Angma D. Jhala

5 Rani Jijima, Soldier, Statesman, Financier: A Rajput Queen in Mid-Eighteenth Century Western India

In 1758, Rani Jijima, the senior wife of the Jhala ruler of Halvad, Jhallesvar Gajsinhji II (1745-1782), rode at the head of her troops, laying siege to the city of Dhrangadhra. She came to oust her brother-in-law, the wily and cunning Sri Sheshmalji. Mid-eighteenth century politics were volatile in western India, what with the recent wane of Mughal imperial power and the growing ascendency of the Marathas. It was in this context of constantly shifting alliances that this internecine conflict within the Jhallesvar royal family took place. In an extraordinary instance of martial prowess and personal courage, the Rani led her soldiers, composed of her own *Chavdas* (fellow clansmen) personally loyal to her, as well as paid mercenaries, Kasbatis, under the Muslim commander, Muhammad Muchalo. She worked to regain her husband's lost citadel (*gadh)* for her teenage son, the then heir-apparent and future ruler, Raj Jaswantsinhji II.

The English political agent, Colonel Watson noted that three armies converged on Dhrangadhra during that fateful battle: those of the Maratha Peshwa, who had entered Jhalavad to collect tribute; the forces of the local Muslim ruler, the Nawab of Radhanpur, whom Jijima had charmed into becoming an ally; and the Rani's own troops (Amubha Saheb, 'Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai'). It goes without saying that the queen successfully defeated her brother-in-law the usurper, and would later herself govern from the new Jhallesvar capital in the years ahead. Not content with merely eliminating a dynastic rival, she would also dispute the authority of her mild-mannered, pious husband, thereby splitting the kingdom into two during his lifetime.

The accompanying portrait of the queen is a dramatic image of regnant authority, which carefully constructs a tableau of power. Rani Jijima rides imperiously out front, her face unveiled and her arm raised. Her adolescent son, the young heir apparent, accompanies her but rides fractionally behind his mother's mount in a position of respectful deference. Her sisters-in-law pay her obeisance. The defeated Sheshmalji touches her foot, which still sits in the stirrup as if in mid-action. His bent posture represents a final act of surrender and submission. Jijima herself famously showed clemency, sparing her brother-in-law's life, by proclaiming, "I don't wish to see my sisters-in-law break their bangles" (the act performed by Hindu women when they are widowed). His wives acknowledge her as the rightful regent, while a loyal subject holds a *chattri* (royal umbrella) as yet another auspicious symbol of sovereignty. She is at the centre of the scene, attracting the viewer's eye, and projecting herself as a speaking, living agent.

Figure 5.1: Rani Jijima accepts the surrender of her brother-in-law Sheshmalji on April 10, 1758 at Dhrangadhra with her son Kunvar Jaswantsinhji and Muslim commander Muhammad Muchalo beside her.

She rides unveiled which was her usual mode of dress as recounted in contemporaneous historical records. While commentators of the time commended her various acts of valour, even her champions decried this perceived lapse in appropriate female etiquette and appearance, in breaking with *pardah* or *ozhal* (that is, the covering of the woman's body or face) (Meghrajji, "Praise of Jijima"). Such controversies reflect the queen's unconventionality. What emerges from the archive is a forceful personality, one who routinely advised and challenged her husband and brother-in-law. She was also a skilled strategist and negotiator, well versed in the political philosophy of her day; a fine horsewoman and warrior; a pragmatic fundraiser; a feisty mother and co-wife, who defended her son and co-wives from internal threats; and a charismatic leader, adroitly culling loyalty both within the royal court and among external allies. Her success at the same time reveals the lacuna in effective (male) leadership during this period, which further galvanized such domestic political instability. Certainly, none of her male contemporaries appear to have had the force of character necessary to bring both internal unity to the Jhala polity or to simultaneously placate and awe foreign powers. Her ambitious, but ultimately ineffectual, brother-in-law, Sheshmalji,

her renunciate, pacifist husband, Raj Gajsinhji, and her adolescent son, Jaswantsinhji, who was not yet of age to play a significant role on the political stage, pale in contrast to this dynamic lady, who gained equal rights to rule through sheer grit by the age of 33 (Meghrajji, "Praise of Jijima"). As George Le Grand Jacob, a British aide to the Resident in Kathiawar several decades later in the 1830s, observed: "It is not unusual to consider Eastern women as a down-trodden, poor-spirited race, and yet cases are numerous in which they have been the actual rulers, whilst fathers, husbands, and sons were of small account" (Le Grand Jacob, 1871, 13).

Such instances of aristocratic and royal Indian women engaging in martial activities and more broadly in the political life of the royal court and its relations with larger hegemonic or imperial powers were not unusual. They played significant roles as military generals, regents and statesmen, patrons of religious, educational and cultural institutions, and as builders and financiers, funding various projects from the medieval era to the postcolonial republic, thus engaging in the wider public sphere of governance, and intellectual and cultural exchange.

They were also successful in creating political networks with key partners, by securing official appointments, ousting rivals and bequeathing expensive gifts or bribes. (Ramusack, 2004, 181). As Rosalind O'Hanlon notes, 'Whatever formal seclusion there was in the zenana. . . it did not cut women like these off from politics, but rather the opposite. The half-humorous references of nineteenth century observers ... to 'domination behind the curtain' may actually have reflected what was once a serious historical reality' (O'Hanlon, 1994, 49-50). While royal women left their father's homes, they often used their own kin connections to advance political ambitions, and promoted the prestige of their natal families over that of their husband's family and clan (Joshi, 1995, 19).

Many formed significant diplomatic and military alliances, as did Rani Jijima. During the medieval era, female members of the Mughal imperial family brokered peace, particularly through the act of marriage. (Lal, 2005, 30-31). Hindu Maratha women served as diplomatic emissaries for their husbands, receiving titles from Mughal Emperors or arranging conciliations between rival, warring Maratha kingdoms. Some, such as Tarabai Bhosle, Ahilyabai Holkar and Tulsibai Holkar, were well known for long periods of stable rule as regents and widows. (O'Hanlon, 1994, 49). Others took to the battlefield, whether against neighbouring kingdoms, the Mughals, the British or their own nobility, as did Rani Jijima in ousting her brother-in-law. The Maratha Rani of Jhansi, who fought against the British a century later during the Indian Mutiny, was seen as performing the duty of her dead husband by taking on the role of a man, and thus became a national icon. (Harlan, 1992, 196).

A growing body of scholarship has addressed the influence of *pardah* women on state governance, law, dynastic politics, cultural and intellectual patronage and religious orthodoxy and reform in both pre-colonial and colonial states. This literature has contested earlier portraits of zenana women as passive objects of colonial or indigenous patriarchy and the perceived political and social limitations of *pardah*.

