

The Poetics of History in Padmakar's *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*

Padmakar and the Corpus of Hindi Historical Poetry

Padmakar (1753–1833), one of the most influential Brajbhasha writers at the turn of the nineteenth century, is often considered the last of a dying breed of Indian court poets, a representative of an old literary order that was destined for obsolescence as the new expressive regimes of Khari Boli Hindi became entrenched during the colonial period. The nationalist turn in Hindi literary criticism that took hold by the 1920s and has yet to be fully superseded did much to propagate the view that there is little worthwhile in *rīti* literature, the modern name generally accorded to the Brajbhasha courtly texts that had flourished for centuries. Supposed to be suffused through and through with *vilāsītā* (decadence) and *sāmantvād* (feudalism), the Hindi courtly past is often thought to be best forgotten.

As I have argued elsewhere, literary scholars are ill-advised to do so.¹ The same holds true for historians. To some extent, the sub-field of *aitihāsik kāvya* (historical poetry) has in fact been allowed to escape the usual 'rīti taint' because unlike the more erotic styles of court poetry it can at least be said to embody a spirit of martial

vigour, a trait that colonial discourse held to be in short supply among 'effeminate' Hindus and a purported failing that nationalist-period writers were keen to redress.² Although several valuable studies of historical poetry exist in Hindi,³ this corpus has yet to be widely appreciated for its enormous historiographical significance. The Rajput rulers of early modern India (c. 1500–1800) were the main patrons of *rīti* literature and there are dozens if not hundreds of Braj and Rajasthani works that shed light on the dynamics of Rajput–Mughal political interactions; many also give voice to something we can call local history. Padmakar's *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* falls into the latter category.

This martial ode pays tribute to Anupgir Gosain, a Brahman warrior-ascetic who rose to the status of a king after decisively defeating Arjun Singh Pamar, his main political rival in Bundelkhand and scion of the Bundela Rajputs, a clan that had controlled the region for centuries.⁴ It makes good sense that when Anupgir was burnishing his kingly credentials he would have found the literary skills of Padmakar, who hailed from a well-known local family of court poets, a useful tool in public relations. Kings needed their court poets; an aspiring young court poet would also have needed a king. This mutual dependency has a long history in India and is aptly expressed in a Sanskrit adage:

jñāyate jātu nāmāpi na rājñah kavitām vinā
kaves tadvyatirekeṇa na kīrtiḥ sphurati kṣitau.

Even the name of a king would not be known if it were not for poetry.
And without kings the glory of poets would not emanate throughout
the world.⁵

Poets were kingmakers, then, and kings were poet-makers, a pattern that can be readily attested throughout Indian cultural history. It is certainly relevant to Padmakar and his patrons: after writing *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* he went on to have a distinguished career, serving various other rulers, including the prestigious Kachhwaha house of Jaipur under Pratap Singh (r. 1778–1803) and Jagat Singh (r. 1803–18).⁶

There is something poignant about the figure of Padmakar in Indian literary history. He comes at the tail end of a two-millennia tradition of *kāvya*, or formal (often specifically courtly) literary production. A tendency—even teleology—propagated by literary historians has

been to view late poets such as Padmakar as doomed to decadence and failure, as though the lake of poetic creativity had already dried up by the time these ill-timed poets came upon the scene.⁷ Seventeen years after Padmakar's death, Bharatendu Harischandra (1850–1885), the so-called founder of modern Hindi literature, was born, and soon the very purpose of poetry and other literary arts would be dramatically re-conceptualized. New genres and registers, many imported from the West under colonial conditions, would displace the old. Padmakar did not see any of this coming. He was confidently rooted in his traditions.

The use of the plural 'traditions' is deliberate, for Padmakar—and this is true of *rīti* poets generally—was heir to several cultural streams. As a professional poet writing at Anupgir Gosain's court, his most obvious literary antecedents would have been the *rīti* traditions that had been born in his very own Bundelkhand two centuries earlier during the long reign of Akbar (1556–1605). Here I refer to the pioneering work of Keshavdas, who served the Bundela kings of Orcha, writing innovative treatises on literary theory and works of historical *kāvya* in a style that came to be widely adopted in Rajput courtly settings. *Rīti* authors—especially the earliest ones—drew considerable inspiration from Sanskrit literary topoi and yet they were also of necessity very much engaged with their present political contexts. During Akbar's reign, most of the Rajput houses of India came under Mughal dominion. Engaging with the present meant a cognizance of the Mughal political order, and a whole lexicon pertinent to Persianized military and courtly culture. A new influx of Perso-Arabic vocabulary into Hindi is one reason why the *kāvya* of 1600 looks nothing like the earlier Sanskrit *kāvya* of 600.⁸ Additionally, because of the importance of Rajputs from western India in the Mughal imperial system, the literary trends of that region were bound to have an impact. Historical poetry in Hindi, much of it rich in martial imagery, is thus an interesting distillation of older Sanskritic *kāvya* modes that aspired to invoke *vīra rasa* (the martial sentiment, according to classical aesthetics), blended with the more contemporary styles such as *Ḍiṅgal* that were popular in Rajasthan.⁹ Literary elements skilfully meshed with more documentary concerns drawn from contemporary political life. All of this is deeply pertinent to the historical poetry of Padmakar.

