Riding Through Change
History, Horses, and the Restructuring of Tradition in Rajasthan

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<u>Introduction</u>

The academic discipline of history follows strict codes of acceptable evidence and interpretation in its search to understand and explain the past. Yet, what this discipline frequently neglects is an examination of how history informs tradition. Local knowledge of history, while it may contradict available historical evidence, is an important indicator of the social, economic, and political pressures a group is experiencing. History investigates processes over time, while tradition is decidedly anachronistic in its function and conceptualization. Although tradition is often intimately connected to history and depends on an implicit understanding of tradition as historical, the purposes of history and tradition may be at odds. A close examination of the historical context and pressures influencing the modern conceptualization and application of horse related tradition by members of the Rajput caste demonstrates the particular ways that history and tradition interact to validate a group identity.

Rajput refers to members of a caste group living throughout Northern India[1] which is considered to have *kshatriya* (warrior) status. During the medieval period, this caste formed part of the nobility in India and it continues to be one of the higher castes and thus enjoys a high degree of status and prestige. Western Rajputs are frequently considered to be the most prestigious among Rajput groups because they often ruled independent kingdoms and states. In this paper, the term "Rajput" is restricted in reference to Rajputs living in western India, particularly in the area that forms the modern state of Rajasthan [Figure 1].[2] It was clear to me while talking with Rajputs in Rajasthan

[1]For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the term "India" to refer to the Indian sub-continent throughout the paper. The meaning is restricted to the modern Republic of India only when specifically referring to events after 1947.
[2]The term "Rajasthan" is a modern political convention but the region to which it refers has had a fairly

Figure 1. District Map of Rajasthan, Census of India 2001

Figure 2. Provinces of India, Census of India 2001

large degree of political and cultural cohesion since the medieval era. For the sake of consistency, I have used Rajasthan throughout this paper. For further considerations of the regional identity of Rajasthan, see Deryck Lodrick's essay "Rajasthan as a Region: Myth or Reality?" in volume one of *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, eds. Schomer et. al., (New Delhi: South Asia Publications, 1994).

that when they use the term Rajput, they are referring to primarily western Rajputs. Although other Rajputs certainly used cavalry, the western Rajputs developed a particularly strong relationship with the horse.

As Rajput is a caste group of a particular region of India, one is born into an identity as a Rajput. However, it is clear that the caste identity of Rajputs today is not the same as what it was several hundred years ago. The category "Rajput" is an inherited identity but it is not a stable category. What it means to be a Rajput has undergone a gradual process of change. In the face of changing economic and political situations, Rajputs are using tradition, particularly traditions involving horses, to make sure that "Rajput" remains a meaningful category with an identity that is separate from that of other caste groups.

Tradition refers to a belief, ritual, or action which is repeated, commonly held, and is believed to be passed unchanging from generation to generation. Although traditions frequently originate from a practical need, the meaning that tradition invests in symbols forms its primary function. Tradition forms a paradigm within which one can position oneself. It provides a sense of continuity, real or constructed, that securely positions one relative to one's historical past as well as to one's current surroundings. Tradition is the active part of a heritage; it is that which makes a heritage real and meaningful. Although tradition utilizes the past, it is firmly rooted in the present; how one formulates tradition and how one interprets it is directly related to one's present situation. Tradition is one of the ways that one can interpret history and connect it to modern life. It provides an explanation for how and why one acts and it forms commonalities between individuals. Tradition is a means by which humans tie the present

to the past, and therefore is a tool of validation.

One of the main ways that tradition can function is to form or bolster a group identity. Tradition is a cultural form that through its reenactment gains new meaning and perpetuates commonalities. It ties one not only to the past, but to others in the present who engage in the same practices or beliefs. Tradition pulls on a sense of collective memory, in which each group member shares in a set of common memories of events that concerned the group. Tradition forms an underlying collective sense of group that can often be hard to pin down onto one particular source. When a group faces outside challenges to its identity, tradition can form a central pillar around which the group can reshape itself and maintain a sense of continuity even in the face of change.

After India became independent in 1947, the Rajput's position in society was challenged politically and economically. The princely states, ruled by Rajputs, acceded to the Republic of India and were consolidated into the province Rajasthan. In a series of reforms designed to further democratize the country, the Indian government stripped the Rajputs of many of their feudal rights. On account of the pressures created by this act and increasing modernization and mechanization, horses were seen as an expensive luxury and were one of the first items sold. However, as the Rajputs have once again gained financial stability in the last fifteen years, they have been finding ways to reincorporate horses into their lives. Many Rajputs continue to feel that horses are a central part of their identity as Rajputs and lay claim to certain historical, literary, and religious traditions as validation for this belief.

Rajputs are using tradition to maintain a group identity that is centered on horses. The Rajputs are currently exploring various ways to make a living related to horses,

including the professionalization of Polo, offering riding safaris for tourists, and breeding

the Marwari, a horse believed to be indigenous to the area. There is a tendency among

Rajputs to claim that Rajputs have always had horses, and that the relationship between

Rajputs and horses is based on the innate genetic or character qualities of one or the

other. Through various stories, folk sayings, and religious rituals the horse is being

imbued with symbolic meaning that almost causes the horse to stand for the Rajput.

Based on field research that I did in Rajasthan in April 2005, this paper explores

how tradition is used by contemporary Rajputs. Although some of the reformulation of

tradition is aimed at tourist-based economic opportunities, much of it is clearly based on

an expressed desire to resurrect the role of the horse in Rajput life. I will examine the

sources the Rajputs are using to reformulate this tradition and examine the disjuncture

between tradition and history. Through invoking tradition, the horse has become a

symbol laden with the weight of warrior chivalry, Pyrrhic valor and high-spirited loyalty.

My goal here is not to somehow expose Rajput traditions as based on falsehoods and call

for a reform or change, but it is instead to examine the interplay of history and tradition

and how each functions for the Rajput community. The Rajputs are strategically using the

past in the form of tradition to create a sense of continuity in a period of intense

economic and political change.

Notes on Method and Interpretation

During my one month research period, I traveled throughout Rajasthan, spending

several days at the Balotra animal fair in Barmer district, one week in Jodhpur, five days

in Udaipur, and the rest of the time in Jaipur. Most of my interviews took place at the

homes of my informants. Some interviews occurred by chance, but most of them were

arranged through networking. I am particularly indebted to Lokendra Singh Rathore and his sister Gayatri Kumari for their generous assistance in providing introductions and contact information. Over the period of one month I conducted a total of thirty-two interviews with twenty-five different participants. In this paper, I have directly used thirteen of those interviews.

Lakshmi Kumari Chundawat is the only woman who I formally interviewed. She and her son Wing Commander Rawat Ghanshyam Singh are no longer directly involved with horses. Lokendra Singh Rathore is one of India's first professional polo players and one of the most widely respected horsemen in Rajasthan. Lokendra's cousin Khem Singh runs a horse safari business, often using the hotel and stables of another participant, Sidharth Singh Rohet. Devendra Singh Nawalgarh, also Lokendra's cousin, has a safari business and breeds Marwari horses. Devendra has business associations with Raghuvendra Singh Dundlod, one of the founders of the Indigenous Horse Society of India. Maharaj Narendra Singh claims to have organized the first horse safari in India and is the founder of the Chetak Horse Society. Gajendra Pal Singh Posana is the Joint Secretary of the All India Marwari Horse Society. Lt. Col. Kishen Singh is a retired member of the 61st cavalry and the first of three generations of polo players in his family. Moti Singh Ramawat is a businessman who is currently translating a family manuscript on horses. Jaipal Singh Rathore is employed at the Mehrangarh Fort Museum in Jodhpur and has spent years collecting folk sayings. These participants are a fairly representative sample of my whole group of participants who ranged from polo players, to museum curators, horse breeders, and safari leaders.

Most of my interviews were unstructured, as I found that my interview subjects,

many of whom were unused to being interviewed, were far more talkative in a casual setting. In an attempt to understand the role of horses and traditions related to horses with regard to Rajput identity, I asked my participants to narrate their personal history with horses as well as to answer general questions about the role of the horse in religion, art, and literature. Most of my interviews had two main parts- a more formal description (generally unprompted) of horses in Rajasthan and what may be described as the theoretical role of horses in Rajput society, and a more personal part describing their actual involvement with horses. As per the guidelines of the program through which I conducted my primary research[3], all research subjects were provided with a description of my project and its intended use at the beginning of the interview.

Although the majority of my interviews were conducted in English, in many ways I was a translator, translating from Indian English into American English as well as translating from the specifics of horse related vocabulary to more generalized ideas accessible to the non-horse specialist. As with any qualitative research, in my work I have interpreted what was said to me by my interview subjects. I have done my best to keep in mind the specific contexts in which these remarks were made.

History

Knowledge of the history of Rajputs and horses in India is necessary to be able to evaluate the way that tradition interacts with history. Although more nuanced than many of the claims made by tradition, the historical record does support the claim that Rajputs had close ties with the horse based on utility from at least the sixteenth century. This relationship was shaped by the conditions of maintaining horses in India as well as the

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[3]The School for International Training based in Brattleboro, Vermont

predominant role of cavalry in Indian warfare throughout the medieval period.

Horses in South Asia

Horses have been present in northwestern India at least since Vedic times (roughly 1500 To 500 BCE). The Vedas mention horse sacrifice as well as horse races and chariots drawn by horses. In the Vedas, as well as other early sources such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, horses are a high status symbol, associated with the sun god Surya and incorporated into kingship rituals. There are archaeological and art traces of horses and riding equipment dating back to at least the first century CE.[4]

Due to the climate and vegetation in India, horses have never been common enough in India to become the beast of burden that they were in Europe. Horses are generally restricted to the northwestern portions of the Indian sub-continent where the climate is drier and there is some grazing land to be found. In this part of the country a grass known as *sevan* grows that has a high nutrition level in contrast with most of the grasses found in monsoon climates. The Indian sub-continent as a whole does not have good grazing lands, which contributed to the high value placed on horses. The lack of proper food and the stresses of the climate have often caused horses to have a shortened lifespan in India relative to the average lifespan of horses in Central Asia and Arabia. Horses were primarily valued for the speed they gave for individual transportation and for the strategic advantages afforded by cavalry warfare.

Horses have entered India from Central Asia through the Khyber Pass and have also been imported by sea from Arabia. The indigenous horses in India show the hot blooded temperament and fine bone structure of Arabian and Turkic horses [Figure 3].

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[4]Jean Deloche, *Horses and Riding Equipment in Indian Art*, English edition, (Madras: Indian Heritage Trust, 1990), 31-2. There are many images in this book of early images of horses.

Figure 3. A. Marwari Mare from front and side. Photos by author. B. Akhal-Teke, horse breed from Central Asia. Photo from http://haras.du.verseau.free.fr/RACEAkhalTeke.htm C. Arab horse. Photo from http://northernlightsarabians.com. The fine-boned nature of these horses is particularly noticeable in the legs and neck.

Although horses were and are bred in India, it is clear from medieval sources such as the

Ain-i-Akbari that imported horses were more valuable and considered to be of higher

quality.[5] Because Rajputs did not have as much access to imported horses, locally bred

horses played a larger role in their stables than in those of the Delhi Sultanate or the

Mughal Empire.

