substituted by the new ones over the time. The functions, not defined in the theoretical works, as the existing studies referred to in this paper show, remain subject to interpretation.

What is being examined in the current paper, is a novel and relatively late in origin (mid-18th c.) body of texts, represented here by the two Brajbhasha poems; it contains three instances of the *nagaravarṇana*, uneven in length, structure and content, and appearing in different contexts. The poems provide important evidence adding to our knowledge of historical poetics, specifically on the history of genre development. The evidence thus presented may be considered as the last stage of development, not touched upon so far in the studies on the subject. In view of this, the aim of present analysis is to better understand the possible functions of the *nagaravarṇana* and thus make sense of its different forms in the composite project authored by Somnāth, the 18th-c. court poet of the Jat rulers of Bharatpur. Out of several possible interpretative tools, the reading offered through this paper shores up an attempt to define pragmatic functions of the text by tracing the *loci* of patronage,[13] while keeping in mind earlier efforts to trace the ortho- and heterogenetic functions of the *nagaravarṇana*. Cohen's conceptualizations of typology of genre[14] provide useful tools to reflect on the possible implications of the unstable location of *Dīrghnagarvarṇan* in the two available manuscripts and the printed edition.

Nagaravarṇana in the vernacular

Keśavdās, pioneer among the learned poets (*paṇḍit kavi*) of the courtly ornate literature of the Hindi literary tradition, developed many parts of his *Kavipriyā* (1591), the literary treatise in verse and a manual for poets, by drawing on Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa.* In chapter 7 of the work, he mentions city as one of the elements that must be included in the description of *bhūmi-bhūṣaṇa*, or the natural landscape discernible on Earth's surface.[15] Interestingly, the set of those elements is somehow reminiscent of the favoured subjects listed already by Daṇḍin.[16]

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[13] Cezary Galewicz, 'In Lieu of Introduction: On Locating Patronage in Space, Voice and Genre', *Cracow Indological Studies* 25/2 (2023), pp. vii–xiv.

[14] Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', *New Literary History* 17/2 (1986), pp. 203–218.

[15] Danuta Stasik, 'Bhūmi-bhūṣana or How Nature Should Be Described. A Few Glimpses into Keśavdās's Kavi-priyā', *Cracow Indological Studies* 7, (2005), pp. 278–279.

[16] Compare: Siegried Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry. Sanskrit – Pali – Prakrit*, p. 162 and Danuta Stasik, 'Bhūmi-bhūṣana or How Nature Should Be Described. A Few Glimpses into Keśavdās's Kavi-priyā', p. 279.

Keśavdās further instructs that the city "must be described in all its parts, being the walls, the fort, the tower, the gate, wells, prostitutes and courtesans (7.4),"[17] thus specifically mentioning some of the elements present also in numerous Sanskrit *mahākāvya*s. The same poet offers instances of the *nagaravarṇana* in his later, not discussed here works, like *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* (1607), where he goes far beyond the obligatory elements and enriches the image of the city of Orchha with a dynamic scene of lively musical and poetical performances.[18]

Prior to Keśavdās, some works of the courtly ornate poetry of the Hindi literary tradition also offer passages conceived as a description of a city, possibly aestheticizing patron's quotidian space and constructing a picture of traditionally legitimate kingdom. Seemingly conventional, such passages could contain some elements indigenous to Persian literary culture. Busch, for instance, departs in her studies on the subject while discussing Amrit Rai's "biography" (*carit*) of Mān Siṃh, *Māncarit* (1585), the third part of which focuses on the city of Amber. It includes an elaborate poetic tour that apparently draws inspiration from the Sanskrit *nagaravarṇana*:

> (…) the poet uses a classical genre to take the reader on a tour of the Kachhwaha capital. Occasionally inserting himself into the narrative as a guide, he reports on elements of the built environment, such as the lush gardens and attractive water reservoirs, the bazaars bustling with commercial activity, and the beauty of the city's women, all of which epitomize the ruler's glory. Several passages deal at length with Man Singh's [Mān Siṃh] darbār (court). Here are also elaborate descriptions of Man Singh's elephant and horse stables, lively recitations by pandits, musical performances, and the city's stunning architectural grandeur.[19]

An interesting point about this extended *nagaravarṇana* is its possible anchorage beyond Sanskrit textual tradition. On the one hand, Busch refers to several segments of the text that may be rooted both in the *kāvya* and the oral tradition, and remarks that "Amrit Rai needed no Persian textual model to craft his nagaravarṇana".[20] On the other, while admitting that it is difficult to determine the provenance of such descriptions, as some tropes have analogues in many literary cultures, she also feels compelled to suggest its links to Indo-Persian texts. Here, she points out similarities of narrative tropes between Amrit Rai's *nagaravarṇana* and, for example, "Abu al-Fazl's famous 'Aīn-i Akbarī ("Edicts of

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[17] Stefania Cavaliere, 'Dhārmik Kings in Courtly Agendas: The Figure of Rāma in the Works of Keśavdās', in: Danuta Stasik (ed.), *Oral–Written–Performed. The Rāmāyaṇa Narratives in Indian Literature and Arts*, Heidelberg 2020, p. 55, fn. 4.

[18] Busch Allison, 'Listening for the Context: Tuning in to the Reception of Riti Poetry', in: Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (eds.), *Tellings and Texts. Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, Cambridge 2015, p. 255.

[19] Allison Busch, 'Portrait of a Raja in a Badshah's World: Amrit Rai's Biography of Man Singh (1585)', p. 293.

[20] Ibidem, p. 308.