Though a compact work of just 211 verses, the *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* executes a variety of functions. As the title

suggests, it is a *virudāvalī* (chain of epithets), a subgenre of praise poetry that will be briefly introduced. This genre, when performed, would have been a mechanism for publicly asserting a patron's martial or kingly disposition. Another concern for Padmakar was history—in particular, a battle that took place between his patron Anupgir Gosain and Arjun Singh Pamar, which he dates and, to some extent, records for posterity. The work's historical mission ultimately proves inseparable from its poetic features, which evince connections to earlier martial poetry produced by Sanskrit literati as well as the vibrant oral traditions of Rajasthan.

The *Virudāvalī* Genre and the Poetry of Praise

Different inflections of the *virudāvalī* (also *birudāvalī*) genre can be found throughout Indian cultural history. *Viruda* is originally a Tamil word and lists of titles, often inscribed, had a significant function in Pallava and other south Indian political cultures.¹⁰ Cynthia Talbot has remarked on the importance of the genre for the Kakatiya dynasty of medieval Andhra, where *birudas* were hard-won material and symbolic accolades:

Birudas were not just bardic pleasantries meant to flatter a patron but were often physical objects in the form of an anklet or insignia—what we consider a medal of honor—as well as titles announced in public appearances and enumerated in inscriptions. *Birudas* could not be adopted freely but had to be inherited from a predecessor, bestowed by an overlord, seized from an enemy, or justified by some deed. A list of *birudas* was a synopsis of a lineage's achievements, in effect, a summary of a person's claim to fame.¹¹

Sanskrit rhetoricians, for their part, took up the subject as a genre of poetry. Vishvanatha in his *Sāhityadarpaṇa* (Mirror on Literature, c. 1250) defined the *virudam* as 'a praise poem for a king, composed in verse and prose'.¹² Vishveshvara proposed a more prescriptive or educative function in *Camatkāracandrikā* (Moonlight of Poetic Wonder, c. 1385): 'The *birudāvalī* is marked by multiple titles. Its purpose is to indicate what [a king] is supposed to do on any given occasion.'¹³

During the early modern period in north India, the *virudāvalī* could likewise function as a synopsis of achievements or an incitement to good works, but both documentary and didactic features

were overlain with panegyric, often in a martial vein.¹⁴ One also sees variations with a more devotional cast, such as the bhakta virudāvalī ('chain of devotees'), or Rupa Goswamin's Krishna-centred *Govinda virudāvalī*.¹⁵

Padmakar, for his part, made the virudāvalī the basis for two entire narrative poems in Brajhasha, interweaving martial and historical elements with royal panegyric.¹⁶ One can well imagine the power that a recitation of a text like the *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* would have had in a courtly assembly. The repetition of the verb *hai* (is) in these lines from the opening verses imparts a stately, percussive regularity:

hiṃmata bahādura bhūpa hai, subha saṃbhu rūpa anūpa hai
dila-dāna-bīra dayāla hai, ari-bara-nikara ko kāla hai
sukha sāhibī amaresa hai, bhuva bhāra dhara abhujamgesa hai
manu mauja deta mahesa hai, guna-jñānavāna ganesa hai...

duti dipati deha manoja hai, manu mauja detani bhoja hai
subha-ḍīla sīla-samudra hai, ghamasāna meṃ janu rudra hai
cauṃsaṭhi kalāni prabīna hai, duja-devatāni adhīna hai
mukha-bola kahata aḍola hai, gaja-bāji deta amola hai...

jaga autaryau ju anūpa hai, mahipāla navarasa-rūpa hai
nija nāikana ju siṃgāra hai, ari lakhata bīra apāra hai
lakhi dīna karunā-batsa hai, khala-katala meṃ bībhatsa hai
nija khilavatina meṃ hāsa hai, bhaya-rūpa durajana-pāsa hai
haya caṛhata adbhuta hota hai, sara leta rudra-udota hai
siva-bhajana sānta sujāna hai, jihi kī samāna na āna hai
hiṃmata bahādura nṛpa balī, jihim sena satruna kī dalī.

Himmat Bahadur is King, he is the unparalleled form of Siva.
His heart is generous and compassionate,
to his host of enemies he is death.
Refined as Amaresh (Indra),
he supports the weight of the world like Sheshnag.
Like Mahesh (Shiva) he delights the heart,
like Ganesh his essence is wisdom....

His form is lustrous like Manoja.
Like Bhoja he lavishes worldly pleasures.
He is of solid build, his character strong. In battle he becomes Rudra.
He is expert in the 64 arts,
he is subordinate (only) to Brahmans and the gods.

His spoken word is unbreakable,
the horses and elephants he gives are priceless....

He has taken unprecedented form in the world;
as a king he embodies the nine *rasas*.
His women find him irresistible (*śṛṅgāra*), his enemies indomitable (*vīra*).
Seeing the helpless he is compassionate (*karuṇa*);
in slaughtering the vile he is disgusting (*bībhatsa*).
With close friends he is comic (*hāsyā*);
for opponents he is terror incarnate (*bhaya*).
On horseback, he inspires wonder (*adbhuta*);
lopping off heads he is fierce (*rudra*).
Adept at chanting Siva-bhajans, he is quiescent (*śānta*);
there is no one else like him.
Himmat Bahadur is a powerful king, who destroys enemy armies.¹⁷

This section is by far the most classical and *kāvya-esque* of the work. Brajbhasha, like modern standard Hindi, can be used in a variety of registers, such as *tatsama* (pure Sanskrit), *ardhatatsama* (modified Sanskrit), or *tadbhava* (words more radically vernacularized); it may also be inflected with Persian or more local Indic dialects, often Rajasthani. Note the dense compounding, which feels like a nod to classical style. To speak of his king as being radiant like Manoja (the god of love, v. 6) and adept in the sixty-four arts (v. 7) is to conjure up ideals of royal comportment that date back at least to the Gupta period.¹⁸ Padmakar here also invokes a significant concept from another courtly art—Indian literary theory—in an elaborate sequence that depicts his patron as an embodiment of the nine *rasas*.¹⁹ When vernacular poets needed gravitas, they turned to a Sanskrit register. Still, the ready assimilation of Persian and Arabic words (such as *dil* [heart], in v. 3; *sāhibī* [grandeur], in v. 4; and *qatl* [slaughter], in v. 12) at the same time forcefully reminds us that this is an early modern *kāvya* in Brajbhasha.

The elegant language serves to reinforce the passage's emphasis on kingliness, and this can hardly be accidental. The political dispensation that Anupgir ushered in was something profoundly new and unsettling. After a period of political turmoil, a Shaivite²⁰ *gosain* had just defeated the ruling Kshatriya dynasty.²¹ Padmakar here stresses the moral components and responsibilities of kingship, as though these were special concerns. Court poets are too often considered shameless sycophants who merely prop up the egos of their patrons in exchange for recompense but, as Julie Scott Meisami has noted in the case of Persian poetry, panegyric is often a powerful instrument

of ethical suasion.²² Here the poet reminds his patron (and perhaps reassures others who are listening) that kingly duty means not just the vanquishing of foes but also requires good character and the protection of one's subjects from harm.

Padmakar, Historian and *Kavi*

If Padmakar mobilizes elements of cosmopolitan Sanskritic poetics to invoke its moral imaginary of kingship, some features of the *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* fall more squarely in the realm of local politics. Here we meet Padmakar the historian. Immediately following the encomiastic opening lines, Padmakar briskly telescopes the historical backdrop of his tale into a few terse verses, and the world of early modern Bundelkhand comes into view. We are introduced to local notables such as Chatrasal, the famous seventeenth-century anti-Mughal rebel, and the poet zooms in on the redoubt of Ajaigarh near the Ken River, home of Arjun Singh Pamar, Anupgir Gosain's contemporary and rival.²³

In a move that would have been virtually unthinkable for a Sanskrit *kavi* (poet) but is relatively commonplace for early modern Hindi writers, Padmakar dates the events of which he speaks. This grounding of narratives in the here and now rather than in a timeless framework marks a changed sensibility during the early modern period and can be considered a significant development in the Hindi historiographical tradition. Still, non-prosaic concerns about temporality persist: Padmakar records how Anupgir summons an astrologer to determine a suitable time to engage in warfare, and it is for this reason that we come to know the exact date of the battle:

He called the favored astrologer,
respectfully asking him to name an auspicious date.
Now speak, when shall we fight?
Name a suitable day, then we will wage war.

Hearing this order by the maharaja,
the royal astrologer's heart was gladdened.
The well-named Sarup Sinha spoke words to ensure victory.

He perused all the astral treatises,
settled upon an auspicious date, and announced it.
Listen, (take) Samvat 1800, and count forty-nine more.

The twelfth day of the dark half of Baisakh, make a note of Wednesday—
an auspicious day for fighting, for young men,
warriors, and the best of kings.²⁴

This is a poetic way of proclaiming that the storied battle between Anupgir Gosain and Arjun Singh took place in Vikram Samvat 1849, or CE 1792.

A typical example of the interplay between history and poetry is a moving catalogue of the many warriors who lost their life fighting for Anupgir. Mandhata Kayasth, the son of one Sabsukhray, is singled out for his pivotal role in the vanguard of Anupgir's army. He delivers a long speech recognizing the generosity of Anupgir to his family before bravely entering the fray.²⁵ His inevitable death in the service of his overlord (*svāmikāraja*) is described in a lively passage:

In this way the brave Mandhata put himself
in mortal danger to fight out in front.
Wielding spear, sword, and dagger,
he cut and sliced through the enemy army.
Then, separated from his horse, he joined the ranks of foot soldiers.
How many blows did he fend off with his shield,
repulsing the enemy assault?

There he leaped and pounced, slapping away blows.
Sacrificing his body for his overlord, he was first in line to enter heaven.
Laughing and shouting, he faced Arjun Pamar
and endured the assault of his weapons.
Even as he breathed his last on the battlefield, he continued the fight.

This is how the good Mandhata died, rushing forth into battle.
Ascending the celestial chariot, he paid obeisance
to his king and became immortal.²⁶

A full twenty other names are singled out (even if their contributions are not explained with the same level of detail), and Padmakar describes in each case these brave men's heroic but ultimately unsuccessful engagements with the forces of Arjun Singh Pamar.²⁷ Many of these figures would not have lived on in history at all, were it not for Padmakar. At the same time, this is powerful poetry.

In narrative terms, all of this is a fitting lead-up to the climax of the work: Anupgir's own fateful encounter with Arjun Singh. The poet chooses not to render this event with verisimilitude. Padmakar the historian cannot be seen as distinct from Padmakar the kavi. Padmakar sought a consummately dramatic tone for his finale. His

technique can be glimpsed in these lines (and to perceive the full effects of Padmakar's poetry, it helps to read the Braj out loud):

nikasīm taḥaṃ khaggaiṃ, umari umaggaiṃ,
 jagamaga jaggaiṃ duhuṃ dala maim
 bhāṃtina-bhāṃtina kī, bahu jātina kī, ari-pāṃtina kī kari kalamaiṃ
 taḥaṃ kaṛhīm magarabī, arī-gana carabī, cāpaṭa karabī sī kāṭaiṃ
 jagi jora junabbai, phaharata phabbaiṃ, suṇḍani gabbaiṃ phara pāṭaiṃ

bijjula-sī camakaiṃ, ghāina ghamakaiṃ, tikhana tamakaiṃ bandara kī
 bandarī su khaggaiṃ jagamaga jaggaiṃ lapakata laggaiṃ nahim barakī
 sohaiṃ subha suratī, ghalata na muratī, rana meṃ phuratī birana koṃ
 līlama taravāraiṃ, jhuki-jhuki jhāraiṃ, taki-taki māraiṃ dhīrana koṃ

Then the swords came out, raised with zeal. Both sides were as if ablaze.
 So many men, comprising many different communities—
 the enemy lines were cut down.

The unsheathed sword sliced the flesh of the enemy host,
 as though it were a stalk of millet.

The mighty lance awoke, wielded masterfully—
 the ground teemed with elephant trunks.

Like lightning they shone, they wounded deeply,
 the fierce sting of the *bandar* blades.

The fine blades dazzled the world, never wavering upon attack.

The fine *surati* swords of the spirited braves,
 once implanted are never extracted.

The *līlam* swords swooped and swayed, aimed and maimed,
 and killed the steadfast braves.²⁸

The *tribhaṅgī* metre with its 'triple folds' of internal rhyme are the perfect way to convey martial intensity. The long sequence catalogues how a host of exotic weaponry was unfurled and heightens the pace to a spectacular crescendo. Poetic flourishes—note the power of the alliteration—are far more important in this scene than documentary precision. *Yamaka* (repeating the same word in more than one sense) is another aural technique used to interesting effect:

Taba nrpa anūpa giri subhaṭa sindhu tiri arjuna soṃ bhiri khaṛaga gahī
 Haya dābi kanhaiyā, sumiri kanhaiyā, su gaja kanhaiyā para pahumcau

Then King Anupgir crossed over the great ocean-army
 and challenged Arjun, sword in hand.

Urging on his horse Kanhaiya, he remembered God,
and attacked at the elephant's shoulder.²⁹

The second line excerpted here cleverly uses the word *kanhaiyā* in three different senses, meaning the name of the hero's horse; Lord Krishna; and shoulder (cf. modern standard Hindi *kandhā*). In the final verses where Anupgir is portrayed decapitating Arjun Singh with his sword, the advent of supernatural beings such as Shiva and the corpse-loving *yoginīs* elevates the scene to a more transcendent register of the wondrous (known as *adbhuta rasa*). There is also not a little bloodthirstiness and gore in the spirit of the *bībhatsa rasa* (disgust) from classical poetics.³⁰

Rajasthani Inflections and the Performance of History

Here we find ourselves squarely in the realm of what can be termed the 'poetics of history'. In fact, in many places Padmakar shies away from realistic description and instead adopts dazzling literary strategies to add depth and zest to his account.

In an early scene where Anupgir's soldiers first set out for Ajaigarh, Padmakar describes the troops not in terms of who Anupgir's allies actually were but instead uses a more formulaic conception of the thirty-six canonical Rajput clans. The motif can be traced at least as far back as Kalhana's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, an important twelfth-century Sanskrit chronicle,³¹ and it also occurs in the *Prthivīrāj-rāso* attributed to Chand Bardai, a text that in its current form dates to the sixteenth century (even if it purports to describe twelfth century events).³² In the hands of the Mughal-period Hindi poets, the Rajput clans became a common literary 'set piece' that was perfect for waxing poetic about Rajput valour. Thirty-six was merely a convenient rubric since each author evidently felt free to elaborate upon the concept in his own way.³³

For Padmakar, who devotes one line to each of the Rajput groups, the point is to set the scene for the impending battle. The sounds *ka*, *jha*, and retroflex *ṭa* in the second half of each line of this verse, for instance, perfectly conjure up the swishing of swords and the cutting down of enemy soldiers:

bara baisa bīra jujhāra je, jhuki jhamaki jhārata sāra je
gautama tamaki je rana karaiṃ, ari kāṭi kaṭi-kaṭi kai laraiṃ

The fine brave soldiers of Baiswara handled their swords with finesse.

The Gautams were fierce in battle: even when cut by the enemy
they kept on slaughtering.

The passage's focus on the exemplary martial excellence of specific clans also contributes an element of Rajput pride, strengthened by clever homonyms such as *paṛihāra hāra na mānahīṃ* (Pariharas never surrender):

paṛihāra hāra na mānahīṃ, jina koṃ haraṣa ghamasānahīṃ
uddhata sulankī sāhasī, je karata rana meṃ rāha-sī

rajaṇpūta rānā haiṃ saje, jinake kharaga rana meṃ jage
haraṣe su hāṛā himmatī, jinakī jagata rana kimmatī

The Pariharas never surrender, taking delight in warfare.
Valorous are the Sulanki braves,
who cut a swathe through the battlefield.

All the Rajput kings have marshaled their forces, swords ready for battle.
The courageous Haras are riled up, whose worldly worth is in battle. ³⁴

This brings us to another important feature of the work: much of its expressive punch stems from its performative features—the rhythm of its cantering metres, the heavy reliance on alliteration. A *virudāvalī* was intended for oral recitation, not just for silent reading.

In this excerpt from an extended passage in the *ḍillā* metre we are whisked up into the bustle of activity as the army advances, the thud of elephants and horses creating a deafening ruckus:

ghanaghanāta gajaghanṭa umaṅgani
sanasanāta sura-śruti subha aṅgani
ghumaṛi calata ghummata ghana ghorata
suṇḍana nakhata-jhuṇḍa jhakajhorata

calata mataṅgani takki tamaṅkiya
pakhkharaita haya huṛaka humaṅkiya
sira jhārata na sahata mṛga-sobhani
kahuṃ-kahuṃ calata chuvata chiti chobhani

The thrilling clanging of the elephant bells,
the whooshing sounds of their stately limbs!
Rolling and massing like dense thunder clouds,
their upraised trunks rocked the heavens.

The intense, enraged elephants were on the move,
and the armoured horses were chomping at the bit.

Spry forest creatures were no match for their swaying and bucking.
Wherever they went, the earth groaned under their weight.³⁵

The harsh velars, retroflexes, and geminate (doubled) consonants effectively convey the jostling of war animals and soldiers. The strategic deployment of alliteration and onomatopoeia was a long-standing practice of Indian poets, particularly for works that were intended to convey the *vīra* (heroic sentiment).³⁶

As a *rīti* poet, Padmakar may have been taking his cues from traditions of *yuddha-varṇanam* (descriptions of war) in Sanskrit poetry. This excerpt from a verse by the acclaimed Sanskrit playwright Bhavabhuti (c. 700) is brimming with sound effects intended precisely to animate the audience with an intensely martial experience. A *vidyādhara* (wise supernatural being) reports vividly to his wife on the fierce combat he witnessed between the heroes Chandraketu and Lava:

jhaṇajjhaṇitakaṅkaṇa
kvaṇitakiṅkiṅkaṇ dhanur
dhvanadguruguṇāṭaṇī
kṛtakarālakolāhalaṃ
vitatya kiratoḥ śarān
aviratasphuraccūḍayor
vicitram abhivardhate
bhuvanabhīmam āyodhanam

They bend the bows that sound with ringing
golden bells and raise an awful
ruckus from their heavy strings
twanging at their tips, all the while
showering down arrows as their topknots
swing constantly and the battle
rages with dramatic intensity,
bringing terror to all the world.

And for the welfare of both the war drums
of heaven boom as deeply as stormclouds.³⁷

Bhavabhuti's carefully chosen language is extremely effective at conjuring up the twanging of bow strings and the booming of war drums.

There were also, of course, more proximate poetic models. It seems likely that Padmakar's exposure to the Ḍiṅgal traditions of western India would also have conditioned his poetic choices.³⁸ This

excerpt from a set piece in the *bhujāṅ-prayāt* metre renders vivid the armamentarium and terror of war through the Ḍiṅgal technique of *vaiṇa-sagāī* (also *vayan-sagāī*), or structured assonance:

tupakkaiṃ tapakkaiṃ dharakaiṃ mahā haiṃ
 pralai-cillikā-sī jharakkaiṃ jahāṃ haiṃ
 kharakkaiṃ kharī bairi-chātī bharakkaiṃ
 sarakkaiṃ gae sindhu majjai gaṛakkaiṃ

calai gola-golī atolī sanaṅkaiṃ
 manau bhaumra-bhīraiṃ uṛātīṃ bhanaṅkaiṃ
 caṛhī āsamānai chaīṃ bepramānaiṃ
 mano meghamālā gilai bhāsamānaiṃ

The crack and throb of the guns is great,
 like the crashing intensity of the apocalypse.
 The harsh clashing pounds the hearts of the enemy,
 who escape into the churning ocean.

Countless shots whizz by—
 like a swarm of bees buzzing,
 they rise up and suddenly shadow the sky,
 as though a mass of clouds has swallowed up the light.³⁹

Here and elsewhere, the poet uses Ḍiṅgal styles, charged with cacophony, to mimic the sounds of guns and powerful weaponry. We can just about hear the explosions and see the dust clouds rising and may even feel like running for cover.

A *rīti* poet par excellence, Padmakar is adept at aestheticized description but he also skillfully conveys the human dimensions of war in a brief scene that captures the mood in the enemy's camp. Arjun Singh delivers an inspiring discourse on Kshatriya dharma to his troops, a few brief highlights of which are excerpted here:

These are attestations of kshatriya dharma,
 according to the Vedas and Puranas:
 Protecting brahmans and cows, routing enemies,
 and enduring wounds inflicted by weapons.
 In this world, a soldier never says 'no' to war, not even in a dream.
 When these prime Rajputs fall in battle,
 they have their pick of heavenly brides....
 There are two types of men in this world
 who go on to pierce the beautiful disc of the sun:

He who has been following the path of yoga from birth never feels grief,
and he whose passion is roused by the battle
and fights to the death then and there.
He who speaks or hears of their virtues understands the highest truth....

Over time all wells and tanks get filled in.
Dense forests and gardens get cut down.
Palaces and splendid homes all collapse—nothing escapes decay.
One day your body and wealth will evaporate.
Cities and towns will also burn to the ground.
In this world, only two things remain: fame and ignominy.⁴⁰

The passage consists of an interesting combination of lofty maxims and everyday speech. As observed by Dalpat Rajpurohit (this volume), the tone becomes somewhat colloquial, which lends verisimilitude to a scene that Padmakar—a court poet to the opposing side—could never himself have witnessed.

The episode also brings a complex emotional tenor to the text. It sets Arjun Singh up as a worthy opponent of Anupgir and renders poignant the plight of his warriors, who are apprehensive about their imminent fate. Arjun consoles his troops, and rouses them to action using a combination of rhetorical strategies. He reminds them that they are Kshatriyas, a social role that carries responsibilities prescribed by hallowed Sanskrit texts. He speaks of the world's impermanence, while also playing to the soldiers' sense of honour. He tempts them with the rewards that await victorious heroes upon death: celestial damsels and everlasting fame. Arjun Singh's noble attempt to inspire his troops seems absolutely of a piece with the Rajput values that we read about in many a tale from the early modern period and there are also notable parallels from classical India, such as Krishna's famous exhortation to Arjuna to fight, in chapter two of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁴¹ Narrative strategy also surely underlies this interlude: giving voice to the concerns of the opponent builds tension. It may also be that in real life Padmakar felt a certain affection for Anupgir's rival, at whose court he is said to have had a brief sojourn as guru and court poet.⁴²

Padmakar's work is, in short, conditioned by both timeless and time-bound features. He had multiple resources for *kāvya* at his disposal and he used them judiciously to craft his captivating poetics of history.

Conclusion

The *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* is an outstanding example of Hindi historical poetry, and one concern here has been to signal some of Padmakar's techniques while situating the work in a larger literary context by drawing attention to various textual layers and their possible sources. A close reading of the work also prompts us to think more about both *Hindi in history* and *history in Hindi*. Kāvya was one of the predominant genres in which premodern Indian history was composed, and the specifically Hindi incarnations of kāvya are as rich as they are underexplored.

Padmakar's *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* is both more and less than history in the mainstream sense of the term. We see a combination of historical specificity with more generic motifs drawn from a poet's toolbox—Padmakar was both a historian and kavi, and the two roles were not in the least incommensurable. He describes a historical episode of great import in the local politics of Bundelkhand at the end of the eighteenth century, but he only sometimes recounts the events historically. Often, he was more interested in poetic effectiveness. It is possible to track the shifting textures of the work and to analyse them with some clarity.⁴³ The opening, we noted, was in a more classical register—both lexically and thematically—which was an excellent choice for highlighting Anupgir's status as a king. Martial themes are also an important element of Padmakar's narrative, as when he invokes the motif of the thirty-six Rajput clans or in Arjun Singh's sermon on Kshatriya dharma delivered to his troops at a pivotal moment. The poem with its vivid battle scenes evinces both its earlier kāvya heritage and a more contemporary Ḍiṅgal poetics, sourced from western India during the early modern period.

We can speak of the work's *style* or *themes*, as is typical of literary analysis, but we can also consider its profile as a historical document, especially with respect to the attention it gives to commemorating the main heroes who took part in the signal battle between Anupgir and his Bundelkhandi rival. Often, this account of local history takes on an aura of epic grandeur that renders it larger than life.

We also see glimpses of yet other genres besides the central dyad of poetry and history stressed here. The *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* functions as a *praśasti* (praise address) and has certain noteworthy

didactic features; poets have always reminded kings and warriors of their duties. As a *virudāvalī* with aural features designed to mimic the atmospherics of a battlefield, the poem further functions as a heroic ode that in its recitation may have instilled courage in warriors who were headed to an uncertain fate. The *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* is a rich and multilayered text that requires a complex engagement, but this should only inspire us all the more to continue to probe the marvellous poetics of history evident throughout the early modern period in Hindi historical *kāvya*.

