



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **In praise of death : history and poetry in medieval Marwar (South Asia)**

Kamphorst, J.

### **Citation**

Kamphorst, J. (2008, June 18). *In praise of death : history and poetry in medieval Marwar (South Asia)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12986>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12986>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## 7 Warriors, Robbers and Priests

The historical context of the Pabuji tradition has thus far been presented in terms of a world inhabited by great and little Rajput warriors. Now I will look at the historical roles accorded to Pabuji's early-medieval comrades-in-arms, and his late-medieval priests, the Bhil. An analysis of the way in which the Bhil were praised in some of the poems (in particular *chamd* II) or were, alternatively, almost entirely excluded from compositions (like from *chamd* I and some of the *gits*) offers yet another way to gauge aspects of the medieval context of narrative poetry about Pabuji. With the following study of what is known of the history of the Bhil of Marwar, I also hope to answer questions regarding the different aspects of Pabuji's deification, in particular the question why Pabuji has been deified while other Rathaur heroes were not, even though their stories closely resemble the nucleus of tales (i.e. their death in a battle over cattle) told about Pabuji and other Rajput folk gods. The most suggestive illustration of the poetic and historical role ascribed to Pabuji's Bhil companions is offered by the poet's portrayal of the relation between Pabuji and his archers in *chamd* II. As I hope to show, the representation of the Bhil in *chamd* II adds yet another poetic and political grammar to the known military "sociolects" of medieval Rajasthan, i.e. the "Payak register" relating to Bhil warriors while other aspects of this Marwari idiom are reminiscent of the earlier-described *naukarī* tradition.

### *Bhil*

I shall begin with a summary of what is known of early and late medieval Bhil history in western Rajasthan. The title "Bhil" (like the title Rajput) has not been used in any of the texts under review. My usage of "Bhil" in this study is based on the self-image of some contemporary Bhil who trace their ancestry to the bowmen in Pabuji's army. From anthropological data, it appears that "Bhil" might be traceable to Sanskrit *bhilla*: "a barbarian of a particular tribe", and to Prakrit *Abhīr*, with a similar meaning (Koppers 1948: 23, 27). Bhil is also traced to Tamil *bil* (bow) pointing up the Bhil's superior archery skills and tracing their ancestry to Eklavya, a Bhil who is thought to have outdone Arjuna with his aptitude for the use of bow and arrow (Koppers 1948: *ibid.*). Likewise, Valmiki, the poet to whom has been ascribed the composition of some versions of the *Rāmāyaṇ*, is thought of as a Bhil bandit (Vail) who (upon repenting his lawless way of life) received the blessings of Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and was thus enabled to versify Ram's adventures. From anthropological literature it appears that Bhil identity, like early-medieval Rajputhood, may have been a rather "open" category since a Bhil can be seen as belonging to a group of people from different backgrounds all of whom

describe themselves as Bhil. Werz-Kovacs (1982: 23f), for example, holds that Bhil is not a “tribal” name, because the people who are commonly classed “Bhil” form neither clearly definable linguistic, racial, nor cultural communities. Instead, she proposes, Bhil should be evaluated as an ascribed, generic title for several “altindischen Stämmen” who were classed Bhil by “culturally advanced” people like the Rajput after they subjected the Bhil to their rule (Werz-Kovacs 1982: *ibid.*).

Today, Bhil is most often defined as an “ethnic” and/or caste name, and contemporary Bhil “castes” are classed as “scheduled tribes” in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. In an attempt to emancipate Bhil and like communities from past and present stereotyping, they are also referred to with names like *ādivāsī* (indigenous people), *girijan* (hill or mountain people) or *vanavāsī* (forest-dwellers).<sup>360</sup> But, such labels are often based on, to my mind, out-dated perceptions of racial differences between Rajput and non-Rajput groups, and are thus often used to further feelings of racial and cultural superiority by people who set apart “backward tribals” from “superior Aryan races”. This construct can also be read from the reports of British travellers, ethnographers and administrators who aided the dissemination of racial definitions which till date inform portrayals of the Bhil of Rajasthan as “dark-skinned, short and ugly” and originating from “aboriginal”, Dravidian, Austric or other “Non-Aryan” forefathers.<sup>361</sup> This portrayal most commonly serves to underline the superiority of the allegedly light-skinned, tall “Aryan race” (or caste) like Rajput warriors. Several of the few available “modern” studies about Bhil are still partly based on nineteenth-century racial theories. Wilhelm Koppers’s 1940s research (*Die Bhil in Zentralindien*), for instance, includes a section on Bhil physiology (“körperliche Eigentümlichkeiten”) for which Koppers extensively quotes nineteenth-century colonial administrators and ethnographers, in particular the medical officer of the Mewar Bhil regiment, Hendley. According to the conventional ethnographic practice of his days, Hendley studied Bhil physiology and measured the skulls of Bhil men to compare unfavourably their appearance to that of “The Hindu” and thus emphasize the perceived differences between “Aryan people” and “non-Aryan tribes” (Koppers 1948: 34).<sup>362</sup>

Keeping in mind the discriminatory usage of terms like “Bhil” and “tribal”, it is good to note here that in referring to the Bhil as “tribal” in the below study of the historical and poetic portrayal of the medieval Bhil, I adhere to Thapar’s (1999:142) non-racial use of the word and understand “tribal” as a socio-economic term

---

<sup>360</sup> These appellations, denoting a community’s socio-political identity and geographical spread, have caused offence to some Bhil writers who argue that such titles continue to brand them as primitive, backward, illiterate and/or criminal peoples.

<sup>361</sup> See *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1908: 101), Koppers (1948: 34), M. H. Singh (1891: 57), Tod (1972 II: 141, 248).

<sup>362</sup> Tod (1972 I: 8f) describes the Bhil and Mair as mountaineers and the “aboriginal tribes” and “wild races” of Rajasthan. However, some Bhil were able warriors because, Tod (*ibid.*) imagined, their progeny “may have been improved by the infusion of Rajpoot blood”.

indicating the life-style of communities like lineage-based hunter-gatherers, slash-and-burn cultivators and warriors. In medieval Rajasthan, the Bhil are thought to have been hunter-gatherers and warriors who had their realms or territories in the hilly tracts of the Aravallis and the desert tracts of western Rajasthan and Sindh (Burton 1852: 323, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1908: 86, Tod 1972 I: 181f, II: 283). Few historical data seem to have been preserved that document the early-medieval history of the Bhil in Marwar. And it appears that legendary tales about Bhil pre-eminence in the region are no longer part of either oral or written contemporary Bhil traditions in Marwar since, as contemporary Bhil priests told me, the early-medieval period is “too long ago to remember”. However, some tales about early Bhil-Rajput relations have been recorded from which it appears that Bhil and similar communities like the Meda and Mer were part of Rajput armies and marriage alliances in the early stages of kingdom formation (Chattopadhyaya 1994: 186, Tod 1972 I: 539, II: 347f). Some Bhil are also known to have held high positions at Rajput courts (Tod 1972 II: 141). Marriage alliances between Bhil and Rajput families till today serve to authenticate the claims of Bhilala, Gola or the semi-nomadic Girasiya to Rajput *amś* (essence), tracing their ancestry to Rajput forefathers (M.H. Singh 1995: 376, Srivastava 1994: 591f, Tod 1972 I: 539, II: 248, 283).

