

Aditya Malik
Hammira

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Aditya Malik

Hammīra



Chapters in Imagination, Time, History

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For M.

As long as you think, there will be existence, person, place and thing,
but when you stop thinking there is no existence,
because there cannot be silence and existence.
Robert Adams

Everything you can imagine is real.
Pablo Picasso

Preface

This book is concerned with two broad themes that are also reflected in the structuring of the book into two roughly equal sections. One section, consisting of the Prologue and Chapters 1, 2 and 4, deals with (a) a series of related historical events that have been profusely written and commented upon through several centuries until the present time and (b) how we perceive relationships between religious communities in India in the past (and also in the present). The events described by different texts and narratives deal with the Rajput chieftain of the impenetrable fortress of Ranthambore and his enmity and ultimate defeat at the hands of the Sultan of Delhi, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī. The text that receives particular focus is the Sanskrit *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*, which was composed by the Jaina scholar and poet Nayachandra Sūri in 1401. The purpose of the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya* seems to be twofold: on the one hand it is about poetry – about rising to the challenge of writing great Sanskrit poetry in the second millennium with all its poetical embellishments and linguistic markers. On the other hand, the poem is commemorative. It commemorates and celebrates the deeds and death of Hammīra, a flawed hero, who is unbending on his word. The poem is therefore both *kāvya* or poetry, and what we would call ‘history,’ i.e. it aspires to simultaneously contain the signifiers of a literary and a historical work.

The Sanskrit poem, however, is but one of an entire continuum of oral and written Persian, Sanskrit, Rajasthani, Hindi and English works over centuries until the present day, as well as conversations held at the fortress of Ranthambore during fieldwork, that draw out the imaginative fabric of Hammīra’s life and heroic death, so much so that this becomes part of Hindu nationalist discourse on the protection of Hindu religion or *dharma* in the 20th century. Thus, a singular moment – the battle between Hammīra and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī – reverberates through centuries vertically to the point of creating a temporal and cultural region, and a ‘history’ through a crystallization of the event in different texts and languages: Persian chronicles, Sanskrit works, Hindi and Rajasthani poems and songs, and English translations, as well as 20th-century historiography grounded in Hindu nationalist thought.

One critical detail concerning Hammīra’s life is that he provides sanctuary to one of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī’s mutineering, ‘neo-Muslim’ rebel generals called Muhammed Shāh (who is later called Mahimā Sāhi) and his followers who then become – more so than the former’s own traitorous Rajput generals Ratipāla and Raṅmalla – his closest and most faithful allies and friends, leading, as one can imagine, to wrath of the sultan, and ultimately the tragic demise of Ham-

mīra, Muhammed Shāh (aka Mahimā Sāhi) and their families. Yet, it is intriguing that despite the singular fact of Hindu–Muslim friendship and loyalty lying at the core of the Hammīra narrative, in the hands of contemporary, post-independence historiography this fact is glossed over while the story attains the status of a ‘national epic’ (*rāṣṭrīya mahākāvya*), and Hammīra the status of a national hero protecting India from Muslim imperialists.

Clearly, the text creates a narrative space that allows a series of shared religious, social and political spaces to arise. Is there a set of values that underlie the creation of this shared literary space? Why does a Jain poet write about a Hindu chieftain and his clash with a Muslim sultan, and the accompanying description of gore, treason, violence, bloodshed, weaponry, war and so on? How indeed are religious labels such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ or ‘Jain’ imagined in this context? Evidently, they do not carry the same significance as they would in the contemporary discourse of ‘essentialized,’ singular, bounded religious identities. Since in the original text they do not carry these meanings, how does Hammīra wind up becoming central to the creation of 20th-century scholarship propelled by Hindu nationalist discourse on the protection and sustenance of Hindu *dharma*? How and why does this shift occur in which shared religious and social spaces shrink? It would seem that modern enclaves of religion and caste also result in a politically charged re-imagining of the past that is both selective and palpably prejudiced in conceiving of discreet religious categories of Muslim and Hindu, rather than, for example, interrelated, rival and yet often mutually beneficial Turk, Mongol, ‘neo-Muslim’ and Rajput assemblages forged through the expediencies of honour, friendship and power but not necessarily religion or ethnicity.