Abkar", 1596, a section of the *Akbarnāma*) – with its discussions of the harem, imperial stables, music and poetry, charity, and notices of leading members of the court".[21] Busch draws conclusion as to possible primary function of the *nagaravarṇana*, which perhaps should be seen in terms of "a carefully crafted poetic proclamation of Kachhwaha power", by reflecting that "Amrit Rai's nagaravarṇana does evince a dialogue with a Mughal-period social and political landscape".[22]

Sunil Sharma focuses on the genre of *shahrāshob* (in Persian, lit., "misfortune of the city" or lament for the city) when he notes that:

> An exploration of the archaeology of the image of the flourishing and multicultural city in selected Indo-Persian poetic and historical texts demonstrates that the so-called hyperbolic and flowery descriptions of urban places that began appearing in the sixteenth century are replete with valuable proto-ethnographic information and represent a system of knowledge that was transmitted by the use of a special language and certain literary topoi and genres.[23]

Parallelly, we observe a unique development of poetical renderings of the city as in the case of Akbar's general and a poet of Persian and Brajbhasha, Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, author of *Nagarśobhā* (Beauty of the City) in the vernacular. Rahim must have drawn on the Persian genre of *shahrāshob* which on its own has also had a long tradition on Indian ground. Sharma traces the Indo-Persian peculiarities of this genre back to Amīr Khusrau's (1253–1325) descriptions of the architectural projects of Delhi sultans and observes a certain continuity till at least the time of the Mughal poets associated with Shah Jahan's court. This continuity apparently must have relied on a special role prescribed for the poets, consisting of "translating the vision of the new building or city into the discursive realm of poetry".[24] Whereas in Persian literary culture the emphasis is usually on the devastating beauty of the young men who stroll the city's byways, Rahim's rendition of this theme in *Nagarśobhā* focuses on "the piquant beauty of myriad Indian women and their saucy ways" as observed by Busch.[25] Thus, we arrive at an example of a developed composition rooted in Persian literary culture, but clearly drawing on the literary practices of Sanskrit poets, such as *nāyikabheda* (classification of heroines) and displaying poet's "sincere attempt to participate in local literary culture".[26]

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[21] Ibidem.

[22] Ibidem, p. 309.

[23] Sunil Sharma, 'If There Is a Paradise on Earth, It Is Here: Urban Ethnography in Indo-Persian Poetic and Historical Texts', in: Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, Durham 2011, p. 240.

[24] Sunil Sharma, 'The City of Beauties in the Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24/2 (2004), p. 73.

[25] Allison Busch, 'Poetry in Motion: Literary Circulation in Mughal India', in: Allison Busch and Thomas de Bruijn (eds.), *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Early Modern India*, Leiden 2014, p. 196.

[26] Ibidem.

Probably no other work in the Brajbhasha of the time situates the city at the center of its interest to such an extent. We thus deal here with an example of a Persianate genre that has been crafted into Brajbhasha and as such could possibly influence future attempts of the vernacular poets to develop the *nagaravarṇana* into a distinct, generic composition.

Among the Brajbhasha works that bring us close to Somnāth's age, Dipti Khera draws our attention to an 18th-century composition, *Jagvilās*, by Nandrām. This ornate poem contains a series of *nagaravarṇana*s defined by Khera as "emotive descriptions of beautiful cities and plentiful settings that call upon ideal and real places alike".[27] In her analysis of both the Udaipur paintings and Nandrām's oeuvre, Khera underlines two things. One is the aspect of building up pleasure (*vilās*) as a certain likely function of the poem, bound intrinsically to the genre and embedded even in the title (*Jagvilās*, The Delight of the Jag [palace]). The other may be defined as "the dialectic between real and ideal as central to constructing meaning in the allied arts".[28] Here again, Khera points out the twofold anchorage of the visual (paintings) and poetics (poem) realm: the Sanskritic and the Persianate cultures. This is most specifically evident when considering the figure of connoisseur central to such pieces of art (both visual and verbal) and at the same time – the underlying concept of pleasure. She writes:

> A focus on pleasure in descriptive and prescriptive accounts like etiquette manuals, poetry and historical chronicles introduces us to the figure of the connoisseur and to his aesthetic and intellectual worlds. (…) A "properly lived worldly" life by kings included "proper enjoyments" of material things like wines, perfumes, garlands and jewellery. Similar kinds of consumption characterized refined men who populated imperial Mughal circles. The education of a mirza, the cultivated connoisseur in Persian conduct manuals like the Mirzanama, resembles the education of the rasika of Sanskritic worlds, but also speaks specifically to the emergence of new nobility by the late 17th century. Elite men strived to cultivate all five senses, bodily gestures and emotions within appropriate limits. The poetry and paintings of Jagniwas reveal the connoisseur, king Jagat Singh II and his court enacting these Indo-Persian aesthetic ideals of pleasure to form the Udaipur elite community.[29]

Looking for an example of a poetical treatise (*rītigranth*) composed in political circumstances reminiscent of the milieu of the rising kingdom of Jats, one may consider, for example, Bhūṣan's *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* (1673), commissioned on the eve of the royal consecration (1674) of the Marartha chief, Shivaji, who has just established a new royal capital of

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[27] Dipti Khera, 'Jagvilasa: Picturing Worlds of Pleasure and Power in 18th-Century Udaipur Painting', in: Molly Emma Aitken (ed.), *A Magic World. New Visions of Indian Painting*, Mumbai 2016, p. 76.

[28] Ibidem.

[29] Ibidem, p. 77.

Rāygaṛh. Here, the *nagaravarṇana* occupies nine stanzas[30] painting verbal picture of court assembly, describing the fort, architectural grandeur and rich ornamentation of the palace, but also musical entourage, beautiful women, flora, including flowers attracting the bees in spring, and different species of birds. These are rather standard elements that reiterate motifs common to many Sanskrit *māhākāvya*s, including their objects of comparison.[31] The passage concludes with a summarizing verse, in *dohā* metre, stating that Shivaji established his capital after conquering the Muslims (*turakana*) and gained fame thanks to his generosity, a motif boldly emphasized throughout the entire treatise, and counted as one of the traditional ways of legitimizing royal authority.[32]

Sujān vilās and *Dīrghnagarvarṇan*

sabhā maddhi ika dina kahī śrī sujā̃na musikyāi /
saumanātha yā grantha kī bhāṣā dehu banāi //[33]