The Rise of the Rajput Clans

Many histories of Rajputs either portray Rajputs as timeless mounted warriors

dwelling in western India or as outsiders who suddenly appeared in the early medieval

era. However, using epigraphs, B. D. Chattopadhyaya gives evidence of the gradual rise

of the Rajputs within an existing political system between the seventh and twelfth

centuries CE.[6] During this period, Rajput was not a static category and many clans that

came to power adopted the name "Rajput." The Rajputs appear to have developed from

diverse clans that gained the military strength necessary to begin to conquer their own

lands and to establish themselves as independent political entities. Their position was

strengthened by building forts, which served as centers of power, as well as by strategic

inter-clan marriages, which strengthened alliances. As these clans rose to power, they had

genealogies written to validate their newly acquired *kshatriya* Rajput status by projecting

their ancestry into the past and connecting it with past rulers. By about 1300 CE, many of

the clans that had originally begun the rise to Rajput status had subdivided as nobles

challenged the rulers and formed new clans, and the term "Rajput" seems to have evolved

from literally denoting the son of a king to referring generally to the members of these

[5]Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, 2d ed., ed. S. L. Goomer, trans. H. Blochmann, (Delhi: Aadiesh Book
Depot, 1965), 141-2.
[6]B. D. Chattopadhyaya, "The Emergence of the Rajputs as Historical Process in Early Medieval
Rajasthan," in *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, ed. Karen Schomer et al.
(Colombia: South Asia Publications, 1994), 2: 161-191. This paragraph is based on Chattopadhyaya's
article.

new political entities.[7]

      The Rajput groups that came to power and founded kingdoms and principalities during the period between the eight and twelfth centuries CE began to develop a cultural ideal for their caste identity. During this time period, literary texts and inscriptions indicate a developing notion of chivalry among the Rajputs. This notion of chivalry was primarily based on ideas of honor.[8] In classical Indian texts, including epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and technical documents like the *Arthashastra*, the concepts of honor and individual valor are present but the applications of these concepts are subordinate to the considerations of diplomacy.[9] During conflicts, treaties and acts of deceit are depicted as acceptable options although they violated ideas of honor and valor. In contrast, in parallel with the rise of feudal systems headed by Rajputs, a code of individual chivalry developed.[10] This code was based on conventions such as treating war as sport, having no restraint in battle, a dislike for deception and diplomacy alike, and being recklessly brave.[11] During the eleventh and twelfth centuries chivalry was encouraged and supported by the compositions of court bards who exaggerated the brave deeds of their patrons in battle.[12] The notion of fighting for higher ideologies also began to develop during this period,[13] although this may be exaggerated in literary sources and by later interpretations. The chivalric conventions adopted encouraged an individualistic style of battle and probably informed Indian war tactics. Notably, only high ranking

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[7]Chattopadhyaya, 180.

[8]Chivalry is the most commonly used term in Indian historiography in this context, but Indian chivalry is not directly equivalent with the concept of chivalry found in medieval European courts. For example, courtly love is much less central in the Indian concept of chivalry.

[9]B. N. S. Yadava, "Chivalry and Warfare," in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000-1800*, ed. Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H. A. Kolff, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67.

[10]Yadava, 67.

[11]Yadava, 69.

[12]Yadava, 68.

[13]Yadava, 85.

*kshatriya*s, most likely including Rajputs, were considered able or worthy of this code of honor.[14] To what extent this code was actually applied is unclear.

Delhi Sultanate (1192-1398 CE)

In 1191, the leader of a Central Asian dynasty known as the Ghurids invaded India and was defeated in the first battle of Tarain by a force led by the Rajput Prithviraja Chahamana. In 1192, the same group invaded and this time was victorious at the second battle of Tarain. The difference in outcomes seems to be related to the availability of suitable warhorses and not in technological differences.[15] The speed and mobility of horses was a significant strategic advantage. The Ghurids established their capital in Delhi and founded the Delhi Sultanate, which had its political and military headquarters in Delhi. They made multiple invasions into Rajput territory, which placed considerable political, economic, military, and religious pressure on developing Rajput groups.

The Delhi Sultanate had a direct impact on many Rajput groups since those kingdoms closer to Delhi were conquered and incorporated into the Sultanate and those farther away faced regular invasions and sieges. Two of the most significant campaigns in Rajasthan led by Sultan Ala' al-din Khalji were those against Ranthanbor and Chitor.[16] In 1301 Ala' al-Din Khalji and his armies took Ranthanbor, whose king, Hammiradeva, died in battle, and in 1303 they conquered the fort of Chitor. Both forts were conquered by siege. These two events have had a prominent place in Rajput as well as Sultanate

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[14]Yadava, 70.
[15]Simon Digby, *War Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate: A Study of Military Supplies*, (Oxford: Orient Monographs, 1971), 11. Peter Jackson does not directly contradict Digby but attributes the success of the Ghurids to tactics. See Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 14-19.
[16]Jackson, 133.

literature.[17] The seizure of these forts enabled Ala' al-Din Khalji's armies to invade farther west and south in the Indian sub-continent. Although sieges were one of the most widely employed strategies of the Sultanate army, the Sultanate's ability to field a large cavalry force also provided a significant strategic advantage in these expansions.[18]

War horses played a central role in the establishment and maintenance of the Delhi Sultanate.[19] Therefore, controlling the trade flow of horses and elephants was a primary concern of the Sultanate. The Ghurids originally invaded with horses from Central Asia that were superior to the locally available horses. However, within fifty years of the establishment of the Sultanate, political ties with Central Asia were broken and the supply route for horses was not guaranteed.[20] An alternate source of horses was the *tazi*, Arab type horses from the Persian Gulf area. These horses were imported via sea to ports on India's western and southern coasts.[21] Some were even shipped to Bengal. This was a more expensive source as the costs of shipping were high and many horses died in transit. However, *tazi* horses were highly favored in the Sultanate.[22]

Not only did the rulers of the Delhi sultanate work to make sure that they had access to horses, they also attempted to restrict the access to horses of other South Asian kingdoms and principalities. Hindu rulers with access to sea ports could buy imported horses, but the availability of horses was severely limited by the expense of shipping and

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[17]M. S. Ahluwalia, *Muslim Expansion in Rajasthan: The Relations of Delhi Sultanate with Rajasthan 1206-1526*, (Delhi: Yugantar Prakashan, 1978). Page 83 Footnote 4 gives a list of non-Persian manuscripts that describe the siege of Ranthanbor. Page 92-94 discuss several bardic texts and inscriptions as well as Persian accounts of Ala' al-Din's siege of Chitor.

[18]Jackson, 214-5.

[19]This paragraph is based on Digby's work.

[20]Digby, 34

[21]Digby, 27.

[22]Ibn Battuta's prices for horses indicate that *tazi* horses were the most expensive horses in Delhi around 1334-1340. Digby, 37-9.

the attempts of the Sultanate to control supply chains.[23] Peace treaties with the Sultanate often involved surrendering warhorses. The Sultanate also imposed annual tributes of horses on rulers in Punjab, northwest of Delhi, and the Deccan to the south and tried to insure that horse traders would trade only with the Sultanate and not with other kingdoms.[24] Based on these actions, it is likely that kingdoms which did not have access to ports were not able to field large cavalries.[25] The Delhi Sultanate was able, in part, to insure its own security by controlling the availability of warhorses. Notably, at the time of the fall of the Delhi Sultanate in the end of the fourteenth century, the Sultanate's cavalry seems to have shrunk dramatically and horse traders were wandering at will through India selling horses to whomever they wished.[26]

Development of Rajput States

In 1398, the centralized power of the Delhi Sultanate was destroyed by the invading Mongol leader Timur. Timur did not stay in India, and in the wake of his invasion, various smaller leaders attempted to set up kingdoms in Delhi and in other areas of India. It seems that between 1398 and the invasion of Babur in 1525, many of the Rajput fiefs and kingdoms developed. Because there was no central power, smaller dominant groups were free to establish their own kingdoms. These kingdoms varied greatly in size and power and were often engaged in warfare against each other. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries centralized states emerged in Rajasthan.[27] This

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[23]Digby, 48.

[24]Digby 48-9.

[25]Digby, 49. Although numbers in many documents are not trustworthy, the relative difference in ascribed numbers between the Hindu ruler Hammiradev and the Sultan Ala-u-din Tughluq in the 1300s indicates that this was indeed the case.

[26]Digby, 41.

[27]Norman P. Ziegler, "Evolution of the Rathor State of Marvar: Horses, Structural Change, and Warfare," in *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, ed. Karen Schomer et al., (Columbia: South Asia Publications, 1994), 2:192

process was aided by the increased presence of horses. However, in contrast to the popular notion that Rajputs have always been mounted warriors, local sources seem to indicate that prior to the sixteenth century horses were rare and those that were available were unsuitable to be war horses.[28] The tradition of fighting on foot did not immediately change even as horses gradually became more available.

Taking the state of Marwar in western Rajasthan as an example, Norman Ziegler has argued that horses played an important role in the way that Rajput states developed. Good warhorses were severely lacking in this area during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so acquisition was a primary concern. It is evident from many of the local sources that most Rajputs at this point fought on foot even if they rode a horse to the site of the battle.[29] The reason for this seems to have been some mixture of convention to fight on foot and that the high value of a horse made it too risky to ride into battle.[30] However, even if mounted warfare was not widely practiced, horses were highly valued because of the increased mobility that they provided.

The kingdom of Marwar seems to have gained larger numbers of horses in the early sixteenth century. The first local textual reference to a stable, which was established on the eastern border of the kingdom of Marwar, occurs around this time.[31] The presence of outpost stables increased the defensive capacity of the kingdom because invading armies could be met on the borders with greater ease. The development of *prebendal domain* in Rajput kingdoms, in which a king grants non-hereditary rights to land to

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[28]Ziegler, 193.
[29]Ziegler, 206.
[30]Ziegler, 206-8
[31]Ziegler, 195.

nobles in exchange for military service, correlates with an increased supply of horses.[32]

Prebendal domain allows for the maintenance of a larger number of horses and soldiers

than one king could do on his own because it distributes the expense of maintaining

horses.[33] With the establishment of larger numbers of horses through *prebendal domain*

and the development of outpost stables, the rulers of Marwar were able to expand their

kingdom. Largely because of the need for horses, *prebendal domain* became the pattern

of land distribution around which many Rajput states developed.

The Mughal Empire (1526-1707 CE)

In 1526, Babur invaded India from Central Asia and, having defeated the Lodi

ruler in the battle of Panipat, founded the Mughal Empire in northern India. Many Rajput

kingdoms joined together into a confederacy under the king Rana Sangha to defend

themselves against Babur as he attempted to expand the next year, but the Rajputs were

ultimately unsuccessful. Their loss signaled the shift of many Rajput kingdoms into a

subordinate position vis-à-vis the Mughal Empire. Five years after conquering parts of

northern India, Babur died, and the next several years were filled with turmoil as his son

Humayun lost the throne and was forced to flee to Persia. Humayun eventually regained

his throne in 1555. In the intervening years, much of northern India was ruled by the

Afghan Sher Shah Sur. Humayun's son Akbar inherited and adapted many policies from

Sher Shah Sur. Although Babur is rightly the founder of the Mughal Empire, it was not

until Akbar's reign from 1556 to 1605 that the empire truly became a centralized power in

South Asia. Akbar's reign is typically portrayed as one of central control and stability,

with steady and frequently successful expansionary campaigns.

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[32]Ziegler, 198.
[33]Ziegler, 200-1.

The stability of Akbar's reign is largely due to Akbar's policies regarding the nobles in his court. Akbar's court cultivated a relationship with nobles that focused in theory on love and loyalty and was expressed in terms of the relationship between a father and son.[34] A noble's rank was demonstrated by how proximate he was to the emperor, and court rituals, such as the granting of *khilat*s, robes which have been worn by the emperor, to nobles were used to signify the incorporation of the noble into the (literal) body politic of the state.[35] Many Rajput clans became close to the Emperor by giving one of their daughters to the emperor as a wife or concubine. This was done particularly by the Kachhwaha and Rathore clans, whereas the Sisodiya clan took it as a point of pride that they did not give a daughter to the imperial harem.[36] The practice of giving daughters to the Emperor was an extension of the already extant pattern of using marriage as a way to solidify alliances. The assumption was that by giving a daughter to a different clan one indicates one's subordinate position to that clan but is also brought into a blood relationship with that family. On many other levels the interactions between Rajputs and the Mughals seem to have been extensions of already existing Rajput practices.