Yet other tales narrate how Rajput warriors “were implacable enemies” of the Bhil, hunting them down and killing them mercilessly until the last century, “taking the best lands from them and pushing them back into the barren stony hills of Western-India” (Fuchs 1973: 191 as quoted in Werz-Kovacs 1982: 28). Stories abound about Rajput warriors who, upon fleeing from rival forces, found refuge with hunter-gatherers and pastoral-nomadic peoples (Tod 1972 I: 272, II: 325). After enjoying their hospitality, the bonds between non-Rajput and Rajput parties were either consolidated for centuries to come, or ended in the subjugation of Bhil hosts by their Rajput guests (Tod 1972 I: 236f, 548, II: 178-181, 372f, 252). One such story is the nineteenth-century version of a tale about the sixth-century Rajput Guha (or Goha) and the Bhil “Mandalika” as described by Tod (1972 I: 180f). This tale evokes the friendship between the “Guhilote” Rajput Guha of Lahore and “the chief of the savage race of Bhil” Mandalika, the ruler of Edur in southern Rajasthan (Tod 1972 I: 181). Guha, fleeing from “barbarous Scythians”, was granted refuge in Edur. He became a friend of the Bhil who in due course elected him their king, after which Guha murdered Mandalika reportedly without reason since the latter had already acknowledged Guha as the new ruler of Edur, or so the story goes. This and similar tales adequately illustrate the volatile power relations between communities like the Bhil and Rathaur Rajput warriors which, after the latter gained ascendancy in Marwar, are customarily defined in terms of the subjection of Bhil, Mina and other communities to Rajput rule.<sup>363</sup>

---

<sup>363</sup> See also Pangarhia (1988: 33-38), Rousselet (1983: 240), Tod (1972 I: 136f, 241f, 539; II: 9, 17, 137-143, 170, 241, 282, 299-301, 348, 372f).

*Unruly tribes*

The dominant Rajput brotherhoods did, however, have some difficulties in keeping their tribal “subjects” (as the Bhil and others are defined in nineteenth and twentieth century sources) subjugated. This can be understood from the fact that many non-Rajput communities continued to voice their claims to an autonomous status until well into the twentieth century (Radhakrishna 2000: *passim*, Tod I: 9, 538-543, II: 241, 247, 283). From colonial sources it becomes evident that the Bhil and other communities, like the Koli, Meo, Meda, Mer and Mina, did not perceive their status in terms of subjection. In particular the tribes of Shekawati, Mewar, Mewat and Marwar were rather independent minded. Here autonomous tribes held sway over most of the roads. Although Mughal emperors are known to have sent guards to protect their officials on their way through these regions, this could not protect their caravans and camps from raids (Bernier 1934: 208). This is hardly surprising for, upon reading the account of the Dutch traveller Francisco Pelsaert (1979: 307f), it becomes clear that local officials would conspire at letting robbers have their way on the road as these officers too wished to share in the proceedings of the, in the eyes of the Mughal and Rajput authorities, “unlawful” extraction of transit dues.<sup>364</sup>

In addition, the nineteenth-century Bhil of Mewar remained capable of denying travellers passage through their territories. Tod (1972 I: 8 n.5), on a journey through erstwhile Rajputana, first had to procure the arrow of a local Bhil headman, by way of travel-permit, before being able to continue on his way. The fact that many Rajput rulers only managed to collect taxes from the Bhil by force, if at all, also points up how “unruly tribes” continued to be a force to be reckoned with. The same can be said of the tribal Mina of Ajmer, known as tireless “robbers” from the twelfth till the nineteenth century, whose historical role was described as follows by Tod (1972 I: 539f): “Like all mountaineers, they of course broke out whenever the hands of power were feeble”. The ruling Sisodiya clan of Mewar also remained apprehensive about the menace posed by the “marauding barbarous tribes of Bhils, Mérs, and Meenas”, who threatened to overrun Rajput estates from the southern, eastern, and western hills bordering Mewar (Tod 1972 I: 116). Some Bhil chiefs, moreover, managed to hold sway in forts and played a not unimportant role in late-medieval power struggles: “All (mountaineers) rose to power from the common occupations of plunderers aided by the national jealousies of the Rajpoots. If the chieftains of Méwar leagued to assault the mountaineers, they found refuge and support in Marwar; and as their fortresses at all times presented a sanctuary, their Rawuts or leaders obtained consequence amongst all parties by granting it (Tod 1972 I: 541).”

Bhil and other tribal communities, branded “bandits”, “unruly tribes” and “robber-peasantry” in Rajput courtly and British colonial sources, evidently remained powerful enough to contest assertions of sovereignty as put forward by their self-proclaimed Rajput, Mughal and British overlords. Few sources appear to

---

<sup>364</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer* (1908: 36f, 86f, 221, 241, 288); Malcolm (1827: 87f); Rousselet (1983: 240), Tod (1972 I: 143 n.2, 541, II: 255).

be available for a description of this aspect of Bhil history in Marwar. But I imagine that in the nineteenth century, after most Rajput ruling houses signed a “peace treaty” with the British, the political position of the Bhil tribes of Marwar (like that of Bhil elsewhere in Rajasthan) changed considerably. Of the Bhil of Mewar, who enjoyed a “semi-independent” status under the Maharanas of Mewar, it is known that they became the subject of British and Mewari “pacification campaigns”, from 1818 onwards (Chundawat Singh 1983: 92-99). It seems that the Rajput rulers of Mewar tried to suppress the Bhil with the help of the British, who came to the Rajput’s aid since they feared that unrest would spread to other tribal territories within the colonial domain.

The tension between Bhil, on the one hand and Rajput and British parties, on the other, escalated when the British started to undertake census activities which, the Mewar Bhil suspected, served to mark Bhil men for recruitment in the British army and to levy more taxes on them. The recording of the name, age and marital status of Bhil women by British administrators was also greatly resented. When, subsequently, the Mewar rulers attempted to take over the control of the roads through Bhil *pals* (villages), the Bhil violently resisted what they saw as an encroachment upon ancient rights, citing centuries-old agreements between Bhil and Mewar rulers that gave the Bhil the right to levy *bolai* and *rekhwali* taxes on the Udaipur-Kherwara road (Chundawat Singh 1983: 95).<sup>365</sup> In the period between 1868 and 1879, this led to a policy of violent repression in order to “settle” Bhil territories in Mewar.

In other parts of Rajasthan too, Bhil and Mina assertions of autonomy inspired “uprisings” against the British policy of “pacification” aimed at restraining Bhil and Mina communities. In 1908, the colonial administrators are believed to have reason to fear the aforementioned communities’ ambitions to form a separate “state” within territories the British claimed as their own and employed a (to Pangarhia’s (1988: 33f) mind) “disproportionate amount of violence” to bring the uprising to an end.

Bhil resistance to being “pacified” earned them the administrative title of “criminal tribes”. As Lloyd (2007: 369f) remarks regarding the bureaucratic classification of Indian communities as “criminal” by British colonizers: this label was informed by British fears about potential resistance to or evasion of colonial governance.<sup>366</sup> Though this kind of labelling still catches the imagination of some

---

<sup>365</sup> The unrest had several other causes which illustrate the changing standing of Bhil in Rajasthan, as can be understood, for instance, from stories about non-Mewar mercenary soldiers (Pathans) that were employed by the Sisodiya rulers of Mewar, who set up money lending businesses and reportedly charged the Bhil exorbitant interest rates, upon which the Bhil killed several Pathans. Mewar officials retaliated by destroying Bhil villages (Chundawat Singh 1983: 95f).

<sup>366</sup> The “criminalization” of peoples was not an exclusively colonial affair. In the *Khatoota Ahala Karana* (1992: 14f, 88, 111), covering Rajput correspondences in the period 1633 to 1769, for example, the right to collect taxes from travellers through their domains, as claimed by minor Rajput Thakurs, was listed as extortions and robbery. The activities of Bhil and other non-Rajput groups received similar labels. See also Gupte (1917: 4) who describes Bhil as Kings of the Forest, accomplished archers and “awfully crooked” men to deal with.

contemporary scholars and politicians, it does not appear to have been internalized by its target communities.<sup>367</sup> Research into the oral traditions of the Meo of Mewat, for instance, documents that this tribe did not think of their activities in terms of robbery but in terms of a duty accomplished: “In the darbar of Delhi, Shah Jahan was the ruler of Hindustan. His horses, loaded with gold, were passing by Ajangarh. The Pahat Meos learnt of this. In those days in the Pahat Meo *pal* of 210 villages there were many brave warriors who used to challenge kings, all twenty four hours. This was their duty (Marayam 1994: 24)”. Accordingly, I think that descriptions of the “rebellious raiding activities of bandits” or, depending on which sources one consults, “the heroic accomplishment of their duty by brave warriors” are best understood as illustrations of the way in which non-Rajput groups continued to claim autonomy in opposition to attempts to subject them by ruling Rajput communities and colonial administrators. In this context, it is good to mention Mayaram’s 1997 and 2004 studies of Meo oral traditions, which she describes as “a form of oppositional practice” against “statist” Indo-Persian representation in court chronicles of Meo resistance to revenue collection. Indo-Persian claimants to imperial power generally represented Meo resistance as a criminal and/or rebellious act to undermine what was construed as the legitimate assertion of dominance by Lodhi or Mughal parties. British administrative practices followed a similar imperial strategy to uphold the image of colonial administrators as the legitimate defenders of order and justice against the “criminal insurgency” of obdurate “subjects”.

