
History As Reflected In The Prithviraj Raso

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Abstract

Chand Bardai (September 30, 1149 --- ca. 1200) was the court poet of the Indian king Prithviraj III Chauhan , who ruled Ajmer and Delhi from 1165 to 1192. A native of Lahore , Chand Bardai composed the “Prithviraj Raso”, one of the most famous works which is an epic poem in Hindi about the life of Prithviraj. A Bhatt Brahman of Jagati gotra , he was a worshipper of the goddess Saraswati , who gifted him with the boon of ‘Bardai’. Chand Bardai belonged to the community of Charan who accompanied Rajputs in war and peace. The royal poet had mastery of grammar, literature, astrology, prosody and the Puranas. He was conversant with the Abhiri, Autkali, Chandali, Dravirshini, Shkari, Swali and Vijaitia dialects.

Keywords- History As Reflected, The Prithviraj Raso, Chand Bardai and Rajputs.

The Prithviraj Raso was embellished with time and quite a few authors added to it. Only parts of the original manuscript are still intact. There are many versions of Raso but scholars agree that a 1,400 stanza poem is the real “Prithviraj Raso”. In its longest form the poem comprises upwards of 10,000 stanzas.

The Prithviraj Raso is a source of information on the social and clan structure of the Kshatriya communities of northern India. It is valuable not only as historical material but as the earliest monument of the Western Hindi language, and the first of the long series of bardic chronicles for which Rajputana is celebrated. It is written in ballad form, and portions of it are still sung by itinerant bards throughout north-western India and Rajputana. It is compiled in the archaic form of Brajbhasa. It elucidates a chronicle of his master's achievements and the historical accounts. According to Colonel Todd, the poems of Chand Bardai, have frequent indistinct references to firearms, especially the malgola. Impressed by the classic elegance of the work, Colonel Todd translated about 30,000 stanzas into English. French scholar Garsa-de-Tasse certified and testified the authority of this compilation.

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Hindi literature as a whole can be divided into four stages: 'Adikal' (the Early Period), 'Bhaktikal' (the Devotional Period), 'Ritikal' (the Scholastic Period) and 'Adhunikkal' (the Modern Period). 'Adikal' starts from the middle of the 10th century to the beginning of the 14th century. The poetry of this period either highlights certain religious ideologies or praises the heroic deeds of the Rajput rulers and warriors in the form of verse-narratives ('raso-kavyas'). The earliest poetry of this period is represented by the "Apathramsha" poetry, which includes the Siddha literature (750-1200 A. D.), the Nath literature and the Jain literature. Siddha literature was written in the popular language and this echoed devotional themes combined with a strong erotic feeling. The Nath literature represents the mystico-devotional poetry, written between the 7th and the 14th century by the poet Gorakhnath (c. 1150 A. D.) and his followers, using the 'doha'(couplet) and the 'chaupai' (quartet) styles in their poems. The 'padas' and 'vanis' of these saints had a great influence on the Sant literature of the later-day mystic poets like Kabir, Nanak and Dadu Dayal. During this period Jain poets like Swayambhu, Som Datt Suri, Sharang Dhar and Nalla Singh composed the 'Charit Kavyas', which propagate moral tenets and portrayals of nature. Heroic Poetry was an integral part of the Hindi literature of the "Adikal" period. Several "raso-kavyas" were produced during this period which include Chand Bardai's 'Prithviraj Raso', Dalpativijay's 'Khuman Raso', Narpati Nalha's 'Visaldev Raso' and Jagnik's 'Parmal Raso'.

In ancient period of Hindi or "Adi Kaal (before 1400 CE), Hindi literature was developed in the states of Kanauj, Delhi and Ajmer. Delhi was ruled by Prithviraj Chauhan and his court poet was Chand Bardai. His eulogy on Prithviraj Chauhan called the Prithviraj Raso was considered one of the first works in the History of Hindi Literature. Kanauj's last Rathore ruler was Jayachand, who gave more patronage to Sanskrit (which was no longer the common man's language). His court poet was Harsha (whose major poetic work was 'Naishdhiya Charitra'). Mahoba's royal poet Jagnayak (or Jagnik) and Ajmer's Nalha were other literary figures in this period. However, after Prithviraj Chauhan's defeat, most literary works belonging to this period were destroyed in Muhammad Ghori's campaign. Very few scriptures, manuscripts from this period are available and their genuineness is also doubted.

The 'Prithviraj Raso' as said was composed by Chand Bardai, Prithviraj's court poet, who accompanied the king in all his battles. Chand Bardai belonged to the community known as Rao Rajputs, whose traditional occupation is to compose poems and ballads in praise of their patrons, based loosely on historical incidents; they were poets and scribes who accompanied the armies of their patrons and encouraged and exhorted the warriors to bravery in battle by reciting the great deeds of their illustrious

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clan forebears. Over time, the 'Prithviraj Raso' has been embellished with the interpolations and additions of many other authors. Only a small portion of the existing texts is likely to have been a part of the original text. The longest available version is the Udaipur manuscript, which is an epic comprising of 16,306 stanzas. The language of the texts available today largely appears to be post-15th century. The 'Prithviraj Raso' is a source of information on the social and clan structure of the Kshatriya communities of northern India i.e. the organisation and lineage of the Rajputs.

According to the ballad, Prithviraj King who, after ceaseless military campaigns, extended his original kingdom of Sambhar (Shakambar) in present-day Rajasthan, to cover Rajasthan, Gujarat and eastern Punjab. He ruled from his twin capitals of Delhi and Ajmer. His fast rise aroused the envy of the then powerful ruler of Kanauj, Jaichand Gahadvala, and caused ill-feeling between the two.

The story of Prithviraj's exploits spread far and wide and became the subject of much discussion among the nobility. Sanyogita, daughter of Jaichand, fell secretly in love with Prithviraj. Prithviraj had heard of Sanyogita's unmatched beauty in a poem and decided to meet her in a disguise. However, Sanyogita who had seen a portrait of Prithviraj could see through his disguise and decided to meet him personally. She disguised herself as not to be recognised and hence their secret affair began. Her father got wind of this affair and resolved to have her safely wed at an early date. He arranged a Swayamvara, a Hindu ceremony where a maiden selects a husband from a number of suitors who assemble at the invitation of her guardian. Jaichand invited many princes of high rank and heritage, but deliberately failed to invite Prithviraj. To add insult to injury, Jaichand had a statue of Prithviraj made and placed at the door of the venue, thus parodying Prithviraj as a doorman. Prithviraj came to hear of this. He made his plans and confided the same to his lover, Sanyogita. On the day of the ceremony, Sanyogita emerged from an inner chamber, entered the venue of the Swayamvara, walked straight down the hall past the assembled suitors, bypassing them all. She reached the door and garlanded the statue of Prithviraj. The assemblage were stunned at this brash act, but more was to follow: Prithviraj, who had been hiding behind the statue in the garb of a doorman, emerged, put Sanyogita upon his horse and the two ran away with each other. This incident resulted in a string of battles between the two kingdoms and both of them suffered heavily. The Chauhan-Gahadvala feud led to the weakening of both Rajput kingdoms.

The book Prithviraj Raso tells us about the history and achievements of Prithviraj III Chauhan, a King of the Kshatriya Chauhan (Chahamanas) dynasty. He was born to King Someshwara Chauhan and his wife Karpuravalli. It says that Prithviraj was the only actual or effective last Hindu ruler of Delhi. He

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was one of the most interesting and powerful characters of Indian history. His story highlights all the important aspects of life ---- duty, bravery, patriotism, friendship, family and romance.

Prithviraj was born to his parents after 10 years of long prayer. Although he grew up to be a very naughty boy, he was the sharpest of all the princes. He often surprised everyone by his profound thoughts on subjects beyond his young age. He loved his parents very much and also respected Jaichand, Nayantara and Anangpal. Everybody in turn, loved him. As a child, he was indeed the Balkrishna, and as he grew up, he reflected the different faces of Lord Krishna ---- Murlidhar, Chhaliya, Chakradhar. He and his friend Chander shared an equation almost alike that of Krishna and Sudama. In his youth, he defeated many enemies but always allowed, room for forgiveness. He never fought in anger or for personal gain, but only performed the duty of a king.

