

Introduction to the *Śivṛājbhūṣaṇ* by Bhushan Tripathi (fl. 1673)

By Allison Busch

The *Śivṛājbhūṣaṇ* (Ornament of King Shivaji) by Bhushan Tripathi is a remarkable collection of nearly four hundred Brajbhasha poems written at the court of the famed Maratha leader Shivaji (r. 1674-80). The near concurrence of the date of the text's composition (1673) with Shivaji's ascent to the throne (1674) makes it extremely likely that the *Śivṛājbhūṣaṇ* was composed for the coronation.¹ In terms of its genre the *Śivṛājbhūṣaṇ* is a *lakṣaṅgranth* (poetry textbook), the word "bhūṣaṇ" (ornament) in the title cleverly playing off both the poet's name and the ostensible function of the text: a discourse on the subject of "ornaments" or figures of speech. As one would expect in a *lakṣaṅgranth*, Bhushan defines each of the figures of speech under discussion, but his definitions (*lakṣaṇ*) are almost always perfunctory and the poet is typically much more interested in the accompanying example verses (*udahāraṇ*). Many of Bhushan's example verses use the traditional *praśasti* style to highlight Shivaji's kingly perfections: his generosity, his valor, etc. A more unusual feature of the *Śivṛājbhūṣaṇ*, and the one highlighted in the selection that I prepared for our workshop, is the number of strongly satirical poems about contemporary politics and personalities.

In order to facilitate the annexation of a regional kingdom the Mughal emperor would offer a formerly independent ruler a position in the Mughal administration such as control of a particular province (*ṣūbā*). Although this fact is regularly glossed over in the modern construction of Shivaji as a Hindu leader warding off the Mughals, Shivaji served briefly in the Mughal administration after a series of heavy losses in the 1660's, brokering peace with Aurangzeb in 1665. In 1666 Shivaji felt humiliated by the lack of proper respect accorded him at the Mughal court in Agra, a theme that emerges in several of Bhushan's poems. By 1669 the accord had totally disintegrated. Shivaji remained a thorn in the side of the Mughals until his death in 1680.

Several of Bhushan's poems are powerful critiques of the *mansabdari* system, as is the case with verse 163, excerpted below, in which Bhushan likens a Mughal governorship (*ṣūbā*) to a prostitute (by extension, I suppose, that makes Aurangzeb a pimp). For Bhushan an important component of celebrating Shivaji's kingly persona was to denigrate his enemies. Although none of Shivaji's enemies is spared, Aurangzeb is the subject of numerous scathingly satirical poems, as in verse 87 below when the emperor faints at the thought of doing battle with Shivaji.

The Brajbhasha of Bhushan is strongly hybridized, allowing for interesting effects that play on both Sanskrit and Persian meanings. Take his manipulation of the name "Aurangzeb." In Persian this is a flattering title, meaning "adorning the throne." Bhushan frequently refers to him as "Avaraṅ" instead. Avaraṅ is a plausible enough "Brajification" of the emperor's name, but if you invoke Sanskrit etymology (and surely this point was not lost on Bhushan, a Brahman), the word means "sickly pale." By its capacity to be understood in the Sanskrit register this epithet

¹ Shivaji's coronation had originally been planned for 1673, but his low-caste birth required some last-minute intervention by Pandit Gāga Bhaṭṭa, a Maharashtrian scholar resident in Banaras. Bhaṭṭa concocted a fictitious genealogy for Shivaji, tracing his ancestry to the Sisodiya Rajput clan. With his newly discovered ancestry ritually-approved, the coronation procedures could safely proceed, only slightly delayed, in 1674. See Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas: 1600-1818*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, p. 87.

subverts the positive meaning contained in the Persian, and gestures towards Aurangzeb's putative cowardice in the face of Shivaji, a recurring theme in the work.²

A (rough) English translation of the selected Braj verses

Verse 31

As soon as Shivaji met the Chaghtai (i.e. Aurangzeb) and saw his harsh disposition he subdued him, as Krishna had Indra.