#### *Bhat, Paradhi and Payak*

By examining the roles ascribed to Pabuji’s companions in the selected poetry sources, I aim to demonstrate that the concerns noted in the above summary of what is known of early and late medieval Bhil history in western Rajasthan are also part of the Marwari poetic tradition. As can be read from chapter 3, the poets of the selected poems ascribed rather different roles to the Bhil. The poet of *chamd* II evoked the Bhil as heroic warrior-archers and Pabuji’s loyal companions. In *duha* I, the Bhil are portrayed as dark, godlike beings, imposing warriors *and* thieves. And in the *parvaro*, the Bhil are depicted as the drum-playing priests and devotees of Pabuji who possess the gift to ritually cure ailments. The Bhil are not at all mentioned by the poets of most *gits* and *duha* II. Only in *git* II, the Bhil have been accorded a minor part, since two Bhil warriors (Camda and Damai) are mentioned in passing. The poets’ different ways of portraying the Bhil will be studied below with a closer look at the roles accorded to them in the *chamds*, *duhas*, *parvaro* and *gits*.

---

<sup>367</sup> After the repeal of the *Criminal Tribes Act* in 1952, “criminal castes” became “denotified”. Since then these communities are officially classed “denotified tribes”. In practice, however, they are still often referred to as “criminal tribes”. And, as d’Souza (2000: *passim*) points out, they are still commonly thought of as “congenital criminals” or “criminal ethnic groups” with “criminal instincts”. See also Freitag (2001: 55).

The portrayal of Pabuji's army made up of Rajput and Bhil warriors in *chamd* I only indirectly evokes the Bhil by referring to them as "140 brave heroes"; their warrior role is not expanded upon. In *chamd* II, on the other hand, the poet praised their war skills at length and also specified the names of the Bhil warriors and their virtues and battle deeds. This point is of note because these details have not been considered worthy of mention by most of the other poets, except (but only cursorily so) by Barhat Amardas, who briefly mentioned two Bhil warriors (Camda and Damai) in *git* II. Though he said little about their standing in this short composition, it is nevertheless clear that Amardas accorded leadership and heroic valour to Camda and Damai for they are said to have brought along "their army of 140 Bhil warriors" who all "proved their worth in battle" (*git* II: 37-40).

To my mind, the versification of Bhil heroism in *chamd* II is expressive of the same kind of unreserved admiration as the poets' usually accorded to Rajput warriors. For Pabuji's Bhil archers were introduced halfway through *chamd* II (v.42) following a detailed description of Pabuji and his Rajput soldiers' war preparations followed by a separate account of the battle deeds and valour of Pabuji's Bhil warriors, an account that takes up a significant part of the narrative. The admiring tone employed to describe the Bhil in *chamd* II is most pronounced in verse-lines 42-55, 67 and 92-94:

42. bha-u pālha taṇā pārādha bharaṃ, āghā anabhaṃga jhisā anaṛa(ṃ)
43. varīyāma sa(ṃ)grāma jhīhā(ṃ)ma va(ṃ)pe, kīyā tili kaṃḍīla su cīla kape
44. dhaṇāhāla bāmhāla jhāṃṭāla dhayaṃ,<sup>368</sup> haṭhīyāla laṃkāla trikāla hayaṃ
45. macharāla khaigāla rosāla mane, vikarāla ghaḍāla ja kālavana<sup>369</sup>
46. dhiṃcāla bhujjāla suḍrāla dhayaṃ, sātavīsai sura saghīra sayam
47. suhaṛam caṃḍīyau iṇa rūpa saḥje, mila pūnima caṃḍa ni kṣatra<sup>370</sup> majhai
48. khākhū pemala khaṃdhāra khalai, vagavāḷata vīsala vīsa valai
49. bhara hekā heka vasekha bharaṃ, pārādhi pāyaka pālha taṇa(ṃ)
50. hūyā sātavīse sātha heka manam, dhana dhana narapati dhana dhana(ṃ)<sup>371</sup>
51. dhāṃdhala samau bhrama dhumha dharai, khata māragi pālha turamga kharai
52. bhara pā-īla meha la bhīṃca bhalā, jhīṭīyā paṃthi pādhari jujhakalā<sup>372</sup>
53. dhara dhūjati<sup>373</sup> [pāi dhanakha dharam, karajoḍa kadāla kha-uga<sup>374</sup> karaṃ

<sup>368</sup> Unclear. Perhaps: *ghayam, thayam*. Alliterative rules suggest: *dhayam*.

<sup>369</sup> The word *kāla* is followed by a hyphen, which reportedly served to connect it with *vanai*.

<sup>370</sup> Unclear. Perhaps: *kritra*.

<sup>371</sup> Unclear. Perhaps: *dhane*. End-rhyme suggests: *taṇa(ṃ)* (v. 49) and *dhana(ṃ)* (v.50).

<sup>372</sup> Unclear. Perhaps: *juhha(ṃ)ka(ṃ)lā*.

<sup>373</sup> The word *dhūjati* followed by an insert-sign, probably referring to the verse-lines scribbled in the top-margin of the manuscript, which reads: "pāi dhanakha dharam, karajoḍa kadāla kha-ugakaram, pā-īka āghaga". By inserting this verse-line in v. 53 and v. 54, which read "Dhara dhuja ti milai praghalaṃ, pārādhi lodhi ghāsa palām", the first letters of all the last and first words of the half-lines of both verse-lines achieve alliteration: *Dhara dhuja ti-( pāi dhanakha dharam, karajoḍa kadāla kha-uga karaṃ)*, (*pā-īka āghaga*) milai praghalaṃ, pārādhi lodhi ghāsa palām. The poet may have also meant to achieve end-

54. *pāika āghaga*] milai praghalaṃ, pāradhī lodhī ghāsa palaṃ  
 55. levā sraga āraṭi praba ladhai, vāhasūvāṃ pālha pramāṇa vadhai
67. samarī gaṇī pāradhīye savare, kīyā kuṃḍala rāha ganāma karai
92. vi(m)ḍhi pā(m)ṇa samampe dhena vaṛai, caṃḍīyai riṇa nāmau caṃḍa caṛai  
 93. lo(m)hāṃ baliyā vaka sraga lahe, riṇa khāṃkhu pemala sati rahai  
 94. kīyā pāradhīyai kali nāma<sup>375</sup> kathaṃ, sātavīśai simdhā pāla sathaṃ

In these verse-lines, the poet pays tribute to Pabuji’s Bhil fighters by describing them as fearsome Paradhi combatants “decked out like the great warrior Yam”. And he recites the warriors’ matchless qualities one by one, listing the names of Camda, the chief-in-command of the Bhil archers Khamku, Pemal, Khamdhar, Visal, Pail and Mehal.<sup>376</sup> Camda is most splendidly adorned of all the Bhil warriors for “he shines (like) the full moon amidst stars” (*chamd* II, v. 47).<sup>377</sup> The 140 Bhil archers never weary of battle and continue to display courage even while vultures crowd the battlefield to devour fallen warriors, picking at their eyes with their sharp beaks.<sup>378</sup> The Paradhi army confronts Jimda’s soldiers, here referred to as Lodhi warriors, and attack time and again hoping thus to fulfil their desire “to obtain heaven” (*chamd* II, v. 54). Together the seven Bhil and their archers make up an impressive army that, once on the move, shakes the earth. The weapons most commonly ascribed to the Bhil is the bow though the poet also has them wield swords<sup>379</sup> and “arms to strike and throw with” (*chamd* II, v. 53: *karajoḍa*). Loyalty is yet another heroic quality ascribed to the Bhil as can be understood from the fact that the warriors Khamkhu and Pemal die side-by-side with Pabuji and thus attain a well-deserved place in

---

rhyme for after inserting the verse-lines from the top-margin, the last words of all half-lines end with *aṃ* (*ām*).