Leslie Peirce and Ruby Lal have written significant works on the medieval Ottoman and Mughal harems respectively while Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Shaharyar Khan have investigated the reigns of the four successive Muslim queens in colonial Bhopal during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Khan, 2000; Lal, 2005; Lambert-Hurley, 2006; Peirce, 1993).

I have written elsewhere extensively on the political and legal histories of colonial and postcolonial zenanas, especially in Rajputana and Saurashtra, which reveal that *pardah* women were engaged players in indigenous state politics and larger power sharing relationships with external hegemonic forces, colonial and nationalist. (A. Jhala, 2008; A. Jhala, 2009; A. Jhala, 2010).

Rani Jijima, as well as several other women of the Jhala royal dynasty, reflects such historic realities. The Raj Vahi or royal genealogy of the Jhala *kuladhapitis* records the wives of the forty-six generations of the royal line, from 1090 until the present. Not only were the chief wives or mothers of successors, the *patranis*, listed but in several cases the junior wives of rulers as well, along with their clan and family backgrounds. (Jayasinhji Jhala, "Marriage, Hierarchy and Identity in Ideology and Practice," 1991). Thus the names of women from the Jhallesvara's family prominently emerge in the genealogical archives. A number have distinct personalities, embodying a diverse spectrum of attributes that were shaped by their historic acts as well as their subsequent, in various cases, mythologized personas. These include the divine progenitor of the clan, or *kulmata* (clan mother), the eleventh century Saktima, who became a goddess; women who served as Regents such as the aforementioned Jijima; female members of the family who were patrons, funding the building of temples, stepwells and palaces as well as artisanal traditions and industries; and women who as servants or attendants played significant roles in state affairs. So while historically there were many women who formed part of the royal household and family, it is a select few who became the subjects of recorded memory and whose life narratives have been depicted in the paintings of this collection.

Nonetheless, due to the practices of *pardah* and the *zenana*, women have long been perceived as isolated and sequestered from matters of state. Both British colonial and later Indian nationalist historians have painted them as the silent, hidden occupants of the palace *antarpura* (inner chambers). Courtly Indian women have been described as shut out and cut off from the larger public sphere of state governance and intellectual engagement, despite the numerous examples of figures such as Rani Jijima. Indian nationalists M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru described *pardah* as a 'barbarous custom' doing incalculable harm on the state of India's women (Nehru, 1946, Reprint 1998, 243). European novelists, such as E. M. Forster, M. M. Kaye and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, described royal women as the licentious denizens of the palace seraglio, mute and indolent, who stirred up trouble for the colonial government, while hidden behind closed doors (Forster, 1953; Jhabvala, 1975, Kaye, 1978). In part, this view of limited female agency is due to a historic minimizing and forgetting of 'women's sources' as well as the perceived wholescale absence of an

archive on women's lives. Historians, of South Asia as well as other parts of the world, have long believed that a paucity of materials on women's pasts reflect their negligible engagement in a broader world outside the narrowly defined domestic. As historian Joan Scott has noted, history has always excluded women from political discourse: 'why (and since when) have women been invisible as historical subjects, when we know they have participated in the small and great events of human history?' (Scott, 1988, 49-50).

As Durba Ghosh has argued, scholars must be critical of historical documents that deny native women existed and new methodologies must be introduced for reading texts where historical subjects are marginally or partially named. As she argues, the obvious deletion of women's names themselves in certain cases highlights their actual historic presence (Ghosh, 2006, 252). Such accounts question the diminution of South Asian women by both Orientalist (Said, 1978) and subaltern scholars, who have emphasized the repressive history of both British imperialism and traditional Indic patriarchies on women. (Chatterjee, 1990, 233-53; Mani, 1998; Spivak, 1988, 271-313). In contrast, Indian women were indeed present and 'spoke' in several different venues (Anagol, 1998, 80; Visweswaran, 1996, 115) as 'cosmopolitan' subjects rather than 'subaltern' figures (Burton, 2003, 17, 26-27).

With the growing fields of women's history, gender studies and feminist historiography, historians are increasingly open to new and diverse sources. Disciplines from social anthropology, literary criticism and history have challenged the emphasis once placed on 'high culture', print forms, articulated by dominant, empowered elites (Scott, 1988).

In any royal or aristocratic household, across culture and time period, much of state politics is inherently of a family nature and the domestic world was inevitably at the centre of governance, being of vital concern to the king and his close male relations and courtiers. A ruler's mothers (uterine or step), sisters, wives and mistresses had significant influence on his upbringing, his religious worldview and instruction, his education (particularly in terms of language, literatures, forms of statecraft, music, philosophy, etc.), his political and military alliances with other satellite, neighboring or distant states and his own aristocracy and gentry, often acquired through marriage, and economic resources gained through the introduction of bridal wealth and dowry. His authority as man and king was legitimized through his sovereignty, secured only through the perpetuation of his dynastic lineage - in the production of royal children, male and female, legitimate and illegitimate. In this manner, the women of his household were essential and had far reaching influence.[1]

1 This was not an unusual occurrence in royal families. One need only think of English king, Henry VIII's trials in the bedroom, to note how important familial politics, and particularly reproductive power, were on state affairs. Consider that multiplied many times in a polygamous environment.

It should also be noted that the women whose names do emerge from these often murky, and, in many cases, incomplete archives have been privileged for various reasons: either, due to luck as the sources have been preserved despite the mercurial vicissitudes of weather, warfare or disaster and remain intact up through the present, or due to their perceived significance by various record keepers (from the monarch down) who have deemed certain female lives, mythic or historical, worthy of remembrance. As Ramya Sreenivasan notes in *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen*, the process of reconstituting memory from the historical "sources" is itself a historical practice, which has been "reimagined" and "reclaimed" by a wide range of social groups from royal and aristocratic centres to village law courts and middle class nationalists during the colonial era. (Sreenivasan, 2007, 6-7.) As she observes, historians have long been chary of literary narratives, such as bardic records or chronologies, not only as suitable archives of women's lives, as mentioned above, but more generally as acceptable historical "sources", questioning their reliability for their very "literariness colors their depiction of historical events." (Ibid., 10). For this reason, there has been limited attention paid to oral and "folk" narratives, except by art historians and historians of the medieval devotional and sectarian traditions. She argues that for historians of culture (and I would argue this includes political historians), the importance of such sources is self-evident. Bardic accounts should be examined as well as their later manuscript production in terms of who produced and copied such "texts", who served as patrons and who determined how they should be preserved and handed down to successive generations. All are seminal elements, as she argues, of the "hidden histories of cultural circulation, transmission and persistence." (Ibid., 11).