According to the poetical statement acting as a brief prologue to *Sujān vilās* (The Pleasure of the Wise), a long poem by Somnāth, "one day", sometime in the middle of the 18th c., "during a court assembly (*sabhā*), Suraj Mal," known to history as the ruler (1707–1763, r. 1745–1763) of the new kingdom of Jats extending over the Braj region, "smiled and said: Somnāth, make a vernacular version of this book".[34] The book in question was the famous *Vikramacarita* (The Life and Deeds of [king] Vikrama[ditya]), composed originally in Sanskrit, known also under titles such as *Siṃhāsanadvatriṁśika* or, in Hindi, *Siṃhāsanbattīsī* (Thirty-two tales of the Throne). The book narrates the story of king Bhoja of Dhara (11th c.), of the Rajput Parmār clan, who apparently found the lost throne of the legendary emperor Vikramaditya of Ujjain. According to the next stanza, the poet accepted the "royal order and composed the book on the thirty-two heroic virtues (of Vikramaditya)" in Brajbhasha, i.e. the supraregional literary form of the Braj language, close to the spoken idiom in the region ruled at the time by Suraj Mal, or Sujān (The Wise):

hukama pāi sasinātha yaha racatu sujāna bilāsa /
jāmai bikrama guna kathā haĩ battīsa prakāsa //[35]

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[30] Before the analysis of *Dīrghnagarvarṇan* offered later on this paper, it is useful to note that these are all long-metre stanzas, such as *savaiyā*, *harigīt* and *chappay*.

[31] For those, see, e.g., Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan, 'Towards an Anthology of City Images', p. 60 or Lidia Sudyka, 'The Vijayanagara City as Described in the Madhurāvijaya and Acuyarāyābhyudaya', pp. 100–101.

[32] Piotr Borek, 'Recognition through Traditional Values: A Literary Representation of *dāna* as an Essential Way of Boosting Royal Worthiness', *Cracow Indological Studies* 18 (2016), p. 236.

[33] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, Khaṇḍ 1, Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, Vārāṇasī 1972, p. 623.

[34] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Brajbhasha are by the author of the present paper.

[35] Ibidem. This and the previous stanzas quoted from the printed edition of *Sujān vilās* are left unnumbered.

Beside this short prologue, the vernacular rendering of the Sanskrit poem does not contain other direct references to the patron who commissioned the work or to his urban setting, which the reader could expect in a lengthy work subscribing to the template of the Brajbhasha courtly ornate poetry, the latter already spanning territories beyond its original geographical setting of various regional courts of North India, including the Mughal. Instead, the only published edition of *Sujān vilās* provides a separate text named *Dīrghnagarvarṇan* (Description of the City of Deeg), introduced by the editor with a short statement informing the reader that Somnāth described Deeg at the end of *Sujan vilās*.[36]

It is important to note here that between the two manuscripts of *Sujān vilās* preserved in good state in the Bharatpur branch of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, the undated one,[37] constituting part of a handwritten miscellanea volume, reflects the structure rendered in the printed edition, thus framing *Dīrghnagarvarṇan* as an appendix to *Sujān vilās*. Interestingly, the other manuscript which contains only Somnāth's oeuvre,[38] incorporates the description of the city of Deeg into *Sujān vilās* itself and shifts it almost to the beginning of the work. In this manuscript, *Dīrghnagarvarṇan* is preceded merely by one stanza containing invocations of the guru, Ganesha and Gopal, the very same stanza which in the other manuscript is located between the prologue to *Sujān vilās* and the first *nagaravarṇana* devoted to Dhara, capital of Raja Bhoja, present also in the Sanskrit pre-texts. According to the colophon of this manuscript, the copy was prepared by a scribe named Nandan as early as 1783 or 1784.[39]

1. First *nagaravarṇana* (Dhara)

Unlike in most available recensions of the Sanskrit text,[40] Somnāth starts with a concise introduction of king Bhoja, framed into a short description of the city (*nagaravarṇana*) of Dhara in the Rajput country of Malwa. The ideal city is "the abode of happiness and wealth" (*sukha sampati ka dhāma*)[41] and of moral order, which means following traditional values (*jahã̃ dharma artha aru milata kāma*). There is no space for injustice (*nahĩ̃ kahũ̃ anīti kī bidhi udāma*).[42] Not even a minor instance of falseness, deceit or cheating can be

[36] Ibidem, p. 819.

[37] Manuscript no. 287, 116 folios, location: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Bharatpur, India, [date unknown].

[38] Manuscript no. 6065, 43 folios, location: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Bharatpur, India, c. 1783.

[39] The date provided in the colophon is 1840 Vikrama (i.e. according to Vikramāditya's calendar).

[40] Original text has been edited and printed along with its English translation in: Franklin Edgerton, *Vikrama's Adventures or The Thirty-two Tales of the Throne*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1926.

[41] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 623, v. 2. Please, mind that the numeration in Pāṇḍey's edition – which includes both compositions – is not always consequent or coherent. At times, the same number appears twice, referring to two consecutive stanzas. In some other locations, the numeration may end abruptly and start from number one. To ensure accuracy in this paper, all references to the original will be provided with both, page and verse numbers.

[42] Ibidem, v. 3.

encountered there (*na rāja mai kapaṭa rañca / nahĩ kahũ su arthani kau prapañca*).[43] The Jain recension of the Sanskrit text which – according to my evaluation – served as the main source of reference to the poet working on the Brajbhasha composition, introduces Bhoja briefly at the very beginning or right after the invocation and an attempt is made to mark Vikramaditya as the champion of Jainism. However, its author does not find it necessary to frame Bhoja within his urban environment. Somnāth's Bhoja on the other hand, encountered in the vernacular reiteration in focus, constantly applies the rules of justice in his capital (*tihi maddhi bhoja nāmā naresa / nita karai rāja kau bidhi subesa*);[44] is "generous like the beautiful god of love" (*sundara manoja ke sama udāra*); emanates radiance like the sun (*rabi sadṛsa teja kau jaga bithara*);[45] and his kingdom, which is for the world like the light of the moon (*canda tulli jaha mai prakāsa*), remains the perfect dwelling place for the high-minded (*jo sumana haṃsa kau bara nivāsa*).[46]

The ideal city of moral order comes across as an appropriate setting for Bhoja, the king known to literary history as the embodiment of perfect rule, successful in fighting the neighbouring states, dynamically shifting the borders and carrying out vast social and economic projects to enhance his kingdom. Such an account preserves a common and widespread memory of the king for whom "the 'regulation of social orders and life stages,' as so many inscriptions put it (…), was the most fundamental of royal obligations".[47] *Vikramacarita* in its various recensions and adaptations had primarily a didactic function as it could serve to instruct young princes by providing them with an ideal of proper conduct and rule. Thus, also in its vernacular adaptation, Bhoja, a "warrior, town planner, builder of irrigation works and more, as well as the most celebrated poet-king and philosopher-king of his time, and perhaps of any Indian time",[48] must have been set out as a paragon of royal virtues.

