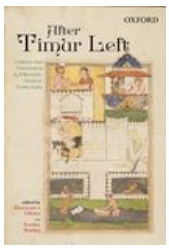

After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India

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CHAPTER

13 Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior: Beginnings and Continuities in the *Rāmāyan* of Vishnudas

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Abstract

The Hindi poet Vishnudas produced a Hindi version of the Ramayana in 1442 at the court of the Gwalior ruler Dungarendra Singh. This, the earliest known Hindi Ramayana encoded aspects of the political and cultural of mid-fifteenth century Gwalior while offering us a case study of vernacularization in the same period. The chapter shows that Vishnudas' epic was intended for a Rajput court (with an emphasis on courts and battles), and through a comparison with Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, demonstrates that while Vishnudas was familiar with the Sanskrit text, it was probably through oral retellings rather than the written text. It further suggests that Vishnudas' rendering was the textualization of an oft-performed vernacular oral version of the Ramayana.

Keywords: epic, Ramayana, Hindi, Gwalior, vernacular, Sultanate, poetry

Subject: Indian History, Medieval and Renaissance History (500 to 1500), Social and Cultural History

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IN THE AUTUMN MONTH OF Kartik in 1435, at the beginning of the military campaigning season, the Gwalior ruler Dungarendra Singh held an assembly where his court poet Vishnudas, a learned descendant of professional epic reciters, was also present. Dungarendra threw down a challenge to his poet by handing him a betel leaf and asking him why the hundred Kauravas were defeated by the Pandavas, who were only five. His question reflected a confidence in the emerging political power of Gwalior, an embattled state confronting powerful enemies. Vishnudas took up the challenge and in order to 'gain immense fame as a poet', he launched on the written composition of what is now the first extant Hindi *Mahābhārata*. This is how Vishnudas himself presents the inception of his first epic. His enterprise was so successful that a few years later, in 1442, he embarked on another major project, the vernacularization of the other great Indian epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

p. 366 Vishnudas[1] was the first vernacular poet in Gwalior to compose powerful narratives that had the strength to survive in subsequent transmission. But while in his *Rāmāyan*[2] he invoked Valmiki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* as a

model and followed his version quite closely, in terms of actual literary form and diction Vishnudas's *Rāmāyan*
p. 367 was also part of the word of vernacular *katha*s circulating orally and in manuscript form. ↳ His epic seems rather to reproduce techniques of condensation and omission that are typical of oral performance and composition, as we shall see.

Operating from the premise that literary works are produced within a matrix of social, political, cultural, and personal constraints and ambitions, this chapter will focus on Vishnudas's *Rāmāyan*—the earliest known Hindi *Rāmāyaṇa*—in order to examine various aspects of the 'literarization' of Gvaliyari as a case study of vernacularization in the fifteenth century. I will first focus on the political and cultural context of fifteenth-century Gwalior and how it can be seen reflected in Vishnudas's work. In the second part of the chapter I will turn to the techniques he used for his vernacular version to show how a work that was originally performed orally entered the written world, as well as the changes it underwent during later transmission. In the final part I will situate Vishnudas's epics within the fledgling Hindi literary culture of the time and will offer some general remarks about language and poetic forms in this early stage of vernacular literary history.

Fifteenth-century Gwalior

Gwalior was more or less continuously under the control of the Delhi Sultanate since 1233, and appears to have been a firm base of Sultanate rule in the fourteenth century.[3] In 1394 the Tomar (Jat) chieftain Virsingh Dev gained control over Gwalior and for most of the next century the Tomars, who seem to have been subsidiaries of Firuz Shah Tughluq, fought to keep control over the city and its fort, rebuffing or briefly submitting to attacks and raids by the Sayyid rulers and Bahlul Lodi of Delhi, the Sharqis of Jaunpur and the Khalji Sultans of
p. 368 Malwa.[4] Gwalior in many ways is comparable to the hill fortresses held by ↳ chieftains described in Chapter 8. The Tomar kingdom reached its zenith under Man Singh (1486–1517), who successfully repelled constant attacks from Sikandar Lodi in the early sixteenth century.[5] After Man Singh's death, Ibrahim Lodi finally was able to annex Gwalior in 1518, installing Man Singh's son Vikram as the fief-holder of Shamsabad.[6] The history of independent Gwalior during the Sultanate period, therefore, stretches over hardly more than the fifteenth century.

One of Virsingh Dev's successors was Dungar (or Dungarendra) Singh (r. 1427–59[7]), Vishnudas's patron. In the year of his ascent to the throne, the Malwa sultan Hushang Shah (r. 1405–35) marched against Gwalior and Dungar Singh avoided open confrontation by paying tribute and vowing allegiance to Malwa. This irked the Delhi ruler Mubarak Shah (r. 1421–34), who sent Bahlul Lodi with an army against Gwalior, but confrontation was again averted by paying tributes. Another attack followed in 1432–3. In turn, when a war of succession broke out in Delhi after the death of Mubarak Shah in 1434, Dungar Singh seized the opportunity and in 1435 captured the fortress of Bhander and later attacked Narvar, even though he was not able to keep either fortress. For the remaining two decades of Dungar Singh's rule, the chronicles speak not of confrontations but of a thriving cultural life mentioning that 'Dungarsi' sent two Sanskrit treatises on music to the Kashmir king Zayn al-'Abidin (r. 1423–74). The warfare of Dungar Singh's early years gave way to a more peaceful coexistence with the north Indian states. Gwalior under Dungar Singh seems to have been a thriving centre of trade and of religious and literary patronage by and beyond the court, with many Jain merchants moving in from Delhi and exercising large-scale literary and sculptural patronage (see Chapter 12 in this volume). Fifteenth-century
p. 369 Gwalior may also have had the potential for a Nath ↳ congregational centre, the Gvalipa-pitha.[8] Dungar Singh's successor, Man Singh Tomar, was a celebrated patron and connoisseur of music.[9]

Within the fluid regional political situation in the fifteenth century, literary texts patronized by the various regional rulers seem to have followed one of three possible choices: (*a*) they either glorified the ruler's dynasty and his predecessors' struggles against powerful rivals (see Chapter 8 in this volume); (*b*) or they could, especially if they had lost their kingdom, write about an earlier phase of conquests typified by 'Ala' al-Din

Khalji in the fourteenth century (see Chapter 9 in this volume); (*c*) else they retold or played upon the epic battles of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, identifying their patrons with the epic heroes and twisting the epic tale to suit contemporary, local concerns. This is Vishnudas's choice.

Vishnudas's Epics

Vishnudas is the author of vernacular versions of the great Indian epics, the *Pāṇḍav-carit*[10] (1435), that is, the
p. 370 *Mahābhārata*, and the *Rāmāyan* (1443).[11] His *Svargārohan*, an adaptation of the last *parva* ↳ of the *Mahābhārata*, is another independent work.[12] Despite the poet's apparently Nath-yogic background suggested by the name of his immediate religious preceptor (*dīkṣāguru*) Sundarnath and his reference to Sahajnath,[13] probably an initiator of a religious lineage (*adi-guru*), Vishnudas's is not a sectarian *Rāmāyaṇa*. Its message is political rather than religious. The argument formulated by Hans Bakker and Sheldon Pollock about Rama worship in the second millennium as a political statement in the face of Muslim threat has been criticized and qualified in recent years.[14] Yet in the case of the early years of Dungar Singh's reign, marked by repeated wars with the neighbouring states, it can be argued that writing a Hindi *Rāmāyan* was both a statement of continuity with ancient Brahminical and Kshatriya values[15] and a way of 'othering' any enemy. Moreover, campaigning with a
p. 371 threat from the other was ↳ also a useful tool in the Rajput milieu, where alliances of chieftains constantly needed to be renegotiated. One cannot miss the parallel with the observations Cynthia Talbot made of fourteenth-century Andhra:

> By accentuating the threat from Muslims and their strange alien ways, aspiring kings in fourteenth-century Andhra could successfully cast themselves in the role of defenders of the Indic social order, the most essential justification for kingly status … In other words, the self-identity of an emerging warrior elite in Andhra was strengthened through recourse to traditional notions of the enemy Other.[16]

However, during Dungar Singh's later regnal years, the Gwalior attitude towards Muslim kingdoms must have changed, which is also indicated by his friendly contact with the Kashmir ruler. Phillip B. Wagoner's concept that the shifts in the balance of power affected the attitude of South Indian elites towards Muslims may also be useful in the Gwalior context. According to Wagoner, when Hindu polities were on the defensive, an anti-Turkic polemic was widespread. During the following phase of an equilibrium of power, greater appreciation of Turkic culture is expressed in Hindu literature.[17]

Enemies play an important role in Vishnudas's epics, and he mentions that 'the fort of Gwalior is a thorn in the eyes of his enemies' (*gaṛha gopācala vairinī sāla*) and that his patron Dungar Singh is the upholder of the dharma. Another contemporary of Vishnudas in Gwalior, the Apabhramsha poet Raidhu, refers to Dungar Singh as a ruler who 'dug up the root of powerful *mlecchas*' (*jiṁ pabalahaṁ micchahaṁ khaṇiu kaṁḍu*), the general term for 'outsiders' that came to be attached to Muslims as well.[18] The presence of the mlecchas is
p. 372 explicitly mentioned ↳ in the preamble of the *Svargārohan*, where the Tomar king addresses Vishnudas as follows:

> *kahau dāsa kavi kali kī karanī; jasa tuma gunī byāsa jima baranī.*
>
> *mliccha baṁsa baḍhi rahyau apārā; kaiseṁ rahai dharama kau sārā.*[19] (4)
>
> Tell me, my poet servant, the deeds of Kaliyuga, the way you sing[20] it and Vyasa described it.
>
> The dynastic rule of the mlecchas has increased limitlessly, how will the essence of the dharma remain?

An epic depicting the threat from an *other* already at the boundaries of a familiar domain, countered by an idealized prince, could serve as a stabilizing force for the ruler and be instrumental in mobilizing allies. Surrounded by inimical Muslim states such as the Sultanates of Delhi and Malwa, it made sense for Dungarendra to take up the role of uprooter of the mlecchas and upholder of dharma.

