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The Myth of the Hare and Hounds: Making sense of a recurring city-foundation story*

Suchitra Balasubrahmanyan**

Abstract

It is said that the city of Ahmedabad in western India was founded at a spot on the bank of the river Sabarmati where the sultan saw a hare overpowering his hunting hounds and driving them away. What is an origin myth such as this one trying to communicate about the city, its founder and his times? And how would our understanding of the myth's expressive meaning and significance expand and deepen when it emerges that this is the origin myth of many capital cities, across the Indian subcontinent and beyond, founded between the eighth and eighteenth centuries? Can the myth, its pattern of recurrence over a vast geography and span of time, and the ways in which it is reported in oral tellings and written sources, illuminate the interlaced political, religious and economic networks of the early and late-medieval world? These are questions that this paper seeks to explore.

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Introduction

This is an exploratory essay which examines a city-foundation myth and its multiple reappearances across the Indian subcontinent and beyond, over a period of a thousand years. The essay begins with Ahmedabad, a western Indian city established as the capital of the Gujarat Sultanate in 1411. This city, it is said, was founded at a spot on the bank of the river Sabarmati where the sultan saw a hare overpowering his hounds. How does one make sense of an origin myth such as this? What does it tell us about Ahmedabad, its founder and about his aspirations for the city he established? And how would our understanding expand and deepen when it emerges that this is the origin myth of many cities, across the subcontinent and beyond, founded over a thousand-year period? Can the myth, and its pattern of recurrence, illuminate the interlaced political, religious and economic networks of the early and late-medieval world? How can we plumb the myth's expressive meaning and significance to gain insight into the vast population which found shared meaning in this myth? These are questions that the paper seeks to explore.

At the outset, a methodological note might be in order. I have lived for most of my life in Ahmedabad and as a resident of the city I had heard of the myth associated with its founding. The story came into sharper focus while I was working on a biography of the city to mark its 600th anniversary. A chance conversation led to the discovery that the myth is also associated with another city halfway across the world.[1] What followed was a saga of sleuthing which led to the discovery of the myth's ubiquity. It took me through ancient western and south Indian history; medieval history of West, South and Southeast Asia; Indian Ocean trade circulation; the spread of Jainism, Buddhism and Islam and

[1] I thank Debashish Nayak for drawing my attention to the story of Malacca's foundation.

their encounters with Hinduism; writings in English and Gujarati, and in English translation Sanskrit, Telugu, Oriya, Kannada, Malay, Portuguese and Persian texts as well as analyses of the literary traditions of these languages; studies in folklore and mythology and urban history. This was made possible mainly through advances in computer science, which made vast resources available to me. It was also perhaps the only way to get past social science disciplinary specializations where, I discovered, it was unlikely that a scholar would know what lay in a neighbouring area, century, language or subject. Finally, and inevitably, the essay probably does justice to none of these disciplines I engaged with and any insights it offers lie in the interstices between disciplines and specialisations. The essay struggles with the difficulty, even impossibility, of ever knowing enough to make fully satisfactory sense of this particular myth and leaves several questions unanswered. It is in this sense that it is an exploratory essay.

Related to the question of methodology is the use of terms. This essay explores a singular narrative ascribed to the foundation of many cities and towns, across a large area and over many centuries. What would be the appropriate term to use to refer to it — legend, myth, folktale or just, plain, story? Of course, it *is* a story. Yet, the essay is about why it is not just a story, but a special kind of story. Legends and myths are both special kinds of stories containing 'true' elements, such as historical figures, places or events, unlike a folktale which is usually about imaginary people and settings. What sets legends and myths apart are their differing time frames and their basic focus. While legends are set in the relatively recent past, myths usually refer to the remote past; legends speak of events, while myths often explain origins. In its preoccupation with origins, myths also contain a strong symbolic meaning, which goes beyond the narrative and in which resides its 'real' significance. It is in this last sense that I refer to the hare-hounds stories as a myth though the reader will notice that all of these terms— myth, legend, folktale—occur throughout the essay, used, often interchangeably, by the various authors quoted here.

