



Amber (early).



Pushpendra Bhargava

Jaipur can recite a four-line map of itself. At Dr Rima Hooja's talk on her biography of Raja Man Singh, that map turned into a room full of shared inquiry: the city offering what it remembers, the historian

offering how to read it, and both leaving the story deeper than before, about evidence, oaths, legends, and what we lose when we demand only 'proof.'

"Sanganer ko Sanga Baba, Jaipur ko Hanuman; Amber ki Shila Devi layo Raja Man."

Jaipur has its own way of compressing centuries into four lines, portable history, recited like directions. It's a rhyme many residents carry even if they don't remember where they first heard it.

Rima Hooja started not with a timeline, but with a scene-reading from her prologue: the Indus in flood, troops hesitating at a dangerous crossing, and a young Kunwar Man Singh calling their bluff with wordplay. The verse she read turns 'Atak' into 'atak,' a pun on hesitation itself.

"Sabey bhumi Gopal ki, ya main atak kahan; Ja key mun mein atak



Rajmahal.

hai, sohi atak raha."

In her telling, it's not just a clever line. It's a leadership test: if you're stuck in your mind, stay at 'Atak,' if you trust God and your own nerve, cross. The army follows, and the crossing becomes part of the legend.

What biography is up against?

Then, she stepped back from legend to method. In any biography, she said, the problem is getting to the real person, past the stories that want him to be only a hero or only a villain. Her most unsettling move was also her simplest: judge 'great men' as people with duty, fear, ambition, and limits. "When you

think of them as human people... what's the choice?" she asked. "Where is somebody's cracking point? Where is somebody's point of bravery?"

From there, Raja Man Singh entered the room early, not as a cut-out general in someone else's empire, but as a figure bound to Amber, Dhundhar, family line, and an inherited code. To see that, Hooja pulled Amber back into focus as a living urban world, not merely a 'before' to Jaipur. Drawing on Amrit Rai's 'Mancharit,' she described Amber as a place with 'trees,' 'wide streets,' and 'trade from every part of the world.'

A city where gods travel with armies

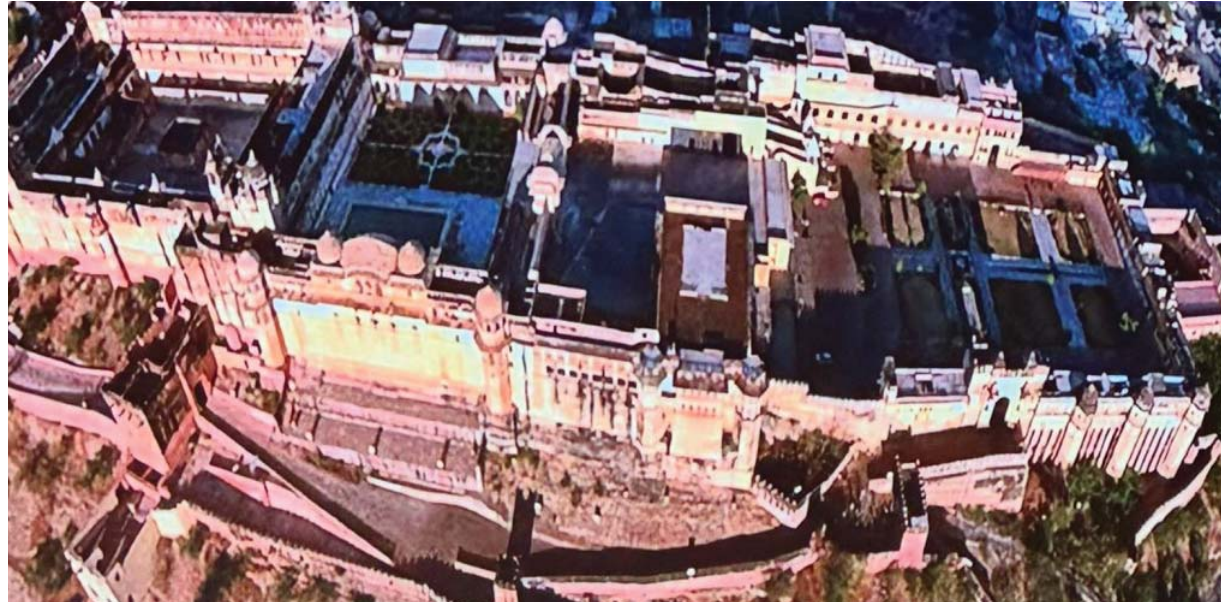
Hooja slipped in something Jaipur understands instinctively: in Amer (Amber)'s world, power didn't move alone, deities moved with it. She spoke of old palace rituals and the Narsinghji temple, quoting a line that maintained and deepened the ties of the kingdom's fate to the deity.