The political message behind Vishnudas's *Mahābhārata* is also explicit. Muscular Bhima, and not Arjuna or Yudhishthira—as the editor Hariharnivas Dvivedi has already noted—is the real hero of this retelling of the epic.[21] R.S. McGregor linked these retellings to the literary genre of the Rajput genealogical poem, the *khyati* 'chronicle of praise', 'celebrating the history of states and dynasties and the deeds of kings',[22] whose socio-political aim is to legitimize the power of an ascendant clan or dynasty by providing it with a divine Kshatriya
p. 373 lineage and thus including it within the brahmanical fold. Legitimizing the hero's power ↳ is also at the centre of historical Sanskrit *kavya*s (see Chapter 8 in this volume) and of Rajput historical epics in the vernacular (see Chapter 9 in this volume). But Vishnudas's epics are rather alternatives to the khyati inasmuch as they provide legitimization not so much by emphasizing a blood lineage but in a more poetic way, by superimposition. This, moreover, gives the poet freedom to compare his patron to any appropriate hero. If Bhima is the hero of his *Pāṇḍav-carit*,[23] in the *Svargārohan* the Tomar king is identified with Yudhishthira (*dharamarāja sama taũvaru rāū*[24]), the most prominent figure in that part of the narrative. And in contrast to the quasi-contemporary *Ḍaṅgvai kathā* by Bhima kavi, which frames its original narrative, deeply rooted in contemporary politics, within the *Mahābhārata* by using its heroes as the main characters, Vishnudas transcends the actual political situation and projects his subject matter into a universal fight between the upholders of the dharma and those who threaten it.[25]

The Circulation of Vishnudas's Works

The scarcity of extant manuscripts of Vishnudas's works shows that although the *Svargārohan* enjoyed relative
p. 374 popularity, early modern Braj Bhasha tradition marginalized his other works.[26] With the exception ↳ of Garcin de Tassy, modern scholarship also neglected him until his rediscovery by Hariharnivas Dvivedi and Shivprasad Singh in the 1950s. As the colophons of some manuscripts suggest, Vishnudas's writings circulated in princely courts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Rama story was particularly popular.[27] One of the two available manuscripts of his *Pāṇḍav-carit* was prepared in 1728 in Datiya for the king Indrajit Bundela, and one of the two available manuscripts of his *Rāmāyan* was copied for a certain prince Bhup Singh (*mahārājkumār Bhūpsiṁh*) in 1863. However, all modern scholars agree that Vishnudas's texts have been reworked. Variants in the passage from the *Svargārohan* quoted at the beginning of this chapter, for example, show that references to the mlecchas, as well as to rulers establishing themselves through certain marriage alliances, were felt by some later scribes as problematic and were omitted from some manuscripts.[28] Manuscripts of the *Svargārohan* also tend to omit all references to the Gwalior Tomars, with whom the scribes may not have been familiar in later centuries or, as suggested above, because they were no longer relevant to
p. 375 the new circumstances of transmission and performance. ↳ In fact, only since Hariharnivas Dvivedi published the *Pāṇḍav-carit* and the *Svargārohan* on the basis of the only two available manuscripts in which Gwalior and its Tomar ruler are mentioned do we know that that was the context of their composition.[29]

The state of textual change in the relatively popular *Svargārohan* is the most spectacular and can be judged from the fact that about half of the 135 lines of the *Svargārohan* published by de Tassy on the basis of an apparently late stage in the development of the text are missing from Dvivedi's edition that represents the earliest extant phase of transmission. The drastic reworking of de Tassy's text includes, among other features, Khari boli forms, abundant references to Krishna bhakti and even a reference to the Europeans: *kali mai prathī paraṁgī āī*, 'Europeans will come on the earth in the Kaliyuga'.

As far as the *Rāmāyan* is concerned, it is preserved in only two, rather late, manuscripts.[30] Unlike the published version of the *Pāṇḍav-carit* and the *Svargārohan*, the preamble to the *Rāmāyan* does not mention either the context of composition or royal patronage.[31] It is tempting to speculate that, as in the case of the *Svargārohan*, the two late *Rāmāyan* copies on the basis of which the first *sarga* was published were purged of the dated Tomar reference. Further, the textual differences between the two *Rāmāyan* manuscripts, from orthographic variations to omissions or insertions of passages of up to ten lines, show that the text was seriously reworked during its transmission. Let me quote just one example to illustrate this reworking. At the beginning of the story the description of Ayodhya is introduced by the following line in the 1750 manuscript:

> *kahī kathā so rāmahī tanī, rājanīti dasaratha kī ganī.* (15)
> He told the story of Rama and recounted Dasharatha's royal ways.

p. 376 In the book copied in 1863 one finds instead:

> *rāmacandra prabhu tribhuvana dhanī, tāsu kathā riṣi nārada bhanī.*
> Lord Rama is the master of the three worlds. Narada rishi told his story.

We are facing here a case of bhakti appropriation. The earlier version is linguistically more archaic with the genitive particle *tanī* (modern Hindi *kī*) and it emphasizes the royal context, while the later version reiterates the idea that Rama is the supreme god, a lore that has become common through the success of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. One can, however, suspect that not even the 1750 manuscript presents a text immune to reworking during its transmission. Therefore, whatever statement we make about the language and the contents, we must take into consideration that we do not know much about the first three centuries in the life of this particular text. As the received text is the result of reworking, the name Vishnudas as author will rather refer to a 'composite author' that also includes all performers and scribes who transmitted and changed this text.

One of the consequences of the scarcity of information concerning the original context of his writings has been that Vishnudas came to be perceived in very different ways by modern scholars. On the basis of his description of the corruption in the Kaliyuga in his *Svargārohan*, de Tassy regarded him as a revolutionary socialist who glorified the working class, the Shudras, against the high and the middle classes and who at the same time proclaimed 'égalité'.[32] Balbhadra Tivari hailed him as the *adikavi*, the initiator, of Bundeli poetry, which in his view predated Braj Bhasha.[33] His other monographer, Mohan Singh Tomar, repeatedly referred to Vishnudas as the 'crest-jewel of devotion', *bhakti-śiromaṇi*.[34] It is due to the research of R.S. McGregor (1991, 1999, 2000, 2003) that Vishnudas is well known in western scholarship today.

A Retelling of Valmiki

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Vishnudas's work is projected as a *bhāṣā Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* in the colophon of the 1750 manuscript. And truly, unlike other vernacular versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vishnudas adheres closely to Valmiki and only in a few cases does he seem to follow other sources. As McGregor demonstrated, in a few details like Bharadvaja's meeting with Rama or Rama's bathing at Prayaga, Vishnudas appears closer to the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and to the *Rāmcaritmānas* than to Valmiki, possibly because they all drew from some common lore.[35] Direct borrowing from another text can also be observed, as in the story of Rishyashringa (1.22–44), which relies more on the *Mahābhārata* (3.100–113) than on Valmiki's text (1.8–9). [36] By recreating rather than reinterpreting Valmiki, that is, following the major story-line and inserting his interpretation through minor changes in some scenes, Vishnudas firmly roots himself within the tradition of Sanskrit, Apabhramsha and a few other vernacular *Rāmāyaṇa*s.[37]

Tellingly, however, Vishnudas's text follows that of Valmiki up to Rama's return to Ayodhya and the description of his reign. His last section, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, refrains from describing Sita's banishment and the Lava and Kusha episode. The parallel with the *Rāmcaritmānas*, which also omits these stories, is hard to miss: perhaps both reworkings drew on a pre-existing tradition of avoiding these potentially embarrassing events. In nine loosely connected subchapters, Vishnudas's *Uttarakāṇḍa* instead narrates episodes that could appeal to a Rajput audience—scenes of royal splendour, genesis and genealogy and more fighting, and a scene that particularly appealed to Vishnudas, that is, ascent into heaven. Thus, he describes Kuvera's entering Lanka, his reign in
p. 378 Lanka and the ↳ genesis of the *rakshasa*s, Ravana's victory and his entering Lanka, the killing of Indra and the birth of Ahalya, the genesis of the monkeys and Rama's boon to Hanuman, the story of Nriga's king, the killing of Lavanasura and Shatrughna's victory, the curse of Arjamathan, and Rama's ascent into heaven. By finishing the main story with the description of the hero's glorious rule, as is the case also in his *Pāṇḍav-carit*, the author alludes to the fact that the final aim of all fighting is to establish an ideal worldly kingdom.

Even more interesting is Vishnudas's redistribution of emphasis. Compared to Valmiki, Vishnudas takes more interest in royal power, battles, and politics, and less in renunciation. A comparison of the different treatment by Vishnudas and Valmiki of a few passages from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* sheds light on Vishnudas's adaptation of the story to his courtly audience, their values and conception of courtly life in mid-fifteenth-century Gwalior. For example, a major concern in Vishnudas's retelling is the downplaying of possible factionalism and emphasis on forging alliances and brave fighting—indeed, king Dasharatha seems to be ruling in a Rajput milieu of alliances rather than over subordinate kings. Contemporary practices also appear, such as males embracing instead of greeting each other with *anjali*.

In line with the model of alliance politics typical of Rajput groups in Vishnudas, Dasharatha's decision to consecrate Rama is more social than personal. It is Rama's righteousness (*nīti māraga byaupare*, 'he traffics on the way of proper conduct')—including social and religious propriety ('he cares for his people as a father for his son', 'he always takes ritual baths and fasts')—that makes Dasharatha decide to consecrate Rama (2.145–6), not the decay of his body (Valmiki *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 1.40–41), or the warning of his white hair (Tulsi Ay. 2.3, *doha*).[38]
p. 379 The importance of the allied chieftains is also highlighted: before the celebration starts, ↳ chieftains (*rāu, narapati*) are invited and arrive in the city (2.147; 2.150), whereas in Valmiki (Ay. 6.10–28) it was the citizens of Ayodhya who celebrated and only the common people from the provinces were described. A significant diversion from Valmiki and from most of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition is a relatively long passage of six chaupais (2.162–7) in which Dasharatha rejects the astrologers' warning of bad omens for the consecration.[39] When asked to determine the auspicious times the astrologers give a detailed description of inauspicious signs (2.162–5) and conclude:

> Everything is inauspicious, there is not a single auspicious thing; do not consecrate Rama now.
>
> If we were to tell something pleasing to you then our virtue would be gone and we would acquire a bad name. (2.165)

While providing an additional cause for the disruption following Rama's consecration, this passage also indirectly suggests the importance of astrologers in Vishnudas's Gwalior. Dasharatha, however, dismisses the warning saying that he is old, that preparations have been made, and the other kings have already arrived (2.166). In the next chaupai Dasharatha adds, realistically, that Bharata has always been loyal to Rama and has no desire to be king (2.166). This statement bridges a gap in Valmiki, namely why consecrate Rama in Bharata's absence as if they had been enemies? The link is drawn notably differently in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, where Rama expresses his scruples against being consecrated alone since he had always shared everything with his brothers (Tulsi Ay. 10.4), thus emphasizing Rama's consideration for his brothers and anyone who loves him.

The motive behind Manthara's action in Vishnudas seems to agree more with a courtly life full of personal
p. 380 resentment and petty tensions. While in Valmiki, Manthara's action was unmotivated, and in ↳ the

Rāmcaritmānas the motivation is generic divine intervention, in Vishnudas it is plain revenge, easily explained and acknowledged:

> Once she was kicked by Rama and since then the servant became a hunchback;
>
> She held this grudge to herself, and for this reason she was inimical to Rama. (2.191)[40]

Further inklings of attitudes towards courtly women in the milieu Vishnudas is in dialogue with can be gleaned from another episode. Valmiki (Ay. 67.1–14) did not exempt Kaikeyi from blame and had Bharata deliver a speech against her, his own mother (Ay. 68.1–27). In the corresponding passage in Vishnudas's *Rāmāyan*, Bharata exempts Kaikeyi after hearing what she has done to get him the kingdom: 'It is not your fault since it is your bad understanding (*kubuddhi*)' (*tohi kubuddhi na lāgyau pāpa* 5.21), perhaps suggesting that such kubuddhi is not unusual in a woman, and that her motive was understandable. A few lines later Kaushalya also underplays Kaikeyi's responsibility: 'Kaikeyi has always been intent on love but this has happened out of fate' (5.37). The light treatment of Kaikeyi may suggest an environment in which some amount of tension and disagreement among royal women was accepted as normal. It may also bear some political significance, namely that in spite of one's misbehaviour a member of the royal family/clan can be readmitted to the community. As the narratives in Chapters 8 and 9 in this volume show, this generous treatment even towards enemies' women was seen as a mark of Rajput honour.

By contrast, women not belonging to the royal clan may be treated cruelly, as Shatrughna's violence towards
p. 381 Manthara exemplifies. In Valmiki (Ay. 72.11 and 72.15–18) Shatrughna in his rage only dragged ↳ a terrified Manthara along the ground; in Vishnudas he is even more aggressive before Bharata stops him, once again in the name of Kshatriya/Rajput values (5.27–8):

> He kicked and struck the hunchback with his fist and taking a sword he was about to strike her;
>
> Bharata ran there and caught his hand: 'Stop it, my lord! Women are not to be murdered.
>
> Do not cut her nose and ears. This would bring blame to the dynasty of Raghu!'
>
> Because of Bharata the prince let her go and threw her down in the dust in his anger.

In line with the general principle of condensation, of which more below, lengthy discursive passages tend to be drastically pared down in Vishnudas, though with some differences. Take Rama's meetings with Kaushalya, Sita and Lakshmana before going to the forest. Broadly speaking, in the description of the meeting with Sita, Vishnudas (3.27–42 and 3.49) follows Valmiki (Ay. 23.1–27.33), but while in Valmiki in this scene Sita receives ample discursive space to voice her ideas, in Vishnudas the meeting is less emphatic: Rama's lengthy discourse on Sita's duties in his absence (Ay. 23.18–24) is compressed into two verses enjoining her to serve the king, her mothers-in-law and not to speak highly of him in front of Bharata, while Sita's lengthy answer to Rama's description of the hardships of the forest (Ay. 26.1–27.24) is compressed into two verses (3.39–40). By comparison, in Valmiki's text, Lakshmana, who is present at the meetings with Kaushalya and Sita, vehemently contests Rama's decision at various points. In Vishnudas these exchanges with Lakshmana are put in one block at the end (3.43–56), so that though seriously shortened, the discussion becomes also the most emphatic and emphatically concerned with Kshatriya/Rajput values. Vishnudas's Lakshmana is enraged, as is Valmiki's. He even offers to kill Dasharatha, questions the legitimacy of a decision made by an old king under the influence of a woman, and says that Rama will be ridiculed among the other kings. Rama replies that this is not Dasharatha's fault and one has to accept fate, to which Lakshmana replies:

> *kāhara āsa daī kī karai, supuruṣa nijabala tārē tarai*. (3.48)
>
> Only cowards have trust in fate, real men achieve their aims by relying on their own strength. (3.48)

p. 382 One can observe similar deviations in other episodes as well. Vishnudas is so concerned with upholding Kshatriya values that in spite of the Valmikian *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, he cannot let the kingly God par excellence, Indra, fail. In Valmiki Ravana reminds Sita that it is beyond the power of gods, even of Indra himself, to rescue her from Lanka (Ar. 53.19). Apparently as a response to this statement, in Vishnudas, Indra comes over to the *ashok* grove and comforts Sita.[41]

Vishnudas's deviations from Valmiki are nonetheless much fewer than Tulsidas's or those of the eastern Indian poets studied by William L. Smith. Vishnudas comes closest to Madhava Kandali (fl. 1350), a poet patronized by a small tribal chieftain whose Assamese adaptation of the 2–6 kandas is the earliest vernacular version of the Ramayana in eastern India. Madhava Kandali closely followed Valmiki and avoided inserting apocryphal material: unlike later *Rāmāyaṇa*s in the region, his work lacks the devotional element and presents a more courtly and worldly narrative.[42] The reason is not hard to find: since Rama's transcendental nature is less emphasized in Vishnudas and Madhava Kandali, there is no need for extra-Valmikian expansion to reinterpret or to explain actions beyond their human motivations.

A Translation of Valmiki?

Vishnudas, as we saw above, presents his *Rāmāyan* as a retelling of Valmiki's and closely follows the yarn of his narrative. But if we turn to actual linguistic and poetic strategies in the text, matters become less simple.

Even in the case of passages that appear close to the Sanskrit text—though not similar enough to decide which recension Vishnudas used—Vishnudas does not employ words that are common to Sanskrit and Braj Bhasha (or Gvaliyari as it is better to call it at this stage). One example of a close 'translation' is chaupai 3.33:

> *bharathahi āgaĩ merī bāta; tuma mati kachu kahau kusarāta.*
> *suṁdari, jāhi pāsa dhana hoi; para kīrati sahi sakata na koi.*
>
> Do not talk of me and of my accomplishments in front of Bharata, beautiful lady, since no one with wealth can bear the fame of another.
>
> p. 383 ↳ based on:
> *bharatasya samīpe te nāhaṁ katyaḥ kadācana;*
> *ṛddhiyuktā hi puruṣā na sahante parastavam;*
> *tasmān na te guṇāḥ kathyā bharatasyāgrato mama.* (Ay. 23.23)[43]
>
> You are never to boast of me in the presence of Bharata.
> Men with wealth[44] cannot bear to hear others praised,
> and so you must never boast of my virtues in front of Bharata.[45]

There are several words in the Sanskrit version that Vishnudas could have used, but he either omits them—for example, *samīpa* and *puruṣa*—or renders them with a different term: thus *ṛddhi, guṇa, stava* (*stuti*) are rendered with *dhana, kusarāta, kīrati* respectively. Only four words (*bharata, āgrataḥ, para-*, and *sah-*) have been retained. This process sheds light on one of the poet's techniques and indicates his consciousness of the independent nature of bhasha from Sanskrit.

Vishnudas's *Rāmāyan*, less than 8,000 lines in the published version, is a considerably shorter text than Valmiki's 48,000 lines. Although condensation can be seen as the consequence of an oral performance text being written down, as will be discussed below, this massive shortening is the result of various factors. One can suspect that first of all the reduction is linked to the performability of a text within a time period that a court could afford.

The overall impression with Vishnudas is that his is a more straightforward story with fewer didactic interventions. The shortening is achieved in practice through omission and condensation: Vishnudas left out speeches, descriptions, or actions irrelevant to the main storyline. Just to give one example, Rama's actions immediately before his departure from Ayodhya—comprising almost three entire sargas (Ay. 29–31)—are
p. 384 omitted. Vishnudas's most frequent technique is, however, ↳ extreme condensing. For example, Valmiki's vivid description of road-building in twenty stanzas—an entire sarga (Ay. 74)—is compressed into a single line:

> *samade voḍi avara sutihārā; saba bana behaḍa ghāṭa savārā.* (5.39)
>
> Craftsmen and coolies assembled and all prepared a road through forests and wilderness.

More interesting is the technique by which shorter units, such as Sanskrit *shloka*s, are compressed into one or a half line in Hindi. First let us consider Sita's complaint to Rama:

> *kiṁ tvām anyata vaidehaḥ pitā me mithilādhipaḥ;*
> *rāma jāmātaraṁ prāpya striyaṁ puruṣavigraham.* (Ay. 27.3)
>
> What could my father Vaideha, the lord of Mithila, have in mind
> When he took you for a son-in-law, Rama, a woman with the body of a man?[46]
>
> *janaka abhāgau sītā kahaĩ; tuma sau mūḍha jaṁvāi lahaĩ.* (3.40)
>
> Unfortunate Janaka—says Sītā—has taken a dull son-in-law like you.

In fact, the stronger Hindi wording with *mūḍha*, 'dull', suggests that Vishnudas may have had in mind also a variant reading of the first line of the shloka attested in several manuscripts of the Western and North-Western recensions, where this word qualifies Janaka:

> *kṛtārthaṁ manyate mūḍhaḥ sa ātmānaṁ pitā mama;*
>
> My dull father must consider himself content.[47]

Let us see one more example when two shlokas are compressed. This is Lakshmana commenting on his father Dasharatha's folly:

> *ika būḍhau tivaī basa rahaï, tāhi ganai kau lachimana kahaï.* (3.44)
>
> First he is old and is under the control of a woman, who takes him into consideration—says Lakshmana.

p. 385 In Sanskrit:

> *viparītaś ca vṛddhaś ca viṣayaiś ca pradharṣitaḥ;*
> *nṛpa kim iva na brūyāc codyamānaḥ samanmathaḥ.* (Ay. 18.3)
>
> The king is perverse, old and debauched by pleasures.
> What would he not say under pressure, mad with passion as he is?[48]
>
> *tad idam vacanam rājñaḥ punar bālyam upeyuṣaḥ;*
> *putraḥ ko hṛdaye kuryād rājavṛttam anusmaran* (Ay. 18.7)
>
> What son, mindful of the conduct of kings
> would take to heart the words of a king who has become a child again?[49]

In both cases Vishnudas conveys the exact message and moves the plot forward, but he rids the verses of all embellishments. In the first instance, Janaka's designations are omitted, and thus the tension between greatness and failure underlying the two lines of the Sanskrit shloka is lost. Furthermore, the *apahnuti alaṅkāra* of 'Rama, a woman with the body of a man', a classical figure of rhetoric where the object described is concealed by another object that bears some similarity with it, is replaced by the blunt epithet 'dull'. In the second example, the series of Dasharatha's defects is reduced to two, the hyperbole of the king becoming a child again, and Lakshmana's appeal to the conduct of the kings is lost. Vishnudas somewhat compensates for this loss in the first case by making his speech more direct by inserting the formulaic phrases *sītā kahaĩ* and *lachimana kahaï*: 'Sita says', 'Lakshmana says'. Similar phrases appear regularly in his text. As we shall now see, the frequent use of a formulaic 'X says' hints at the oral origins of this vernacular *Rāmāyaṇa*. Furthermore, expressions like 'says the poet Vishnu' (*bisnu kavi bhanai*)[50] and the use of other formulas, such as the description of meetings, also refer to or at least evoke orality.

Not much attention has so far been paid to the fact that Vishnudas's *Rāmāyan* is a bilingual text. There is an
p. 386 abundance of Sanskrit shlokas ↳ within the narrative, either at some emphatic points or at the end of the individual subchapters, called sargas. These shlokas are used in two ways. In the middle section of the text (pp. 64–147), there is normally a Sanskrit shloka after every five-to-twenty chaupais, and like the dohas of the *Candāyan* or the *Rāmcaritmānas*, their function is to provide a break in the narration and remind the listener or the reader of the prestigious Sanskrit archetype. In the earlier and later sargas, however, the Sanskrit passages are less frequent. There, the shlokas are only used to mark the ending of the sargas. These Sanskrit couplets indicate that the author, or a later redactor, knew this language; however, he may not have been intimately acquainted with the Valmiki-*Rāmāyaṇa*. Though some of these shlokas are found in Valmiki,[51] the overwhelming majority of them seem to have been taken from other sources or were, more likely, the poet's or the scribe's own compositions. These shlokas express continuity with Sanskritic culture—in a way similar to Tulsidas's Sanskrit invocations at the beginning of the cantos of his *Rāmcaritmānas*—and create an impression of closeness to Valmiki who had a symbolic function as purveyor of this culture.

In some parts of the epic, not Sanskrit shlokas but Braj Bhasha verses in *dohra* (e.g., pp. 92, 105) or *chhanda* (e.g., p. 148) metres can be found in similar structural positions. Their inclusion may be a later development, just like the systematic insertion of dohra couplets instead of verses in the *palhuri* metre into his *Pāṇḍav-carit*, as we shall see. Thus, the editor Hariharnivas Dvivedi asked whether the palhuris and dohras in similar structural positions are not the results of a reworking of earlier, now lost shlokas?[52] We may also note that in other early epics, one can find two different approaches to structuring the text.[53] A well-established convention in Apabhramsha epics was to insert a few chhandas after a certain number of chaupais and thus create short sections called *kadavaka* (cf. Chapter 12 in this volume). This approach was followed in early Hindi by poets like Da'ud and Sadhan, the authors of the *Candāyan* and the *Maināsat*, and was made particularly popular by the
p. 387 *Rāmcaritmānas*. Parallel to this approach was the Hindi ↳ tradition of telling epics exclusively in chaupais without much attention to structuring the text into *kadavaka* sections, as was done in Jakhu Maniyar's *Haricand purāṇa*, in Narayandas' *Chitāī-carita* or in Bhima Kavi's *Daṅgvai kathā*.

Oral Embeddedness

The close relationship that Vishnudas's text bears to the Valmiki-*Rāmāyaṇa* indicates that he was acquainted with and actually followed the *text* by Valmiki. Lines closely mirroring the Sanskrit original can be perceived as translations even while maintaining the vernacular's independence. Their low number, however, suggests that Vishnudas may not always have been directly acquainted with Valmiki's text. We are not in a position to measure with certainty the depth of his knowledge of Valmiki. In all probability, he was a literate person acquainted with Sanskrit but most likely he knew the Sanskrit version more from oral retellings than from written text. Since he was a hereditary singer, he may have inherited a Hindi, or more exactly bilingual, text, which was based on Valmiki.

In his study of the Eastern Indian retellings of *Rāmāyaṇa*, William L. Smith has suggested that the lack of Valmikian common epithets, such as *kākutstha* (descendant of Kakutstha), *naraśārdūla* (man-tiger), and so on, may indicate that the vernacular poets were not intimately acquainted with Valmiki's Sanskrit text.[54] This may be true for Vishnudas, too, since these common epithets are also missing in his text. Though he uses Sanskrit shlokas, most of them are in fact not Valmiki's.

This leads us to imagine that, while oral renderings of the epics in the vernacular must have existed long before Vishnudas, the novelty of Vishnudas was that his *Rāmāyan* and *Pāṇḍav-carit* were not only performed in the royal assembly of experts ('Listen learned people, says the poet Vishnu') but were also written down. Vishnudas's reference in both epics to Sarasvati with a book in her hand suggests a court environment where literacy was known and prized.

There are several elements that point towards an 'oral embeddedness' for Vishnudas's text and lead to the
p. 388 suggestion that Vishnudas committed to writing a vernacular version that he (and his ancestors) had ↳ performed orally several times before. The date indicated in the poem would then be the date when these performed texts were written down. Some of these elements pertain to the texture and techniques of the text itself, and some to the way his manuscripts were treated.

As McGregor has already noted, the condensing of the text reminds one of the technique of Indian professional epic reciters, the kathaks.[55] The epithet of Vyas in the name of his father or his teacher (*vidyāguru* as opposed to his religious preceptor, *dīkṣāguru*, Sundarnath), Lavan Shrikarna Vyas, suggests that Vishnudas belonged to a lineage that was linked to kathaks. The fact that Vishnudas does not refer to himself as a Vyas but as a *kavi* or 'poet' may well symbolize a shift to the written. Moreover, recent studies of the transition from oral to written note a drastic shortening of the text in dictation.[56] The 'dictated epic discourse is, it would seem, more a listing of events with less or none of the embellishments'.[57] In all probability we are dealing with a similar phenomenon in the case of Vishnudas's epics—'characterised by spareness and terseness'.[58] Thus, an oral text enters the world of written culture.

That Vishnudas's texts remained (linked to) oral performances even after they were written down is suggested by another detail. Scholars of orality have long noted how performances are adapted to their audiences, and therefore no two performances are ever the same. This implies that a new performance would have no reason to carry on orally the date and a context of an earlier performance. Now, the *Svargārohan* manuscripts show that written transmission discarded the verses giving information of the original context, and only one manuscript out of four preserved it.

Lauri and Anneli Honko have used the concept of mental text to explain why the same epic is realized
p. 389 differently at different times: 'the ↳ mental text consists of storylines, episodic patterns, images of epic situations, multiforms, remembrances of earlier performances and other memorable units in a pool of tradition internalized by the singer of the epics'.[59] Mental texts are not reproduced word-by-word at any performance. The Honkos' empirical evidence showed how singers edit their mental texts: singers take their time in

preparing their performances and also make conscious changes in storylines and episodic patterns. Performed versions of an epic, the Honkos conclude, should be viewed as possible realizations of the mental text, not as authoritative or 'master versions'. This is in line with other theorizations of textual change according to which texts are changed by the people who use them in order to make them personally and culturally relevant; and what is most important in a text will be revalorized in each generation.[60] One is tempted to conceive of Vishnudas's original *Rāmāyan* as a written realization of a mental text, a mental text that was closer to the Valmiki-*Rāmāyaṇa* than its actual realization. This mental text must have long been realized orally on various occasions but was eventually committed to writing at the Gwalior court, possibly because this was a learned
p. 390 courtly milieu ↳ more interested than other audiences in the workings of power and the erudition of the poet. The Tomar king's words from the preamble of the *Svargārohan*: 'Tell me, my poet servant, the deeds of the Kaliyuga; in the same way as you sing[61] them and as they were described by Vyasa', can be taken as evidence that the narrative was first performed in the assembly and then committed to writing at the request of the ruler. It would be difficult to account for the oral embeddedness of the epic if we conceived it as a written retelling of a written text.

Histories of Prosody and Language: The *Chaupai* and *Madhyadeshi Bhasha*

As noted earlier, Vishnudas was the first vernacular poet in Gwalior to compose powerful narratives that had the strength to survive in subsequent transmission, even though they were marginalized by later fashions in Braj Bhasha. As Chapter 12 in this volume demonstrates, there was a lively Apabhramsha literary life in Gwalior in the fifteenth century. Although the Apabhramsha poets worked under the patronage of wealthy Jains and not that of the rulers, it would be difficult to imagine that Vishnudas was unaware of their epic poetry. Several narratives of the prolific Raidhu and of his spiritual guide Yashahkirti draw on the Jain *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Yashahkirti, who lived in Gwalior around 1430, produced two Jain reworkings of the *Mahābhārata*, a *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa* (1440) and a *Harivaṁśapurāṇa* (1443), though he composed them outside Gwalior, in Delhi and Indore. While the shared epic interest of these two poets is apparent, the extent to which Yashahkirti's works are in dialogue with Vishnudas's *Pāṇḍav-carit* produced in 1435 (and perhaps his *Harivaṁśa-kathā*) remains to be studied.

As we are going to see below, apart from a shared interest in epic themes, Vishnudas's works show continuity with Jain epics in Apabhramsha and in early Hindi both in the choice of poetic forms and of language.

In an earlier section we considered the oral origins of Vishnudas's works. But historicizing prosody can also
p. 391 open some new perspectives and throw light on the development of early vernacular literary culture. ↳ Just like Mawlana Da'ud in his *Candāyan*, Vishnudas used the chaupai metre for his epic poems and this was no coincidence. In their surveys of early Braj Bhasha works, Shivprasad Singh and Hariharnivas Dvivedi have made references to several vernacular works that in fact predate Vishnudas's enterprise.[62] Although in the light of more recent research, most of them cannot be considered as early as they claimed, the dates of at least three works have not since been questioned seriously—Sadharu's *Pradyumna-carit* from 1254/1354/1454,[63] Jakhu Maniyar's *Haricanda purāṇa* from 1396,[64] and Lakhanseni's partially available *Haricarit virāṭparva* written in 1424 in Jaunpur–Chausa (which in modern terms would belong to the Avadhi-speaking area). All these works are *charitkavya*s, that is, reworkings of epic and puranic themes in chaupais. Although the sixteen-mora metre called *padakulak* (or *vadanak, adilla*, or *madilla*)[65] was already popular in Apabhramsha, its use for epic purposes in Hindi indicates a common understanding that in Madhyadesha, unlike Bengal or Rajasthan, there existed a tradition of composing epic poetry in chaupais in the language of the place. Early works outside Madhyadesha, such as the *Vīsaḷadevarāsa* (c. 1450), a heroic and love poem from Rajasthan, were not composed in chaupai.[66]

Recognizing the chaupai to be the most important metrical form used in early Hindi poetry can lead one to further discoveries. A close examination of the earliest layers of Kabir's compositions, for example, leads us to
p. 392 the conclusion that Kabir—just like most early Sant poets—also ↳ used chaupais overwhelmingly.[67] Many of his poems presented by the tradition as *pada*s are in fact made up of chaupais. For example, thirteen out of the fifteen padas attributed to Kabir in the famous Fatehpur manuscript of 1582, the earliest available dated manuscript of Hindi bhakti poetry, are nothing else but series of 3–5 chaupai lines. Similarly, out of the first 500 poems of the *Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī*, which are normally present in more than one manuscript, 238 can be reconstructed as composed in chaupai. When these chaupai compositions were adapted to musical performance they were reworked as padas with their first line presented as the refrain. Since what are today called *ramaini*s are also clusters of chaupais with a doha couplet at the end, one suspects that many of the poems in the earliest layers of Kabir's poetry were written in chaupais and dohas.[68] Does the use of the early poetic forms mean that Kabir participated more in a literary culture than we think nowadays?

What about the language? Of the above-mentioned five early narratives, apart from the well-known *Vīsaḷadevarāsa* and *Candāyan*, only Sadharu's *Pradyumna-carit* has a critical edition which was prepared on the basis of four manuscripts—three of which date back to the sixteenth century, a very rare occurrence in Hindi editing history.[69] In spite of the claim that it is in Braj Bhasha,[70] with its abundance of vowel clusters instead of diphthongs, Sadharu's language can rather be considered a form of proto-Avadhi-Braj Bhasha with Rajasthani and Apabhramsha features. The language of the *Haricand purāṇa* also retains archaisms such as diphthongs and
p. 393 Apabhramsha elements.[71] As for Vishnudas's ↳ works, the variant readings hint at the fact that his language has been subjected to a 'modernizing process'.[72] (A similar 'Brajifying drive' in the eighteenth century can be observed in the case of Svami Haridas' *rekhta* quatrain and in the Avadhi *chhappay* of Tulsidas's *Kavitāvalī*.)[73] In its present form the language is Braj Bhasha with a slight touch of archaism. We know, however, that Chaturbhuj Chaube, the scribe of 'manuscript *ka*' of the *Pāṇḍav-carit* copied in 1728 in Datiya has reworked its language.[74] Thus, for example, in his manuscript the *tadbhava* (Sanskrit-derived) Apabhramsha *suravai* became the *tatsama* (Sanskrit-identical) Braj Bhasha *surapati*, similarly *dobai* became *draupatī* and *bairāre* was changed into *birāṭa*. He also changed the words to be more in line with Braj Bhasha, whereas the other manuscript of the *Pāṇḍav-carit*, copied in 1757, kept the language closer to Apabhramsha or Avadhi by separating the diphthongs. In Chaube's version *akāsaha* became *akāsaiṁ*; *dīsahi* became *dīsaiṁ*; *kahahu* became *kahau*.[75] Similarly, as McGregor already noted, one of the *Rāmāyan* manuscripts retains while the other eschews tadbhava archaisms.[76] The retained Apabhramsha elements as well as the use of tadbhava rather than *ardha-tatsama* words, such as *bhuvāra* (S *bhūpāla*); *pasāu* (S *prasāda*); *sāyara* (S *sāgara*); *dinayara* (S *dinakara*); *ruharu* (S *rudhira*); *paisār* (S *praveśamārga*); *tivaī* (S *strī*) still link Vishnudas's language to that of Sadharu's proto-Avadhi-Braj Bhasha.

p. 394 What to make of these archaisms?[77] McGregor presented a complex picture by observing the closeness of Vishnudas's 'archaisms' both to early Rajasthani and Gujarati on the one side and to Bundelkhandi and Avadhi on the other.[78] The chart below shows some linguistic features of Vishnudas not present in later Braj Bhasha and compares them to the language of three early bhasha works of which we possess critical editions based on early manuscript material, where the likelihood of their having been reworked into later literary idioms is somewhat less. (The date of the earliest manuscript used in the edition is indicated in brackets. Shared elements are in bold. The sign '+' indicates the presence and the sign '–' the absence of a specific feature.)

Vishnudas (1728)	Sadharu (1548)	Nalha (1576)	Da'ud (1616)	Later Braj Bhasha
Apabhramsha names	+			–
abundance of *tadbhavas*	+			–
separating the diphthongs +–	+	–	+	–
tanau (rarely *kau*)	***taṇaü*** (rarely *kau*)	***taṇaü***	kara/ka, kaï, ke	*kau*
kahã		*nũ*	***kahã***	*kaũ*
pahã	***pahã***			*pai*
sahã		*saũ, syaũ*	*seũ, setī, saïṁ*	*saũ*
sarisa	gohiṇa	***sarisa***		*saṃga, sātha*
phuni	***phuni***	*pachai*		*puni*
tām	*tihi*	*tihi, tahi*		*tihi*
sār	*sār*	*vāta*	*bāta*	*bāta, kathā*
tivaī	***tivaī***, *tiriya*	*tirī, trī, trīyā, astrī*	*tiriyā*	*tiya*

p. 395 These features sometimes bring Vishnudas's language closer to the language of *Candāyan* written in Avadh and at other times to the reconstructed language of the *Vīsaḷadevarāsa* composed in Rajasthan. A more marked mixing of eastern and western features is preserved in the *Pradyumna-carit* as well as in the *Bārahabhāvanā* by the Jain poet Raidhu, Vishnudas's younger contemporary in Gwalior who is better known for his Apabhramsha compositions (see Chapter 12).[79] It is the language of these two Jain Hindi works that shares most linguistic peculiarities with Vishnudas's epics. The language of the *Bārahabhāvanā*, a short work in thirty-nine stanzas, is proto-Braj Bhasha. This means that its grammatical template is the same as that of later Braj Bhasha, but it shows a lot of archaisms and includes a mixture of regional features. The genitive particle, for example, is expressed by the Apabhramsha/Rajasthani taṇau as well as by the Khari Boli/Braj Bhasha *kī* and the Avadhi *keri*.[80] It may well be that the original language of the *Candāyan* was not the pure Avadhi in which its modern editor Mataprasad Gupta presented it, but it may have contained more archaic features.[81]

The high number of the shared non-Braj Bhasha elements in the above texts shows that in the fifteenth century the dividing line present between later literary dialects was not yet prominent and there existed a
p. 396 literary idiom with features that later became peculiar to crystallized ↳ literary dialects. This literary language, a proto-Avadhi-Braj Bhasha that can indeed be called *Madhyadeshi bhasha*, 'the vernacular of the central region of India', was composite in its nature and later shed its Apabhramsha/Rajasthani archaisms and crystallized into the separate literary dialects of Braj Bhasha and Avadhi, while its non-standardized form that mixed elements from a wide region was maintained by the Sant poets and was later given the name *Sadhukkari*, 'the idiom of the sadhus'. Courtly works in this early Madhyadeshi, however, were gradually dragged to the direction of Braj Bhasha or Avadhi during the centuries of their transmission, losing many of their archaic features.

Madhyadeshi bhasha in Gwalior may have been developed towards the language that was used in the 1405 inscription of Biramadeva, just a few years after the establishment of the Tomar dynasty. The language of the

inscription is not that of Vishnudas; rather, with its openness towards Persian vocabulary and its use of *ko* instead of Vishnudas's *tanau*, it shows the direction Braj Bhasha would take later (non-Sanskrit elements are in bold):

> *om siddhiḥ|* ***saṁvatu*** *1462 varṣe mārga sudi 15*
> *somadina mahārājādhirāja srībīramadeva*
> *śrī aṁbikā* ***kau maṁḍapu karavāyau|*** ***pradhānu*** *paṁ*
> *janārdana|* ***phujdāru*** *... sūtradhāra* ***haridāsu|***
> ***māṭhā****pati goviṁda candrānyavarī|*[82]

> Om. Success. In the Vikrama year of 1462 on Monday the 15th of the bright half of Mārgaśīrṣa Śrī Bīramadeva, overlord of the rulers, had the *mandapa* of Śrī Ambikā made. The chief was pandit Janārdan, the military commander ..., the mason Haridās, the stone-carver[83] Govind Candrānyavarī.[84]

p. 397 During the centuries of transmission, Vishnudas's language, Madhayadeshi bhasha, must have been reworked according to this usage, the usage of Gwalior, which later became known as Braj Bhasha.

Emerging Hindi Literary Culture and Vishnudas

The development of written literature was posited by German Romanticism, and especially J.G. von Herder (1744–1803), in his *Fragments on Recent German Literature* (1767–8) and *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), as a continuation of oral 'folk' literature. While Herder held the view that poetry is the mother tongue of mankind—referring of course to oral poetry—in literary histories the beginnings of oral literature have tended to remain lost in a distant haze. In sharp contrast to this still widely held view, Sheldon Pollock has maintained in the case of South Asia that literary cultures presented something qualitatively new with regard to folk and oral traditions. In fact, excluding oral traditions from the field of the 'literary', Pollock has argued that every literary culture has a two-phase beginning: at first a language is 'literized', that is, committed to writing in inscriptions and other documents; and secondly, it is 'literarized', that is literary works start appearing in writing modelled on earlier literary forms.[85]

Vishnudas has recently received scholarly attention as an emblematic figure at the beginning of the Braj Bhasha (and indeed Hindi) literary tradition, the poet who, by writing vernacular epics in the courtly setting of the Gwalior Tomars, literarized Gvaliyari, the language that came to be known in later centuries as Braj Bhasha. Indeed, Vishnudas has been hailed as the first great poet of Hindi (*hindī kā pratham mahākavi*) and his *Pāṇḍav-carit* as the first great epic in Hindi.[86] According to the more cautious formulation of R.S. McGregor, Vishnudas consolidated a pre-existing literary idiom rather than creating a new literary one.[87]

p. 398 As has been seen above, the views of Herder and Pollock are not necessarily contradictory but rather complement each other. Vishnudas's 'literarization' clearly 'recreated the cosmopolitan world of Sanskrit in local form', as Pollock has claimed, while at the same time it stemmed from oral traditions of the epics, in a Herderian fashion.

Sheldon Pollock has posited the idea of a two-phase vernacularization: literization and literarization. Just like other vernaculars, Gvaliyari was 'literized', as Pollock rightly noted, before it was 'literarized'. Observing the list of inscriptions from the Gwalior region, one cannot miss the growing number of corrupt Sanskrit as well as Hindi inscriptions in the first four centuries of the second millennium.[88] The emergence of Hindi can be posited as parallel with a decrease in the knowledge of Sanskrit.

The vernacular inscriptions in the region between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries are exclusively on sati stones, suggesting that they may also have been intended for a female readership or audience. Pollock has

argued that both literization and literarization took place in courtly environments. In the Gwalior region, the evidence of the sati stones, the lack of royal vernacular texts prior to Biramadeva's 1405 inscription, and the presence of early Jain and Sufi works suggest that the emergence of courtly vernacular followed language usage that was somehow linked either to women or to mobile groups such as Sufis and Jains.

At the newly established Tomar dynasty, Biramadeva's Hindi inscription is dated 1405, but literary works at court continued to be composed in Sanskrit, like Nayacandra's *Hammīramahākāvya*.[89] Hindi literarization came a generation later. While Jains in Gwalior continued to write and patronize Apabhramsha literary works
p. 399 throughout the fifteenth century (see Chapter 12 in this volume), Sanskrit as a vehicle of heroic ↳ poetry was soon replaced by Hindi. Yet vernacularization was not a straightforward process, and rulers might have varied in their patronage of the various languages depending perhaps on their own tastes or on the availability of poets. Vishnudas's own patron, Dungar (or Dungarendra) Singh (r. 1427–59[90]), sent Sanskrit treatises to Kashmir, and there is a gap of some forty years after the works of Vishnudas.[91] Hardly any Hindi work is available from the regnal years of Dungar Singh's two successors, Kirti Singh and Kalyan Mall.[92] Only one short and one longer work in Hindi may be extant from this period, Raidhu's undated *Bārahabhāvanā* and Sadhan's story *Mainācarit* from 1480. Hindi compositions start to appear again in Gwalior only during Man Singh's reign (r. 1486–1516), and this time in ever-increasing numbers. Even Man Singh is credited with the composition of a vernacular treatise on music, a Hindi version of the Sanskrit *Rāgadarpaṇa* called *Mānkutūhal*.[93]

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Vishnudas's epics can be linked to the world of the vernacular epic kathas that started to proliferate in the second half of the fifteenth century. Many of Vishnudas's technical devices are present in later katha literature. The literary techniques in the kathas require further investigation
p. 400 and I want to draw ↳ the attention to only a few peculiar aspects. The most conspicuous is that they embed Sanskritic themes into a local milieu. Many of them are concerned in martial themes. Since they enter into the written world from the oral, the fluidity of the text is also maintained, and written versions exhibit significant variations. They also tend to use the standard elements present in Sanskrit, such as the *mangalacharan*, the invocation to the gods, the praise of the patron, a brief note about the situation that led to the composition, as well as the *phalashruti*, a statement regarding the merits of listening or reading the tale. It is not clear how much Vishnudas set an example for later katha writers, who tend to refer to themselves as kavi, poet, and how much they all drew on a shared stock of epic devices. In some of his usages Vishnudas may have inspired later writers. For example, McGregor argues that in the invocation to Sarasvati in his *Rāmāyan* (v. 3), by using the word *ravani*, Vishnudas also refers to the queen.[94] The queen is not necessarily praised in kavya texts, yet Bhima Kavi does the same in his *Ḍaṅgvai kathā* where the patron's wife is likened to Durga and Bhavani.[95] More than this, it is Vishnudas's *Svargārohan* that shares themes with later kathas in its description of moral decline. Even though Vishnudas's *Svargārohan* was written in a relatively stable Tomar state, its theme of 'leaving one's area peacefully and finding a new dwelling place elsewhere, thus possibly consoling warriors/patrons who were forced to leave their areas of influence'—as Francesca Orsini argues[96]—becomes intelligible once we consider the popularity of this theme in other kathas of the period. The popularity of this theme may have prompted Vishnudas to compose an independent *Svargārohan* as much as did the end of the world expectations in Gwalior.

Conclusion

Though marginalized in later Hindi literary history, the oeuvre of the Gwalior poet Vishnudas is of great importance for the study of the earliest phase of Hindi literary culture. Vishnudas helped to consolidate the
p. 401 tradition of writing in Hindi in Madhyadesha. His innovation is ↳ twofold: first, in his extant preambles he politically localized the epics; second, through his vernacularization he reached out to an audience who respected but did not know Sanskrit, an audience formed in all probability of allied chieftains and soldiers in the Tomar court of Gwalior. Vernacularization here, just like in other places in South Asia, broadly fits Sheldon Pollock's definition of 'the historical process of choosing to create a written literature, along with its complement, a political discourse, in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture'.[97] There are, however, two observations to be made. First, Vishnudas did not create a written language but consciously chose an existing one, and second, the models he used were not just provided by the cosmopolitan Sanskrit (and probably Apabhramsha) but also by oral vernacular performances. Thus, in the first part of the chapter we saw that Vishnudas remained relatively close to Valmiki's story but used various techniques of compression and omission. These techniques hint at the possibly long pre-history of presenting the *Rāmāyaṇa* story orally in the vernacular, but it was Vishnudas who first committed the story to writing in Hindi and whose version has survived.

In spite of projecting itself as a *bhāṣā Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, as the colophon of the 1750 manuscript states, Vishnudas's *Rāmāyan* does not always necessarily follow Valmiki. At several points it introduces features from other sources or adapts the story to Gwalior courtly settings. However, Vishnudas's deviations from Valmiki are minimal when compared with those of Tulsidas or with the *Rāmāyaṇa*s from eastern India. Vishnudas's methods of adaptation are in line with early modern practices in the region. He did not produce a translation—since the idea of translation in the modern sense was yet to develop—and in fact there was not even a term to denote it.[98] The verbs that Vishnudas uses for his practice are *bhākhaũ*, 'I vernacularise' or *baranaũ*, 'I describe'.

In the absence of editions or studies of the *Haricand purāṇa* (1396) and the *Haricarit virāṭaparva* (1424), the most
p. 402 important early Braj ↳ Bhasha works available today are Vishnudas's. Even if the language of his epics was reworked by later copyists, the archaisms retained show that Vishnudas chose a literary language that had already been used for narratives by Jains for almost a century. Thus, the original language of Hindi works produced in Madhyadesha between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries was closer to the proto-Avadhi-Braj Bhasha Madhyadeshi preserved in Sadharu's *Pradyumna-carit* and in Raidhu's *Bārahabhāvanā*, showing archaisms and composite features. In the course of time, due to the success of Braj Bhasha in the religious setting of the Braj region and in the Mughal and Rajput courtly environments, Madhyadeshi works were modernized or 'Brajified'. The fact that Vishnudas's epics were reworked in Braj Bhasha shows that they later came to be seen as part of that tradition.

Vishnudas's works are at the crossroads of three different traditions. They are embedded in the long oral tradition of epic storytelling; they are also inspired by the written Apabhramsha or Hindavi Jain works on epic themes, and they consolidate a literization of the language of Gwalior that had begun a few decades earlier. As such, Vishnudas's epics crystallize the earliest phase of Hindi literary culture in Gwalior.

Notes

1 I will retain the name Vishnudas since modern scholarship and the colophons of the manuscripts refer to him in this form. The poet often calls himself Vishnu kavi, 'the poet Vishnu', referring to the non-sectarian milieu of his work. In the first five *sarga*s of his *Rāmāyan*, he refers to himself five times as Vishnudas and once as Vishnudas kavi. The situation is more varied in the preambles of his other works, the *Pāṇḍav-carit* and the *Svargārohan*, where he uses the names Vishnudas and Vishnudas kavi twice each, and Vishnu kavi and Das kavi or kavi Das three times each. The title *dās* 'slave' fitted well

into a later bhakti context since it is deferentially attached to the name of many bhakti poets, but since the king in both preambles addresses the poet as *kavi das*, this title may have originally referred to his being in the service of the ruler. Vishnudas is a common Hindu name and manuscript catalogues credit Vishnudas with several works in various genres, such as *Pārāśarī-vyākhyā, Jog-līlā, Snehlīlā* (perhaps the same as *Bhāvargītā*), *Rukminīmaṅgal, Kṛṣṇcandra candrikā* (*Bhāgavata-daśamaskandha bhāṣā*), *Aśvalakṣaṇ, Ekādaśī māhātmya caupāī, Nāsiketu rī kathā, Bārah khaṛī, kavitt, sākhī*, and many devotional *pada*s. While Garcin de Tassy ('Tableau du kali yug ou de l'âge de fer par Vischnu-dâs traduit de l'hindoui par M. Garcin de Tassy', *Journal Asiatique*, May–June, 1852, p. 551) considered the author of the epics and the *pada*s to be the same, twentieth-century scholars attribute the above works to other poets sharing the same popular name. Hariharnivas Dvivedi ([ed.], *Mahābhārat: Pāṇḍav-carit: 1435 ī viracit mahākāvya: mahākavi Viṣṇudās kṛt*, Gwalior: Vidya Mandir Prakashan, 1973, p. 19) gives a list of nine poets called Vishnudas. Two of them, the authors of *Mahābhāratkathā, Rukminīmaṅgal* and so on, and of *Vālmīki rāmāyaṇ* he identifies with Vishnudas of Gwalior. His list is based on the 'catalogus catalogorum' of the Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā's manuscript search reports, hereafter, *Khoj reports*, from between 1900 and 1955. K.P. Gaur, *Hastalikhit hindī pustakõ kā saṁkṣipt vivaraṇ I-II*, Kashi: Nagaripracharini Sabha, 1964, pp. 396–7. On the *Rukminīmaṅgal*s, including the one attributed to Vishnudas, see Siyaram Tivari, *Hindī ke madhyakālīn khaṇḍakāvya*, Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Samsad, 1964, pp. 110–11 and 289–304.

2 The text of this adaptation based on one manuscript dating from 1863 was published under the name *Rāmāyan-kathā*; see Loknath Dvivedi, *Viṣṇudās kavikṛt Rāmāyan kathā*, Allahabad: Sahitya Bhavan, 1972. Although this title emphasizes Vishnudas's connection with the *katha* literature, the poet refers to his own work as *Rāmāinu* or *Rāmāyan* with a Braj dental *n* rather than with the Sanskritic retroflex *ṇ*. I will retain this spelling while referring specifically to Vishnudas's work.

3 Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 12, 26–7, 96, 143–5, 200.

4 Jackson (1999), pp. 188, 321; K.S. Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963, p. 173; K.D. Bajpai, *History of Gopāchala*, New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2006, pp. 28–9.

5 Lal (1963), pp. 49, 74–5, 83, 90, 145, 172, 174–9; Rajaram Jain, *Raïdhū sāhitya kā ālocanātmak pariśīlan*, Vaishali: Prakrit, Jainshastra aur Ahimsa Shodh Sansthan, 1974, pp. 96–7, 104–6.

6 Lal (1963), pp. 205–6.

7 There is a disagreement among scholars about Dungar Singh's dates. The ones I am giving were those established by Gulab Khan Gauri on the basis of inscriptional evidence (Gulab Khan Gauri, *Gvāliyar kā rājnaitik evaṁ sāṁskṛtik itihās: san 1392–1565 ī. tak*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1986, pp. 68–70.

8 Gvalipa is mentioned in Khadgaray's *Gopācal-ākhyān* composed in the eighteenth century. Hariharnivas Dvivedi claims that one of its ascetics was Ramdas, who was the guru of Theghnath, who composed a *Bhagavad gītā* in Hindi verse. H. Dvivedi, *Mahābhārat: Pāṇḍav-carit: 1435 ī viracit mahākāvya: mahākavi Viṣṇudās kṛt*, Gwalior: Vidya Mandir Prakashan, 1973, p. 44. About the Naths, see also H. Dvivedi, *Tomarõ kā itihās*, vol. 2, *Gvāliyar ke tomar*, Gwalior: Vidya Mandir Prakashan, 1976, p. 117. Recent research by James Mallinson shows that there is no reference to any Nath congregation prior to 1604 and the Nath yogis might not have become an organized community before the fifteenth century (Personal communication, 2 February 2010).

9 See Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, 'Les chants *Dhrupad* en langue Braj des poètes-musiciens de l'Inde Moghole', in *Littératures médiévales de l'Inde du Nord. Contributions de Charlotte Vaudeville et de ses élèves*, Françoise Mallison (ed.), Paris: Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991, pp. 139–85.

10 An incomplete version based on two manuscripts dating from 1728 and 1757 is published in Dvivedi (1973).

11 A manuscript of a *Harivaṁśa kathā* by Vishnudas copied in 1666 (VS 1723) is preserved in the City Palace of Jaipur (Pothikhana, ms no. 1951/19). This is also an epic retelling in 435 Braj Bhasha *chaupai*s (couplets) but its lack of any trace of archaisms makes it unlikely that its author is identical with Vishnudas of the Tomar court.

12 Unlike the other *Mahābhārata* cantos, called *parva*s, this work has an independent preamble; see Dvivedi (1973), p. 24. It also circulated independently of the *Mahābhārata*. In various catalogues and reports I have found references to ten manuscripts of this work. An incomplete version based on one manuscript from Badhari Kalam is published in Dvivedi (1973), pp. 171–82.

13 Vishnudas also refers to himself at the beginning of a relatively late *Svargārohan* manuscript, copied in 1854, as Vishnunath 'Lord Vishnu' (*Khoj report*, 1929–31, 328c). Although this name hints at the same Nath-yogi context evoked by the names of his gurus, being a single and late occurrence it is unlikely that he was called Vishnunath. Research by James Mallinson shows that the nominal suffix *-nath* does not necessarily denote any connection with a Nath or yogi order before the eighteenth century (Personal communication, 2 February 2010). R.S. McGregor (*Hindi Literature: From the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984, pp. 35–37) investigates some possible Nath yogic traits in the preamble.

14 Since the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic was 'profoundly and fundamentally a text of "othering"', Pollock maintained that it was the

perfect vehicle for demonizing these alien and dangerous newcomers; S. Pollock, '*Rāmāyaṇa* and Political Imagination in India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 52(2), 1993: 261–97. See also H. Bakker, 'Reflections on the Evolution of Rāma Devotion in the Light of Textual and Archaeological Evidence', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 31, 1987: 9–42; and C. Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37(4), 1995: 692–722.

15 This relationship is examined in R.S. McGregor, 'The Progress of Hindi, Part I: The Development of a Transregional Idiom', in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, S. Pollock (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 917–19.

16 Talbot (1995): 703–4.

17 Quoted in Talbot (1995): 705.

18 *Paümacariu* 1.2.4b as quoted in R. Jain (1974b), p. 646. R.S. McGregor erroneously attributes this phrase to Yashahkirti ('Viṣṇudās and his *Rāmāyan-kathā*' in Alan W. Entwistle, C. Salomon, H. Pauwels, and M.C. Shapiro (eds), *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1999, p. 246); I am indebted for the correct quotation to Eva De Clercq. For the uses of the term mleccha, see Talbot (1995) and B.D. Chattopadhaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims (8th–14th Century)*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1998.

19 These lines are missing from several manuscripts of the work such as the undated Hirdaipur (*Khoj report*, 1921–31, 328d), Majhola (*Khoj report*, 1921–31, 328e) and Udaipur (Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Udaipur, 3785/5) manuscripts.

20 Taking the word *gunī* as a noun meaning 'performing artist' the expression *jasa tuma gunī* can be interpreted in other ways 'as you are a performing artist', '(since) you are a famous performing artist'. In these interpretations, however, the connection with the last words of the line becomes clumsy. In whatever way the expression is interpreted, it refers to performance.

21 Dvivedi (1973), p. 47.

22 R.S. McGregor, 'A Narrative Poet's View of His Material', in *The Banyan Tree: Essays on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages*, M. Offredi (ed.), New Delhi: Manohar, 2000, p. 338.

23 And as Pollock notes, 'Viṣṇudās's work is a double narrative: his patron is equated with the epic hero Bhīma …, into whose lunar lineage the king was born'. S. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 394–5.

24 Dvivedi (1973), p. 171.

25 See F. Orsini, 'Travelling Tales', in *Tellings and Texts: Singing, Story-Telling and Performance*, Francesca Orsini and Katherine Schofield (eds), forthcoming C.

26 Dvivedi (1973, pp. 45–6) claims that Vishnudas is deferentially mentioned at the beginning of the *Chitāī-carita* by his son, Narayandas, *jaṁpai visnu narāyanadāsū; maraï phūla jīvaï dina vāsū*. 'Narayandas repeats (the name of) Vishnu; the flower dies but its scent remains during the day'; H. Dvivedi and Agarchand Nahta (eds), *Chitāī-carita*, Gwalior: Vidyamandir Prakashan, 1960, p. 4 (see Chapter 9 in this volume). Dvivedi takes the word *Visnu* as a reference to Vishnudas. However, his claim that Narayandas was his son is not convincing. As Sreenivasan argues in this volume (Chapter 9), the *Chitāī-carita* is embedded in a political environment of the warlord Silhadi's Sarangpur around 1526 and postdates Vishnudas by almost a century. The use of the word 'Visnu' in his preamble is not necessarily a reference to Vishnudas.

27 The royal collection in Jaipur alone has preserved some thirty Hindi works on the Rama story among which are several composed under the patronage of the local maharajas; see G.N. Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur*, Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1976, pp. 62, 192–4. Bahura explains the abundance of Rama works by Jai Singh's initial disposition towards Rama bhakti. Many of the works, however, were composed towards the end of the ruler's life. Although the importance of Rama's cult, especially through the presence of the Ramanandis, cannot be underestimated, these poems reflect a courtly milieu deeply interested in Rama.

28 A further mention of the *mlecchas* (*lupata hoi patibrata dharma; calana calai mlicchana ke karma*. Faithfulness to one's husband disappears and the deeds of the *mlecchas* become current; Dvivedi [1973], p. 172) and a reference to rulers establishing themselves by marriage alliances (*kali meṁ rājā karai akāju; beṭī dai dai bhogihaiṁ rāju*. Kings in the Kaliyuga do bad things, they enjoy their kingship by giving away their daughters; Dvivedi [1973], p. 172) have similarly been omitted from the Udaipur manuscript. What may have been considered outrageous in the Tomar court became accepted in the later Rajput milieu where the manuscript must have circulated.

29 Although one of those manuscripts presents a slight problem with the inserted date of composition, since Kartik krishna 11 in Samvat 1492 was not a Friday (*śukra*, as claimed in the manuscript; Dvivedi [1973], p. 46). Dvivedi's emendation into a neutral *subha* is not convincing, since the day of the week is usually part of the date.

30 The published edition was prepared on the basis of one manuscript copied in 1863. H. Dvivedi also published the first *sarga* of the *Rāmāyan* collated with its other manuscript copied in 1750. Dvivedi (1973), pp. 183–9.

31 Dvivedi (1973), p. 183.

32 ‘Mais l’enseignement religieux est accompagné dans ce poème, comme dans beaucoup d’autres poésies waischnavas, de maximes socialistes et de la glorification de la class ouvrière ou de sûdras … On croit entendre quelquefois un revolutionnaire de nos jours qui, tout en proclamant l’égalité de tout genre, attribue néanmoins toutes les vertus au peuple et tous les vices aux grands.’ de Tassy (1852), p. 551.

33 Balbhadra Tivari, *Kavivar Viṣṇudās aur unkī Rāmāyan-kathā*, Allahabad: Sahitya Bhavan, 1976, p. 140.

34 Mohan Singh Tomar, *Hindī Rāmkāvya aur Viṣṇudās kī Rāmāyan-kathā*, Delhi: Takshashila Prakashan, 1979.

35 R.S. McGregor, ‘An Early Hindi (Brajbhāṣā) Version of the Rāma Story’, in *Devotion Divine*, D. Eck and F. Mallison, (eds), Groeningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991, pp. 193–4.

36 It should also be noted that along with Vyasa, Markandeya, the narrator of the Rama-story within the *Mahābhārata*, is also mentioned in the invocation. Was it because Vishnudas was more closely linked to the transmission of the *Mahābhārata*? His father, also a poet (*sumirata kavi jasu hoi bahūtu*, ‘remembering him the poet attains much fame’ or ‘remembering this poet one attains much fame’), was called Vyasa, a frequent title of professional *kathaks*, epic storytellers. See Dvivedi (1973), p. 42.

37 See McGregor (1999), p. 244.

38 Quotations from the Valmiki-*Rāmāyaṇa* are from the critical edition, J.M. Mehta, G.H. Bhatt, and P.L. Vaidya (eds), *The Valmīki Rāmāyaṇa*: Critically Edited For the First Time, 7 vols, vol. 2, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, P.L. Vaidya (ed.), Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–75) and references to it begin with the initial characters of the kanda. References to Tulsidas’s *Rāmacaritmānas* begin with the term Tulsi followed by the name of the kanda. References to Vishnudas are given in numerals.

39 There is a mention of bad omens in Valmiki and in the *Mahānāṭaka* as a reason for a fast consecration. In Valmiki (Ay. 4.17–19) the king has bad dreams and speaks of the omens, interpreted by those who know the future (*daivajñās*), that his end is near. (In the *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* Rama sees himself in a forest in a dream.) Vishnudas also mentioned astrology at another place (2.148) as an important part of selecting the auspicious time.

40 This is similar to some Valmiki manuscripts and to Kshemendra’s *Rāmāyaṇamañjarī* (1037) (see Kamil Bulcke, *Rāmkathā*, Allahabad: Hindi Parishad, 1950, p. 322); it is also similar to that of the *Agnipurāṇa* (see W.L. Smith, *Rāmāyaṇa Traditions in Eastern India: Assam, Bengal, Orissa*, Stockholm: Dept. of Indology, University of Stockholm, 1988, p. 14):

> *rāme sā niścitā pāpā pūrvavairam anusmaran;*
> *kasmiṁś cid aparādhe hi kṣiptā rāmeṇa sā purā;*
> *caraṇeṇa kṣitiṁ prāptā tasmād vairam anuttamaṁ*. (Baroda V Ay. 7.9n)
> *śaiśave kila rāmeṇa purā praṇayakopataḥ;*
> *caraṇenāhatā tatra ciraṁ kopam uvāha sā*. (Rāmāyaṇamañjarī 1.667)

41 See McGregor (1999), pp. 244–5.

42 Smith (1988), pp. 27, 36.

43 In the case of these lines, none of the variant readings in the Baroda critical edition of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* are closer to the Hindi version than its main text.

44 Pollock (2005, p. 165) translates the word *ṛddhi* as ‘power’ on the basis of the context; however its more common meanings are ‘increase; prosperity; success; wealth’. This is clearly how Vishnudas understood *ṛddhi* when he translated it with the word *dhana*, ‘wealth’.

45 Translation based on S. Pollock (trans.), *Ramáyana Book II: Ayódhya*, New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2005, p. 165.

46 Pollock (2005), p. 177.

47 Variant reading recorded in *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Critically Edited for the First Time*, vol. 2, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, p. 172.

48 Pollock (2005), p. 133.

49 Pollock (2005), pp. 133–5.

50 The Braj Bhasha verb *bhan-* is used in the sense of ‘speak’ (just to quote other instances from the second sarga: *rājā risa kari bhanai* 2.68; *yõ dasaratha bhanai* 2.124; *āyau bhanata kahā̃ haī rāma* 2.127 *kaikayī bhanyau* 2.180b).

51 For example, 13, 27, 14, 23, and the one on p. 98 are textual variants of Valmiki *Kiṣkindhā* 25.38, *Kiṣkindhā* 26.23, and *Sundara* 22.7c–f respectively.

52 Dvivedi (1973), p. 33.

53 Dvivedi (1973), pp. 32–3.

54 Smith (1988), pp. 51–2.

55 McGregor (1991), p. 185.

56 The shortening techniques at the time of committing their epics to writing were examined by Brenda Beck and the Finnish scholars Lauri and Anneli Honko. The reduction in Brenda Beck’s documentation of the dictated and audience-oriented

versions of the Tamil epic *Aṇṇanmār* was about 70 per cent. In the case of the Tulu epic *Siri* it was 45.5 per cent. See Lauri Honko and Anneli Honko, 'Multiforms in Epic Composition', in *The Epic Oral and Written*, Lauri Honko, Jawaharlal Handoo, and John Miles Foley (eds), Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages, 1998, p. 34.

57 Honko and Honko (1998), p. 57.

58 McGregor (1984), p. 37 and McGregor (1991), p. 185.

59 Honko and Honko (1998), pp. 74–5. The singer's performance strategy is profoundly affected by the situational context, such as the composition of his audience, the available time frame and the requirements of collateral action. Lauri Honko further explains that variation itself is wider and more dramatic than recognized by scholars working on a thin mass of poetic texts. It takes different forms, from permanent changes ('great' or diachronic variation) to temporary ('little' or synchronic) variation, and it is based on the adaptation of tradition to a particular milieu and the processing of meaning. Lauri Honko, 'Types of Comparison and Forms of Variation', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 23(2–3), 1986: 105–24.

60 Stewart and Dimock formulate this statement on the basis of Gerard Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature of the Second Degree*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 (originally: *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré*, Paris: Seuil, 1982). T.K. Stewart and E.C. Dimock, 'Kṛttibāsa's Apophatic Critique of Rāma's Kingship', in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, Paula Richman (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p. 246. Another example are fables, which 'could be modified in oral presentations to refer to particular political situations'; C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Information in India, 1780–1870*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India, 1999, p. 201.

61 About the possible interpretations of the word *gunī*, see note 20.

62 Shivprasad Singh, *Sūrpurva bhāṣā aur uskā sāhitya*, Banaras: Hindi Pracharak Pustakalay, 1958, pp. 143–72; Dvivedi (1973), pp. 99–103.

63 In some manuscripts the date is read as Samvat 1311 (1254 CE) or Samvat 1511 (1454 CE), but the most reliable manuscript evidence supports Samvat 1411 (1354 CE); see K. Kaslival (ed.), *Pradyumna-carit: ādikālik mahākāvya*, Jaipur: Di. Jaina A. Kshetra Shri Mahaviraji, 1960.

64 A manuscript copy of this work can be found at the Abhay Jain Pustakalay in Bikaner. Passages from this manuscript are published in Singh (1958), pp. 385–7.

65 G. Misra 'Dvijendra', *Hindī sāhitya kā chandovivecan*, Patna: Bihar Hindi Granth Akadami, pp. 19–20.

66 Although just like in Vishnudas's works there are problems with the inserted dates in the *Pradyumna-carit* and in the *Vīsaḷadevarāsa*, their early date cannot be denied on the basis of the culture they present and because of the existence of sixteenth-century manuscripts.

67 Callewaert and Lath, without calling it a chaupai, mention that the 16-beat *tal* obtained by combining four clusters of four beats each is the most common of the Sant singers. W. Callewaert and M. Lath, 'Musicians and Scribes', in *The Hindi Padavali of Nāmdev*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, pp. 55–117.

68 On this question, see my 'Kabīr's Prosody', in *Bhakti Beyond the Forest: Current Research on Early Modern Literatures in North India, 2003–2009*. I. Bangha (ed.), New Delhi: Manohar, 2013, pp. 284–303.

69 Dvivedi (1973, p. 101) promised an edition of the early works, but it never seemed to have been published. The passages he cited are very close to later Braj Bhasha and are mostly devoid of the archaisms found in Vishnudas.

70 Singh (1958), p. 143.

71 Singh (1958), p. 149. The language of the *Haricarit virāṭaparva* instead, at least from what can be assessed in the short excerpt published by Dvivedi, differs from that of the early works and agrees with later Braj Bhasha usage. Dvivedi (1973), p. 102.

72 McGregor (1991), p. 185.

73 For Haridas's *Aṣṭādas siddhānt* 6, see L. Rosenstein, *The Devotional Poetry of Svāmī Haridās: A Study of Early Braj Bhāṣā Verse*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997, p. 107. In this poem composed in Khari Boli, some of the manuscripts give Braj Bhasha variants, such as Braj Bhasha *karī* for *kiyā* or Braj Bhasha *bhaī* and *bhayā* for *huā*. In the *Kavitāvalī uttarakāṇḍa*, 117 words such as *niradaheu, kīnheu, dīnheu* have been Brajified in later transmission as *niradahyau, kīnhau, dīnhau*. See I. Bangha, ed., *The Kavitāvalī of Tulsīdās: Critical Edition* (work in progress).

74 Dvivedi (1973), pp. 27–30.

75 Dvivedi (1973), p. 29.

76 McGregor (1999), pp. 245–6.

77 Loknath Dvivedi, the editor of the *Rāmāyan*, suspected an agenda behind the non-standard forms and credited Vishnudas's cosmopolitan aspirations for his use of the Rajasthani genitive particle: *tanau/tanī*. L. Dvivedi (1972), p. 49. This feature is, however, not peculiar only to Marwari but it was in wide use in Apabhramsha. See G.V. Tagare, *Historical Grammar of Apabhraṁśa*, Poona: Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, 1948, p. 399.

78 McGregor (1991), pp. 184–5.

79 This work is preserved in an undated manuscript (Digambar Jain Mandir, Godhan, Jaipur, 241) and was published in Jain

(1974b), pp. 448–52.

80 Apart from the genitive particle the archaisms include tadbhavas with double consonants for assimilated sounds without the later lengthening (*appa, appā, ikka, davva, ṇimmalā, parivajjayau, thappiyā*), the suffix *-ha* as an oblique marker (*saṁsāraha, narakaha, kisaha, padaha*), the pleonastic *-ḍā* (*sayānaḍā*) as well as the negative *navi* (S *naiva*, H *nahīṁ*, also present in Rajasthani). The regional features include the *-ā* masculine ending peculiar to Panjabi and Khari Boli (*āyā, gayā*) and of the *-iyā* perfective suffix peculiar to Panjabi (*avagāhiyā, thappiyā*). The suffixes *-tāṁ* for the oblique of the imperfective participle is Rajasthani. The frequent use of retroflex *ṇ* and *ṛ* also links the language to Rajasthani and Panjabi rather than to Braj. The archaic word *setī* (H *se*) can be Avadhi, Rajasthani or Panjabi. Only a few features show similarity to Avadhi, such as the vowel clusters in the perfective form (*rahiu*), or the possessive particle keri.

81 Personal communication with Shyam Manohar Pandey (17 May 2010). Pandey formulated this statement on the basis of his work with a new edition of the *Candāyan*.

82 Quoted in Dvivedi (1973), p. 51. A slightly different version is published in Gauri (1986), p. 55, based on the *Archeological Survey Report 1961–62*, no. 1584.

83 The meaning of this word is unclear. The most likely meaning can be derived from the Rajasthani verb *māṭhṇau* 'to shape and finish a stone' (*ghaṛāī karke patthar ko sāf karnā*). See Sitaram Lalas (ed.), *Rājasthānī sabad kos*, Jodhpur: Caupasni Siksa Samiti, 1972, vol. 3, p. 3687.

84 The meaning of this word is unclear.

85 Pollock (2006), pp. 4–5 and 23–5.

86 Dvivedi (1973) pp. 49, 62, and Pollock (2006), p. 394.

87 'Much of the credit for consolidating an early tradition of vernacular narrative on Sanskritic themes goes to a Gwalior poet named Viṣṇudās.' McGregor (2003), p. 917. Another view of Hindi literary beginnings is presented by A. Busch, who argues that neither the early Jain works nor Vishnudas's *Pāṇḍav-carit* and *Rāmāyan* are consequential major works due to their limited circulation; A. Busch, 'Hindi Literary Beginnings', in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, Y. Bronner, W. Cox, and L. McCrea (eds), Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2011a, pp. 203–25.

88 M.D. Willis, *Inscriptions of Gopaksetra: Materials for the History of Central India*, London: British Museum Press, 1996, pp. 6ff. Willis terms all vernacular inscriptions from the region 'Hindi'. The earliest Hindi inscription is dated Vikrama Samvat 1134 *āśvin* 2 *guruvāra*, that is, from 1077. Most Hindi inscriptions from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, however, are illegible or damaged.

89 Pollock (2006), p. 394; for the inscription, see Dvivedi (1973), p. 51.

90 For the dates, see Gauri (1986), pp. 68–70.

91 Dvivedi (1976) and Gauri (1986, pp. 191–7) present a survey of literary works produced in Gwalior during the Tomar period. It should be mentioned that Gauri relies heavily on Dvivedi, who was eager to construct an impression of vivid literary life in Gwalior by attributing works and authors to Gwalior. However, some of these authors' dates and place cannot be defined with certainty, and later scholarship seem to agree that some were active in other places (Kalyan Mall) or at other times (Narayandas).

92 Dvivedi credited the Gwalior king Kalyan Mall with two Sanskrit works, the popular treatise on erotics, *Anaṅgaraṅga*, and the story of the Prophet of Islam, the *Sulaimaccarita*. More recent scholarship, however, attributes these works to a Kalyanamalla from Bengal. See C. Minkowski, 'King David in Oudh: A Bible Story in Sanskrit and the Just King at an Afghan court', Inaugural Lecture for the Boden Professorship, University of Oxford, 7 March 2006.

93 In the following I am relying on Gauri's survey of Gwalior literature under the Tomars (1986, pp. 191–7) but I discredit Gauri's attributions of Narayandas's *Chitāī-carita* and Damodar's (Narayandas's son) *Vilhaṇ carit* as well as Chaturbhujdas Nigam's undated *Madhumālatī* to this period.

94 McGregor (1991), p. 187.

95 Orsini (forthcoming B).

96 Orsini (forthcoming C).

97 Pollock (2006), p. 23.

98 John E. Cort, 'Making It Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-Century Digambar Jains', in *Tellings and Texts: Singing, Story-telling and Performance*, Francesca Orsini and Katherine Schofield (eds), forthcoming.