Akbar's policies regarding conquered territories and the nobles of subordinate kingdoms were largely focused on integration. Those kingdoms which surrendered to him were generally granted some form of semi-autonomy and their rulers became nobles in his court. In this way, many Rajput kingdoms became closely linked with the Mughal Empire during Akbar's reign. It is estimated that during Akbar's reign about fifteen

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[34]Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 57, 61.
[35]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 58-9.
[36]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 58.

percent of nobles in the Mughal court were Rajputs.[37] Rajput integration into the Mughal court was so complete that Rajputs were at several times put in charge of all or part of the Mughal army. It is probable that Mughal patronage helped to solidify Rajput hierarchies and constructions of history.[38] At the same time, these policies brought the Rajputs in close contact with other warrior groups including the Mughals, Afghans, and Turanis. Codes of proper conduct for nobles and warriors developed in this context.

One expression of the courtly codes was the symbolic role of the horse in the Mughal court. Perhaps through its connections with court nobles, the horse became a symbol of nobility and fine manners. An encyclopedia of the horse, the *Farasnama*, was developed that drew from both the Indian tradition of *Shalihotra*, illustrated manuscripts detailing the care of the horse, as well as Persian *Furusiyya* literature, which is a collection of horse lore. The access to knowledge about horses was a trait which distinguished nobles from commoners. In the *Farasnama*, horses are presented as the mounts of kings. Equine metaphors such as "the imperial stirrup" for the emperor or "present with the stirrup" for being at court indicates the central symbolic role of the horse in structures of authority. Horses are also widely used in the school of Mughal miniature painting as a symbol of nobility and authority.[39]

One of the most successful strategies of integration that Akbar implemented in the Mughal Empire was the *mansabdari* system. This was essentially a ranked system of revenue land and salary (collectively called *mansab*) distribution among the nobles of the court in exchange for maintaining a certain number of soldiers and horses. The *mansabdari* system has its roots in the *lekhapaddhati* system of Rajput rulers granting

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[37]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 73.
[38]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 54.
[39]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 120-1.

villages to lesser Rajput chiefs in exchange for their providing military service with a certain number of horses and men used in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[40] Another model for the *mansabdari* system can be seen in the decimal organization of cavalry in the Delhi Sultanate in which ten warriors of one rank were commanded by one, who is in turn along with nine others of the same rank commanded by one.[41] This pyramid scheme, which seems to have been typical for many Persian influenced armies, allowed for an army to be raised on a scale not previously possible.

The *mansabdari* system established by Akbar departs from these models in the way that the system was used as a system of flexible hierarchy. It indicated the rank of the noble but not their position in a chain of command. Each *mansabdar* (the holder of a *mansab*) was directly responsible to the emperor and one's rank in court was closely tied to the size of one's *mansab*. A *mansab* consisted of two number rankings: *zat*, which represented individual rank and honor as well as pay, and *sawar*, which represented the number of cavalry the noble was expected to maintain from the salary and land grant he was provided. Incentives to become a *mansabdar* included receiving both cost-based salaries and the resources to strengthen one's military contingents.[42] The *mansabdari* system provided a convenient means for further integrating landed groups such as the Rajputs into the political structure of the empire because it allowed the emperor to turn their ancestral lands into non-transferable holdings bequeathed on them by the state.[43] In many ways this made Rajput sovereignty dependent on the Mughals. Thus the

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[40]Yadava, 74-5.
[41]M. Athar Ali, "Organization of the Nobility: Mansab, Pay, Conditions of Service," in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000-1800*, ed. Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H. A. Kolff, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 232.
[42]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 84.
[43]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 73.

mansabdari system functioned to integrate Rajputs into the court life of the Mughal Empire.

Like the earlier systems it is based on, the *mansabdari* system also had the strategic advantage that it allowed a larger army, and particularly a larger cavalry to be maintained. The system helped to mitigate the central government's expenses in maintaining livestock, especially warhorses, and dispersed the military supplies effectively throughout the country. Each *mansabdar* was supposed to maintain two horses per warrior. This ratio allowed for greater mobility and flexibility of the army. There were also financial incentives to maintain higher quality horses. Because of the mansabdari system, it is estimated that the Mughal army could have gathered a force of 100,000 to 200,000 mounted warriors.[44] Fraud was a perpetual risk and problem with the dispersal of horses, and in an attempt to combat this, a system of horse branding and annual inspection was instituted.

The Rajputs had implemented systems of land grants based on *prebendal domain* prior to the Mughal *mansabdari* system. During the Mughal reign there continued to be a two tier system in that the Mughals granted *mansab*s to the Rajput rulers or chiefs who in turn granted *jagir*s to nobles within their own courts. *Jagir*s were grants of land given to nobles for revenue and administrative purposes.[45] The Rajput rulers stipulated a number of horses to be maintained from the *jagir* revenue. The *jagirdar*s formed the village chiefs within the Rajput kingdoms. Although not technically hereditary, many *jagir*s were repeatedly bestowed on the same family. In many ways the administrative and military organization of the Rajput courts mirrored that of the Mughals.

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[44]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 117.

[45]*Jagir* also refers specifically to the land granted as part of a *mansab*. The Rajput princes tended to primarily grant *jagir*s only without the salary associated with a *mansab*.

The Mughal Empire can be classified as a "gunpowder empire" because of the role of artillery and muskets in the establishment and expansion of the empire.[46] The horses used by the Mughal army were dispersed among the nobles, but artillery and musketry was tightly controlled by the Mughal court because of the advantage they gave.[47] The artillery was most effective in siege warfare and therefore sieges became one of the most common tactics employed. Infantry armed with muskets were also certainly present in the army and, although the muskets of the time could not be fired as rapidly as arrows, they struck their targets with considerably more force than arrows and could be effectively used against cavalry.[48] Starting in the mid-seventeenth century there were regiments of mounted musketeers in India which were highly effective, but did not become popular until the middle of the eighteenth century.[49]

Cavalry tactics intensified under the Mughals because of the greater size of the army. Mounted warfare continued to be one of the most effective strategies during pitched battles, especially since the infantry present in India was not well-trained for coordinated movements.[50] The Mughals used a strategy which placed heavy cavalry in the center and light mounted archers on the flanks. The archers would fire on the enemy from a distance and then the heavy cavalry would charge. This strategy was highly effective, especially with large numbers of horses.[51] The Rajputs in the Mughal army were most frequently part of the heavy cavalry.[52] Over the duration of the Mughal

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[46]Iqtidar Alam Khan, *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.
[47]Khan, 92,146.
[48]Khan, 144-5.
[49]Khan, 154-5.
[50]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 117.
[51]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 117-118.
[52]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 55.

Empire, the use of mounted warfare declined somewhat because of the difficulty of making and maintaining good bows in the Indian climate and the reduction in number of Central Asian warriors migrating to the Mughal Empire and joining the army.[53]

Like the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire was largely dependent on imported horses. The sea trade declined in the mid sixteenth century with the fall of the Vijaynagar Empire in South India and the Mughals were increasingly dependent on horses from Central Asia.[54] This trade posed a perpetual risk to the empire as the difference between a horse trader and an invader was sometimes a fine distinction.[55] The volume of the horse trade is estimated at 16,000 horses per year, although the available numbers vary greatly.[56] The trade was both a drain on the state treasury as well as a source of revenue in the taxes and duties collected on horses at several points along the trade route.[57]

The Mughal Empire was not directly involved in local breeding efforts until the eighteenth century and foreign horses were clearly preferred. Excerpts from the *Ain-i-Akbari*, a court record from Akbar's reign, mention that foreign horses were given larger feed rations and *mansabdars* received extra maintenance allowances for high quality foreign horses.[58] It seems however, that many of the mounted soldiers in the army were actually mounted on indigenous horses of dubious quality.[59] Although imported horses were preferred, it would not have been feasible to import the numbers of horses needed by the Mughal army. The Rajputs used mostly local horses, although it is likely that they were of fairly suitable quality as most of Rajasthan falls within decent breeding areas.

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[53]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 118, 120.
[54]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 115.
[55]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 116.
[56]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 116.
[57]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 116.
[58]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 115.
[59]Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 115.

The Ain-i-Akbari mentions a breed called *pachwarya* from Rajasthan among the three or four local breeds that were found to be the best of the indigenous horses.[60]

Rajput relations with the Mughal Empire were not stable and constant. The kingdom of Mewar, which initially resisted Mughal control for a period of over forty years, was conquered by the Mughals in 1615. The kingdom of Marwar occasionally rebelled under later emperors. After Akbar's reign, the succeeding rulers Jahangir (1605-1627), Shah Jahan (1628-1658), and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) were all involved in succession struggles before they took the throne. These struggles forced the nobles of the court to choose their loyalties and a wrong choice was often a fatal decision. The Rajput rulers had to employ considerable skills of diplomacy to survive these rough periods. The *mansabdari* system continued to be used by Akbar's successors, though to varying degrees of effectiveness.

Although Rajput warrior ethic developed in a large part in the context of the Mughal court, in many ways it also varied greatly from the Mughal ideas of warfare. Emperor Aurangzeb observed that the Rajputs fought "[with the] crass stupidity of the Hindustanis [i.e. most probably Rajputs] who could part with their heads but not leave their positions [in battle]. In every way, you should confer favour on this race, because on many occasions these men can do the necessary service, when no other race can."[61] What set the Rajputs apart from the other warriors was their conception of self-sacrifice in battle. While Aurangzeb may not have seen this as an admirable trait, he did see it as a useful trait.

Decline of the Mughal Empire

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[60]Abu'l Fazl 'Allami, 140.

[61]Hamid al-Din Khan Bahadur, *Anecdotes of Aurangzib [Ahkam-i Alamgiri]*, 4th ed., trans. J. Sarkar, (Calcutta, 1963), 48, quoted in Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 55. Brackets theirs.

After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the Mughal Empire went into a state of decline. It continued to exist in name until 1857, but no Mughal ruler after Aurangzeb was able to control a large area or rule for a significant amount of time. As a result, the eighteenth century saw the fragmentation of northern India into small kingdoms. Many nobles from the Mughal court based their kingdoms on the land they had been granted in *mansab*s. The Rajputs during this time continued to rule their established kingdoms in Rajasthan, though not without struggle. The most powerful Rajput kingdoms in this period were Mewar, Marwar, and Jaipur.

During the eighteenth century, the Marathas, a warrior group from western central India, became a powerful threat. Aurangzeb had been involved in several battles against the Marathas and although he had not been able to defeat them, he had kept their power in check. Once the Mughal army could no longer muster a significant force, the Marathas began a series of fairly successful invasions north into Rajasthan. The Marathas were a cavalry based force and they also took to employing European mercenaries armed with artillery. The Marathas' successes have often been attributed to the fragmentation of the Rajput kingdoms. Although the Rajputs recognized each other as members of the warrior nobility, they did not form a cohesive group identity. It was not a logical assumption for the Rathors of Jodhpur to join in a battle of the Sisodiyas of Udaipur against the Marathas based on their shared status as Rajputs.

