

Ascetics' rights in early 19th century Jaipur (Rajasthan)

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The kingdom of Jaipur formed in the early decades of the 19th century an important political entity of North-Western India. In April 1818 its maharaja Jagatsiṃha had signed with the East India Company a treaty of “perpetual friendship, alliance and unity of interest” (art. 1)¹. The neighboring kingdoms had taken the same step. The British were *de facto* the paramount power in the whole of Rajputana. Though in principle the maharaja of Jaipur remained the absolute master of his own territory, the British Political Agent kept looking into the kingdom's chaotic internal affairs. James Tod (1772-1835), the first Political Agent posted in Mewar (Udaipur), another large Rajputana kingdom, observed that it was unavoidable since « we deem ourselves justified in interfering in the two chief branches of government, the succession and finances ». Therefore, he added, “whatever his resolves”, the Political Agent of Jaipur “will find it next to impossible to keep aloof from the vortex of intrigue”². This proved true soon enough. In December 1818 Jagatsiṃha breathed his last without having fathered a son or adopted an heir. For four months the Jaipur throne of the Kachavāhās remained dangerously empty while the British tried their best to ascertain what were the established rights and customs in matters of succession. We are fortunate to have an account of the whole episode narrated tongue in cheek by James Tod and I will leave it to the reader to study it himself. Suffice it to say here that there was at first an attempt by interested parties to put on the throne a young adopted heir whose claim to legitimacy appeared to be dubious to several members of the Rajput nobility as well as to the British themselves. But in March 1819 it was suddenly announced (three months after the maharaja's death!) that one of the queens of the late ruler was in “the eighth month of her pregnancy”. The fact was recognized by all the sixteen widows of Jagatsiṃha, by the Rajputs who counted and also by the British, and in April 1819 the birth of Jayasiṃha III (1819-1835) gave the final blow to the claims of the other faction

In September 1822, less than four years after Jagatsiṃha's death and during the minority rule of his posthumous son, the Kachavāhā government issued a document, which is now in the possession of the Vaiṣṇava monastery of Salemabad, outlining the rules of succession and

¹ Aitchison 1932 : 68.

² Tod 1920 [1971] : 1372.

inheritance pertaining among the main Hindu ascetic lineages of the kingdom³. In was a time when in order to function effectively in Jaipur the British had not only to grasp the rules of royal succession, they also needed to understand the internal organization of its thriving religious institutions. As we are going to see, the Salemabad document sheds light on the juridical provisions allowing ascetic lineages to transmit their patrimony, an important albeit little known aspect of the relationship between asceticism and power. It yields in particular valuable information on the complete dependence of the chiefs of ascetic lineages upon the state to obtain and maintain control over the material means required to build and exercise their legitimacy. It thus highlights the particular combination of economic and religious considerations lying at the roots of their power and authority⁴ And since it was signed by the chiefs of the main monasteries (and temples) of the kingdom, it has the added advantage of affording insights into the ascetics' own understanding of their rights.

At the time of the drafting of the document of Salemabad the affairs of the kingdom were looked after by Ānanda Kuṃvārī of the Bhaṭṭi clan (hence she was called "Bhaṭṭyāñijī"), Jagatsiṃha's widow and mother of the infant maharaja; she was assisted by the Prime Minister Rāval Bairīsāl Nāthāvat. This was a period of gross misgovernment and of petty rivalries at the highest state level. This was also a period of royal ostentatious religious activities. Bhaṭṭyāñijī was a very devoted worshipper of Viṣṇu, particularly in the form of Kṛṣṇa, and she squandered the resources of the kingdom on temples and also on different Vaiṣṇava divines. The abbot of the monastery of Salemabad ranked first among them. He belonged to the sect of Nimbārka. We shall return later to the nature of the bond that existed between the queen mother and this particular ascetic and see that it was not unrelated to the birth of her royal son.

The Nimbārkaīs were one of the leading Vaiṣṇava sects (*sampradāya*) settled in Jaipur. They coexisted there with several other religious groups that also enjoyed the patronage of the state. The administration of the kingdom of Jaipur was intrinsically linked to religious institutions. Its dynasty extended grants and honors to a host of religious specialists, priests, ritualists,

³ I thank the abbot of the monastery of Salemabad for showing me the document in September 1988. But he would not part with it and I had no photographic equipment with me then, I am therefore very grateful to Sharad Chandra Ojha for making available to me a xerox copy he had obtained from Brajavallabhaśaraṇa Vedāntācārya, the caretaker (*adhikārī*) of Śrījī kī baḍī kuñj, the main establishment of the Salemabad lineage in Vrindaban. Besides, I also benefited greatly from Sharad Chandra Ojha's assistance in reading a number of difficult passages of the Hindi version of the text. It also pleases me to acknowledge the comments and suggestions of Monika Horstmann and of Marc Gaborieau regarding the translation of certain key words and to thank the latter too for having transliterated for me the Persian section of the text. I was finally able to take a digital photography of the document at the monastery of Salemabad in October 2001 ; it is reproduced here.

⁴ For recent studies addressing the economic and political dimensions of the relationship between kingship and asceticism in modern India, see Pinch 1996b, 1998; Bouillier 1997; Horstmann 2002 and in this volume; Clémentin-Ojha 1999.

astrologers, philosophers and ascetics. The signatories of the document of Salemabad belonged to the latter category: they were representatives of the Rāmānandīs, the Nimbārkiś, the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas, the Nāthas and the Jainas. I will introduce each one of them more precisely later on. All one need to keep in mind now is that they were chiefs of ascetic lineages. As such their main concern was to perpetuate their tradition, that is to hand over their doctrines, rituals, rules of conduct and patterns of organization. They also aspired to transmit their material possessions. The ideal of the ascetic unconcerned with worldly acquisition notwithstanding, these religious lineages had accumulated considerable wealth ; they had been the recipients of grants (of landed property in particular) and, some of them like their contemporary counterparts elsewhere, had also built and maintained solid networks of commerce and finance⁵. Conflicts at times of inheritance were to be expected in such a context. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that succession itself had to be regulated. But by whom and how was it done? Access to these questions may be gained by reading the document of Salemabad. I will therefore attempt to retrieve the historical realities that prompted the state administration of Jaipur to draft it and to have it endorsed by the British⁶.

1. The master of the sect of Nimbārka

The royal document issued in September 1822 records⁷ among other things that Nimbārkaśaraṇa, the abbot (*mahanta*) of the monastery of Salemabad, is the “master of the seat of the sect of Nimbārka”⁸. Written on paper, measuring 80 cm by 42 cm, it displays twice the same text disposed in two parallel columns, the first one (on the left) in Hindi, the right-hand one in Persian⁹. It bears the royal seal, the seals and signatures of two representatives of the East India Company and the seals and signatures of the chiefs of ten religious lineages, including those of Nimbārkaśaraṇa or “Śrījī” as the abbot of Salemabad was (and is still) known¹⁰.

⁵ On the important role played in the 19th century by ascetics in the local economy as traders and money-lenders, see Cohn 1964; Kolff 1971; Bayly 1983 [1992] : 143-144, 183-186; Pinch, 1998.

⁶ For a transliteration of the original and a translation, see the appendix.

⁷ It is a “statement of facts”, *hakikat* for *haqiqat*, “truth” in Arabic. It refers to “the true condition”, implying that there is no question of formulating a rule more or less new, but of confirming the condition prevailing of old. The Persian section of the text makes this meaning clear as it translates the term by “description of the state of things”.

⁸ *nīmāraka sampardāya [sic] kī gādī ke mālik*. On the meaning of *mālik*, see further.

⁹ The Persian section was not drafted independently but was a translation. My paper focuses on the Hindi section of the text.

¹⁰ The document also bears endorsements on its verso page. It was written on the 5th lunar day of the bright half of *dutika āśvina (aso) vikrama samvat* [VS] 1879, that is around the 20th September 1822. “*Dutika*” (= *dvitīya*) *āśvina* means a second month of *āśvina* inserted before the “natural” month of the



The document of Salemabad (photo by the author)

same name. An intercalary month (*adhika-māsa*) is introduced approximately every 32 months in the Hindu lunar calendar in order to bring it in synchrony with the solar cycle. Though it is considered impure by the *dharmaśāstra* an intercalary month is not altogether prohibited for ritual performance, for example it is permitted for those rites for which there is no alternative (such as the *saṃdhyā*) (see Kane V.1 : 672). No festive day prescribed on a particular lunar day (*tithi*) is however to be observed during an intercalary month, it is to be celebrated during the natural month. Hence though dated *āśvina śukla* 5, the document was not issued on the fifth day of the auspicious cycle of Navarātri, the Nine-day worship of the Goddess, but one month earlier. The date on the verso, *kartika kṛṣṇa* 10, precedes by 4 days the date of the yearly “awakening” of Viṣṇu (*kartika kṛṣṇa* 14), but that fact may not be relevant since this second date is clearly linked to the administrative procedure (which took 50 days to complete). The corresponding date in the Persian document is given in the Christian calendar: 11 November 1822, which tallies.

The monastery of Salemabad was founded in the 17th century near the pilgrimage site of Pushkar in Eastern Rajasthan by the Nimbārki ascetic Paraśurāma. It fell within the boundaries of the small kingdom of Kishangarh and enjoyed the patronage of its dynasty which was known for its Vaiṣṇava orientation; it was also protected by the ruling family of the much larger and prestigious Kachavāhā kingdom of Jaipur. The ties with the Kachavāhā dynasty had been established in the 18th century when Jayasiṃha II (1688-1743), the founder of the city of Jaipur, had made Vṛndāvanadeva (abbot of Salemabad from 1697 to 1740) his theological advisor¹¹. At the end of the 18th century, a Kachavāhā queen presented the monastery a temple within the Jaipur palace precincts and hereafter the abbots of Salemabad used to dwell for lengthy periods of time in the capital city of the kingdom.

The foundation of the monastery of Salemabad followed the spatial expansion of the Nimbārki monastic network in the second half of the 16th century. Prior to this period the history of this Vaiṣṇava sect remains rather obscure. Nimbārka (12th century?), its alleged founder, was a Telaṅga Brahman ascetic and a vedāntin. His reading of the *Brahma-sūtra* was probably influenced by that of Rāmānuja (11th century), but he based his system of Vedānta not on the worship of Viṣṇu but on the dual cult of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. We also know the theological works of half-a-dozen Nimbārki ascetics who lived after him¹². At the end of the 15th century, if not earlier, the sect was associated with Braj, the holy land of Kṛṣṇa (located to the east of Jaipur) and by the mid-16th century it had spread to near-by Rajasthan under the dynamic leadership of Paraśurāma's guru Harivyāsa, a Gauḍa Brahman ascetic¹³.

The fact that the Nimbārki are named "Harivyāsī" in old sources attests that Harivyāsa played an important part in the refoundation of their sect. Harivyāsa lived in Mathura, the capital city of Braj. It is held that he had twelve disciples who founded as many monastic lineages of spiritual succession (*dvāra, śākhā*). Later several of these lineages further divided and there arose a contest of authority between the original seat situated in Braj and the recently founded monastery of Salemabad in Rajasthan. Among the Nimbārki settled in Braj there is a tradition that Harivyāsa's successor on the main seat was his elder disciple Svabhurāma. There could be some truth in their version since Svabhurāma's lineage is still based at Dhruv Tila, near Narad Tila (Mathura) where Harivyāsa's as well as his two predecessors' memorials (*samādhi*) are shown. However the extent of Svabhurāma's (or his successors') religious authority is not actually known nor is it known whether the Nimbārki of all lineages ever considered Mathura as their main sectarian seat. In the 1870s, Growse met a Nimbārki ascetic (lineage not given) living at Vrindaban who held instead that the main seat of his sect was at Salemabad¹⁴. Some forty years ago there arose a bitter dispute among representatives of Mathura's (Svabhurāma's)

¹¹ Bahura 1976 : 65; Entwistle 1987 : 191.

¹² Bose 1943.

¹³ Clémentin-Ojha 1990.

¹⁴ Growse 1883 [1978] : 196.

and Salemabad's (Paraśurāma's) lineages, each claiming his abbot to be the only legitimate chief of the sect¹⁵. Therefore, by stating as a fact beyond doubt (*haqīqat*) that Nimbārkaśaraṇa, a successor of Paraśurāma and the abbot of Salemabad, was the "master of the seat of the sect of Nimbārka", the royal document issued in September 1822 by the court of Jaipur calls for some attention.

Nimbārkaśaraṇa had been appointed abbot (*mahanta*) of his monastery during a ceremony supervised, as per tradition, by the Jaipur state. In September 1822, in fact, only four months had passed since he had been invested (*tikā*) by a representative of the infant maharaja (who being too young to attend was symbolized by his sword)¹⁶. Even before that, Nimbārkaśaraṇa had enjoyed a privileged position within his monastery. In 1806 Sarveśvaraśaraṇa, his predecessor and guru, had nominated him heir (*yuvārāja*); a decision which had also been approved by the Jaipur state administration¹⁷. But Nimbārkaśaraṇa was not only powerful within his monastic community. As I have noted he had also gained considerable influence at the court and was a special protégé of the queen Bhaṭṭyāñijī. Several years earlier, his guru Sarveśvaraśaraṇa had initiated her into the Nimbārki sectarian mantra (*mantra-upadeśa*)¹⁸. However the royal disciple would have certainly remained in the backwaters of history had she not given birth to Jayasiṃha III in 1819, a few months after maharaja Jagatsiṃha's death as we have seen. James Tod had not been wrong in regarding this birth as "miraculous". But whereas he speculated that it had been wrought by the "timely interposition of Mata Janami"¹⁹, the queen mother had another explanation. She was convinced that it was due to the special blessings of Nimbārkaśaraṇa that she had delivered a son and thus been propelled up to the rank of regent. She had manifested her gratitude by showering the ascetic with gifts and honours from 1819 onwards, that is at a time when he was only the heir apparent of the abbot of Salemabad.

In September 1822, then, at a time when the kingdom was in the hands of the gynaeceum, Nimbārkaśaraṇa was the queen's religious adviser. By being called the "master" of the sect of Nimbārka he was officially attributed a religious authority that went far beyond that of an abbot. What kind of power of command did it effectively give him is not known but it was theoretically meant to embrace all the Nimbārki lineages and sub-lineages, the majority of which were not based in Rajasthan but in Braj, the heart-land of the Vaiṣṇava sects of North India. It is therefore of some import to add that around the same time the document of Salemabad was

¹⁵ Clémentin-Ojha 2000: 184-185.

¹⁶ The fact was duly recorded in the *ad hoc* register of protocol, see *Tojī dastūr kaumvar* [TDK] 34 (*svāmī*): VS 1879 *jyeṣṭha* s. 2, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

¹⁷ TDK 34, VS 1865 *cait. kṛṣṇa* 7.

¹⁸ *Śrījayasāhasujasa-prakāśa*, p. 8

¹⁹ Tod 1920 [1971]: 1376. He certainly meant Janvāimātā, the *kuladevī* of the Kachavāhās, whose sanctuary is situated 20 km to the North-East of Jaipur.

drafted the queen mother had a magnificent temple and *haveli* built for Nimbārkaśaraṇa in Vrindaban. She came to inaugurate it in person in the summer of 1826²⁰. At that time, the Braj area was enjoying a state of peace and prosperity that it had not known for years. It had been under the British rule for about twenty years. Earlier, the incessant wars waged between the Afghans, Jats and Marathas under the helpless gaze of the Mughal emperor had brought several decades of political turmoil to the region of Mathura; then it had fallen first under the Marathas' control (1789) and, in 1803, under that of the East India Company. But in the 1820s its flow of pilgrims was steadily increasing and aristocrats and merchants were generously patronizing its religious life, building new temples and ghats, especially in Vrindaban, a city which was said to be particularly attractive with its location on the banks of the Yamuna and its many groves²¹. It is therefore as if the queen mother had wanted to give the abbot of Salemabad an establishment of standing in Vrindaban²² - the foremost place of pilgrimage for Kṛṣṇa worshippers -, so that inspite of his having his base in Rajasthan his claims to being the highest authority of the sect of Nimbārka would be known to all those concerned.

Although Bhaṭṭyāñijī's position at the court was powerful her name does not appear on the document of Salemabad. On the royal seal one finds mention of the tutelary deity of the kingdom (Rāma) and of three persons: Jayasiṃha II (r. 1699-1743), the most famous ancestor of Jayasiṃha III, but long dead by then ; the ruling infant maharaja himself (but his name was not given, only his title) and the Prime Minister, Rāval Bairīsāl Nāthāvat.

Strategically situated above the royal seal are the endorsements of two British officials. They served as a reminder that if locally the maharaja represented sovereign authority, he himself was but a link in the new chain of command which tied the kingdom of Jaipur to a larger political configuration. Since the treaty of 1818 the Jaipur ruler was bound to "act in subordinate co-operation with the British government and acknowledge its supremacy" (art. 3)²³. Captain J. Steward, one of the two British signatories, was the first Political Agent to be posted at Jaipur in 1821; Edward Colebrooke, the other, was the Resident in Delhi and his immediate superior. While there is no indication as to when J. Steward certified the document's seals and signatures (but it could not have been later than 1824 when he left his Jaipur office), Colebrooke's attestation of Steward's signature is dated 1829, that is seven years after the document's date²⁴. Through the elegant (if difficult to decipher) handwritten endorsements of these two

²⁰According to an inscription on the temple wall dated VS 1883 *jyestha*. The temple, locally known as Śrījī kī baḍī kuñj, is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa-Ānandamanohara.

²¹ Entwistle 1987: 211-216.

²² Earlier the abbot of Salemabad had a smaller residence in Vrindaban near Bihar Ghat (Entwistle 1987: 405) ; the *samādhi* of Harivaṃśa, Paraśurāma's immediate successor, is found there.

²³ Aitchison 1932: 68-69.

²⁴ Though by 1829, the British would have had reasons to be suspicious of the abbot of Salemabad. Three years earlier, in 1826, "Shriji Mahant" had sided against them during the Bharatpur succession war (Sarkar

British officials, the English language was taking some of its very first steps into the Kachavāhā administration, but Persian, the old language of power which the British had adopted in all their transactions with Indian rulers, remained important; it even left its strong imprint on the Hindi original as illustrated by the word *mālik*, “master”.

The document was not only endorsed (in Hindi only) by Nimbārkaśaraṇa of Salemabad but also by the representatives of nine other lineages of spiritual succession. Altogether they represented the main ascetic lineages existent at Jaipur at the time : the Rāmānandīs, the Nimbārkiś, the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas, the Nāthas and the Jainas. Besides Nimbārkaśaraṇa, five of the signatories were also particularly prominent figures. They were the abbots of the three main Rāmānandī monasteries of the kingdom (Ācārya Mahārāja Sītārāmācarya of Galta ; Mahanta Mahārāja Gambhirānanda of the Bālānandī monastery; Mahanta Mahārāja Jyānakīdāsa of Raivasa)²⁵ and the custodians of two of its four Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava temples (Gosvāmī Govindalāla of Rādhādāmodara and Gosvāmī Nityānanda of Rādhāvinodilāla)²⁶. I am not able to identify with certainty two other signatories (Gosvāmī Harikiśora and Nṛsimhalāledeva), but it is clear from their names that they too were Vaiṣṇava; the first one being probably the custodian of a temple (possibly Lāḍīlījī, the main temple of the Lālita *sampradāya*) and the second the abbot of a Rāmānandī monastic lineage (probably of the militant type). This overwhelming Vaiṣṇava presence reflected the religious orientation of the kingdom of Jaipur²⁷. The last two signatories were a Śaiva Nāthapanthin yogī (Āyas Pīr Kavalanātha), based at Mansagar²⁸ and a Jaina (Śrī Sukhendrakīrti), Bhaṭṭāraka of “Dallī Amairi” [sic], a religious authority of the

1955-1956) at the head of a regimen of “fighting ascetics” (Sharma 1964 : 65-66). For the complicated relations between Jaipur and the East India Company during this period, see Batra 1958.

²⁵ Based respectively at Galta, on the eastern outskirts of the city of Jaipur; at the Bālānandī establishment, at the foot of Nahargadh Fort inside Jaipur and at the village of Raivasa, some 70km to the north-west of Jaipur, in the province of Shekhavati.

²⁶ The two missing Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas were the custodians of Govindadeva and of Gopinātha temples. One explanation could be that the seat of the temple of Govindadeva was empty at the time: Rāmanārāyaṇa had died in May 1822, a few months before the promulgation of the document and had not been replaced yet; in fact, his successor Govindanārāyaṇa would be appointed more than a year later, in December 1823, see Horstmann 1999 : 355, n. 19 and 20.

²⁷ Clémentin-Ojha, 1999. Two of the seven seats of the sect of Vallabha were in Jaipur but their representatives did not sign the document. As is well-known, the sect was not founded by an ascetic but by a married man and the sect’s authorities are his natural descendants. It is therefore a possibility that they were not considered to be “in *bheṣa*” or in robe, since their lineages were not originally monastic. Hence the provisions of the document did not apply to them.

²⁸ This is a lake situated to the North of the city of Jaipur on the way to the ancient capital city of Amber. Behind the wall of the barrage built in its north-eastern section, there is a Nātha monastery (now in poor condition) said to have been founded by Rūpanātha, the son of Pṛthvīrāja, ruler of Amber in the first quarter of the 15th century. But I don’t know whether it is the place referred to in the Salemabad document.

Bīsapanthī sub-sect of the Digambara Jaina²⁹. By signing the document all of them indicated that they complied with its clause that the abbot of Salemabad was the “master of the sect of Nimbārka”. But as we are going to see they had also their own reasons to sign it.

2. Rules of inheritance within lineages of spiritual succession

Besides registering the eminent position of the abbot of Salemabad the document stated the rules of inheritance followed by those of the kingdom who were “in robe” (*bheṣa*). I am going to take a close look at these now. The problem of whether these rules were related to the previous issue will occupy us in the last section of this paper.

Members of different religious groups distinguish themselves by their external appearance, by the shape of their dress or by the texture and colour of its material, by their hair-style, bodily-marks, etc.: all of which constitute their *bheṣa*³⁰. The notion has to be taken in a metaphorical way: it implies not just the dress, but all the practices and rules characterizing a particular religious way of life. Moreover it has a definite *monastic* connotation. For example, among the Nāthapanthin yogīs, the organization called “*bhek bārah panth*” is composed by the representatives of their twelve monastic lineages; it has supervision over the monasteries and is consulted at the time of election (and deposition) of the monastic abbot³¹. Among the Bauls who usually have three different gurus, the *bekh guru* [sic] is the one who gives the renunciation robe and ushers the disciple into the monastic life style³². Among the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal, the ascetics are called *bhekadhārī*³³. Another interesting evidence comes from the Hindu Code of Nepal promulgated in 1854. In this Code which attempted the very first classification of the groups constituent of the Nepali society, the expression “*bheṣadhārī*” was used for “ascetics”³⁴. By contrast, the term “*grhastha*” applied to the householders of the

²⁹ See note 68. On Sukhendrakīrti of the Delhi-Jaipur śākhā of the Balātkārā-gaṇa, see Jain 1975: 98. According to him, the seat was transferred from Delhi to Nagaur, and to Jaipur ca. 1765, where it remained. Sukhendrakīrti was apparently inaugurated in 1795, his successor Narendrakīrti in 1823. I am grateful to Peter Flügel for this information.

³⁰Modern Hindi *bhesa*: appearance; likeness; dress; disguise (McGregor 1993); Sanskrit *veṣa*: dress, apparel, ornament, artificial exterior, assumed appearance (Monier-Williams 1899 [1976]. It is pronounced *bhekha* in Rajasthani and other dialects where the phoneme “kh” is noted “ṣ” (k is a corruption, so that one also finds the form *bhek*).

³¹ Briggs 1933: 35; “*bhek bārah panth*” can be translated as “the twelve lineages wearing the monastic robe”; but note that Briggs takes “*bhek*” as the name of the *consultative body* itself. The same meaning is found in modern judgments involving *monasteries*, see, for example, Varadachari 1968 : 102-103. The signification is obvious : an assembly of people “in *bheṣa*” comes to be known as a *bheṣa*.

³² Openshaw 1998: 4.

³³ Chakrabarty 1985 : 317; they enter the monastic order following the procedure outlined in the *veṣāśrayavidhīh*, “rules for taking refuge in the robe” (Chakrabarty 1985 : 316).

³⁴ Bouillier 1978; Höfer 1979.

different castes. Moreover the so-called “*bheṣadhārī*” were said to be of two kinds: “*maṭhadhārī*” or living in a monastery and “*gharabārī*” or maintaining a house. A clear distinction was thus made in the Code between *ascetics* who though married (*gharabārī*) were (as ascetics) outside the caste system and *householders* (*gr̥hastha*) who were still part of it.

All these occurrences are helpful to understand that the word *bheṣa* was used in a technical (juridical) sense in the royal document of Salemabad. The Nepali Code in particular makes one aware of its juridical implications. It shows that, in the 19th century, an ascetic « living in a house » was not to be mixed up with a “householder” in the strict sense of the word. The Code was actually very consistent in stressing that though married, a “*bheṣadhārī*” ascetic was a person who had left the second *āśrama*³⁵. This draws one’s attention to the fact that a lot of confusion arises from the indiscriminate use of the term “householder” (and “*gr̥hastha*”) to qualify both types of married states³⁶. As we are going to see, the difference was of considerable import when it came to legal provisions such as the rights of inheritance.

In the document of Salemabad “*bheṣa*” was applied broadly to members of three large religious groups (literally “paths”, *mārga*), Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Jaina, who were either celibate ascetics, married ascetics or married custodians of temples and who all differed from “ordinary” householders by their life style, customs and costumes. In the Jaipur state administrative documents, these three types of religious specialists were classified into two categories: the “*svāmīs*”, who headed a monastic establishment (*maṭha*), and the “*gosvāmīs*” (*gosāī*), who were in charge of a temple (*mandira*)³⁷. Their common characteristic was to belong to lineages of

³⁵ Thus the Code forbade a “*bheṣadhārī*” to celebrate the ceremony of *upanayana* because he had given up the householder stage of life (Bouillier 1978 : 139). The expression *gharabhārī* (with bh) -from *gharabhāra*, the house and domestic space-, is also found in India for married *saṃnyāsīn*. See Bouillier 1979 : 195, quoting J. Warden who wrote in 1827 ; see also Kane 1941 [1974] : 952.

³⁶ The indiscriminate use of the word “*gr̥hastha*” (lay householder), for married ascetics prevails not only in the works of anthropologists or historians, it is to be found in the Indian society itself. In common parlance it usually has a derogatory implication (a clear indication that marriage is usually held to be contradictory with asceticism). It should be observed that a lot of confusion arises also from the fact that it is not readily obvious to know whether one is dealing with a regular “house dwelling” ascetic (belonging to a hereditary monastic lineage), or with an ascetic who leads a marital life though he belongs to a strictly ascetic lineage.

³⁷ See TDK 7 (*gosāī*) and 34 (*svāmī*). Besides these two, there was the third category of “*brāhmaṇa*” (TDK 26), i.e. the scholars and ritualists. The TDK or registers of protocol (*dastūr*) recorded the ceremonies of investiture for each of these three different categories of religious specialists. A lot of details regarding the activities of the *svāmīs* and *gosvāmīs* was also recorded in the registers of the temples’ protocol (*thākuraḍvārā*). Since in those registers it was not relevant whether one was a “*svāmī*” or a “*gosvāmī*” (because monastic establishments too owned temples) no distinction was made there between the two statuses. It should also be kept in mind that there was a constant confusion between the current religious titles. Thus in the 18th and 19th centuries, the title *gosvāmī* was used for a number of religious authorities

spiritual succession in which the religious authority was transmitted from guru to disciple (*celā*), even when, as it happened, the disciple was at the same time the son of the said guru. As will become even clearer as I proceed, it is precisely this notion of spiritual descent (as distinct from biological descent) that the word *bheṣa* implied.

What, then, were the rules of inheritance prevailing among the ten signatories? The document of Salemabad outlined them in three main points. Firstly, anyone wearing a religious robe fell under the jurisdiction of the “master of a seat”. Secondly, at his death his belongings were transmitted to one of his disciples (*celā*) or co-disciples (*guru-bhai*) under the supervision of the “master of the seat”. Thus the extent of the latter’s jurisdiction was clearly defined: he supervised the devolution of property of those who were subordinated to his lineage; he was to inherit their property if they had no heir or if their heir was not worthy of his charge. But who was called “master of the seat”? It is at first a matter of some confusion for the reader that the document of Salemabad should use two different expressions that can both be translated as “master of the seat”: “*gādī kā dhaṇī*” and “*gādī kā mālik*”. Moreover it defines only the first expression. The *dhaṇī*, it says, is the man in charge of a consecrated seat (line 4) who wears the consecrated robe (line 7). That is to say he is the person who has been duly invested as the main authority of the said seat. But “*mālik*” is not explained. And one can rightly wonder whether the expression “the consecrated master (*mālik*) of the seat” (line 9) that follows³⁸ refers to the one and same person as *dhaṇī*. The fact that *it does* is established beyond doubt by the Persian version of the document which renders “*ḥikāī gādī kā dhaṇī*” by “*mālik gaddivālā*”. The master (*dhaṇī*) of the consecrated seat is the master (*mālik*) of the seat. It is therefore clear that both *dhaṇī* and *mālik* designate the highest authority of a particular lineage of spiritual succession. What the first two main points of the document stress, then, is that in case of escheat nobody else was entitled to inherit beside this man. Because, and this was its third and last main point, those who had “taken refuge in a robe” had “given up the householder stage”: their family could not claim their property after their death and they themselves had lost their right over their family’s belongings.

I will return later to the form of sectarian organization that these statements reflected. Let us concentrate here on their import regarding renouncers’ patrimony.

The first thing to be noted is that their provisions were in keeping with Hindu religious Law. The *dharmaśāstra* does not forbid members of the fourth *āśrama* (*saṃnyāsīn*) to own property. In this respect it sets forth two principles which have to be distinguished. - 1. By entering the fourth *āśrama* a man renounces his householder property and loses any claim on

(see Pinch 1996: 43-45; for Rajasthan, Clémentin-Ojha 1999 : 162). At that time, for example, the abbot of Salemabad was both referred to as “*śrījī mahantā*” and as “*gosvāmī*”; and he used this last title for himself in all his correspondence with the rulers of Jaipur.

³⁸ *ḥikāī mālik gadī kau*. Note the two spellings for the word “seat” (*gadī, gādī*) ; modern Hindi has *gaddī*.

his family inheritance³⁹; he can recover neither of them even if he gives up his monastic way of life⁴⁰. - 2. The property of a renouncer is transmitted to his disciples and not to his family members⁴¹. According to the first principle, then, "renouncing the world" has the same consequences as death since it breaks all ties with family and caste. But according to the second principle, one does not lose thereby one's right to own nor one's right to inherit the property of another ascetic⁴². There is still life after civil death... even if hereafter spiritual ties prevail over family ties.

These principles of Hindu religious law were widely accepted in the 19th century as evidenced by one of the earliest judgments pronounced in a case of monastic succession by a British court. Though it came half a century after the document of Salemabad, it is still relevant to our subject since it reflected indigenous rules and customs which, as is well-known, the British had striven to retain even if they had adapted them:

"A preceptor of religious doctrine gathers around him a number of disciples whom he initiates into the particular mysteries of the order, and instructs in its religious tenets. Such of these disciples as intend to become religious teachers, renounce their connection with their family and all claims to the family wealth, and, as it were, affiliate themselves to the spiritual teacher whose school they have entered. Pious persons endow the schools with property which is vested in the preceptor for the time being, and a home for the school is erected and a *matam* [read *matha*] constituted. The property of the *matam* does not descend to the disciples or elders in common; the preceptor, the head of the institution, selects among the affiliated disciples him whom he deems the most competent, and in his own life-time installs the disciple so selected as his successor, not uncommonly with some ceremonies. After the death of the preceptor, the disciple so chosen is installed in the gaddi, and takes by succession the property which has been held by his predecessor"⁴³.

What this judgment also implied was that the patrimony of a lineage of spiritual succession could never be divided. This principle was opposed to the rule of repartition of inheritance generally applied by the *dharmasāstra* to family property (though it also recognized

³⁹ Kane 1941 [1974] : 951-952; see also see Derrett 1977 : 30, 31-32.

⁴⁰ Unlike the Buddhist monk of ancient India, see Lingat 1937 : 432.

⁴¹ The same principle was adopted by the Buddhist *saṅgha*; except that the inheritance of a monk included also the property that he had owned while he was a lay man, see Lingat 1937 : 443 sq; Gernet 1956 : 72-74.

⁴² Kane 1941 [1974] : 952; Lingat 1937 : 444; Derrett 1977 : 38-39.

⁴³ Aiyar 1953 : 916-917.

the undivided transmission to the elder son)⁴⁴. The “statement of facts” of Salemabad reflected the very same principle of the indivisibility of religious patrimony.

Now the question to ask is what was the point in reiterating these principles if they were well-known? Either they were totally unheard of in Jaipur and in this case the document of Salemabad reflected a policy of brahmanization, but this is unlikely. Or, as I am inclined to think, the presence of the British made their implementation problematic. However before addressing this question it is important to understand thoroughly what the provisions regarding renouncers’ property would have implied for those ascetic signatories who happen to belong to *hereditary* lineages.

Paradoxical at first, their situation becomes clear if one keeps in mind the fact that their lineages had been *founded* by an (unmarried) ascetic but had become hereditary by the time the document was drafted. Such for example was the case with the “*gosvāmī*” of the temple of Rādhādāmodara⁴⁵ and with the “*svāmī*” of the Rāmānandī monastic establishment of Galta⁴⁶. In their lineages, it was usually *the son* of the “master of the seat” who took over at the death of his father; sometimes it was the brother or the nephew of the incumbent; adopted son was also a possibility⁴⁷. But in order to be juridically legitimate the successor *had to be an initiated disciple* of the former incumbent whether the relationship of the two was of blood or by adoption⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ See Lingat 1973 : 61-62.

⁴⁵ His lineage, started by the ascetic Jīva Gosvāmī, had become hereditary after the third generation (therefore much before the reign of Jayasiṃha II, see further), personal communication of Gosvāmī Moni Mohana, Jaipur 1990; see also Entwistle 1987 : 166.

⁴⁶ His lineage, founded by the ascetic Kṛṣṇadāsa Payohāri in the 16th century, had become hereditary in the 18th century following the reform policy of Jayasiṃha II, see further.

⁴⁷ See TDK 34 (*svāmī*). For example, in 1828 (VS 1885), two months after the death of Sītārāma of Galta, his brother’s son Hariprasāda, was appointed by the palace to succeed him, he had to pay 42,000 Rs of dues (*peśkaś*, TDK 34, VS 1885 *caitra śukla* 9). Then in 1876 (VS 1933), Hariprasāda died ; as “he had no descendant (*santan*) so during his life time he had a bond (*kurathā* [sic]) done in favor of his daughter’s son and had made it known to the maharaja” (TDK 34, VS 1933 *kartika kṛṣṇa* 11).

⁴⁸ For the Rāmānandī, see Horstmann 2002 :170. Another evidence comes from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava temple of Govindadeva (though its custodian didn’t sign the document; for the likely reason see note 26). According to a judgment concerning its management passed in 1958, the devolution of “shebhaitship” descended from “guru to chela” until the marriage of Jagannatha (in the 18th century), then it followed the rule of primogeniture: the property devolved on “the eldest son [...] as chela and if the shebait died without issue, then the next senior brother of the deceased succeeded as Guru Bhai”, see *Thakur Govind Deoji Maharaj versus Sudha Chandra and others*, p. 4-5). It is therefore implied that from the beginning the transmission was understood in terms of spiritual relationship (*celā, gurubhāī*); however once the lineage of spiritual succession had become hereditary, it was either the eldest son who qualified to be the successor or the next senior brother. Such a system also admitted adopted son. But it ruled out any division of inheritance: the property was to pass to “single heir and not to all members of the family who might have been heirs of the last shebait under the personal law” (ibid., p. 35).

In a juridical context, “son” and “disciple” are two distinct categories corresponding to two different sets of rights and prerogatives. But in such lineages, when it came to inheritance the son had to be a disciple in order to succeed on the lineage seat. As a son, he would have to celebrate the funeral rites of his father according to the principles of the *gṛhastha āśrama*; as a disciple, he abided by the rules of inheritance set forth by the Hindu religious law for the fourth *āśrama*. It might well have happened that in such lineages caste and family interests became inextricably mixed up with religious ones⁴⁹. The numerous suits involving monasteries and temples in the late 19th and early 20th centuries testify that there was a lot of confusion at the time of succession. Things were even more complex as, in some cases, the rights of succession of religious lineages did indeed pass by inheritance to the *natural* heir⁵⁰ and *not* to someone defined as “disciple”! This is the reason why again and again the jurisprudence stressed that there was no general regulation in these matters; the *custom* of the establishment was all important to settle the devolution of the rights. We see the signatories of the document of Salemabad emphasizing exactly the same point in their endorsement.

All this shows that by *stating facts* the document of Salemabad would not have been superfluous at all. It registered that the heads of the hereditary lineages who signed it recognized thereby that they could not treat their religious property as family property since according to their own age-old custom the rules of inheritance prevailing in the second *āśrama* did not apply to them. Since “they wore the robe”, their property could not go to their natural-born heirs but devolved to their disciples. Their property had to be transmitted undivided. For the purpose of inheritance, ascetics, married ascetics and married custodian of temples all fell within the one and same category.

3. The power to control wealth

The “master of the seat”, then, was one who had been officially recognized as the head of a main lineage of succession, invested with the robe of authority (*ṭīkāī bheṣa*) and enthroned on the *gaddī* of his lineage in the presence of the ruler himself⁵¹. Each sect had its own rules of investiture but in every case the successor received a *ṭīkā* on the forehead and was wrapped in a shawl. On the occasion, he had to pay dues (*peśkaś*) to the state administration which were calculated on the basis of the extent of the revenues of his establishment. It therefore varied from lineage to lineage. There are indications that given the particular nature⁵² of their holdings

⁴⁹ Véronique Bouillier has written extensively about the incertitude resulting from this type of situation; for a recent study in English, see her paper of 1998.

⁵⁰ Aiyar 1953 : 94 ; Varadachari 1968 : 104, 141.

⁵¹ In the contemporary royal documents of Jaipur, one comes often across expressions meaning that the ruler “had installed the successor on the seat”, had “made him sit”.

⁵² For example, in this system, the dues applying to grants made after a religious vow (*puni udik*) amounted to half the ordinary rate, see Horstmann 1999 : 37 and also Clémentin-Ojha 1999 : 60; both

some lineages were altogether exempted from payment of dues at the time of *mātamī*. This was the case of the Nāthapanthins, among others⁵³. Such exemptions of celibate ascetics raise the question whether hereditary lineages were not subjected to heavier taxes and therefore were not more « profitable » to the state than the strictly ascetic lineages. But more investigation than is possible here would be required to answer that question.

In fact we do not as yet possess a clear idea of the history of the rights of inheritance prevailing among the religious groups settled in the kingdom of Jaipur. It seems that during the Mughal period, the property of ascetics was confiscated after their death. In the 18th century, Jayasiṃha II denounced that practice and pleaded with the Mughal authority to discontinue it. In 1721 the latter agreed that “sanyasis, jains and muslim fakirs” be allowed to inherit the property of their guru. The decision was not limited to Jaipur, it received a wide circulation in the Mughal empire as evidenced by the fact that the text of the Mughal parvana was sent to Ajmer, Mathura, Lahore, Haridvar, Agra, Benares, Patna, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Surat and to other places⁵⁴. Thus it appears that under the influence of Jayasiṃha II the rights of inheritance of the ascetics living in the Mughal empire were recognized.

But the same Jayasiṃha II enforced a policy of marriage among ascetics. He induced them to live “the life of a householder”⁵⁵ or, to maintain the distinction made above, to become “house-dwelling” ascetics. His aim might have been to regulate their social conduct and to spread the Brahmanical norms of the *varṇāśramadharmā* among them. But it was nevertheless

quote a modern Office note used by the state administration of Jaipur in the 1930s (“Definitions of important vernacular terms”, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner). According to the same document, the amount of dues was doubled in case of adoption.

⁵³ “Definitions of important vernacular terms”, p. 9 (see above note).

⁵⁴ “ Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh has recommended that the properties of bairagis, jains and *sanyasis* and other Hindu mendicants as well as Muslim *fakirs* are escheated by the government officials immediately after their death . In the circumstances their dead bodies are not disposed of for two or three days. This practice may kindly be ordered to be stopped. It is, therefore, ordered by the Emperor that the properties of the *sanyasis* and *fakirs*, etc. should not escheated or interfered with on their death.” See Bahura and Singh 1988 : 41-42, n° 271; see also n° 354-376. The document implied that if ascetics were allowed to pass on their property then their successors would be... interested in organizing their funeral rites (in keeping with the Hindu rule that the mourner is the heir). Another and larger implication of this policy concerned the redefinition of the prevailing law of escheat. According to Muslim law royal claim of succession prevailed in case one died without heir. Hence the treatment of ascetics. According to Brahmanic law too the king was the universal heir (Lingat 1973 : 62, 220; Derrett 1977 : 41); except in the case of Brahmans (see Manu, IX. 189), whose belongings were to go to other (pious) Brahmans (see Manu IX. 188), for it was “axiomatic in the *dharmasāstra* that a king should not take, or if he took should not keep, the property of a Brahman” (Derrett 1977 : 48).

⁵⁵ Entwistle 1987 : 191. See also Bahura 1979 : 84, verse 89 (with comments p. 108). For an older example of a similar type of policy, see Derrett 1976.

a blatant case of infringement upon the internal organization of the interested religious parties. For, theoretically, the ruler's role was only *to confirm* the successor of an autonomous religious lineage, not *to select* him; the latter responsibility rested with the guru or co-disciples, depending upon the prevailing customs of the group, and the decision was honored by the political authority. However the ruler could *remove* a religious chief from his office. For example in 1843 the ruling abbot of Salemabad, an ascetic called Rāmagopālaśaraṇa, would be forcibly dismissed by the palace and Gopeśvaraśaraṇa, an ascetic too, officially installed in his place⁵⁶. But principles were one thing and religious policies another. In reality, the palace exercised control over religious establishments and it kept interfering with the rules of succession of their authorities. It was during Jayasiṃha II's reign that the Rāmānandī abbot of Galta was coerced into marriage and that his monastic lineage became hereditary⁵⁷. As Monika Horstmann has shown this policy did not alter the privileged relationship between the palace and the abbot of the monastic establishment of Galta nor diminish the latter's influence as custodian of Sītārāma, the tutelary deity of Jaipur. However Galta was a huge landed estate and transforming an ascetic lineage into an hereditary one might have had some legal and fiscal consequences that, at the time of succession, were more advantageous to the state administration than to the custodians of Galta themselves. But in the absence of documentation this remains a matter of mere conjecture.

However there is some evidence that the move of Jayasiṃha II to have the ascetics of his kingdom married was not agreeable to them and was met with strong opposition. What is all the more interesting is that this evidence takes us back to the Nimbārkīs of Salemabad. The monastery of Salemabad battled with the palace on the issue of the marriage of its abbot for twenty-five years and won the case in the end. I reconstruct the episode partly from contemporary Jaipur administrative records and partly from the data gathered by the Nimbārkī ascetic Brajavallabhaśaraṇa Vedāntācārya⁵⁸, who devoted his life to writing the history of his sect. Though his concerns and methodology were not those of an historian, his findings prove useful once carefully confronted with other sources.

⁵⁶ "*Mahanta* [Rāma]Gopālaśaraṇa of Salemabad didn't appoint [Gopeśvaraśaraṇa] his successor so the *darbār* appointed him" (TDK 34, VS 1900, *pauṣa śukla*. 8 and VS 1900 [for 1901] *caitra śukla*. 12). The reasons for the destitution of the abbot of Salemabad remain obscure but they must have been sufficiently embarrassing for the monastery because Gopālaśaraṇa's name has been altogether erased from the lineage of spiritual succession. The register of protocol also recorded that the ceremony of investiture of Gopeśvaraśaraṇa was performed in the presence of the young maharaja (Rāmasiṃha II), then 10 years old, and that the new abbot had to pay a tax of succession (*peśkaś*) amounting to Rs 20,000. Let it be noted in passing that only 8 years before, after the demise of Nimbārkaśaraṇa, his successor Virajarājaśaraṇa, had to pay half of that amount (TDK 34, VS 1892, *caitra śukla*. 4).

⁵⁷ Horstmann 2002 : 160-165.

⁵⁸ See note 3.

According to Brajavallabhaśaraṇa Vedāntācārya, then, it is recorded in the royal chronicle of Kishangadh (*Kiśaṅgadh rājya tavārīkh*) that in summer 1740 (VS 1797 *Bhādrapada kṛṣṇa* 6), Jayarāma Seṣa was appointed abbot of Salemabad following the death of Vṛndāvanadeva (the theological counselor of Jayasiṃha II)⁵⁹. The ceremony of investiture was organized at a military camp set at Merta by Savantsiṃha (alias the poet Nagaridāsa), ruler of Kishangadh, in the presence of the rulers of Jaipur, Bikaner and of smaller Rajput states such as Jalor, Nagor and others⁶⁰. Jayarāma Seṣa was a learned Maharashtrian Brahman and a disciple of Vṛndāvanadeva. But the Nimbārki ascetics never allowed him to enter the precincts of the monastery of Salemabad “because he was a householder”. So he resided either at Kishangadh or at Jaipur. At his death a new dispute arose between those who wanted his son Mathurādāsa to succeed him and others who favored instead an ascetic. It went on till 1765 (VS 1822) when finally the ruler of Kishangadh officially recognized an ascetic as the abbot of Salemabad.

The Jaipur state archives show that Jayasiṃha II and his successors gave their support to the policy of making the lineage of Salemabad hereditary⁶¹. They record that in autumn 1740 (VS 1797 *āśvina* b. 10), Jayasiṃha II paid a visit to “Jayarāma the *mahanta* of Salemabad at Merta”. Ten years later in 1750 (VS 1807 *āśvina* b. 3), under the rule of Mādhvasiṃha I, they record a ceremony of succession, unfortunately without details so one does not know whether the new abbot was a celibate ascetic or a householder. But in 1771 (VS 1828), during the time

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Sharad Chandra Ojha for allowing me to use his notes from the unpublished papers of Brajavallabhaśaraṇa Vedāntācārya kept at Śrījī kī bāḍī kuñj, Vrindaban. Rasikaśaraṇa is also to be thanked for making the documents available after the demise of his predecessor. For similar accounts of the same episode in print, see *Śrī Nimbārka aura unkā sampradāya* : 237, 262, 281, 308.

⁶⁰ The absence of Jodhpur (Marwar) in this list is not to be overlooked considering the fact that in May 1741, a few months after the Merta gathering, Jaipur and Jodhpur and their respective allies fought the disastrous war of Gangwana (11 miles to the north-east of the lake of Pushkar). The whole episode and its background are described by Tod 1920 [1971] : 1047-1052. See also Sarkar 1932 [1988 : 139-140]. In a nutshell : Jayasiṃha II of Jaipur had been induced by Bhaktasiṃha of Nagor to come to the help of Bikaner, besieged by Jodhpur, its arch rival ; though Bikaner was freed, Jayasiṃha II suffered a major setback at Gangwana at the hands of Abhayasiṃha of Jodhpur and of ...Bhaktasiṃha, who meanwhile had changed his mind (he was the brother of the former). Both Kishangarh and Bikaner were independent branches of Marwar. The purpose of the military camp of Merta might have been to prepare the encounter with Jodhpur. This was a time when not engaged in their petty rivalries the same regional powers were considering forming an alliance to safeguard their independence from the Marathas. The episode of Merta, which witnessed the revolution affecting the monastery of Salemabad, was itself caught between two larger historical processes: the decline of the Mughal empire and the ascendancy of the Marathas in North India. But, as we also know, the Rajputs finally failed to unite: soon after the battle of May 1741, they were engulfed into the bitter fratricidal war that arose between the two sons of Jayasiṃha II after the latter's death in 1743.

⁶¹ TDK 34 (*svāmī*).

of Pṛthvīsiṃha, they record that the abbot of Salemabad was an ascetic called Govindadeva⁶². At long last the ascetics had won their case.

One has therefore to lend some credit to Brajavallabhaśaraṇa Vedāntācārya's account of the disputed succession of Vṛndāvanadevācārya as the Jaipur administrative records do confirm that he was officially replaced by a householder named Jayarāma Seṣa (also called Jayarāmadāsa) but that decades later the transmission among ascetics was reestablished.

In 1822 then, by registering the right of celibate ascetics to transmit their patrimony to their celibate ascetic disciples, the document of Salemabad confirmed that the palace had given up the policy of "secularization" favored by Jayasiṃha II some 80 years earlier. As we have just seen this policy had already been abandoned for some decades, so in reality the document proclaimed nothing new in this matter. I have shown that it was equally non-innovative in matters of inheritance. It in fact reflected established shastric principles and religious practices that had been traditionally followed in Jaipur. It is all this that leads me to think that the necessity to leave a record of the state of things did respond to the presence of the British who as newcomers would not have been acquainted with them.

In 1822, it had been only one year since the East India Company had appointed its first Political Agent in Jaipur. Understandably he would have required an objective description of current customs and institutions. As is known the British wanted to govern India by Indian principles, particularly in relation to personal law. Laws of property and inheritance were such institutions for which they thought particularly fit to respect local customs and practices.

In such a context the initiative of drafting the document of Salemabad could have come from the British. But it could also have come from the signatories themselves. When it came to assert their rights vis-à-vis the secular power the different sectarian traditions could unite and forget their rivalries and competition for royal patronage. Their aim would have been to urge the Jaipur state to apprise the British of their internal organization and established practices so that the latter may not engage in a policy that was contrary to their interests. Something similar had taken place in October 1806 when, soon after the advent of the British rule in Braj, the custodian of the temple of Govindadeva in Vrindaban wrote to the state administration of Jaipur under whose jurisdiction his temple fell. He solicited the assurance that the land revenues that he had been allowed to collect for the Jaipur crown would not lapse to the British revenue authority: "now the Sahib exercises the right to collect revenue in Mathura and Vrindaban. Therefore send a bond confirming that the right to collect revenue on all these items lies with His Highness and that as long as the foreigners exercise their revenue authority they must not interfere [with that right]⁶³. As the colonial power attempted to define its policy of taxation it was

⁶² He was succeeded by Govindaśaraṇa, the first abbot of Salemabad to be addressed by the title of "śṛī". His disciple Sarveśvaraśaraṇa ruled after him (from 1784 to 1822); he was himself replaced by Nimbārkaśaraṇa, who signed the document under scrutiny.

⁶³ Horstmann 1999 : 27-28, 334-336.

the rights regarding landed properties that were most affected by its presence. In this respect the East India Company had introduced by 1820 a series of regulations on all territories it directly administered⁶⁴. Though according to the treaty of 1818 the East India Company was not supposed to interfere with the fiscal or other internal affairs of Jaipur, in reality, as James Tod observed, it kept a close eye on the administration of its revenues since the regular payment of the tribute depended on the kingdom's solvability. It is therefore not unlikely that in such a context the local religious establishments feared that their property might be confiscated or unduly taxed.

But whether the initiative rested with the British or with the ten signatories the document of Salemabad gave assurance to the latter that the wealth accumulated by their lineage would continue to pass on to their successors. So it is clear that they had some very good reasons to sign it. At the same time, they recognized that the abbot of Salemabad was the highest authority of the Nimbārkīs. What did that statement mean actually?

4. The power to command

The document introduced the signatories as members of three different religious "paths" (*mārga*), Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Jaina, belonging to "Six Systems" (*ṣaṭdarśana*). The Vaiṣṇava group was further said to comprise "Four Sects" (*catuḥ sampradāya*).

"Six Systems" is a curious designation. Obviously an echo of the intellectual classification of the totality of orthodox systems of philosophy in six (and only six) schools, it seems to have acquired a different meaning for the purpose of state administrative machinery; but how and when is unknown. In fact I have not seen the expression being used in this technical sense in any historical records of Jaipur⁶⁵. But I have found it in Udaipur. At the beginning of the 19th century (and till independence) the official in charge of the protocol of religious affairs in the Śisodiya kingdom of Mewar was called *ṣaṭdarśana dārogā*, superintendent of the "Six Systems". His charge was hereditary. His descendant, who till recently kept (at his home) all the documents written by his forefathers and has acquired a good knowledge of their content, told me that the "Six Systems included all the Hindu sects, the Jainas and the Muslims"⁶⁶. If this proves that from the point of view of the state administration of religious affairs it was not relevant to distinguish between "Hindus" and "non Hindus", it does not provide any clue

⁶⁴ Bayly 1983 : 319-321, 328.

⁶⁵ However the expression is found associated with the militant branch of the Rāmānandīs of Jaipur. The Bālānandī abbot bears the title of "*ṣaṭdarśana śāhṃśāh*" (king of kings of the six systems) which is said to have been bestowed by the Mughals to one of his predecessors.

⁶⁶ Vishnu Shankar Bhatt, Udaipur, September 2001. The documents are now in the custody of the State Archives of Udaipur. The same point was made by Śyāmalādāsa 1886 [1986] : 137; he further stated that all those who belonged to the *ṣaṭdarśana* were exempted from taxes (*muāphī*).

unfortunately as to the origin of the designation used by the Sīsodiyā and the Kachavāhā kingdoms.

With the label “Four Sect” we are not on much safer ground. The exact history of this loose federation of Vaiṣṇava sects is yet to be written though it is known that its formation owed much to the religious policy of unification ushered by Jayasimha II of Jaipur⁶⁷. The unification of the Vaiṣṇavas was realized in three spheres: - 1. Theological matters (all the sects concerned followed one form or another of theistic Vedānta); - 2. Rules of social conduct (all the sects claimed to respect the *varṇāśramadharmā*); - 3. Organization of a coordinated body of militant ascetics (*nāgā*). In this threefold manner the federation called “Four Sects” became the repository of Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy and orthopraxy in North India but its contours remained vague and the list of sects claiming to be affiliated with it varied from area to area. At the same time each of these sects maintained its separate identity.

As we have seen, out of the ten signatories eight belonged to the “Four Sects” (being either Nimbārkīs, Rāmānandīs or Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas). The other two signatories belonged to the Śaiva and Jaina groups. But it is worthy of notice that only the abbot of Salemabad, the Nātha yogī and the Jaina Bhaṭṭāraka⁶⁸ stated their sect’s name. In order to know the sectarian affiliation of the other signatories we have to rely on external evidence. Let me illustrate my point with the Rāmānandīs before expanding its implication for an understanding of intra-sectarian relationship.

The three Rāmānandī signatories were the chiefs of three different monastic lineages of spiritual succession based respectively at Galta (on the outskirts of Jaipur), at the Bālānandī establishment (inside the city) and at the village of Raivasa⁶⁹. The first two merely introduced themselves as “being protected” by their tutelary deity (Sītārāma) while the third also mentioned the name of his village (Raivasa). None provided any information as to his relative position in respect to the other two lineages or *within the Rāmānandī sect as a whole*. All we are told is that : - 1. Each of them had a deity at the roots of his power; - 2. Each of them attested that the facts stated in the document complied with the custom of his particular sect (*sampradāya*); and he did so *as the head of a particular lineage* of that sect.

⁶⁷ Entwistle 1987 : 191-194.

⁶⁸ Instead of *sampradāya* the Jaina signatory used the synonym *amnāya*. A Bhaṭṭāraka was the chief of a *gaccha*, a division of Digambara Bīsapanthī corresponding to a geographical region. He was chosen from a certain caste and enjoyed both a religious and secular authority over its members. In the 19th century, a Bhaṭṭāraka was a hybrid between lay (*śrāvaka*) and ascetic (*sādhu*) : he was above the lay members of the group but inferior to the ascetics ; he owned property and lived in a house but was a celibate, see Sangave 1981: 67 (I am thankful to Marie-Claude Mahias for this reference). The Bhaṭṭāraka system prevailed in Delhi area, in North-West India (Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra), and in Karnataka and the Tamil country. In 1981, there remained only 11 seats of Bhaṭṭāraka (Sangave 1981: 63). But in the 19th century the institution was still prosperous.

⁶⁹ See note 25.

Each signatories was the “master of a seat”, whose jurisdiction, extending “up to the land bordering the sea”, encompassed persons “wearing the robe” who, in turn, had their own disciples. In effect, therefore, the document pertained to the rights of inheritance prevailing at the level of those robe-wearing persons and not at the higher level of the main lineage, whose rules of succession were supervised by the local ruler himself, as we have seen. The general picture we get from the Salemabad document then, is that there coexisted in the kingdom of Jaipur several autonomous lineages of spiritual transmission, each divided into sub-lineages. All fitted into a multi-tiered religious configuration or composite whole called “Six Systems”, comprising three groups, Śaiva, Jaina and Vaiṣṇava (the latter encompassing “Four Sects”). In all that the intermediary unit of the “sect” was not mentioned. Except in the case of the Nimbārkīs.

I think we are now in a position to understand that the royal document gave Nimbārkaśaraṇa a status altogether different from the one he had enjoyed before. As abbot of Salemabad, his rights had been the same as those possessed by the other heads of autonomous sectarian lineages. There were: - 1. The right to supervise the devolution of succession of sub-lineages subordinated to Salemabad; - 2. The right to inherit their property in case of escheat. But as the “master of the sect of Nimbārka”, he was further recognized direct jurisdiction *over the whole sampradāya*. This implied that the sect of Nimbārka possessed a central seat of authority.

Judging from what one observes in contemporary India, seats of autonomous sectarian lineages are easier to come by than seats of entire *sampradāya*. In fact most Hindu sects appear to be very loose federations of autonomous lineages of spiritual succession claiming descent from the same founder and following (theoretically at least) the same doctrines and rules of conduct. There exist different consultative bodies (*pañc*, etc.) that take decisions of common interest to all lineages of a sect⁷⁰ but there is no such thing as an overall coordination vested in a permanent body or institutionalized authority for say all the Rāmānandīs⁷¹, all the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavas or all the Daśanāmīs⁷². Instead we find that the different lineages of these sects enjoy a great autonomy in financial, religious and disciplinary matters.

There is no reason to believe that things were very different at the beginning of the 19th century. Therefore whether or not the formulation that “Śrījī” was the main religious authority of

⁷⁰ The huge gatherings of ascetics of the Kumbha melās offer an occasion for such consultations. In Jaipur, the state also used to take the initiative to organize such gatherings before independence. For example, in 1820 (VS 1877), it had the “Four Sects” gather in Jaipur to honour Nimbārkaśaraṇa, see *Śrījayasāhasujasa-prakāśa*, p. 19 ff.

⁷¹ Pinch (1996:80-81) remarks that despite the existence of the office of *jagadguru* (universal master) among contemporary Rāmānandīs, “the sampradāya still does not constitute an ecclesiastical monolith with one group of religious leaders dictating religious opinion for the rank and file to follow”.

⁷² For a very apposite study of the loose monastic structure of the Dāṇḍī samnyāsīs, see Sawyer (1998).

his *sampradāya* was overblown, it reflected a concern for sectarian centralization that was not found in other groups. And whether or not the abbot of Salemabad was in a position to enforce his power of command over all the lineages of his sect, the political authority had decided to legitimate his claim. The other sectarian groups had little choice but to back that claim and oblige the state of Jaipur with their signatures in order to have their own rights officially recognized and thereby to further their own interests.

Conclusion

The royal document kept at the Nimbārki monastery of Salemabad shows how religious groups relied on political power to establish their legitimacy and were accountable to the political authority in a number of ways. It throws light on the type of relationship that prevailed between Hindu kingship and religious authorities in the early 19th century, at a time when the British had only started inserting themselves in the affairs of the kingdom and had not yet upset its traditional system. But it was probably their very presence that prompted the state administration to draft a document that gave an objective description of current customs and institutions existing among religious establishments and at the same time assured their custodians that the newcomers would not infringe on their traditional rights.

The document affords evidence of the essentially fragmentary nature of the sectarian traditions. It shows that the political authority dealt directly with chiefs of autonomous sectarian lineages not with chiefs of whole sects. It also shows that there was a religious chain of command that went from the ruler to the last disciple of a sub-lineage. While the ruler exercised his authority on the main lineage, the latter's chief, the so-called "master of the seat", exercised his on the sub-lineages. The ruler's agreement was required to appoint the "master of the seat" and he had the power to remove him from office; for his part, the "master of the seat" had the power to dismiss whosoever he had recognized as a successor of a sub-lineage. The ruler not only acknowledged his control over his sub-lineages, he guaranteed that there would be no endless splitting of the latter's patrimony and that their members would comply with the rule of undivided transmission. The ruler further guaranteed that the main lineage was the universal heir thus precluding escheat or confiscation of a sub-lineage's property by the crown. In this way dispersion and dissipation of the assets of religious establishments were prevented.

The singular case of the abbot of Salemabad emphasizes by contrast the widespread absence of sectarian centralization. He alone among all the signatories was recognized as the chief of *a whole sect*. It was clearly political support that had allowed Nimbārkaśaraṇa to gain prestige and influence. First the ruler appointed him abbot of the monastery of Salemabad, then he recognized him as the "master" of his sect. The obvious corollary of the ringing declaration that he was the "master of the sect of Nimbārka" was that his monastery was *de facto* recognized as the central seat of the sect. At the same time, the queen mother gave him the

material means to exercise his authority in the Braj country, the traditional strong-hold of the Nimbārkīs where most of their establishments remained concentrated. The temple cum residence that she built for him in Vrindaban, the heart-land of the Braj country, was to function in the subsequent decades as an effective relay of the power he yielded from the distant monastery of Salemabad. There is no doubt therefore that the secular authority played a decisive part in the process of legitimation of “Śrījī” as the main religious authority of all the Nimbārkīs.

If power implies control over wealth and men, then the document of Salemabad dealt with nothing but power. The power of those who were recognized as having established their leadership and their financial viability, as head of a sectarian lineage or as head of a whole sect. But by stating that all Nimbārkīs fell under the single authority of Salemabad, the document not only recognized that a monastery of relatively recent origin had superseded the founding seat of the sect. It also registered that given the right kind of political backing religious power could shift hand. It therefore underlined the supremacy of political power. If it had not been for the support of the kingdom of Jaipur how the chief of Salemabad, successor of Paraśurāma, could have achieved such a success based as far away as he was from the holy land of Braj and the original sectarian cradle!

Appendix : the document of Salemabad
Transliteration (Hindi section)

[seal]

śrī rāmājī

śrī mhārājadhīrāja

śrī savāī jayasīṃhājī

vande rāval bairīsāl nāthāvat

- (1) hakīkat baiṣṇava mārag ke cyāra sampradāya kī vā siva mārag vā
- (2) panthīn kī vā jaina mārag kī smasta ṣaṭdarsana kī iṃ bhānti hai
- (3) jo vam bheṣām maiṃ jī kī prakari ko baiṣṇava vā dasanāṃmī vā jo-
- (4) gī jaṭī paṇḍita hoy so ṭīkākī gādī kā dhaṇī kī āgyā
- (5) maiṃ rahai had samūdra tāī cāhai jahām rahau ar jo koi yām bheṣām
- (6) maiṃ mari jāya tau vai maribāvālā kī jo sattā hai tāke māl
- (7) kī vārasī jo ṭīkākī bheṣa maiṃ hai gādī kau so hī karai
- (8) ar jo ūnkaiṃ dasa pañca celā gurubhāī haumy tīnmaiṃ te jo sa-
- (9) puta baḍau choṭau hoy tākaiṃ ṭīkākī mālik gadī kau kaṇṭhī
- (10) bāndhi de pachevaḍī ūḍhāya de so vāke māl kī vārasī ka-

- (11) rai ar duje vāke māl ke vāras nhī ar pher vaha guru ma-
 (12) rajāda choḍi kai kucāla calai tau vāke vāras mālik gadī
 (13) ke haiṃ cāhai maukūph kari daiṃ tau vākī phariyād nhī ar ū-
 (14) skai celā gurubhāi nahīṃ hī hoy vā kapūta hoy tau ū-
 (15) skī sattā kī vārasī ṭikāī gādī ke dhaṇī kī hai ar
 (16) jo girastāśrama choḍi kaim bheṣa kau saranaṃ laile tīṣṃ
 (17) pher ūskā kuṭamba kā girastana kau dāvo nahī ar kuṭamba
 (18) kā sauṃvaiṃ kau dāvo nahī yā rīta kadīm ṣṃ jadi sūṃ ye sampra-
 (19) dāya bheṣa calyā āvai hai tadi sūṃ hī calī āvai hai aur ap
 (20) aṇī sampardā ke mālik gādī vāre haiṃ taise nīmāraka
 (21) sampardāya kī gādī ke mālik śrīī salaimāṃvād vāre
 (22) hī haiṃ mitī dutīka āṃsauja sudi 5 sambat 1879 kā

[seal] śrī sītārāmājī sahāya sevaka śrī sītārāmācāryājī
 dasakat ācāryājī mahārājya śrī sītārāmājī kā ya marayāda sampradā mārag kī vā bheṣa kī
 sanātana ṣṃ calī āve hai

[seal] śrī sītārāmājī sahāya śrī guru mahanta mahārāja śrī gambhirānandaājī
 dasakat mahanta mahārājājī śrī gambhirānanda jī ke yā likhyā māphak bheṣa kī sadīva sū calī
 āve hai

[seal] xxx śrī nimbārka śaraṇa pādukā
 dasakat śrī nimvārka sampradāya ke ācārya jī mahārāja śrī nimbārkaśaraṇadevaājī kai jo liṣe
 māphak maryād sadaiva su hī sampradāya maryada kī va bheṣa kī hai

[seal] śrī rādhādāmodara jayati
 dasakat gosvāmī jī govindalāla jī ke yā liṣyā māphak mararyād bheṣa kī sadaiva calī āve hai

[seal] xxx śrī rādhāvinodilāla
 dasakat gosvāmījī śrī nityānandaājī ke ya liṣyā māphak maryād bheṣa kī sadaiva sucalī āve hai

[seal] xxx
 dasakat mhant mahārājya śrī jyānakīdāsaājī raivāsā kā ke jā liṣyā māphik marajād sampradāya
 mārag kī vā bheṣa kī sadaiva sucalī āve hai

[seal] xxx
 dasakat gosvāmī śrī harikisorājī ke yā liṣyā māphik maryād sampradāya vā bheṣa kī sadaiva
 sucalī āve hai

[seal] śrī sītārāma sevaka gusāijī nrasimhalāladevajī
dasakat gosvāmījī śrī nrasimhalāladeva jī yā liṣyā māphik kā maryād sampradāya vā bheṣa kī
sadaiva sucalī āvai hai

[no seal]

dasakat mānasāgara kāvaḍxxx kā āyasa pīr kavalanāthaji xxx jogī kā liṣyā māphik sampradāya
kī sadiva sucalī āvati hai

[seal] śrī jino xxx bhaṭṭāraka śrī sukhendrakīrtijī

dasakat dallī āmairi kā bhaṭṭārakaājī śrī sukhendrakīrtijī kā mhām̐kai jaināmnāya maim̐bhekha kī
sadaiva sanāana soṃ yā hī maryād sucalī āvai bai

Translation

Certified that these xx seals and signatures xxx
affixed to this xxx xxx
are the seals and signatures of
xxx of my xxx
J. Steward
Delhi Residency 19th January 1829
Signed in Attestation of Captain Steward's signature
E. Colebrooke
Resident

[Seal]

Śrī Rāmājī [Rama, the tutelary deity of the kingdom of Jaipur]
Śrī Mhārājadhīrāja [title of the ruling king]
Śrī Savāī Jayasim̐hajī [title and name of the ancestor of the ruling king]
Homage to Rāval Bairīsāl Nāthāvat [Prime Minister of the kingdom of Jaipur]

The state of things among the Four Sects of Vaisnava path or the Siva path or (1) Panthin or the Jaina path of all the Six Systems is as follows (2). Those who live in a religious robe (*bheṣa*) be they Vaiṣṇava or Daśanāmī or (3) Yogī ascetics or paṇḍita, they come under the rule of the master (*dhaṇī*) of a duly consecrated seat (*ṭīkāl gādī*) (4), wherever they may be living up to the land bordering the sea. And should one in religious robe (5) die then the

inheritance (*varasñ*) of the power (*sattā*) over the property (*mā*) of the dead man (*maribāvālā*)⁷³ is settled by the one who wears the duly consecrated religious robe (*tīkāi bheṣa*) of the seat and by him alone (6-7). And among his half a dozen disciples and brothers in guru, [it is to] the one who is worthy, be he elderly or younger, [that] the duly consecrated master (*mālik*) of the seat ties the necklace (8-9) and then offers the shawl. He gives him the inheritance of the property and none other is the inheritor (*vāras*) of his property. And thereafter if he (10-11) abandons the dignity of the office of guru [and] follows wrong ways, then his inheritor is the master (*mālik*) of the seat (12). If he wishes he can dismiss him and his complain [will] not [be accepted]. And (13) if he has no disciples and no brothers in guru or if they are unworthy, then (14) the inheritance of his power goes to the master (*dhanñ*) of the seat. And (15) he who has given up the householder stage, who has taken refuge in a religious robe (16), thereafter the householders of his family have no claim upon him (17) and he has no claim upon his family. This custom [exists] since ancient times (18)⁷⁴. [It] continues from the time the sectarian robes (*sampradāya bheṣa*) [exist](19). And the master (*mālik*) of each and everyone's sect is the [master] of the seat. Similarly (20) the master (*mālik*) of the seat of the sect of Nimbārka is Śrījī of Salemabad (21) and he alone. On the 5th lunar day of the bright half of second āśvina vikrama samvat 1879 (22).

[seal] The servant Śrī Sītārāmājī who is protected by Śrī Sītārāmājī.

Signed Ācāryajī Mhārājya Śrī Sītārāmājī. What is written agrees with the custom of the robe, of the *mārga*, of the *sampradāya* which has been going on for ever⁷⁵.

[seal] Śrī Guru Mahanta Mahārāja Śrī Gambhirānandajī who is protected by Śrī Sītārāmājī.

Signed Mahanta Mahārājajī Śrī Gambhirānanda. What is written agrees with the [rule of the] robe which has been going on for ever.

[seal] xxx who has taken refuge at the holy feet of Śrī Nimbārka.

Signed Ācāryajī Mahārāja of the Śrī Nimbārka *sampradāya*, Śrī Nimbārkaśaraṇadevajī that what is written agrees with the custom of the *sampradāya* or of the robe which has been going on for ever.

[seal] Hail to Śrī Rādhādāmodara.

⁷³ Literally "who is about to die", I translate it as "dead" to fit in the context. Here the Persian version of the document has "of the deceased Vaisnava".

⁷⁴ As we have seen, this was not a hollow formula: in the absence of lawful regulations, the legitimacy of the said practices rested of their being grounded in ancient customs.

⁷⁵ The endorsements follow a more or less standardized word sequence.

Signed Gosvāmī Govindalāla that what is written agrees with the custom of the robe which has been going on for ever.

[seal] Śrī Rādhāvinodilāla xxx.

Signed Gosvāmī Śrī Nityānandajī that what is written agrees with the custom of the robe which has been going on for ever.

[seal] xxx

Signed Mahant Mahārāja Śrī Jyānakidāsajī of Raivasa that what is written agrees with the custom of the *sampradāya*, of the *marga* or of the robe which has been going on for ever.

[seal] xxx

Signed Gosvāmī Śrī Harikisorajī that what is written agrees with the custom of the *sampradāya* or of the robe that has been going on for ever.

[seal] Gusājī Nrasimhalāladevajī, servant of Śrī Sītārāma

Signed Gosvāmī Śrī Nrasimhalāladevajī that what is written agrees with the custom of the *sampradāya* or of the robe that has been going on for ever.

[no seal]

Signed Āyasa Pīr Kavalanāthajī of the xxx of Manasagara, xxx yogī, that what is written agrees with the *sampradāya* that has been going on for ever.

[seal] Bhaṭṭāraka Śrī Sukhendrakīrtijī xxx Śrī Jina.

Signed Śrī Sukhendrakīrtijī, Bhattarakajī of Delhi-Amer (?) that this is the custom of the robe of our Jaina tradition (*amnāya*) which has been going on eternally for ever.

Note on the Persian section⁷⁶

The original text was written in Hindi and then translated into Persian. This is shown by the fact that the key words are kept in their Hindi form (and simply transliterated into the Persian script). But there are two variants of interest. Firstly, as already mentioned, “*haqīqa*” is rendered by “*kaifīyat sūrat-i ḥāf*” (description of the state of things). Secondly, instead of “*maribāvālā*” the Persian text has “*baisnava marḥūm*” (the deceased Vaisnava). The document is dated 3 [of the month of] *ṣafur* 1238. It bears on its recto the Western [Christian] date of 11 November 1822.

⁷⁶ From indication provided by Marc Gaborieau (see note 3).

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