"Jab tak Narsingh Devli par, tab tak Raj hatheli par."

The procession vehicle taken out during Teej and Gangaur follows the same tradition. In Hooja's narrative, Man Singh connects Jaipur with Afghanistan. In her telling, that widening map keeps connecting Jaipur to Kabul is on the frontier, Lahore as an imperial anchor-until you stop seeing Man Singh as only 'Akbar's general' and



Amber (later).

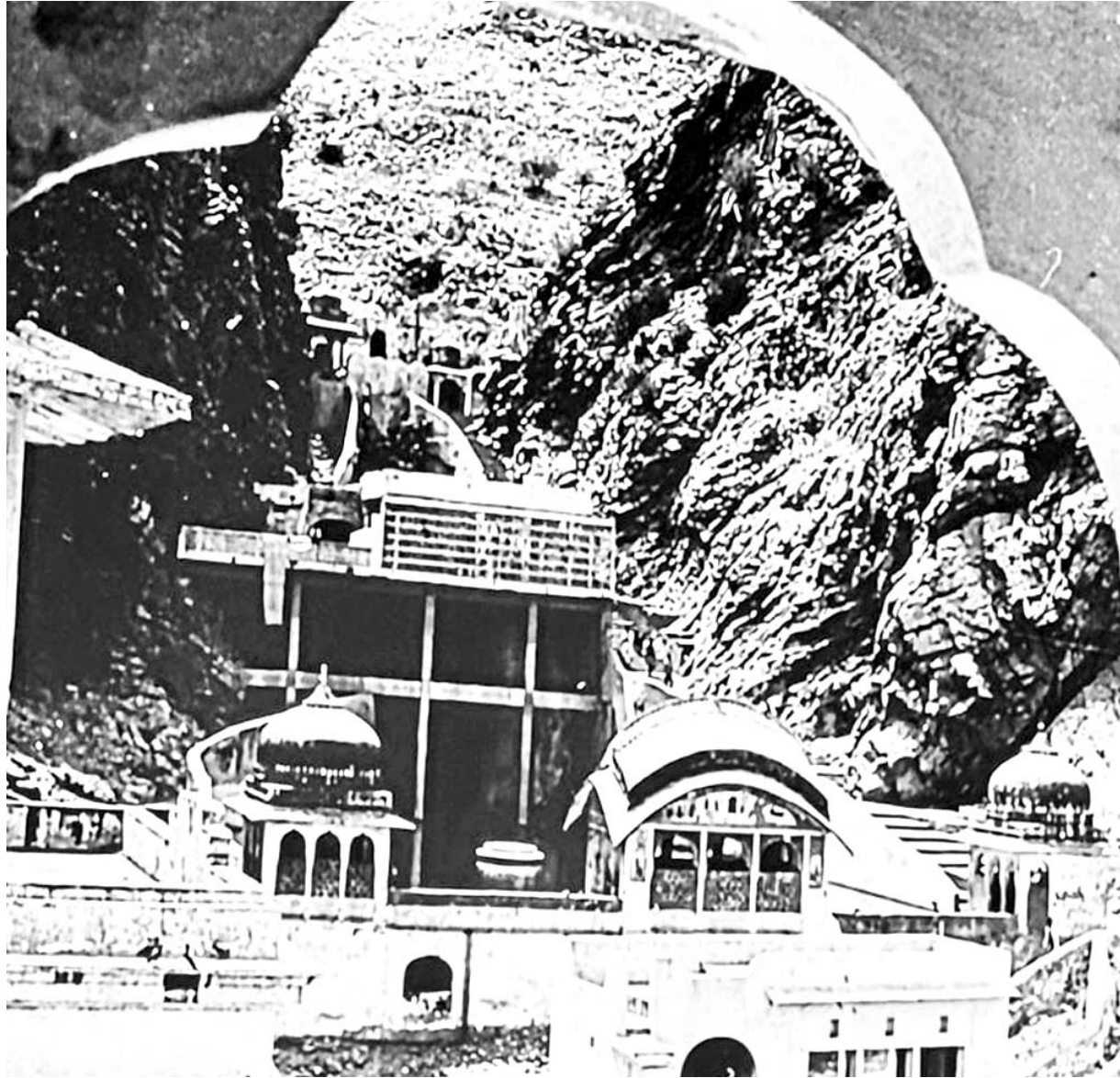


Man Singh Mahal.