Anangpal, the King of Delhi, had two daughters, Roopsundari and Kamaladevi. Roopsundari married Vijaypal, King of Kanauj. They had a son Jai Chandra. His daughter was the beautiful Sanyogita. Kamaladevi married Someshwar, the King of Ajmer. Prithviraj was their son, born after 10 years of marriage. Pritha, his sister marries his friend Samar Singh (King of Chittor). At his guru Ram Purohit's gurukul (school), Prithviraj learnt shastra vidya (weaponry, armed combat), sahitya (literature), kala (arts) and rajniti shastra (politics). It was here that he was groomed to be the king of Ajmer. One day at the gurukul, young Prithviraj was attacked by a lion. Though caught unawares and unarmed, Prithviraj bravely fought the lion and killed it. Tales of his heroism spread far and wide. Similarly, once he and his friends were lost in the jungle. During the night, when they were resting, they were attacked by dacoits. With Prithviraj courageously leading the way, they managed to chase the dacoits away. It was just another example of his cleverness. In gurukul Prithviraj learnt “shabd bhedi baan vidya” i.e. using a bow and arrow to shoot without even looking at the target, just on the basis of sound. As per common belief, he was the only person to have mastered this art. With the stories of Prithviraj's courage, valour and intelligence spreading far and wide, Anangpal the King of Delhi decided to adopt him. He announced Prithviraj Chauhan as his heir. Thus he was crowned prince of Delhi at the young age of 13 years. He had four best friends. They were ---- Sanjam, Arjun, Pundir and Chander (Chand Bardai who wrote the biography of Prithviraj Chauhan called Prithviraj Raso). Prithviraj at the age of 13 killed Bheemdev Solanki, the king of Gujarat, who killed his father ---- Someshwara Chauhan.

Prithviraj Chauhan was the second last Hindu king to sit upon the throne of Delhi (the last Hindu king being Hemu). He ruled from the twin capitals of Ajmer and Delhi. He controlled much of Rajasthan

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and Haryana, and unified the Rajputs against Muslim invasions. His elopement with Sanyogita (Samyukta), the daughter of Jai Chandra, the Gahadvala king of Kanauj, is a popular romantic tale in India, and is one of the subjects of the Prithviraj Raso, the epic poem composed by Prithviraj's court poet and friend, Chand Bardai.

Qila Rai Pithora in Delhi, also known as Pithoragarh is named after him. Prithviraj Chauhan's succession had been rather confused since the death of Vighraha-rajah in 1165. Prithviraj reconsolidated control of the Chauhan kingdom and conquered several neighbouring kingdoms, which made his state the leading Hindu kingdom in northern India. Delhi was captured from the Tomara Rajputs during the early years of his reign, and was renamed Qila Rai Pithora. He campaigned against the Chandela Rajputs of Bundelkhand. His kingdom included much of the present-day Indian states of Rajasthan and Haryana, and parts of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Princely Nabha, jewel in the Crown of India and families from Nabha have close relations with the Great Prithviraj Chauhan. Prithviraj Chauhan, also called Rai Pithora, was the ruler of Ajmer and Delhi, by far the strongest of all the rulers of Northern India at the end of the twelfth century. He was brave, powerful, haughty and was considered the flower of Rajput chivalry. His brother Khandey Rai (or Gobind Rai ---- some historians called him Prithvi's relative whose daughter was married to Prithvi) was the viceroy of Delhi. Prithvi's first cousin Jaichand, Raja of Kanauj, had strained relations with Prithvi because their grandfather (father of their mothers) had allowed Prithvi to inherit the throne of Delhi. Also because Prithvi had married the beautiful daughter of Jaichand against his wish.

Chand Bardai was not only a court poet but was a member of the inner circle of the king. The poet accompanied the king during wars. Muhammad Ghori or Muhammad of Ghor i.e. Muhammad, hailing from Ghor in present-day Afghanistan grew increasingly powerful. He captured Ghazni and subsequently defeated the Ghaznavid governor of Punjab. Muhammad Ghori's domain now touched upon that of Prithviraj Chauhan. A clash was inevitable: First Battle of Tarain (1191 CE): Muhammad Ghori invaded Prithviraj's domains and laid siege to the fortress of Bhatinda in Punjab, which was at the frontier between the two kingdoms. Prithviraj's appeal for help from his father-in-law was scornfully rejected by the haughty Jaichandra. Undaunted, Prithviraj marched on Bhatinda and gave battle to the invaders at a place called Tarain (also called Taraori) near the town of Thanesar (Kurukshetra, Haryana state). In face of the Rajput onslaught, the invading Muslim army broke ranks and fled, leaving their leader, Muhammad Ghori, a prisoner in Prithviraj's hands. Muhammad Ghori was brought in chains to

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Pithoragarh, Prithviraj's capital. He begged his captor for mercy and release. Prithviraj's ministers advised against pardoning the aggressor. However, the chivalrous and valiant Prithviraj thought otherwise and respectfully released the vanquished Ghori.

Second Battle of Tarain (1192 CE): The very next year, Ghori repaid Prithviraj's gesture by again invading Prithviraj's kingdom with a stronger army. Again, the two armies met at Tarain. The Hindus followed a traditional practice of battling only between sunrise and sunset. This practice, was based upon great epics and ethics in their civilised society. The Ramayana and the Mahabharat support this practice. Ghori attacked the surprised Rajput army before daybreak and thus emerged victorious. The defeated Prithviraj was pursued up to his capital. At the point when annihilation became certain, Sanyogita committed suicide by self-immolation rather than face the prospect of personal dishonour at the hands of a barbaric invader. Prithviraj was taken in chains to Ghor in present-day Afghani stan before Muhammad Ghori where he saw his wife Mahrukh. Chand Bardai, the raj-kavi and his friend accompanied him. The events as written by Bardai and later completed by his son are as follows: Prithviraj haughtily looked Ghori straight into the eye. Ghori ordered him to lower his eyes, whereupon Prithviraj scornfully reminded him that the eyes of a Rajput are lowered only when a Rajput dies. On hearing this, Ghori ordered that his eyes be burnt with red hot iron rods. Prithviraj and Chand Bardai got an opportunity to kill Muhammad Ghori when Ghori announced an archery competition. Chand Bardai told Ghori that Prithviraj was so skilled an archer, that he could take aim based only on sound, and did not even need to look at his target. Ghori disdained to believe this, the courtiers guffawed and taunted Chand Bardai, asking how a blind man could shoot arrows. In the spirit of their usual barbaric mockery, they brought the blind and hapless Prithviraj out to the field. Pressing a bow and arrow into his hand, they taunted him to take aim.

Chand Bardai told Ghori that this taunting would avail nothing, for Prithviraj would never do as some sundry courtiers bade him do. He said that Prithviraj, as an anointed king, would not accept orders from anyone other than another king. His ego thus assuaged, and in the spirit of the occasion, Muhammad Ghori agreed to personally give Prithviraj the order to shoot. Some iron plates were hung and Prithviraj was asked to hit that plate. Thus, Chand Bardai provided Prithviraj with an oral indication of where Ghori was seated by composing a couplet on the spot and reciting the same in Prithviraj's hearing. The couplet, composed in a language understood only by Prithviraj went thus:

“Char bans, chaubis gaj, angul ashta praman, Ta upar sultan hai, mat Chuke Chauhan.”

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Char bans meant four bamboo sticks, chaubis gaj as approximately 24 yards, angul ashta praman meant eight fingers width. All this combined to give the exact location of Ghori sitting on his throne i.e. 4 bamboos stick high, 24 yards away and exactly eight fingers up was the Ghori sitting. "Go ahead O Chauhan and don't miss the aim." This is how Prithviraj kills Ghori in his court. Prithviraj and Chand Bardai did not want to die from the hands of Ghori's courtiers so they stabbed each other.

Above is the historical written account which we get from Prithviraj Raso in which the patron king has been eulogised thus enabling us to know about the history of Prithviraj Chauhan and his life and times. Other interesting historical information can also be gathered from the Prithviraj Raso. Firstly, it tells us about the origin of the term 'Rajput'. The term Rajputra has been used since the time of Harshavardhana (606-648 A.D.) of Kanauj, to be more exact it was first used by him. The term was used for the descendants of the Shahi dynasty present in Kashmir in Rajatarangini of Kalhana. However the modern usage of the term refers to the descendants of the 36 major clans who ruled western / central and north India. Names of these clans are given in the Kumarpala Charita of Jayasimha, in the Prithviraj Raso of Chand Bardai and other sources also. The list includes classical clans like Ikshvaku, Soma and Yadu, well-known Rajput clans such as Parmar, Chauhan, Chalukya, Rathore, Parihar, Chandela etc. as well as lesser known clans such as Silar (Shilahar), Chapotkat, Tank etc. The Rajputs divided into 36 clans claim three basic lineages: the Suryavanshi (Solar Race), the Chandravanshi (Lunar Race), and the Agni vanshi (Fire Born). Some scholars also include Rishi vanshi, Nag Vanshi and Vayu Vanshi as separate classes. House of Mewar, Marwar, Amber are Suryavanshi Rajputs. Rulers of Bundi, Kotah, Jalore, Sirohi are Agnivanshi. Chandravanshi and Yaduvanshi are from the same line which bifurcated at King Yadu when his father banished him from becoming the king. House of Jaisalmer are Yaduvanshi Rajputs. The term Rajput ordinarily refers to the group's "jati" which is an endogamous group within the traditional Hindu social system. The Rajputs are considered to be the descendants of the Vedic warrior (Kshatriya) varna. Although all members of a warrior caste, Rajputs vary in profession from aristocrats to farmers.

It should also be noted that a number of sub-castes, or jatis', claim to be Rajputs. Some of them have a historical basis for the claim. Some are considered to be descendants of the Rajputs but are not generally accepted by the main Rajput community (for example, Girasia). Many branches of Jains and Marwaris had Rajput forefathers but none of them are considered Rajputs today. We can see James Todd's Annals and Antiquities for various Jain and Marwari lines that originated from Rajputs.

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Ancient Rajput kings had permitted all faiths to flourish in their domains. While personally they have often practised Vedic, Shaiva, Vaishnava and occasionally Jain traditions; they supported Buddhists, Zoroastrians and Sufi traditions as well. Muin-ud-din Chishti was allowed by Prithviraj Chauhan to set up his madarsa. Rajputs in India are mostly Hindu. There are some Rajputs who follow the Sikh panth, and they often intermarry with Hindu Rajputs today. History has also recorded that a very small minority amongst Rajputs did convert to Islam. Most of these converted to save their land / kingdom or remain a chief in the army. Some of the conversions of Rajputs, it is claimed, happened at the hands of muslim saints.

Today, with the aid of inscriptions and copperplates discovered, it is possible to trace the history of the royal clans with considerable certainty. However they were not available in 17-18th century when a number of chronicles (khyats) were compiled, often based on oral tradition. By this time the agni-kunda myth had been expanded to explain the origin of four of the major clans. James Todd wrote his influential book "The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan" in 1829 and 1832 on the basis of these chronicles. Some of his hypotheses have been used by other authors, even though the texts discovered and read during the 20th century show that Tod's hypotheses are sometimes inaccurate.

From the Prithviraj Raso we also come to know about the Rajput character. The Rajput ethos is martial in spirit, fiercely proud and independent, and emphasises lineage and tradition. Rajput patriotism is legendary, an ideal they embodied with a sometimes fanatical zeal, often choosing death before dishonour. Rajput warriors were often known to fight until the last man. The practice of 'jauhar' and 'saka' was followed only in Rajput communities. When the outcome of a battle was against the Rajputs, 'jauhar' would be committed by Rajput women and children in the night and next morning inen would commit 'saka'. Brahmin priests would chant Vedic mantras and Rajput women wearing their marriage dresses, along with their young children, would embrace sandalwood flames. The next morning after taking a bath, the men would wear kesariya and apply the ash from the maha samadhi 'of their wives and children' on their foreheads and put a tulsi leaf in their mouth. Then the palace gates would be opened and men would ride out for complete annihilation of the enemy or themselves. Rajput men and women could not be captured alive. When Hindus fought against other Hindus there were never any 'jauhars' or 'sakas' because the defeated were treated with dignity. However, history records very few instances wherein a Rajput king sued for peace after a battle reversal and the Muslims initially agreed to the peace terms, only for the Rajputs, and their women and children, to be slaughtered upon surrender

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and once the 'pols' or gates of their mighty fortresses were opened. One example of this is war between Puran Mal of Raisina and Sher Shah Suri.