Ahmedabad

According to Ahmedabad's foundation myth, Sultan Ahmed Shah fell in love with Teja, the daughter of the Bhil chief of Astodia on the Sabarmati river. He marched his army south from Patan, subdued Asha Bhil and married his daughter. One day, upon their return to Patan, his new wife praised the area around her father's home and suggested the sultan take a look at the land there. Piqued by her words, Ahmed Shah decided to explore the area and one day came hunting in the woods on the banks of the Sabarmati. Suddenly, a hare emerged from the bushes, attacked his hunting dogs and chased them away. The astonished sultan concluded that if the hares of this land were so courageous, its people must be even more extraordinary. So he decided to build a city at the spot where the incident occurred and make it his capital. Thus, Ahmedabad, the city of Ahmed, was established in 1411. The local people's understanding of how the city came to be is reflected in this Gujari couplet:

> *jab kutte par sassa aaya*
> *tab badshah ne shaher basaaya*
> when the hound was overpowered by the hare
> then the king established a city there[2]

How does one begin to make sense of a city foundation myth such as this? Foundation stories associated with cities of classical antiquity in the Mediterranean feature heroes battling mythical and real creatures along with interventions by divine beings and oracles. The stories explain the establishment of these cities and with them, the emergence of a new order.[3] In the subcontinent, we have medieval south Indian temple *sthalapuranams* or place-histories. These are accounts explaining how and why a particular temple to a god or goddesses in a particular form was built at a specific spot. Gods and goddesses are direct participants in these stories and temples are built at the spot of their manifestation.

[2] Maganlal Vakhatchand. (1977), pp. 7–8 (trans. from Gujarati by author)
[3] Azara et al. (2000), n.p.

Sthalapuranams thus circumscribe a sacred geography around deity and shrine, which subsequently takes the form of a town and pilgrimage centre.

The Ahmedabad story, however, bears little resemblance to these Mediterranean and temple-town genres and is a story of a completely different kind. It is the story of a city being founded at the spot where nature's immutable laws are overturned, not through some miraculous divine power but through the personal courage of one whose triumph, in normal circumstances, would be inconceivable, even impossible. What could the story of a weak and vulnerable creature overpowering its natural predator allude to in the context of the establishment of a city? The first clues emerge from events unfolding in the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries in Gujarat.

Gujarat had been annexed to the Delhi Sultanate in 1304. By the late fourteenth century, the authority of the Delhi Sultanate was waning and provincial governors were beginning to assert themselves. In the early fifteenth century, Zafar Khan was the Sultanate's governor in Gujarat. His ambitious son, Tatar Khan, was a noble in the court at Delhi and actively competed for greater power in the fluid political situation. When court rivalries in Delhi became difficult, Tatar Khan fled to Gujarat. But, finding his father reluctant to assert his independence, Tatar Khan imprisoned him and declared himself sultan of Gujarat in 1404. He died soon after, allegedly murdered through his father's machinations. With his son out of the way, Zafar Khan proclaimed himself sultan in 1407 and established the Gujarat Sultanate with its capital at Patan. A few years later, Zafar Khan's nineteen-year-old grandson, Ahmed, poisoned him and gained control over the sultanate.[4]

The young sultan now needed to assert his individuality. His first step was to distance himself, quite literally, from his grandfather's capital, Patan. For the preceding century, Patan had

[4] Yagnik and Sheth. (2011), pp. 5–8

been the city from where Gujarat had been administered as a province of the Delhi Sultanate. Even earlier, from the mid-eighth century onwards, Patan had been the capital of the Chavda and Chaulukya (Solanki) Rajputs. Thus, moving away from Patan marked the establishment of a new order on three counts. It marked Ahmed Shah's assertion against his family, a final breaking-free from the central authority in Delhi and a firm relegation to the past, the region's Rajput antecedents. Ahmed Shah's extreme youth added yet another dimension to this picture of weakness and vulnerability and his search for his own space, strategic and psychological, ended on the banks of the Sabarmati. And in the process, this meek hare overcame the hounds of his time and the stage was set for a new capital city.

This account tries to make sense of the myth by relating it to the biography of the young sultan, a weak and vulnerable teenager facing and overcoming predatory political opponents. We interpret the first line of the myth-couplet *jab kutte par sassa aaya* (when the hound was overpowered by the hare) to suggest that in the tableaux of the hare overcoming the hunting hounds, Ahmed Shah was witnessing his own life story being played out before his eyes. Yet, if we return to the second line of the couplet *tab badshah ne shaher basaaya* (then the king established a city there) we find the teenaged bystander transformed into a decisive badshah who comprehends the scene he has just witnessed to recognize the profound value of the *site* where this scene has been enacted. The miracle of the weak creature overcoming the powerful predator to become the hero of the situation is undoubtedly central, but the epiphany lay in grasping the significance of the particular space the actors occupy. So it is in the decision to consecrate the space as a new capital city that the witness-as-hare overcomes his political-rivals-as-hounds.