Central Asia continued to be the primary source of warhorses for India during the eighteenth century. Unlike under the Mughal Empire and Delhi Sultanate when trade to the capital city (Delhi, Agra, or Fatehpur Sikri at various times) was privileged, during the eighteenth century many horse trade routes went through Rajput states and cities. For

example, traders would come through Multan and across the Thar Desert instead of going through the Khyber Pass. Routes also linked Jaipur to central Awadh (modern central Uttar Pradesh) and bypassed Delhi.[62] These route changes presumably gave the Rajput states greater access to imported horses, though they were still largely dependent on their own breeding efforts. They also afforded a new source of income for the Rajput states through customs and duties collected on trade caravans.[63]

The Central Asian horse traders arrived in India in October and November. Fall fairs (*mela*s) were held in Pushkar and Balotra at the time when these horses would arrive. At Balotra a larger fair was and is held every spring, at the end of the grazing season, during which mostly local breeds are traded. Each trader would bring only several horses to the fair, on which basis army officers and the horse trainers of the courts (*cabuk-savar*s) would buy whole strings of horses. Out of these strings, the buyer would normally resell the best and worst horses and keep the middle quality for cavalry use.[64]

Local data for the volume of the horse trade is prone to exaggeration but still gives a sense of the demand. Gommans claims that during the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, the number of horses in South Asia reached its peak levels.[65] Estimates vary from 400,000 to 800,000 horses total.[66] Robert Orme, a British man in India in the eighteenth century, recorded the military strength of the Rajput kingdoms around 1760. He estimated that the Rana of Udaipur had 20,000 horse troops and the chief of Marwar had 25,000 to 30,000 troops, consisting mostly of cavalry.[67] The demand

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[62]Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire c. 1710-1780*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 80.
[63]Gommans, *Rise*, 43.
[64]This paragraph is based on Gommans, *Rise*, 80-81.
[65]Gommans, *Rise* 87.
[66]Gommans, *Rise* 88.
[67]Gommans, *Rise*, 86.

for horses in the eighteenth century is thought to have peaked largely in response to the needs of rising local courts struggling for power in the wake of the Mughal Empire. Because of this large demand for horses, prices were high and trade was brisk.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the horse trade began to decline in India because of pressures from the British East India Company (EIC), which settled in Bengal in 1757. Trade became more difficult in EIC controlled areas as the EIC attempted to control the movements of the horse traders and the EIC settlements blocked some routes. The British Agent Wyatt, who was sent to obtain horses from Kathiawar which had a good reputation, observed in 1814 that the quality of the local breeds had declined because of a poor system of local, native government and disruptions due to the Maratha invasions.[68] Although this may have been in part true, it was also probably due to the increasing British presence. The imposition of *Pax Britannica* caused the demand for war horses to decline, which was paralleled by a decrease in the quality and quantity of local breeding.

Although the imposition of peace reduced the demand for horses, they remained an important military resource. The East India Company realized that in order to expand westward in India, they would need cavalry troops in addition to the drilled infantry with which they were more used to fighting. However, the British demands for horses were hard to meet in India because they required larger, heavier horses for their heavily equipped soldiers than the native cavalry required, which used very light equipment. The EIC also had a limited budget and could not pay as much for horses as surrounding states,

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[68]Gommans, *Rise*, 91.

so the horse traders would only bring their worst animals to trade with the EIC.[69] The

East India Company's attempts to obtain bigger, bonier horses through agents at fairs in

Punjab and Rajasthan were also largely unsuccessful. The EIC attempted to set up

breeding centers within their territory to supply their own needs, but they were generally

unable to secure the interest or cooperation of local horse owners.[70]

British Paramountcy

The Maratha invasions provided the means for the EIC to expand into Rajasthan.

By the start of the nineteenth century, the main Rajput kingdoms had been fighting a

losing battle against the Marathas for fifty or more years. The Marathas were demanding

high tributary payments and were destabilizing the Rajput kingdoms. Several of the

smaller kingdoms in Rajasthan were completely under Maratha control.

Under these circumstances, the treaties offered by the EIC in 1817 and 1818

seemed quite attractive to the Rajput rulers. These treaties, composed and signed

individually with most of the kingdoms in Rajasthan over the span of a year, included

clauses establishing perpetual mutual friendship between the British and the Rajput

states, protection of the states by the British, and the acknowledgment of British

supremacy supported by the subordinate cooperation of the states. In addition, these

treaties included non-aggression pacts whereby the Rajput states were not to attack each

other. Most treaties also required the rulers to make their troops available to the EIC

government and to pay an annual tribute to the EIC.[71] Unlike many of the East India

Company's other territories, under these treaties the ruling families and nobles continued

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[69] Gommans, *Rise* 98.
[70] Gommans, *Rise*, 97.
[71] Nidhi Sharma, *Transition From Feudalism to Democracy: A Study of the Integration of Princely States of Rajasthan (1947-50 AD)*, (Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers, 2000), 3.

to enjoy hereditary feudal rights. The EIC now had greater rights and ability to interfere with the kingdoms, and they guaranteed the sovereignty of the rulers much as the Mughals had.[72]

The treaties of 1817 and 1818 required many of the rulers to provide troops to the British on demand. For many of the states this was mainly cavalry troops. For example, Jodhpur was required to provide 1,500 horse and men on a regular basis and the British could request their entire army excepting what was needed to maintain the state's internal affairs.[73] The regularly provided force was quite small in comparison to the size of Jodhpur's total force which Orme estimated about fifty years earlier. After 1835, this requirement was commuted to a set sum of money that the EIC used to raise and equip a legion of local soldiers.[74] In addition, the states kept their own forces for state use which were often composed of Afghan mercenaries because they were thought to be more reliable than the forces raised by the *zamindar*s, nobility who enjoyed hereditary land rights.[75] However, the total number of horses and warriors supported by the states declined dramatically after 1818.

The reduction of central state troops gave more power to the *zamindar*s and *Thikana* chiefs.[76] They continued their role as feudal lords and maintained horses, although they were not under as strict requirements as they were during the Mughal era. Also, because the rulers were no longer as dependent on them, they lost some of their

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[72]This paragraph is based on Sharma, 3-4.

[73]Sharma, 170.

[74]Sharma, 170.

[75]Sharma, 169.

[76]Nobility who enjoy hereditary land rights. *Thikana* chiefs are either *zamindar*s or *jagirdar*s. A *Thikana* generally refers to a town or district.

rank and privileges that were tied to the court.[77] During the revolt of 1857, when Indian soldiers employed by the British led armed revolts against the British starting in Uttar Pradesh (then called United Provinces) and spreading across north India, many of the *zamindar*s supported the revolting troops. However, the rulers, under the pressure of the treaties they had signed and because the British insured their continuing rule, helped the British to quell the revolts. The rulers and the nobles were frequently in a tense relationship and the rulers were often reliant on the British to maintain their authority over rebellious nobles.

After the 1857 revolt, the British crown officially took over the administration of India from the East India Company. The treaties the Rajput rulers had signed with the EIC transferred over to the British crown. The relationship between the British and the Rajput rulers officially became a paramountcy. However, there was considerable difference in viewpoint as the Rajputs saw these agreements as being between two sovereigns and the British viewed the Rajput kingdoms as feudatories.

In 1888 and 1889 the British revised their system of native troops and the Imperial Service Troops were raised. These troops were comprised of only soldiers from a particular state. They included the Sardar Risala, a cavalry unit from Jodhpur, as well as a cavalry regiment from Alwar and a transport corps from Jaipur. At the turn of the nineteenth century, there were three types of troops in Rajasthan: regiments of the Indian army, the Imperial Service Troops, and the Local service troops. It is estimated that out of these troops there were 6,427 cavalry and 33,520 infantry.[78] Cavalry was still useful at this time, but it was declining in favor of well-drilled infantry and artillery regiments. The

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[77]Sharma, 7.
[78]Sharma, 175.

cavalry troops from Rajasthan, in addition to fighting in Indian battles, also participated in the Boxer rebellion in China and in World War I in both Europe and northern Africa.

Under the British paramountcy, local breeding of horses and the horse trade continued to decline. The imperial service troops were equipped in the British style so local breeds became less viable in cavalry units. The agreements often stipulated the type of horses. For instance, the Jodhpur Lancers were to be mounted on Arab, Valer (Australian thoroughbred) or English thoroughbred horses.[79] The British preference for these types of horses also affected the perceptions and preferences of the local rulers and nobles. Sir Pratap Singh, a regent of Jodhpur in the nineteenth century, is said to have thrown the local breeds out of his stable. An article from the 1930s lists the local breed known as Marwari as being in danger of extinction.[80] The preference for thoroughbreds for both war and sport decreased the importance of local breeds.

Independence (1947-1948 CE)

By the mid 1940s, it was apparent that India was likely to receive independence soon. Most of the Rajput nobility was opposed to independence because they felt it would end their feudal privileges. Many of the rulers were hoping to form independent monarchies and argued that their treaties with the British crown were directly with the crown and that therefore agreements with the rest of India, including those related to forming the Republic of India, did not affect them. The infant Government of India worked to convince the rulers to sign an instrument of accession before Independence. This agreement transferred responsibility for defense, external affairs and communications to the Government of India. It also paved the way for the eventual

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[79]Sharma, 174.
[80]"Saving the Marwari Breed," *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 8 Feb 1933.

integration of the kingdoms into the Republic of India.

After Independence on August 15, 1947, the Government of India worked to merge the Rajput states with the rest of the country. Prior to Independence, Rajasthan consisted of nineteen princely states and two chiefships. There were many obstacles in the process of negotiating a merger because neither the rulers nor the nobility wanted to give up their hereditary rights to revenue collection or administration. In 1948, Mewar became the first state to accept a treaty with the Government of India. In part because of Mewar's high status among the other kingdoms, over the next two years the rest of the kingdoms entered into treaties with the government.[81] These treaties transferred the administrative and revenue responsibilities over to the government of India, but the rulers were granted privy purses upon which they could continue to live. Through these treaties, the modern state of Rajasthan was created.

Part of merging the princely states with the Republic of India was merging the state armed forces with the national forces. To some extent this started informally in 1948 and 1949 when some of the states started to retrench their army personnel and reduce their forces due to financial strain. Many of the soldiers who were let go were absorbed into the Indian army.[82] The formal merger involved a complicated point system by which a member of the state forces was assigned a particular rank and regiment with the Indian army.[83] After World War II, it was evident that mechanization was the way of the military future. It is thought that it was only through Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's wish that a horse based cavalry regiment was preserved in independent India.[84] This

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[81]Sharma, 39.
[82]Sharma, 183.
[83]For a table of the point system, see Sharma, 185.
[84]Col. K. S. Garcha, interview by author, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 13 March 2005.

regiment, the 61st cavalry, was primarily formed from the Dangar Lancers, the Kachhwaha Horse and the Mewar Lancers. The Jodhpur Lancers were merged with the 7th cavalry, which became a mechanized unit.

These mergers officially broke the tie of utility between horses and the Rajputs. No longer ruling independent states and in the face of mechanization, the Rajputs had no need of maintaining horses for military use on either the royal or the jagirdar level. Those who were employed in the 61st cavalry used horses which were provided by the government.[85] Horses were no longer a high demand item for war and served only for pleasure.

Post Independence to Modern Times

After Independence, tension between the Government of India and the former rulers and nobility continued. Because of the long history of the hereditary feudal rights, many local residents still considered the kings and nobility to be their leaders. The government worked to gradually reduce the privileges of the Rajput upper class. In 1952 and 1953, land reform acts were passed which abolished the *jagirdari* system. These acts removed the main source of income of the Rajputs and limited the amount of land they could own. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Congress government passed acts removing the privy purses.

In the post-Independence period, the Rajput nobility went through a period of financial instability. Due to the treaties they had signed and the reform acts passed by the government, they lost their administrative rights including taxation and the collection of customs and duties that they had used to support themselves. With the removal of the

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[85]Lt. Col. Thakur Kishen Singh, interview by author, tape recording, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, April 2005.

privy purses and the redistribution of land, they lost two more sources of income. Although many Rajputs were highly educated, they were not used to needing to seek employment.

During this period of instability, horses were one of the first items to be discarded. The maintenance of horses is particularly costly in India and lacking the land for pasture and fodder as well as a certain source of income, the *jagirdar*s sold or gave away many of their horses. Some Rajput families did try to retain several horses for personal use, but many stables were completely emptied. The horses were often dispersed by ones or twos with local villagers, which led to a decline in breeding because of the dispersal of suitable studs. At this point in time, horses were a liability, not a valuable resource.

Although the Rajputs may have undergone financial upheaval, they retained their high social rank which helped them to recover. Between the 1970s and the current time (2006) many Rajputs have achieved financial stability through going into business careers or converting their family homes and forts into hotels. Others have pursued military careers. Many have tried to find ways to make maintaining horses economically feasible. These attempts include professionalizing polo, leading horse safaris, working in the thoroughbred racing industry, and breeding as well as creating a market for indigenous horse breeds. These attempts to revive the economic utility of the horse have been paralleled by reinterpretations and invocations of Rajput traditions relating to horses.

