



Research Paper

Chronicles of Rajputana: the Valour, Sacrifices and uprightness of Rajputs

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ABSTRACT

Many famous kings and emperors have ruled over Rajasthan. Rajasthan has seen the grandeur of the Rajputs, the gallantry of the Mughals, and the extravagance of Jat monarchs. None the less history of Rajasthan has been shaped and molded to fit one typical school of thought but it holds deep secrets and amazing stories of splendors of the past wrapped in various shades of mysteries stories. This paper is an attempt to try and unearth the mysteries of the land of princes.

KEYWORDS: Rajput, Sesodias, Rajputana, Clans, Rana, Arabs, Akbar, Maratha

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We are at a fork in the road in India that we have traveled for the past 150 years; and if we are to make true divination of the goal, whether on the right hand or the left, where our searching arrows are winged, nothing could be more useful to us than a close study of the character and history of those who have held supreme power over the country before us, - the waifs. (Sarkar: 1960) Only the Rajputs are discussed in this paper, which is based on Miss Gabrielle Festing's "From the Land of the Princes" and Colonel James Tod's "Annals of Rajasthan." Miss Festing's book does for Rajasthan's impassioned national traditions and dynastic records what Charles Kingsley and the Rev. Alfred J. Church did for Homer, Hesiod, and Herodotus' accounts of the gods and heroes of ancient Greece. She has embodied the bardic legends, or rashes, as they are known among the Rajputs, or "Sons of Kings," which were first systematically gathered for English readers by James Tod. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

Every Rajput, regardless of which of the thirty-six royal tribes he belongs to, belongs to one of three races: solar, lunar, or agnicular. He connects his origins through Rama to the sun in the first scenario, Krishna to the moon in the second case, and Agni, the Fire God, in the third circumstance. The Gehlotes, as previously established, are of the sun race and are widely regarded as the earliest of the royal tribes, being descended from Rama's oldest son. (Kling: 1993) The Rahtors, a tribe of equal prominence, also claim descend from this race, but the purity of their lineage is debatable. The Tuars and Bhattis are the most powerful lunar tribes, while the Chohans, Pramaras, and Solankis are the most powerful solar tribes. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989)

Bappa was the forebear of the Sesodias, a Rajput tribe from the state of Mewar. His immediate successors had the title of Rawal, which was later altered to that of Rana, in honour of the king himself. Every year since Bappa's reign, the lord of Mewar has been known as "the regent of Siva," having the authority to execute the responsibilities of a high priest when he pays a visit to the god's temple. In Rajputana and Indian history, the Sisodia-Guhilot clans are remembered as a symbol of resistance to the invaders. (Chandra: 2008) Not to diminish the contributions of other Rajput clans, large and small, who resisted invaders at various times to maintain their independence and faith. They were true Indian heroes who should be honored for their individual and communal sacrifices. Rather of being taken as slaves or concubines for their harems, their ladies preferred to be cremated. One of the first questions that should cross the mind of the reader is why the rulers of the Sisodia-Guhilot clan have chosen to use the titles of Rawal and Rana rather than the more commonly used titles of Maharaja and Raja, which can be found in Vedic and Hindu literature and were previously used as a common practise in India. (Talbot: 2015) This is a thought-provoking question that begs for a solution. This, combined with the fact that the Sisodia and Guhilot clans identify as sun worshippers and have consistently used the epithets "Rai," "Rao," and "Rana," should be taken as evidence of their ancestor's affinity to one of the countless tribes of Indo-Scythia in central Asia or the ancient kingdom of Bactria.

As stated above, Bappa Rawal was a celebrated king of the Mewar region in Rajasthan who reigned for over a century. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Legends, stories, lore's and tales comprise a huge part of known history of Bappa Rawal, if one excludes that then there are gaps that are left behind. According to legend, he was descended from the dynasties that reigned over Mewar at various periods of time, including the Gahlot, Sisodia, Kalabhoj, Shiladitya and Khumana of the present day. (Kling: 1993) References to Bappa Rawal can be found in ancient historical texts such as the 15th century Ekalinga mahatmya (also known as the Ekalinga Purana), the work of Indologist David Gordon White, and the 11th century writer Al- Baruni, among others. It is generally recognized that Bappa Rawal, whose actual name was Raja Kalbhoj, was the ruler of the Mewar Kingdom and the builder of the famed Eklingiji Temple. (Chandra: 2008)

One of the most controversially known stories among legends is that, Bappa Rawal, while innocently playing as a child, married a brahmin girl along with 600 other girls in the hamlet, enraging the men of the community. Bappa fled from the outraged parents of his wives after being warned by one of his fellow shepherds. He made his way to Chitor, a city built on a rock in the middle of a vast plain. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) His mother's brother, a descendant of the ancient Malwa lords, ruled here and greeted his nephew warmly. When Chitor was threatened by an enemy, all of the nobles declined to lead their soldiers into battle because of the prince's love and favour shown to the young stranger who arrived from who knows where. They claimed that if Bappa was deserving of everything his uncle had lavished upon him, he could take on the enemy on his own. (Chandra: 2008) They would rather give up their estates than battle for the prince.

Bappa was unfazed, and he prepared for the fight. (Sarkar: 1960) Despite their jealousy, the chiefs were shamed into joining him, the enemy was destroyed, and the adversary gave his daughter in marriage to Bappa. The disgruntled nobles then boldly stated their dissatisfaction with their prince's leadership and proposed to Bappa that he depose his uncle and claim the throne of Chitor for himself. Bappa was no slouch; with the help of the nobility, he drove out the prince and established himself as the ruler of the land. (Chandra: 2008) Ballad and folklores written in the pages of history with the sole aim of showering mighty praises on Bappa referred to him as "the sun of the Hindus, the preceptor of princes, and the global master," as a hermit had referred to him as "the regent of Ekalinga" (Siva).

He controlled Chitor with a strong hand for many years, expanding his borders on all sides. He had several wives, including a princess from the island of Bunderdhiva, who brought as a dowry a statue of the guardian goddess—"Vyanmata," "the mother," who had safeguarded Chitor for many centuries until a cowardly monarch abandoned it in its hour of need. (Kling: 1993)

Royal Bappa Rawal was a Commander with a lot of vision. He saw right away that the invaders were not only going to be destroyed within the borders of India, but they were also going to be demolished in their own countries. Bappa Rawal didn't have the term "forgiveness" in his dictionary when he was growing up. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) A testament to the strength and military might of his character, he confederated with the kingdoms of Jaisalmer and Jodhpur to defeat the Arabs in Afghanistan in his first foray into the country. Confederation possessed an incredible amount of sheer force. A large proportion of the Arabs were killed during this conflict. For his greatness and reverence, Bappa Rawal, also formed a confederacy of troops with Pratihara King Nagbhata I, Bhils, and Nagas, and crushed the Malechha Arabs before taking control of the fortress of Chittor in Rajasthan. They destroyed and chased the Arab army of Mohammad bin Qasim into the deep desert beyond Ghazni. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) In a sense, Bappa Rawal had dispelled the idea that Indian kings could not band together against foreign invaders in order to safeguard the motherland. For far too long, history texts have contained a fabricated narrative intended to separate and delegitimize them. Sometimes history isn't all about artifacts and monuments, occasionally its within the pages of old stories and folktales that we find some light on these historically puzzling characters. (Chandra: 2008) Bappa Rawal one of the most renowned of Rajputana is a great mystery wrapped in folklore so its almost impossible for us to separate the two of them.

It is a deluding delusion for today's learner and fictitious historian who developed the notion that Afghans were warriors rather than defeated. However, the fact remains that Indian Kings, ranging from Bappa Rawal to King Lalit Aditya and Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, an army general of Great Ranjit Singh, defeated, subjugated, and controlled this Ghazni for an extended period of time. Bappa Rawal had demonstrated his military statesmanship across a broad geographical territory that extended all the way into Central Asia. (Sarkar: 1960) Upon the completion of his successful military expeditions into Sindh and Baluchistan, Ghazni and Kandahar Khorasan, Turan and Isfahan, as well as Iran, he was recognized as one of the world's most powerful Kings on the contemporaneous political map. After witnessing Bappa Rawal's authority and valour for the first time, his countrymen bestowed upon him the honorific title Bappa. (Chandra: 2008)

Similarly, to the beginning of his existence, the end of Bappa's is obscured by a web of tales. According to legend, when he was an old man, he abandoned Chitor, his wives, and his family, and led an army towards the far west, conquering as he went. He travelled to Khorasan, where he encountered the wild tribes of the northern hills, and created a new kingdom in their midst. All of the rulers of the western world, including the lords of Ispahan, Kandahar, Kashmir, Iraq, Iran, and Kafiristan, paid him honour, as did the kings of Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. (Kling: 1993) He was still as eager to marry as he had been in his boyhood, so he took as wife

the daughters of all of these monarchs, and between them they bore him a hundred and thirty sons, or so speak the tales. Then, as soon as he had grown tired of Khorasan and Chitor, he abandoned his conquests and his grandeur and travelled even further, to Mount Meru, the holiest of mountains. (Chandra: 2008) There he lived as an ascetic, chastening himself through fasting and penance, and it was there that he died—or was buried alive—at the age of one hundred.

A Tuar dynasty ruled Delhi until 1164, making it the most powerful of all the Rajput states. Anangpal, the dynasty's penultimate ruler, is now widely acknowledged to be a direct descendant of Yudhistara, the founder of Indraprastha, or ancient Delhi, in B.C. 1030. As a result, he portrays the astonishing phenomena of a prince sitting on a throne that was established by a direct ancestor of his own two thousand two hundred and fifty years ago. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) Anangpal abdicated in favour of Prithvi Raj, the son of the Chohan prince of Ajmir, to whom he had given one of his daughters in marriage in exchange for service provided. (Chandra: 2008) Now, the Rahtor ruler of Kanouj had married a Tuar daughter, by whom he produced a son, Jaichand; and when Prithvi Raj was proclaimed chief of Delhi, Jaichand not only refused to recognize his superiority, but also asserted his own claim to the throne. Thus, began the competition between the Chohans and the Rahtors, which eventually led to their annihilation. (Talbot: 2015)

Jaichand had to take the risky step of enlisting the help of the Tartar of Ghazni in order to bring down his adversary. In this circumstance, Prithvi Raj dispatched an envoy to Samarsi, to whom he had only recently given his sister in marriage, pleading with him to support his cause. (Sarkar: 1960) Samarsi immediately offered his help, not only because he was the Tuar's brother-in-law, but also because he was outraged by Jaichand's decision to form an alliance with the "barbarian." He went straight to Delhi, where it was decided that Prithvi Raj would fight the Rahtor, while Samarsi would march to Ghazni to intercept Shahab-ud-din's armies. (Chandra: 2008) Samarsi fought multiple battles before being joined by Prithvi Raj, who had subdued the Rahtors in the meantime. They attacked and routed the invaders, capturing their captain in the process.

Not long after, Samarsi was called upon once more to assist Delhi in repelling a Tartar onslaught, this time led by Shahab-ud-din himself. He designated his son regent before leaving, anticipating a protracted campaign. Prithvi Raj and his entire court marched seven kilometres to meet him when he arrived in Delhi, greeted with joyous screams. (Chandra: 2008) Samarsi is portrayed by the bards as the host's Ulysses: calm and skilled in battle, prudent and eloquent in council, respected by his nobles and revered by the Chohan's vassals. No augur on the line of march could better explain the omens, no field commander could better prepare the squadrons for war, and no steed or lance could be guided or used with greater precision. After the march or during fighting intervals, the leaders' primary retreat is his tent. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989)

The courageous Gehlote's acts of bravery are still recorded by the bards of Mewar in the aftermath of the deadly battle. The enmity and Jaichand's angry character made him an apathetic observer of a conflict that may have ended badly for him and his country. Gehlotes and Chohans battled in a way that only Rajputs could. But it was all for naught. Samarsi, along with 1,300 of his household men, was killed on the third day of fierce battle. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Pritha, his devoted wife, was waiting for the news in Delhi. She formed the big atonement, like a real Rajpiitni, and joined her lord via the flame after hearing the dreadful intelligence—her husband murdered, her brother kidnapped, and all the chivalry of Delhi and Chitor "asleep on the banks of the Caggar." (Chandra: 2008) Shahab-ud-din marched into Delhi and took it by storm. Kanouj was assassinated not long after, and the traitor to his country met his end in the Ganges. Then came scenes of devastation, plunder, and massacre. (Talbot: 2015) The blood of the spoiled and the spoiler spilled down every road in Rajasthan. Whole tribes were wiped out, and their names remain the only reminders of their once-famous status.

Kurna was Samarsi's successor. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) His rule, like that of the eleven princes who followed him, is devoid of interesting qualities. Rahup is the only one of these who deserves to be mentioned. He was the one who overcame the Rana of Mandor and captured both his realm and title immediately after his accession in 1201. (Sarkar: 1960) He also created the town of Sesoda, which gave rise to the name 'Sesodia,' which the Rajputs of Mewar have been called by since then. He ruled for nearly forty years and was instrumental in restoring the state's prosperity. Six of the remaining nine died on the battlefield in valiant endeavours to save the precious Gya from defilement at the hands of the 'barbarian,' while their reigns were marked by confusion and strife both inside and without. The centuries' dust is thick on them; let us leave it alone and move on to the next big event in the state's history—an event that has more of a romantic feel to it than history, though the facts are undeniable. (Kling: 1993)

None of the incidents chronicled in the annals of Mewar are more unforgettable than those that occurred during the reign of Lakumsi, when the Pathan emperor Allah-ud-din assaulted, looted, and desecrated Chittor, the storehouse of all that was valuable in Indian arts, with remorseless barbarity. When Lakumsi ascended the throne in 1274, he was a minor, and his uncle Bhimsi served as regent and protector. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Bhimsi had married Pudmani, a Chohan princess who was breathtakingly beautiful. Indeed, while her charms were inferior to those of the heroine of Troy, they were no less lethal in their consequences, for it was Allah-ud-din's desire to possess this matchless princess, rather than the gain of military reputation, that drove him to attack Chittoor, according to the bard chroniclers. (Chandra: 2008)

After a long and futile siege, Allah-ud-din, who made no attempt to hide the fact that he was attacking Pudmani, offered to withdraw his soldiers if his demand for the surrender of Pudmani was met. After all else failed, the crafty Pathan reduced his demands to a simple glimpse of this incredible beauty, even agreeing to see her through the medium of mirrors.(Sarkar: 1960) He entered Chittoor unguarded, relying on the Rajput's faith, and took his leave after fulfilling his wish. Not to be surpassed in self-assurance, Bhimsi led the king to the fortress's foot. This was the chance Allah-ud-din had calculated and risked his life for.(Chandra: 2008) He had planned his ambush. Bhimsi was imprisoned and rushed to the Tartar camp, with the price of his freedom being Padmini's capitulation.

When word of this deadly tragedy reached Chittoor, it caused consternation. Pudmani was prepared to proceed to the Tartar camp, armed with the weapons to protect herself from shame, when her uncle Gorah and his nephew Badal proposed a scheme for the rescue of Bhimsi in which neither her life nor her good name would be jeopardized. The princess would be sent to Allah-ud- din's tents on the day he withdrew from his trenches, but in a manner befitting her high status, and escorted by her female relatives and handmaids, while the Emperor would issue rigorous orders for the preservation of their private. (Kling: 1993) The terms were accepted, and no less than 700 palanquin arrived in the royal camp on the specified day. Each palanquin was carried by six armed men disguised as bearers and occupied by one of Chittoor's best warriors. None of Allah-ud- din's companions suspected the trick, and none of them yelled "equo ne credite," which means "do not trust the horse.(Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) " The Emperor's tents were enclosed by thick canvas screens, and after the litters were deposited within the enclosure, Bhimsi and his wife were given half an hour for a goodbye interview. When the Rajputs threw off their disguise, the time had almost run out and Allah-ud-din was about to give instructions to end the interview. Bhimsi made his way out of the enclosure, mounting a horse that had been prepared for him, and making his way to the fortress in the ensuing chaos. His brave rescuers protected him until they were all killed. Only their commitment kept the chase at bay for a little period. But that was enough, and Bhimsi raced into Chitor, trailed by the Tartar army.(Sarkar: 1960)

The Rajputs, led by Gorah and Badal, showed incredible bravery in the assault that followed. Gorah was killed, along with practically every notable Chitor warrior. But the carnage they wreaked in the opposing ranks was so great that Allah-ud-din was obliged to withdraw and leave his beloved endeavours, although for a short time. The manner in which Gorah's wife heard the news of her husband's death is described in detail in the *Khomdn Rasa*. (Chandra: 2008) The details are undoubtedly made up, but we can be confident that they are congruent with the facts. She summoned Badal, a stripling who had been severely injured in the struggle, and asked him to describe how her lord had acted. " (Talbot: 2015) "He was the reaping of the crop of conflict," the young man said. He lay a carpet of the slain on the grisly bed of honour. He lay a barbarian prince down on his pillow, and he sleeps surrounded by the enemy." "Tell me, Badal, how did my love behave?" she asked again. O mother," the lad continued, "since he left no foe to fear or admire him?" "My lord will chide my delay," she said as she smiled farewell to the boy and leaped into the flames.(Sarkar: 1960)

After several years had passed and Lakumsi had taken leadership of the state, Allah-ud-din regained his strength and renewed his attack on Chitor. Legends are abundantly interwoven throughout the history of this second siege. The latter, on the other hand, do not obfuscate the facts; rather, they fill in gaps or explain events for which history has no explanation. There appeared to be little possibility of saving the city from the start. Allah-ud-din had an overwhelming force at his disposal, and his assaults became more ferocious by the day. (Kling: 1993) One night, as the Rana lay stretched on his pallet, pondering how he could save at least one of his twelve sons from the destruction, he knew was coming, he heard a voice say, "main bhuka hun" (I am hungry), and raising his eyes, he saw the majestic form of Chittoor's guardian goddess advancing between the granite columns, illuminated by the dim glare of the lamp. "Not satiated, even though eight -thousands of my relatives were late an offering to thee?" screamed the Rana. (Chandra: 2008) "I must have regal victims," the inevitable reply continued, "and if twelve of those who wear the diadem do not bleed for Chitor, the land will be removed from the line."

He summoned a council of his chiefs the next morning, to whom he related the vision of the night, which they dismissed as the result of a disordered imagination. He summoned them at midnight, when the shape reappeared, and reiterated the terms under which she would be the only one to remain among them.(Sharma, Mathur: 1989) "Thousands of barbarians may be strewn over the globe, but what do they mean to me? Enthroned a prince every day. Let the Kirnia, Chhatra, and Chamara¹ proclaim his sovereignty, and his decrees be supreme for three days; on the fourth, let him face his foe and fate "It makes no difference whether the scene was conjured up by the poet as a work of fiction, or whether it was conjured up to enliven the spirit of resistance; it is consistent with the tribe's beliefs, and as a guarantee of good faith, whether it originated with the goddess or with the Rana, was fully accepted and fully redeemed.(Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

¹This is a royal crest. The kirnia is a parasol derived from the word Kiran, which means "ray"; the Chhatra is a scarlet umbrella; and the chamara is a wild ox's flowing tail placed in a gold handle and used to ward off flies.

Given the circumstances, a generous debate emerged among the heroic brothers as to who should be the first victim in order to avoid the condemnation. Arsi pressed for his birthright to be recognized; he was announced, the umbrella was waved over his head, and on the fourth day, he gave up his honours and his life. (Barua: 2005) Ajaisi, the youngest, begged to go first; but, he was his father's favourite son, and he agreed to allow his brothers go first at his request. (Chandra: 2008) After eleven victims had died in succession, a competition erupted between the Rana and his survivor son. However, the father triumphed, and Ajaisi, with a small contingent of soldiers, safely escaped past the enemy's lines and sought safety in Kailwara.

The Rana was confident that his dynasty would not die out, and he was ready to follow his heroic sons. But before this final act of self-devotion, another horrific sacrifice, the horrible Jauhar, was to be made. The funeral pyre was lit in the "vast subterranean retreat," in chambers that were resistant to daylight, and the defenders of Chittoor watched their wives and daughters pass in procession, numbering in the thousands. (Chandra: 2008) When everyone had entered the cavern, the fair Pudmani closed the throng, and the doors were shut behind them, leaving them to seek safety from disgrace in the devouring element. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) The Rana then ordered Chittoor's gates to be opened, gathered his clans about him, and proceeded to the plain, where he and everyone with him flung themselves at the opponent, slaying until he was eventually slain.

Rajputana resembled a nation swept by a cyclone after the Tartar irruption, with its citadels and temples in ruins, villages abandoned, and fields destroyed. Some of the dynasties that were deposed, such as Chitor, Jaisalmer, and Bundi, were doomed to rise again. Others died completely. The Kachwahs of Ambar and the Rahtors of Marwar were both still insignificant. (Barua: 2005) However, the Pramaras, Solankis, and every other branch of the Agnicular race lost their political status after that. Allah-ud-din stayed in Chitor for a few days, admiring the magnitude of his conquest, and then after inflicting every act of savagery and sacrilege that a fanatical zeal could inspire, he gave the city over to Maldeo, the Hindu chief of Jhalawar, whom he had captured and recruited as one of his vassals. (Talbot: 2015)

Chittoor's first *saca* (a sudden fall or blow) occurred at this point. The assault after Bhimsi's escape is classified as half of the three and a half, because even though the city was not conquered, the best and bravest were cut off (*saca*). (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) All great fights accompanied by massive slaughter were referred to as *saca* among the Rajputs. Chitor ka *saca ka pap*, or "by the sin of the sack of Chitor," is the most earnest form of a solemn oath a Rajput can use.

Rana Ajaisi, the only survivor of Chitor, was now safe in Kailwara, a town in the middle of the Aravalli mountains at the highest point of one of the range's most extensive valleys. He gradually gathered the remains of the Mewar tribes around him. His father's last wish was for the son of Arsi, the oldest brother, to succeed him when he reached "one hundred years" (a figurative phrase for death). He quickly followed this command, owing to the lack of noble characteristics in his own sons. Hamir was the name of Arsi's kid, who was twelve years old at the time. (Barua: 2005)

Ajaisi had to battle with the chieftains of the highlands, the most fearsome of which was Munja, who had attacked the Shero Nalla, the valley where the Rana was now hidden, and injured him on the head with a spear on a previous occasion. His own sons, Sajunsi and Ajunsi, were of little help in the emergency, although being fourteen and fifteen years old, an age at which a Rajput's future character should be revealed. (Kling: 1993) Hamir, on the other hand, accepted Munja's quarrel and set off to find him, pledging to return victorious or not at all. He was seen entering the Kailwara pass with Munja's head at his saddle-bow a few days later. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) "Recognize the head of your rival," he said modestly as he placed the trophy at his uncle's feet. This determined the fate of Ajaisi's sons, one of whom died at Kailwara and the other, Sajunsi, went for the Deccan, where his descendants came to prominence; for he was the ancestor of Sivaji, the founder of the Satara dynasty, and his ancestry is recorded in the Mewar chronicles. (Sarkar: 1960)

In 1301, Hamir was successful, and he was given sixty-four years to save his kingdom from the destruction that had befallen it. He demonstrated an earnest of his future energy in the *Tika-dour*² on the day he assumed the ensigns of leadership. He advanced quickly into the heart of Baluchistan, the land of his late foe Munja, and took the country's main stronghold, a feat that his supporters saw as a sure sign of his future grandeur. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Maldeo, with the imperial armies, was still holding Chitor when Ajaisi died; nonetheless, he was not left in peace. Hamir ravaged the plains, leaving only the fortified towns that might be occupied safely to his foe. (Barua: 2005) He ordered all who held his sovereignty to either leave their homes and flee to the safety of the highlands on the eastern and western frontiers with their families, or be counted among his foes.

When Maldeo attempted to appease his persecutor by promising him the hand of a Hindu princess in marriage, Mewar's fortifications were captured by the enemy, and cultivation and peaceful pursuits were

²The *Tika-dour* denotes the inauguration expedition. It's a tradition that dates back to the dawn of time, and it's still practiced everywhere there's a semblance of animosity.

abandoned as a result of Hamir's persistent animosity. (Talbot: 2015) Against his counsellors' wishes, Hamir ordered that "the cocoa-nut be retained,"³ calmly reflecting on the perils, "my feet shall at least ascend the rugged steps trodden by my forebears." It was agreed that only 500 horses should make up his suite, thus he started off towards Chitor with this company. (Sarkar: 1960) Maldeo, his son Banbir, and other chiefs greeted Hamir in the old halls of his ancestors. The bride was carried forth and presented by her father, but without any of the solemnities common on such occasions. "The knot of their clothing was tied, their hands united," and thus they were left. (Kling: 1993)

Kaitsi was the result of this union, and a few months after his birth, the princess secured permission from her parents to transport the infant to Chitor and place him before the shrine of his ancestors, pretending a deficiency in the household gods of Kailwara. Maldeo was out on a military mission with a big number of his troops, so the timing was ideal. (Barua: 2005) She entered the city escorted by a detachment from Chitor, and used the medium of Jal to gain control of the remaining forces. Hamir was close at hand, and in a matter of hours, he had taken control of the citadel. Maldeo was greeted with a "hail of arabas" upon his return, and because his force was too small to mount an attack, he delivered the news of his defeat to King Mahmud, who had succeeded Allah-ud-din on the throne of Delhi. (Talbot: 2015) The "standard of the sun" blazed brightly once more from Chittoor's walls and camp follower Hamir's followers returned to their ancestral homes from the highlands.

But it wasn't long before Mahmud was on his way to reclaiming his misplaced property. Fortunately for Mewar, he chose to march through the eastern plateau, where the country's complexity robbed him of whatever advantage his greater numbers would have given him if he had come by the northern plains. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) Hamir⁴ marched to meet him, backed by every lord in Mewar. The forces met at Singoli, and Mahmud was defeated and taken prisoner after a massive battle. He was imprisoned at Chitor for three months and only released after agreeing to give Ajmir, Ranthambore, an important fortress in the state's south-east corner, and Nagor in exchange for a six-lakh-rupee indemnity and a hundred elephants. (Barua: 2005)

The strength and stability of Mewar's power were higher than at any other time in her history throughout the two centuries following the capital's recovery. Despite being besieged on three sides by Muhammadan kingdoms, Delhi to the north, Malwa to the south, and Gujarat to the west, she was able to defeat them all. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Tughlak, Khilji, or Lodi, the dynasty in control of the imperial throne at the time, courted the Ranas, whose power was so consolidated that they were able not only to repel the invader, but also to carry their victorious arms abroad to Saurashtra in the west and to the very walls of the Mogul capital in the north. (Talbot: 2015)

Rana Lakha⁵ of Mewar, who succeeded to the throne at the end of the fourteenth century, contributed significantly to the strengthening of the work begun by Hamir and carried on by Hamir's son. He expanded his dominions by wresting numerous fair districts from both the Emperor Mahmud of Delhi, whom he beat in a pitched battle, and his Rajput neighbors, who took advantage of Mewar's weakness to acquire regions to which they had no right. (Talbot: 2015) He founded Bednore; he exploited the tin and silver mines, the existence of which had been little more than a legend until his time. (Kling: 1993) The Rana had two sons, the eldest of them was the elder. Prince Chonda was valiant and honourable, with an almost excessive level of punctuality, clever and resourceful, but, like his father, also rather obstinate. (Barua: 2005) The more youthful. Prince Raghu deva was gorgeous and endowed with such a sweet disposition that he was universally adored.

The Rana was one day sitting in his hall when an embassy came before him and placed the cocoa-nut at his feet, which is always the symbol of a marriage proposal among the Rajputs. Rao Rinnull of Marwar had invited them to offer his daughter Hansa as a bride for Prince Chonda. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) The Rana bowed his head and twirled his long moustaches, a cruel smile flashing over his lips as he stared down at the cocoa-nut below. 'Please take it up,' he continued, "and give it to my son Prince Chonda, because I trow that you would not bring such toys for an old greybeard like myself.' (Talbot: 2015)

A Westerner may think the speech was innocent enough; but, when it was brought to his attention, Prince Chonda was struck with humiliation and fury at his father's lack of delicacy in public speaking. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) What, after the potential of her becoming his father's wife had been raised, was he expected to

³The tikka material that the bride's family carries to the bridegroom's home consists of a silver tray with a few grains of rice on it, a silver bowl containing some saffron, 14 chuharey (dried dates) nicely wrapped in a silver foil and a coconut covered in a golden leaf.

⁴ Rana Hammir, or Hammir, was a 14th-century Hindu Rajput ruler of Mewar in present-day Rajasthan, India. Following an invasion by the Delhi sultanate at the turn of the 13th century, the ruling Guhila dynasty had been displaced from Mewar.

⁵ Lakha Singh was the third Maharana of the Mewar Kingdom. He was the son of Maharana Kshetra Singh and ruled from 1382 until his death in 1421, when he was killed in battle. Lakha was married several times and had at least eight sons.

marry a princess, as had been suggested? He declared it was out of the question, and he stood by his position with all the dogged scrupulousness that was a part of his temperament; the cocoa-nut had to be returned to Marwar, he said. (Talbot: 2015) The Rana questioned whether he would listen to argument.

It was difficult for them to inflict this affront on a friendly prince, knowing how quickly a Rajput may avenge a slight and the large number of strong sons who were willing to fight the Rao's battles. That didn't matter, inflexibly responded the son; both honour and decency forbade him from even considering marrying the Princess Hansa.⁶(Sarkar: 1960) At this point in time, the Rana lost his cool and declared that if his son were such a fool, he would, in fact, marry the lady himself, and that "if we should have a son, he shall be Rana after me." (Barua: 2005) This was met with the same level of calm from Prince Chonda, who responded by saying that the Rana could do whatever he pleased; that he was prepared to relinquish his claims to the throne in favour of any son that the Princess Hansa might bear to his father; and that nothing should compel him to take her as his wife. As a result, after much grumbling about the stupidity of young men, the Rana finally agreed to receive the cocoa nut in his personal name. (Kling: 1993) The Marwar princess was brought to Chitor, where she was married in accordance with all the necessary formalities, and she eventually gave birth to a son who was given the name Mokul.