<sup>374</sup> Unclear. Perhaps: *kharaga*.

<sup>375</sup> Unclear. Perhaps: *nādā*.

<sup>376</sup> Some of the names for the Bhil archers can be seen as epithetical references for they could be translated as “Moon” (Camda), “Heroic Man” (Khamku), “Loved One” (Pemal), “Powerful” (Visal). The meaning of the names Pail, Mehal and Khamdhar are less clear to me. Perhaps Mehal denotes Mahal (“palace”) while Khamdhar possibly translates as “Swordfighter”.

<sup>377</sup> Listings of Pabuji’s Bhil warriors’ names commonly differ. In Nainsi’s *Khyāt* (Sakariya 1993:58-79), the Bhil have been listed as Camda, Devo, Khapu, Pemalo, Khalmal, Khamgharo and Casal. Tessitori (1916:110) mentions Khakhu, Khemalo and Vasalo. And Smith (1991: 493, n.8) notes the existence of nine retainers, including the Bhil warrior Dembho (Dambo) and a Rebari retainer named Hariyo or Harmal.

<sup>378</sup> *Chamd* II (v. 43): “varīyāma sa(m)grāma jhīhā(m)ma va(m)pe, kīyā tili kaṃḍila su cīla kape”. The meaning of this couplet is ambiguous. It could perhaps be read as a portent of the Bhil’s heroic death when they fall prey to vultures. It seems to me, however, that the verse-line was meant to underscore the bravery of the Bhil who fight on even while vultures devour dead warriors.

<sup>379</sup> If *kha-uga* (v. 53) can be read as *kharaga*.

Indra's heaven (*chamd* II, v. 93-94).<sup>380</sup> Pabuji's commander-in-chief Camda also dies in battle thus adding glory to his name (*chamd* II, v. 92).

In the selected poems, dissimilar epithets are accorded to the Bhil in a way somewhat comparable to the portrayal of the earlier-studied Rajput titles, for the epithets connote different aspects of Bhil identities, including different occupational roles and geographic and religious identity. For example, epithets which refer to Bhil martial status include epithets they share with Rajput warriors like *bhaṭa*, *subhaṭa*, *bhara*, *bharaḥbīca*, *trikāla*, *laṃkāla*, *pāyaka*. Their war feats are suggested with epithets like those accorded to Rajputs (and discussed above) including *hathiyāla* and *jujhalā*. Their weapons, chiefly bow and arrow, warrant titles like *dhuniyāla* and *dhanakh* (both denoting "archer"). Other appellations designate imagined or real places of origin (*pāradhī*, *āharī*), divine qualities and/or skin-colour (*saṃvāla*), their thieving reputation (*thorī*) and, lastly, their role as healers and priestly performers (*Bhopa*). The designation "Bhil", like the title Rajput, does not figure in any of the studied poems.

The most interesting epithet accorded to the Bhil is Payak (*pāyaka*) in *chamd* II, a word which has been traced to Sanskrit *padāti* (foot soldier) by Lalas (1962-1988) and to Persian *paika* (footman, armed attendant, message bearer) by McGregor (1993).<sup>381</sup> Payak denotes a servant, but also refers to Naukar or (armed) foot soldiers, heroes and warriors and is reminiscent of the idiom of *naukarī*. It is an epithet employed only by the poet of *chamd* II and solely to refer to Pabuji's Bhil warriors. The poets of both *chamds* accorded identical honorifics, denoting a hero or (foot) soldier (like "Bhat") to Bhil and Rajput warriors. The exclusive usage of the Payak for Bhil in *chamd* II suggests that its poet saw it as an epithet reserved for Bhil archers. In *chamd* II, the title "Payak" occurs in conjunction with Paradhi (*pāradhī pāyaka*). The poet explicitly asserted that "The Pardiya (are) the (loyal) Payak of the protector (Pabuji)".<sup>382</sup> Today Paradhi in the first place connotes a hunter or fowler (McGregor 1993), while Lalas (1962-1988) also lists the meaning "armed attendant", specially a Bowman. The third meaning given by Lalas is simply "Bhil" and his last-listed meaning describes a Paradhi as a person who "strikes from a hiding place", conceivably like a hunter or robber lying in wait for his prey. Koppers (1948: 28, 117), on the other hand, thought of Paradhi (Pardee) as a regional Bhil clan and caste name.<sup>383</sup> It seems that Paradhi communities know

<sup>380</sup> In ambiguous verse-lines (*chamd* II, v. 60-61, 68-71, 79-82) the Bhil also seem to figure as protectors (*vāhasāvā*), heroic men (*dhārīta narām*), lords of cattle (*dheṇa dhanī*) and warriors (*bhara*), but it is not always clear whether the poet meant to refer to the Bhil, Pabuji, or both, when he composed these lines.

<sup>381</sup> *Chamd* II (c. 43): "pāla tanā pāradhīyā pāyaka".

<sup>382</sup> *Chamd* II (v. 49): "bhara hekā heka vasekha bharaṃ, pāradhī pāyaka pālha taṇa(ṃ)".

<sup>383</sup> Paradhi "sub-castes" are listed as Fase-Paradhi, Gav-Paradhi, Berad-Paradhi, Gay-Paradhi, Chita-Paradhi by Jamanadas (www.ksafe.com, 2005). The idea that Paradhi should be seen as a caste name is contradicted by present-day missionary sources about contemporary Paradhi, which describe them as an "isolated" and "unusual" group of people who, unlike other Bhil clans, have remained largely outside regional caste hierarchies till date (*ibid.*).

several “sub-castes”, all of which share three surnames, that is Chauhan, Pawar and Solanki, all of which suggest Rajput ancestry. Koppers traced the name Paradhi to Marathi *paradha* (“hunt”) and accordingly described the Paradhi of Jhabua and Kushalgarh (Rajasthan) as a “caste” of hunters who used nets to catch their prey. The Gujarati Paradhi were known to him as a “wandering tribe of fowlers”. Nowadays the Paradhi are classified as “migratory Bhil” who speak one of the many Bhil “languages” (Pardhi) and live throughout Maharashtra and Kacch (or Kutch) in Gujarat, earning their keep as hunters of birds and small game, snake charmers, basket weavers and producers of black-stone bowls and pitchers (www.ksafe.com).

The Bhil are referred to as Dhanakh (*chamd* II, v.53) a title traced to Sanskrit Dhanurdhar (“bowman”) by Lalas (1962-1988).<sup>384</sup> Though they are most commonly described as fighting with bows and arrows, the Bhil have also been portrayed (in verse-line 53) as wielders of swords and slinging weapons or daggers.<sup>385</sup> Pabuji’s Rajput warriors are, on the other hand, at all times evoked as the wielders of swords and spears in *chamd* II and the other poems under review. While the use of the epithet Dhanak is straightforward in *chamd* II, the usage of bow and arrows, usually ascribed to the Bhil, is not always as clear like in verse-line 70 of *chamd* II in which it is not altogether obvious whether the poet describes Bhil archers and Pabuji, or only Pabuji, when he versified how the “Spearwielder” (Pabuji) tore apart his enemy with deep incisions, probably of his spear, and the enemies armour and arm shields were torn apart by arrowheads shot by Pabuji or his Bhil warriors.<sup>386</sup> Though this lack of clarity could be the result of chronologic confusion, it is nevertheless interesting to note that Rajput warriors like Pabuji were perhaps seen as wielders of bows and arrows *and* wielders of swords and spears by some poets. Conversely, the above instance could also suggest that Bhil archers and foot soldiers were at times evoked as wielding spears. This and other occurrences (discussed below) give reason to imagine that Pabuji, in the mind of the poet of *chamd* II, may have figured as a bowman and had more in common with his Paradhi archers than the traditional divide between Rajput and Bhil identity suggests.