Diwan-i-Khas.

Diwan-i-Aam.

Jaleb Chowk.



Galta ji.

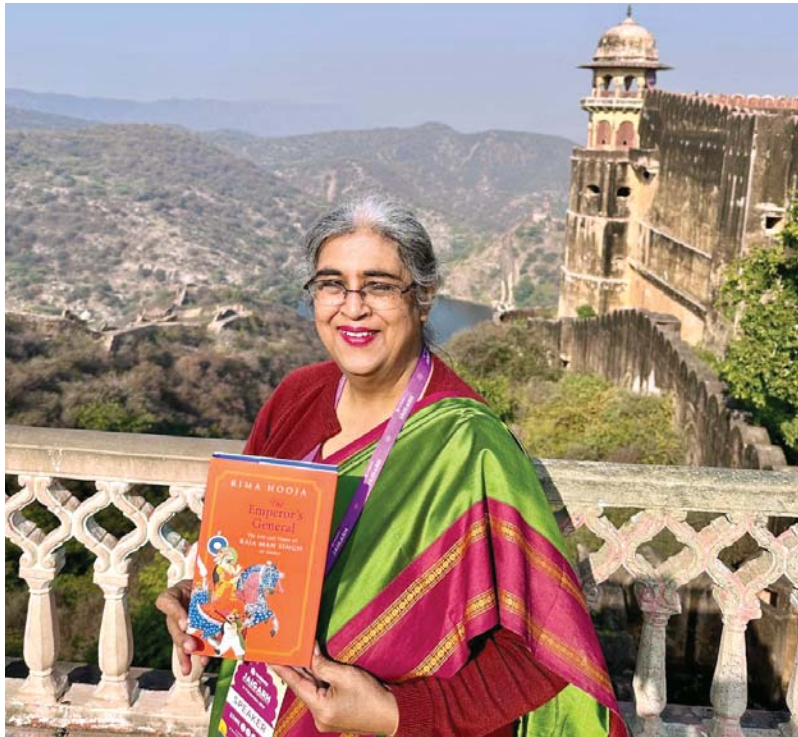
Sanganer ko Sanga Baba... PART:1

The Narsingh story in Rajasthan goes like this, in Jaipur: 'Jab tak Narsingh Devli par, tab tak raj hatheli par.' "At one point, towards the end of the late Rajmata Gayatri Devi's life, I was in a place where I could ask her. So I said, you know, we've always heard this. She says, 'Darling, it's true.'... She said it disappeared just around the time that the conversations had started for the state of Jaipur acceding to be part of a new union. And later, it was found in a well and it has been put back. That was her version."

#RAJA MAN SINGH



A portrait of an older Raja Man Singh.



DR. RIMA HOOJA WITH HER NEW BOOK AT THE LALIT MANDIR BALCONY, JAIGARH FORT.



Kunwar Man Singh I of Amber.

uals of the royal family used to traditionally take place, including wedding time, opening of the kankandori, etc., they have a temple in Narsinghji. And that image was given by Krishnadas, along with others."

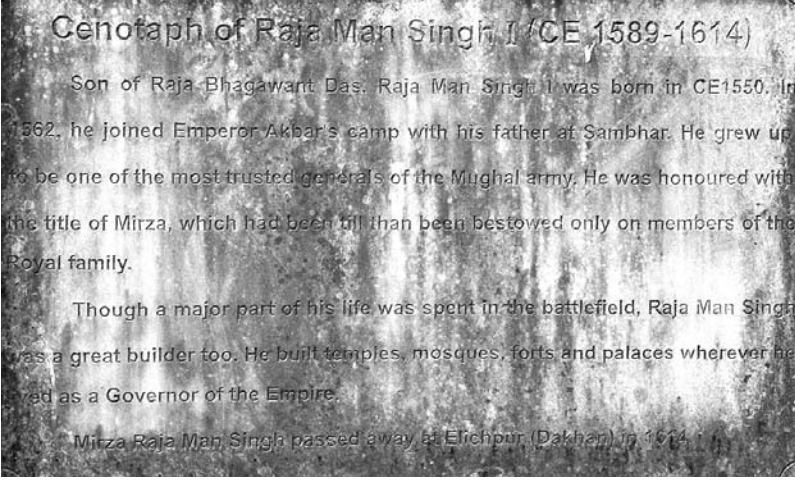
The Narsingh story in Rajasthan goes like this, in Jaipur: "Jab tak Narsingh Devli par, tab tak