However, the interesting point lies in the way the picture of Dhara has been adapted by Somnāth to the requirements of the actual site of composition of his Brajbhasha poem. Thus, the inhabitants of Somnāth's Dhara want glory and joy, and they sing the exploits of Krishna (*saba cahata kitti ānanda sahitta / nara nārī gãvai hari caritta*).[49] Although the Jain recension of the Sanskrit text seeks, in a similar manner, the authority of the Vishnuite *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, it still does not refer directly to Hari. It also omits the initial frame story of Shiva – otherwise present in various forms in other recensions of *Vikramacarita* in Sanskrit – who recounts the story of the throne to his consort, Parvati. In the like manner, in *Sujān vilās*, the original Shivaite reference is relocated down to the epilogue of the poem. The text composed in the kingdom of Jats is affiliated to Krishna, the most popular deity of the Braj region, that too before the invocation preceding the

[43] Ibidem, v. 5.
[44] Ibidem, v. 4.
[45] Ibidem, v. 5.
[46] Ibidem, v. 4.
[47] Sheldon Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Press, Berkeley 2003, p. 177.
[48] Ibidem, p. 178.
[49] Cf. Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 623, vv. 2–5.

short description of the city of Dhara and king Bhoja. Here, the poet inserts Gopāl, another name for Krishna, next to the rather obvious mention of Ganesh, protector of poets and artists, and patron of good beginnings (*guru ganapati gopala ke paga dhyāi*).[50] Moreover, the verses of the *nagaravarṇana* suggest that Bhoja's subjects are devotees of Krishna as well, although elsewhere in the historical and traditional accounts the king is usually showcased as the follower of Shiva. Presentation of Dhara, in this respect, becomes possibly a part of a larger enterprise aimed at the aestheticization of the new power through the textual, but it also appears as a *locus* of a specific religious patronage – in this case, the Krishnaite.

2. Second *nagaravarṇana* (Ujjain)

The plot of the text, regardless of its recension or linguistic version (Sanskrit or Braj) is divided into thirty-two stories narrated by female statuettes (*putrikā*) who prevent Bhoja from mounting Vikramaditya's throne he had found in a village close to Dhara. Each time he attempts to do so, one of the thirty-two statuettes speaks up. In all Sanskrit recensions, the first speech or lecture by a *putrikā* is positioned after the frame story, which introduces the audience to the account of the origins of the throne, though in *Sujān vilās* the frame story is merged into the teachings delivered by the first statuette. She addresses the king by uttering the praise of king Bhartrihari who, disappointed with the world, leaves the kingdom to his brother Vikramaditya. In three out of four Sanskrit recensions, one finds just brief references to Ujjain into which the throne has been brought, whereas the Jain one offers nine stanzas of the description of the city. This section of the text seeks authority from the fifth part of *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, but states that the city has been founded by Yugādideva, i.e., lord Ṛṣabha, the first of the twenty-four Jinas. The Jain recension composed by Muni Kṣemaṅkara, "became so popular among Jains that they made King Vikramāditya as the follower of Jainism".[51] The description available in the Jain recension has been developed by Somnāth into a more elaborate form and transformed – as we shall see – into an ideologically different *nagaravarṇana*. The poet keeps the reference to Yugādideva, but apparently with a changed denotation; the same name refers here to an incarnation of Vishnu. The poet recreates then the moral and social order of the city by shifting the focus onto Krishna (here Gopāl), but also onto the brahmins:

> *jahā̃ basata bipra saddhai trikāla, gāvata prasannacita guna gupāla /*
> *gahagahe jagamagata tilaka bhāla, upabīta kaṇṭha maī̃ tulasi māla* // 42 //[52]

[50] Ibidem, v. 1.

[51] Jagdishchandra Jain, 'Jain Contribution to Indian Story Literature: Importance of Story', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 72–73/1–4 (1991), p. 512.

[52] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 627.

> It is where brahmins live and govern all times of the day. With utter joy they sing the virtues of Gopal,
> They spread delight with *tilaka* shining on their foreheads, sacred threads and *tulsi* necklaces adorning their necks.

The brahmins would not have been of much interest for the Jain version of the book, but the clue to understanding specificity of the space given to them by Somnāth lies somewhere else. In fact, the whole *nagaravarṇana* devoted to Ujjain draws the picture of an ideal city by concentrating solely on its moral and social order. While in the Jain recension the harmony of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* (moral order, wealth and love) relies on the right conduct of the rich and wise inhabitants of the city, Somnāth inserts eight additional stanzas on the members of the four *varṇa*s,[53] with the first five stanzas devoted strictly to brahmins. They are the source of knowledge, they sing the Vedas, perform *agnihotra*, are noble, enlightened, full of *satva*, devoid of dishonesty and have their morning meal only after the *darshan*. They are also always accompanied by their sons and wives, which state is the source of continuous prosperity to them; they never touch others' daughters and adhere to the six daily duties.

Shonaleeka Kaul notes that in *kāvya* compositions brahmin's "presence in the urban space is, for the most part, indicated incidentally or indirectly".[54] As her study provides general perspective on the practical implications of poetics of the city description, we may assume that the elaborated talk on brahmins within Somnāth's *nagaravarṇana* of Ujjain went beyond the framework of convention and, as a novelty, must have served some specific purpose. Also, the subsequent presentation of the other *varṇa*s strictly adheres to the principles of the brahminical order. Kshatriyas, for instance, are ready to die to protect brahmins and their cows, recite *Dhanurveda*, i.e., the treatise on warfare, and observe their duties in accordance with the Vedas. Vaishyas, or *baniya*s, are devoted to their commercial activities, speak truth and worship both the gods and the brahmins. Shudras perform services according to their dharma, but their introduction is predominantly of a prohibitive nature – they do not indulge in false discourse or cosmic speculations.

The rest of Somnāth's *nagaravarṇana* looks like a creative adaptation of several stanzas that may be found in the Jain recension of *Vikramacarita*. The presence of learned men and the connoisseurs of arts prevents the city from indulging in enmity and adultery, or illicit love.[55] Since women, especially beautiful and properly adorned with jewellery, should also form an important part of the *nagaravarṇana*, Somnāth introduces them in a similar way that we see in Sanskrit verses, but focuses strictly on their social role, instead of their beauty. They are likened to the ocean, they wear bracelets incrusted with precious stones, but – what seems equally relevant from the perspective of brahmin ideology – they all have many sons, just as the limitless oceans are covered with ships.[56]

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[53] Ibidem, vv. 42–49.

[54] Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban. Sanskrit and the City in Early India*. ePub.

[55] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 627, v. 50.

[56] Ibidem, v. 51.

Since we deal here with an adaptation of a well-known story, it is logical and productive to assume that any new message or peculiar discourse of the vernacular composition is concealed in the passages unattested in its Sanskrit source. From this perspective, Somnāth not only showcases the ideal of the traditional social order, but underlines the importance of brahminical ideology in it, and thus possibly articulates another *locus* of patronage in his composition – the brahmins. This remains coherent with the historical context which informs us that brahmins' recognition was crucial for the upstart warriors[57] who used to be considered low caste before their attempts to claim and legitimize their new rule. For the Jats, predominantly considered as shudras by the neighboring Rajputs,[58] and competing with them for supremacy, brahminical patronage was indispensable to legitimize the right to rulership by lying claims to the Yadava lineage.[59] The latter is also reflected in the poem throughout complex Krishnaite references, emphasised – as we could see before – in the *nagaravarṇana* of Dhara.

To use Redfield and Singer's classification, the descriptions of both cities, Dhara and Ujjain, are clearly orthogenetic, as they carry forward, develop, elaborate a long-established local culture or civilization". This does not mean that they are presented as some historical relicts. If an orthogenetic description aims to "convert the folk culture into its civilized dimension",[60] its extended reintroduction in the vernacular literary setting might be well meant to set the ground for the aestheticization of a rising political power. The kingdom of Jats, finding itself in the geopolitical arena abutting on the weakened Mughal empire on one side, competing alliances of Rajputs and successful Marathas with their state ideology linked to traditional Hindu values on the other, apparently needed to delineate their own sphere of influence, which would be deeply reflected in the literary projects it patronized.

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[57] This is how one may call several emerging powers which developed in the orb of the Mughal-centered geopolitical arena and then, along with the Rajputs, competed for supremacy in the time of decline of the Mughal empire. Among possible factors that "contributed to accelerating decentralization after Aurangzeb's death in 1707" the historians point at "(…) the upstart warriors, Marathas, Jats, and the like, as coherent social groups with military and governing ideals, [who] were themselves a product of the Mughal context, which recognized them with military and governing experience." Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, Cambridge 2006, p. 23.

[58] The Jats claimed higher social status than traditionally ascribed to them and, in many views, the Rajputs looked down upon them as peasantry. Stereotypically, their relations were hostile, but historical evidence provides much more complex image of Rajputs' attitude towards the Jats. See e.g. Aleksandra Turek, 'Hostility or Solidarity? The Rājpūts and Jāṭs in the *Chāvaḷī*s from the region of Śekhāvaṭī', in: Danuta Stasik (ed.), *Polish Contributions to South Asian Studies*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 82–93.

[59] According to the historian, this process must have been initiated by Suraj Mal's father Badan Singh (1722–1756) whose "one dear object was to secure the title of *Rajah*, and for this, he was even ready to bow before the imperial throne, which he could otherwise have safely defied. But he was not successful, perhaps owing to the jealousy of the ruler of Jaipur, who affected to look down upon the Jats as his subjects. It was perhaps from this time that the ruling house of Bharatpur laid claim to the Yadava lineage and the title of *Braj-Raj*, a claim if not sanctified by the past tradition, at least justified by their complete sway over what is known as *Braj-mandal* or the Mathura region." Kallika-Ranjan Qanungo, *History of the Jats. A contribution to the History of Northern India*, Calcutta 1925, p. 62.

[60] Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, 'The Cultural Role of Cities', p. 57.

3. Third *nagaravarṇana* (Dirgh)

Notwithstanding the original location of *Dirghnagarvarṇan* in or after *Sujan vilās* proper, in both manuscripts and in the printed edition it is one and the same text, with minor differences that may be considered side effects of the process of copying or writing down an oral performance. As a *nagaravarṇana*, it offers a new generic structure, and one may consider it to be a complete elaborate composition in itself.

The town of Deeg, described in this composition, was the original seat of the Jat estate prior to the construction of the city of Bharatpur, built by Suraj Mal between 1743–1750. Both, "Deeg and Bharatpur were then admittedly the strongest and most carefully fortified cities in India."[61] Deeg, founded by Badan Singh, adorned with treasures brought from the Mughal palaces after the Jats sacked Delhi, is considered an exquisite example of Hindu-Mughal architecture.

> Withing these formidable fortifications was a flourishing city, the wealth and magnificence of which mocked the decaying grandeur of the proud capitals of the Great Mughal, Delhi and Agra. The honour and wealth of the Hindus were considered nowhere more safe than at Deeg. (…) The architects whose skill was no longer in demand at the impoverished Court of Delhi sought the patronage of the wealthy Jat and transformed a robber-chief's retreat into a city of palaces worthy of the capital of a powerful nation.[62]

The 62-stanzas long canto is divided into several sections: it opens with an invocation to Tribhuvana rai (here: Saraswati), after which comes a 17-stanzas long passage composed in *madhubhāra chand*. This peculiar short metre (4 × 8 *mātrā*s)[63] offers a concise description of the architectural and social features of the new city. It brings a change in texture and leaves no space for much ornamentation. It reminds more of a sketch than a picture of the most essential elements that may be observed in the city. Although, like in case of two other *nagaravarṇana*s, it carries neither operational motifs nor literal markers of a tour,[64] and even very few verbs, the way its narrator quickly jumps from one object to another, and from one social group to a different site which hosts local professionals, creates a sense of movement. The dynamics of this passage leaves no doubt that we deal here more with a space than just a place, in de Certeau's definition of the term.[65] The movement is to be found in the last verse in *madhubhāra* metre, where people in all four

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61 Kallika-Ranjan Qanungo, *History of the Jats. A contribution to the History of Northern India*, p. 288.

62 Ibidem, pp. 288–289.

63 In the extensive *Sujān vilās* this metre is used only in five brief passages, each of them six to twenty stanzas long.

64 The notion of "tour" refers here to de Certeau's conceptual distinction between the place and the space. See: Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien. 1. Arts de faire*, Paris 1990, p. 175.

65 Ibidem, pp. 170–191.

stages of their life, adhering to their duties, fearlessly stroll in a humble or courteous manner (*āśrama ju cāri, nijadharma dhāri / biharai abhīta, ati hī binīta*).[66]

The contrast with the verbal depiction of Dhara and Ujjain may be seen right from the outset. The description of architecture is a pragmatically crafted sketch of a well-planned, sensibly organized and functional space of a legitimate rule, victorious and resistant to military attacks, e.g.:

> *dīragha sugrāma, atihī lalāma /*
> *jahã gaṛha bilanda, chalake amanda* // 4 //
> *burjani aneka, maṇḍita bibeka /*
> *sahasani bilāsa juta jantra jāla* // 5 //
> *tinapai patāka, sarasaṅka* [/*sarasati* – MS 6065] *dhāka /*
> *kalaghauta* [/*kaladhauta* – MS 6065] *raṅga, jitavāra jaṅga* // 6 //[67]
>
> Extremely attractive, auspicious town of Deeg,
> Where the lofty fortress shines bright, (4)
> Numerous towers planned with discernment,
> Net of thousands of observatories with enjoyment (5)
> Silver and golden flags put on them,
> [Are marks of] victorious battles. They spread the dread. (6)

Further, the image of the society showcases both the adherence to the moral order, with the presence of best brahmins, and kshatriyas keeping control of the borders,[68] and the active participation of its several strata in the economic order. Prosperity of the city is displayed, for example, through the presentation of the merchant class. They are described as generous[69] which is not the case elsewhere. Social prosperity is underlined thus in manifold manner by employing also the description of urban architecture, which includes a crossroads bazaar with innumerable shops, and vast mansions.[70] It is clearly stated that the city is populated by various communities of different birth (*bahu jāti aura, lahi basī ṭhaura*).[71] This does not say anything about specific foreigners or newcomers but marks the diversity which more or less subtly gives a sense of heterogeneity. Both the generosity attributed to the *baniya*s (merchant class) and the mention of the *kāyastha*s (a powerful class of scribes/clerks) as a virtuous social body (*dharmasīla kāyastha ḍīla*)[72] seem to reveal a form of patronage founded on a community's social elevation. Providing space to specific communities of merchants and clerks within a brief sketch on social

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66 Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 820, v. 20.
67 Ibidem, pp. 819–820. Emendation based on Manuscript no. 6065, c. 1783.
68 Ibidem, p. 820, v. 17.
69 Ibidem, v. 18.
70 Ibidem, v. 15–16.
71 Ibidem, v. 19.
72 Ibidem.

composition of the inhabitants seems uncommon enough to consider it a vehicle of a new message, and thus enables one to locate in it poet's strategy for inviting, attracting, or binding their patronage. Or, at the least, it indicates that bare institutions, traditions and religion which dominate the descriptions of Dhara and Ujjain are not the only *loci* of patronage to be found within the larger poetical project.

Both, the editor of the printed edition and the scribes, introduce subsequent sections of the poem with appropriate subtitles. The passage on the spatial construction of the city continues in two following sections devoted to the garden (*bāg varṇan*)[73] and to the pond (*tāl varṇan*).[74] The richness of fauna and flora forms rather an idealized picture of those urban sites, although it is much more extensive and elaborate than in some other *nagaravarṇana*s found in earlier Brajbhasha poems, e.g., in Bhūṣaṇ's poem on Shivaji mentioned before. The Mughal capital of Agra, not distant from Deeg, was famous as the city of gardens, thus Somnāth's emphasis on gardens may be interpreted in terms of a dialogue with the center and an attempt to surpass it.[75] Moreover, it is interesting to observe that the longest passages of *Dirghnagarvarṇan* are related to the topics which may be considered a distinct genre of poetical expression in itself: *rājakulavarṇana*,[76] the description of royal lineage.[77] The initial part of this section is devoted to Krishna, born to Vasudeva, into the Yadu clan, who is ultimately presented as the conqueror of Kansa and the companion of *gopi*s. Such typical image of Krishna precedes remarks on Suraj Mal's grandfather:

> *bhāva sigha tihi baṁsa mai pragaṭyo sinisinivāra* /
> *jāke paga parasata rahe anagana bhūmibhatāra* // 35 //[78]
>
> Bhao Singh of Sinasinawara gotra manifested [himself] in this lineage,
> Countless kings paid homage to him by touching his feet.

Bhao Singh, historically the founder of the dynasty and the new dominium,[79] is showcased as the righteous king: an upholder of dharma, dazzling with radiance like

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[73] Ibidem, pp. 820–821, vv. 22–30.

[74] Ibidem, p. 821, vv. 31–32.

[75] As for the pond in Deeg, it might have been dug by Suraj Mal who hoped to recover the treasure hidden underground by his father. See: Kalika-Ranjan Qanungo, *History of the Jats. A contribution to the History of Northern India*, Calcutta 1925, p. 96.