5.1 A Word on Interpretation and Sources

Much of this chapter is indebted to the painstaking archival research of His late Highness Maharaja Meghrajji III of Dhrangadhra, who spent more than a half century compiling, transliterating and, in certain cases, translating a number of the documents which inform this chapter. Trained as an anthropologist, he was as much or more so a historian, philologist, political scientist and scholar of religion, among his many interests. A polyglot and a polymath, he collected a vast number of documents across multiple periods, from the Solanki, Gujarat Sultanate, Mughal, Maratha and British eras, and in various languages, including Sanskrit, Persian, Gujarati, Hindi, Marwari, Kutchi, Sindhi and Marathi, as well as English, which pertain to the history of the Jhallesvars and Jhalavad more broadly. Most of the primary sources referenced in this article owe their use and discovery to his meticulous and detailed compilations, accompanied often with his own personal commentary and careful notes. Much of the challenge in conducting this scholarship on women's lives lie in the collecting of such materials, which cover nearly a millennium of human history and are recorded in a

plethora of different languages and dialects. One can only imagine the hours spent laboring through these, in several cases, obscure manuscripts, for those few specks of gold that quite literally sparkle down the murky tunnel of the past. (I hope this chapter will, in some small way, do justice to his Herculean labours of 'mining the archives.') As Meghrajji recounted in one of his marginal notes, the Jijima Records in particular were of historic interest, as they were the oldest State accounts maintained for the Jhala dynasty. Dated from around 1750, approximately two to three generations before the British arrival in Kathiawar, they were housed in the British Rajasthanik Court in Rajkot for evidence in a later case, the Hariana case, which revolved around an issue of bastardy and legitimacy that carried on for twenty years, from 1879-1899.

The records themselves held rich details on a variety of activities. These included the jewelry made for Jijima's maidservants, the coinage of that era, the method of writing accounts, the creation of silos for grain storage in famine time, the payment of spies, the Rani's leisure activities (such as bathing in the river) and military expenses, among various miscellanea (Meghrajji, 'Jijima glimpses').

In this manner, these paintings, and my critique of them, are fundamentally engaged in the process of interpretation and translation of meaning on several levels. First, they are engaged in interpreting bardic sources to reconstruct historic lives, arguably by coloring between and beyond the lines to fill in an incomplete or, in certain cases, missing record. How does one parse out myth from truth, revisionist views from historic reality? These are among the challenges a scholar must face when dealing with subjects of an earlier age, where the sources are not always composed contemporaneously with the historic events chronicled or are part of an oral tradition which cannot be validated through written records.

Second, the paintings "translate" these historic (and often mythologized) depictions from spoken or written sources to the pictorial world of the two-dimensional Indian miniature painting. Further, they are the product of the unique and individual imagination of Jayasinhji Jhala. His own background in Indian aesthetics, Rajputai and Rajput history and ethnography as well as the Jhallesvar chronicles, acquired both as a scholar and descendent of the Jhala royal lineage, informs these works. His background influences a range of choices made from the kind of themes addressed, the particular lives chosen as worthy of rendition, the aesthetic tropes and techniques used in the paintings themselves and the multimedia platform chosen to display these pieces. Everything – from the subjects of the paintings to the juxtaposition of particular visual elements to the entire composite scene – are his choices alone and these paintings should be seen as the product of a singular vision as much as a clan's visual history, just as the oeuvre of any individual artist. At the same time, these paintings are very much collaborative pieces, arguably like those produced in a Mughal painting school, a Renaissance atelier or the Charles and Ray Eames architectural firm. They reflect the relationship between a master and his associates, where the principal visionary works with a team of other artisans; in this case, earlier medieval artists, living painters and digital media technicians, to create new and

innovative works. In this way, these paintings are both derivative (literally taking visual motifs from preexisting paintings) as well as original (creating a wholly new way of rendering a painting and in certain cases introducing new visual elements).

Thus, at every level, these paintings are mediating levels of meaning. They move from historic act as recreated and rendered in memory and myth, and from recited or written memory to vivid, visual rendition. In this manner, they generate novel ways of seeing and recollecting for their audiences.

This process is particularly compelling for female subjects who have not only been hidden behind the veil of *pardah* but also, often, the opaque curtain of archival silence. In the process, these paintings reclaim these women, beginning to sketch in their partially drawn profiles and shadowy figures upon both a painterly canvas and a historical memory.

This chapter will provide a wider discussion on the roles of women within the Jhala Rajput dynasty, before going into detail on the historical case of Rani Jijima. In particular, it will examine the depiction of aristocratic women as goddesses, patrons and political arbiters, as well as the important influence of lower caste women on the public life of the Jhala polity. It will then go into an in-depth analysis of Rani Jijima's influence during Gajsingh II's reign, both before and after the siege on Dhrangadhra. Her story is particularly illuminating as there are multiple historical sources available on her life, and she emerges as a very real, flesh and blood person, rather than one purely of myth or legend.

5.2 Goddess, Patron, Warrior and Regent: The Many Faces of Jhala Women

The following section will highlight a few significant women from the Jhallesvar chronicles, who have for various reasons been memorialized over time. There are, in particular, four roles that women have played in Jhala dynastic politics. First, that of goddess and divine benefactress and progenitor, reflected in the *kulmata*, Saktima. Second, as patronesses who built important public sites that formed the centre of political, religious or everyday life, including temples, stepwells or palaces. Third, as servants of the state, who worked on behalf of the *kuladhapati*, and fourth, as political players and Regents.

5.3 Woman as Goddess: On Saktima

All accounts of Jhala women, and indeed the clan more generally, must begin, in fact, with a woman who was not herself born a Jhala: that is the *kulmata* and *kuldevi*, Saktima, whose children became the first three Jhalas. Most Rajput clans (or *kuls*) have patron goddesses (*kuldevis*) whom they worship and who perform various

auspicious duties, such as the gifting of boons, the lifting of curses, protection during times of adversity, strength for political enterprise, and provisions for fertility and health. (Harlan, 1992). The Jhalas are additionally unusual in that they also have a *kulmata*, a goddess mother who serves simultaneously as the clan *kuldevi*. *Kuldevis*, just as other Hindu deities, are associated with specific holy sites and locations, which historically and still today, are centers for pilgrimage, that attract both domestic and external visitors to Saurashtra. For devotees, the particular act of union or *samadhi* with the deity comes through the act of *darsan* or actively "seeing" and beholding the icon. (Eck, 1998).

Saktima has many faces, so to speak, for which she is revered and worshipped. There is the historic late eleventh century woman who became consort and wife to a displaced soldier prince, Raj Harpaldev (1093-1130), who in turn rose to become king of a sovereign state. Then there is the queen who performed miracles, most notably by extending her arm from a window and lifting her sons bodily to safety from a marauding elephant in *mast* (heat). And finally, there is the later goddess, embodied in sculptural and painterly iconography, often depicted with gigantic all-seeing eyes, mounted on a fierce lioness and dressed in resplendent garments, whose image has been etched on amulets and worshipped in temples and home shines for nearly a millennium.

Saktima, the woman, was herself a Solanki, the granddaughter of Solanki Surajji. They were the descendants of the Lord of Patan, King Chamundrai. Her own father, Pratap, was from Modhera, a town near Patan, the capital of Gujarat, and served as a commander of the fort at Abu. A devout man, he was a great worshipper of the goddess Ambaji. Saktima was born on October 11 1076 within the Ambaji Temple precincts. ("Sri Saktudevina Purvajo").

As legend, Saktima performed various miraculous acts that imbued her with divine qualities. Two are most notable. The first relates to her original encounter with Harpal Dev, the Makhvan adventurer and displaced prince, whose maternal uncle had given him the task of capturing the demon (*raksha*) Babrasur who was creating havoc in the countryside, looting and destroying villages. It is the classic tale of the hero on his quest, who conquers all in the creation of a new legitimate sovereignty, which we see in earlier Sanskritic and Homeric epics as well as later medieval vernacular ballads and praise songs. Saktima assists the hero in his mission, in this case aiding Harpal in his taming and civilizing of the "barbaric other," the savage, lawless Babrasur.

In the various oral retellings, Saktima meets the hero when he has come to a cremation ground at night en route to the submerged lair of the demon. There Saktima tests the warrior's mettle and courage: first by showing herself as a frail, old woman and then revealing her divine nature by growing as tall as the sky, with limbs the width of tree trunks. This unveiling of the divine self is a fundamental process of transformation in the Hindu tradition, which we see in the Sanskrit epic time and again, most notably with Krishna's unveiling and divine manifestation in the

Mahabharata and *Bhagavata Gita*. Once challenged, Harpal Dev reveals his bravery and fearlessness, by resisting the goddess despite her evident omnipotence. Pleased by his courage, the goddess not only agrees to aid him in capturing the demon *rakshasa*, but also pledges to become his wife and consort, and help him establish his kingdom. Later, the king-in-making is given one night to garland as many villages as possible, which serves as a gift of territory from his maternal uncle, in exchange for purging the countryside of the barbarian scourge .

Figure 5.2: Night of November 6, 1093, ShaktiMa, her Shiva incarnate husband Raj Harpaldev, and demon servant Babrasur, ride floating, over the land tying festoons at 23 hundred villages to form the future kingdom of Jhalavad.

The accompanying painting depicts this momentous night on November 6, 1093. Harpal is recognized as an *avatar* of the Hindu god Shiva, with his demon servant Babrasur and regal, divine consort Saktima, as they ride from dusk to dawn, festooning the gates of 2300 villages with garlands. They began their journey in the town of Patadi, rested at Tuva at midnight, and ended the night at the village of Deghadiya at dawn (Deghaduya translates as 'the moment of dawn'). The land they traversed became the boundaries of the new kingdom of Jhalavad.

The second miraculous event occurs after she has been married to her human husband for twelve years. During this period, had him promise not to disclose her divine nature, for if he did so, she would be forced to leave. Harpal Dev has honoured his vow and Saktima is described as all that a devoted Hindu wife or *pativrata* should

be. She has assisted her husband in the formation of his new state and household, birthed him three sons, and is well liked by her subjects. During this time, the Jhala polity (still a Makhvan offshoot) is very much still on the make, and the people's reverence for Saktima is as much for the goddess' unique qualities as it is for her role in the founding and stability of the new state.

Figure 5.3: At noon in Patadi on April 14, 1105 A.D Saktima lifts her 3 sons from harm and this act of being lifted gives them the name Jhala.

In this second public act, Saktima fatefully reveals her divinity, creating the myth that will later supplant and further embellish the image of the historic woman. As this painting depicts, at noon on April 14, 1105, as the royal princes Sodhaji, Manguji and Shekhraji are playing with their friend Tapaliya Charan in the palace courtyard, an elephant in heat breaks his chains and invades the private family quarters. Wild and dangerous, the animal destroys all in its wake, rushing towards the princes. All seeing, Saktima watches the impending disaster from her palace window and extends her arm. It grows enormous in size (as her body did on first meeting her future husband). The boys climb upon it and are lifted up, saved from the impending disaster, while she taps Tapaliya Charan on his head and ushers him into a narrow alley where the mad elephant Supratik (whose name means 'auspicious omen') cannot reach him.

The name Jhala from the Gujarati word *jhalvun* 'to lift up' is thereafter ascribed to the boys and their descendants, while Tapaliya received the epithet, 'he who was tapped on the head.' The surrounding people and bird are witnesses to these acts of miracle by the now unveiled goddess Saktima. Just as in the earlier encounter with Harpal Dev, Saktima again creates order out of disorder, joyousness out of calamity.

Figure 5.4: At sunset in Dhama on April 14, 1105 A.D Saktima enters the ground to become JhalavadiMa, the mother earth.

This second miraculous act ultimately draws her human existence as the wife-consort of Harpal Dev to an end. Having revealed her divinity, she must depart the human world. Not dissimilar to Sita's departure in the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, she leaves the palace grounds and is swallowed up by mother Earth (which some feminist scholars have argued is an euphemistic symbol for the act of suicide) (Tyagi, 2013, 151). The *pativrata* who has more *shakti* (power) than her husband, while admirable, is dangerous, for the prince wishing to establish himself as lord of all he governs. While the deity may not have intended that her divinity eclipse her human husband, her very presence implicitly emasculates him.

Thereafter, Saktima takes on the mythological, theological role as consecrated goddess, who saved not only the clan's founder and his successors, but who will save, succor, nurture and in this way reproduce all clan members and inhabitants of Jhalavad, who are under the protection of the Jhala Raj.

Figure 5.5: Rajputani as SatiMa, the fiery internal power essence or *tejasva* understood to reside in Rajput women and by extension in all women.

Not only was the goddess Saktima herself honored and worshiped in such iconic representations, but so was her very divine energy or *shakti*. In this painting, an unknown Rajput woman or Rajputani is depicted as imbued with *shakti* and thus a representation of the universal Saktima or Satimata. It is believed that a fiery internal essence (*tejasva*) resides in all Rajput women and by extension all women. Here, the woman, as mother, nurtures her family, her clan, her country, her world and the birthing and sustaining powers of the universe. While ordinarily manifest behind a gentle exterior, housed in grace and restraint, the woman's *tejasva* in this painting is revealed through the powers of her *sat* (virtue). This is expressed pictorially through the flames emanating from her finger and toe: the finger representing knowledge and thought, while the toes the power of 'action' and the transformation that ensues from acts in the world.

5.4 Women as Patrons

Rani Kalyan De was the wife and widow of the murdered Jhallesvar Ranoji who pronounced the 'âḍ' or ordinance against the practice of *sati* after a vision of Saktima prompted him to do so. She built a stepwell, the *Kalyani vav*, outside Halvad. In an

unprecedented break with tradition, which ordinarily chronicled the names only of male patrons on the sides of public buildings, such as temples or stepwells, she inscribed the names not only of seven successive generations of male rulers but also their queen consorts who bore their heirs. She included her own pedigree within this genealogy. It remains an important instance of a female contribution to the ruling house – not only as architectural patron but also as chronicler. In the accompanying painting, Rani Kalyan De visits the grounds of '*Arane vara Mahadev*' temple outside Halvad.

Figure 5.6: Rani Kalyan De, learned in Sanskrit, visits the grounds of 'Arane vara Mahadev' temple Halvad on February 10, 1520 She lived her last days with the poet saint MiraBa in Dvarka.

It was also well known that she enjoyed a close relationship with her co-widow and her sons, which was described as loving, even when it came to a potential ousting of the successor Man Ghelo. She and her fellow co-wife, Yatna De, would follow the Krishna *bhakta* and songstress Mirabai into retreat and renunciation at Dvarka (Meghrajji, "Queens of the Jhallesvaras").

At other instances, Jhala royal wives played an important role in cementing alliances with greater imperial forces. One such lady was Satyabhamaji (Rathodiji), daughter of Mota Raja Udesinhji of Jodhpur, wife of Raj Chandrasenji and mother of the ill-fated Askaranji. Not only did she bring ties with the Rajasthani kingdom of

Marwar-Jodhpur, but Satyabhamaji's sister, the princess Manibai, also often called Jodhbai, was the wife of prince Salim, later Mughal Emperor Jahangir, and mother of future Emperor Shah Jahan. The sisters maintained a close relationship, and according to some sources, Satyabhamaji may have intrigued to have the Mughal authorities remove Prithurajji, the heir apparent and progenitor of the Wankaner, Wadhwan, Chuda and Jhalarapatan lines, although that is debatable (Meghrajji, "Queens of the Jhallesvaras"). This relationship of marriage would remain significant for the Jhallesvaras, both during times of peace and war, in the subsequent reigns of Emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

5.5 Women as Servants

It was not only aristocratic and royal women who played a part in the Jhallesvar history but also those who served as attendants, servants and members of lower caste groups.

Figure 5.7: Goddess MeladiMa destroys the army of the Sultan of Gujarat at the battle of Kadi in the 1350s by releasing a torrential rainstorm, as Raj Vegadji and his army watch.

The two who figure in this painting collection, Meladima and the unknown widow who visited Raj Ranmalsinghji II's court, both played critical roles, so much so that they have remained part of the clan history for several centuries, though they did not leave a legacy of reproductive power (through successors) or material remains (architectural buildings, wells, etc.) Their continued place in oral memory reflects how women from various caste and class backgrounds engaged in both consecrating royal authority and protecting it.

The Goddess Meladima is in many ways a folk hero, part Joan of Arc, part St. Teresa of Avila. While there is not as much textual material about her, she is very much part of living memory. The woman Meladima was a servant girl, who lived during the reign of Jhallesvar Raj Vegadji (1355-1368). When the warrior king was struggling to subdue the forces of the Sultan of Gujarat, during the battle of Kadi, she invoked a colossal storm, inundating the Sultan's troops with rain, and thereby protected the lands and suzerainty of the Jhallesvar.

Figure 5.8: Widow throws the coconut to reveal the divine presence in the king Jhallesvar Raj Ranmalljisinhji II, 1841-1869, known as Dharamraj.

In the later nineteenth century episode of the coconut, which was recorded orally, an unnamed widow came to visit the *darbar* (court) of Raj Ranmalsinhji II (1841-1869).

Ranmalsinhji had been given the moniker Dharmaraj, the upholder of justice, by his subjects for his judiciousness and religious devotion. During his reign, he built a number of temples, including the Rammol temple and the *Gidhariji ni Haveli* to Krishna in Dhrangadhra. In addition, Ranmalsinhji was an accomplished scholar of Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and Gujarati.

In this instance, as seen in the accompanying painting, the widow, who came from a modest caste group, throws a coconut at her lord's head. However, this act was not one of violence or disrespect. Rather, she used it to illuminate the king's divine nature. The coconut breaks in midair as it hits the invisible, adamantine shield of his own holiness and wisdom. Thus, the act of both seeing the king and the breaking of the coconut is a boon to the viewer as devotee. In this moment, the king transcends the human plane and becomes the divine godhead as observed in the Hindu act of *darsan*. (J. Jhala, 2009).

These women also serve as important examples of the roles and agency of Jhala Rajput women. Perhaps one of the most significant documented historical figures is that Rani Jijima, the mid-eighteenth century queen and regent. The rest of the chapter is devoted to her life as case study.

5.6 Rani Jijima: Queen Extraordinaire

The years preceding Rani Jijima's siege and ascendency had long been rife with uncertainty. Like his father before him, the Jhala ruler Gajsinhji II was in a vulnerable position, constantly under the threat of a possible Maratha invasion. However, he proved to be somewhat apathetic when it came to concerns of state governance and Rani Jijima constantly prodded and pushed her husband towards further action. Gajsinhji himself was content to leave the reins of government to his uncle (kaka), Kaloji. Kaloji proved an effective administrator, creating a charter to trade that established long lasting stability, despite successive changes in regimes. He appointed his own *kamdar* (manager), Bhagvanji Makanji Jhala, to serve the Raj as *daftari* (or record keeper) and his younger brother Devji as *bakshi* (army paymaster).

Kaloji also warned his nephew that his younger brother Sheshmalji was an increasing threat to the Raj, noting that he had become overly ambitious and arrogant. Gajsinhji and his brother exchanged harsh words to this effect and thereafter ceased speaking. Sheshmalji left the court in high dudgeon and went to live in Mathak.

Complaints against Sheshmalji were not limited purely to his audacity towards the *gadi* (crown), but also to close family members. His stepmother, mother of his half brother Meroji, complained to Rani Jijima that Seshmalji was harassing her son and encroaching upon his lands (both half brothers had been granted Mathak and six nearby villages in a joint appanage). She feared for Meroji's life.

Attempting to calm the situation, Kaloji thought to settle the dispute through a fair division of land and suggested Gajsinghji apprise Seshmalji of the terms. Sheshmalji

was insulted, but vowed he would accept whatever his brother commanded, but afterwards would make his own way in the world. He only asked for the town of Narchiana which Gajsinghji, touched by his apparent humility, gave to him.

However, Sheshmalji continued to be rude towards his sister-in-law, Rani Jijima. Gajsinghji, increasingly frustrated by this family feud, appointed Sheshmalji to his *darbar* (council) in a"fit of exasperation or self-assertion."Piqued, Rani Jijima left with her son and co-wife Rani Vaduma for Sitha. According to Colonel Watson, Raj Gajsinhji was now more than ever vulnerable to his brother's influence, and spent his time between Dhrangadhra and Halvad, in addition to visiting the family in Sitha and his *gurubandhu* (religious counselor).

While Gajsingh was in Sitha, his uncle Kaloji heard a dispute during a routine open court proceedings in Halvad. During the hearing, Seshmalji joined him and without prompting openly argued with his uncle, speaking in a discourteous manner before a public audience. For Kaloji, that was the last straw. He wrote to Gajsinhji urging him to put his young son Jaswantsinhji, who was then between the ages of 15 and 16, in charge of Dhrangadhra, with his mother's aid, which Gajsinhji commenced to do.

After his return to Halvad, Gajsinhji removed Sheshmalji from the council. In a moment of contrition, the younger brother rode to Bavali and apologized to their uncle Kaloji, but sources suggest that the apology was not a sincere one. In the meantime, observing the disorder within the Raj, local Khavad Kathis, who were "notorious freebooter and cattle-lifters" skilled in cavalry warfare took Sayla and nearby surrounding villages (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

The Darbar was now in crisis, as they were unsure of what action to take. Learning this, Seshmalji attempted to regain his brother's favour by volunteering to deal with the Kathis, if Gajsinhji gave him the necessary permission, arms and men. The *bakshi* (army paymaster) was instructed to give Sheshmalji the necessary soldiers and accompany him on the campaign. Gajsinhji, attended by his *kamdar* Bhagvanji Jhala and his bodyguards, went along with the army, watching the action from afar, as Sheshmalji recaptured Sayla.

Awed by his brother's military skill and leadership (for he had gained the support of the garasdars), Gajsinghji celebrated Sheshmalji's victory with pomp and circumstance, presenting his brother with a *dhal* (banner) and making him *senapati* or general of his armies.

Learning of her brother-in-law's successes, Rani Jijima sent her *kamdar* (manager) to Halvad, informing Gajsinghji that she and their son, the heir apparent, would visit her paternal home, Varsoda, as her father was ill. There is some speculation in Meghrajji's commentaries as to her motivations and whether it was indeed a manufactured ruse. The sources suggest several possible motives for this trip to her childhood home. Watson suggests that she feared Sheshmalji's growing influence and wished to take her son to the security of Varsoda. Amubha, a local village historian, argues that the Rani's motivations were far more Machiavellian – she wished to return home to rally her own clansmen to her side (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

In the meantime, Gajsinhji sent his uncle Kaloji to Dhrangadhra and gave temporary charge to Sheshmalji, after which he and his brother went to Sitha as part of a farewell party for Jijima and the *yuvraj* (heir apparent), Jaswantsinhji. On the evening of her departure, the Rani and her brother-in-law engaged in an "unholy row" which reverberated throughout the household. Gajsinhji reprimanded his brother and ordered him back to Halvad, while Jijima departed after sending Kaloji a warning. Gajsinhji remained on in Sitha. It was a place he particularly loved due to its surroundings, a beautiful lake, where he could spend time with the Mahant of the temple.

At this time, their sister Bai Phuljiba, who had married Jam Jasaji of Navanagar, ruler of an important kingdom, was visiting Halvad, and expressed a mutual distaste for their elder sister-in-law, Jijima, to Sheshmalji. One night, the chamberlain of the household, the *daroga* Khavas Ajoji, informed her that Sheshmalji was planning to overthrow the Raj. She sent the chamberlain in haste to Sitha, before the town gates locked for the night, to bring Gajsinhji back with a secret force in all haste. As Watson noted, Sheshmalji now hoped "to usurp the gadi" and depose his elder brother. Gajsinhji fled to his uncle Kaloji in Bavali, where he wept at his brother's treachery.

Sheshmalji, comfortably situated in Halvad and smug that he had nothing to fear from his brother or uncle, began collecting funds to lead a march on Dhrangadhra and Sitha, either for a secret or overt attack. One day, he went out with a contingent of troops to levy a toll tax or possibly loot a caravan that was passing through the Rann of Kutch at Tikar. At that moment, Kaloji, with a contingent of men, skillfully surprised the gatekeepers, taking back the city. In festive celebration, drums were beaten as Gajsinhji reclaimed his capital and was joyfully greeted and garlanded by his sister Phuljiba and the women and men of the town. As Udaysinh M Jhala, a local historian noted, Kaloji in such a manner recaptured the capital with little to no bloodshed on behalf of his nephew. (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

Meanwhile, Sheshmalji, with his own troops, made for Dhrangadhra and captured the city. Again, the Raj was agonized. The *garasdars* (gentry), alerted of such alarming news, rode to Halvad, where they pledged their support. Ignited by Bai Phuljiba's rousing language, they supported Kaloji's plan to mobilize the *ghadisena* (garrison) and take Dhrangadhra by storm.

But Gajsinhji was in a quandary for he feared a possible Maratha invasion. His Mahajan (advisor) had earlier suggested leaving Dhrangadhra undefended and open to possible infiltration (by the Marathas). Now, however, it was well fortified and could withstand an extended siege. For that reason, the Mahajan recommended letting Sheshmalji remain in Dhrangadhra, an opinion seconded by Kaloji, who agreed that a domestic dispute would be a foolish undertaking in light of possible Maratha interventions. Gajsinhji sent Kaloji to Sitha with reinforcements, while instructing Rani Jijima not to return.

Disregarding his message, Jijima marched from Varsoda to Sitha with her adolescent son. She had a band of faithful *Chavdas* [clansmen] and her own money, and began preparing her own battle plan by acquiring additional troops and armaments. In Viramgam, she engaged the mercenary Muhammad Muchalo, who recruited local Kasbatis (soldiers of fortune, as Colonel Walker noted, who were known for their cavalry skills) (Mayne, 1921, 113-114).

With these forces, she rode into Dhrangadhra, where she was met by two additional armies: those of the Peshwa and the Nawab of Radhanpur. The Nawab was on his way home from Junagadh, after having unsuccessfully attempted to put his son on the Junagadh *gadi* (throne). His army, disheartened and weary, was keen to reach Radhanpur swiftly. Nonetheless, he stopped in Dhrangadhra where he was warmly received and entertained by the Rani and her son and was thoroughly charmed by the queen. In need of moveable wealth, he sold his cannon to Jijima in exchange for her jewelry, and agreed to march his troops to Dhrangadhra city and situate his soldiers in readiness for an assault.

According to Amubha, when Rani Jijima was in Varsoda with her son, who was known as Kunvar Bapji, Gajsinghji sent a royal courier via camel messenger requesting that she remain in her father's home, but the message was lost in transit. This was largely due to the fact that Jijima had her own ambitions. She informed her husband that Sheshmalji should be routed from Dhrangadhra before the Maratha envoy arrived, and that she was preparing for the homeward journey. Kaloji had his own army (*sena)* but as noted earlier had thought better of marching on Dhrangadhra. Instead, Rani Jijima sent her own reinforcements to the garrison at Sitha, on the off chance that Sheshmalji might attempt to seize the village. Gajsinhji wrote to her advising her not to *jokham* (risk) traveling back to Halvad.

The Rani's response, on receipt of her husband's command, was fiery in nature. She asserted that should the Marathas find Sheshmalji in command of Dhrangadhra, they would use it for their own interests, and likely form a permanent settlement with the usurper, thus splitting the kingdom in half. She urgently reiterated that Sheshmalji must be removed swiftly and at whatever cost, even if he had to be given additional *giras* (villages) in compensation. She would ride back in all speed with her son, she wrote. This response was a clear and obvious rejection of her husband's royal decree.

She arrived at Sitha with the heir apparent, where the Raj appointed her adolescent son the Ghadaval (fort-keeper). But it was a title purely in name as the heir was more boy than man, and his mother took over most of his duties with vigor and skill, defying the prescriptions of *ozhal* (or *pardah*) and riding briskly from camp to camp.

Since her first attempt to seize Dhrangadhra failed, she resorted to forming significant alliances in her second, with the Kasbatis of Viramgam and Dholka and the Nawab of Radhanpur, much of which was personally financed through her own monies. (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

5.7 The Siege

On the day of the battle, she opened canon assault on the walls of Dhrangadhra, although there is no mention of damage to the exterior. Sheshmalji sent his commander (*senani*), Viraji, to negotiate a peace agreement, although he tried to hold out as long as he could. They were in the midst of these negotiations when the Maratha contingency arrived. Seeing that his sister-in-law's forces were amicable with those of the Peshwa, Sheshmalji agreed to a common settlement (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

According to the Maratha sources, as summarized by Umaidsinhji M Jhala of Bavali, the Maratha army arrived in the midst of the battle, just as Rani Jijima was about to breach the walls. She and her son held a council and prepared to meet them. The banners were flying in the wind and kettle war drums were beating. A line of gunners faced them, beside the Rani's Varsoda force, the hired Kasbatis, the Dhrangadhra contingent, and the Nawab of Radhanpur, who had signed a friendship pact with her.

The young Kunvar Bapji or heir apparent, then seventeen years old, in the company of four men, two officers and two lancers, rode out to greet the Marathas. He rode on his beautiful horse Apsara with his *bandhi talvar* (bound sword) held aloft, symbolizing that he came in peace. He rode straight to the Maratha *Subha* or Viceroy, Sadasiva Ramchandra, and with his hand on his sword, vowed that he would meet their demands in time. The Marathas, trusting in a Rajput's word of honor, accepted. In return, Rani Jijima and her son requested that the Marathas remain and through their presence intimidate those holding the Dhrangadhra fort through a show of strength. The Maratha commander agreed. Sheshmalji, witnessing this compact, realized that his time was up.

This was the first instance that the Marathas had met a Rajput queen in person and they were struck by "Jijima's commanding personality" and pledged a vow in reinforcement of her son's promise. While unable to feed the entire Maratha army, who 'occupied the earth,' she did extend an offer of hospitality to the Maratha leaders and officers as her personal guests.

In the following negotiations, her son Jaswantsinhji, with his mother's permission, promised that he would pay what they requested as tribute (although this would later be contested by his father). Those in attendance were impressed by his "open and honest demeanor" and a *bandhan* (or bond) was written up. Rani Jijima herself was illiterate, but her daughter-in-law, who was always by her side and served as her aide and companion, Chandra De, read and wrote both Gujarati and Marathi and served as her intermediary in these negotiations. This Jhala-Maratha agreement was signed on Ram Navami, 1758 (Umaidsinh M. Jhala, "Jijima-Maratha Mulk/giri and Halvad").

Beyond her negotiations with the Marathas, Rani Jijima was also aware of the need to pacify Sheshmalji. Aware of her brother-in-law's own ambitions and cognizant that she must satisfy those needs, Jijima not only granted him his life, but also his estates

and lands, including the towns of Narichana and Sayla, which he had conquered, as long as he gave back his booty to the town's residents and swore allegiance to the Raj in perpetuity. Once he eventually agreed to the Rani's terms and made the requisite vows, she gave him a proper farewell party. He departed Dhrangadhra with all honors, including the beating of drums and his Nag (serpent) banner unfurled. Subsequently, Rani Jijima entered the city gates victorious and the townswomen streamed out of the city to greet her.

Indeed, the chronicles of the time (and the later reminisces by descendants of these key players) note the unusual nature of this plucky, audacious lady. She was clearly an "intrepid queen" who "astonished the world with her prowess." She had publicly ignored and ultimately challenged her lord husband's decrees and given herself sovereign powers. When the ruler's uncle, Kaloji arrived with other Halvad ministers to take over the administration of Dhrangadhra, the queen stuck to her guns, unwilling to hand over the reigns of government. A misunderstanding arose. Her husband's council publically criticized her on several counts: for disregarding the Darbar's command, gifting territory to Sheshmalji and riding on horseback publically without being veiled (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

According to a Bavali source, the Halvad council (*chovat)* took particular umbrage with three of her decisions. The first was that she had negotiated and signed an agreement with the Marathas without Darbar authority, which was seen as "disgraceful," and that this agreement occurred on that most solemn and auspicious of days, Ram-Navami. Further, she had agreed to pay a fixed tribute every year, which in itself was a "shameful commitment" that no Rajvada (royal house) had made before and which the Darbar did not wish to honour.

Secondly, she had allowed the "treacherous" Sheshmalji to leave Halvad with honour and had gifted him another village (that is Liya). The granting of land was the sole right of the sovereign, Raj Gajsinhji, and the queen consort did not have the authority to do so. The Rani responded that she had only given Sheshmalji the lands in exchange for his surrender of war plunder.

Thirdly, the council reprimanded her son for making an illegal *desavari* (i.e. foreign) alliance with the Muslim Nawab of Radhanpur and for having given him a Jhala woman in marriage to his son.

Indignant, the Rani showed herself an implacable adversary. In response to the Darbar's repudiation, she severed ties with Halvad. She declined to leave the walled city and "declared herself independent." Thereafter, the state was divided into two, with separate capitals in Halvad and Dhrangadhra. The Rani also paid fifty percent of the tribute to the Marathas, making herself not only a formidable player in internal dynastic affairs but also in the state's relationship with a significant regional power, in several instances overshadowing her husband (Meghrajji, "Praise of Jijima"). It was her own strength of will and character that would create the bedrock for her son's subsequent reign.

5.8 Her Influence Post Siege

If this period saw the rise of Jijima's star, it saw the wane of Gajsinghji's whose failings sound nearly Shakespearean in nature. One source notes, "Nowhere is found a prince, a ruler, who suffered such a succession of misfortunes and humiliations as Gaj Singhji." He would later face imprisonment by the Marathas and the humiliation of having his renegade wife pay his ransom, as well as the murder of his beloved sister. In the wake of Jijima's usurpation of Dhrangadha, he had the loyalty of a select few: his trusty and capable uncle Kaloji who continued to administrate his part of the kingdom, the spiritual guidance of his gurubandhu Mahant Balgiri and the indulgent affection of his sister, Phuljiba. He spent much of his later life in meditation and yoga.

A split state led to split government. Kaloji returned to Halvad disillusioned and ceased trade with Dhrangadhra. The Bhavali bards noted that he reported to his nephew that nowhere in the long history of Hindustan had there ever been a woman who was so unworthy of being a wife. Despite her courageous actions, she had broken apart the Jhala state and created a trade embargo.

Gajsinhji's guru warned that the severance of commerce between Dhrangadhra and Halvad should not occur, for the Rani might march herself on Halvad; this opinion was seconded by the king as well as his noblemen. Exchange between the two cities recommenced and the heir apparent Jaswantsinhji was made *patodhar* or regent of Dhrangadhra.

Figure 5.9: The Chaturbhuja madaliya of Jhallesvar Raj Dvarkadasji 1210-1240. It is in the puja of the Jhallesvars' shrine at Lakmivihar zenana palace in Dhrangadhra.

A year following the state's division, the Maratha viceroy wrote that he would stop at Dhrangadhra but then adroitly bypassed it. In 1759, he sent a secret force and laid a nocturnal siege on Halvad, taking it on the 2 April 1759. The Marathas captured Gajsinhji and took him to Ahmedabad. It was left to the intrepid Jijima to bargain for her husband's release, after collecting the ransom monies from her willing subjects. The Rani sent the funds along with a delegation of her subjects to Ahmedabad.

On Gajsingh's return, he gave the locket he wore, an image of Chaturbhajaji, to his son, (which is now part of the Raj's daily puja) as well as the pargana of Hariana, which was later visited by Rani Jijima. The relationship between husband and wife remained a less than happy one. As Meghrajji observed, it was a "tragic tale" which could easily serve as a subject for an entire book of its own (Amubha Saheb, "Gajsinhji II and Rani Jijibai").

5.9 Concluding Thoughts

Rani Jijima proved a formidable player during Gajsingh II's reign and emerges from the archive as one of the most clearly defined female figures of the Jhala line, with an individuated historic personality and attributable achievements. In part, her successes were due to the fragile and volatile nature both of mid eighteenth century politics in western India, seeing the eclipse of one empire, the emergence of another and the imminent arrival of a third, as well as a lacuna of strong (male) regnant power in the Jhala Raj itself. Yet it was not opportunity alone (coupled with an opportunistic instinct) that brought her to power and made her a credible and dominant power in her husband's reign. The Rani herself was an accomplished ruler in her own right; one imbued with martial prowess, physical fortitude, entrepreneurial instinct and diplomatic charm. As soldier and equestrienne, she was matchless, comparable to any male contemporary, leading military campaigns and spending long days in the saddle. As financier, she used both state and personal funds to pay the expenses of her siege. As negotiator and arbitrator, she showed adroit ability, creating alliances with the Nawab of Radhanpur, the Marathas, the mercenary forces of Muhammad Muchalo, and even with her own defeated brother-in-law Sheshmalji after the reconquest of Dhrangadhra. As one observer noted Rani Jijima's settlement with the Maratha's prevented their "armies ravaging and laying waste to the countryside"; a decision which was one of "extraordinary foresight, wisdom and achievement – unprecedented anywhere at that time and in the Annals of Kathiawar" and which anticipated the later East India Company's "Permanent Settlement" by 50 years (Meghrajji, "Praise of Jijima").

Figure 5.10: Rani JijiBa amongst her beloved spirited horses.

Most of these skills were largely self taught and gained through pure force of character, as Jijima herself was not a schooled woman of letters. She serves as a powerful predecessor for the later Maratha Rani of Jhansi, who would also valiantly fight with her son beside her. Where Jijima played on the regional stage, Jhansi would become a national symbol. But women like Jhansi were indebted to the many pre-colonial warrior-diplomat-queens who paved the way for her own ascendency.

In terms of her gender, Jijima was criticized: as a disobedient and obstructionist wife, who did not heed her husband's commands; as a shameful woman, who displayed her face and body to all and sundry; as a controlling mother, who ruled in place of her adolescent son and minimized him. Yet in many ways she also embodied the classic *gunas* or virtues so oft celebrated in bardic literature and eulogized as desirable qualities for Rajput women even today. She was the brave, fearless Rajputni who rallies her husband and male kinsmen to battle, and teaches them their martial duty; the fearless mother who secures her son's interests and protects his estate; and the able bodied and strong willed warrior, who sleeps on horseback with her sword at the ready, as all good Rajputs should do. It is no surprise that Jijima has remained such a resonant figure some 230 years after her death. She is known to us largely due to the fact she captured the imagination of her descendent, Meghrajji, who became her advocate and commemorator, maintaining this record for posterity. But it is her powerful personality, and the persona she created, that beckons to us across time, as history, memory, legend, myth.

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