The other section, consisting of Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7, arises in particular as a response to the underlying cause that triggers the composition of the Sanskrit work: it is in a *dream* that the dead hero, Hammīra, appears to the poet urging him to write the *historical* poem. Can history begin in a dream? What does it mean to think about the past, and about history and time, through an enquiry into the imagination? Is there a connection between the imagination and thinking about the past? Is history linked to imagination? What, indeed, is imagination? Is time – whether past, present or future – linked to imagination? In other words, does time arise only when there is imagination? Or conversely does imagination arise when there is time? Alternatively, is there a simultaneous arising or rather co-arising of imagination, time and history, and therefore of what we call world? As a corollary to these questions, the book explores the idea that what we call world may be quintessentially nothing more than an enormously intricate ‘seemingly real’ appearance engineered by the imagination. What are the implications of this perspective for an understanding of history and of time? Is history,

as a result, simply a simulation of an apparent reality? Can History ever be *possibility*?¹

While this book is inspired by the story of Hammira – a Rajput chieftain who lived and ruled over the impregnable fortress of Ranthambore in south-eastern Rajasthan during the 13th century – the ideas, content and questions in the second section may not immediately appear as belonging to the kind of content and questions one expects of a work of history in the traditional sense. Perhaps at best – given some of the themes it deals with – the second half of the book can be described as an enquiry into the questions that a phenomenology of both history and the imagination would concern itself with. The book is thus about history as it appears in our experience while exploring the idea of what it means to be a historical being, and to write a history from the point of view of the subject who is aware of writing it, and in whom different temporalities and experiences of time are simultaneously intertwined in the here and now.

This book thus attempts to trace the movement of various texts and narratives, spiralling circles of imagination prospectively and retroactively from the 20th and 21st centuries going back to the moment of the *Hammira-Mahākāvya*. The narratives live forward, backward, and simultaneously in the moment of now and the temporalities of past and future, as a prospective–retrospective field of intersubjective experience. The book endeavours a structure that represents this movement from future back to past, and from past into future in the simultaneity of ever-widening circles of imagination.

1 The understanding of imagination as I am using it is different to imagination as a function of a mental faculty that can conjure and construct and makes sense of past, present and future – it takes us to the realm of sheer possibility and ‘clearing’ that gives rise to the possibility of imagining as an intellectual or mental faculty of human beings.

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Acknowledgments

Although I had heard of the *Hammira-Mahākāvya* during my graduate years at the University of Heidelberg when I was doing my PhD under the guidance of Günther-Dietz Sontheimer² and Hermann Kulke, the concrete suggestion to work on the Sanskrit poem came from John Smith of the University of Cambridge more than decade ago when I was invited as a visiting professor to participate in an amazingly productive and inspiring month-long Summer Academy on Regional Sanskrit in Jerusalem. The academy was hosted by David Shulman and Yigal Bronner with the support of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. I am grateful to the hosts and the other participants of the Summer Academy, particularly H. V. Nagaraj Rao, for their encouragement and support in clarifying some of the more difficult grammatical aspects of the *Hammira-Mahākāvya*. However, after returning to the University of Canterbury where I was teaching in the Department of Religious Studies and later in the Department of Anthropology, my research interests turned in different directions that later resulted in the publication of several articles and a book.³ Many, many years after the Summer Academy, my friend and colleague Ishita Bannerjee asked me to write a book about Hammira that would be published in a series she was editing for De Gruyter. However, when the series was discontinued, I was fortunate to receive an offer from Sophie Wagenhofer to publish it as a standalone volume. Subsequently, Frank Korom urged me to have the book published in this series. And, since then, Katrin Mittmann has guided me patiently and very ably through the stages of submission and publication. I am grateful to the team at De Gruyter for their enduring support and guidance; to Ben Dare for his meticulous and thorough reading of the manuscript on account of which many ideas in the book became much sharper than they were to begin with; and to Ulla Schmidt for her prompt assistance and friendly co-operation in preparing the manuscript and indexes. I am also indebted to Romila Thapar and Ann Grodzins Gold for their encouraging comments and suggestions during the initial review of the book proposal.