[76] Here, the term *rājakulavarṇana* stands for the name of a literary convention known to Sanskrit poetry. The terms such as *bāg varṇan* or *tāl varṇan*, or further in the paper, *caudah gun rāj ke*, *buddhi ke āṭh aṅg varṇan*, *sabhā varṇan* etc. are the subtitles in Somnāth's work and thus their spelling adheres to the principles of Hindi transliteration.

[77] Ibidem, pp. 821–822, vv. 33–38; pp. 823, vv. 38, 2–4.

[78] Ibidem, p. 822.

[79] However, the first one to have been honored with the royal title, purportedly unaccepted, was Badan Singh. The Rajput king Jai Singh II (1688–1743) with whom he entered into agreement in 1722 "placed a turban on his head. The French missionary says that he also bestowed upon the Jat chief the title of 'Raja of Birch (Brij)',

the sun, and the moonlight, the latter traditionally denoting royal fame. He is noble, magnanimous, but most of all, by way of comparison with the god Rudra and Bhishma, the hero of *Mahābhārata*, he is presented as a brave conqueror of the enemies.[80] In different words, but in the same convention proper for the king who governs according to the rules of *rājadharma* and *rājanīti*,[81] the poet introduces in the following stanzas Bhao Singh's son and founder of the Deeg city, Badan Singh, recognised by kings coming to touch his feet not only from the neighbourhood territories, but also from far away (*desa paradesa ke naresa*).[82] Finally, Sūraj Mal comes to stage as the wisest, or endowed with a superior power of discernment, among Badan Singh's numerous sons. The poet's patron is further presented in a way different than his predecessors. His main attributes are referred to through two categories: "fourteen qualities of the king" (*caudah gun rāj ke*) and eight constituents of the intellect (*buddhi ke āṭh aṅg*), both of them attributed to Suraj Mal. The next, and the most extensive section of *Dirghnagarvarṇan*, named "description of eight parts of intellect" (*buddhi ke āṭh aṅg varṇan*),[83] provides a complex definition of both these categories, followed by the praise of the king: embodiment of Krishna alone, radiant, strong, skilled in martial skills, the one who can confront Rudra or face the rage of Indra, and finally, the unchallenged one. Such recurring focus on the martial prowess does not dim the image of the wise king. The praise of Suraj Mal's intellectual qualities is something one should perceive as a way of positioning the patron as a connoisseur. On one hand, some contrast between the patron and his father may be in tune with the historical evidence, as Badan Singh, unlike Suraj Mal, was considered illiterate;[84] on the other, the father is also endowed with an immense sense of aesthetics and a distinct picture of the son must have been thought to epitomize the power and abilities of the new ruler.[85] Instead of a description of "mirza's five senses,

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the *teeka*, the *Nishan*, the *naqqara* (kettledrum) and the five-coloured flag (which was that of the Rajas of Jaipur also). But Badan Singh took no other title except that of the '*Thakur*'." Girish Chandra Dwivedi, *The Jats. Their Role in the Mughal Empire*, Delhi 1989, p. 91.

Badan Singh owed his success to a conciliatory approach to the Mughal court and the Rajput state of Amber. And that was in contrast to the confrontationist politics of his cousin Mohkam Singh. In fact, the latter's father, Churaman should be considered the most influential historical figure who prepared the ground for establishing the new kingdom of Jats. For more on the role of Churaman in the history of the kingdom, see: Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj, 'Churaman and the making of the Jat state in the late 17th and early eighteenth century', *Studies in People's History* 7/1 (2020), pp. 30-52.

[80] Ibidem, v. 36.

[81] According to Duncan Derrett, in short, *rājanīti* is "the way a king should comport himself to be successful" and *rājadharma* – "the way a king should comport himself in order to be righteous." For a more complex elucidation of the concept of *rājadharma*, see: John Duncan Martin Derrett, 'Rajadharma', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 35/4 (1976), pp 597–609.

[82] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 823, v. 38.

[83] Ibidem, pp. 823–826, vv. 5–17.

[84] Kuṁvar Naṭvar Siṁh, *Mahārājā Sūrajmal. Jīvan aur Itihās*, Dillī 1985, p. 49.

[85] Nevertheless, it is important to note here that a nobleman's illiteracy in itself did not necessarily implicate lack of refinement. This can be best exemplified with the well-known case of the Mughal emperor Akbar, certainly not the only illiterate connoisseur of the early modern courts in India.

bodily gestures and emotions",[86] we come across a different elaboration which adds up to the picture of the patron-connoisseur. A similar function may be attributed to a short one-stanza section called "the description of the [court] assembly" (*sabhā varṇan*)[87] which locates the patron amidst the wise and beautiful people skilled in arts, such as dancers and musicians and brings to fore the concept of pleasure, just as in Nandrām's *Jagvilās*. Since "the Jats sought to create a court comparable to the example of Delhi, installing poets and musicians to counter their reputation as 'rustic farmers'," [88] the aesthetization of Suraj Mal and his court in *sabhā varṇan* can be interpreted in terms of a discursive realization of patron's ambitions.

At this point one may express doubt whether the presentation of the royal lineage and the lengthy talk about patron's qualities actually belong to the *nagaravarṇana*. It would be logical to assume that the same stopped with "the description of the pond" (*tāl varṇan*) adjacent to the royal palace. As one may observe in some other courtly poems, the *nagaravarṇana* and the *rājakulavarṇana* are usually located in a physical close proximity. Take for instance the already mentioned poem *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* (1673), although even there the royal lineage is introduced before the capital city of Raigarh. Theoretically, one may look at *Dirghnagarvarṇan* in terms of structural ellipsis, where the discourse on the city has been brought to a halt to introduce a different topic. I thus propose to interpret the use of such textual technique as a means to incorporate the convention of *rājakulavarṇana* into the text composed in the new genre of the *nagaravarṇana*. Subsequent sections reveal that Somnāth clearly marks the end of the thus embedded composition. Just as Keśavdās went "beyond the obligatory" and enriched the description of the city with a lively scene of musical and poetical performances in *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* (1607), or devoted several passages to Mān Siṃh's court in *Māncarit* (1585), Somnāth in the middle of the 18th c. uses the same technique to remind the audience that the discourse of the city is not over yet. Not only the court assembly, but also the king seem to become its obligatory descriptive elements. However, *sabhā varṇan* is not the last section of the composition. It is followed by four more elaborate stanzas organized into two distinct sections: one on horses and the other on elephants. Those elements, although they link the genre to the widespread practices of the Indo-Persian literary tradition – just as the royal stables that Dipti Khera has spotted in *Jagvilās*, and related to the Mughal sphere – are more than that. Included in the manuscripts and the printed edition, the titles of both final sections: *dān ke hay varṇan*[89] or *hay dā̃n varnan*[90] (description of the horses [as/for] gift) and *dān ke gaj varṇan*[91] (description of the elephants [as/for] gift), summarize and foreground the sense