Another instance that appears to highlight correspondences between particular Rajput and Bhil martial identities can be found in *chamd* I when the poet portrays Pabuji and/or the Bhil as young warriors who fight with bow and arrow in verse-line 39: “kaṭi tuṃṇa kabāṇa suṃbāṃṇa kasai, dhari pāṃṇa su(ṃ)bāṃṇa javāṃṇa dhasai(ṃ)”. Depending on whether *javāṃṇa* should be interpreted here as a plural form or not, this verse-line may be interpreted as “They place the arrow(s) (from) the arrowholder(s) (around) (their) waist (upon) (their) bow(s); holding the arrow(s) in (their) hand(s), the young warrior(s) enter(s) (the fight)”. If *javāṃṇa* is read as a singular form, the verse-line may be interpreted as “They place the arrow(s) (from) the arrowholder(s) (around) (their) waist (upon) (their) bow(s). Holding the arrow(s)

<sup>384</sup> Shekavat (1968: 36, n.40) translates *dhānaṅk* as “dhānake yoddhā” and “nāyak jāti ke vīr”.

<sup>385</sup> *Chamd* II (v. 53): “dhara dhūjati pāi dhanakha dharāṃ, karaḷoḍa kadāla kha-uga karaṃ”.

<sup>386</sup> *Chamd* II (v.70): “phara phāri sanāha sabāha pharaṃ, bhaloṇaṃ bha(ṃ)bhāra bheda(ṃ)ta bharaṃ”.

in (his) hand, the young warrior enters (the fight)". Either way, this instance is of interest because the Bhil are not normally referred to with "Javan", a title which appears to have been reserved for Pabuji in the selected sources since he is believed to have been a young boy when he took up arms.<sup>387</sup> Likewise, though Pabuji is commonly depicted as a young warrior, he is not usually portrayed as fighting with bow and arrows. Other reasons to imagine that the roles attributed to Pabuji and the Bhil were not as disparate as they may seem are the connotations of the epithets chosen for the Bhil archers which, as mentioned just now, are shared by both Rajput and Bhil protagonists in *chamd* II and illustrate that Rajput-like heroism was at times attributed to the Bhil bowmen.

My impressions can to some extent be the result of the fact that, as noted before, it is not always clear which combatant or army makes which move in either *chamd* I or *chamd* II. Especially from the battle descriptions in the latter composition it is at times difficult to establish who fights with what weapons or which epithet is used for whom. Yet, the poet's choice of words in the *chamd* II does appear significant when compared with other texts in which the distinction between the two groups is much more marked. A case in point is *chamd* I. Although the poet portrayed both Pabuji's Bhil and Rathaur Rajput warriors as the wielders of swords, clubs, maces, bows and arrows, even so, when mentioned individually, the Rajput warriors were always depicted as fighting with spears and swords, while the Bhil archers, needless to say, availed themselves of bows and arrows. And in *duha* I, Ladhraj very clearly distinguished between Rajput warriors, who were portrayed as wielding swords, daggers, spears, clubs and maces, on the one hand, and the Bhil whose role was confined to that of archers, on the other. It is against this background that I have come to imagine that the blurred distinction between the two groups, their epithets and use of weapons, is not just the result of chronological flexibility or poetic licence. And, as shall be discussed below, the description of Pabuji's parentage in *duha* I has also given me reason to conceive of Bhil and Dhamdhal Rajput relations as more involved than those between lords and subjects or martial leaders and their foot soldiers.

### *Samval, Thori, Ahari*

In most of the shorter compositions, the Bhil do not figure at all except in *git* II (v. 40), where they have been referred to as *sāṃvalā(ṃ) sātavīsī*, the "7 times 20 (140)

---

<sup>387</sup> Compare *chamd* I (v. 37) and *duha* II (v. 11) in which Pabuji is referred to with the titles *jīvā* ("young") and *bālaka* ("boy"). This role is perhaps comparable to the role of the "Yuva rāja", as described by Kolff (1990: 126f), who defines the *yuva rāja* as a crown prince or other prince who went in search of land, honour and a lord to serve. Since other men than fathers and sons may take up these role (and the roles can be performed alternately by one man) it can be imagined that aspects of Pabuji's role refer to the role of *yuva rāja*, a rebel son who goes into the jungle; in his case not to win land but to add to the fame of his sword by protecting cattle.

Samval". *Duha* I and the *parvaro* do present us with a good number of examples of alternating perceptions of Rajput-Bhil relations. From the first-mentioned composition it can be surmized that Pabuji's Bhil archers came to be thought of as the low-status subordinates of Rajput warriors in seventeenth-century Marwar. They were no longer, like in *chamd* II, explicitly portrayed as heroic warriors. On the contrary, the role of the Bhil protagonists is much less significant, and Ladhraj only mentions Camda by name while the other six archers' names, like listed in *chamd* II, were apparently forgotten or perhaps they were not deemed important enough to mention. Ladhraj moreover describes in some detail how Pabuji has to overcome the wavering feeling of his Bhil retainer Camda who is portrayed as rather disinclined to join Pabuji in his war against Jimda, a depiction which in this kind of poetry appears to underline the rather un-heroic stance taken by the Bhil warrior (*duha* I, v. 249-250 quoted in chapter 3). Camda has other things on his mind than war, in particular the arrangements for his daughter's marriage. When the Bhil warrior finally agrees to join Pabuji, his role in the battles, and the part played by his army (*thāṭa*) of Thori (*thorī*) is described as relatively insignificant. Ladhraj did, even so, accord some measure of heroism to the Bhil in verse-line 254 by comparing them to gods or heroes (*sur*) who resemble Samval (*sāmvalā*), literally meaning "black" or "dark", perhaps in an allusion to the complexion of the archers;<sup>388</sup> *sāmvalā* moreover also translates as "hunter" and "Bhil" (Lalas: 1962-1988). Once Rajput-like heroism is accorded to Camda and his archers, when their valour is described as arising from Kshatriyahood (*khatravāṭa* or *kṣhatrīyatā*) in verse-line 258.

On the whole, however, Ladhraj did not dwell on the archers' role in the battle proceedings or their martial prowess in any detail. And, apart from titles like Sura and Samval, Ladhraj also employed the less flattering epithet Thori ("thief") to refer to Pabuji's archers. The Bhil are also named Ahari (*duha* I, v. 254: *āherī*). Ahari, yet again according to Lalas (1962-1988), connotes hunt (*shikār*) and accordingly Ahari is translated as "hunter".<sup>389</sup> While Ahari appears to have a neutral meaning, the title Thori does not; it is commonly rendered "thief".<sup>390</sup> Shekavat (1968: 211) translates Thori as a caste name (*thorī jāti ke sevak*). It is not clear whether Ladhraj meant to use the name Thori in a disparaging manner or just to denote a caste name. Judging from Nainsi's *Khyāt*, the former seems more likely since Nainsi's usage documents

<sup>388</sup> If *sāmvalā* can be traced to Sanskrit *syāmal*, the epithet may also have served to liken the Bhil to Krishna since this epithet is also one of many names of this god, connoting his dark-blue skin.

<sup>389</sup> In the twentieth century, Ahari has also been classed as one of the many clan names used by Bhil from different regions in Rajasthan, including Udaipur-Kherwara, Banswara, Dungarpur, Partabgarh and Sirohi (Koppers 1948: 115, 119). There may have been a connection with the peasant and pastoralist Ahirs of the Saurashtra Jangal in Gujarat, bordering south-western Rajasthan, for Ahir Bhil, though differentiated from Ahari Bhil, were traced to Gujarat and Kandesh by Koppers (1948: 121).

<sup>390</sup> Today, some Thoris prefer to be called Nayak (chief) a term that has also come to refer to "thorī jāti" and "Bhil jāti" in Rajasthan (Lalas 1962-1988).

the disparaging overtone of the title Thori in the seventeenth century.<sup>391</sup> In the *Khyāt*, Pabuji's Thori are evoked as eating meat, including she-camels, before Pabuji takes them under his wings and recruits them as his companions and comrades-in-arms. The fact that they killed "an animal" is the main cause for their banishment by their former patron, Ano Vaghelo. The Thori are, moreover, subject of a quarrel between Pabuji's sister Sonam and her co-wife, who taunts Sonam by saying: "Your brother eats in the company of Thori", a remark which was clearly aimed at insulting Pabuji (Smith's translation, 1991: 482-83).