Sources of Tradition

Tradition is shaped by the sources it uses. The recent Rajput reconstruction of tradition has largely been dependent on sources from the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries as well as some folklore of undetermined age. The different types of sources each confer their own type of authority to the tradition. The Rajputs have been using both historical as well as symbolic sources. The availability of sources is also very important to their ability to support claims to tradition. Widely available sources or types of sources often provide greater credibility because of their familiarity. What sources are used in building a tradition is in part a function of particular historical circumstances which determine availability and access to sources.

Horses in Art

The majority of the art depicting Rajputs and horses together is painted in the miniature painting style. This style of art developed in the Mughal court and was influenced by Persian and Indian traditions of manuscript illustration. The Mughal emperor Akbar patronized a large atelier of painters to illustrate the events and accounts of his life. Later, under the rulers Jahangir and Shah Jahan, many of the images became more abstract or were developed separate from a text. Miniature paintings commonly depict scenes of court life, historical events or portraits. Patronizing painters became a status symbol and was a common court activity for both rulers and nobles.

This school of art was a courtly style, requiring patronage and educated viewers. Miniature painting is called such not for the size of the paintings, which range from several square inches to several square feet, but for the level of detail in the painting. The faces of the subjects were paid especial attention. Painted on a specially prepared paper with colors created from ground stones and plants, the paintings were meant to be held and examined, not framed and hung on the wall. An educated eye was needed to perceive the artistry and interpret the paintings. A vocabulary of standardized symbols evolved in

this art form, with the art coming from the skillful composition and execution of the elements.

One such symbol was the horse, conveying a sense of power, authority, and nobility. The theme of the horse legitimating authority is not new in Indian culture. The Ramayana mentions a rite establishing kingship in which a white stallion is set free and wherever it roams, that area becomes part of the kingdom. The presence of the horse symbolized kingly rule and authority. This rite is thought to have been conducted by Jai Singh of the Jaipur (Amber) court during the medieval era. That the horse continues to be closely linked with royalty is evident from the title "How will the King's horse be saved?"[86] of a series of articles on the Marwari in the local newspaper in the spring of 2005.[87] The image of the horse conveys royal prestige and authority.

Although Miniature painting originated with the Mughal court, over time many of the painters migrated to Rajput and other courts. At these smaller courts, distinctive styles developed both in subject matter and in technique. The Rajput courts often commissioned paintings of Hindu religious tales as opposed to the Persian tales painted by Akbar's painters. Interestingly, the Rajput paintings, especially those from Marwar which has good breeding areas, show more paintings of horses than many of the Mughal paintings. These include portraits of mounted kings, depictions of hunts and polo games, as well as portraits of favorite horses. The pervasive nature of these painting gives the impression of the ubiquitous presence of horses and mounted Rajputs [Figure 4].

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[86]Original Hindi: *Kaise bacega Raja ka ghora?*
[87]*Dhainik Bhaskar*, 21-23 April 2005 (Hindi).

Figure 4. Clockwise from top: Hunt scene, portrait of a horse and groom, Portrait of Raja Man Singh I of Amber. Jaipur School. Images courtesy of City Palace Museum, Jaipur.

Technical Documents

In addition to patronizing miniature paintings, many Rajput nobles patronized artists to make copies of manuscripts about horses. Falling somewhere between the high class formal painting and the folk sayings in terms of its milieu, there are a number of technical documents on horses that contribute to Rajput tradition. The most common type of these manuscripts in Rajasthan is known as the Shalihotra (alternately transcribed as Salhoter). The Shalihotra is an illustrated hand copied text attributed to the sage Nakul and dating from at least the 1500s. It provides the origin story for the horse, types and characteristics of the horse, auspicious and inauspicious markings, training methods, and types of diseases and their treatment. The details of the text, particularly regarding medicine, vary in different regions of Rajasthan because of the availability of different plants.[88] This text is an all inclusive manual for the care and riding of horses.

Figure 5. Shalihotra manuscript pages. Photos by author.

It seems that most Rajput noble families had a copy of the Shalihotra during the medieval period. The Shalihotra provided the basis of knowledge of horses appropriate

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[88]Devendra Singh Nawalgarh, interview by author, tape recording, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 26 April 2005.

and useful for someone whose lifestyle was dependent on horses. It is not clear to what extent the Shalihotra was used as a practical reference text, though it is reasonable to believe that it reflected the practices and beliefs regarding horses from the time of its composition.

Access to the Shalihotra's record of traditional horse knowledge has decreased due to linguistic shifts in Rajasthan, as Hindi and English become the predominant languages taught in schools, and the prestigious languages needed by Rajputs to get a job. Most of the Shalihotras from Rajasthan are written in a mix of Sanskrit verses and medieval forms of local dialects such as Marwari and Mewari. Although it is still possible for some Rajputs to read these languages, the text is not easily accessible from a linguistic point of view. Nor is it widely available. It is no longer being copied by hand so the main Rajputs with access to it are those who have preserved a copy with their family. Many copies are also stored in museums.

Work is being done to make the Shalihotra more available. Recently, an abridged version with Hindi commentary has been published by a research institute in Jodhpur[89] and I met several people who are working on translating the text both into Hindi and into English. Moti Singh Ramawat, a business man from Udaipur currently translating his family's Shalihotra manuscript, sees his attempts to translate the Shalihotra as an ethical responsibility. He is working from a photocopy of a manuscript owned by his family. He said that the preservation and translation of the text was a moral duty because people are forgetting about it but this text is a practical book.[90] Indeed, Moti hopes to form a business making medicine for horses based on the recipes in the Shalihotra and develop a

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[89]Hukm Singh Bhatti's *Shalihotra: Asvayurveda-sastra: Nakula krta-tika Rajasthani*, (Jodhpur: Rajasthani Shodh Sansthan, 2004).
[90]Moti Singh Ramawat, interview by author, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 17 April 2005.

horse research institute where this knowledge could be further developed.[91] With a lack

of trained veterinarians, particularly in the countryside, the traditional knowledge could

be highly useful if more widely spread. Through translation, Moti is actively working to

spread the Rajput horse tradition based on the traditional knowledge held by Rajput

families five hundred years ago. He is motivated by the sense that it is his responsibility

to others, in particular the coming generations to translate the Shalihotra. While this book

already serves as a source of tradition, Moti's work would bring it to the forefront.

Folk Sayings

The image of the Rajput and the horse together has been reinforced on the folk

level by couplets called *doha*s. These couplets, often proverbial or anecdotal by nature,

are widely known and thus create an image of the Rajput for non-Rajputs as well as for

Rajputs. Bardic groups in particular know these *doha*s as they are sometimes used for

entertainment between longer recitations or performances. This source of tradition is

particularly powerful for creating an indefinite sense of tradition. As part of a folk

tradition, the *doha*s become standard knowledge and, with the exception of ones which

are related to a particular historical event, they have a sense of timelessness. *Doha*s are

knowledge without context.

Many *doha*s almost seem to define a Rajput. Folk wisdom portrays itself as

timeless truisms. Therefore, a statement such as "Horse, sword, turban, mustache, and

pride; the lover of war, the Rathor clan has kept all five things"[92] does not portray these

things as contingent on a particular context, but states that this is the way it is and by

extension the way it was. This is a powerful tool for legitimating tradition as it implies

[91]Moti Singh Ramawat, 17 April 2005.
[92]Rajvi Shri Jaipal Singh Rathore, interview by author, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, 13 April 2005.

stasis and continuity. The *doha*s also clearly imply a system of values, not facts, which is useful in tradition. Values are a solidifying force because they hold up an ideal image instead of painting the complicated and messy picture of historical reality.

Many of the *doha*s emphasize the importance of the horse to the Rajput by comparing it to other important aspects of their life, such as their wife or children. The jealousy of a wife over the way that her husband treats his horse is a common theme. Sidharth Rohet, a hotel owner and avid horseman, observed, "To a Rajput a horse is dearer to him than his own family. And many a jealous and angry wife would comment on that. A lot of folk tales are about that. I can't relate them to you off-hand, but many folktales about how wives were jealous of the mare in the Rajput house because the mare got more attention than the wife."[93] For Sidharth, the doha forms the basis of general cultural knowledge. He does not know the specific words of the verse or a particular example, but anecdotes have colored his general ideas and for him constitute evidence that the horse was the most important thing in a Rajput's life.

Colonel James Tod

Almost all of the Rajputs I interviewed cited Colonel James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* as the source of their knowledge of Rajput history. At first, the reliance on Tod puzzled me, as he represents a colonial view of Rajasthan. However, perhaps it can be explained by the relatively positive relationship higher class Rajputs had with the British, especially when compared to the feelings of loss they express in regard to the post-independence Indian government. Tod's work is also widely available to the English educated Rajputs I interviewed, and is presented in a format that is closer

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[93]Sidharth Singh Rohet, interview by author, tape recording, Rohet, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, 8 April 2005.

to the western conception of history than the indigenous bardic poems that also provide

evidence of Rajput deeds.

Colonel Tod was stationed in Rajasthan in the early nineteenth century. In

addition to his military duties in the region, he, like many of the colonists, had an interest

in local history and anthropology. Tod's writing seems to have been fueled largely by his

belief that the Rajputs were a martial race embodying chivalric ideals. Indeed, based on

this conception, one of the hypotheses that he raises in his book is that the Rajputs share a

common origin with the Europeans.[94] Within Rajput history he sees many points which

he compares with the history of the Ancient Greeks. He claims, "There is not a petty state

in Rajast'han that has not had its Thermopylae, and scarcely a city that has not produced

its Leonidas."[95] Tod's interpretation of and admiration of the Rajputs is based on this

sense of recognition. In his estimation the one part of ancient Greece that Rajasthan had

not produced is a historian such as Herodotus.[96] Therefore, Tod took it as his role the

production of a history of the Rajput races.

Tod's interpretation of the Rajputs as an admirable chivalric martial clan led him

to be favorably disposed toward them. Tod's original preface, addressed to King George

the Fourth, states, "Their (the Rajput tribes') admirer and annalist (Tod) may, perhaps, be

permitted to hope, that the sighs of this ancient and interesting race for the restoration of

their former independence, which it would suit our wisest policy to grant, may be deemed

not undeserving Your Majesty's regard."[97] Tod conceived his work in part as an attempt

to sway the opinion of the king of England in favor of granting independence to the

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[94]Col. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, (Routledge and Sons, 1829; reprint; New Delhi: K. M. N. Publishers, 1971), xix.
[95]Tod, xviii.
[96]Tod, xviii.
[97]Tod, xi.

Rajputs. The grounds for his arguments are the ways in which the Rajputs represent an ideal noble race. Although Tod's work has many examples of colonialist distortion, the Rajputs appreciate his positive attitude toward them and rarely question his glorification of their past.

Tod's work is a combination of history and travel narrative. The result of Tod's efforts, *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, is a two to three volume work originally published in 1829. The work is divided into two main sections, one on the history and geography of Rajasthan and one on the personal observations and experiences of Tod as he traveled through Rajasthan. He had the closest connection with the Mewar court, and his writings likewise place Mewar at the forefront of Rajput kingdoms. Tod's book provides a clear narrative of the history of Rajasthan. This narrative, which generally sympathizes with the Rajputs, is unified and confident in its portrayal of historical events.

Tod traveled through Rajasthan with a group of native intellectuals to aid him. His closest aid seems to have been Gyanchandra, a Jain cleric. Tod would commission reproductions of documents that interested him, as well as translations of documents into the Indian languages he knew.[98] Although Tod most certainly did use local sources, he rarely gives citations, which makes it almost impossible to determine what part of his writing is based on local knowledge and what parts are based on his own interpretations and extrapolations. In many ways, Tod's work has become a mask that has hidden the local sources from view. His voice has become the sole voice representing medieval and early modern Rajasthan.

Rana Pratap and Cetak

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[98]Presumably Hindi or a widely used dialect thereof.

When I asked various residents of Rajasthan about the connection between Rajputs and horses, they immediately responded with the anecdote of Rana Pratap and his horse Cetak[99] in the Battle of Haldighati. Other horses and their Rajput riders were occasionally briefly mentioned, such as Vir Durgadas and his horse Arbud, but these stories are more localized. Based on a historical battle fought between the Rana of Mewar and the Mughals, the story of Rana Pratap and Cetak has undergone more than four hundred years of change and retelling to be firmly placed at the center of Rajput tradition. The development of this story provides a glimpse into some of the many factors contributing to the construction of tradition.