[86] Dipti Khera, 'Jagvilasa: Picturing Worlds of Pleasure and Power in 18th-Century Udaipur Painting', p. 77.

[87] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 826, v. 18.

[88] Susan Snow Wadley, *Raja Nal and the Goddess. The North Indian Epic* Dhola *in Performance*, Bloomington 2004, p. 60.

[89] Ibidem, pp. 826–827, [v. 19]. Lacking number of this stanza is an apparent misprint in the printed edition.

[90] Such variant of the subtitle appears in the manuscript no. 6065. Whereas in the manuscript no. 287 it is *dān hay varnan* (word division mine).

[91] Sudhākar Pāṇḍey, *Somnāth Granthāvalī*, p. 827, vv. 20–22.

of the verses, and inform the audience that the animals of the best breed are commodities employed to express royal generosity. Thus, Somnāth uses the complex descriptions of horses and elephants, which invoke awe and admiration, by merging here the Indo-Persian practices with a rather Sanskritic literary discourse on *dāna* (generosity, magnanimity), "one of the major tools of validating, vitalizing and bolstering royal authority", already adopted by the Brajbhasha poet patronized in the courts.[92] The figures characteristic of the description of the city are presented as attributes of the legitimate kingship and its embodiment, the king, and logically the king and the discourse on royal power become a constitutive, well-warranted element of the city.

Conclusion

In the light of Redfield and Singer's study, reading all the three *nagaravarṇana*s by Somnāth offers a clear contrast between the first two and the third one. If the orthogenetic nature of the description of Dhara and Ujjain supports the traditional social order, the presentation of Deeg discloses more of the poet's interest in the "prevailing relationships of people and the prevailing common understandings [that] have to do with the technical not the moral order, with administrative regulation, business and technical convenience."[93] This interest is not pervasive in the entire composition, and some passages, reminiscent of what may be found in the earlier works containing *nagaravarṇana*s, recreate rather conventional elements that can be found in the city, especially a capital city. This is how one can read e.g., the section devoted to the garden or to the pond. However, the entire description securely carries the audience towards the image of a heterogenetic entity. The description of the brand new city of Deeg is juxtaposed with the *nagaravarṇana*s of rulers recognized in Indian tradition as embodiment of perfect rule and as such it is attempt to inscribe the new place and the aspiring patron into the network of tradition and hierarchy. The ruler who seeks recognition for himself and for the Jats' status patronizes the composition which translates his ambition into the discursive realm of poetry.

The kingdom of Jats, an emerging power aware of political and military dangers, opens itself cautiously. The sequence of the *nagaravarṇana*s may be seen as a declaration of Jats' distinct place in the geopolitical arena: adherence to Hindu values vis-à-vis the waning Mughal power and competing Rajput and Maratha forces, but also its modern trait. It is rich and progressive, but while aware of the dangers it does not remain open to everyone. A carefully crafted proclamation of royal power accommodates various *loci* of patronage, not just mere statements of recognition. By *loci* we may thus understand also, literarily, references that need to be *located* in the specific passages of this composite project, in tune with the nature of the specific patronage: religious and brahminical in

[92] Piotr Borek, 'Recognition through Traditional Values: A Literary Representation of *dāna* as an Essential Way of Boosting Royal Worthiness', p. 212.

[93] Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, 'The Cultural Role of Cities', pp. 57–58.

Dhara, but royal in the patron's actual urban setting centered on Deeg. This is how a carefully crafted poetic proclamation accomodates the vision of the new, emerging state and the vision of its new city.

The *nagaravarṇana*, initially an obligatory element of *kāvya* in Sanskrit, further a convention that could be used in both Sanskrit and Brajbhasha to aestheticize the court or epitomize the ruler's glory, started to be recognized by the audience as a passage that carries a message somehow detached from its original or literal presentation of the new urban settling. And this is exactly how genres possess themselves of "social purposes in a community".[94] If indeed "the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public",[95] the popularity of the *nagaravarṇana* among the poets and thus public acquaintance with it was conditioned by the fact that the audience could immediately identify the section playing a possibly different function than the adjacent passages. As such, it was finally ready to become a full-fledged, standalone literary genre. Another catalyst that possibly conditioned the emergence of the *nagaravarṇana* was the Indo-Persian tradition: the Brajbhasha poem *Nagarśobhā* by Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan was a distinct composition reminding one of the Persian genre *shahrāshob*, with the content adjusted to the tastes and practices familiar to the Sanskritic tradition.

An uncertain, movable location of *Dirghnagarvarṇan*, found within or beyond the textual body proper of *Sujān vilās*, raises an important question related to the development of the genre of the *nagaravarṇana*. According to Cohen, "When an oral society is replaced by a literate one, the reasons for generic classification undergo change."[96] Following Cohen's theoretical considerations on genre one may ask if and to what extent the final stage of transforming the *nagaravarṇana* component of a poem into a full-fledged literary genre was bound to the process of literalization, or maybe looking even further, was possibly tied later to the advent of print. Was *Dirghnagarvarṇan* originally thought by the poet as an appendix to *Sujān vilas*, or was its placement a scribe's decision – duplicated by the editor of the printed book – that moved such a complex composition as this one outside the framework of another?

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[94] Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', p. 206.

[95] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton 2020, p. 247.

[96] Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', p. 206.

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