But it was only when I was invited as a fellow at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Social and Cultural Studies (Max-Weber-Kolleg)⁴ at the University of

² I was probably his only student to work in Rajasthan. Most of his other students worked, as he himself did, in Maharashtra.

³ Malik (2016/2018).

⁴ *Max-Weber-Kolleg für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien*.

Erfurt for a period of one year (2016/2017)⁵ that I resumed working on the ideas that had initially begun to interest me at the Summer Academy in Jerusalem. The exceptional intellectual space offered at the Max-Weber-Kolleg provided perfect conditions to think, read, write and discuss some of the many ideas presented in this book with colleagues from universities from around the world who had also joined the Kolleg as fellows. The international guest house (IBZ) of the university – located in a 16th-century building that was originally a printer's workshop in which, amongst a few hundred other works, Martin Luther's bible translation was printed – was an ideal place from which to work and walk around the beautiful medieval town of Erfurt in the evenings. The weekly colloquia in which individual fellows' research was rigorously debated gave me a critical platform on which to think about the questions in this book. I am grateful to several colleagues from the fields of sociology, anthropology, religious studies, theology, philology, philosophy, classical studies, history, law and jurisprudence, Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Chinese Studies, and Hebrew Studies at the Max-Weber-Kolleg from whom I received critical and encouraging support: my hosts and friends at the Kolleg, Antje Linkenbach and Martin Fuchs as well as Jörg Rüpke, Harry Maier, Ann Murphy, Saurabh Dube, Ishita Bannerjee, Kumkum Sangari, Asaph Ben Tov, Angelika Malinar, Markus Vinzent, Jutta Vinzent, Avner Ben Zaken, Martin Mulrow, Daniel Boyarin, Michael Staussberg, Julie Casteigt, Richard Gordon and Max Deeg. I am also grateful to Oliver Schmerbauch, Diana Blanke, Diana Puschel and Bettina Hollstein, who untiringly and generously provided many other kinds of support and assistance at the Max-Weber-Kolleg. As I was writing it, parts of the book were presented in the form of lecture presentations at the University of Leipzig, and at an enormously creative international workshop I organized together with my colleagues in the School of Historical Studies at Nalanda University that was entitled *Imagining Histories, Writing Pasts*. I am grateful to my colleagues and students at these institutions for their observations and comments: Ursula and Sadashiv Rao for their invitation to visit Leipzig and give a lecture at the Institute of Anthropology; my colleagues at Nalanda – Samuel Wright, Sraman Mukherjee, Murari Kumar Jha, Kashshaf Ghani, Pankaj Mohan, Ranu Roychoudhuri, Abhishek Amar and Christine Vial-Kayser; and my students at Nalanda – Aditya Chaturvedi, Annalisa Mansukhani, Shikhar Goel, Shashi Ahlawat, Pritha Mukherjee, Sanjivani Dwivedi, Azad Hind Gulshan Nanda and Pavni Sairam. At the fortress of Ranthambore in Rajasthan where I conducted fieldwork, I was fortunate to have extended conversations about

5 This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 665958.

the history of the fortress with Wahid Mohammed, Manohar Lal Mina and Naresh Gujjar.⁶

While the idea for this book was first conceived in Jerusalem, different parts of it were written in Christchurch, Erfurt, Nalanda and Delhi. Wherever I happened to be, I was constantly accompanied by the love, support and encouragement of my parents, Zarine Malik and Subhash Chandra Malik. I am grateful to my father, Bhashiji, for reading through the draft of the book and offering many valuable and critical observations. My daughters Renuka and Ambika have always been patient about the vast distance there is between India where I now work and live, and New Zealand which is their home. They are a constant source of strength and inspiration. My aunts Usha Malik (Ushaji), Kapila Vatsyayan (Kapilaji) and Anjali Capila (Anjuji) have brought depth to my own thinking through their prodigious creativity in so many areas of the arts and scholarship.

This book is dedicated to Meethu, who is the embodiment of brilliance, tenacity and compassion, without whom I would not have endeavoured to undertake and complete many things, including this book.