Rajputs love their steed and sword and enjoy listening to the tales of bravery of their ancestors. Rajputs honour their word more than their life and are renowned for their loyalty. Rajasthan which has a very high concentration of Rajputs, is located in northwestern India, near the Khyber Pass route used by most foreign invasions of India, including the Arabs, Afghans, Turks, Mughals and other Islamic invaders of the Middle Ages. In his 'New History of India' Stanley Wolpert wrote, "The Rajputs were the vanguard of Hindu India in the face of the Islamic onslaught." In his "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan' James Todd wrote "What nation on earth could have maintained the semblance of civilisation, the spirit or the customs of their forefathers, during so many centuries of overwhelming depression, but one of such singular character as the Rajput ? Rajasthan exhibits the sole example in the history of mankind, of a people withstanding every outrage barbarity could inflict, or human nature sustain, from a foe whose religion commands annihilation, and bent to the earth, yet rising buoyant from the pressure, and making calamity a whetstone to courage.....Not an iota of their religion or customs have they lost....."

The Suryavanshi trace their lineage to the Vedic Sun Surya (Lord Rama was also born in this lineage). Somvanshi to Som (the Vedic deity Soma or Moon) and Agnivanshi originated from fire. The Yaduvanshi trace their lineage to Lord Krishna. Each vansha has many kulas and each kula has shakhas. Rathores are divided into these shakhas: Dhandhul, Bhadail, Khokra, Jodha etc. Gehlote kula is subdivided into these shakhas: Aharya (at Doongarpur), Sisodiya (at Mewar), Peeparra (at Marwar) etc. Chauhan are divided into these shakhas: Hada, Kheechee, Deora, Songara etc. Similarly, there are various shakhas in Kacchwaha, Parihaar and rest of the 12 clans described below. Each shakha has its Gotra Acharya, a genealogical creed, describing the essential peculiarities, religious tenets and pristine locale of the clan. It is a touchstone of affinities and guardian of the laws of intermarriage. Rathore Gotra Acharya ---- Gautam Gotra, Mardurunduni Shakha, Shukra-Acharya Guru, Garroopata Agni, Pankhini Devi.

Twelve of 36 clans of Rajputs further subdivide. These 12 are Gehlote, Parmara, Chauhan, Solanki, Rathore, Tuar/Tomar, BirGoojur, Parihaar, Jhala, Yadr, Katchwaha Gor. These 24 clans are 'Eka' and do not divide further ----- Sengar, Balla, Khurwur, Chawura, Dahima, Dahiya, Byce, Gherwal,

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Nikumpa, Deurut, Johya, Sikerwal, Dabia, Doda, Mori, Mokarra, Abhirra, Kalchouk, Agnipala, Aswariya, Horel, Manutwal, Mallia and Chhahil.

One version of the story of Agni Kula' origins is that four warriors, Agnikul, Yadaukul, Suryakul and Odak, whose names are given to the Rajput clans, sprang from the sacred fire (Agni-kunda) in a ceremony performed by Sage Vashishtha near Mt. Abu.

The Prithviraj Raso depicts the Rajputs preference for legend and romance and thus is a source of historical literature on this subject. The bard (bhat) was the most crucial member of every Rajput army. He sang out loud the valiant deeds of their forefathers to inspire the warriors into making the fiercest exertions in battle. The bard was also an observer of events but he did not make a historical record... ..rather such events were related in poems, which were passed down through generations of bards by word of mouth.

Legendary and romantic stories are easier to relate in poetic form , hence Rajput history is full of these stories, which today have been faithfully reproduced in the 'Amar Chitra Katha' series. But even in an earlier age myth and legend managed to unseat bland historical fact ---- the evolution of the 'Agnikund' legend illustrates this point.

Thus we see and realise after a careful examination that the "Prithviraj Raso' in its original form and in the form it is now available taking into account the additions made to it is a source of the history of the Rajputs, their origin etc. and especially in detail about the history of Prithviraj III Chauhan, everything connected with him and his special qualities and characteristics and thus the Prithviraj Raso serves to lift the veil over Prithviraj III Chauhan and gives us a very illuminating account into all details connected with him and the life of India, of his people at his time. Several other indirect historical evidences are gathered from the Prithviraj Raso which thus as a source of history is a remarkable literature especially of the Rajput history which is legendary, romantic, interesting, awe-inspiring and has no literary record equal to it. Its verses are remarkable and endearing.

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