raj hatheli par." "At one point, towards the end of the late Rajmata Gayatri Devi's life, I was in a place where I could ask her. So, I said, you know, we've always heard this. She

says, 'Darling, it's true.'... She said that it disappeared just around the time that the conversations had started for the state of Jaipur acceding to be part of a new union.



Man Mandir and Ghat in Varanasi.



Cenotaph at Amber. Image taken by Pushpendra Bhargava.

And later, it was found in a well and it has been put back. That was her version."

"But that's an interesting story which was part of this tale, that Krishnadas Pehari gave that image. Because the other image he gave is the image of Sita Ramji. And that used to go in the hazaar (in the front of the army), wherever the army went. It is still there in what is now the Palace School Temple, and the one traditional rath is still known as 'Sita Ram ji ka Rath.' It is taken out during Teej and Gangaur in the front, but also the local saying that has come: "Gola khave Sitaramji, ladu khave Govindji," because Govind Devji is right there and Sita Ramji has been everywhere. And the family's flag, which was on it, went all the way to Kabul."

But for Man Singh, most of his life became one of not just warfare, which is what we think, but warfare for survival: survival of the empire, survival of maybe his own status. "But with that, a lot of patronage of people at his court, a good poet is encouraged to come to the court. A good painter is encouraged to come and paint there. So all of this takes place... in between fighting."

Hooja put it plainly: imperial relationships were not always a surrender of identity or a religious conversion. They were arrangements, often with a home territory kept intact.

Rima Hooja: "But the grandfather is a king in his own right... So, when the Pratiharas are ruling over Kannauj, lots of groups pay homage to them, but they don't give up their kingdom. And if you want to think of a parallel... is what happens when the British have treaties with various Indian kingdoms."

"It's the relationship. The big king says: I am here; you hold your territory. In the case of the Mughals and Man Singh, that territory, that vatan, that homeland, is the vatan jaghir. That stays with them..." "So, you have a twelve-year-old Man Singh going into Agra, finding out what that larger world is... He discovers the clothes... He also grows up both in his own religious tradition and... the wider belief systems around him. Islam, yes, but very soon, Akbar takes notice of this bright young guy and it's reciprocated." Hooja's point here is crucial for



Insides of the fort.

the reader: Man Singh's 'imperial' life doesn't erase his home world. The home world is precisely what the empire keeps drawing on, ritual legitimacy, inherited obligations, and the cultural confidence of Amer.

Rima Hooja: "So, for Akbar, eventually, Man Singh gets the title of 'Farzan'-Farsi, Persian mein 'beta'. He also much later gets the title of 'Mirza'. Now, it sounds like... he's getting Islamised. He's not. It's the best compliment you can do when you mean: 'Yeh mere beta jaisa hai.'"

"When you're given the title of 'Mirza'... it's not to say: Hey, your family has matrimonial alliances with me. It's to say: you are special; you are like a son."

"So, there was a campaign where they all go to Gujarat... They covered that journey in twelve days on horseback and then fought a battle straight away. Now, during that whole time period, Akbar has him next to him."

Patronage, temples, Tulsidas, and the part Jaipur forgets to say out loud

Hooja kept returning to what we usually miss when we say Akbar's general, Man Singh's life wasn't only warfare. It was also structures, repairs, temples, and courtly patronage, the work that happens in between fighting.

Rima Hooja: Something else that we often don't think about for Man Singh is all the structures he made, the Man Mandir and the ghat

famous Ganga Mandir at Haridwar. When his mother dies at Gaya, he makes a temple in her name. The Bindu Madhav temple at Banaras was renovated by him."

Bengal, 'Subedar,' Bankim, and Raj Mahal

Then, she widened the map again, because Man Singh's life doesn't stay contained in Rajasthan, and his reputation has an afterlife far beyond it. She spoke of his posting as subedar (governor) in Bihar, his long tenure across Bengal-Bihar-Odisha, and the personal costs that followed him there, losses in the family, and the grind of holding a vast frontier of administration and war together.