Notes

* I owe many insights about Padmakar's *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* to my colleagues William (Vijay) Pinch and Dalpat Rajpurohit, with whom I have been collaborating on a translation. I thank Ronnie Dreyer, my assistant at Columbia University, for her help in transcribing passages from the text and following up with references. I am also grateful to the American Council of Learned Societies, New York, for a grant that partially supported this work.

1. Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 240–8.

2. Constructions of masculinity and virility loom large in colonial and nationalist appraisals of Indian literature. For a discussion of this problem in relation to Nirala, see Heidi Pauwels, 'Diptych in Verse: Gender Hybridity, Language Consciousness, and National Identity in Nirālā's "Jāgo phir ek Bār"', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 3 (2001): 455–9; cf. Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1994]), 33–7.

3. An interested reader might turn to Bhagavandas Gupta, *Mughalom ke antargat bundelkhand ke itihās-saṃskṛti ke Hindī sāhityik srotom kā mūlyānkan* (Jhansi: Bhavan Printers and Publishers, 2001); D. B. Kshirsagar and Omprakash Sharma, eds, *Rājasthān kā aitihāsik gadya sāhitya* (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Pracyavidya Pratishthan, 2000); Omprakash Sharma, ed., *Rājasthān ke aitihāsik bhāṣā kāvya* (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1999).

4. See William R. Pinch, this volume, and *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108–47.

5. *Bhojaprabandha* of Ballaladeva, ed. Jagdishlal Shastri (Bankipur [Patna]: Motilal Banarsidass, 1900), v. 120.

6. Basic details about Padmakar's career and larger oeuvre are available in R. S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), 183; Vishvanathprasad Mishra, 'Sampādakīya', in *Padmākargranthāvalī* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1959), 41–7.

7. I have critiqued this formulation in my paper for the 9th ICEMLN conference. See Allison Busch, 'Questioning the Tropes about "Bhakti and "Rīti" in Hindi Literary Historiography', in *Bhakti in Current Research 2001–2003*, ed. Monika Horstmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 33–47.

8. Some of the radical new Hindi adaptations of the kāvya form are discussed in Allison Busch, 'The Classical Past in the Mughal Present: the Brajbhasha Rīti Tradition', in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*, ed. Gary Tubb, Yigal Bronner, and David Shulmar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

9. Ḍiṅgal is a literary dialect-cum-genre of Marwari. A useful recent study is Janet Kamphorst, 'In Praise of Death', PhD diss, Leiden University, 2008, 31–6.

10. See T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau, *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984): entry 5414 on Tamil *virutu*, 491; Sheldon Pollock, 'Praśasti: A Small Note on a Big Topic', in *Rajamahima: C. Rajendran Congratulatory Volume*, ed. N. K. Sundareswaran (Calicut: University of Calicut Press), 30–1.

11. Cynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 144.

12. *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Vishvanatha, ed. Krsnamohan Sastri (Banaras: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1947–8), v. 6.337.

13. *Camatkāracandrikā* of Vishveshvara, ed. Pandiri Sarasvati Mohan (New Delhi: Meharchand Lachhmandas, 1972), v. 3.60.

14. See, for instance, the striking virudāvalī of Man Singh Kachhwaha composed by Amrit Rai, *Māncarīt*, in *Māncarītāvalī: amber ke suprasiddh rājā mānsiṃh ke carit se sambandhit pāṃc rājasthānī racnāoṃ kā saṅkalan*, ed. Gopalnarayan Bahura (Jaipur: Maharaja Savai Man Singh II Sangrahalay, 1990), 2.

15. On the former, see G. N. Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur with an Index to the Register of Manuscripts in the Pothikhana of Jaipur (I. Khasmohor collection)* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1976), 292, 320; on the latter, see David Buchta, 'Pedagogical Poetry: Didactics and Devotion in Rūpa Gosvāmin's 'Stavamālā'', PhD diss., Department of South Asia Regional Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 2014, 292–312.

16. The other poem (not discussed here) was for Raja Pratap Singh of Jaipur. See *Pratāpsimhvīrudāvalī* of Padmakar, in *Padmākargranthāvalī*, ed. Vishvanathprasad Mishra (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1959).

17. *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* of Padmakar, in *Padmākargranthāvalī*, ed. Vishvanathprasad Mishra (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1959), vv. 3–4, 6–8, 11–14. Unless otherwise specified, all citations of the *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* refer to the Mishra edition. Here and elsewhere, I draw (occasionally with minor modifications) from the draft of a forthcoming translation of *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* by Busch, Pinch, and Rajpurohit.

18. Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74–7.

19. Here Padmakar may be taking a page from the book of Keshavdas, who opened his landmark *Rasikpriyā* with just such a verse about Krishna. See the *Rasikpriyā* of Keshavdas, in vol. 1 of *Keśavgranthāval*, ed. Vishvanathprasad Mishra (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1954), v. 1.2; Keshavdas himself had drawn on the Sanskrit rhetorician Rudrabhatta, cf. *Śṛṅgāratilaka* of Rudrabhatta, ed. R. Pischel and trans. Kapildev Pandey (Varanasi: Prachya Prakashan, 1968), v. 1.1.

20. Note how Anupgir is repeatedly compared to Shiva in the passage just cited.

21. For further on this point, see William Pinch, this volume.

22. Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 11–14. The same holds true for Brajhasha court poets. Keshavdas is a case in point. See Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 43–55.

23. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 15–19.

24. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 20–3.

25. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 122–6.

26. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 132–4. The last line references one commonly held belief that brave fighters attained immortality at the moment of death since divine beauties awaited them with a chariot. Another was the idea that warriors pierced the sun and were absorbed into its light.

27. These are, in order, Gangagiri Dilavarjang, vv. 135–9; Jagat Bahadur, vv. 139–41; Rajgiri, vv. 141–5; Uttamgiri, vv. 146–51; Zulfikar Nawab, vv. 151–3; Umrao Singh, vv. 153–6; Naval Singh Pamar, v. 157; Narind Singh Pamar and Jagat Singh Pamar, v. 158; Buddh Singh Sengar, v. 159; Sarupgiri Kumvar, v. 160; Nidhan Singh Parihar, v. 161; Khuman Singh, v. 162; Hiralal, v. 163; Hindupati Pamar, v. 164–68; Bahadur Singh, vv. 168–70; Dilip Singh Gaur, vv. 170, 172; Niwaj Singh Gaur and Durjan Singh Gaur, v. 171; and Uttam Singh Gaur, v. 172.

28. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 192–3.

29. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, v. 206.

30. See, for instance, verses 207–8. For further analysis of this passage, see the papers by Dalpat Rajpurohit and William Pinch, this volume.

31. This reference occurs in a section about King Harsha (r. 1089–1101) from *Kalhana's Rājataranṅiṇī: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, vol. I, Introduction, Books I–VII, translated, with an introduction, commentary, and appendices, by M. A. Stein (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1900), vv. 1617–18, p. 393.

32. For a thorough discussion and contextualization of the *Pr̥thivīrājṛāso*, see Cynthia Talbot, *The Last Hindu Emperor: Prithviraj Chauhan and the Indian Past, 1200–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

33. Select examples of the literary motif include *Anūp-Prakāś* of Man Kavi (London: OIOC. British Library, Hin.D.9 [a]), vv. 105–16; *Kānharāde Prabandh* of Padmanabha, ed. Kantilal Baldevram Vyas (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1997), vv. 3.37–3.39; *Vīrsimhdevcarit* of Keshavdas, vol. 3 of *Keśavgranthāvalī*, ed. Vishvanathprasad Mishra (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1959), vv. 8.15–8.20. Related examples are Amrit Rai, *Māncarit*, v. 136; *Binhairāsau* of Maheshdas Rao, ed. Saubhagyasingh Shekhavat (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1966), v. 61. For further on the thirty-six clans, see Norman P. Ziegler, ‘Action, Power, and Service in Rajasthani Culture: A Social History of the Rajputs of Middle Period Rajasthan’, PhD diss, Department of History, University of Chicago, 1973, 36–9. Also note the early mention of the thirty-six clans by Colonel James Tod (he called them *rajakula*, or ‘royal linages’), who compiled various iterations of the concept from Rajput sources. See James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, vol. 1 (London: Humphrey Milford; Oxford University Press, 1920), 97–145. I am grateful to Cynthia Talbot for the reference.

34. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 30–2.

35. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 51–2.

36. The poetics of martial description—for instance, a desire to convey *ojas* or ‘spirit’—was in fact a topic taken up by several leading Sanskrit rhetoricians, including Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, and Mammata, who tied the notion to specific rasas, especially *vīra* (the heroic), *raudra* (the terrible), and *bībhatsa* (the disgusting). See V. Raghavan, *Bhoja’s Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1963), 348.

37. *Rama’s Last Act* of Bhavabhuti, trans. Sheldon Pollock (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 316–17.

38. On ḍiṅgal poetry, see also Rajpurohit, this volume.

39. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 63–4.

40. Padmakar, *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, vv. 101, 105, 109 (drawing on the Lala Bhagvandin edition for v. 109, which includes his reconstruction of line 2).

41. A fruitful comparison can be made with Keshavdas’s *Ratanbāvanī* (c. 1583), a poignant martial ode about the Mughal takeover of Orcha. Prince Ratnasena displays exemplary Rajput conduct and delivers a sermon on Kshatriya dharma that has some resonances with Arjun Singh’s. This lesser known work of Keshavdas is discussed in Busch, *Poetry of Kings*: pp. 29–32; also see Heidi Pauwels, ‘The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor: Discourses of Braj Bhakti and Bundelā Loyalty’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52, no.2 (2009): 196–207.

42. See Mishra, ‘Sampādakīya’, 42, and Pinch, this volume.

43. Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam have proposed that south Indian historiography of approximately the same period exhibits varying textures, weaving together both literary and more factual elements that were parsed as

such by contemporary audiences. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India* (New York: Other Press, 2003).

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