The modern version of the Rana Pratap and Cetak story is set in the narrow valley of Haldighati in the summer of 1576. Rana Pratap, mounted on his brave horse Cetak, led his soldiers in battle against the Mughals. Pratap and his army were defending Hindu religion and their homeland against foreign Muslim invaders. The commander of the Mughal army, the Rajput ruler Man Singh, was riding on an elephant. In order to allow Pratap to attack Man Singh, Cetak reared up onto the elephant. Pratap struck with his spear but missed and Cetak's hind leg was cut by the sharp tusk covers the elephant was wearing. Pratap's life was in danger because he was in the thick of the battle and in order to save him, Cetak began to flee despite his cut leg. Cetak carried Pratap to safety away from the battlefield and across a stream. There the horse could go no further and when Pratap dismounted, Cetak collapsed. Pratap held Cetak's head in his lap as the horse died and prayed to the gods thanking them for his horse and asking that the horse be allowed to live longer. After Cetak died, Pratap's brother Shakti, who had been traitorous but now

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[99]This is the proper transcription. However, the name is commonly spelled Chetak in English language materials.

had defected from the Mughals, arrived on the scene and gave Pratap his horse so that Pratap could flee farther. Later, a traditional cremation marker for heroes was raised on the site of Cetak's death honoring his sacrifice.[100]

The historical record gives a rather different account of the battle. The battle seems to have come about in part because of a slight that Rana Pratap gave to Man Singh, who then asked for Akbar's permission to lead the Mughal army against Pratap.[101] Man Singh was the Rajput ruler from the Kachhwaha family of Amber (later Jaipur), but he was also a commander of the Mughal army and a noble in the Mughal court. Both sides in the battle led both Hindu and Muslim troops, which makes it doubtful that the battle was about religion as it is often thought to be today. It is estimated that Pratap led a force of 3,000 Rajput and Afghan horsemen, as well as some Bhil archers against Man Singh's army comprised of 4,000 warriors from Amber, 1,000 other Rajputs, and 5,000 troops from the Mughal army.[102]

The outcome of the battle seems to be unclear, with both sides eventually claiming it as a victory. The overall battle is meaningless from a strategic point of view because Pratap survived, so he continued to lead guerrilla resistance against the Mughals, but had he won at Haldighati, a larger Mughal attack would have followed.[103] Douglas Streusand feels that in the long run, the battle "reinforced the Mughal image of superiority."[104] The local sources written closest to the time of the battle mention little of

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[100]This marker, a *chatri*, is located near Haldighati. Lindsey Harlan notes that it is "an active shrine that receives offerings from pilgrims." *The Goddesses' Henchmen: Gender in Indian Hero Worship*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48.

[101]Muhinot Nainsi, *Khyat*.

[102]Douglas Streusand, "The Process of Expansion," in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000-1800*, ed. Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H. A. Kolff, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 342.

[103]Streusand, 342.

[104]Streusand, 342.

what is present in the modern story. Although many do say that Pratap was mounted on a horse, the name of the horse is not given nor are any particular deeds of the horse described. The references to the horse seem to be completely normal and are not terribly significant observations. Some historical accounts, such as Nainsi's *Khyat*, leave out the Battle of Haldighati entirely.

The initial rise and development of the story of the Battle of Haldighati seems to occur during the mid seventeenth century. Cynthia Talbot argues that the Mewar rulers of the time, having been forced to capitulate to the Mughals, undertook a project of self-aggrandizement by patronizing the composition of glorious genealogies.[105] She observes that Rana Pratap made a good hero for this project because he, himself, did not suffer any humiliating defeats at the hands of the Mughals, although both his father and his son did.[106] The seventeenth century Mewar rulers patronized court bards, called Carans, to compose genealogies which featured among other things, the heroic deeds of Rana Pratap. In the poems composed by these bards, the gradual development and expansion of the narrative can be seen. For instance, in the Sanskrit text that Talbot has consulted, Pratap is said to be mounted on a swift horse.[107] By about a century later, in the poem *Khummana-Raso*,[108] the horse has acquired the name Cetak and is responsible for carrying the king to safety.

Cetak's increasingly prominent role may be because Rana Pratap is a curious hero in the story. Pratap is not victorious, and in fact flees from the battlefield. In the retellings

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[105]Cynthia Talbot, "The Mewar Court's Construction of History," forthcoming in *Arts of Mewar*, ed. Joanna Williams, (San Francisco: San Francisco Asian Art Museum), 3, 11.

[106]Talbot, 8.

[107]Talbot, 10.

[108]The text of this Rajasthani poem has been edited and published in the three volume set *Dalapati Vijaya Krit Khummana-Raso*, ed. Brajamohan Javaliya, (Udaipur: Maharana Pratap Smarak Samiti, 1999). There is a Hindi translation/paraphrase but so far no English translation has been published.

of the story his running away from battle has been glorified as a great deed by the brave Cetak. This shifts the emphasis away from the fact that Pratap is fleeing and makes the story one of the sacrifice of a loyal horse. In this way, an act which by general standards of Rajput honor should be one for shame becomes a celebrated event. Rana Pratap's role as a hero in this story seems to come largely from the context of his resistance to the Mughals than from his actual deeds in the Battle of Haldighati.

In the early 1800s the colonial officer Colonel James Tod was posted in Rajasthan, and specifically sent to the Mewar court. In many respects, Tod's book has become the definitive source for Rajput tradition. Based primarily on the poem *Khummana-Raso*,[109] Tod's version of the Maharana Pratap and Cetak story continues the earlier trend of glorification. He calls the Battle of Haldighati the "Thermopylae of Mewar"[110] and it seems that this event was one of several that caused him to judge the Mewar Rajputs as the highest Rajput group. After Tod wrote his version, the diversity in accounts of the battle seems to drop. Today, Tod's account is the one which is referenced by Rajputs and previous local versions are virtually unknown.

The nineteenth century Mewar court poet Shyamaldas wrote *Vir Vinod*, which is a Hindi text on Mewar history, as a local response to Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. However, his section on Haldighati differs very slightly from Tod's account, only correcting several historical details. Shyamaldas cites his source for the story as local folk tales as well as texts available to him in the Mewar royal library. This indicates the prevalence of the story among the locals at the time. Tod had also observed a level of local popularity when he observes wall paintings of scenes from the battle in the city of

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[109]Tod, 1: xvii.
[110] Tod, 1: 270.

Udaipur.

These two published sources helped fuel the spread of the story of Haldighati outside of Mewar. In the early nineteenth century Indian nationalists, particularly in Bengal, adapted the story. In these versions, the role of Cetak is less important. Instead, Rana Pratap came to symbolize resistance against outside invaders and parallels were drawn between his resistance and the resistance against the British colonists. In addition to becoming a national symbol, Pratap and Cetak have also become pan-Rajput symbols. Although the Battle of Haldighati was on one level a battle between the Kachhwahas of Jaipur and the Sisodiyas of Mewar, today Pratap is considered a hero in Jaipur. Pratap and Cetak have also been adopted into the lore of Jodhpur and a large statue of Pratap mounted on Cetak looms atop a cliff over the city.

Modern representations of the Battle of Haldighati often focus on the role of the horse. A monument to Pratap and Cetak has been raised in Moti Magri park in Udaipur. In addition to the main statue, reliefs on the side of the statue's base show Pratap holding dying Cetak's head. A signboard, both in Hindi and in English provides a version of the story that highlights the brave deeds of Cetak. In the city palace, a plastic horse models the supposed elephant disguise worn by Cetak and numerous paintings illustrate the battle. These models and statues form much of the official version of the battle.

Figure 6. Representations of Cetak. Above: Statue of Pratap and Cetak at Moti Magri Park. Below: Exhibit in City Palace Museum, Udaipur. Photos by author.

The battle is also widely represented in written accounts. Although currently out of print, there was a comic book version published by the widely popular comic series Amar Citra Katha. Accounts of the battle and poems praising Cetak appear in elementary school texts. Many modern poets have attempted to write poems in traditional Caran style in both Rajasthani and Hindi on the matter, including a long poem completely devoted to

Cetak. Pratap and Cetak have also been a popular subject for much scholarly attention in India. Supported by the Pratap Smarak Smiti, several conferences on Rana Pratap have been held and collections of articles and poems concerning Rana Pratap have been published.

The modern tradition's perception of and fascination with Rana Pratap and Cetak is largely due to a particular sequence of historical events. These events brought this battle in particular to the forefront and gave it a wide range of symbolic meanings. The Battle of Haldighati's current role in the Rajput imagination is far larger than the original historical battle would warrant. In modern versions, the emphasis is on Cetak and the way in which he became a martyr. Rajputs feel that Cetak's character, and thus that of the horse in general, meets with that of the Rajput. Cetak demonstrates this by his complete loyalty, his bravery, and his sacrifice for his rider. It is through his death that he proves himself in a society where death in battle is considered a high honor.

<u>Building a Tradition</u>

Shaping the sources of tradition into a living tradition requires resources. Particularly because of the expense of maintaining horses in India, restructuring traditions with regard to actual involvement with horses has required finding ways to make keeping horses utilitarian and economically viable. Tradition is built through the way it is marketed or presented. The need for resources has shaped the way that tradition is marketed and performed. The creative process of reshaping tradition and building new traditions is driven in part by economic concerns.

Economics

The relationship between horses and Rajputs has always been shaped to a great

degree by economics. It was through a feudal system of revenue lands that the Rajputs were able to afford to maintain large numbers of horses for military purposes. As established earlier, maintaining a horse in India is a particularly expensive proposition. Horses require large amounts of food and thus land and the drought-prone climate of Rajasthan can make grass scarce. Underlying the traditional connection between the horse and the Rajput are considerations of utility which are based on economics.

In the post-Independence period of decline in the financial stability that the Rajputs experienced, horses were one of the first things they got rid of because of the expense. Around this time, horses also lost most of their utility. The state cavalry forces were merged and many cavalry regiments were converted into armored units. Only one small regiment which uses horses exclusively for ceremonial purposes as well as one full time cavalry regiment used in remote areas remained. During the 1950s and 1960s India underwent a rapid, though not complete, mechanization. In many places where horses had previously been the quickest mode of transportation, now jeeps could travel there and carry more people, and the network of roads was greatly expanded. In the span of twenty years, the horse lost almost all of its utility. Owning a horse has for the most part become purely a status symbol.

Today, those Rajputs who continue to be actively involved with horses and claim a tradition centered on horses are the Rajputs who have found or created a use for the horse. There are Rajputs without the financial resources to keep horses who are aware of the symbolic and utilitarian tradition. However, Ghanshyam Singh Rawatsar, who is not currently able to own a horse, expressed his concern that gradually general modern

symbols of wealth will replace the role of the horse in Rajput life.[111] He bitterly reflected that many Rajputs who did not grow up around horses do not turn to horses, even if they have the financial resources from their hotel businesses to purchase and maintain a horse. Instead, they buy a Mercedes Benz.

Many Rajputs have found ways to incorporate horses into their lives in an economically viable manner. Some are in the cavalry, some breed or lead safaris, and some play polo. The professionalization of polo is one of the ways that tradition has been reshaped to meet the current economic situation. Polo has been played in India in varying forms since the Mughal Empire. During British colonization, the British formalized the rules. It was a sport played by many of the royal families in Rajasthan. At that point, the cost of maintaining polo ponies was covered by the income from taxable land and each royal house would field a team. After independence, the royal families continued to be prominent in polo until they lost their privy purses. At that point, polo was maintained only by the military until the early 1990s.