Aditya Malik

22 May, in the First Year of COVID-19

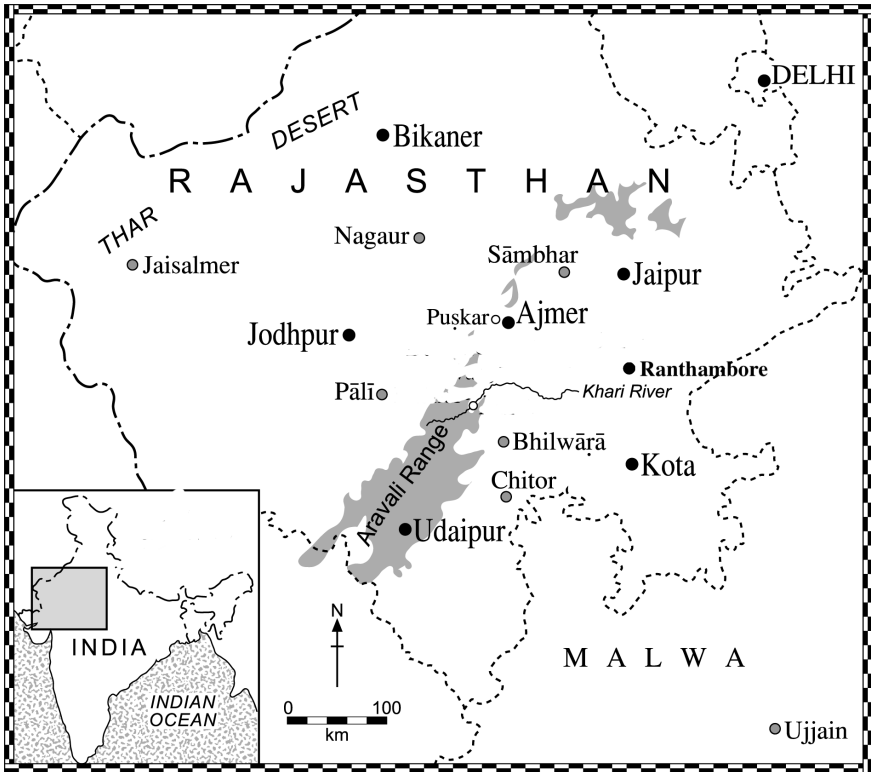
Note

While this book substantially, though not solely, draws on the content of the Sanskrit poetical work, the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*, in which the life and deeds of the Rajput king Hammīra Chauhan and his ancestors are described, it does not contain a full length translation of the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*. To do this would be to alter the size, direction and character of the book. Instead, some translated passages of the poem along with the original Devanagari text have been included in the main body of the text, while other translated sections that I found relevant to the broader purpose of the book are contained in Appendix 1.

Here I would like to express my gratitude for the assistance I received in the translation from scholars of Sanskrit literature and language: Rakesh Das (Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math), Abirlal Gangopadhyay (Central University of Hyderabad) and Aneesh Raghavan (Pondicherry University).

⁶ The bulk of these conversations are included in Appendix 2.

In addition to the translated portions of the Sanskrit text featured in Appendix 1, Appendix 2 incorporates translations of several longer conversations in Hindi concerning the history, architecture and the ritual and religious significance of the fortress of Ranthambore, which is the site of the siege laid by ‘Alā’ al-Din Khaljī against Hammīra. These conversations were recorded during a short period of fieldwork conducted at the fortress and nearby locations. Excerpts of these conversations are also included in the chapters of the main text.



Map 1: Map showing location of Ranthambore in relation to other cities and towns in Rajasthan.

Prologue

Imagination is more weighty than fact.
Thomas Moore



Fig 1: Outer wall of the fortress



Fig 2: The rampart built around the fortress



Fig 3: An outer wall and rampart

Imagine the following scenes:

Hammira, the chieftain of the great desert fortress of Ranthambore in Rajasthan, realizes that defeat is imminent by the enemy forces that have laid siege of his fortress for months. He turns to his most loyal commander, Muhammed Shāh (aka Mahimā Sāhi) and tells him to leave the fortress because he is a foreigner,⁸ and therefore should protect himself and his family before it is too late. The loyal commander is inwardly enraged but seems to happily agree with the chieftain's request. But when he returns to his quarters, he draws his sword and unflinchingly slays his wife and young children.⁹ Then he informs the chieftain that his wife was grateful for the latter's concern and care. The chieftain insists on visiting the commander's home only to find his wife and children's corpses afloat in pools of blood. The chieftain swoons and falls to the ground upon apprehending the ultimate loyalty shown by his 'foreign' commander. He praises the commander calling him "O Upholder of the Kāmboja¹⁰ Tribe!" "O Dwelling Place of the Glorious Tribe!" "O Bearer of the *kṣatriya* Vow!" "O beloved of humanity!"¹¹ Not long after this the chieftain bids farewell to his own wife, Āraṅgidevī, and leaves his young daughter, Devalldevī, in a poignant embrace before they and scores of other women of the fortress leap into a terrible, all-consuming fire pit, committing *jauhar*.¹² Then the chieftain together with his loyal commanders rides out to face the superior army of his enemy only to die in dramatic yet heroic fashion. The chieftain, who is struck by a hundred arrows, beheads himself before the enemy can take him captive. The loyal commander, Mahimā Sāhi, is injured and taken prisoner. The enemy king, 'Alā' al-Din Khaljī, offers to spare his life in return for his loyalty. When the commander refuses to betray the dead chieftain, the enemy king has his head placed under the foot of an elephant and crushed.¹³

8 Skt.: *vaideśika* i.e. someone belonging to another country (*videśa*), a foreigner, or stranger.

9 See the movie *The Usual Suspects* (1995) in which the mysterious, main character *Keyser Söze* is rumoured to have murdered his own family who were being held hostage by Hungarian mobsters after which he massacres the mobsters and kills their families. I am grateful to Eli Franco for pointing out this comparison.

10 A tribe thought to have its origins in Afghanistan or even further north-west in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

11 The king also calls Mahimā Sāhi "O Person of Matchless Virtue!" "O Blessed Courage!". Sanskrit: "*Hā Kāmbojakuladhāra!*" "*Hā Kirtikulamandira!*" "*Hā Ananyajanyasaujanya!*" "*Hā Dhanyatamvikram!*" "*Hā Kṣaitravratāgara!*" "*Hā Viśvajanaṅvātsala!*" (*Hammira-Mahākāvya Sarga* 13.163–164ab)

12 While the etymology of *jauhar* remains uncertain, the term refers to a collective or mass self-immolation of women belonging to the Rajput or warrior communities. This act of sacrifice and bravery was undertaken when it became clear that the women's male relatives (husbands/fathers/brothers) would inevitably lose or die in battle leading to the captivity and enslavement of the women. *Sati*, on the other hand, represented the self-immolation of an individual woman subsequent to the death of her husband either in battle or of natural causes.

13 This detail is found in Kirtane's introduction. It is not in the text of the *Hammira-Mahākāvya*. There is reference to this also in the *Khazā'in al-futūḥ* of Amir Khusraw. See Appendix 1, for the translation of excerpts from *Sarga* 13.147–226 and *Sarga* 14.17–21 of the *Hammira-Mahākāvya*, which contains the scenes described above.

Exactly one hundred years later, the dead chieftain appears in the poet Nayachandra Sūri's dream. In the dream the chieftain urges the poet to write a poem called the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*¹⁴ about the history of the chieftain's lineage, and the series of incidents leading to his heroic death and the defeat.

Dreaming History

Can history begin in a dream? What does it mean to write a history – an account of *factuality* – from a seed planted in a dream?¹⁵ A seed, vision or an urge planted in the subconscious that bubbles over into a cascading poem? What sorts of reverberations and ripples in space and time does the poet's dream set off once it has been birthed in material form as written language? How can or do spirals and whorls of meaning emanate from an ephemeral dream? Can the subject of a historical work direct the writer of the work in a dream? The dream I am talking about here is one that a poet and scholar from the 15th century had of a warrior king from the sandy tracts of Rajasthan who died dramatically in the 14th century. The whorls of meaning are literary and historical accounts of the events the poet wrote about elaborately in his poem that have found their way into different languages – Persian, Rajasthani, Hindi and even English – in different genres – ballads, royal chronicles, translations and scholarly essays across vast regions of space and of time.

How does the inception of time, region, history and literature flow from the poet's dream? It is not uncommon for poets and writers to be inspired by the things that they are going to write about. The inspiration may come from the

14 See below for further details about the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*. The siege of Ranthambore is comparable to the siege of Constantinople by the Ottoman Emperor Sultan Mehmed II (Mehmed the Conqueror) on May 29, 1453. Both sieges become narratives of persistence, betrayal, loyalty, the shortage of grains, the slaying of traitors by the victorious king, close relatives turning against the defending ruler and joining the attacking kingdom, and so on. Many historical details of Sultan Mehmed's siege and assault on the unconquerable and impenetrable city of Constantinople, which had stood firm even after 23 attacks in the past, are similar to the details of the attack, defence and siege of the impenetrable, unconquerable fortress of Ranthambore. Is there, perhaps, a template into which historical narratives concerning sieges of impenetrable fortresses are inserted and woven around?

15 This, of course, would seem to be at odds with the so-called 'evidentiary protocols' of the modern discipline of History. Dreams can be both private and public, inside and outside, revealing the past or the future. In the case of the composition of the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*, the dream seems to have the place of an 'authenticator,' legitimizing the truth-claims of the author.

past, or it may even come from the future.¹⁶ The poet in question is no exception, except that the warrior king that he will write about appears to him – like apparitions sometimes do in people’s dreams – with a request, perhaps a directive, decree or even royal command that he cannot turn down. A command that lodges in the poet’s mind an unusual but urgent desire, possibly a demand: to compose a poem about the warrior king, a poem that recounts his ancestors’ deeds, his own birth, his reign as a king in a remote, sprawling, impenetrable fortress atop a flat hill surrounded by barren, dry land, speckled with thorny green shrubs, thickets of tall yellow-green grass and the occasional precious shimmering, shallow lake. The warrior king directs the poet to write a poem – not just any poem, but a poem that runs to a thousand and five hundred verses in the most complex and difficult Sanskrit verse, embellished with all forms of alliteration, rhythm, metres and grammatical twists for knowledgeable readers of high culture to decipher and relish. The warrior king commands the poet to write a story, a compilation of facts put to wonderful verse about how the stubborn and strong king gave refuge to enemy generals who had mutinied from the army of their commander-in-chief, the Sultan of Delhi, and how after defeating the sultan’s armies, the warrior king’s fortress was besieged by the sultan himself for months, even years. Some say that the siege lasted so long that mango kernels the sultan’s soldiers had thrown away after eating the delicious fruit had grown into shady fruit bearing trees themselves. In the end the warrior king was slain, after being deceived by his own trusted generals. Only the mutineer generals who sought refuge by him remained close. The warrior king’s wife and daughter, and all the other noblewomen of the fortress, dressed in bedazzling jewellery and the finest, flowing garments, burnt themselves alive in a flaming pit. The king and a handful of remaining loyal friends then rode out of the fortress to confront the camping sultan’s army only to die in flamboyantly heroic ways – the warrior king, struck by a hundred arrows, severed his own head lest he be taken captive.¹⁷

The warrior king’s generosity in giving enemy generals refuge but also his steadfast – indeed stubborn¹⁸ – adherence to a code of Rajasthani (Rajput) war-

16 Kurt Vonnegut (2005) in his novel *A Man without a Country* writes: “Is it possible that seemingly incredible geniuses like Bach and Shakespeare and Einstein were not in fact superhuman, but simply plagiarists, copying great stuff from the future?” See Bowie’s (2004, 13–28) reflections on ‘remembering the future’.

17 See Appendix 1 – translated portions of *Sarga* 13 and 14 of the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*.

18 Sanskrit: *haṭṭa*. Hammīra has been described in the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya* and in other sources in varying ways, not always positive. But one feature that does consistently characterize him is his indomitable will to keep his word regardless of the circumstances. He is called *Haṭṭa-*

rior's code of honour, his impossible defeat of the sultan's armies and his audacious pursuit of bravery in death creates a spiralling imagination through literary forms, languages and epochs both pre-modern and modern in India. How and why does this spiralling of meaning and its sedimentation in literary and historical genres take place? How do different literary and historical moments look back, appropriate and refashion the events that were first inscribed in the poet's dream of the warrior king? How do different narratives and the events they speak about create a future time and a time past? What does the poem itself say about the dramatic events of the 14th–15th centuries? Who is the warrior king here and who is he in the Persian chronicles of the victorious sultan? Who is he in the ballads and songs of the Rajasthani countryside? And, finally, who does he become in the writings of 19th- and 20th-century Indian historians moulded now in the tradition of empirical history, and the nationalist fervour of a young independent, post-colonial republic? How does the hero of our poem transform from a stubborn, honour-driven local chieftain and hero in Sanskrit and Rajasthani poems and songs, to vanquished enemy chieftain in Persian chronicles, and then back to iconic figure of Hindu national identity in Hindi and English scholarly writing? How does the poem with its inception in a dream-like vision slide like a piece on a carom board from being a poetical work of historical and factual significance composed in the pattern of *kāvya* in the 15th century, to becoming a non-historical work of poetical and imaginative significance in the 19th–20th centuries? What sorts of shifts in the ideology of historiography – of writing history – can we glean from this movement? How are we supposed to read and listen to the poem inside the swirls of meaning that have spun around it from its beginning up until close to the present moment?

Hammīra or stubborn, staunch, unbending Hammīra. This characterization of Hammīra is key in some ways to understanding the unfolding of the narrative in *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*.

Chapter 1

Historical Contexts

1.1 Rajput Identities

The period between the 8th and 11th centuries witnessed the emergence and rise of different Rajput clans and lineages in Rajasthan and Gujarat. This was also a period when there were several invasions, raids and clashes with Muslim chieftains and rulers (for example, with Muhammed Ghori, 1175 CE). It was also the time when the Delhi sultanate under the so-called slave kings (for example, Qutb al-Din Aibak, ruled CE 1206–1210) and the Khaljī dynasty was established. This was also a time of interchange, allegiances, victories and defeats that occurred between Rajput rulers themselves and Muslim sultans. It was a time when the culture of valour, heroism and self-sacrifice – a particular kind of Rajput martial ethos – begins to emerge. Not only are a number of heroic narratives composed during this time in Rajasthani and Sanskrit, contemporary oral epics in Rajasthani such as those of Pābūjī and Devnārāyaṇ also situate themselves in that period, i.e. 10th–11th centuries.¹⁹ One of the main themes of these oral narratives is the self-sacrificial deeds of the heroes. These oral narratives, as well as written compositions from the period, celebrate heroic death. Death and dying is seen as a kind of victory. Indeed, in all its complexity, the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya* celebrates this idea in a fundamental manner.²⁰

One of the central narratives that we also find evidence for during this period through inscriptions and also written texts is the so-called *agni-kula* origins of certain Rajput clans. According to this narrative, of which there exist a number of tellings, Rajput clans, in particular the Chauhans or Cahamanas, arose either directly out of the fire or from the sun during the performance of a *yajña* (Vedic fire ritual) by Brahmā.²¹ Their prime purpose was the protection of the *yajña* from marauding groups of *dānavas*, *daityas* and possibly *Mlecchas*. The narrative of Brahmā's *yajña* and the origin of the Chauhans is also retold at the beginning of the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*.²²

The period preceding the composition of the *Hammīra-Mahākāvya* is therefore one in which various new *ṣatriya* (warrior caste) and Rajput identities,

¹⁹ See Smith (1991) and Malik (2005).

²⁰ See Blackburn (1985).

²¹ See also Malik (1993) for an analysis of the *Puṣkara-Māhātmya* which contains a description of the ancient pilgrimage place of Pushkar, the origin of which is a *yajña* performed by Brahmā.

²² See *Hammīra-Mahākāvya*, *Sarga* 1.13–18.