He desires a calm transition. As a result, Maharana performed the ritual to install Mokul before embarking on his mission to Gaya. Chonda was the first to pay respect to the future monarch and swear fealty to him. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) He just keeps the top spot in the councils for himself as a reward for his abstinence. He required that his own insignia, the lance, be superimposed on the signature of the chief in all grants to the crown's vassals, a tradition that continues to this day. Following his father's departure and death, he successfully managed the state's public affairs. (Kling: 1993) But the queen-mother, as the natural guardian of her infant's rights, was dissatisfied with her loss of power, forgetting that she would never have given birth to the Rana of Mewar if it hadn't been for Chonda. She observed everything he did with a watchful eye, and she made no attempt to hide her suspicions that he was aiming for ultimate dominion, and that if he didn't take the title of Rana, he would relegate it to obscurity. (Talbot: 2015)

She couldn't keep her doubts to herself for long, and they eventually made their way to Chonda's ears., As he realized it was pointless to fight with an angry woman, he decided to leave Chitor. He resigned all of his power and authority into her hands and withdrew from his brother's court, bringing with him some two hundred of his huntsmen who were determined not to be divided from him for whatever reason. In the wake of his departure, her immediate family arrived, including her brother Joda, and her father, the old Rao Rinmal. (Kling: 1993) The queen-mother discovered that, rather than protecting her own position and the interests of her son, she had put them both in danger by her actions. The old Rao would sit on the throne of Mewar with his grandson perched on his knee, and when the kid left him for play, the royal ensigns would continue to wave above his head until he returned. (Barua: 2005) This was too much for the Sisodia nurse to handle. She asked of the queen one day, boiling with rage, if her relatives were defrauding her child of his inheritance. The queen was frightened and issued a remonstrance to her father, to which the only response was a suggestion that her offspring's life was in jeopardy. Chonda's brother Raghu deva, a beloved prince, was slain shortly after, increasing her mother's fear.

At this point, the queen- mother's thoughts wandered to Chonda. She warned him about the peril to his race in a letter. On his way out of Chitor, he was accompanied by 200 huntsmen. These huntsmen's forefathers had long served the Mewar chiefs. These men obtained entry to the city on the guise of visiting their families, whom they had left behind. (Barua: 2005) They were able to join the ranks of the gatekeepers. The Chonda messenger advised the queen-mother to send the young prince with a large retinue to the surrounding villages every day to provide feasts. The prince must hold the feast at Gosunda. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) The day came; the feast was conducted at Gosunda; but when night fell, no Chonda appeared. The nurse, the purohit, or family priest, and others went home in secret with heavy hearts.

When forty riders galloped by them at a speed, with Chonda⁷ disguised at their head, they had arrived at Chitori's eminence. As he passed his younger brother and sovereign, Chonda made a covert sign of respect. When confronted, the band claimed to be neighbours who had the honour of escorting the young prince home after hearing of the feast at Gosunda. (Sarkar: 1960) The story was given credit, but the treachery was revealed in the major body, of which this was only the beginning. Chonda drew his blade from its sheath, and his hunters

⁶Hansa Bai was Rani of the Rajput kingdom of Mewar during the early 15th century. She was the wife of Maharana Lakha Singh and mother to his heir, Mokal.

⁷Rao Chonda (1384-1428), the twelfth Rathore to rule in Marwar, established his capital at Mandore, which he had acquired as a part of a dowry. Two generations later, Rao Jodha (r. 1438-89) began to build a fort at a new site six miles to the south, on an isolated rock with a higher elevation and better natural defences. Jodhpur, the town that sprang up at its base, was named after him.

leapt into action at his well-known shout. (Barua: 2005) The guards were murdered by the huntsmen who flung open the gates. Every Chonda chased down and slaughtered every Rathore in the city in a matter of seconds.

Rao Rinmal's ending was far more absurd than tragic. He was in his palace, partially inebriated by wine, when the gates were rushed open. He was having an affair with a Sisodia woman who had been forced to join him by force. (Sarkar: 1960) The little Rajputni, who had deftly bound the intoxicated old chief to his bed with his own Marwari turban after hearing the commotion outside, was no match for the inebriated old chief. Before his confused senses could register what was going on, death's emissaries were at the door of his dwelling. He strained to free himself, rage-filled, and stood up on his feet. (Talbot: 2015) He fought valiantly with no weapons other than a brass ablution vessel until being killed by a matchlock ball.

Chonda's vengeance, however, was not yet complete. Rao Joda⁸, who had managed to flee, was pursued by him. Chonda followed Joda into Mandor's capital city. Chonda easily entered Mandor and seized control of the city. (Talbot: 2015) For a period of twelve years, his two sons were in charge of the city. After twelve years, Joda was able to reclaim his capital with the help of the chieftains of Mewoh and Pabuji. (Barua: 2005) With the help of numerous of his warriors, Joda assassinated Chonda's oldest son. Chonda's youngest son Manja was able to flee on a fast horse. However, he was overtaken and slain by a Joda soldier. As a result, Joda exacted vengeance for his father's death.

Chonda went back to Mundore after hearing this bad news, only to be met by Joda, who delivered the Rana's documents granting him control of the city. (Sarkar: 1960) "Why should our dwellings be at odds with each other? Allow each person to maintain what is his or hers. You killed my father if I killed your boys. Let this be the end of the slaughter, and let us establish a line between us." Chonda had every right to continue the feud because he had suffered more losses than Joda. However, the virtuous prince saw that fighting Rajput against Rajput was no longer safe, and that the day would come when they would all have to stand together against a common foe. He would forsake all revenge because his boys had died in a fair combat. (Kling: 1993) The princes—once fierce foes but now sworn friends—marked the border between Marwar and Mewar together, and Joda agreed that his dominions should finish where Manja had fallen, giving Mewar the prosperous area of Godwar. According to mythology, the ground was covered with the blooms of the "aonla" when the princes were measuring the boundary, and Chonda ruled that the Rana of Mewar should rule wherever the "golden blossom" was found. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Long after, when Godwar had reverted to Marwar in Mewar's dark hour, the Mewar sons remembered the tradition and pointed to where the "yellow blossom" had stopped blooming, on the border of Godwar, as proof that the province belonged to the Rana's dominions by right. Chonda had reason to be grateful for Joda's selfless devotion to the Rana's cause; in the midst of the turmoil that soon engulfed Mewar, the former opponent proved to be the staunchest of allies. (Sarkar: 1960) For more than three centuries, the Ranas controlled the region of Godwar. Chonda's name is one of the most well-known in Mewar history. He formed the Chondawats, a legendary clan that played a significant role in the state's later history.

Mokul, who ascended to the throne as a result of Chonda's surrender of his birthright in 1398, reigned for a period of twenty years during which he was not unworthy. (Sarkar: 1960) He seized control of Sambur and its salt lakes, among other things, and used the distraction caused by Timur's invasion to consolidate and expand his territories, which he accomplished with little difficulty due to the state of the country at the time of the invasion. (Barua: 2005) He was assassinated by his uncles, who were his father's biological brothers, who believed they had been insulted by the prince's alleged allusion to the irregularity of their ancestry. Following him was his son Khumbho, who succeeded him in 1419, and it was during his reign that Mewar reached its zenith of opulence. (Kling: 1993)

It had been one hundred years since Allah-ud-din⁹ had torn to shreds the glories of Chitor, and time had passed. The city had reclaimed the sack, and new defenders had risen to take the place of those who had given their lives in the name of the city's preservation. Khumbho accomplished everything that was required to strengthen Mewar's defenses against the storms that were gathering on the Caucasus and the banks of the Oxus. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) He did so with Hamir's zeal, Lakha's taste for the arts, and a genius as comprehensive as either and more fortunate, and he succeeded in all his endeavours, raising the "crimson banner" of Mewar once more upon the banks of the Caggar. (Barua: 2005) Khumbho was responsible for the construction of thirty-two of the state's eighty-four fortresses, the most famous of which is the KomulMr, or Khumbho's fortress, which stands as an indelible reminder of his stupendous achievements.

⁸Rao Jodha was a ruler of Mandore in the present-day state of Rajasthan. He was the son of Rao Ranmal of the Rathore clan. He is known for his illustrious military career and for founding the city of Jodhpur in 1459.

⁹Alauddin Khalji, born Ali Gurshasp, was an emperor of the Khalji dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate in the Indian subcontinent. Alauddin instituted a number of significant administrative changes, related to revenues, price controls, and society.

This fortress sits on a steep and treacherous peak that rises to over 3,000 feet above sea level. A towering wall with multiple towers and perforated battlements surrounds a region below that is several miles in length. (Barua: 2005) The slope is steep and winding, with four gates to pass through before reaching the fortress's entrance. The battlements rise tier by tier to the hill's crest, which is crowned with the Ranas' Badal Mahal, or "cloud-capped palace." (Sarkar: 1960) He also built a citadel on Abu's summit, where he lived for a long time. His name is preserved on the magazine and the alarm-tower, and bronze effigies of Khumbho and his father are revered in a shabby temple.

Aside from these genius monuments, two religious structures still exist: the " Khumbho Shaim " on Mount Abu, which, while worthy of notice elsewhere, is overshadowed by a crowd of more interesting objects here; and a temple built in the Sadri pass, which is one of the largest structures in existence. (Kling: 1993) It is estimated that it cost over a million pounds to construct. It has three floors and is supported by granite columns that are 40 feet tall. Cornelian and agate mosaics are used throughout the interior. (Barua: 2005) Khumbho was also a published author, with his most famous work being a commentary on the Gita Govinda, or "Divine Melodies."

Khumbho's military successes were numerous, but his defeat of the combined forces of Malwa and Gujarat is the most well-known. The satraps of Delhi began to break free from the imperial yoke and establish themselves as autonomous rulers near the end of the Khilji dynasty. Bijapur and Golconda were established in the Deccan, whereas Jaunpur, Malwa, and Gujarat were established in Hindustan proper. (Barua: 2005) When Khumbho ascended the throne, the two latter had amassed significant influence, and in 1440 they formed a coalition against him and invaded his realm. With 100,000 horse and foot soldiers and 14,000 elephants, the Rana met them on the plains of Malwa, which bordered his own state. The invaders were defeated completely, and Mahmud, the Khilji ruler of Malwa, was taken prisoner to Chitor. (Kling: 1993) The legendary historian Abul Fazil recounts this triumph and extols Khumbho's grandeur of soul in releasing his foe without asking for a ransom or presents. However, the Mewar annals claim that Mahmud was imprisoned in Chitor for six months, and that the conquest trophies were kept, as evidenced by Babar's reference of regaining the Malwa king's crown from Rana Sanga's son. (Barua: 2005) This triumph, as well as the prowess of Khumbho, who saved his land when "shaking the earth, the rulers of Gujur-khand and Malwa, with armies overwhelming as the ocean, invaded Medpat," is commemorated by a ten-year-long built column. Khumbho ruled for almost half a century, and his reign was the most illustrious in Mewar's history. However, the year that should have been a jubilee was marred by the most heinous crime ever recorded in history. (Talbot: 2015) His life, which was about to be cut short by nature, was cut short by the slim dagger of an assassin—that slayer, his son.

After his father Raimal and two brothers died, Rana Sanga became Mewar's successor. Due to a succession problem, Maharana Sangram Singh ascended to the throne, bringing forth yet another powerful Mewar warrior son who fought for his kingdom till the last drop of blood was shed. Rana Sanga was not only a strong warrior who bravely fought invaders, but also a visionary who brought together and fought the outsiders several Rajput states. (Talbot: 2015) He was a stalwart warrior in the mould of his grandfather Rana Kumbha.¹⁰ He is claimed to have continued fighting his opponents despite losing an arm, an eye, and countless other serious injuries. He is also famous for his chivalry in restoring Mandu's kingdom. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) He treated Sultan Mahmud of Mandu and his country with charity and chivalry after conquering him and taking him as a prisoner of war. During his lifetime, Rana Sanga fought and defeated the rulers of Delhi, Malwa, and Gujarat on multiple occasions. After Ibrahim Lodi's death by Babur, the power in Delhi waned, and he rose to become the most powerful Hindu king in North India. He made the decision to take Delhi, the most valued possession of Muslim kings, and to rule over all of India. Rana Sanga, with the help of the Rajputs, engaged Babur in the Battle of Khanwa, which was cruel and devastating. The Rajputs lost dearly despite their initial lead, and Rana Sanga, who had fallen unconscious, was taken away to safety by his soldiers. (Sarkar: 1960) After regaining consciousness and learning of the setback, he resolved to rebuild his army to compensate for war damage. Rana Sanga succumbed to his injuries and died soon after. The death of Rana Sanga established Mughal dominance in India, marking a new chapter in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Maharana Sangram Singh, also known as Rana Sanga, was the last monarch of mediaeval India to stand up to invaders and unite many Rajput states to oppose them. (Barua: 2005) He was a real Rajput, a courageous combatant and a king renowned for his bravery and charity. Though he was defeated by Babur in combat, but his bravery inspired many others.

Rajasthan was allowed some breathing room after the disaster in Kanwaha so she might bind - up her wounds and, if possible, repair some of the damage. Despite the fact that hardly a single clan or household mourned the loss of someone whose bones whitened that plain, it appeared as if Rajput women would have a

¹⁰Kumbhakarna, popularly known as Rana Kumbha, was the ruler of Mewar kingdom in India. He belonged to the Sisodia clan of Rajputs. Rana Kumbha is known for his illustrious military career against various sultanates and patronization of art and architecture.

chance to raise strong boys who would avenge them on the conqueror. (Barua: 2005) Babar had only lasted approximately two years before being cut off from his enemies, leaving his beloved son Humayun to unite the disparate collection of nations that he had conquered or cowed into a cohesive and durable empire. (Kling: 1993) Humayun was a gallant and courteous gentleman, as sensitive to matters of honour as any Rajput, valiant, kindly, and a person deserving of all love and regard. He was not, however, the man to construct an empire. He was very cautious, overly emotional, and prone to acting in fits and starts; in short, he lacked ballast, and to make matters worse, he inherited his father's opium addiction without his father's cool demeanor or iron resolve. (Talbot: 2015)

Rutna, Rana Sanga's eldest surviving son, on the other hand, possessed all of his race's warlike attributes. When he ascended the kingdom, he stopped the Chittoor wardens from closing the gates that Sanga had left open. "Let them be," he answered, "Chittoor's gateways are Delhi and Mandu." Unfortunately, he had a slew of problems to deal with, some of which he created himself, and others which were concocted or exacerbated by others around him. (Talbot: 2015) His father's widow, Jawahir Bhai, a Marwar princess with an untamable temperament and unbridled ambition, was the first of his opponents. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) After Sanga's death, she devised a plan to send messengers to Babar, offering him the crown of Mahmud of Malwa, which had been left at Chitor, as well as the fortress of Ranthambhor, one of Mewar's most powerful locations, in exchange for putting her son Vikramjit on the throne in place of his half-brother. The Rani's plot failed because Babar was allegedly too busy to intervene.

The Rana had also been discreetly married by proxy to the daughter of the prince of Amber, adding to his woes. For some odd reason, he refused to own the marriage upon his ascension, and while he waited, Soorajmul of Boondi stepped in and carried off the lady in good faith. This sowed the seeds of Soorajmul's intense jealousy, which was stoked by several factors until Rutna betrayed the Boondi prince treacherously slew him and received his own deathblow from the dying man during the spring hunting season. Jawahir Bhai got her wish, and Vikramjit became Rana of Mewar within a few years. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) It's tough to write about Vikramjit with any confidence. His insolence toward his nobles and his fondness of low company greatly surpassed any claims to their devotion that he could have had as the son of Rana Sanga, according to Rajput histories. It's difficult to excuse him for spending his days with low-caste men like wrestlers and prizefighters, but one of his major transgressions appears to be foresight. (Barua: 2005) He deduced that, as Bayard had mourned in a faraway land, the period of chivalry had passed, and that the guy with the pistol was now in command of the situation. (Kling: 1993) A charge of Rajput horsemen in saffron robes used to be able to decide the fate of a day. To operate the large cannons, artillerymen must be present, as well as men on foot armed with matchlocks to protect them.

Up until recently, the Rajput detested and reviled the use of firearms in battle, and could not conceive fighting without his horse. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) When Vikramjit proposed to his army that a section be dismounted and used as infantry, they were adamant that no gentleman could fight on foot; and when he tried to explain the disadvantages they would face when pitted against guns, one and all replied that they would rather die on their horses, as was the Rajput custom, than risk their lives by dismounting. It was hard to argue with such soldiers, so the Rana enlisted the help of mercenary troops who, in exchange for a fee, were willing to fight on foot for him. This affront to his nobility's pride was met with uncontrollable groans. Sullen muttering turned into open mutiny when he began to treat these common hired people with dignity and friendliness, lavishing gifts on them and allowing himself to be seen in their company. (Kling: 1993) The Rana's authority was challenged everywhere; his laws were disregarded, and his officials were insulted. Bands of reivers from the highlands descended on Chitor, stealing the herds grazing outside the city walls from right under the Rana's nose. (Barua: 2005) When Vikramjit sent out his cavalry to chase them, he was scoffed at and told that he should deploy his new foot men instead.

The turmoil and chaos of Mewar provided an opportunity for an adversary to settle past debts. Gujarat's ruler, Bahadur Shah, has recently ascended to the throne. During Humayun's battles with the ill-tempered brothers and kinsmen who made the mild Emperor's life a living hell, he possessed Malwa. He considers it a burden. Bahadur Shah was therefore Mewar's next-door neighbor, and he frequently recalled the humiliation of earlier Malwa kings, one of whom had spent six months in Chitor as a prisoner, leaving his crown behind, while the other had been kidnapped in the midst of his own army. (Barua: 2005) The moment had come to punish those insults, so Bahadur Shah assembled his forces and marched towards the Rana, who was then in Boondi's land.

Despite his flaws, Vikramjit was his father's son, and despite the odds stacked against him, he prepared to face the Islamist forces. He was nearly alone; the hired troops didn't want to fight a hopeless battle, and the Mewar nobles were unwilling to strike back at the man who had betrayed them. His chieftains were done with Rana Vikramjit, allowing his foot men to fight for him or not; they were returning to Chitor to safeguard Rana Sanga's young son, whom a Boondi princess had given birth to after his death. (Kling: 1993) As a result,

Rajasthan's princes banded together to defend the royal capital. Despite its painful losses on the plains of Kanwaha,¹¹ the Chondawats mustered with vigour: the Rao of Mount Abu was present, accompanied by a band of supporters; and two princes disregarded all blood feuds in this hour of supreme peril. The previous Rana had assassinated his host, the Rao of Boondi, during the spring hunt; however, the new Rao, Arjuna, who had recently been elected to the throne, led 500 members of the Hara clan to Chitor in response to his sister's plea for assistance. When the fate of Chitor hung in the balance, Soorajmul's son, Bagh-ji, forgot how his father had been driven an exile from his native land and hurried from Deola, bringing reinforcements. (Sarkar: 1960) Many other high-ranking leaders were present, certain that their rock-enthroned goddess would not desert them in their hour of need.

Against Bahadur Shah's cannon, all the bravery in the world was useless. He pulled huge guns to the walls and manned them with his army's "Prankish" engineers, most likely Portuguese. While the balls descended from the skies on the beleaguered garrison, the earth would open beneath their feet, and a mine would detonate beneath their feet, murdering and maiming everyone in its path and causing a breach in the walls. The hill to the south, like in Ala-ad-din's siege, was the weak point of the defenses, and Arjuna, the Boondi prince, held the bastion there with his five hundred troops. (Barua: 2005) The rogue engineer burrowed and tunneled—"murderous mole"—laid his train and fired it. "Arjuna drew his sword as he sat on a chunk of rock shattered by the mine explosion, and the world watched in awe as he departed." (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) His Haras, for the most part, shared his fate, and the rampart was blown down in forty-five cubits. The Chondawats, on the other hand, rushed to the breach and held it so heroically that the enemy was unable to gain entry for the time being.

Everyone knew Chitor couldn't hold out for much longer until a new force came to her help. The defence commanders sought advice, and the Queen-Mother, Jawahir Bhai, was the first to devise a strategy. If she had sinned by summoning the infidel to place her son on his brother's throne, she atoned for it in these latter days, when desire for her son or for herself was abandoned in the resolve to save Chitor and Mewar's honour. She emerged from behind her silky drapes, armored herself, and took weapons in her hands. She faced the besiegers, putting herself at the head of a sally, and died a warrior's death. (Kling: 1993)

Kurnavati, Sanga's young widow and mother of the infant, Udai Singh, was another spirit for whom all their lives were being lost. She could not know the name of fear as a Hara of Boondi, and she would have gladly followed her brother, Arjuna, and her master, Rana Sanga, to the heaven where a woman may triumph over fire. But she had a plan to save her son, if not his city, and she put it into action. (Sarkar: 1960)

On a certain holy day, a lady, even an unmarried damsel in distress, may give a bracelet to a man, according to an ancient Rajput custom. The bracelet could be made of gold and jewels, or silk intertwined with spangles; the sender may only know the man's name, and he is unlikely to ever meet her. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) Regardless of the value of the token or the identity of the lady, the receiver becomes her adopted brother as soon as he has wrapped it around his wrist and returned to her the embroidered bodice that custom dictates as the proper return for her gift. (Barua: 2005) He is pledged to her service from that hour, just as the knights of Christendom were to the ladies (whom they may never have seen) whose favours they bore on helm or sleeve; she may ask whatever she wishes, even if it means risking his life, and he may not refuse.

Kurnavati wove threaded silk and spangles into a bracelet at the Rana's palace's women's wing. Then she summoned a reliable messenger: "Ride to the Emperor Humayun," she urged, "and make your way through the enemy's lines." Tell him that he is Rani Kurnavati of Mewar's bracelet-bound brother with this symbol."

The messenger had a long and exhausting journey ahead of him. Humayun was nowhere to be found in his palace in Delhi or among his father's rose gardens in Agra. Fearing for Chitor, the Rani's envoy pressed on until he reached Bengal, where Humayun had just beaten a rebellious army led by a contender to the Delhi throne. Humayun was overtaken with excitement when the bracelet was placed in front of him; such an appeal appealed to his chivalrous inclinations as well as his benevolent heart. (Sarkar: 1960) "What would the Rani want?" he wondered as he tightened the ring around his wrist; "she would have her wish, if it were the castle of Ranthambhor." "The Rani asks nothing for herself," the messenger replied, "but she begs her brother to safeguard her son." Humayun turned his back on his victories and marched towards Rajasthan, ignoring everything he had to do in Bengal. Bahadur Shah hadn't yet entered Chitor, and a little hurry could have spared the city. (Barua: 2005) But, unfortunately, Humayun dallied and hung back when he was almost within striking distance; some say that, as a real believer, he couldn't fall upon another true believer who was carrying out the will of heaven on "pagans." Regardless, instead of blows, he remonstrated with Bahadur Shah, sending him a succession of puns on the phrase "Chitor", and the city could no longer hold out. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994)

¹¹The Battle of Khanwa was fought near the village of Khanwa, in Bharatpur District of Rajasthan, on March 16, 1527. It was fought between the invading forces of the first Mughal Emperor Babur and the Rajput forces led by Rana Sanga of Mewar, after the Battle of Panipat.

The defenders readied themselves bravely and calmly, knowing that "the last day of Chitor had arrived." Udai Singh was smuggled outside the gates with the help of a trusted henchman, and the nobles of Chitor anointed him king, recalling Rana Lakumsi's vision. Bagh-ji of Deola stated that as a blood-royal, he had the right to die for the city. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) There was little time for ceremony, either in enthroning him or in erecting the women's pyre; the breach was yawning wide, beyond all possibility of defence, and the enemy would be within the walls in a matter of hours. Some of the thirteen thousand ladies who Rani Kurnavati¹² put to death were hastened by piles of gunpowder piled beneath the dry wood; others were forced to use poison or the dagger. The gates were flung open, and the garrison's final survivors raced down on the besiegers in their saffron robes and coronets. (Kling: 1993) During the second siege of Chitor, thirty-two thousand soldiers perished, including the heads of every clan and the bravest of its members.

For a week, Bahadur Shah conducted court within the walls of Chitor, amidst the dying and dead; then word came that Humayun was approaching. Save for the bad counsel of Bahadur Shah's engineers, it was too late to save, and the ever-scrupulous Emperor might not have been able to avenge. Their chief officer knew he had won Chitor for the king, and he trusted his weapons completely as a result. (Barua: 2005) A camp was created, fortified, and entrenched under the supervision of engineers and artillerymen, and Bahadur Shah installed himself with his army there, believing the officer's word that the enemy would never be able to get in.

The engineer officer was correct, but he had never considered that the army trapped in its trenches would be unable to escape as well. The surrounding land was combed by Humayun's forces; supplies were running low, and Bahadur Shah, in a fit of rage, snuck out of the camp at night with five men and abandoned his army to its fate. (Sarkar: 1960) When the army awoke to find itself deserted, it dispersed in all directions, leaving the spoils of Chitor; and when Humayun set out, he found his enemy's camp in nearly the same state as those miserable israelitish lepers found the Syrian camp. Before Humayun, Bahadur Shah moved from place to place, eventually disappearing from view—only to reappear after a short time, stirring up new trouble for the Emperor. Humayun seized control of his kingdoms of Malwa and Gujarat and dispatched to Chitor for Rana Vikramjit. (Sharma, Mathur: 1989) The son of Babar girt the son of Sanga with a sword in the barren halls of the fated city, thereby, as he imagined, installing him as ruler of Mewar and subordinate to himself, and putting an end to all fighting, within and without. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) In a few years, Humayun was a landless fugitive, travelling up and down the nation, looking for a roof to shelter his head among the Rajasthan rulers, and Vikramjit lay in the tomb to which his own subjects had hurried him.

When Rana Vikramjit returned to Chitor, he showed the same harshness to his nobles that he had shown when he first became Rana. They put up with him for a long time, mostly because no one else was worthy of his place. His half-brother, Udai Singh, was only six years old at the time, and it was not the right moment to crown a child. The Rana, on the other hand, became incensed towards the leader of Ajmer one day in broad assembly and struck him. The nobles all stood up and walked out of the room. (Kling: 1993) Because the chieftain was an elderly man, the insult would have been offensive in any case, but Vikramjit delivered it with special malice. The guy he struck was the same Srinuggur chieftain who had helped Sanga in his time of need and had been rewarded by Sanga with a grant of Ajmer lands. The nobility may well sneer at their unkempt young monarch and sulk out of the assembly. (Barua: 2005) The Chondawuts' leader was unable to contain his rage. "Until now, brother chiefs, we've only had a whiff of the blossom," he muttered as he stormed out from the royal presence, "but soon we'll have to eat the fruit." The Ajmer chieftain murmured darkly as he followed, "Tomorrow its flavour will be recognized." (Chattopadhyaya: 1994)

Such an insult, even from their monarch, could not be endured by Rajputs, and the nobles resolved to have no more dealings with Vikramjit or any other son of Rana Sanga. Mewar had already been brought to its knees by two rash youths, and a strong man's hand was required to restore the kingdom to its former glory. Sanga's blood had been tested and proved wanting; but, Sanga's brother, Pirthi Raj, whose name was still known far beyond the Rajasthan borders, had left a son, Bunbeer, whom the nobles summoned to be Regent of Mewar. (Barua: 2005) They couldn't make him Rana because his father was Pirthi Raj and his mother was a bondmaiden, but they hoped that a few years under his rule would allow Mewar time to recuperate and give them the chance to determine if Udai Singh was a worthy son of the "Lion of War."

Bunbeer paused and behaved flirtatiously with the suggestion at first; he had no right to sit on Mewar's throne, and the black ostrich plumes adorning the golden disc could not be waved over the head of a fool. Bunbeer lacked the fortitude to resist the chieftains when they pressed him again, pointing out Mewar's weakness—on which there was no reason to expand—and declaring that he, and he alone, could save the land.

In the intervening time, in a corner of the Rana's palace, tiny Udai Singh ate, played, and slept, completely oblivious to the machinations that were unfolding around him. Punna, a nurse, was in care of him,

¹²Rani Karnavati also known as Rani Karnavati, was a princess and temporary ruler from Bundi, India. She was married to Rana Sanga of Chittorgarh, the capital of Mewar Kingdom. She was the mother of the next two Ranas, Rana Vikramaditya and Rana Uday Singh, and grandmother of the legendary Maharana Pratap

and his playmate was her young son, who was around the same age as his. Dinner had been delivered to the room by the barber, who, in addition to his many other responsibilities, also serves as the cook in a Rajput family. (Sarkar: 1960) Udai Singh had finished his rice and milk and dozed off on a couch in one of the room's corners, with his playfellow alongside him. Son and foster-son were under the care of the nurse.

Punna stood up to listen as piercing cries erupted from the women's apartments. When a group of ladies was herded together, shrieks and shouts were usual; a slave might be suffering punishment for an offence, or a jealous beauty might be falling upon a rival. But no, that wretched, long-drawn, shrill, incomprehensible, melancholy cry rose again and again, and Punna recognized it as the death-wail. The barber rushed in, half-distracted by terror, while she listened breathlessly. (Barua: 2005) Was she oblivious to the fact that she had been overheard? Did she know nothing because she was cooped up in a corner of the palace? The nobility had ousted Vikramjit and replaced him with Bunbeer, and now Bunbeer had assassinated Vikramjit, whom the women mourned. The nurse was terrified and dismayed as she looked around her. (Kling: 1993) Her gaze was drawn to the sleeping youngsters. She knew that as long as Sanga's son survived, no invader could sleep peacefully. It took only a few moments to apprehend the prince, strip him of his finery, and hide him at the bottom of a large basket in which fruit had been delivered. She draped leaves over him and handed the basket to the barber. "Get thee out from the city, and hide in the dry riverbed; I'll join thee when I can."

The barber raised his load and walked out of the palace, past guards and warders, and beyond the city gates. Everyone was used to seeing him go back and forth with the dishes, and if they noticed his basket, they assumed he was bringing home the leftovers from the royal table for his wife and children. Punna's labour was far from done; she still had to place the garments she'd torn off Udai Singh on her own child. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) She performed it in a panic and then crouched down to wait for the end. She didn't have to wait long. Steps were heard in the passage, the hangings were removed, and Bunbeer appeared, sword in hand. (Barua: 2005) "Where is thy responsibility, woman?" he inquired. "Udai Singh, show me the prince." For a brief while, the mother's heart stopped beating, and she was unable to speak. She did, however, lift her hand and point to the couch, with a glitter of steel and a quick cry, and her son lay dead. Bunbeer marched out of the room, feeling himself to be the Rana.

The woman's cries over the deceased prince were bitter and numerous, and the funeral pyre built for the child's body was stunning. The nurse grieved as well until the funeral rites were completed, at which point she asked and received permission to leave. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) Her labour was finished, her baby who is being breastfed had died, and no one in the home need her assistance. She gathered her meagre belongings, enveloped herself in her veil, and departed from the home of grieving. She discovered the barber, who had been waiting for her in the dry riverbed beyond the city. (Barua: 2005) Punna may have given him a taste of the opium that was sure to be ready when she needed it because the youngster had not woken up or cried since he was placed in the basket. They worked their way across the nation to Deola, where the nurse intended to leave her charge in the care of Bagh-ji's son, who had died for Chitor.

The chief greeted them warmly and provided them with food and shelter, but he admitted that he couldn't keep them. Deola was too close to Chitor, and a spy's malice or an accidental word from a stranger could bring the new Rana down on them at any moment. Barber and nurse resumed their journey, this time to Dongerpoor, whose chief was also a member of the royal family. He wished he could have received the infant and its guardians, but he, too, might not have been willing to risk the Rana's wrath. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) He couldn't safeguard the youngster in case he was discovered, so he could only send Punna on her way.

Punna would not be deterred. (Sarkar: 1960) The fortress of Komulmer, originally the home of Bunbeer's father, Pirthi Raj, and now garrisoned by a certain Assa Sah, stood among the eastern hills. Punna was resolved to go to him for the protection that Rajputs were scared to give, despite the fact that he was not a Rajput but a member of a commercial clan that followed the Jains' beliefs. (Kling: 1993) To those who are familiar with the wild desolation of the region Punna had to travel through, it seems almost unbelievable that a woman carrying a child could have travelled through valleys, above precipices, across mountain torrents, in and out of a network of lowlands, into the heart of the mountains, even if she was a Rajput with steely nerves and manly strength.

Aside from the risks of the route, there were also the dangers of wild beasts and wild men. But the wild men actually, were the savage tiny Bhils who lurk amid the forests and keep their distance from the wider world, heard her story and helped. (Chandra: 2008) A Bhil had acquired the privilege to place the teeka—the mark of sovereignty—on the Rana's forehead in the days of Bappa Rawul, and the Bhils now aided Udai Singh as their forebears had aided his great ancestor. Assa Sah was seated in the stronghold of Komulmer with his mother when he was informed that a lady would meet with him. (Barua: 2005) A veiled person dressed as a Rajput woman knelt before him, and in response to his command to proceed and say what she wanted, she lifted the boy standing at her side in her arms. She sniveled out, "Guard the life of thy sovereign, Assa Sah," and placed the child on his laps.

Punna's narrative came to light after a few queries, and Assa Sah was bewildered and dismayed. He was obligated to protect the infant on his lap by virtue of loyalty, honour, and religion itself, yet he had no desire

to fight Rana Bunbeer.¹³ The Jain lacks the Rajput's love of battle for the sake of battle, and Assa Sah correctly concluded that the quarrel was not his. (Chandra: 2008) His mother abruptly interjected as he peered down with a dismal brow at Punna's travel-stained body, trying to explain his worries and forebodings. "Why are you afraid and hesitant, my son? Fidelity never considers dangers or challenges. (Chattopadhyaya: 1994) He is your master, Sanga's son, and the outcome of this day will be beautiful, with God's favour."

Punna's nursling was secure, but the caring mother faced a difficult test. Because the youngster was supposed to pass for Assa's nephew, he couldn't be cared for by a Rajput caregiver. She had to say her goodbyes to the boy for whom she had sacrificed all and return to the house where no offspring awaited her return. (Sarkar: 1960) So Udai Singh stayed in the stronghold among the hills, while all his kin mourned his death, and Bunbeer grew more arrogant day by day, thinking he had destroyed all the seed-royal, and forgot that his mother was a simple slave girl, and that he governed Mewar by election rather than hereditary right. (Barua: 2005) The nobles had many reasons to regret the day they installed him on the throne of Mewar, but they endured him for seven years, believing that the Sanga line had been completely extinguished.

A celebration day once attracted an unexpected crowd to Komulmer, who were entertained by the best that Assa Sah has to offer. The Rajputs were ensconced in the place of respect, while the governor's own class of visitors — prosperous tradesmen and the like — were dined at a separate table. To the amusement of the company, Assa Sah's small nephew snatched a dish of curds from the dining table and refused to give it up, despite warnings he laughed at and sweet-talking he ignored. (Kling: 1993) Some of the visitors believed that Assa Sah was incapable of dealing with an unruly youngster; but one or two were certain that the so-called nephew bore no semblance to the governor.

Sometime later, a powerful man sent news that he was travelling through Komulmer; this was none other than the chieftain of Sonigurra, a descendant of the Maldeo who had duped Rana Hamir by offering him a widow as wife. At the door, he was greeted by a thirteen-year-old lad whose pompous bearing astounded the chieftain. When informed that the youngster was the governor's nephew, the chieftain showed scant politeness in declining to believe it. (Barua: 2005) Assa Sah then disclosed the truth, believing the moment had arrived for action.

The tale spread like wildfire; all the great nobles of Mewar and the surrounding areas rushed to Komulmer to personally meet the boy. The Chondawuts' leader approached, still reeling from an insult Bunbeer had recently hurled at him. When the Rana dined with his nobles at such royal dinners, it was customary for him to send a portion of his own food to the man he intended to honour. (Barua: 2005) This ceremony was hedged in with such etiquette that a chieftain has been known to storm out of the room in rage because the Rana sent a portion to someone whose rank did not qualify him to receive it, and for the lord of another province of Rajasthan to eat off the same plate as the Rana is regarded as a sign that his birth is legitimate and his rank unquestionable. (Chandra: 2008) Bunbeer could hardly have picked a more inappropriate tradition for himself, and when he sent remnants from his plate to the Mewar nobility, they made no attempt to conceal their distaste. However, when the distinction was bestowed upon the head of the Chondawuts, he denied it categorically, knowing himself to be of the royal house's elder branch. "What is an honour from the hand of a true son of Bappa Rawul," he said boldly, "is a disgrace from the hand of a slave-girl's son." (Sarkar: 1960)

As a result, the Chondawuts were primed for rebellion, and the news that Rana Sanga's son was in Komulmer seemed to be the answer to their prayers. Punna¹⁴ reappeared with her helper the barber in the assembly of nobles gathered within the fortress; she repeated her narrative and vowed that the kid in their near vicinity was the Rana's son, whom she had accused of stealing from Chitor, and that the toddler who had been torched with protestations during Bikramajit's slaying was her own heir. (Barua: 2005)

Assa Sah formally relinquished his protection to the head of the Chohan clan, the senior among the nobles, to whom the nurse had told the revelation long ago, and the old chieftain put the boy upon his lap and shared his plate with him. Udai Singh's brow was inscribed with the teeka, and the chiefs knelt before him. From all directions, followers and resources began to flood in. (Chandra: 2008) The Sonigurra chief was one of the first, as he had been instrumental in bringing the truth to light. He presented his daughter in marriage to the young Rana, and the Rana's council agreed that the wedding should take place immediately, deeming it prudent to appease a powerful ally.

Now, in the throes of his rage at discovering how he had been duped and defrauded, Rana Hamir had issued a solemn curse against any member of his race who intermarried with the descendants of Maldeo, and many recalled this and advised Udai Singh to avoid any association with Sonigurra's daughter. However, the

¹³Vanvir Singh was the ruler of Mewar Kingdom between 1536 and 1540. He was allegedly the son of Prithviraj (elder brother of Rana Sanga) and a maid.

¹⁴Panna Dai was a 16th-century nursemaid to Udai Singh II, the fourth son of Maharana Sangram Singh. In Hindi, Panna means "emerald," and dai means "nurse." She was given charge of Udai Singh, breastfeeding him virtually from his birth in 1522, along with her own son Chandan.

alliance's benefits were so obvious, and the chieftain had contributed so much to Udai Singh's cause, that it was determined that Hamir would have been pacified and that the curse was more than two centuries old. (Kling: 1993)

Everything went smoothly for the new Rana, from the minor to the major. Every day gained him a new ally, and just as he needed provisions for his wedding, a caravan of 500 horses and 10,000 oxen carrying Bunbeer's daughter's dowry was intercepted by some of his allies in the mountain passes. Only two key chiefs were absent from the wedding, and an investigation was dispatched as soon as the festivities were ended to bring them to reason. (Chandra: 2008) Bunbeer, who had marched to their rescue, found himself almost abandoned by his army and fled back to Chitor when one was killed in battle and the other had the foresight to submit.

He could have stood a long siege for all the guns that the Mewar chieftains were expected to deliver, but his minister was loyal to the cause of Sanga's son at heart. The gates of Chitor were opened one day to what appeared to be a lengthy string of carts carrying provisions for the garrison. A thousand-armed men leapt from their hiding places as soon as the carts entered the walls, the guardsmen were cut down or captured, and Udai Singh marched triumphantly into his capital. (Sarkar: 1960)

Bunbeer's demise would have been little more than justice if he had met the same fate as Vikramjit and Udai Singh; but the Rana's counsellors were grateful to have succeeded so easily, and they couldn't forget that he had ascended the kingdom at their invitation. Bunbeer was allowed to leave in peace, with his entire family and all of the moveable things he could lay his hands on; he lived out his days in comfort and respectability in the Deccan, the founder of a dynasty that lasted many generations. (Chandra: 2008)

In the same year that Udai Singh was welcomed back to Chitor by all of his people, another was born who would make Chitor a desolation for all time. There had been many changes in Delhi during the years that Udai Singh had spent in the hill stronghold. At the same age as Udai Singh was brought back to Chitor from Komulmer, Akbar succeeded to Delhi and the Punjab, which had been reclaimed from his father's reign. (Chandra: 2008) The two lads, though, were of totally different caliber. During his nearly thirty-year reign, Udai Singh is said to have done nothing brave, wise, or courteous. (Kling: 1993) He was the son of one of the bravest monarchs ever to have the golden disc lifted over his head, and he constantly demonstrated that he was not just a fool, but also a coward. Indeed. Were it not for the fact that in his son, Pratap, all the finest attributes of the line of Bappa Rawul reappeared, one might be inclined to believe that Punna's foster-son had been supplanted by some fake prince during his youthful wanderings.

After four years under the tutelage of his intelligent but tyrannical tutor, Bairam Khan, Akbar broke free from his tutor's authority and demonstrated that, despite his youth, he was not a man to be trifled with. The Rajputs were the target of one of his early excursions. (Sarkar: 1960) The mother's hardships may have left an impression on her unborn child; and, in any event, Akbar was sure to have heard from Hamida Begum and others about Rajput inhospitality and treachery, as well as about that desert journey. (Chandra: 2008) Marwar was attacked, and Rao Maldeo was humiliated; but, the Raja of Amber was spared since he had lowered his pride to see the Lord of Delhi, and to give him a daughter in marriage—the first of Rajput kings to disgrace his house by forming an alliance with the infidel. (Barua: 2005)

Other leaders heeded the warning and paid respect to Akbar, who demonstrated a favourable attitude toward all of their creed. He removed the poll tax on nonbelievers, as well as the charge on Hindu pilgrimages—two of the most hated tolls ever imposed on his Hindu subjects. (Fanger: 1991) But there were many who refused to be appeased, the first of whom was Udai Singh, who withdrew from Chitor out of mere indolence and folly, not out of pride or heroism. He'd escaped his guardians' control and was now enslaved by an enchanting mistress, and he couldn't care less about his responsibilities as Rana of Mewar as long as she was with him. (Sarkar: 1960) When Akbar drove Baz Bahadur, the Afghan king of Malwa, out of Malwa, he permitted him to take refuge with him, despite his typical disregard for repercussions. The Rana sat comatose within the walls of Chitor, without attempting to raise a finger for his country, as Akbar marched into Mewar to exact vengeance.

The dangers of the city awoke Udai Singh's mistress's¹⁵ better instincts. She possessed the courage of her species, despite being shameless and crafty, and since her boyfriend had proven to be weaker than a woman, it was time for her to be more than man. She clothed herself in armor, as had Rani Jawahir Bhai in the previous siege, and led the sallies into the Moghul camp. She even made it to Akbar's headquarters, according to legend. (Barua: 2005) The Emperor and his army were summoned from Chitor for a more pressing necessity elsewhere; from the battlements, the garrison saw the besieging army gather their gear and dissolve away, and the Rana burst into rejoicings and assertions that his mistress was responsible for his liberation. This was too much for the Mewar chieftains to take; hadn't they fought for their worthless monarch as their race demanded, and was all the glory to be given to his paramour? (Kling: 1993) The heroic woman was slain on their orders, and the craven

¹⁵Maharani Bhatiyani, is shown to be Maharaja Uday Singh's wife, however, if historians are to be believed she was not his wife but his mistress.

Rana lost the only person who loved or inspired him because he lacked the intelligence to protect her or the spirit to avenge her.

The Emperor sat down in front of Chitor in 1567 with three or four thousand warriors, his artillery, and his most skilled engineers, according to Moghul historians. The men of Chitor, well-supplied with water and ammunition, laughed at their besiegers, and the city appeared invincible to Akbar's soldiers at first. One of the Moghul historians present at the siege says, "The castle is situated in the midst of a level plain with no other hills. (Sarkar: 1960) At the base, the mountain is twelve miles in diameter, and at the summit, it is approximately six." It is confronted with strong stone on the east and north sides, and the garrison had little fear on those sides, nor could artillery, swivels, stone-slings, or mangonels do any damage on the other sides, if they could reach them. There is no other stronghold like it in the world, according to travelers. (Barua: 2005) The entire peak was crammed with structures, some of which were several stories high, and the battlements were heavily guarded, and the magazines were overflowing."

Akbar's headquarters were at a location designated by a thirty-foot-high white limestone column from which a beacon burned every night to provide light to the camp. As they strode back and forth on the ramparts of Chitor, they could see the crimson flame flowing across the sky. Their Rana, who should have been encouraging the defenders by moving from post to post, was not with them; he had fled to the Aravali hills,¹⁶ leaving others to defend his capital. But, as in the past, the sons of Mewar arrived at the right time. (Sarkar: 1960) There was Jeimul of Bednore, a tested warrior descended from a Marwar tribe but owing allegiance to the Rana; and there was Putta of Kailwa, a sixteen-year-old youngster descended from a branch of the Chondawut clan. In the absence of the Rana, the head of the Chondawuts asserted his inherited right to administer the city and royal palace, as well as to defend "the entrance of the sun." (Barua: 2005) The lord of Deola had sent his son to Chitor because he remembered the place of his forefathers. There were many more, whose names have been passed down through the generations; and of all the chiefs who came from far and wide to defend the city, only one of any significance survived to strike another blow for Mewar after the siege was lifted.

Akbar went about his task in the meticulous and systematic manner one would expect from someone who spent his spare time creating various gadgets for improving and cleaning gun barrels and shooting guns. From all throughout India, artisans and workers—builders, carpenters, masons, smiths, and sappers—were summoned to his camp. Despite a withering barrage from the ramparts, the trenches crept a little closer to the city each day. (Barua: 2005) Undaunted, the workmen—all volunteers spurred on by the Emperor's largesse—toiled away at their positions, digging trenches, burying mines, and constructing the broad covered avenues known as sabats, from which an invading force could reach the walls. (Kling: 1993) The survivors used their corpses as cover as they fell, numbering in the hundreds every day, and the job continued. The besiegers began to sense their impending doom; the Rana had abandoned them, and it appeared that "the Mother" had abandoned them as well. (Fanger: 1991) She would never have left her rocky throne if bravery and self-devotion could have persuaded her to stay; but she needed a crowned victim, and the Rana who was as eager to die for Chitor as to live for her.

A mine blew a bastion into the air, mingling besiegers and besieged in the gap; as they fought hand to hand, a second mine exploded, hurling Rajput and Moghul into the air. The troops on the plain below was engulfed in dust and smoke, and was bombarded with stone fragments and what appeared to be human remains. (Sarkar: 1960) The Chondawuts' chief was murdered at his post, the "gate of the sun" in the eastern face's centre, and the command went to Putta, his family's lone son. His mother, who was in the city, was concerned that his love or anxiety for the young bride he had recently married might weaken his resolve. But everyone in Chitor shared the same spirit, from elderly grandfathers to beardless youngsters, scarred warriors to delicate women. (Barua: 2005) The widowed mother and her newlywed daughter donned armor and took up the lance. They went into battle with Mewar's sons and died side by side. Where the women dared so much, the men could not keep up; and the narrative of that siege is one of Chitor's noblest, if also saddest, memories.

By this time, one of the sabats had overtopped the castle's wall, and Akbar was accustomed to watching the battle from a gallery on the castle's roof, firing his favourite gun "Sangram" whenever a light flashed from the bastion. It was the hour of evening prayer, and the Emperor, long-armed and stout, sat there, intently observing the sight with his piercing black eyes, as he would wait on his elephant for the deadly spring of the jungle tiger. (Fanger: 1991) In a sudden glimmer of light, Jeimul appeared on the bastion, issuing orders to his soldiers, and his appearance revealed itself to Akbar.

The Rajput fell dead where he stood after a swift manoeuvre by the Emperor and a shot from "Sangram." The garrison then gave up hope and prepared for the final act. The women proceeded in a slow

¹⁶The Aravalli Range is a mountain range in Northern-Western India, running approximately 670 km in a south-west direction, starting near Delhi, passing through southern Haryana and Rajasthan, and ending in Gujarat. The highest peak is Guru Shikhar at 1,722 metres.

procession as the men changed into their saffron robes and shared the pan—the last meal a brave warrior eats before dying. (Barua: 2005)

From his gallery, Akbar could see the city's flames writhing, jumping, and flashing, and his soldiers, knowing what they meant, pushed through the city's northern walls, where the city's defenses had been completely demolished. Chitor, on the other hand, had not yet been conquered. (Sarkar: 1960) A stream of yellow-clad soldiers surged down to the breaches, the husbands and fathers of those whose fire was raging on high to light the carnage. Every step was a murdered opponent; along tortuous streets, along tight lanes, the besiegers methodically forced their way through, each step a slain foe.¹⁷ (Fanger: 1991) At least 8,000 Rajputs were killed during the siege or on the day of the coronation; nine queens and five princesses were among the women who perished.

On a beautiful May day in 1567, Akbar entered the city that would never be Queen of Mewar again. The Rana never returned to that haunted site, and the sons of Mewar never gathered there to defend it against an attack. (Sarkar: 1960) When someone steeped in Rajasthani folklore first pitched his tent among the ruins of Chitor, these words occurred to him alone: "How doth the city lie alone when it was full of people!" How did she end up as a widow?

When Akbar marched away from wrecked Chitor, he left the area desolate and the people despondent. The glory was no longer there. Shrine and temples were desecrated, palaces and pleasure houses were demolished, and everything "carven work," whether depicting a Rajput chief's triumphs or the glory of his gods, was damaged and destroyed. (Barua: 2005) The Islamites carried away all of Chitor's most holy treasures; no more would the enormous kettledrums be rung to summon Mewar's sons to combat; no more would the great candelabras be lit before the altar of the "Mother." (Fanger: 1991) The gates themselves were removed from their hinges and transported to Akbar's new city.

When Akbar marched away from wrecked Chitor, he left the area desolate and the people despondent. The glory was no longer there. Shrine and temples were desecrated, palaces and pleasure houses were demolished, and everything "carven work," whether depicting a Rajput chief's triumphs or the glory of his gods, was damaged and destroyed. (Sarkar: 1960) The Islamites carried away all of Chitor's most holy treasures; no more would the enormous kettledrums be rung to summon Mewar's sons to combat; no more would the great candelabras be lit before the altar of the "Mother." The gates themselves were removed from their hinges and transported to Akbar's new city. (Kling: 1993)

At Chitor, the flood of conquest continued unabated. Two courageous Rajput chieftains, one a Hara of Boondi and the other of the Chohan clan, had taken back the citadel of Ranthambhor, which Humayun had promised to return if Kurnavati Bhai requested for it. (Fanger: 1991) Rao Soorjun of Boondi, the son of that Arjuna who had died defending Chitor against Bahadur Shah, now ruled it as a Mewar fief. The flag with the sun's disc could still be waving over its battlements if it hadn't been for two renegades in Akbar's camp—Bhagwan Das, the lord of Amber, and his nephew, the Raja Maun—who lay siege to the citadel for a period without success. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

Raja Maun thought a meeting with Soorjun would be beneficial to the Emperor, so he proposed an armistice and a visit to the fortress. He entered the hall as the Emperor's emissary, accompanied by a few attendants, and was warmly hailed by Soorjun. Soorjun's uncle abruptly rose from his seat and turned to the mace-bearer, who stood close behind Raja Maun, as the two chieftains conversed. (Kling: 1993) With a profound reverence, he withdrew the mace from his grip and gently pushed him into the seat reserved for the castle's governor. Some had seen those piercing black eyes, that sallow face, and observed the wart on the left side of the nose that had long been thought to be a sign of the good fortune that awaited Akbar; others intuitively guessed who the disguised foreigner must be. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) There was a moment of recognition, followed by a moment of doubt; it was against all Rajput customs to touch a visitor, but how should they deal with this, their most terrifying foe, who had entered the lion's mouth on his own accord, and must have scouted out all their defenses? And what should be addressed to Raja Maun, their betrayer? (Sarkar: 1960)

There was no tremor in the clear ringing voice that asked, "Well, Rao Soorjun, what is to be done? " Akbar alone showed neither fear nor anxiety; the "godlike dignity" that his son praised was unaffected; and there was no tremor in the clear ringing voice that asked, "Well, Rao Soorjun, what is to be done?"

Rao Soorjun was stumped for an answer, but Raja Maun regained his composure and said, "Leave the Rana, give up Ranthambhor, and become the Emperor's man, with great honours and positions. (Sarkar: 1994) "According to Rajput chroniclers, the citadel of Ranthambhor surrendered to Akbar in this manner.

After all, it's simple to see how even honourable men would cave in such a situation. Rajputana was beginning to disintegrate, and her states were fighting for their personal interests rather than for the common

¹⁷The fatal Jauhar (third jauhar of Chittor) was commanded, 8,000 Rajput soldiers ate their last beera together and prepared for Saka, while women folk prepared for jauhar. The Mughal army killed all the Rajputs who walked out the fort. Akbar entered Chittorgarh and massacred around 30,000 of its inhabitants.

good. The days had passed when Rana Sanga had made everyone glad to be a part of Mewar, and Udai Singh was unworthy of a single man's sacrifice. All who were in Ranthambhor must have admired Akbar's strength and self-possession; this was no ignoble foe to whom they were succumbing, but a born ruler of men who, moreover, had married a Rajput wife and permitted her to worship her gods as she wished. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Boondi had already made enough sacrifices for Mewar, and the terms he was offered were deserving of the Hara honour. The Rao was to rule over fifty-two districts without being questioned or checked; when summoned, he was to provide his levy of men to the imperial army, but no Boondi chieftain was to be forced to pay the poll-tax or serve beyond the Indus. (Barua: 2005) The imperial harem should not be forced to accept any Boondi princess.

The Boondi kettledrums should be heard within Delhi's gates, the chieftains should be fully armed when they approach the audience chamber, and no one should force them to humble themselves before the Emperor. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) Rao Soorjun¹⁸ was unsurprised to accept these terms, and Sawunt Hara, the chief who had previously reclaimed Ranthambhor from its Afghan administrator, was the only one who objected. He had granted it to the lord of Boondi on the condition that it be held as a Mewar fief, and he would not participate in treason or profit from a breach of trust. (Kling: 1993) He and his soldiers were too few to hold Ranthambhor against the Emperor, but they might at least die without tarnishing their reputation. His final deed was to write a solemn curse on a pillar, threatening "any Hara of gentle blood who should approach the castle of Ranthambhor, or should leave it alive." He then donned the saffron robe and ate the pan with his followers before collapsing at the fortress's gates, defeated by hopeless odds. Since that day, no Hara has passed Ranthambhor without averting his gaze, as if ashamed. (Sarkar: 1994)

With the treasures of Chitor, Akbar triumphantly returned home. (Sarkar: 1960) Despite his religious prejudices, he was too noble-minded not to respect a valiant foe; tradition may be wrong in saying that the two stone figures on elephants that he placed by the gate of his palace at Delhi were intended for Jeimul and Putta; but he certainly appreciated their bravery, and some of his wisest advisers and most skillful generals were Rajputs from this time. (Chandra: 2008) Meanwhile, Udai Singh had been living a disgraced existence, unnoticed by anyone.

During the Emperor's invasion, he sought sanctuary in the forests and hills; after Akbar returned to Delhi, the Rana dared to come out of retirement, even building a city on the shores of a lake he had created by damming a stream. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) He named it Udaipur after himself, and as a result, Mewar's capital city today bears the name of one of her most unworthy kings. Except for the fact that he was the father of five and twenty boys, little else is known about Udai Singh's life. (Kling: 1993) His favourite child, Jugmal, whom he hoped to make his heir, was his favourite; he had no affection for his true successor, Pratap, the son of his ill-fated first marriage, and he had only been stopped from murdering another son, Sukta, who had been exiled from home.

When Sukta was born, astrologers and Brahmins were invited to draw his horoscope, and everyone shook their heads at the outcome. They claimed the boy was destined to be a Mewar foe and inflict disaster upon his family. Sukta had been monitored since that hour. He was about five years old when a skillful craftsman arrived with a dagger he had crafted for the Rana while he was playing about the chamber where his father sat. (Sarkar: 1994)

When little Sukta grasped it, Udai Singh had tested it on a bale of cotton and approved its temper. The child exclaimed, "Daggers are designed to cut flesh, not cotton," and immediately tested the blade on his own hand. Sukta did not scream or flinch when the sharp edge pierced the bone, quietly watching the blood stream out and stain the carpet. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) This was too much for his frightened father, who was convinced that such bravery in a child could only spell doom. Sukta was to be executed right away, according to the orders. As the kid was being brought away, he was intercepted by the Chondawuts' chief, who, upon hearing the narrative, ordered the executioners to release him and openly demanded the Rana's life. (Chandra: 2008) He shouted out, "Let me have the boy!" "I am childless, and he shall be my son, and after I am gone, he shall lead the Chondawuts."

Udai Singh couldn't say no to Mewar's greatest chief, and the elderly man bore the child and raised him on his lovely estate of Saloombra, the residence of the Chondawut clan's lord. Udai Singh prepared to leave a world that would be no poorer for his absence four years after Chitor fell. When the chieftains gathered around his deathbed, it was the time of the spring hunt, when the nobles of Mewar are known to slay the boar, and the Rana distributes green garments and scarves to them before riding forth at their head. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) He named Jugmal as his heir before he died, ignoring Pratap. Then, as was customary, his body was taken to the home of the family priest, who was in charge of performing the funeral rites, while his palace was prepared for the enthronement of the new Rana. (Barua: 2005)

¹⁸Rao Raja Surjan Singh was the 14th Rao Rajput Raja of Bundi. He was crowned in 1554.

His brother-in-law, the Sonigurra chief, whose sister was Pratap's mother, was among those who had stood near the dying man, and his blood was heated to see his nephew so calmly cast aside. "Will you stand by and watch this wrong?" he demanded vehemently of the Chondawut leader, who responded with another inquiry. (Sarkar: 1994)

"Why refuse milk when a sick guy in his final moments asks for it?" he said, meaning that Udai Singh was not worth challenging. "But my preference is Sonigurra's nephew, and I support Pratap." Regardless, all of the preparations for Jugmal's installation went down without a hitch. The chiefs had gathered to witness Jugmal crowned as their new Rana, and Prataphad ordered his attendants to boot and saddle, knowing that his brother's dominions would be no safe haven for him. (Barua: 2005) As Jugmal rose to take his place beneath the sun's disc, he was greeted by the Chondawut leader, who had the authority to gird the Rana with his sword, and the Tuar chief, the sole survivor of Chitor's sack. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

"You make a mistake, my lord," the Chondawut¹⁹ remarked as he grabbed Jugmal's arm, "that seat is for your brother, not for you." Jugmal was dragged down onto a cushion near the throne and Pratap was brought forward before he could protest or even realise what was going on. (Fanger: 1991) The Chondawut girded the true heir with the sword, twice tapped the ground in front of him, and led the acclaimed Pratap Rana of Mewar's shout.

Pratap expressed little surprise or joy in being elevated from a landless fugitive to "the sun of the Hindus." He reminded his nobles that it was time for the spring hunt—"To horse, and slay a boar to Gouri, and take the omen for the next year." Rana and the chiefs mounted their mounts, donned their green scarves, and rode out. As in the past, and the quarry they brought back was thought to be a good omen for Mewar. (Kling: 1993)

"No Toork had ever provided rules to the realm of princes if I had been the son of Rana Sanga," Pratap exclaimed at that hour, "and had Udai Singh never come between us." He had now set himself the seemingly hopeless mission of restoring Mewar's independence. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) Not only the imperial soldiers were aligned against him, but also the other Rajput nations; Marwar, Boondi, Amber, and Bikaner were all vassals of Delhi, and all had offered their daughters in marriage to the "Toork" save Boondi. Sugra, one of his own brothers, deserted him for Akbar, who could provide him with territories and towns, and the Segarawuts, his successors, grew to be an important family at the Emperor's court. (Sarkar: 1960) The late invasion depleted Mewar's resources, both in terms of men and equipment. Any one save Pratap would have given up the fight before it started, pledged to be the Emperor's man, and accepted all the nice things that were presented to him. Pratap, on the other hand, would not allow the sons of Mewar to capitulate; if they could not conquer, they might at least annoy, plunder, and vex the power of Delhi, and at worst, they could die with honour. He pledged to himself that he would never rest or be at ease until the Toork were expelled from the realm and Chitor's glory days were restored. (Sarkar: 1994)

So, starting at that hour, the kettledrums in the Rana's army's van were ordered to the rear; Mewar could not take the field in victory until her previous dishonour was erased. The gold and silver plates that had adorned the Rana's table vanished, and Pratap and his leaders were served platters twisted from tree leaves until they reclaimed the spoils of Chitor. The Rana's nice couch was removed, and he was forced to sleep on a heap of straw until he could secure his horse in the foe's palace. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) His beard and the beards of his servants grew straggly and untrimmed, and no scissors were to be used until Chitor was once again queen among the Rajasthan cities. He left Udaipur and established his headquarters at Komulmer; hence, this dwelling, and the homes of all others who were with him, were to be in a lofty castle or a tented plain, rather than within the walls of a palace. Sukta, his brother, was summoned to his court as one of his first acts. Sukta's adoptive father was suddenly the father of several boys in his old age, and because the young man's situation at Saloombra was not very cheerful, he gladly hastened to Pratap, who welcomed him with great love. (Sarkar: 1960)

At first, the brothers were great friends, but as in the case of Sanga and Pirthi Raj, the younger brother was jealous of the elder and believed he was better suited to rule Mewar. (Kling: 1993) At a hunt, they exchanged angry words, and the chasm between them grew wider by the day, until Sukta suggested that they mount their war-horses, level their spears, and let a single combat determine the matter. Pratap consented, probably recalling his grandfather's quest for the Tiger's Mount. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) They fought over who should strike first, each calling on the other to do so, and they were about to charge at the same time when the family priest went up to them and told them to stop fighting.

Pratap consented, probably recalling his grandfather's quest for the Tiger's Mount. They fought over who should strike first, each calling on the other to do so, and they were about to charge at the same time when the family priest went up to them and told them to stop fighting. Both were too enraged at this point to stop for

¹⁹Chondawuts are a Rajput clan and were powerful chiefs in the Mewar region during the 1700s. They are the descendants of the 15th century Mewari prince Chunda Sisodia, the eldest son of Rana Lakha.

policy or even decency. (Sarkar: 1960) They were ready to gallop in, levelling their spears, when the priest, determined to stop them at all costs, stabbed his dagger into his own breast and died between them. Both reined their horses and sprang down at the sight; it was too late to save the decent man's life, but his blood was a barrier that neither dared to cross. When Pratap gained the art of speaking, it was to bid Sukta farewell; with a mocking bow, Sukta turned away and mounted his horse for Delhi. Pratap had lost a sibling that day, but the Emperor had gained an ally. (Sarkar: 1994)

Pratap was nobly supported by many of his chieftains, who were deserted for the most part by his own relatives and by the rulers of other states. The Chondawuts' commander was as faithful to him as he was on the day Jugmal was to be enthroned; Jeimul's and Putta's sons followed in their father's footsteps. No amount of bribery offered by Akbar could persuade them to change their minds. The ancient methods, which had benefitted Rana Hamir against Ala-ad-din's soldiers, were resurrected. The news spread across Mewar that Rana Pratap was ready to flee to the hills, and that everyone who did not want to be numbered among his enemies had no choice but to accompany him. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) The pastures were bare, while the fields remained unplanted and vacant. The livestock were herded into the Aravali's defiles, where no one dared to pursue. The wild beasts, the "doleful creatures" of the woods, couched where chieftains and warriors had inhabited, and the towns and villages were left to fall to pieces without inhabitant. (Fanger: 1991) The highways were deserted, and weeds blocked the paths that had previously been travelled by busy feet. The Emperor's soldiers were unable to locate sustenance for themselves or their horses. (Kling: 1993) Every now and then, the Rana would sweep down from Komulmer, or from another of the hills' fortresses, and pillage some caravan packed with valuable goods for Akbar and his court, which was making its long journey from Surat's port. Alternatively, he would descend upon the plains, dubbed "the garden of Rajasthan," to ensure that no one dared to graze animals or cultivate maize in areas where he had ordered desolation. (Chandra: 2008) He once came across a wretched herdsman on the banks of a river, who hoped his goats would wander unnoticed through the meadows; a few sharp questions, a court order, and the goatherd was hanged where his flock had grazed, his body left to wither in the sun, a warning to all who might think to defy their Rana.

All of these signals were recognized by Akbar with disdain. He was hesitant to go to extremes with the rana. He would have preferred to see all the different races and creeds of his empire living in harmony beneath his shadow, and the Rajputs were immensely favoured amongst his subjects. A Rajput princess was his favourite bride and the mother of his son Selim (Jehangir). Many of his generals, including Bhagwan Das of Amber and Maun Singh, Bhagwan's nephew, were Rajputs, including Todar Mai, his brilliant financier who restored Delhi's revenue. (Kling: 1993) Although he had refused to sanction some Hindu practises like child marriage, animal sacrifices, and compulsory suttee as a lawgiver, he had always shown tolerance for their religion, allowing them to perform their ceremonies within his palace and forbidding his other subjects from slaughtering cows. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Despite the lesson he had planned to teach during the fall of Chitor, the other Rajput rulers were content to pay him respect; he had displeased many devout Muslims by his benevolence to these idolaters; and still Mewar defied him.

The Rajput chronicles tell the story of how a desultory guerilla struggle became a well-organized operation. Maun Singh of Amber had to pass through Mewar on his way home after fighting in one of Akbar's campaigns in another region of the Empire. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) Even though he was fallen and poor, the Rana was still "the foremost of the thirty-six royal tribes," and Maun Singh sent a polite message asking if he may appear before Pratap. (Kling: 1993) Pratap was at Komulmer at the time, and he replied that he would meet Raja Maun on the lake's shores at Udaipur. When the Raja and his train arrived, the nobles of Mewar were present, led by Umra, Pratap's eldest son; however, the Rana himself was nowhere to be seen. (Sarkar: 1994) Umra politely invited Maun Singh and his followers to sit and eat, explaining that he would be their host because the Rana was suffering from a severe headache and could not appear to welcome his visitors.

Everyone there, even Umra, knew the real reason: Pratap would not eat with someone who had aligned himself with Delhi. "Tell the Rana I know what's causing his headache," Maun Singh responded, "but no one can take his position." Who will be my host if he declines?" Pratap's response to this message was simple and straightforward. (Barua: 2005) "I cannot dine with someone who has surrendered his sister to a Toork and eats toorks himself." Raja Maun rose from his seat, enraged and humiliated, leaving the feast unfinished. "I will take no food from your hand except the grains of rice that must be dedicated to the gods," he shouted. (Fanger: 1991) We sacrificed our own honour to save yours, giving our sisters and daughters to the Toork; abide in risk if you will; this kingdom will not hold you long."

When the Rana himself strode down to see the last of his guests, he gave the signal to his followers to saddle their horses and ride away. Pratap, scarred and haggard, his clothes weather-stained and his arms cut and dented, yet a monarch manifest, was a sight to behold. Raja Maun's rage erupted—"If I do not degrade your pride, my name is not Maun," he swore aloud. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) One of Pratap's suite was not so courteous, and shouted after the Raja of Amber, encouraging him to bring Akbar when he next visited them, and describing the Emperor in language that will not bear translation into modern English. (Kling: 1993)

The ground where Maun Singh and his entourage had sat was sprinkled with Ganges water to purify it from the pollution of their touch, and Pratap and the Mewar leaders bathed and put on clean robes as soon as they had set spurs to their horses. Then they returned to Komulmer, with the offended Raja rushing to inform his new lord of his problems. (Sarkar: 1994) The Emperor's insults, contempt of authority, and epithets were all carefully recounted. In the long score versus Pratap, it was the final count. When Maun Singh returned, he did, in a sense, respond to the Mewar chieftain's taunt, "and bring Akbar with him." (Barua: 2005) The Delhi forces were gathered against Pratap, and Prince Selim was in command, with Raja Maun as his primary adviser.

Gradually, the Muslim army encircled the Rana, confining him to an eighty-square-mile territory near Udaipur that was densely forested, mountainous, and crisscrossed by mountain streams. Except at a few places near the base of the hills, where it abruptly opened into a level plain, the ground was too broken for an army to be formed up in battle order. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) The plain of Haldighati, from which a way led into the mountains, where Pratap had sought sanctuary, was one of these, and it was here that the two forces met in July 1576.

The sight of the army opposed to Pratap must have saddened even his dauntless spirit as he rode forth on his beloved war steed " Chytuc," the royal umbrella over his head, the sun's disk carried behind him, as was the custom of his race, any of whom would have thought shame to disguise himself and enter the battle. The field artillery, the swivel-gun-wielding dromedary corps.(Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

Brother was set against brother, kinsman against kinsman in the serried ranks that waited the signal on either side, and the other engines of war that Akbar had gathered against him were of little account to a Rajput, who still placed most of his trust in the valour of his horsemen; but in those serried ranks that waited the signal on either side, brother was set against brother, kinsman against kinsman. (Chandra: 2008) Mahabat Khan, one of the generals in command, was Pratap's nephew, and he was somewhere in that array.

Sugra is his brother's child. Prince Selim was the son of a Rajput mother, and he was accompanied by Maun Singh of Amber, whom Pratap had pledged to protect. Let the fortune of the day decide how he would avenge himself. Only 22,000 Rajputs and some of the ever-faithful Bhils were on Pratap's side, as fierce warriors as ever drew sword, but few indeed to be arrayed against the legions of Delhi.(Sarkar: 1994) The little wild people refused to fight; it went against all of their customs, and they were immune to military discipline. (Barua: 2005) They crouched on the cliffs above the pass, hidden by rocks and trees, waiting to fire their delicate arrows or bring huge boulders crashing down on the enemy's heads.

As far as I could tell, neither side displayed any generalship during the day. The Muslims fought to acquire the pass that would allow them access to the mountains, while the Rajputs fought to preserve it with desperate, reckless heroism. The crimson banner and the State canopy could be seen wherever the fighting was thickest, and Pratap dealt blows all around him, heedless of his own life, his one ambition to cross swords with Raja Maun. (Chandra: 2008) As he rushed across the field, escorted by a bodyguard of his chieftains, he noticed a multitude gathered around a war elephant, elaborately trapped and decked, and realized that Prince Selim lay beneath the howdah. The imperial guards were slain in an instant by Rajput swords, the elephant's driver was slaughtered just where he sat, and only the steel plates of the howdah shielded the Prince from Pratap's assaults.(Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) The fight became increasingly ferocious. The sons of Mewar rallied around their king, and the warriors of Delhi gathered to save Akbar's son.

Pratap's armour had been penetrated by a shot, and he was bleeding from three spear wounds and three sword cuts. The elephant, unrestrained by the driver, from whose dead hand the goad had dropped, abruptly pivoted, broke through the press, and charged frantically to another area of the field. (Barua: 2005)

Without a single follower, Pratap rode away from the battlefield, towards the hills, where he may find refuge alone. They were either fighting to cover his escape or fleeing in various ways. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)He resented people who were free to die for Mewar, knowing that he had no choice but to live for her because his son, Umra, was unable to continue his task. The sound of hoofs caught the Rana's ear as Chytuc made his way through the stones and rocks, and he turned to look behind him. Two riders were after him, while a third was trailing him from afar. Despite the fact that Chytuc had been wounded in the combat, he valiantly responded to his master's touch. They continued riding, the terrain becoming increasingly challenging until it was crossed by a fast torrent rushing down from the hills. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) The two horsemen drew stop on the nearer bank and hesitated to follow Chytuc as he gathered his legs beneath him, lifted in the air, and safely bore his master to the other side. They were dealing with a desperate guy, and a stumble, a fall amid those slick stones could mean death. It would be wiser to wait till a larger portion of their number became available.

Pratap rode on, tired and stiff from his wounds; Chytuc²⁰ was stumbling, and he himself felt he couldn't go on. Behind him, the sound of a horseman galloping at incredible pace came once more. A wounded man and

²⁰The horse rode by Maharana Pratap at the Battle of Haldighati, fought on June 18, 1576 at Haldighati, in the Aravalli Mountains of Rajasthan, western India, is known as Chetak or Cetak in traditional literature.

a wounded steed had no chance of escaping, so the Rana turned to bay. (Chandra: 2008) "Ho, rider of the blue horse!" said a well-known Mewari voice; "canst describe me how a man feels while he's fleeing for his life?"

Pratap was speechless when he saw Sukta in front of him—Sukta, who had joined forces with his foes. (Sarkar: 1994) Was today the day that the Brahmin's long-running battle would come to an end? Chytuc quivered, stumbled, and rolled over on the ground while he checked his horse. "'No need to look behind thee, brother!" exclaimed Prince Sukta cheerfully. I've left the chiefs of Khorasan and Multan by yon brook; they won't bother thee any longer."

The quarrels, the bitterness of previous years faded away as he talked, and the brothers fell into each other's arms. Sukta rapidly recounted that when he spotted Pratap flying alone and injured, he had forgotten everything except that they were of the same blood, and had galloped after him to assist him. He had slaughtered the chiefs of Khorasan and Multan as they stood on the bank of the creek. (Sarkar: 1994) "Take my horse and ride for safety," he replied. I must return to the camp for a bit, but I will rejoin thee as soon as possible." Pratap knelt over his horse and began unbuckling the saddle, unable to believe his hearing. Chytuc stretched himself out and died as he yanked on the buckles. There was no time to say goodbye to Sukta's beloved horse or new-found brother; Pratap mounted Sukta's horse and galloped away, leaving Sukta to slog back to Delhi's camp on foot. In a desperate attempt to explain his absence to Prince Selim. (Kling: 1993)

Sukta's tongue was full of a lengthy and amazing story. He had seen the rebel against our lord the Emperor fleeing from the battlefield, and he had seen the rebel against us. Of course, the chiefs of Khorasan and Multan had raced in pursuit, intending to seize him and lead him in chains to the Prince's feet. (Sarkar: 1994) Unfortunately, the rebel was possessed, and he had slaughtered the chiefs and was on the verge of killing Sukta. Sukta had barely made it out alive, let alone with his life.

As the Prince could see, he had lost his good steed, forcing him to return on foot. Selim, nasty and capricious as he later proved to be in many ways, possessed some of his father's liberal intelligence and reading ability. He didn't believe a word of this story, and when it was over, he turned on Sukta: —

"I swear I'll give thee my life if you tell me the truth," he says. Sukta's voice and eyes were filled with the spirit of his fathers: "My brother carries the weight of a country on his shoulders. Without defending him, I couldn't perceive his peril." (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

As a result of his candour, one day, while Pratap was living in the bamboo huts he had built alongside Udaipur's lake, Prince Sukta appeared, as light-hearted as ever. He had decided to join his brother after being discharged from the Emperor's service, but not empty-handed. He had shocked Bhynsrar, who was being detained by the Muslim, by gathering his soldiers, and he had now handed it to Pratap as a gift. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

Pratap immediately awarded it to Sukta and his heirs as a fief, and Bhynsrar²¹ became the Suktawuts' headquarters, as Saloombra of the Chondawuts. (Sarkar: 1960) From the day their founder joined Pratap, the Suktawuts became a big and strong clan, whose aspirations and jealousies were meant to distract Mewar, and whose slogan has always been "the barrier to Khorasan and Multan." The descendants of the Jhala chief have a special right to recall the day of Haldighati with pride. (Kling: 1993) In honour of their ancestor's sacrifice for his lord, all were given the title "Raj," and were allowed to play their drums before the palace gates; their commander rode on the Rana's right hand and carried the royal ensigns.

Following the battle of Haldighati,²² Prince Selim did not follow up on his triumph; he may have believed Pratap had been annihilated. Then came the rains, which rendered campaigning difficult and perilous, if not impossible; the huge army of Delhi withdrew, giving the Rana time to catch his strength and gather the fragmented remains of his soldiers. Selim returned the following spring, during the time of year when monarchs went forth to combat. (Sarkar: 1994) Pratap confronted him once more on an open field, and once again the Rajputs were horribly crushed. Pratap hurled himself into Komulmer with a handful of soldiers, believing he was safe in the hold where Pirthi Raj frequently insulted his adversaries.

However, there was a hidden adversary among them who was more dangerous than any of Akbar's hosts. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Since the days when one of the Deora leaders of Mount Abu gave the poisoned sweetmeats to Pirthi Raj, the well from which the garrison received their water became abruptly filthy, and the head of Mount Abu is supposed to have defiled it. Pratap was once again forced to abandon gallant soldiers to die for him. (Chandra: 2008) While he snuck away through the woodlands and over the hills, his kinsman, the ruler of Sonigurra, defended the fortress to the bitter end, and fell at the head of the garrison, sword in hand. (Kling: 1993) With them died Mewar's chief bard, whose war-songs had frequently encouraged Pratap's warriors.

²¹ Bhainsrorgarh is a village in Rawatbhata tahsil of district Chittorgarh in Rajasthan. Bhainsrorgarh Fort or Bhainsror Fort is an ancient fort.

²² The Battle of Haldighati was a battle fought on 18 June 1576 between cavalry and archers supporting the Rana of Mewar, Maharana Pratap, and the Mughal emperor Akbar's forces, led by Man Singh I of Amber.

Raja Maun and the imperial army captured successive castles in Mewar. The hosts of Delhi moved in closer and closer on the Rana, blocking the end of every pass and enclosing him on all sides. Mahabat Khan captured Udaipur itself; Pratap was left with nothing but the eagle's cliffs and the wolf's cave. Driven to consort with wild beasts, he learnt to conceal himself, to lurk in wait, and to escape the toils and attack the hunters. (Chandra: 2008) His pursuers believed they had cornered him repeatedly; and repeatedly, they would beat the cover, discover their target was not there, and discover that he had been pursuing his adversaries in another way. Or, as they passed over some mountain pass, believing Pratap was a long way away, a sudden shrill call would reverberate from the hills around them, and from behind every bush and rock would spring an armed warrior, and the Rana would encourage his troops on to the fray. Pratap once caught an entire division in this manner and reduced them to a single man. (Sarkar: 1994) The Bhils, the woods' wild men, were all his allies, acting as ears and eyes for his small squad. Then, when his plight appeared hopeless, the skies would befriend him; the rains would descend in torrents, swelling the streams to impassable levels, washing away whatever could be considered a road in the absence of something better, and wreaking havoc on the countryside, to the point where Akbar's generals were eager to withdraw their troops before they rotted with disease. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

Pratap was one of them who were kings in exile, on the throne, in a cell, or in a palace. When they served him under the greenwood tree, his small band of followers were as dedicated and respectful as if he sat in Chitor's halls. Even if the Rana broke a piece from his meagre provisions and handed it to one of his chieftains, the gift was regarded as great an honour as it had been in Mewar's brightest days. (Kling: 1993) There was no better school for civility and gallantry than these half-starved, coarsely-clad warriors, who had no shelter and carried their lives in their hand's day after day. With a single word, any of them could have been returned to prosperity and honour, to lie sweetly and fare delicately, to ride to battle at the head of a squadron, to marry wives, and to raise children who would carry on his name. (Sarkar: 1994) They would stay true to the Rana as long as he was true to himself. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

Pratap's wife and children were also with him, adding to the perils and challenges of his life. His children learned to cope with adversity at a young age. They were not only "rocked in a buckler and fed from a blade," but they were also suspended in baskets from trees when there were few people around to guard them, lest tigers or wolves take them. (Chandra: 2008) The mountaineers would still demonstrate small shelters among the woods where Rana Pratap had hidden himself, and point to rings and bolts on the trees where the royal nursery had been made two hundred and fifty years later. Aside from the risks posed by wild animals, there was also the risk of being captured by the enemy, and women and children slowed down a quick escape. (Kothiyal: 2016) Some of the generous Bhils once protected the babies from falling into the hands of Akbar's forces by packing them into large baskets and hiding them in the tin mines, feeding and caring for them until the uproar died down.

In the intervening time, those Rajputs who paid devotion to Akbar did well and were honoured in his court. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) They were granted a special square in the city as a camping ground, and Akbar treated them with a tenderness and respect that made surrender easy, even if it aroused the wrath of more conservative Muslims.

The two sons of the lord of Bikaner, Rae Singh and Pirthi Raj, were among the Rajput chieftains who arrived to Delhi. Both were regarded highly by the Emperor, who had married Rae Singh's daughter to his own son, Prince Selim. Pirthi Raj, warrior and poet, was regarded as the most honourable of all the Rajput chieftains who had bowed to Akbar, and he was married to a lovely and high-spirited bride, Sukta's daughter. (Chandra: 2008)

Akbar had directed that a bazaar or fair be hosted within his palace every month for his own entertainment and the amusement of his court. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) His queens, daughters, attendants, and ladies of the court were all required to attend, either to maintain a stall where they sold their own work and the work of their kin—which fetched the high prices that royal industry is accustomed to commanding—or to chaffer with the merchants' wives who brought goods from all over the empire. Although only ladies were permitted, the Emperor was accustomed to concealing himself and mingling with the audience. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

According to Moghul historians, he travelled to gather information that would be valuable to him, to "acquaint himself with the value of merchandise," and to "acquaint himself with general ideas on public matters and the character of government officials." The Rajputs believed he went for a more dishonorable purpose—to freely spy on the court women's attractiveness and to choose whichever pleased him. (Sarkar: 1960) This notion was so ingrained in their thoughts that when the Rao of Boondi submitted Ranthambhor to Akbar, one among the first conditions he imposed was that no Hara's wife or daughter be ordered to attend this fair.

Akbar was widely said to have observed the wife of Rae Singh of Bikaner during one of these fairs, with disastrous consequences. (Sarkar: 1994) "She returned to her residence tramping to the tinkling sound of gold and gem-encrusted jewellery on her person," reads a poem in which Pirthi Raj laments his brother's shame. Nonetheless, Pirthi Raj's wife was obligated to attend the fair whenever it was conducted, and it was thus that

she came to the attention of the Emperor, who was immediately overcome by her wondrous beauty. (Kling: 1993)

The princess had completed her purchases and exited the hall; she was hurrying through the maze of dark passageways leading nowhere, small latticed rooms devoid of occupants, silent passageways that appear to be full of unheard whispers and unseen eyes, which befuddle all who find themselves in the innermost corners of an Eastern palace. (Sarkar: 1994)

Suddenly, a guy sprang out of the darkness and silence in front of her, obstructing her path. As she stared upon him, she realized how well she knew the man and his intentions; alone, defenseless, and in the centre of the Emperor's palace, what could a woman do against the Emperor?

However, the daughter of Bappa Rawul was not like her sister-in-law; linking her hands, she pleaded with "the Mother" to deliver her from a fate worse than death. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Then, according to Rajput legend, "the Mother" heard her petition and arrived before her, carried by the tiger she mounts to war. (Kothiyal: 2016) She clutched a dagger in her hand, which she presented to the Mewar princess.

Swift as a hawk, the brave woman turned on the Emperor; before he could defend himself or strike her down, she had his neck slashed with the knife. "If you live," she pleaded, "promise that you will never again strive to hurt a Rajput woman." The Emperor took the oath and fled; the princess returned triumphantly to her husband. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

Finally, the courier from Delhi arrived, bearing a letter addressed to Pratap. However, this was not an order to return to Delhi with wife and children and prostrate before the Peacock Throne. Pirthi Raj was the author; and his anguish and dismay were expressed in verse: —

"The Hindu's hopes are placed in the Hindu; nevertheless, the Rana abandons them. But for Pratap, Akbar would elevate everyone to the same level; for our chiefs have lost their valour, and our women have lost their honour. Akbar is the broker in our race's market; he has acquired everything but the son of Udai, who is beyond his price. What true Rajput would trade his or her honour for anything? Yet how many have done so! Will Chitor make an appearance at this market? Though Pratap has squandered fortune, he has retained this treasure." (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

Anguish has brought many to this bazaar, where they might behold their disgrace; from such infamy, only Hamir's descendent has been rescued. The world is curious as to where Pratap obtains assistance. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) He possesses none but the spirit of manliness and his sword, with which he has successfully maintained the Rajputs' pride. This broker in the market of men will eventually reach his limit; he cannot live indefinitely; at that point, our people will come to Pratap in search of Rajput seed to sow in our arid regions. To him, we all seek its preservation in order that its purity may once again shine. (Sarkar: 1994) "Pratap abandoned all hope of making peace with the Emperor after reading this letter. His countrymen looked to him to protect the race's honour; he would not disappoint them at any cost.

However, it was clear to the Rana that he could no longer hold out in his current position. He resolved to abandon Mewar, to abandon hopes of reclaiming Chitor, and to lead his followers in search of a kingdom in another country. Babar, the Rajputs' greatest foe, had set the precedent; pushed from his stronghold in Samarcand, he had established a new kingdom in Kabul and then in Delhi. The Rana's march towards the Indus was announced throughout Mewar. (Kothiyal: 2016) All arrangements had been made, and those who want to join him gathered around him. They had descended from the hills and reached the desert's edge when a messenger arrived from Bhama Sah, Mewar's hereditary prime minister. (Kling: 1993) He and his forebears had amassed enough wealth over their years in service to sustain five-and-twenty thousand men for twelve years; he lay it all at the Rana's feet, praying that he would deliver another blow for Mewar. The imperial forces sat at rest in city and castle, imagining that Pratap was laboring through the desert; perhaps he had died, like so many others had, by missing a well or emptying the waterskins prematurely, and the hot wind was heaping the sands over his corpse. (Sarkar: 1994) Suddenly, and without suddenly, the call rushed through forest and glen, and Pratap found himself once more in their midst. He flashed from castle to fort, from camp to city, leaving nothing but dead bodies in his wake. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008)

"Pratap built a Mewar desert; he offered the sword of whatever resided on its plains to the sword." Within a year, all of Mewar was his, with the exception of Chitor, Ajmer, and one other location that remained in Akbar's possession; he then proceeded to exact his belated vengeance on Raja Maun. Amber, the main commercial town, was sacked, and the spoils were sent back to Mewar. (Sarkar: 1994)

With the exception of the offended Maun Singh, Akbar was powerless to stop the Rana; the affections of every Rajput were with Pratap, and outlying parts of the empire were causing problems. (Bandyopadhyay: 2007) There were constant revolts in the north, and in the south, the Deccan, which Akbar, like every other great Delhi king, aspired to conquer. The Emperor was getting on in years; he'd had a difficult life, and his sons provided little comfort. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Two drank themselves to death, and Prince Selim, after openly rejecting his father, ordered the assassination of Akbar's dearest friend and trusted adviser, the scholar Abu-1-Fazl. In the later years of his life, Akbar had stopped worrying about Rajasthan's concerns.

But he was doomed to outlast the one foe who had managed to defeat him. Rana Pratap, too, was a broken man, betrayed, and well past his prime. Despite his efforts, he had not been able to reclaim Chitor, and he had no hope for the future. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) He brooded over the ruin of Chitor and the frailty of his son and heir as he sat in the makeshift hut he had made by the lake of Udaipur—his promise barred him from living in his father's palace—as he sat in the makeshift hut he had built by the lake of Udaipur. (Sarkar: 1994) Prince Umra was leaving his father's hut, he had neglected to take his shoes off.

Pratap remembered Umra's irritation and abrupt exclamation as a bamboo snagged his turban and dragged it from his head, and he believed that his son would never have the self-sacrifice and hardihood to bear what he had borne. Pratap had borne the brunt of war and wanderings without seeming to suffer; now that the tension had passed, he could take no more. The leaders were summoned to Udaipur to hear the dying Rana's final commands, and the head of the Chondawuts was surprised to hear a bitter groan from his lips. (Kling: 1993) "What grieves your soul that it cannot depart in peace?" he inquired. Pratap summoned all of his might. He answered, "I might not die yet. I linger for solace, hoping to receive a promise that our country would not be handed over to the Toork." He then explained why he predicted Umra would abandon the fight. "He will not be willing to live out his days under this dingy edifice." (Bandyopadhyay: 2007)

These sheds will be demolished, and you will build mansions in their place. You will learn to enjoy ease if you live softly. You would barter the liberation of Mewar, for which we have bled our blood, for the sake of affluence. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) "With one voice, the leaders protested that they would never yield. "We will not build a house until Chitor is reclaimed and all of Mewar is liberated. We swear it before Bappa Rawul's throne, and we swear to see that Prince Umra follows his word." Pratap leaned back on his couch and died with barely any words spoken. (Chandra: 2008) He had been known as Rana of Mewar for six and a half years, much of which had been spent in turmoil and wandering.

In conclusion, the claim that Mewar lost her independence during the reign of Pratap's son Amar Singh,²³ and that if Pratap had done so in 1572, it would have saved enormous sacrifices, appears to be based on a misinterpretation. Amar Singh was granted honourable terms in 1615 as a result of Pratap's and Amar Singh's long and tenacious resistance. Mewar could not have hoped for preferential treatment if not for these sacrifices; treatment that differed from that accorded to Amber, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, and Dungarpur by the Mughal emperor. (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Pratap has been appropriately described as the personification of "the elemental spirit of India," which upholds India's traditional splendour and rejects all that tarnishes it, because of his victorious defiance of Akbar the Great without counting the sacrifices. (Sarkar: 1994) The Rajputs were thereafter victims of the Maratha confederacy's chiefs until, at the end of the last Maratha war, they acknowledged British suzerainty (1818). (Gupta, Bakshi: 2008) Following India's independence in 1947, the majority of Rajput states in Rajputana were combined to establish the Indian state of Rajasthan.

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²³Maharana Amar Singh I, the Maharana of Mewar, was Maharana Pratap of Mewar's eldest son and heir. He ruled Mewar from January 19, 1597, until his death on January 26, 1620, as the 14th Rana of the Mewar dynasty of Sisodia Rajputs. Udaipur was his capital.