Lokendra Singh Rathore is considered to be the first professional polo player in India. In 1987, he and one other Indian player as well as two British players were on the first professional team sponsored by the Maharana of Udaipur.[112] The players received playing fees and for this team, the Maharana provided the horses. During the 1990s many more professional polo teams were founded. Delhi and Jaipur have become large centers for polo, with smaller centers including Jodhpur and Calcutta. These teams are sponsored primarily by business groups advertising to the upper class audience of the sport. Some of the players are independently wealthy, but it has become possible to sustain oneself and

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[111]Wing Commander Rawat Ghanshyam Singh Rawatsar, interview by author, tape recording, Jaipur, 21 April 2005.
[112]Lokendra Singh Rathore, interview by author, tape recording, 30 April 2005.

one's horses playing polo if one is willing to teach the game or lead safaris on the side. A sport which was once a royal privilege has been reformed into a career option.

Although the financial backing for polo now comes primarily from businesses, royal patronage is still quite important. When I was in Jodhpur, this theme was particularly prevalent. The Jodhpur polo team, founded in 1995, was started largely at the behest of the crown prince of Jodhpur, Yuvraj Shivraj Singhji. About a month before I arrived in Jodhpur, the Yuvraj Shivraj had a polo playing accident which left him in a coma. The prognosis for his condition was that even if he regained consciousness (which he eventually did) it was unlikely that he would be able to play polo again. Many of the polo players, both current and retired, in Jodhpur expressed that on account of this tragedy, it was unlikely that the Maharaja would continue to patronize polo. Without the Maharaja, there would be no one to maintain the grounds, which are on royal land, and the number of sponsors would probably drop. The Maharaja, although he may not provide all the monetary backing, is the figurehead for this institution and his patronage is necessary for the existence of the team. The expression of tradition through polo requires patronage from the highest authorities within the group claiming the tradition.

Tourism and Tradition

One of the economic forces currently behind the resurgence of Rajput tradition is tourism. Rajasthan's economy is shifting heavily toward tourism and one of the major selling points for tourists is opportunities to witness "traditional India." The demands of the tourist market are influencing Rajput tradition in a cyclical fashion. Tradition is being shaped to appeal to tourist tastes and at the same time, what is propagated for the tourists gradually comes to be generally accepted as tradition.

Many of the Rajputs have transformed their family's ancestral homes and forts into what are called "Heritage Hotels." The name itself indicates the way that these hotels purport to give tourists a glimpse of heritage and tradition. These hotels often feature performances, art, and experiences taken out of their historical context but reconstructed and presented as tradition to the tourists. In this way, a new interpretation of tradition is being built.

One example of the role of Heritage Hotels in the construction of tradition is the resurrection of *ashvapuja* by the Mewar royal family. It is hard to date the practice of performing *ashvapuja* (horse worship) [Figure 7] on the Hindu festival of Dasara, which is dedicated to the goddess Durga. Several of my informants mentioned this practice, but I have not found any textual references. Bani Singh Dundlod believes that the ceremony in Udaipur, which is sponsored by the HRH group of hotels and the Rana of Udaipur, is a resurrection of a practice which had lapsed.[113] The 2004 informational pamphlet is titled "The Horse – Saviour of Rajput." The inside of the pamphlet explains the significance of the holiday and gives some background information on the horse. It states, "What you are witnessing this year is one such traditionally reverential acknowledgment of the empathy between a Rajput and his Horse."[114] This tradition has moved form being a private ritual to being a performance staged and interpreted.

[113]Raghuvendra Singh Dundlod, interview by author, Jaipur, 3 May 2005.
[114]Arvind Singh Mewar, "The Horse – Savior of Rajput." 21 October 2004.

Figure 7. Maharaj Narendra Singh of Mewar performing *ashvapuja*. Photo courtesy of Maharaj Narendra Singh.

Often in connection with the Heritage Hotels, the practice of horse safaris more directly affects images of the Rajput and the horse. The first safari was held in the late 1970s when a Dutch couple rode from Rajasthan to Kashmir. Safaris became a major business in Rajasthan in the early 1990s, at about the same time when the popularity of adventure traveling began to rise. There are currently about five or six Rajputs operating horse safaris in Rajasthan. Many of them are operating safaris in order to support other activities with horses, such as polo or breeding. All of them started their safaris at the request of tourists or a tourist agency.

The safaris have been constructed to match what the tourists want to see. Many

rides are timed such that the end or start of the ride is at one of the major animal fairs in India, with the Pushkar fair being the most popular. All of the safaris take the riders through "traditional" villages as well as across open countryside and purport to show a rural India that is more authentic than its urban counterpart. To some extent, it is getting more difficult to present the image of a colorful rural land with gallant princes and quaint villages to the tourists. The safari leader Khem Singh, while making very clear that he is not against modernization, observes,

> The concept of a riding safari is to be out in the country and go through villages, go through rural India, rural Rajasthan. Nowadays, you find a lot of the villages are also changing. They're getting modernized so you start losing the originality. When what you are actually hoping (is) to go back in time and be riding in the country, it may not be as good as it was. Traditions are changing.[115]

What the tourists want to see is "traditional" India. Although the riding safari attempts to create this experience and is in many ways dependent on tradition, actual village life is changing rapidly.

I stayed for several days with Devendra Singh Nawalgarh at the camp he had set up at the end of a safari ride to the Balotra horse fair. The camp was a strange mix of traditional style tent set up and modern western amenities. In order to create an "authentic" atmosphere, Devendra employs two folk musicians to perform every day for the riders and provides other types of cultural activities as well. He and his cousin serve not only as guides through the countryside, but also as guides and interpreters for Rajasthani culture. In many ways, they perform their own culture for the benefit of the tourists.

The advertising literature for all of the safaris contributes to a romanticized image

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[115]Khem Singh, interview by author, partial tape recording, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 1 April 2005.

of the Rajput and his horse. The literature emphasizes riding through rural and unexploited areas while in the care of Rajputs. The tents are "royal" and accommodations are often in palaces. Many safari leaders give a brief history of their family and its noble and heroic lineage in their brochures. Much of the literature constructs a picture of exotic nobility and royal grandeur. The descriptions of the horses make sure to portray the Marwaris, which are the most commonly used safari horses, as being the horses of kings and warriors as well as being an exotic endangered breed. Although one could question to what extent the safari leaders believe what they write and to what extent it is a performance, I would argue that the act of creating this literature is an act which builds a particular sense of tradition among these Rajputs.

Publicizing Tradition

One of the most powerful ways to create or shape a tradition is through performance. The public enactment of a cohesive whole is a strong source of validation since the public nature of performance gives it a wide audience. Part of what validates Rajput tradition is knowledge of the tradition among non-Rajput groups. Recognition of a unique Rajput tradition by these groups separates the Rajput from these groups. Public performance, unlike the economic aspects considered earlier does not build tradition through the creation of utility for the horse, but instead contributes to the development of the horse as a symbolic nexus for Rajput identity.

The idea to create a performance portraying the connections between horses and Rajputs originates from the work of the French man Bartabas. He created a performance called Zingaro which feature choreographed horses moving to music from different parts of the world. He included a section on Rajasthan with Langa and Manganiyar musicians

who live in villages west of the city of Jodhpur. Several of my informants owned the videotape of this show. Sidharth Singh Rohet referenced Bartabas as the source for his vision of a performance.[116]

Several performances depicting the cultural and symbolic aspects of the Marwari horse have already been held. In 2003, Francesca Kelly, an American, and Bani Dundlod choreographed a show called "Nritya aur Ashva" ("Dancing and Horses") and performed it in Jaipur. The show featured dancers, musicians and riders mounted on Marwari horses performing "in a passionate moving tribute to the horse."[117] Having denoted the horse as an embodiment of the gods, the program goes on to state, "As the regal emblem of the Kshatriyas and noble families the Marwari horse has survived centuries of turmoil and bloodshed to redeem us in his present role from the secular confines of our contemporary world."[118] The metaphors are a bit heavy handed here, but the point is clearly to present the Marwari in a flattering way and to promote its conceptual status as the semi-divine mount of the warriors and nobles. Francesca Kelly has also imported six Marwaris to the United States and lent one to the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington where it participated in the daily "Parade of Breeds." This performance presents the horse in a ring ridden in traditional equipment and costume while a narrator explains the history and salient characteristics of the breed. Although this performance was directed at an American audience, it also played a major part in constructing global knowledge about the breed.

During our interview, Sidharth Singh Rohet presented a clear idea for furthering and promoting tradition through performance. He said,

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[116]Sidharth Singh Rohet, interview with author, tape recording, Rohet, 8 April 2005.
[117]"Nritya aur Ashva," performance program, available from http://www.horsemarwari.com/pic/nritya.jpg; Internet: accessed 19 April 2006.
[118]Ibid.

> The idea is to get the message across to people who don't know about the Marwari (horse)....Ideally, what I would like to do would be to organize a really nice choreographed show with traditional music. An hour long, or an hour and a half long show. Work on it and really put it together, coming down through history. Marwari as the Rajput warrior's horse, some little glimpses of famous deeds and battles. Marwari in how it is completely interwoven in the culture of the region. It has a prominent place in our marriages, in our festivals, how the people of Rajasthan and the Rajput worship the horse. How it holds a place at every step in our folklore, in our folk music. And then, with traditional costume do a small show with traditional music and the horse.... And have them (the performances) in prominent places like Delhi, or Chandigarh, or Bombay to start with. Make sure the media gives it good coverage. I think that would be a very good beginning.[119]

Sidharth is not sure when he will be able to put such a show together because it requires outside financing and he wants the show to be done very professionally in order to have the maximum impact. Nevertheless, his vision is a clear indication of the desire among Rajputs to propagate a particular vision of their tradition with horses.

Breeding a Tradition

Breeding may be a viable metaphor for the organic aspects of tradition. While some parts of creating and perpetuating a tradition may be as clearly articulated as they were by Sidharth, tradition in many ways relies on being perceived as innate and natural. The literal concern with breeding the Marwari horse seems to provide ready metaphors for more generalized concerns about tradition. Several of my participants also argued that Rajput tradition is a function of genetic tendencies.

The Marwari Horse

The Marwari breed is one of the central, but in many ways most divisive, issues for Rajputs currently involved with horses. The revival of this breed has received local, national, and international interest in the last ten years. Debates about breeding Marwaris seem to cut to the core of many of the problems and concerns surrounding tradition.

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[119]Sidharth Singh Rohet, interview by author, tape recording, Rohat, Rajasthan, 8 April 2005.

There is much concern about purity and the proper means of breeding, there are rival breed organizations each claiming to be the one, true representative of the breed, and at the base of the issue there are the attempts to answer the question, "Breeding for what purpose?"

The Marwari is one of several breeds of horses currently existing in western India. Other breeds include the Kathiawari and the Sindhi. The Marwari is a smallish horse, ranging from 14.2 to 15.2 hands high,[120] and has the long legs and slender body typical of many desert or semi-desert breeds. The head of the Marwari is fine and delicate. Its most distinctive feature is its curved ears, the tips of which meet at the top when both ears are pointing forward. Marwaris occur in all colors, and based on beliefs of auspicion, horses with markings are preferred. Some members of the breed are naturally able to do *revaal*, a quick four beat pacing stride. It is a sturdy animal that can withstand the extreme temperatures in Rajasthan and the often coarse fodder available to it.

Figure 8. Marwari horses. Photos by author.

For many, the character and personality of the breed is more notable than its

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[120]58 to 62 inches at the highest point of the withers.

physical characteristics. Official breed descriptions require a Marwari to be "loyal, tireless, and competitive."[121] I heard many anecdotes about the character of the Marwari. Maharaj Narendra Singh, the owner of Pratap Country Inn and a safari business, described a horse stopping and standing still when its rider fell off and landed beneath the horse.[122] For him, this demonstrated the horse's concern for the rider and its loyalty to the rider. The character traits for the Marwari seem to largely line up with the ideal traits of the Rajput. There seems to be an equational relationship between Rajput and horse on the level of personality.

One question which drives the debates surrounding the Marwari concerns the origins of the breed. Most Rajputs swear that the Marwari was the mount of their forebears. Rana Pratap's horse Cetak has been claimed as a Marwari although there is no evidence for this. The terms used to categorize horses in the medieval sources are unstable. The categories were based on physical appearance, not bloodline, and they shifted in meaning over the years. There is no horse in these sources called "Marwari." Paintings are also unclear. There are horses with curved ears, but that may indicate an aesthetic preference more than an actual breed and it is further complicated by noting that the Kathiawari also has extremely curved ears and many Arabs have at least mild curvature. However, it is likely that the Marwari developed from some of the local breeds. The earliest textual mention of a Marwari that I have found is from the 1930s.[123]

In contrast with the available evidence, there is a tendency to project the Marwari back in time. The Marwari has been given a sense of timelessness in much of the breed

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[121]Indigenous Horse Society of India, *The Marwari Horse Breed Standards*, (Dundlod: Private Publication).

[122] Maharaj Narendra Singh, interview by author, tape recording, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 15 April 2005.

[123] "Saving the Marwari Breed," *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 8 Feb 1933.

literature. For example, the history section on the web page horsemarwari.com is less

concerned with providing information about the history of Marwaris than it is with

evoking a sense of the Marwari's connection with a distant glorified past.[124] By analogy,

the modern Marwari horse becomes a potent symbol of the Rajput past. This legitimates

the claims that the Marwaris form a key part of Rajput heritage and as such are worthy of

Rajput time and energy.

Within the question of origin, there is also a fierce debate over the Marwari's

status as an indigenous breed. There have been many attempts to prove that the Marwari

does not have any foreign blood in it. This has been extended even to the level of DNA

tests.[125] Although many Rajputs do agree that there is probably Arab and/or Turkic

influence in the Marwari, the point that it is indigenous is stressed. This is probably in

part so that they are able to receive funding and support from the government. The claim

that the breed is indigenous reflects claims to a group identity because it draws

boundaries around the breed and its place of origin. This emphasis may also be a way of

claiming that the Marwari is part of a pure, untainted, idyllic past.

The purity of the breed is a continuing concern for many of the breeders. Due to

the lack of paperwork and the newness of the breeding organizations, it is impossible to

determine whether a horse is a pure Marwari. Some, such as Gajendra Pal Singh of

Posana, the joint secretary of the All-India Marwari Horse Society, have traveled to many

of the villages in search of information about bloodlines. Gajendra has spent his

weekends traveling through his home district Jalor, which happens to have been one of

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[124] http://www.horsemarwari.com/historical.htm, accessed 25 April 2006.
[125] Kr. Raghuvendra Singh Dundlod, interview by author, 3 May 2005. See also A. K. Gupta, M. Chauhan, and S. N. Tandon, "Genetic Diversity and Bottleneck Studies in the Marwari Horse Breed," *Journal of Genetics* 84, no. 3 (December 2005) : 295-301.

differences are expressed in the breed characteristic listings and the guidelines given for judging Marwaris. There continues to be lively debate between members of the organizations about the traits and role of the Marwari horse. Many of my informants, if they realized I had had contact with a breed organization other than the one to which they personally subscribed, would attempt to correct my knowledge about the Marwari. The identity of the Marwari is contested. As the character of the Marwari is so closely identified with the Rajput, in many ways the debates and different breeding projects seem to be projects of constructing a new or renewed sense of what it means to be a Rajput.

At the same time, in order to gain government support for the breed, the Marwari organizations have to in some ways separate their own identity as Rajputs from their role with the breed. Bani (Raghuvendra) Singh Dundlod claims that the government is suspicious of Rajputs because it worries that they will reestablish their local roles as overlords and undermine the state and national government. In response to this, he feels that it is important to portray the Marwari as part of India's general cultural heritage and as an endangered animal that should be supported because of its indigenous status, not because of its ties to the Rajput.[130]

One of the questions I have about the Marwari breeding effort is, "Why the Marwari?" There are three organizations working for the betterment of the Marwari while other indigenous breeds from a similar area, including the Kathiawari and the Sindhi, seem to be more neglected. Admittedly, the Indigenous Horse Society in name at least covers these breeds, but in actuality it is primarily concerned with the Marwari. As far as I know, there is no breed organization dedicated to the Kathiawari and searches on the

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[130] Raghuvendra Singh Dundlod, interview by author, Jaipur 3 May 2005.

Kathiawari yield primarily government pages dedicated to general animal breeding or secondary references to the breed, whereas searches for the Marwari bring up many pages dedicated solely to this breed, which extol their connection with the Rajput. Perhaps because of the breed's connection in name with the kingdom of Marwar, the Marwari has become the chosen symbol of the Rajput.

"It's in my blood."

In somewhat coarse comparisons to horse breeding, several of the people I interviewed argued that just as the Rajputs have bred horses, Rajputs themselves are bred for horses. They argue that the connection between horses and Rajputs is not the result of the construction of a tradition or centuries of a utilitarian relationship, but is instead the result of a genetic tendency in Rajputs that predisposes them to horses and the ability and desire to ride. This explanation conceives the Rajput connection with horses as a matter of blood.

Underlying this explanation is the caste system. Rajputs form a singular group in part because they rarely marry outside of their caste. Ideally, each clan of Rajputs does not marry within its own clan but marries within another clan. This builds a complex network of inter-familial connections while keeping Rajputs connected to Rajputs. Marrying families living further west has generally been considered more prestigious. While I am not able to estimate how separate they are in actuality, according to socially accepted convention and belief, the Rajputs form their own distinct genetic unit within Indian society. They claim this separation from as far back as they can trace their genealogies, which is generally somewhere between the eighth and tenth centuries CE.

Hayagreev Singh Bhati made the comparison of the caste system based marriage

practices to horse breeding. He claimed that "you [as a Rajput] are the ones who are supposed to be the warrior class.... It is caste oriented. Father to son to grandson, it's been in the family.... And it's like a fighting machine."[131] He draws the comparison that, since Rajputs are supposed to be warriors due to hereditary caste rights, the ability to fight has become hereditary. He goes on to say that, just as when breeding animals the assumption is that "when the parents are good, the offspring, it will be slightly better than the parents," this idea of pedigree should work in humans too.[132] From this understanding, which has overtones of Social Darwinism, the end result is that the Rajputs have selectively bred themselves to be mounted warriors.

Many of the people whom I interviewed said that they had always been crazy about horses and that that was part of why they had started to ride. It is not improbable that they had an interest in horses from an early age, as plenty of people living where horses are found have. However, some went a step further and claimed that this interest was inherited from their parents. Sidharth Singh Rohet stated, "my personal feeling is that the horsemanship and the love for the horses is inherited. It's in the blood of every Rajput. But it's just dormant. Once exposed to the animal or once made to ride, it just comes up automatically."[133] This intrinsic quality makes having a tradition of riding and owning horses an extension of nature. What I would interpret as a socially constructed phenomenon becomes an unquestionable truth of nature according to Sidharth's conception.

Sidharth supports his theory with anecdotes from his own experience. He claims

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[131]Hayagreev Singh Bhati, interview by author, tape recording, Jhalamand, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, 11 April 2005.
[132]Bhati, 11 April 2005.
[133]Sidharth Singh Rohet, interview by author, tape recording, Rohat, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, 8 April 2005.

that when he first started to keep horses at the heritage hotel he manages he hired local shepherd boys to help with the care. He found that these boys were generally not able to form good relationships with the horses and that many had an "inherent fear" of the horses. But when he hired some Rajput boys instead, they "took to the horse" even though they had never taken care of or regularly been around horses before.[134] He also cites the high percentage of Rajputs employed in racing stables both in India as well as in the Middle East as evidence that Rajputs naturally know how to handle a horse.

There are points at which this argument fails. For instance, if an inclination toward horses was genetically marked, why would it be passed only from men to men? There is evidence that Rajput women rode regularly, though generally not into battle.[135] Presently, women do not play an active role in shaping Rajput tradition with regard to horses, although they are often aware of the tradition. Almost all the women riding in India today are foreigners, often on vacation. The social conventions, particularly for married women, do not let women ride except in large cities like Delhi and Mumbai. Theories of natural inclination are hard to prove when there are also many social factors that play into the results.

Although there is no evidence that the Rajputs inherit a natural tendency to ride, what they do inherit socially is a particular status and role. Their caste places them within a paradigm of warrior and overlord behavior. They are born into a social framework and this framework provides the idea that they are connected with horses. They also inherit a genealogy, which may be embellished, but which frequently connects them with famous

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[134]Sidharth Rohet, 8 April 2005.
[135] Lakshmi Kumari Chundawat, interview by author, tape recording, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 21 April 2005. Born before independence, Lakshmi Kumari Chundawat was taught to ride and recalls that this was normal for Rajput girls.

warriors and their horses. The variable within the relationship between Rajputs and horses is often that of luck, which determines whether or not they actually have access to horses.[136]

Tradition, as Hayagreev and Sidharth portray it, almost turns into an inheritable genetic marker. An affinity for horses is a mark of the Rajput not through a relationship of utility but by one of innate tendencies and talents. Understanding tradition as a trait that is bred provokes an understanding of tradition as a process. This analogy may make tradition a natural part of one's body, but breeding also implies conscious attention to the propagation of certain characteristics. This understanding seems to underline the connection between traditions and a sense of identity. It is evidence of the naturalization of tradition.

Conclusion

Lokendra Singh Rathore was one of my more skeptical informants. He questioned a lot of the claims other Rajputs make, such as those about the origin of the Marwari. He based his skepticism in his perception of the difference of history and tradition. Lokendra explained that before the English came, history in India was written as stories. The mindset was that what happened is over, so it does not need to be factually recorded. Instead, it would be romanticized into a fairytale because exaggeration of heroism was seen as more useful and more inspiring.[137] Lokendra's distinction between history and tradition is largely based on function. Tradition is a reshaping of the past to suit present needs. History, at least in theory, is an attempt to understand what happened in the past and is a study of the past in the context of the past.

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[136] Almost all of my participants included luck as a factor when I asked them about their personal connections with horses.

[137] Lokendra Singh Rathore, interview by author, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 31 March 2005.

Lokendra gave an example of what he feels is two versions of the same event, one of which is mythologized and the other is not. In the mythological version, one of his ancestors met a goddess in the mountains and built a temple devoted to her. In appreciation the goddess said, "horses will come to you until you say 'enough' (*bas* in Hindi)." Horses came running and were collecting in a courtyard. The horses were excited and so to calm them someone said "*bas*," which is a commonly used word to calm horses. The horses stopped coming; only forty or fifty total had come.[138] This story is used to explain Lokendra's ancestor's acquisition of horses.

The second story that Lokendra heard in his childhood claims that Arab horse traders were camped near his ancestor's village. When an enemy army approached, the leaders of the army thought the traders were a camp of soldiers so the army attacked and killed all the traders. During the fight the horses got free and ran into the courtyard of the home of Lokendra's ancestors. Lokendra feels the first story may have originated from this event because the temple referenced in the first story is close to his family's village and the freed horses may have run past the temple.[139]

Lokendra is fairly confident in his conjecture that these two stories refer ultimately to the same event. These two stories demonstrate the different functions of history and tradition, as the first story serves as an inspiring anecdote about being rewarded with horses on account of devotion. The second story provides a more plausible explanation, but the acquisition of horses in this story has no particular symbolic importance for Lokendra's family because it is the result of chance. What is significant about these two stories is they demonstrate the potential for historical events to be

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[138]Lokendra Singh Rathore, 31 March 2005.
[139]Lokendra Singh Rathore, 31 March 2005.

reinterpreted and integrated into tradition.

       The relationship between history and tradition is shaped by conceptions of function. Tradition puts forth one particular interpretation of history aimed at bolstering a clearly defined group identity. The function of tradition is social and cultural as opposed to academic. Tradition is very fluid despite its claims to stasis and is continuously being shaped by the demands of current situations. History influences the development of tradition, but ultimately, the discipline of history has separate aims from tradition. In the case of the Rajputs and their horse traditions, tradition is clearly a historical process shaped by politics and economics. It does not disregard history, nor is it separate from history in both development as well as sources. Tradition for the modern day Rajput is a carefully bred and developed collective memory informed by history.

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