### *Bhil Bhopas*

The *parvaro* represents an altogether different genre within the Pabuji tradition as it does not have many themes or protagonists in common with the other selected compositions except, of course, its main hero Pabuji. In this composition, Bhil protagonists play an important part, but they no longer figure as Pabuji's comrades-in-arms and neither their martial roles and epithets nor any of the other titles that are listed above receive any mention. From this poem, the Bhil emerge as Bhopas, the medieval devotees, priestly performers and ritual healers of Pabuji's temples. The title Bhopa has several meanings and has been ascribed to many different communities, including Bhil, Rebari and Rajput devotees of folk gods and goddesses. Its range of meanings include: "seer", "diviner", "medium", "priest", "devotee" and "fool".<sup>392</sup> The *parvaro* makes apparent that Bhil Bhopas figured as the *dhol*-playing priests of Pabuji's Kolu temple and of smaller temples (*maṛhi*, *thāpanā*) dedicated to him at Dhamgrava and, perhaps, Sojhat (*sojhita*). The temple priests are also portrayed, in verse-line 14, as Bhopas from Bharara (*bhopā bhararā*). It is unclear whether this should be taken to mean "Bhopas of the Bharar community", a caste group from Madhya Pradesh, or whether it was meant as a reference to Bhopas from a place called Bharar, unknown to me.

Inscriptions found at Pabuji's Kolu temple today document that Bhopas used to be connected to the temple. As remarked in the previous chapter, the beginnings of the Kolu temple can be dated to fifteenth or early sixteenth century, well before the seventeenth-century *parvaro* was committed to paper. None of the available epigraphic evidence at the temple helps in dating a Bhil Bhopa cult to the initial stages of temple history, but the title Bhopa is found inscribed on some of the later *devaḷīs* (hero stones) and *kīrtistambhs* or commemorative pillars. The eighteenth-century memorial pillar to the left of the entrance of the white temple, for instance,

<sup>391</sup> In the nineteenth century, "t'horī" apparently came to be known as "bhoot" (ghosts) or the "sons of the devil", and "professional thieves" as well as camel proprietors and caravan guides (Tod (1972 II: 255). Likewise, Mewar's "thaoris" have been described by Tod (1972 II: 154) as a "caste of robbers".

<sup>392</sup> From the meanings accorded to the Rajasthani noun *bhopā* and the verb *bhopanī*, it can be surmized that contemporary Bhopas are believed to be people endowed with supernatural or magic powers, and able to perform miracles (Lalas 1962-1988). Frater (1989: 96) describes Rebari "Bhopa" as priests "through whom the goddess speaks". See also McGregor (1993).

documents the fact that it was erected by, among others, Bhopa Bhagchand from Palani and substantiates Bhopa service in (or associated with) the temple in the late medieval period. Bhopa Bhagchand is mentioned again in an inscription on the hero stone in the middle of the altar of the white temple, dating it to 1713 and informing us that this hero stone was established or donated by Bhopa Bhagchand and Bihari Das during the reign of prince Abhey Singh, son of Ajit Singh.<sup>393</sup>



*Bhil memorial stone (undated).*

The reference to Bhopas as eighteenth-century Kolu temple priests or devotees does not inevitably suggest that we are here dealing with an allusion to Bhil Bhopas. As noted earlier, contemporary usage suggests that Bhopa is, and perhaps has long been, a title used for priests and devotees from different communities like the Bhil and Rebari as well as for Rajput priests who nowadays also employ the title “Bhopa” to refer to themselves. Evidence to document the inclusion of Bhil archers in the Pabuji cult as observed at the Kolu temple can be read from hero stones with images of the Bhil (Thori) archers. Many of the hero stones dedicated to Pabuji can be recognized by the inclusion of one or more Bhil archers, mostly in the right-hand corner of the hero stones.<sup>394</sup> On the central altars of both the white and red temple two or more Bhil figures accompany Pabuji on hero stones with inscriptions dating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Besides, two memorial stones depicting

<sup>393</sup> The inscription reads: “srī pābūjī saṃvata 1770 vara khe matī caira vadi 11 somavarla bihari dāsa vidanī sādāvai srī maharājā di rāja srī ajita siṃgajī komaraji abheya siṃgajī ri vāra maṃhai carai bhopā b(h)āg chāṃda”. Another hero stone on the altar of the red temple carries an inscription that documents that a Bhopa (his name is unreadable) served at the Kolu temple in 1713 during the time of the ruler Sangha. This inscription reads: “pābūjī sata cahi ni savata 1770 varasa saṃghajī ri vāra bhopā (...) re kesamno saitraṅga saṃtra”

<sup>394</sup> However, the majority of hero stones kept at the Kolu temple show an individual warrior wielding a spear or sword and riding a horse, who is identified as Pabuji riding Kalvi. Some of these hero stones are at times accompanied by a “twirl” in the lower right corner which at some instances looks like a calf, and at other times seems to represent a wave. Only one of the undated hero stones shows Pabuji accompanied by the small figure of a Bhil with bow-and-arrow, below the riding figure, in the right corner of the stone.

the seven archers in Pabuji's retinue now stand within the temple compound placed in small shrines. One stone faces the entrance of the white temple and the other faces the entrance of the red temple. Two more memorials with seven Bhil archers are furthermore found in a separate alcove in the side wing of the temple compound. All these commemorative stones are without dates or other inscriptions and their depiction of the seven Thori wielding bow and arrow rather differs, ranging from intricately carved figurines to rather sketchy carvings.<sup>395</sup> The temple priest, Tulsi Singh Rathaur, lists their names as: Ishal, Vishal, Kaku, Baku, Harmal, Camda, and Dema. The seven men carry bows and arrows and, judging from the fact that their legs are bent at the knee, are kneeling down. Today Bhil Bhopas are seated in front of the archers' hero stones when they ritually perform the *paravāraus*<sup>396</sup> that are part of the contemporary *mātā* (drum) epic dedicated to Pabuji. The Bhopas claim direct descent from the seven archers and include accounts of the heroic deeds of Pabuji's companions in their performance of the epic. I will return to the subject of Bhil archers and their contemporary worship in chapter 9.



*Mātā* epic performance by the brothers Ram in front of a Thori memorial stone.

<sup>395</sup> To my untrained eyes, the rather sketchily carved Thori memorials have an aura of "antiquity" while the more intricate carvings resemble the style of late-medieval hero stones dedicated to Pabuji. However, it is also possible that the two different styles were contemporary and represent different kinds of handiwork, perhaps Rajput and Bhil workmanship. I do not know enough of the history of this kind of art to be able to speculate about the dating of Bhil worship practices in Kolu on the basis of these stones.

<sup>396</sup> I use *paravārau* to refer to the contemporary *mātā* tradition and to differentiate between this tradition's *paravāraus* and the medieval *parvaro*.

From the eighteenth-century version of the *parvaro* attached to *duha* I it becomes clear that medieval Bhopas presided over drum performances and ritual healings at medieval Pabuji temples in Kolu and Sojhat, while in *git* III, Pabuji's patronage of a temple in Kolu is also referred to. In view of the medieval *parvaro*'s narrative, I imagine that the drum (*rhola* or *dhola*) played an important role in the medieval cult and perhaps served a similar ritual purpose as the ritual *mātā* (drum) used by today's Bhil Bhopa to accompany their performance of *parvaros* dedicated to Pabuji. This becomes apparent from the tale told by the *parvaro*'s poet, Mohandas or Ladhraj, about the Rathaur Rajput Vagha who stole the *dhola* belonging to a Bhopa serving at Pabuji's temple in Dhamgrava (*dhāṅgaravā marhi*). To punish Vagha, the Rathaur hero-god cursed him with a severe stomach ache. It soon turned out that only the Bhopa could cure Vagha's pain. Once the Bhopa restored him to health, the Rajput repented and restored the drum to the temple. The meaning that could be attributed to this episode becomes clearer when one remembers the importance of the *dhola* as a ritual instrument in present-day Bhil Bhopa epic performances and healing practices which involve trance rituals and indicate that *dhola* and *mātā* drums should be thought of as divine and/or magic instruments and ceremonial aids which assist in invoking a trance-like state.<sup>397</sup> In trance, a Bhil Bhopa feels himself to be a medium through which the presence of a god's *chāyā* ("shadow", "apparition") is revealed. Thus a god expresses himself in an oracular manner, addressing his devotees through his Bhopa.<sup>398</sup> The aim of such rituals is to solve a devotee's everyday problems, see the future, settle disputes and/or cure illnesses.

Though the contemporary tradition of *chāyā* has not been mentioned in the studied *parvaro*, I even so do feel that this text contains instances that illustrate the ritual, magic and healing qualities ascribed to the *dhola* in medieval times. My interpretation is based, first, upon the importance attached to the retrieval of the stolen *dhola*, second, on the description of Pabuji's voice coming from heaven and talking to the Bhopa, and third, on the poet's statement that the Bhopa healed Vagha with Pabuji's help (*parvaro*, v. 2-27, cf. chapter 3). Lastly, the description of the healing ritual (*sīco*) in verse-lines 18-19 also seems to indicate that the poet accorded healing powers to the Dhamgrava Bhopa.<sup>399</sup> All one comes to know from the *parvaro*, however, is that some Dhamgrava Bhopas used to cure stomach aches

---

<sup>397</sup> The use of drums as trance inducing instruments, which can invoke a god's presence, is part of religious traditions worldwide. In northern India, the meaning attributed to the sounds of drums can be connected to myths that portray the creation of the universe as resulting from the sound of Shiva's drum (Alter 2004: 361).

<sup>398</sup> Compare Blackburn's (1989: 10f) description of ritual possession, spirit possession, trance dance, divinization and self-mutilation as "generic" to oral martial and sacrificial oral epic in India.

<sup>399</sup> Studies of Bhil customs do not mention this particular ritual but they do document the use of medicinal plants and trees by Bhil to cure stomach aches and other afflictions by crushing bark, leaves, etcetera, and administering them to a patient mixed in water (Ebner 1996: 21).

through a ritual in which *sico* (clean water to remove impurity) is used while invoking Pabuji by repeating his name “(with) sincerity”.<sup>400</sup>

The significance of the story about Ratna and Jaita becomes clearer when it is read against the background of yet another concern of contemporary Bhil life as described in anthropological studies. Ebner (1996: *passim*) and Robbins (1998: *passim*) describe the importance attached to the protection of trees by Bhil and other inhabitants of the Thar Desert, and I imagine that this practice motivates the punishment meted out by Pabuji’s to Bhati Jaiti for cutting an Acacia tree (Khejar) near the warrior-god’s temple. And the severity of the punishment meted out by Pabuji for cutting trees (he kills Jaiti) can perhaps be read as an illustration of the great significance that people used to accord to trees. Like the present-day inhabitants of the desert, former communities must have been very dependent upon trees as fodder for their cattle and as fuel for their cooking fires.

Ratna’s tale may also be understood as an illustration of the fact that the eighteenth-century Kolu temple was surrounded by an *orhan* (*auran*), a communal pasture area for the grazing of goats, sheep, cows and camels and a shared source of fuel for village kitchens. The contemporary village *orhan* in Rajasthan can be defined as a “class of land management systems dependent on social sanction and the patterns of authority structured into traditional village politics” (Robbins 1998: 87). Oral tradition records how the same probably held true for medieval times when the Kolu temple was surrounded by a sizable *orhan* that served to regulate the use of trees, bushes and grasses as cattle fodder and fuel (personal communication Tulse Singh Rathaur 2001).<sup>401</sup>



The Kolu *orhan* rules allow for the grazing of animals on the lower branches and bark of trees, and collecting dead wood, but strictly proscribe the cutting of trees or branches. This custom is commonly enforced through local village counsels and by means of cautionary tales, which (like the

<sup>400</sup> *Parvaro* (v. 18-19): “sācai muṃṇa sīcoha, pābū ro ghāto puṇai. 19. iṣarau ū sīcoha, kīdho yuṃ sājo kamadha”.

<sup>401</sup> It is said that the Kolu *orhan* used to provide fodder for huge herds of cattle, in particular camels. This is no longer the case today. In the last two to three decades, camel keepers and their herds are no longer welcome in Kolu. Ever-increasing population pressure and the resulting desertification in western Rajasthan has left the temple *orhan* a large sandy “meadow” with little shrubbery and few scattered acacia trees. The leaves, fruits and bark of these trees still serve as cattle fodder and fuel but only for the cattle of the villagers. I was told that the Kolu *orhan* can still provide green pasture during a good monsoon. During my visits to Kolu, the rains had failed for four consecutive years and the *orhan* was barren, the village wells had run dry.

medieval *parvaro*) warn about the dire consequences resulting from the cutting of trees. Divine retribution, like the castigation of the Rajput Bhati Jaiti by Pabuji in the *parvaro*, continues to be invoked. This incident, I think, illustrates that the rules broken by Jaiti resemble existing rules curtailing the cutting of trees in Kolu's *oṛhaṇ*. In the *parvaro* it has been clearly stated that Ratna planted the ill-fated Khejar tree near Pabuji's Kolu temple (*maṛhi*) and near Pabuji's "statue" (*thāpanā*).<sup>402</sup>

Other socio-political and religious concerns in the *parvaro* relate to the roles ascribed to Rajput warriors in the beginning of the eighteenth century in Marwar and the manner in which the veneration of Pabuji was linked to Shakti worship. The first concern is part of the episode about the hero-god Pabuji's rescue of his Bhopas after they have been robbed by the Rajput Vagha. The poet describes how the Rajput warrior Vagha does not share the Bhopas' dedication to Pabuji since he does not fear the hero-god's anger and robs the temple drum from Pabuji's temple. The Rajput Jati does not respect Pabuji's powers either since he cuts down a tree near the hero-god's temple. Only after the Rajput godling has punished the two Rajputs for their deeds, do the wrongdoers repent and accept Pabuji's divine authority. This tale documents the changing relation between the Rajput and Bhil of eighteenth-century Marwar, who apparently fought amongst each other. The Bhil are portrayed as fighting Rajput warriors with the help of magic and through Pabuji's divine intervention, but they no longer figure as warriors in their own right like in *chamd* II and some verse-lines of *duha* I. From the quoted episodes one may gauge that, unlike most Rajput families of Marwar today, not all medieval Rajput were devotees of Pabuji. From this instance, and from the poet's attempts at positioning Pabuji's cult vis-à-vis "other gods" (discussed below), it could be inferred that in the seventeenth century, Pabuji's Bhopas and other non-Rajput devotees were in the process of establishing or re-establishing Pabuji's popularity among a wider audience.

The *parvaro* also details the manner in which poets sought to relate the Pabuji cult to the goddess worship. In the second half of the *paravaro*, the poet expands upon his devotion to the goddess and Pabuji like in verse-lines 67-68, where it has been implied that both the poet Ladhraj and Pabuji are servants or devotees (*sevaga*) of Devi, while in the following verse-lines the poet takes quite some trouble to explain that the worship of Pabuji and the mother goddess do not exclude each other even though the poet at the same time presents his dedication to Vasihathi, the "twenty-armed Goddess", as the supreme form of devotion:

67. suṇi tāharī suvāmṇi, rājī hai ladharājīya

68. kaha to rāva kamaṁdha, tu sevaga devī taṇo

<sup>402</sup> *Parvaro* (v. 30): "ratanām ro vaṁṭī, kolu maṛhi pābū nhai", and (v. 37): "naine naha dekheha, th(ī) pābū rī thāpanā". Today, *maṛhi* and *thāpanā* can refer to a hero stone on a small uncovered altar, scattered throughout the Thar Desert, though *maṛhi* can also be used to refer to the Kolu temple.

69. sosabalo sanamaṁdha, āṁpāṁ chai ladharājīyā  
 70. tonu chāiyari tīna, pārosī jasa ekā prabhā<sup>403</sup>  
 71. āja pacho ākhīna tāharo huṁ madha kara taṅā  
 72. ladhīyā lokā ika, devī tina bhina devatā  
 73. visahathī vāyaka, sūṅī<sup>404</sup>yā chai māharā sakai  
 74. devāṁ māṁhi dubhāṁti, rī kahu mata le vato  
 75. khitavā sī sūra khāṁti, jasa gāyo ladharājīyai  
 76. bhālālā bhara māī, lo kāṁnu ke-ī lūṁḍīyā  
 77. māharai manuṛā māṁī, bhinana hasaba deve bhagita

In stating that there exists no disparity among gods and that what counts in these matters is man's devotion to the gods in general (v. 72-77), the poet perhaps tried to solve his evidently conflicting loyalties. But he did not seem to really manage to do so, for in conclusion he asserts that the existence of a multitude of gods has made many devotees lose sight of "true faith", indicating that according to the poet there existed "false faiths" too (*parvaro*, v. 76). His declaration in the next verse-line (77) that in his heart "(devotion to) the mother goddess (is) not different (from) devotion 'to' all (other) gods", also, seems to indicate that the poet felt the need to defend his belief in the goddess, perhaps to counter contemporary claims made by devotees of other sects. It is of course also conceivable that the poet felt the need to clarify that by worshipping Pabuji the goddess is not neglected but venerated as well. Such an interpretation may indicate that for the poet and his audiences, the goddess embodied the highest godly authority, encompassing all other manifestations of the divine. A more detailed interpretation of Shaktik imagery in the Pabuji tradition will be given in chapter 9, when I discuss the Charani Shakti tradition of Marwar. Suffice it to note here that goddess worship, encompassing the goddess's archaic or "pre-patriarchal" forms, like mother earth and her tribal and locally worshipped "village" forms as well as her Shaktik manifestations, is currently one of the main constituents of Bhil religious mythology and ritual practices (cf. Werz-Kovacs 1982: 151, 189, 214).

### *Bhil-Rajput bonds*

By studying the different forms Rajput-Bhil relations took in the different poems, several features of their historical background can now be explained. I have illustrated how the Bhil were accorded a Rajput-like role in *chamd* II while their martial role becomes much less notable in *duha* I, and the Bhil are altogether "written out", or were just forgotten, in the composition of other poems, like *chamd*

<sup>403</sup> Unclear. A *daṁda* precedes and follows *prabha* (*/prabha/*).

<sup>404</sup> In *sūṅīyā*, "ṅī" was crossed out.

I and some of the *gits*. The study of the martial idiom employed by the poet of *chamd II* highlights the “Payak-register” the poets used to describe Bhil martial roles. This poetic idiom, suggestive of Rajput-Afghan military culture as expressed through the idiom of *naukarī*, enables us to conceive of a distinctly local Marwari grammar for defining martial relations between Rajput warriors and Bhil archers

As was argued just now, the ascription of epithets and weapons to the Rajput and Bhil warriors in *chamd II* attains a distinct meaning when this poem is compared with the other studied sources for then it appears that the composer of *chamd II* may not have blurred the distinction between the two groups by accident. The indistinct portrayal of the two groups, and especially the ascription of similar epithets and weapons to Rajput (in particular Pabuji) and Bhil warriors, has made me wonder whether Pabuji and his Bhil warriors may have had more in common than becomes clear when one reads the other selected sources, the poets of which unambiguously differentiate between the epithets and weapons ascribed to Rajput or Bhil combatants, if the latter are at all mentioned. In this light, an answer seems to present itself to the question posed in chapter 6 concerning the possible reasons why Pabuji was the only Rathaur from a long line of cattle rustlers and warriors who came to be deified? Though Pabuji’s deification may, as we saw in the introduction to this study, be understood as an attempt to make the life of a small-time village hero appeal to wider, regional audiences, it appears to me that the depiction of Pabuji and his Bhil associates in *chamd II* points up another possible motivation underlying Pabuji’s deification.

Perhaps the relation between Pabuji and the Bhil was not a solely martial affair, maybe it could also be understood as a reflection of the fact that the inclusion of Bhil in Rajput ranks (and vice versa) through marriage alliances was not at all uncommon in the period preceding Rajput ascendancy in Marwar (cf. Chandra (1999: 251).<sup>405</sup> A point in case is the history of today’s Bhilala “castes” who trace their ancestry to Rajput-Bhil marriage alliances. The Rajput Garasia (or Girasia), for example, claim to be the progeny of the early medieval bonds between Rajput warriors and Bhil women. Today the Garasia highlight their Rajput status and object to being reminded of their Bhil ancestry. In reading the portrayal of Pabuji and Bhil warriors in *chamd II* together with the inclusion of Pabuji’s birth story in *duha II*, I have come to feel that it is not likely that the ascription of a semi-divine birth to Pabuji, who is portrayed as the son of a Rajput father and a forest nymph in *duha I*, served to shroud Pabuji’s father’s dallying with a non-Rajput woman, perhaps a Bhilni or Mer. As was noted in the previous chapter, Pabuji’s forefathers had to deal with Mer and Bhil contenders to power who, during the early-medieval stage of Rajput kingdom formation, still ruled large desert and forest tracts in and

---

<sup>405</sup> The opposite is also true. Peabody (2003: 88) relates how one Rao Deva flattened a Mina town after a Mina man proposed marriage to a Brahmin woman. Deva thus aimed to uphold a differentiated social order by preventing the “mixing of castes”. This instance appears to illustrate a Rajput man could wed a tribal woman while the alliance between a tribal man and a Rajput woman was not deemed acceptable.

neighbouring Marwar. If “nymph” can be understood as a narrative theme that is emblematic of “the wild”, the poets’ representation of Pabuji’s nymph-mother could be thought to stand for a woman of the forest, perhaps a “tribal” woman. This impression is further documented by the description of how Dhamdhal is thought to have chanced upon the “princess nymph” (*kumvārī apacharā*) when he, while hunting in the jungle, discovered her taking a bath in a forest pond (*duha* I, v. 16-22). The fact that Pabuji, in poetic, prose and genealogical sources, is the only Rathaur of the period whose ancestry is traced to a nymph, may be an eloquent example of attempts to obscure Rajput-Bhil relations in some later sources when Rajput, upon gaining ascendancy in Marwar, no longer wanted to be reminded of the earlier inclusion of Bhil in Rajput ranks and no longer felt a need to acknowledge Bhil martial valour in terms of equality.

My study of Bhil history in Marwar illustrates how the poetic concern with cattle and the aspirations of the warriors who belonged to Rajput and non-Rajput groups represent a narrative theme that evokes the medieval pastoral-nomadic world of cattle rustlers and upcoming Rajput clans who sought to establish their dominance in areas that were, at that time, ruled over by Mer and perhaps Bhil tribal chiefs. This was a world where socio-political identities were not as well-defined as in later medieval society. Such themes at first sight set apart the *chamds* from late-medieval texts like the *duha* I and *parvaro*. The varying roles ascribed to the Bhil are one of the clearest examples of the changing narrative content of the selected poems. But it is difficult to tell whether this change also represents a historical, chronological change that could date *chamd* II to an earlier time of composition than *chamd* I, *duha* I and the *parvaro*, perhaps an early-medieval time when poets still included Bhil warriors in the martial “hall of fame” constituted by their poetry. Yet, the portrayal in *chamd* II of early-medieval Rajput-Bhil alliances and Bhil heroism as opposed to the portrayal of the Bhil’s loss of status in later compositions like *duha* I does appear to be a good reason to assume that the former text can be dated to an earlier period than the latter.

One cannot, however, be certain that the inclusion of a clearly early-medieval theme does indeed mark the studied version of *chamd* II as an earlier version of Pabuji’s story, since this theme may have become part of late-medieval compositions as well, perhaps by a sixteenth-century poet, conceivably a Bhil, who wrote the Bhil into *chamd* II to ascribe Rajput heroism to his ancestors by portraying them as the valiant archers of Pabuji’s army. This kind of connection may have also served to claim a Rajput-like status by Bhil priests or Bhopas of a sixteenth-century (or earlier) Pabuji cult. At present, the Bhil Bhopas of Kolu perform *paravaros* dedicated to Pabuji for exactly this reason: to assign Rajput-like heroism in battle to the Bhil and thus highlight that they were equal to Pabuji’s Rajput warriors in the past and, I was told, therefore lay claim to Rajput status today (cf. chapter 10). A more than martial relation between Pabuji and the Bhil, a relation defined by bonds of marriage, could also help in explaining why Pabuji was deified, but none of his

fellow Rathaur warriors. It would, in addition, also shed light on the question why the Bhil became Pabuji's devotees and, as the *parvaro* illustrates, his Bhopas.





*Depiction of the Charan goddess Karni Mata (Courtesy: Paul Veltman, Amsterdam).*