Bhushan says, when for no good reason they had allotted Shivaji an inappropriate position at court, Shivaji roared and made the Muslims (mleccha) faint.

Aurangzeb's noblemen emerged from the bathroom (where, it seems, the emperor had been driven to hide out of fear of Shivaji³)

And tried to appease Shivaji.

It was like an army general trying to coax a powerful, angry, stubborn elephant.

Verse 87

One day Alamgir assembled his troops and set out on a hunting trip

"Watch out! Sarja is coming!" People called out and warned him.

Aurangzeb misunderstood (the word Sarja) and thought it was the Bhonsle King Shivaji who was causing terror.

His hunting attendants ran and explained that they only meant "lion"

They came and lifted up [the emperor] who had fainted⁴

Verse 93

They are teachers of emperors, and emperors of soldiers, lion-like in battle.

Bhushan says, they keep trembling in fear of Shivaji's might.

They don't find the will in their hearts (to fight him).

Afzal Khan's⁵ helplessness, Shaista Khan's crookedness, and Bahlol Khan's adversity have set fear in the hearts of the nobility.

The Muslims (mlecchas) have made up their minds to abandon their mansabs.

They cross the ocean on the pretense of going to Mecca.

² More information about Bhushan (and his brother Cintamani Tripathi) can be found in Allison Busch, "Riti and Register." Forthcoming in Francesca Orsini, ed. *Hindi-Urdu Before the Divide*. Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008.

³ The syntax here is a little obscure to me.

⁴ This verse is an illustration of a "false attribution" (*bhrāntāpahnuti-alankāra*). Its power stems from the dual meaning of the word "sarjā[h]." It is both a common title of Shivaji and also, I am told, an Arabic word for "lion."

⁵ These are various agents of Aurangzeb who were losing out in skirmishes with Shivaji in the Deccan.

Verse 101

In the houses of the enemies the name “Shiva, Shiva,” is chanted day and night
It’s as if to save themselves the Turks too recite the name of Hara (Shiva).

Verse 144

Bhushan says, Aurangzeb, who is twice as cruel as Duryodhana, has deceived the world.
Ghazi Shivaji has exhibited prowess even greater than that of the Pandavas.
He mobilized the moral courage of Yuddhisthira, the strength of Bhima, the fortitude of Arjuna,
the intelligence of Nakula and the power of Sahadeva.
The five of them snuck out from a wax house in the dark of night--
Shivaji on his own escaped from 100,000 watchmen in broad daylight.⁶

Verse 163

Seeing her beauty, who doesn't long to possess her?
Her manner is to conquer the world by the power of trickery.
Whomever she approaches she immediately renders penniless⁷
Bhushan says, spending time in her company brings no reward.
A governorship under the Delhi government is like a clever, desirable prostitute.
She does not stay faithful to one man.
But Shivaji is under the sway of a woman called "fame"
The woman who traps everybody else can't touch him.

Verse 169

Maharaj Shivaraj, out of fear the women folk of the Abyssinians are seen fleeing to the dense jungles
Bhushan says, among the army (?) of Ramnagar rivers of blood flow.
Lion, powerful hero, the wives of your enemies in Bijapur don't bear even the marks of their bangles.
Because of your wrath, the moon-like faces of Muslim women are seen to be marked with Sindur.

Verse 346

Seeing that he is worried about something,
And that his eyes brim with tears,
His wife says, "My lord, why don't you tell me (what is troubling you)?
Bhushan says, it seems you have just come from the darbar
Why do you keep shaking, losing control of yourself?
Your chest is throbbing, you have broken out into a sweat
Your complexion has gone pale, you stare into space, looking neither to the right or left
It looks as though the emperor has made you a governor (suba) in the Deccan--
And you have completely withered up due to fear of Shivaji.

⁶ This verse refers to an incident when Shivaji escaped from Aurangzeb's court in Agra (not Delhi, as the verse says) in 1666. There is a pun on the word “lakha,” meaning both wax and 100,000.

⁷ Here too is a “slesha” with double meaning: the word “nidhana” means both death and poor.