From there, she pointed to something more surprising: how this eastern world reappears in literature. She explicitly linked that broader story-material to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Durgeshnandini*, and described Man Singh establishing a new capital called Raj Mahal (Rajmahal), a 'big story,' she said, that lives beyond him.

Hooja also brought the man back into the frame she had started with: Not a 'bujha hua diya,' she said. He 'died in harness,' in 1614, far from Amber, at Ellichpur (near today's Achalpur). The story ends the way many imperial lives end, on the road, in service, far from home.

To be continued...

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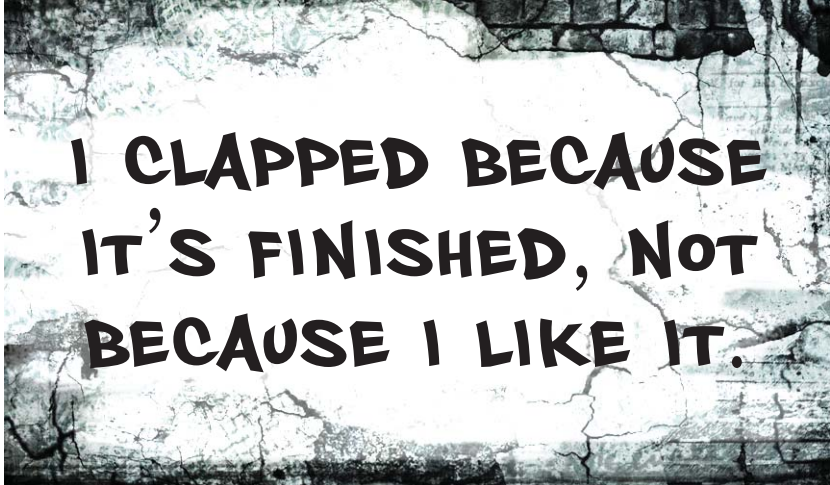


Amer Fort viewed from the town of Amber beneath it.

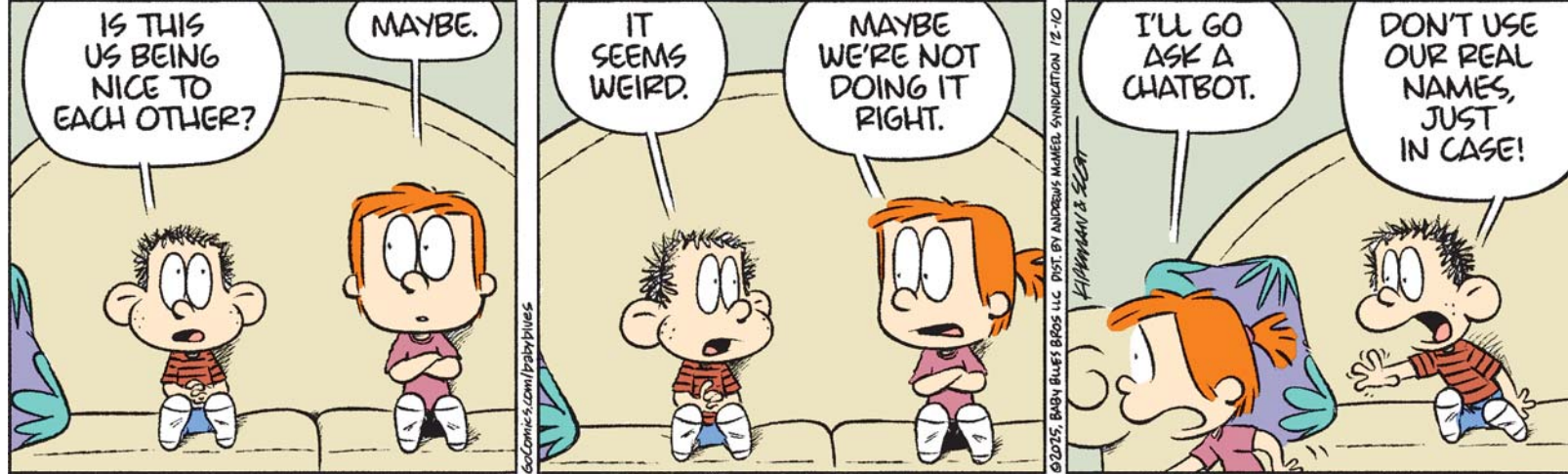


Cenotaph at Amber.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman