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"Unhitching the Oxcart of Delhi": a Mughal-Period Hindi account of Political Insurgency*

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Abstract

This article is part of a larger effort to broaden the source-base for understanding Mughal-period India by engaging with the Hindi literary archive. I analyze the vignettes of Aurangzeb and other Mughal figures that are available in Lāl Kavi's Chatraprakāś *(Light of Chatrasal, c. 1710), a Brajbhasha (classical Hindi) historical poem commissioned by the Bundela ruler Chatrasal (1649–1731). Written shortly after Aurangzeb's death, the* Chatraprakāś *is in part a retrospective on Aurangzeb's reign. It is also a valuable source of regional history that gives voice to how the Mughal Empire was perceived from a local court that went in and out of political favour. In places, Lāl Kavi engages in trenchant political critique, expressing the court's strong disillusionment with the Mughal manṣabdārī system as well as more local grievances. While by no means the dominant tone of the work, there are occasional hints of the court's outrage at Mughal offenses against what Lal Kavi explicitly terms "Hindu dharma." Parsing the* Chatraprakāś *as both poetry and history, I probe the text's complex perspectives on Mughal rule.*

Our knowledge of Mughal-period India derives overwhelmingly from Persian sources. This was an important period for Persian historiography and textual culture, to be sure, but it was also the heyday of vernacularisation in North India when Hindi and other regional languages came into their own.[1] Numerous local Indian kings who served as Mughal *manṣabdār*s or high-ranking officials appointed vernacular writers at their courts. Their texts, many of a literary bent, but some at least quasi-documentary (the two approaches were not generally well distinguished in this milieu), reveal local perceptions of the Mughal polity and provide detailed, if at times somewhat embellished, accounts of current events. In this article

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[1]On the Mughal turn toward Persian literary culture during Akbar's reign, see M. Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics", *Modern Asian Studies,* 32: 2 (1998), pp. 317–349. By "Hindi" I reference "Brajbhasha" or classical Hindi.

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I analyze select vignettes of Aurangzeb and his officials as well as more local claimants to political authority, notably the Bundela rebel-king Chatrasal (1649-1731), that are available in the Hindi literary record. Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś* (Light of Chatrasal), a Brajbhasha historical poem written shortly after Aurangzeb's death, is a special focus.

Whereas modern scholars have been slow to recognise the historiographical significance of the Hindi writings that were produced in Mughal-period regional courts,[2] colonial officers were already attuned to the value of Hindi sources nearly two centuries ago. As early as the 1820s Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś* was attracting significant notice.[3] William Price, "Professor of Hindee and Hindoostanee" at Fort William College, is credited with the first printed edition in 1829. This was preceded by a rough translation, supplemented by historical documents that Captain Wredenhall Robert Pogson of the Bengal Army had prepared in 1828.[4] Judging from the title of his book, *A History of the Boondelas*, Pogson had no hesitation in seeing *Chatraprakāś* as a work of history, even if he did not hesitate in his translation process when it came to "retrenching redundancies, ... supplying obvious deficiencies, and rendering perspicuous such parts as appeared defective, ambiguous, or erroneously transcribed".[5]

Quite apart from Pogson's editorial overreach, his lens was also obscured by colonial tropes about "Muslim tyranny" that are worth noting only because they still cloud, even today, approaches to Chatrasal and the historiography of Aurangzeb's reign.[6] We haven't yet turned the first page of his preface before we encounter proclamations like "no Raja, before or since [Chatrasal Bundela], appears so successfully to have stemmed the tide of Mohummudan [sic] conquest" or "Aurangzeb, the most intolerant and vindictive persecutor of the Hindoos, manifested his religious zeal by mutilating their sculpture, demolishing their temples, or converting them into mosques for Mohummudan worship".[7] We will have occasion to revisit this colonial-period reading of the *Chatraprakāś* below.

However questionable Pogson's framing of the work, the *Chatraprakāś* is an important source for understanding local perceptions of Aurangzeb's reign and there is certainly evidence of discord. Both Chatrasal and his father Campat Rai Bundela did stints as Mughal *manṣabdār*s and came away with serious grievances toward the emperor. A careful reading of the *Chatraprakāś* reveals the complexity of this period's political ethics, and these are not neatly aligned with religious communitarianism, even if Lāl Kavi occasionally raises concerns about what he explicitly calls "Hindu *dharma*" in the work (as discussed below). Aurangzeb is initially treated with a degree of sympathy, and Campat Rai must have believed in Aurangzeb's legitimacy for a period since he took his side in the succession war that broke

[2] Mahendrapratap Singh and Bhagavandas Gupta are notable exceptions. See M. P. Singh, *Aitihāsik pramāṇāvalī aur chatrasāl* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 158–159; B. Gupta, *Mughaloṃ ke antargat bundelkhaṇḍ ke itihās-saṃskṛti ke hindī sāhityik srotoṃ kā mūlyāṅkan* (Jhansi, 2001).

[3] *Chatraprakāś* evidently sparked the interest of the colonial state since there are several nineteenth-century manuscripts in the British Library. See Dipali Ghosh, *A Handlist of Hindi Manuscripts in the India Office Library* (London, 1990s), entry 17: Mss.Hin.B.1, Mss.Hin.B.23, Mss.Hin.C.22, Mss.Hin.B.32.

[4] W. Price, *The Ch,hutru Prukash; A Biographical Account of Ch,hutru Sal, Raja of Boondelkhund* (Calcutta, 1829); W. R. Pogson, *A History of the Boondelas* (Calcutta, 1828).

[5] Pogson, *A History of the Boondelas,* p. vi.

[6] Typical are B. Tivari (ed.), *Chatra-vilās* (Allahabad, 1984), p. 5; M. Gupta, "Prastāvanā [preface]", in K. Singh, *Yugpravartak mahārājā chatrasāl* (Delhi, 2001), pp. vi–viii.

[7] Pogson, *A History of the Boondelas,* p. v.

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out in 1657. However, as the court's frustration increased with *manṣabdārī* (the terms of its service relationship with the Mughal Empire), political fractures cleaved more deeply. The expression 'insurgency' appears in the title of this article but, from the point of view of the Bundela court, the Mughals were unreliable overlords with capricious ways, which made opposing them a legitimate exercise in *kṣatriya dharma*, the Rajput code of ethics to which Chatrasal and his father subscribed. Lāl Kavi presents the rejection of *manṣabdārī* as a political and even, arguably, a moral stance for the Bundelas. Counterposed to Mughal service was *bhumiyāvaṭ*, the claiming of rights over one's own territory,[8] something Chatrasal began to achieve with stunning success from the early 1670s.

I turn now to further introduce Chatrasal and his clan of Bundela Rajputs, as well as the political, literary, and religious contexts that bear critically on any reading of Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś*.

1. Lāl Kavi and the Court of Panna in Bundelkhand

The Bundela kings begin to come into view from the sixteenth century as a clan of self-proclaimed Rajputs from central India. They had relationships both hostile and amicable with the Mughal emperors and are rightly remembered as important patrons of architecture, painting, and literature.[9] Their early capital at Orchha was founded in 1531 on a fertile tract along the Betwa River and later Bundela rulers established themselves at other centres throughout the Bundelkhand region (in today's Madhya Pradesh), such as Datia (built by Bir Singh Deo Bundela), Chanderi (the home base of Bharat Shah Bundela, among others) and, later, Panna, the capital of Chatrasal.[10] Agra and Delhi, the two primary seats of Mughal authority in North India, were in close proximity to Bundela territory, as was the road to the Deccan, a place of the highest strategic military importance. The Bundela regions were also a crucial source of military labour for the Mughal state.[11] Proximity is not destiny, of course, but certainly it made Bundelkhand far too central to ignore.

The Bundela kings, for their part, were hardly in a position to ignore the Mughal Empire. The Mughals always loomed large for the Bundela kings, as is everywhere visible in the Hindi literature that they patronised. Some of the earliest Hindi political *kāvya* that we have on the Mughals is from Bundelkhand, where the pioneering vernacular writer Keśavdās had served as an influential court poet from the late sixteenth century on. Keśavdās began his career by writing a martial ballad that depicted, albeit in romanticised fashion, the heroic Bundela response to the Mughal incursions into Orchha that took place in the 1570s during the reign of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Moreover, several of the critical themes of the *Chatraprakāś* can already be seen in his oeuvre, notably a concern to highlight local authority and the expression of tensions over *manṣabdārī* that would not readily be resolved

[8]Dirk Kolff defines *bhumiyāvaṭ* as a Rajput prince's "raid in search of a territory of his own", *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy,* p. 61.

[9]See, respectively, E. Rothfarb, *Orchha and Beyond: Design at the Court of Raja Bir Singh Dev Bundela* (Mumbai, 2012); K. Seitz, *Orchha, Datia, Panna: Miniaturen von den rajputischen Höfen Bundelkhands 1580-1820* 2 Vols (2015); A. Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York, 2011), pp. 23–64.

[10]Chatrasal's capital at Panna is located less than 30 miles southeast of Khajuraho in today's Madhya Pradesh.

[11]D. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy* (Cambridge, 2002 [1990]), pp. 117–158.

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even generations later.[12] Lāl Kavi, writing in the 1710s from Chatrasal's court in Panna, was working in an established tradition of Hindi historical writing.

We have only scant biographical information about Lāl Kavi, who is largely remembered today through his association with Chatrasal. An official *sanad* (land deed) dating to October 1712 that was issued directly by the king to the poet states:

> . . . You are given the village Chhipa pargana Pawai as Padaragh (freehold). Enjoy it in perpetuity. When the book would be completed much more would be thought about. A seat by the side (in Darbar) is herewith conferred as a mark of favour.[13]

This is rare documentation from premodern India of precise details concerning a Hindi poet's remuneration and status at court.[14] The incomplete book referenced in the *sanad* is almost certainly the *Chatraprakāś*, although Lāl is also credited with other works, including one *Chatravilās*.[15]

Chatrasal's court, in general, is associated with a strong cultural vitality. A recent book has highlighted the vibrant painting traditions of Panna,[16] but the court's literary contours are still not widely understood. Chatrasal himself is said to be the author of several compositions and Lāl Kavi references his patron's interest in literature from a young age.[17] Modern Hindi scholars aver that Chatrasal had 82 poets in his employ, but this assessment is difficult to corroborate on the basis of concrete evidence.[18] It is true that several well-known early modern literary figures, such as Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī (see below) and Nevāz, are thought to have passed through Panna.[19]

The cultural efflorescence that is easiest to document is a religious one, largely owing to Prannath (1618-94), a renowned seventeenth-century charismatic preacher and mystic. He proselytised in various Mughal cities, even attempting to sway the emperor Aurangzeb, before making Panna his home in 1683, where he converted Chatrasal and his heir apparent Hirde Shah.[20] Prannath was deeply influenced by Vaishnavism, Sufism, and messianic Ismaili Shi'ism. He declared himself a messiah and is recognised today as a spiritual authority in

[12]See A. Busch, "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium: The Historical Poems of Keśavdās", *South Asia Research* 25: 1 (2005), pp. 34–37, and H. 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: 2 (2009), pp. 187–228.

[13]"Sanad of Chhatrasal to Lāl Kavi," in B. Gupta, *Contemporary Sources of the Mediaeval and Modern History of Bundelkhand (1531-1857)* Vol. 1 (Delhi, 1999), p. 4.

[14]Codicils note the granting of additional villages eleven years later.

[15]It is difficult to fully attest Lāl's oeuvre, much of which remains unpublished and unstudied. B. Tivari, the editor of *Chatravilās*, mentions 10 works, and also notes that Lāl Kavi was the "gāyatrī guru" (initiatory teacher) and "sāmarik saciv" (war counsellor) of Chatrasal, on what grounds it is difficult to say (p. 6).

[16]K. Seitz, *Orchha, Datia, Panna: Miniaturen*.

[17]Compositions attributed to Chatrasal have been collected in V. Hari (ed.), *Chatrasāl-granthāvalī* (Panna, 1926). Although Lāl Kavi provides a somewhat formulaic account of Chatrasal's upbringing and education, he does pause to note the king's literary proclivities, saying "When he heard the poems of fine poets, he would be immersed in feeling and he enjoyed engaging his intellect in the meanings (*satakabi kabita sunata rasa pāgai, bilasata mati arathani meṃ āgai*), *Chatraprakāś,* (ed.) M. Singh (Delhi, 1973), p. 73.

[18]R. Sharma, *Śaurya evam bhakti ke pratīk mahārājā śrī chatrasāl* (Jaipur, 2002), p. 60.

[19]Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī is credited with ten verses in praise of Chatrasal, *Chatrasāldaśak*. Nevāz (also Nevāj) is a slightly harder poet to place because there are multiple figures with that name. The association with Chatrasal is briefly mentioned in Nagendra (ed.), *Hindī Sāhitya kā bṛhat itihās* Vol 6 (Varanasi, 1973), p. 406; also see H. Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India* (Berlin, 2015), p. 38.

[20]S. Ram, *Swāmī lāldās kṛt mahāmatī prāṇnāth bītak kā madhyakālīn bhāratīya itihās ko yogdān* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 157–176; on his religious sermons in Delhi and the conversion of Chatrasal see B. LaRocque, "Trade, State and

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several modern devotional communities.[21] The *Bītak* ("happenings"), composed by one of Prannath's principal disciples, Lāldās (not the same as Lāl Kavi), contains his revelations and teachings, including accounts of meetings with Aurangzeb.[22] Prannath himself has a considerable literary legacy, and several of his disciples were also poets.

The Panna court's religious fervour finds occasional expression in the work of Lāl Kavi. This is especially the case with his little known *Chatravilās*, a partial narration of the Krishna legend that also drew sustenance from Muslim traditions. A powerful instance of the composite religious ideals espoused by Prannath and his followers is this reported address to Devacandra (the guru of Prannath):

> And how many other means have I assayed?
> I have searched the earth and garnered my strength.
> The Quran speaks of me in the form of Muhammad (*mahamanda rūpa*)
> And people recognised his purpose, knowing him.
> Know this to be the doctrine of comparability.[23]
> Unite everybody under this banner and spread the word.
> The unison between the two religions (*duhū dīna*) has been forgotten.
> Become the people's guiding hand and wake them up to this fact.[24]

The call to religious unity flies in the face of Pogson's account of Hindu-Muslim enmity being at the heart of Lāl Kavi's literary pursuits. The *Chatravilās* goes on to present a complex theology that posits Chatrasal, the reigning monarch of Panna, as a *sarūpa* or incarnation of Krishna.

Lāl Kavi's *Chatraprakāś* is more concerned with the biography of Chatrasal as it pertains to Mughal politics and does not directly mention his apotheosis. Still, two full chapters at the end of the work constitute a distinctive detour into eclectic spiritual topography. Prannath, here termed, *mahāmati*,[25] presents an elaborate sermon on the life story of Krishna and his dalliances with the cowherd maidens of Braj. This is just one of the ways in which the *Chatraprakāś* is often much more than history in the sense we think of history today. This surplus needs to be recognised at the outset of any engagement with the premodern Hindi historical record. In its often idealising stance, the *Chatraprakāś* has much in common with the Indic *carit* or biography genre, which sometimes shades into hagiography.

Religion in Early Modern India: Devotionalism and the Market Economy in the Mughal Empire", unpublished PhD., University of Wisconsin-Madison, History Department, 2004, pp. 206-210.

[21] These include the Pranami and Nijanandi (also Nijdhami) *sampradāy*s (communities).

[22] For a brief synopsis of the life of Prannath see B. LaRocque, "Trade, State and Religion in Early Modern India", pp. 152-166; M. Jayasval, "Bītak kā aitihāsik mahatva", in *Bītak*, (ed.) K. Bhagat, with the commentary of M. Dhami (New Delhi, 1991) pp. 1–5.

[23] The word used here is *tāratamya*, which has a special signification as scripture among practitioners of the Pranami and Nijanandi communities.

[24] *Chatravilās*, p. 28.

[25] As written by Lāl Kavi, the term *mahāmati* means "greatly enlightened". Another variant is "Mahamat" which as noted by Brendan Larocque would mean "the supreme religion" but in a more syncretistic spirit can also be an evocation of Muhammad. See his "Mahamat Prannath and the Pranami Movement: Hinduism and Islam in a Seventeenth-Century Mercantile Sect", in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, (ed.) Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (New Delhi, 2014), p. 357.

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2. 'Light of Chatrasal' and the Logic of the Carit Genre

The title *Chatraprakāś* may be deliberately multivalent. It is obviously meant to shed light on the life of Chatra[sal], in the manner of a *carit* or biographical work and, as is typical of a *carit*, the *Chatraprakāś* contains a considerable amount of *praśasti* or panegyric. This panegyric element would be stressed if we adopt a literal translation, 'light of Chatrasal,' to reflect the brilliance cast by the king's actions in the world.[26] A less overt, but surely also intended, meaning is the idea that this text is an exposition of *chatra-dharma*, chatra being a synonym for Kshatriya that Lāl uses frequently in the text.[27] Seen from this perspective, Lāl Kavi's work would then be directed at enlightening the reader with respect to warrior values, of which Chatrasal is a paragon indeed.

Another facet of the text's genre complexity is the weaving of enchantment scapes into the logic of the narrative, whereby great men are to be found rubbing shoulders with the gods (and goddesses). Several scholars have modelled how engaging with a hermeneutics of the 'strange' or 'supernatural' can open up access to the richness of premodern political, social, and religious landscapes. Thus, Azfar Moin in his analysis of Safavid and Mughal modes of "sacred sovereignty" shows that reports of dreams and supernatural events need to be taken seriously as historical artefacts; or Dipesh Chakrabarty, following Ranajit Guha, cautions against rejecting out of hand as irrational or pre-political realms of experience where men feel themselves to be intensely connected to a divine landscape.[28] Lāl Kavi was obviously writing long before the expectations shaping Rankean historiography took hold, and the work's moments of enchantment should not just be brushed aside in a narrow quest for brute facts; they contribute to the rhetorical power of the narrative and, critically, to the presentation of Bundela political authority.

A good example of how enchantment registers are mobilised in the *Chatraprakāś* is the *vaṃśāvalī* or genealogical account in the opening of the work. Amid the plodding details of king X begot Y and king Y begot Z we learn the arresting story of how this Rajput clan, a distant collateral line of the Gahadavalas of Varanasi (or so the text claims), came to have the name "Bundela". Chatrasal's ancestor Pancam was a great devotee of the local goddess Vindhyacal Devi, and resolved to cut off his head as a sacrifice to her. The Devi was moved to spare him but not before one drop (*bund*) of his blood spilled forth. Behind this playful etymologising is something serious: by highlighting sacred geography Lāl asserts a foundational connection between the Bundela kings and a revered goddess who inhabits the nearby Vindhya hills (on the southern border of Bundelkhand, abutting the Deccan).[29]

[26] As the poet puts it "The brilliant deeds of Chatrasal wipe out the darkness of the kaliyug" (*chatrasāla ke carita ujyāre, meṭata kula kalikāla aṃdhyāre*), *Chatraprakāś*, p. 63. Luminosity is often connected to fame (both are depicted as bright/white) in Indian poetry. Compare the title of Keśavdās' *praśasti-kāvya* to the Mughal Emperor, *Jahāṃgīrjascandrikā*, "Moonlight of the fame of Jahangir". Lāl Kavi must have been aware of the compositions of his famous predecessor, who had worked for a Bundela ruler from whom Chatrasal was descended. There is congruence in the genealogy and Lāl Kavi occasionally adopts similar phrasing and themes employed by Keśavdās. (see notes 29, 85, and 98).

[27] See note 33.

[28] See *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 14-16.

[29] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 4-8 (with genealogical details continuing through p. 13). As elsewhere in the work, Lāl Kavi may have been drawing directly on Keśavdās. The goddess of the Vindhya Mountains is similarly given an important role in the frame story of Keśavdās' *Vīrsiṃhdevacarit* (notably in Chapters Two and Three), where she is hailed as the clan deity or *kuladevī*. Keśavdās may also have been Lāl Kavi's source for the genealogical information

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The nearly sacred status of region (*deś*) in this text, and the devotion that it inspires, is a theme to which we will return.

Other miraculous scenes centre on the protagonist of the work: Chatrasal. When Lāl kavi first introduces him in canto 6, his very birth is miraculous. Chatrasal's mother Lalkumvari had been distraught over losing her eldest son Saravahan to a skirmish with Mughal forces when he was barely a teenager.[30] She takes heart when the deceased Saravahan appears to her in a dream to announce that he would be reborn in her womb:

> I need to take revenge on the Turks, and take care of unfinished business.
> Therefore I will reincarnate and in this way come back and bring you joy.[31]

The stage is now set for one of Chatrasal's main functions in the *carit* — fighting the Mughals. Here Lāl Kavi uses the term 'Turks' to conjure up a longstanding rhetoric of political othering. Such bursts of stridency occur periodically in the work — and these must have conditioned the interpretation of the colonial translator Pogson — but such rhetoric, as will already be evident, is only one component of a far more complex narrative.

At the heart of a *carit* is a sense of awe at the formidable capacity of the *nāyaka* or hero. This means that Lāl Kavi must introduce Chatrasal by setting the stage for the great leader that he will eventually become. His very birth is attended by wondrous signs, for Chatrasal had special physical characteristics that marked him as a *cakravartin*, a ruler over vast realms, in the manner of kings of old. "It was as though *chatradharma* (i.e., *kṣatriya dharma*, the code of warrior ethics) itself had incarnated", exclaims Lāl Kavi.[32] The homonymous conflation of Chatra[sal], the hero, with chatra [Kshatriya] *dharma*, drives home an important point and is a technique Lāl Kavi uses frequently in the work.[33] Here the poet also tellingly uses the Braj verb *autaryau*, (cf. *avatār*, incarnation), possibly a nod to the perceived divine status of Chatrasal that is given more extensive play in Lāl Kavi's *Chatravilās.*

Integral to Chatrasal's awesome power is his ability to be in communion with god. Lāl Kavi devotes an entire canto to Chatrasal's remarkable experience of divine grace as a seven-year old child. His parents had taken him to the Ram temple at Mahoba, where he became awestruck by the icons:

> On both sides the *āratī* began:
> tambourine, cymbals, and conch blaring.
> Children, the elderly, the youths all gathered.
> Men and women alike received *darśana.*
> Chatrasal approached the icons with the open heart of a child.

of the Bundelas. Compare *Vīrsiṃhdevacarit,* in *Keśavgranthāvalī* Vol. 3, (ed.) V. Mishra (Allahabad, 1959), vv. 2.21-54 and *Kavipriyā,* in *Keśavgranthāvalī* Vol. 1, (ed.) V. Mishra (Allahabad, 1954), vv. 1.6-39.

[30] *Chatraprakāś,* pp. 63-65.

[31] *Mohiṃ baira turakana sauṃ lībai, aurau kāja apūraba kībai/tā taiṃ phiri avatārahiṃ laihauṃ imi phiri āi tumhai sukha daihauṃ, Chatraprakāś,* p. 66.

[32] *Cakravarti ke cinha saba, aṅgana-aṅgana rākhi/chatra-dharma janu autaryau, sāmudrika dai sākhi, Chatraprakāś,* p. 67.

[33] Lāl Kavi often uses *chatra* as a homonym, playing off of the dual meaning of Kshatriya and Chatrasal as in these instances: *chatrasāla chatrī chavi chāyau* (Chatrasal was engulfed with warrior luster, *Chatraprakāś,* p. 180) or *tinake tanaya chatrapana dhārī, chatrasāla sohata bhaṭabhārī* ([Campat Rai's] son upheld the warrior code, Chatrasal, a luminous and formidable warrior, *Chatraprakāś,* p. 192).

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He gazed upon the unparalleled beauty of the icons,
convinced in his heart that they were alive.
[He thought to himself]
"If I could play with them, wouldn't it be wonderful?
Maybe if I ask [Ram] he would let me try out his bow for a bit".[34]

The priest tries to explain to young Chatrasal that the idols won't actually speak to him, but he is powerfully drawn to them and refuses to budge. After finding Ram a bit standoffish, he thinks maybe he could convince the baby Krishna to play:

"I will watch him eating butter,
if he wants more then I'll run and get it for him.
And he will dance for me, crown cocked to the side, in great splendour!"[35]

Suddenly a vision overpowers him:

The visible world engendered by Maya gave way,
and the threefold ties by which the world binds snapped.
Waves of bliss flooded forth,
an ineffable effulgence of love (*prema umagi kachu kahī na jāī*).
As love welled up in his heart, the baby Krishna continued to dance.
As he swayed, the crown on his head cast its effulgence,
with light cascading through his body.
Chatrasal was riveted to see his steps, in rhythm,
and those who had come for *darśana* were amazed.
They watched the dancing Krishna,
perceiving something miraculous, unheard of.
The temple priests were all flustered,
and hurried to put the image to rest.[36]

By the logic of *bhakti* (devotion), a tiny child with pure feeling, indeed, pure love (*prema*), knows best. He is able to gain a vision of god, and the priest with all of his fussy rituals is cast as ludicrous. There is a hint of another *bhakti* register, *vātsalya bhāva*, the delight a parent would take in the naughty or cute behaviour of a little boy, as well as considerable humour — poking fun at the priest who is supposed to be the intermediary with god but instead simply impedes the child's access. All of this is fully consistent with the logic of a *carit*. Even at the age of seven Chatrasal is achieving great things.

A novelist or biographer will naturally choose the incidents that add depth to his character, and emplot the story to bring particular points to the foreground. This is certainly the approach of Lāl Kavi, and such narratavising techniques, whether overtly acknowledged or not, are tools of the trade for historians as well.[37] Also critical to Lāl Kavi's narrative infrastructure in the *Chatraprakāś* are several early cantos devoted to Campat Rai (d.1661),

[34] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 70.
[35] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 71.
[36] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 71.
[37] H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London, 1987).

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Chatrasal's father, who was actively involved in Mughal political life toward the end of Shah Jahan's reign (r. 1628–57).[38] These episodes pose one of the central problems of the *Chatraprakāś,* the tensions between empire and region, and set the stage for the successes of Chatrasal later in the century.

3. The Claims of Empire

As a strategy of political incorporation, it became typical from the days of Emperor Akbar for regional kings to serve as *manṣabdār*s in the Mughal politico-military dispensation. Not everybody wanted to be incorporated into the Mughal Empire, of course. This was certainly the case with Chatrasal's ancestor Madhukar Shah (r. 1554–92), the first Bundela ruler to confront Mughal power. It took multiple battles with the imperial forces for him to give up the fight. The tension between being a sovereign ruler of one's own region (*deś*) and a servant of the Mughal emperor was one of the most vexatious political conundrums for Rajputs in this period. As Dirk Kolff has pointed out, the Mughal state did not have the capacity to demilitarise the hinterlands, and one tactic for maintaining control over potentially obstreperous rivals was "employing as soldiers those men it could not otherwise control".[39] But these arrangements were generally unstable.

The Bundelas, like the Sisodiyas of Mewar and other Rajput clans, sometimes fell in with Mughal authority and sometimes rebelled mightily, withdrawing from service and reclaiming tracts of their territory. In introducing Chatrasal's father Campat Rai, Lāl Kavi reports on the Bundela king's militant claims on his region in a homely Braj idiom that is quite typical of his style:

> Shah Jahan had spread everywhere like threatening clouds.
> Campat Rai [countered him like] a fierce storm with gusts of wind.
> He dispersed the imperial forces with a forceful blast, causing the Mughals
> to spit back up the Bundela region that they had swallowed up.[40]

Campat Rai's attempts to reclaim Bundela lands from the empire were unsuccessful, not least because other Bundela kinsmen were in cahoots with the Mughal authorities in a complex power game. His participation in the Mughal imperial system of *manṣabdārī* was no less fraught.

Campat Rai's first experience taking up a *manṣab*, or ranked position, ended disastrously. His imperial post took him to Qandahar in 1653 where he served for a brief period under Shah Jahan's son and heir apparent Dara Shukoh. As Lāl Kavi reports the matter, Dara did not adequately appreciate Campat Rai's achievements and instead of giving credit where credit is due the prince accorded undeserved accolades to Pahar Singh, a Bundela rival who had once tried to kill him.[41] Campat Rai is shown outraged:

[38] For further on the historical background see Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy,* pp. 120-144; B. Saksena, *History of Shahjahan of Dihli* (Allahabad, 1958), pp. 79–93.

[39] D. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p. 16.

[40] *Sāhi jahāṃ umaṛyau ghanaghorā, campati jhanjhā pauna jhakorā/sāhi kaṭaku jhakajhora jhulāyo, gilyoṃ bundelakhaṇḍa ugilāyau, Chatraprakāś*, p. 16. Cf. *gilī bhuṃma bhujabala ugilāī*, p. 93.

[41] Pahar Singh's two attempts to assassinate Campat Rai are what drove him to seek out a *manṣab* with the Mughals. See *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 28-30.

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Where there is no recognition or commendation of merit,
Where the overlord listens with attention to baseless rumours,
Where instead of being appreciative he displays anger,
Is there any point in a man of virtue mobilising his good qualities?[42]

Incensed, Chatrasal's father abandoned his *manṣab*. This frustration with the Mughal overlord can be considered a recurring theme in Bundelkhand politics and one that, as we shall see, crescendoes over time. It is also a recurring theme of the *Chatraprakāś*.

For Campat Rai it proved impossible to opt out of Mughal politics entirely, however, and Chapter Four of the *Chatraprakāś,* devoted to the succession dispute that broke out between Shah Jahan's sons in 1657, features another stint of imperial service. This is where we first meet Aurangzeb, the ultimate victor of what would later be remembered as an infamous and bloody struggle. Aurangzeb was stationed in the Deccan and he joined forces with his brother Murad, who was based in western India, in order to defeat their eldest brother Dara Shukoh (beheaded in 1659). Eventually Aurangzeb would overpower all of his brothers to claim the throne, ruling India for nearly 50 years. Whereas many Rajput contingents fought under the banner of Shah Jahan and Dara Shukoh, the Bundelas fought on Aurangzeb's side. Subhkaran Bundela, a grandson of Bir Singh Deo, acquitted himself well at the battle of Ujjain in April of 1658, in a battalion that marched north from Burhanpur to obtain victory for Aurangzeb.[43] Campat Rai, for his part, joined Aurangzeb's forces at the critical battle of Dholpur in May of 1658.

Lāl Kavi focuses on Dholpur in his treatment of the succession war. Initially, when we hear of Aurangzeb, it is in a panegyric spirit: "*Aurangasāha samāna na dūjā* –there is nobody equal to Shah Aurangzeb!"[44] The emperor's great intelligence also comes in for special notice.[45] The main point, though, is that Aurangzeb found himself suddenly in a bind because after Dara Shukoh's troops had been routed at Ujjain he pivoted toward Dholpur and installed his cannons at a strategic point along the banks of the Chambal river.[46] Aurangzeb was going to need to find a way to out manoeuvre his brother. An immediate strategic concern for the would-be emperor was how to get across the Chambal River.[47]

As is the norm in Mughal-period Hindi texts, the stress is on the local rather than the centrist perspective. Campat Rai is shown coming to Aurangzeb's rescue:

The clamour of battle enveloped the earth.
When Aurangzeb heard that Campat Rai Bundela had arrived,
he took heart, as though he had gained victory over Delhi.[48]

[42] *Jahāṃ na guna kī būjha baṛāī, cugalī sunai citta dai sāī/rījha ṭhaura prabhu khījha janāvai, tahāṃ kauna guna gunī calāvai, Chatraprakāś*, p. 32.

[43] V. G. Khobrekar, (ed.) *Tārīkh-i-dilkasha* (Memoirs of Bhimsen relating to Aurangzib's Deccan campaigns), English Translation by Jadunath Sarkar, in *Sir Jadunath Sarkar Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume* (Bombay, 1972), pp. 17–19.

[44] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 35.

[45] *Nauraṅgasāha . . . vara buddhi pravīnī, Chatraprakāś*, p. 36.

[46] Bhimsen, *Tārīkh-i dilkasha*, p. 20.

[47] *Cāmila pāra kauna vidhi hūjai, Chatraprakāś*, p. 39

[48] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 38.

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Dholpur was close to Bundela territory and Campat Rai knew a less-frequented route that would allow Aurangzeb's troops to get around Dara Shukoh's encampment.

Campat Rai Bundela spoke: "attack from a different area of the riverbank.
If Dara attacks you from where he is stationed, then our hope of victory is lost".
Aurangzeb heard these words and was overcome with wonder:
"Campat, you know another crossing?"
Campat said, "I do know another crossing. Now set out and gain the throne!"[49]

Other sources confirm that Campat Rai's logistical help at Dholpur was key to Aurangzeb's success, but not quite in the same way. Bhimsen's *Tārīkh-i dilkasha*, for instance, presents Subhkaran Bundela as the critical intermediary and his remarks do not exactly redound to the praise of Campat Rai:

[Dara] left the capital of Akbarabad (Agra) with a huge army and headed towards the pass of Dholpur [May 1658] which was situated on the bank of the river Chambal and strengthened this place with *topkhana* (cannons). At that time Champat Bundela, who had not learnt anything except plundering or looting in his life and due to the lack of consolidation and firmness on his part, was loitering about in jungles and mountains like the pigeon who had lost its nest, was called by Subhkaran and allowed to develop hopes about the royal kindnesses. In this way, he got encouragement. He (Subhkaran) took him into his confidence. Aurangzeb awarded him the *punj-hazari* (5,000) rank.[50]

In Lāl Kavi's account, Aurangzeb is, by contrast, ventriloquised as deferential and in great need of his underling's logistical support. The effect of the *Chatraprakāś* passage is to convey an intimacy between Aurangzeb and Campat Rai since these two figures alone occupy the narrative stage. Bhimsen, for his part, adopts a critical tone toward Campat Rai and gives the credit to Subhkaran Bundela.

Amicable relations did not endure between Campat Rai and Aurangzeb. He served in the advance guard of Aurangzeb's army and provided the key logistical information that handed the prince a signal victory against Dara Shukoh, only to be imperiously thrust back into service the minute another of Aurangzeb's brothers, Shah Shuja, threatened from the Bengal front. Lāl Kavi does not go into much detail except to say that Campat Rai was greatly irritated by the command and, as he had done with Dara Shukoh four years earlier, he abandoned his *manṣab*.

Here the text sets up a powerful opposition between *manṣabdāri*, imperial service, and *bhumiyāvaṭ*, the pursuit of one's own territorial claims. Lāl Kavi pithily summarises a core issue using the clipped rhythms of a *Dohā* that perfectly encapsulates the Bundela ruler's deep recalcitrance:

Anakhu baṛhyau manasaba tajyau, sevā kachu na sohāi
ḍaṃkā dai campati calyau, āga āgarai lāi

His disgruntlement grew, he abandoned his *manṣab*,
service didn't suit one bit.

[49] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 39.
[50] *Tārīkh-i dilkasha*, p. 20.

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> Sounding his war drums, Campat Rai set out,
> bringing an inferno to Agra.[51]

His heart set on *bhumiyāvaṭ*, (*bhumiyāvaṭa ura meṃ akhatyārī*),[52] Campat Rai goes on a rampage in the countryside, wreaking havoc on Mughal outposts. Aurangzeb was distracted for a period securing the throne but in the end Campat Rai's ill-fated rebellion is countered with a deadly contingent of Mughal troops. Campat Rai's brother Sujan Rai counsels him to make a treaty with the Mughals, but he is set in his resolve.[53] Sujan Rai also makes an impassioned plea for help to Rani Hirade, the widow of Raja Pahar Singh of Orchha, but she had already been approached by Aurangzeb, and makes the political decision to stand firm in Orchha's partnership with the Mughals. Lāl Kavi later compares her to Shikhandi from the *Mahābhārata*, implying that Aurangzeb has to hide behind a woman in order to kill Campat Rai, as Arjuna had once done in combat with Bhishma.[54] Campat Rai is ultimately cornered and meets his end. The year was 1661. He and his wife decided to kill themselves to avoid being taken captive by the Mughal armies.[55] Lāl Kavi here delivers an important political message about the supremacy of *bhumiyāvaṭ* over *manṣabdārī* — as long as you don't mind dying for it.

Lāl Kavi presents Campat Rai as a martyr for the Bundela cause, but, as with the account of the battle of Dholpur, divergent views of the incident are available in Persian sources. Khafi Khan (d. 1732/33), who wrote one of the principal Persian histories of Aurangzeb's reign, casts Campat Rai as a deserter:

> being misguided by the innate wickedness of his nature, he deserted the army like a sinner and taking the path of flight, reached his old place and resumed the profession of a brigand. . . . He sought asylum with other Zamindars and like a fox he took refuge in the hills and caves. He was eventually captured and his head was struck off and brought to the court. It was put on the gibbet of retribution so that the people could point at it with their fingers.[56]

A later biographical dictionary by Shahnavaz Khan takes a similar stance: "as he [Campat Rai] was innately seditious, he ran away to his home . . . and took to highway robbery".[57] The Hindi and Persian texts could not be more at odds with one another in their assessment of Campat Rai's behaviour and his final moments. About the only thing they agree on is that he was backed into a corner and met his death (was it suicide or did the imperial authorities reach him first and kill him?). Is he to be seen as a noble rebel who stood up to Aurangzeb and met his death defiantly like a brave Rajput (the view of Lāl Kavi), or a seditious fugitive

[51] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 44. The "inferno" (āga, a word in all likelihood chosen for its pleasing assonance with *āgarai,* i.e., Agra) is evidently a metaphor for the disruption that Campat Rai occasioned Aurangzeb, who was still battling his brothers in the succession struggle.

[52] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 44.

[53] *Hama na sāha kauṃ manasaba chaihaiṃ, bhumiyāvaṭa meṃ sāmila raihaiṃ, Chatraprakāś*, p. 49.

[54] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 74. Shikhandi had been born as Amba in a previous life and gravely wronged by Bhishma, who abducted her even though she was in love with Salva. In the end Bhishma recognised his error but when he tried to return Amba to Salva the latter rejected her as damaged goods.

[55] *Chatraprakāś,* pp. 59-60.

[56] S. M. Haq, *Khafi Khan's History of 'Alamgir (Muntakhab al-lubāb)* (Karachi, 1975), p.134.

[57] S. Khan, *Ma'āṣir al-umarā* Vol. 2, translated by H. Beveridge (Calcutta, 1952), pp. 720–721. Spellings have been lightly emended for clarity.

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(the view of the available Persian sources)?[58] The truth, as is so often the case, must lie somewhere in between.

With the death of Campat Rai it is time for Lāl Kavi to turn his attention to the real hero of his work, Chatrasal. The Bundela prince is just eleven or twelve years old when he learns of his parents' death in a moving scene. At first he gives way to grief, convulsing with sobs.[59] Lāl Kavi does not miss the opportunity to expound on the transitoriness of life and delivers a short *bhakti* sermon (such commemorative moments occur periodically in the text and seemingly reflect the penchant for religious discourse at the Panna court):

> The ways of the world are just like daydreams.
> They superficially appear real but everything passes in an instant.[60]

Like a good Kshatriya, Chatrasal forces himself to get a grip (*tajyau soka himmata ṭhika ṭhānī*).[61] He goes to meet his brother Angad, who had earlier served alongside Campat Rai in the Mughal armies (another brother, Saravahan, as noted, had already been killed in a skirmish with the Mughals). There aren't too many choices. When Chatrasal is sixteen,[62] he too enlists in the Mughal army and, at the recommendation of the Kachwaha king Mirza Raja Jai Singh, is placed in the army of Navab Diler Khan Ruhilla.[63] This generation too is destined to experience the revolving door of *manṣabdārī*.

Chatrasal, like his father, becomes disillusioned with Mughal service. Lāl Kavi records one major catalyst: an intense and difficult battle fought under the aegis of Diler Khan. During the course of the battle, the advance guard that Chatrasal is leading is severely strained but the young warrior is somehow able to stave off the enemy. Like the childhood vision in the temple, this scene is imbued with otherworldly elements. All of the other soldiers and characters fall out from view for a moment as an almost cinematic lens showcases the Bundela warrior's exceptional courage and survival instincts:

> *ganai na golī tīra chatārau, dekhata deva acambhau bhārau*
> *eka bīra sahasana para dhāvai, hātha aura ko uṭhana na pāvai*
> *sāṃgana māri karī ghanaghānī, samara bhūmi sronita sauṃ sānī*
> *nacī chatā kī jora kṛpānī, kilakī umagi kālikā rānī*

> Chatrasal paid no heed to the cannon shot and arrows,
> while the gods looked on in wonder.
> One hero rushed against thousands,
> but nobody could lift a hand against him.
> With spear thrusts he inflicted grave damage,
> soaking the battlefield in blood.

[58] Heidi Pauwels has also noted similar characterisations in her comparison of memory traditions that focus on the Akbar-period Bundela ruler Madhukar Shah: the Mughal sources invariably see him as a "recalcitrant rebel". See "The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor", pp. 192-196.

[59] *Dukha kī lahara lahara par āī, hiyau hilaura dṛgana para chāī, Chatraprakāś*, p. 75.

[60] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 75.

[61] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 75.

[62] Here the text appears to skip quickly over a period of 4-5 years.

[63] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 79-81; for further context, see M. Singh, Introduction to *Chatraprakāś*, p. 7.

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Chatrasal's dagger danced forcefully,
and the majestic Kali cackled in delight.[64]

Heroic registers are very much the stuff of Hindi historiography, and here an aura of enchantment is privileged over verisimilitude — note how the gods are watching in wonder from on high, and the bloodthirsty goddess Kali spurs the warrior on. Lāl Kavi portrays the incident as an almost superhuman trial for Chatrasal. He was severely wounded and became separated from his contingent. Night had fallen and the Navab's victory drums were blaring, but Chatrasal could not make it back to camp. His comrades searched the whole night, despairing over a victory that now felt empty with the apparent loss of their leader (*jīte juddha, taū mana hārai*).[65] Suddenly, just as the sun was rising, one of the soldiers hears a voice. Chatrasal had survived the night, sword in hand, passing in and out of consciousness on the cold earth as his horse stood watch. The matter is reported as a *kautuka*, a miracle, and a wonder (*aciraja*) that had never been seen before.[66]

The enemy had now been routed, at great personal cost, but who gained from these efforts? Not Chatrasal. Lāl Kavi adopts an indignant tone:

Pleased, the emperor increased the Navab's *manṣab*.
Who did not reap the rewards of Chatrasal's labours?[67]

This provides the occasion for one of the more scathing critiques of *manṣabdārī* in the work, which is worth citing at some length:

When you serve an idiot, thinking him to be your well-wisher,
what good could ever come of it?
My experience is that it's pointless toil.
I have protected the warrior's code,
But neither was he pleased nor did he acknowledge it.
It's like singing the praises of a fool,
delighting in a buffalo playing the *bina*.
It's like planting lotus flowers in the ground,[68] or watering the desert.
It's like rubbing scent all over the body of a donkey,
or feeding camphor to a crow.
It's like revealing a mantra to a deaf man,
or showing a picture to Surdas.[69]
It's like sharpening a hammer to make an axe — to serve an idiot master.[70]

Though couched in humour, the political import rings loud and clear. The rewards for being an imperial servant were not sufficient to outweigh the loss of independence.

[64] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 81.
[65] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 82.
[66] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 82–84.
[67] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 85.
[68] Lotuses are supposed to grow in water.
[69] Surdas was a famous Hindi poet who was thought to be blind.
[70] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 86.

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The Mughals had, in Lāl Kavi's words, "swallowed up Bundelkhand," rendering its power *hīnau,* or diminished.[71] Chatrasal's father had striven, unsuccessfully, to protect the honour of Bundelkhand.[72] This was still unfinished business.

4. The Claims of Region

Such regionalist claims become particularly visible in Chapter Eleven, which features a momentous meeting between Chatrasal and the Maratha leader Shivaji. The year was 1670. Shivaji's relationship with the Mughals had never been amicable, but it had been seriously deteriorating for a number of years. In 1663 he had attacked the camp of the Mughal officer Shaista Khan in the Deccan; the same year he staged a daring raid on the Mughal port of Surat. The treaty of Purandar of 1665, brokered by the Rajput general Jai Singh Kachwaha after a prolonged siege, did not last long. In 1666 Shivaji's trip to the Mughal court at Agra to pay his respects to Aurangzeb took a disastrous turn and he was put under house arrest. (He escaped.) In the years 1669–70 he resumed his attacks on forts in the countryside and raided Surat a second time.[73] Thus, at the time that Chatrasal went to meet Shivaji he was in flagrant revolt against the empire. In a dramatic passage Chatrasal and a small escort are shown navigating by the stars and crossing the monsoon-bloated Bhima and Krishna rivers, seeking a covert meeting with Shivaji in his camp. Chatrasal may have had in mind an alliance with the Maratha leader. It is worth quoting in some detail the reported conversation:

> Shivaji asked after his welfare and sat him down beside him,
> saying "What brings you here, brave Chatrasal?"
>
> Shivaji listened, as Chatrasal told his tale (*kisā apanī*).
> Then Shivaji said, "you are the foremost of Kshatriyas.
> Go and conquer your territory and rule from there (*jīti āpanī bhuṃma kau, karau desa kau rāja*)".
>
> Rule over your territory, Chatrasal. There's no difference between you and me.
> Go back home and defeat the Mughals. Press hard and defeat the forces of Delhi.
> Never trust those Turks. You are a lion, consider Turks the elephant.[74]

This is a pivotal moment in the *Chatraprakāś*. Chatrasal is energised by Shivaji's vehement and rousing words of support and turns back home to fight for his *deś*.

Chatrasal is often compared to his better-known Maratha contemporary, and rightly so. He and Shivaji were operating in similar political milieus and both were frustrated with the terms of empire. It may be germane to mention here that Shivaji's Brajbhasha court poet Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī, writing these lines in 1673, likened the Mughal administrative relationship to prostitution:

[71] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 16-17.

[72] *Aiṛa bundelakhaṇḍa kī rākhī, campati kīrti jagata mukha bhākhī* , *Chatraprakāś*, p. 85; and similarly: *campati rāi tega kara līnī, opa bundela baṃsa kau dīnī*, *Chatraprakāś*, p. 95.

[73] For details of Shivaji's military and diplomatic exploits during these years, see S. Gordon, *The Marathas: 1600-1818* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 70–80.

[74] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 88. The relatively weak elephant is considered the enemy of the stronger lion.

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A governorship from Delhi (*sūbedārī dillīdala kī*) is like an enticing prostitute.
Seeing her beauty, who doesn't long to possess her?
Her manner is to conquer the world by the power of trickery.
Whomever she approaches she immediately renders penniless
Bhūṣaṇ says, spending time in her company brings no reward.[75]

Bhūṣaṇ made his career at Shivaji's court, expressing this ethos of rebellion in his magnum opus, the *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*.

Expressing an ethos of rebellion vis à vis the Mughals is also a prime concern of Lāl Kavi. Chatrasal came away from his meeting with the Maratha leader deeply inspired. He resolved to give up his *manṣab* to pursue the claims of *deś*. Shivaji would proclaim himself king in 1674, staging an elaborate coronation ritual. Chatrasal was not far behind, establishing himself as King at Panna in 1683.[76] As regional clan leaders both Shivaji and Chatrasal had the resources and logistical knowledge to fight the Mughals effectively on their home terrain.[77]

Chatrasal needed manpower, though, and not all of the people whom he approached were fully convinced of his plan. First his Bundela kinsman Subhkaran (mentioned above as an Aurangzeb loyalist in the succession war) tried to talk him out of this rash move, offering to intercede with the Mughals to help him procure a favourable *manṣab*.[78] Chatrasal could not be tempted. He travelled across the Narmada river to the city of "Naurangabad" (presumably Aurangabad) to meet his cousin Baldau[79] and delivered an impassioned speech:

I have abandoned my *manṣab*,[80] for in my heart
rebellion rages against the Shah.
Join me! You will help me remedy the problem.
When two beneficial forces come together,
even a difficult task can be accomplished.
(Bala)rama and Krishna removed the burdens of the world
and Rama and Lakshmana together killed Ravana.
The wise Campat Rai and Sujan [Rai]
joined forces to break the enemy armies.
And similarly you and I will unite as brothers
and grave harm will be inflicted upon the Turks.[81]

Baldau was swayed by the proposition but not fully convinced. Only when he received a sign (*isārata*) from on high did he prove willing to commit.[82] Still, it was a start. Chatrasal crossed back over the Narmada into Bundelkhand and began to amass further supporters as

[75] Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī, *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* (Delhi, 1982), v. 163.

[76] For a brief synopsis of Chatrasal's political life under the Mughals and pursuit of independence in Bundelkhand, see B. LaRocque, "Trade, State and Religion in Early Modern India" pp. 212-213.

[77] On the impact of the Marathas' expertise in guerilla warfare, see S. Gordon, *The Marathas*, pp. 37-41, 75.

[78] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 90.

[79] Baldau is called *bhāī* or brother in the text, a term that in Hindi also applies to cousins. According to the text's editor, Mahendrapratap Singh, Baldau (also Baldivan) was the paternal cousin of Chatrasal with ancestral holdings in the area of Pahara. *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 104-105.

[80] The word *manṣab* is often used as a stand-in for the Mughal relationship in this text.

[81] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 97-98.

[82] This episode is a useful reminder of the power of the occult in everyday political life. For more on this important theme, see A. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012).

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well as supplies.[83] At Baldau's suggestion Chatrasal went to the village of Bijauri to enlist his own brother Ratan Shah into his army. The cause is clearly stated:

> Set your heart on your own territory (*bhumiyāvaṭ*),
> campaign for your lands (*desa*).
> Rush against the Delhi forces, and brandish your sword on the Turks.[84]

Ratan Shah, however, could not be convinced of the viability of Chatrasal's plan. He considered it empty daydreaming, "like trying to paint frescoes without a wall".[85]

Chatrasal was, in the end, successful in mustering the necessary support. For one, the earth herself (*vasudhā*) was on his side. She appeared to him in a dream and vowed to assist Chatrasal. (Again, enchanted and documentary registers sit quite comfortably alongside one another in this text.) Leaders from the region also pledged their support, including another of Chatrasal's brothers, Angad, and one Baki Khan Bundela, described as a friend in arms to Chatrasal, as Sugriva was to Rama.[86]

For the next nine chapters — nearly the remainder of the work — Chatrasal and his supporters rampage through Bundela territory, terrorising enemies and exacting tribute. The Mughals are seriously consternated and send an embassy. Chatrasal was causing the "oxcart of Delhi" to become "unhitched," as Lāl Kavi puts the matter in one of his lively expressions.[87] Descriptions in canto after canto of unrelenting violence, guerilla warfare, and looting — Lāl Kavi uses the Hindi word *lūṭ* with some regularity — naturally prompt curiosity about the moral contours of Chatrasal's legitimacy. It is worth surveying the various justifications that Lāl Kavi provides for Chatrasal's insurgency. What was the Bundela leader fighting for? Was he, in the formulation of Pogson, "stemm[ing] the tide of Mohummudan conquest"?

5. The Political Ethics of the *Chatraprakāś*

Lāl Kavi often lingers very precisely over matters of local geography, and we too must linger over what this may have meant to the court as a political position. The *Chatraprakāś,* as noted, introduces the Bundelas as a people but it is also very much concerned with Bundelkhand *as a place.* Chatrasal repeatedly vows to take back his *deś* (a term that is related, but not exactly equivalent, to the word's current meaning of *nation*). This and the related principle of *bhumiyāvaṭ* were at the heart of Chatrasal's (ultimately unsuccessful) exhortations to his brother Ratan Shah, cited above, and can also be considered the substance of the conversation between Shivaji and Chatrasal. There were also material gains. Baldau and Chatrasal worked out an arrangement for dividing up the spoils of their conquest (45% and 55%, respectively)

[83] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 99-100. Here the text takes a strongly documentary turn, with Lāl Kavi providing specific names and even the time of year: Baishakh (March/April) of V.S. 1728, approximately 1671.
[84] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 100.
[85] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 101. Keśavdās had used a similar expression in *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* 1.33: *bina bhītihi kata citrahi citra.*
[86] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 104.
[87] *Kula dillī dala bahala kau, gayau dhurā so ṭuṭi, Chatraprakāś*, p. 171.

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and, like the Marathas, Chatrasal demanded *cauth* (a tax of "one quarter") as he captured Mughal territories.[88]

In Lāl Kavi's account, Chatrasal's military adventures also become something of a textual mapping of Bundelkhand. These excerpts from Chapter Seventeen powerfully create the sense of Chatrasal's moving through space, while simultaneously conjuring up the relentlessness of the warrior king's onslaught:

salyo sāla[89] *sūbāni ke, dhakkani halai paṭhāna*
diyau bhāla chatrasāla kai, bijaitilaka bhagavāna

jūjha jīti nīsāna bajāe, hvāṃ tai dhaurīsāgara āe
karī daura dulacīpura māryau, dalamali dubani barahaṭā bāryau
umaṛi dalani eracha jhakajhorī, nipaṭa bikaṭa magarauṭha marorī
banahulī meṃ āga lagāī, phiri jalālapura lūṭa macāī.

A thorn in the side of the Mughal officials, his onslaught ousted the Pathans.
On the forehead of Chatrasal god put a victory mark.

He was victorious in battle and his war drums blared.
From there he set out to Dhaurisagar
And campaigned murderously in Dulachipura
He crushed the enemy and razed Barhata.
He surged forth and rampaged against the forces of Erach
And he took down Magrauth with extreme force.
He set fire to Banhuli, and then looted Jalalpur.[90]

And:

Kumbharāja kañjiyau ujāryau, kaṭakana kacari kuṃvarapura ḍāryau
Lai kabīrapura layau kachauvā, kanharāpura meṃ rahyau na kauvā
Raundi ranauda ranagiri lāī, haṛā jamahaṭā lūṭi macāī
Phatepurā candāpura līnau, cāmpi cāṃdapura capaṭau kīnau

He laid waste Kumbhraj and Kanjiya too, his armies trampled Kumvarpur.
Having taken Kabirpur, he took Kachova, Kanharapur was depopulated.
He crushed Ranaud and Rangiri, then plundered Hada and Jamhata.
He took Fatehpura and Candapur, then crushed Candpur with an attack.[91]

These are literary descriptions (note the force of the alliteration and onomatopoeia) but they also produce a very specific territorial imagining.[92] Lāl Kavi's insistent listing of local

[88]On the financial arrangements with Baldau, see *Chatraprakāś*, p. 104. For a brief description of *cauth*, see C. Asher and C. Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 240. References to *cauth*, and the related concept of *ḍāṃḍ*, are numerous in this section of the *Chatraprakāś*. See, for instance, pp. 100, 109-110, 114, 144-153.

[89]Chatrasal, whose very name means "thorn to the enemy" (derived from Sanskrit *śatruśalya*), is aptly described as a "thorn that pierced through" (*salyo sāla*), cutting his enemies to the quick.

[90]*Chatraprakāś*, p. 134.

[91]*Chatraprakāś*, p. 141.

[92]M. P. Singh discusses the extent of Chatrasal's conquests in Bundelkhand (and Baghelkhand to the east), in *Aitihāsik Pramāṇāvalī*, pp. 114-124.

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place names reinforces his patron's political aspirations that were governed by the principle of Bundelkhand for the Bundela kings.[93]

Another political concern might be said to coalesce under the rubric of warrior ethics. The pan-Indic tradition of *kṣatriya dharma* was referenced above, which Lāl Kavi is able constantly to stress since one meaning of the first half of Chatrasal's name is "Kshatriya".[94] Also in play are more historically specific concepts from the early modern period. One is the notion of *uddim* (Sanskrit *udyama*), or personal striving, which may have had special resonance for a Kshatriya community like the Bundelas that lacked the stature of the older aristocratic Rajput groups (such as Mewar, Amber, and Marwar).[95] When Lāl Kavi reports on Chatrasal's efforts to convince his brother Ratan Shah to join him, the strategy was to deploy generalised remarks on the value of *bhumiyāvaṭ* and the duty of a Kshatriya in combination with a sermon on *uddim*.

> God has bestowed the potential for striving on all four *varṇa*s that are recognised in this world. He gave us hands and feet, and the wise make use of them. It is by personal striving that households amass wealth, and when sons accomplish something we speak well of them. If you strive then others will join you. And through striving we gain fame in the world. Through striving the ocean can be crossed. Through striving we attain god. Moreover, at the primal moment of creation god imparted to Kshatriyas the way of the sword. And thus we may conquer and possess the world in accordance with the heroism we display. So campaign now for your lands (*tātai daura desa kau kījai*). Gain the earth on the strength of your sword.[96]

Here *uddim* becomes a powerful rhetorical justification for seizing territory by force. This is not illegitimate looting.[97] It is presented more as a philosophy of action grounded in human capacity (as opposed to fatalism), a view evinced elsewhere in Mughal-period cultural discourse.[98] Lāl Kavi's argument is that *uddim* is the very culmination of *kṣatriya dharma* and at the same time the fulfillment of one's highest potential as a human being.

We have also referenced extensively the tensions with regard to *manṣabdārī* in this period. The Mughal Empire had fought off rebellions since its very inception. But something had changed in the century that had passed between Lāl Kavi and Keśavdās. There were ever deeper fissures and now the Mughals, while formidable, could be successfully contested. Mughal historians often speak of "the crisis in *manṣabdārī*" in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, posing it as an economic question. (In short, there were too many

[93] Lāl Kavi's regionalised description of Chatrasal's conquests is a far cry from the more universalising *digvijaya* in the Sanskrit political imaginary, which envisioned "power up to the horizons". See Sheldon Pollock, *Language of the Gods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2006), pp. 237–258.

[94] See note 33.

[95] I owe this insight to Cynthia Talbot. On the lowly status of the Bundelas, see Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, Chapter 4.

[96] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 102. *Uddim* is also invoked in Chatrasal's conversation with Subhkaran Bundela (p. 90).

[97] Cf. M. Singh, Introduction to *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 46-47.

[98] Ali Anooshahr has called attention to a late sixteenth-century pivot in Persian historiography towards newly elevating human reason above fate. See "Author of One's Fate: Fatalism and Agency in Indo-Persian Histories", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49 (2) (2012), pp. 197-224. Analogues can also be found in Hindi texts. For instance, in Keśavdās' *Jahāṃgīrjascandrikā* (1612), the Mughal *manṣabdār* Iraj Shahnavaz Khan (son of the famous Mughal general 'Abd al-Rahim Khan-i khanan), is portrayed asking Keśavdās whether personal striving or fate play the greater role in a man's life: *kahijai kesaurāyajū, uddima baṛo ki karma, Jahāṃgīrjascandrikā*, (ed.) K. Lal (Allahabad, 1994), v. 10. The work then enfolds as a debate between these two forces.

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appointments being made, and the empire lacked the fiscal resources to pay its swelling ranks of officers).[99] The view from Hindi sources is slightly different, for *manṣabdārī* is also posited as a problem of political ethics. Rajputs who had once been stakeholders in the empire were becoming disillusioned.

6. Eruptions of Stridency

In the *Chatraprakāś*, expressions of Bundela disaffection are occasionally tinged with religious rhetoric. For instance, early in the work, at the very moment when Chatrasal is coming of age as a warrior, he remembers his deceased father as a protector of "Hindu dharma" and the text states explicitly that Aurangzeb is an enemy of the faith:

Auraṃgasāha takhata-pati jāgyau, meṭana hindu dharama kauṃ lāgyau
campati hindu dharama rakhavārau, dillī dala kau jītanahārau

When Aurangzeb came to power he began to wipe out Hindu *dharma*.
Campat Rai Bundela protected Hindu *dharma*, defeating the Delhi forces.[100]

The eve of Chatrasal's departure to meet Shivaji also prompts the author to adopt a strident tone, as the Bundela warrior thinks to himself:

Hindū turaka dīna dvai gāe, tina sauṃ baira sadā cali āe
Lekhyau sura asurana kauṃ jaiso, kehari karina bakhānyau taisau
Jaba te sāha takhata para baiṭhe, taba taiṃ hinduna sauṃ ura aiṃṭhe
Mahaṃge kara tīrathani lagāe, beda divāle nidara ḍhahāe
Ghara ghara bāṃdhi jañjiyā līne, apane mana bhāe saba kīne
Saba rajapūta sīsa nita nāvaiṃ, aiṛha karaiṃ nita paidala dhāvaiṃ
Aiṛa eka sivarāja nibāhi, karai āpane cita kī cāhī

Hindus and Turks have been considered two religions, constantly at odds.
They are like the gods and the demons,
They are spoken of as lions and elephants.[101]
Ever since the emperor took the throne
he has turned his heart against the Hindus.
He imposes heavy taxes on religious sites and
Brazenly destroys Vedic [rites] and temples.
He imposes on every household the *jiziyā*, and acts imperiously.
All of the Rajputs bow down in subservience, remaining at his beck and call.
Shivaji alone shows some pride. He acts independently.[102]

Note here the very specific critique of the emperor's religious policy — the very sorts of issues that still incite sensitivity among Hindus today. Still, we should recall that the actual encounter with Shivaji — at least as Lāl Kavi reported the matter — focused on the theme of *deś*, with not one word spoken on the subject of Hindu oppression.

[99] See (among others), C. Asher and C. Talbot, *India Before Europe*, pp. 235-236.
[100] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 73.
[101] See note 74.
[102] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 86.

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The most polemical sections of the *Chatraprakāś* are in the lead up to Chatrasal's rebellion. In one verse the tone becomes downright militant, as a Mughal representative in Bundelkhand, one Fidai Khan, is made out to be the mouthpiece for orthodox Islam:

> One hears in the city of Orchha that the Hindus have become uppity (*hindū gahaiṃ gumāna*).
> They constantly worship idols and spread heresy (*kufrāna*).
> Temple banners fly high, and bells and conches and horns resound . . .
> Muslims (*musalamāna*) who hear the sound of their conches
> are not able to ascend to heaven (*bhista na pāvai*).
> They cover their heads and avert their ears.
> May God save us from hell! (*dojakha taiṃ khudā bacāvai*).
> Therefore their temples should be destroyed, and mosques built in their place.
> Mullahs will call out the *azān*, *namāz* will be read . . .
> I will implement the order of the Shah [Aurangzeb], and eradicate all heresy.
> Destroying their temples I will eradicate heresy,
> and build mosques in their place.
> I will spread the fame of the empire,
> and make good on my name Fidai Khan![103]

In the end Fidai Khan *does not* make good on his name. His forces are quickly dispersed under the leadership of one Dhuramgad Bundela.[104] But the ire of Raja Sujan Singh, the reigning monarch of Orchha, has been roused. He sends a delegation to his Bundela relative Chatrasal.

If Fidai Khan is the mouthpiece of orthodox Islam in this text, Sujan Singh comes across as equally vociferous on the Hindu side. In intense discussions between the two leaders the campaign to take back Bundela territory suddenly becomes deeply overlain with religious concerns, as when Sujan Singh exclaims, "the emperor has begun to destroy Hindu *dharma*".[105] Sujan Singh also speaks passionately of what he sees as Hindu weakness and a fear of Turk depredation:

> Ever since Campat Rai departed, Hindus have become weak (*paryau hīna hindavānau*).
> And the Turks have increased in might.
> Who will protect the honour[106] of the Hindus?
> You are the illustrious son of Campat and will steady the rod of *kṣatriya dharma*.
> You have taken courage into your heart, a Campat returned to earth.
> Now strap on your sword and luster will return to the face of Hindus (*tau phira caṛhai hindu mukha pānī*).[107]

There is a likely historical basis for feelings of wounded Hindu pride at the Orchha court. Judging from other historical markers in the text (Lāl Kavi occasionally inserts specific dates), the meeting between Sujan Singh and Chatrasal would have taken place in either 1670 or

[103] *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 91-92. In Persian the word *fidā'ī* means somebody who sacrifices himself for a noble cause.
[104] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 92.
[105] *Pātasāha lāge karana hindu dharma kau nāsu*, *Chatraprakāś*, p. 93. Cf. B. LaRocque, "Mahamat Prannath and the Pranami Movement," p. 355 (quoting one Ashajit, a contemporary of Aurangzeb who considered him "an enemy of Hindus."
[106] Lit. *torā*, "turban ornament" (Arabic *ṭurrā*).
[107] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 95.

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1671 — in other words, just after a Mughal-initiated spate of temple destruction in 1669–70.[108] Prominent among the demolished monuments was Mathura's acclaimed Keshavadeva temple, built by the Bundela kings.[109] This recent event may have made issues of "Hindu *dharma*" politically and religiously sensitive, although it is difficult to state this conclusively, since on the two occasions when Lāl Kavi does refer explicitly to temple destruction he does not specify the exact incident.

What is the best strategy for construing such militant passages? In recent decades a voluminous body of secondary literature has been generated around the question of whether religious communalism existed in premodern India.[110] Did the people we now refer to as "Hindus" self-identify as Hindu? One dominant position has been that a strong substantive sense of Hindu identity arose only in response to colonial rule, during the nineteenth century. Earlier uses of the term "Hindu", in this view, are held to be "ethno-geographical" rather than pointing to sharply delineated religious feeling. On the basis of both European and Hindi sources David Lorenzen has argued against the idea that Hinduism was invented by the British, and Andrew Nicholson has provided further evidence from Sanskrit philosophical discourse for the existence of consolidating forces in Hinduism and a concomitant strain of Hindu identity long before the nineteenth century.[111]

Coming in on the side of those who believe that pronouncements about religious identity must be made only after weighing the precolonial evidence, I propose that these religiously-loaded passages in the *Chatraprakāś* force us to consider the possibility that eruptions of stridency, even when governed by stock polarities of "Hindu" versus "Turk", can have more than just "ethno-geographical" meaning. Surely we have to pay attention when Lāl Kavi speaks of something called "Hindu *dharma*", whether it is Aurangzeb being accused of destroying it, or a powerful exhortation to Chatrasal from Sujan Singh "to go forth and spread the Hindu *dharma* in the world after doing battle with the forces of Delhi and routing them".[112] There can always be room for debate about how to translate Sanskrit terms like *hindu*, or *dharma*, or the Arabic word *dīn*, but it is difficult to consider a struggle religiously neutral when the terms are juxtaposed in this manner. At the same time, it does not always seem possible to disaggregate religious feeling from the realm of political motivations.[113]

Here it may be relevant to highlight Lāl Kavi's portrayal of Aurangzeb as treating Hindus unfairly in light of other testimony from the Hindi literary record that shows ecumenism

[108] This meeting is described in the canto previous to the one in which Chatrasal's meeting with Baldau in the Deccan is reported. See note 81.

[109] R. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States", *Beyond Turk and Hindu*, pp. 264-266; cf. H. Pauwels, "A Tale of Two Temples: Mathurā's Keśavadeva and Orcchā's Caturbhujadeva, *Religious Cultures in Early Modern India,* (eds.) R. O'Hanlon and D. Washbrook (London and New York, 2012), pp. 156–159.

[110] Many scholars have weighed in on the interpretation of terms like "Turk" and "Hindu" in the premodern literary record. Several now-classic discussions are C. Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 37:4 (1995), pp. 692–722; D. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism? *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 41:4 (1999), pp. 630–659; and D. Gilmartin and B. Lawrence (eds.), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville, FL, 2000).

[111] D. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism"; A. J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism* (New York, 2010), pp. 196–205.

[112] *Hindu dharama jaga jāi calāvau, dauri dilīdala halani halāvau*, *Chatraprakāś*, p. 96. Cf. D. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism," pp. 651-653.

[113] For the Maratha case, cf. P. Deshpande, *Creative pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (New York, 2007), p. 42.

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to have been an important political virtue. In one of the earliest works of Hindi literature, Maulana Daud's *Candāyan* (1379), Firoz Shah Tughluq's minister Khan-i Jahan is praised for treating Hindus and Turks equally.[114] Akbar was widely appreciated for his respect for and even adoption of Hindu ways.[115] Hindi poets accorded Jahangir and Shah Jahan epithets that extol them for "protecting the two faiths/paths".[116] Such exhortatory political epithets are not just restricted to Muslim rulers but are attested for Rajputs too.[117] The operative concept is that there were two *dīn*, or two *rāh* ("faiths/paths"), important precolonial evidence of a binary that at least occasionally structured religious difference. Just rulers were supposed to be solicitous of the needs of *both*. In a world where protecting religious freedom was seen as a defining component of political ethics, Aurangzeb was failing to live up to the standard.[118]

Conclusion

The ending of *Chatraprakāś* is slightly anti-climactic, in all likelihood because the work remained unfinished,[119] but the vicissitudes of *manṣabdārī* remain a critical theme until the last page. In the end Shivaji's prediction came true. Chatrasal did get his *deś*, ruling from his capital at Panna. A later Hindi poet, Mān Kavi, writing of Bundelkhand politics that were still turbulent a century after Lāl Kavi, spoke with evident admiration of Bundelkhand as "Chatrasal's place".[120] This was the *deś* that Chatrasal fought for, and his struggles against the Mughal Empire are often seen today as a proto-nationalist battle of independence to throw off the yoke of Muslim rule.[121] But this is not a correct representation. Lāl Kavi foregrounds Chatrasal's struggles with the Mughals (and also his own kinsmen) over *deś*; religious concerns were not the primary stakes. Moreover, Chatrasal's victory was never definitive. The Bundela rebel-king may have briefly "unhitched the oxcart of Delhi", but he could not remain unyoked from it. His relationship with the Mughals lurched along, sometimes starting up again only to be abruptly halted in its tracks. And upon the accession of Aurangzeb's son Bahadur Shah I (r. 1707–12), one of Chatrasal's own sons was placed in Mughal service. This is where the work ends, a fade-out rather than a definitive conclusion, in Chapter 26. The empire never fully recedes.[122]

[114] *Hindū turuka, duhūṃ sama rākhai,* Daud, *Cāndāyan,* (ed.) M. Gupta (Agra, 1967), v. 14.

[115] The Kachwaha court poet Narottam Kavi, a contemporary of Akbar, said of the emperor, "This is Hindu rule, who says it is Turk?" or "Akbar loves Hindus, he has turned against the Turks", *Māncarit*, (ed.) G. Bahura (Jaipur, 1990), vv. 123-125.

[116] Keśavdās referred to Jahangir as *duhuṃ dīna kauṃ sāhiba*, "the master of both faiths," *Jahāṃgīrjascandrikā* , v. 31. In his *Binhairāso*, a Rajasthani account of the succession conflict between Aurangzeb and Dara Shukoh in 1658, Maheśdās signals his approval of Shah Jahan by saying that he ruled justly over "the two paths" (*rāha dahuṃvai). Binhairāso*, (ed.) S. Shekhavat (Jodhpur, 1966), v. 10.

[117] See A. Busch, "The Rulers of Bundi in Mughal-Period Literary Culture", in *Bundi Fort: a Rajput World,* (ed.) M. Beach (Mumbai, 2016), p. 106.

[118] A recent article by Rajeev Kinra makes clear that *sulḥ-i kull* or "absolute civility" with respect to religious freedom was an enduring Mughal-period political value. "Handling Diversity with Absolute Civility: The Global Historical Legacy of Mughal Sulḥ-i kull." *Medieval History Journal* 16: 2 (2013), pp. 251–295.

[119] Recall how the *sanad* referred to earlier in this article contained a gentle exhortation to complete the work.

[120] Mān Kavi, *Anūpprakāś* (a biography of the Bundela warlord Anupgiri Gosain), mss.Hin.D.9a, British Library, London, *Chatrasāla ke desa/Chatrasāladesa*, vv. 443, 449.

[121] See note 6.

[122] *Chatraprakāś*, p. 194. A wealth of correspondence between Chatrasal and a quick succession of Eighteenth-century Mughal emperors survives, further attesting to the continuing relationship. See B. Gupta, *Contemporary Sources of the Mediaeval and Modern History of Bundelkhand* and M. P. Singh, *Aitihāsik pramāṇāvalī.*

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The viewpoint of imperially-sponsored Persian chronicles is generally that *manṣabdārī* is an unqualified good, whereas vernacular works tend to report more complex perspectives on imperial service. There are some courts for which it seems to have been largely a positive experience, as evident from the Hindi texts that they sponsored.[123] Still, the issue is complicated, and it would be prudent to acknowledge a plurality of experiences. Certainly the representational strategies are multiple.

In reporting on Chatrasal's relationship with the Mughals, Lāl Kavi deployed various rhetorical techniques. Chatrasal often has a sacred aura about him — from the childhood episode outsmarting the priests to the visions of the Devi to his miraculous survival when he was separated from the rest of his troops and left for dead (while fighting for Diler Khan). Such portrayals are consistent with the way that *nāyaka*s or heroes are depicted in the *carita* genre. Lāl Kavi's view may also have been inflected by the Bundela rulers' espousing of Prannath's theology. In some cases, the poet subverts the power hierarchy by showing the Bundela kings Campat Rai or Chatrasal as the key to Mughal success (recall that during the succession war Campat Rai had strategic knowledge of local terrain: he showed Aurangzeb how to cross the Chambal river). This service to the Mughal overlord, however, came with expectations both material and moral, and Lāl Kavi stresses that when the emperor was felt to be undeserving of his authority, the potential for rebellion loomed.

Chatrasal, Shivaji, and Aurangzeb are often mobilised today as emblematic figures for whom religious animosity was the animating force. This was the position of Pogson, who was writing under a colonial historiographical regime that read the past in stark terms of incommensurable religious difference. Pogson's overdetermined interpretation of *Chatraprakāś* as fundamentally conceived in terms of Hindu-Muslim enmity must be queried and countered in light of more nuanced recent research, but let's be clear: Pogson did not just invent the idea. Lāl Kavi left us some passages that need to be grappled with, precisely because of their tone. There are moments where he deploys the vocabulary of acute othering, as when terms like "Turk" are used to add polemical weight to a struggle with the Mughals. Chatrasal's speeches to both Baldau and Ratanshah, cited above, conclude with a call to rout the Turks.

Complexities also accrue to political ethics when the question of religion is raised. A strong Hindu positionality flares up in particular places, as when in the passage cited above, Chatrasal remembers his deceased father and is overcome with a desire for vengeance that takes on religious hues. And then there is the forging of the alliance with Raja Sujan Singh of Orchha, who voices grave concerns about Aurangzeb's attitude towards Hindus, accusing him of destroying Hindu *dharma*. Here we could say that there is the potential for religious and political rhetoric to become enmeshed. Pogson was not entirely wrong but he is guilty of having used his evidence selectively. And so have subsequent redactors.[124] But the *Chatraprakāś* is *not* an anti-Muslim text. For one, Prannath, the charismatic leader who espoused a deeply syncretistic religious movement that included Islamic tenets, converted the

[123] The *Māncarit* of Narottam Kavi, written for the Kachwahas of Amber during Akbar's reign, is one such work. See note 115 and A. Busch, "The Classical Past in the Mughal Present: The Brajbhasha Rīti Tradition", *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature,* (eds.) Y. Bronner, D. Shulman, and G. Tubb (New Delhi, 2014), pp. 650–662.

[124] See B. Gupta, *Life and times of Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela*, New Delhi, 1980), p. 8.

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king and had a position of prominence at the court of Panna. This militates strongly against any kind of polarised reading of the Hindu-Muslim question.[125] The Pogson framework, which is still very much dominant for Aurangzeb historiography,[126] is not only inadequate; it simply isn't true.

The evidence, as stressed here, is far more nuanced and polyvocal. Cynthia Talbot, who has closely analyzed the rhetoric of "Hindu and Turk" in premodern India, has provided useful guidelines for parsing the historical record in terms of layered discourse rather than being too quick to accept a monolithic construction of the past. In her work on the Andhra region between 1300 and 1600 CE, she is able to track how the tone shifts according to the balance of power between Hindu and Muslim rulers. When the balance of power was relatively stable, Talbot notes, "tensions subsided momentarily" and "we witness no demonisation of the Muslim"; at other times, "Hindu polities were on the defensive".[127] Thus, the best path forward is for scholars to study eruptions of stridency on a case-by-case basis, contextualised in terms of local politics, rather than uncritically accepting the crude and totalising constructions that are typical of colonial and nationalist historiography.

It is also worth stressing that Lāl Kavi wrote the *Chatraprakāś* decades after the fact (the terminus post quem is 1707, the year of the war of succession between Aurangzeb's sons that finds mention in the last chapter of his work). These were not eye-witness accounts but historical (and poetic) reconstructions, for Lāl Kavi was writing retrospectively with the hindsight of Maratha victories, the Rajput rebellion in Marwar,[128] and Chatrasal's successful pursuit of *bhumiyāvaṭ* in Bundelkhand. He was now enthroned at Panna, a position that would have lent itself to traditional rhetorical visions of Dharmik kingship.

Whatever the register (and, once again, there are many), the Hindi texts of this period have much to teach us about early modern political culture, especially the complexities of *manṣabdārī* relationships and the counterclaims of region in an imperial system. ab2544@columbia.edu

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[125] See note 25.

[126] There have been some revisionist strides in scholarship, but these do not have much effect in countering the dominant views in popular culture and the historiography that most South Asians imbibe through school textbooks. Nuanced approaches to Aurangzeb historiography include S. Chandra, "Reassessing Aurangzeb", *Seminar,* 364 (1988), pp. 35–38; C. Asher and C. Talbot, *India Before Europe*, Chapter 8; K. Brown, "Did Aurangzeb Ban Music? Questions for the Historiography of his Reign", *Modern Asian Studies,* 41:1 (2007), pp. 77–120.

[127] C. Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self", pp. 705-706.

[128] For more on the the so-called "Rajput rebellion," and further arguments on the need for historical contextualisation of the polemics espoused in various Mughal-period literary works, see Cynthia Talbot's essay in this issue.

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