We can again interpret the significance of the site as indicated in the myth through a geo-political reading. That spot on the river Sabarmati, where the hare had behaved so unusually, was ideally located in multiple ways. It was about 125 kilometres south of Patan. It promised economic prosperity as it lay along

subcontinental trade routes that led to the prosperous ports of Cambay and Bharuch, which were key centres in the Indian Ocean trade from east Africa to east Asia. It was strategically positioned in the centre of the sultanate and thus offered protection from the challenges posed by Ahmed Shah's ambitious uncles and cousins in the south while enabling him to neutralize them. It was sufficiently insulated, yet well located to take on the Rajput kingdoms encircling Patan as well as the formidable kingdoms of Mewar, Malwa and Khandesh along the borders of the sultanate. The river Sabarmati acted as a barrier and also provided water, unlike Patan's Saraswati river, which was drying up.

So far, we have a fairly straightforward way of reading the myth, making sense of it by relating it to the situation in which Ahmed Shah found himself—vulnerable through his youth and inexperience, faced with multiple challenges from strong rivals and the urgent need to make quick, timely and bold decisions on which his very survival depended. It seems clear he was in the position of the hare which courageously stood up to its predators from a strategic location and vanquished them. But how would our understanding expand when it emerges that the myth of the hare and hound is associated with a contemporaneous city over six thousand kilometres away from Ahmedabad to the east. This is the city of Malacca, situated in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula.

Malacca

The Malacca story is intriguing, if a little foggy. The time period is the late fourteenth century and the story is about Parameswara, a Palembang prince and ruler of the Hinduised maritime kingdom of Srivijaya in the Java region. In some accounts he is described as a vassal of the Majapahit empire of Indonesia. In around 1377, Parameswara was defeated by Javanese rivals and was forced to flee to Singapore. He killed the ruler there and took over the area and surrounding sea-channels. After an attack by the king of Siam, Parameswara fled northwards up the river Muar and established a new kingdom

along the coast. We get detailed descriptions of the story from Malay and Portuguese accounts.

The story goes that Parameswara was once resting under a tree on the banks of the river Bertram where he had gone hunting. In the *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals written in the Malay language, Parameswara had by this time converted to Islam and is referred to as Iskandar or Secander Shah (in different versions and translations of the Malay original):

> And as the king, who was hunting, stood under a tree, one of his hounds was kicked by a white mouse-deer. And Sultan Iskandar Shah said, "This is a good place where even its mouse-deer are full of fight! We shall do well to make a city here". And the chiefs replied, "It is indeed as your Highness says". Thereupon Sultan Iskandar Shah ordered that a city be made and he asked, "What is the name of the tree under which I am standing?" And they all answered, "It is called Malaka, your Highness"; to which he rejoined, "Then Malaka shall be the name of this city".
>
> And Sultan Iskandar Shah took up his abode at Malaka, where he established a system of court ceremonial.[5]

In the Portuguese version of the story, it was Paramjcura's [Parameswara] son Xaquem Daraxa [Iskandar Shah] who went hunting "as was his custom everyday and most times", and saw his dogs and greyhounds "chasing an animal like a hare with feet like a little buck and a short tail". The dogs, which "used to kill ten or twelve of these animals every day", pursued the animal until it reached the sea by the hill of Malacca (so named by his father when he first fled to the area since *Malaqa* meant 'hidden fugitive' in the local language). When the animal went up the hill it "regained so much strength on the hill that it seemed a different being" and "it turned on the dogs and they began to run away". Iskandar Shah reported the incident to his father, and described

[5] Brown. (1952), p. 52. See also Leyden. (1821), p. 88

what he had seen, puzzled at "how was that one strong enough to defend itself against all the dogs so that they would not reach it". Paramjcura accompanied Xaquem Daraxa to the hill of Malacca and acquiesced to his son's wish to settle there "on top of the hill where the kings of Malacca have had their dwelling and residence until the present time".[6]

Malacca was established in about 1400 A.D. and, like Ahmedabad about a decade later, at a site of enormous strategic importance. Once again, we can decode Malacca's story as encapsulating Parameswara/Iskandar Shah's courage and tenacity to establish his independence in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. He was, like the hare-deer, one of many who were killed everyday by hunting dogs, but turned strong enough to assert himself. He sensed the immense significance of the role reversal and the spot where the incident occurred and was shrewd enough to recognise the advantages of the topography to make it his base. It was midway on the straits between Malaysia and Indonesia, which meant that Malacca could control the maritime trade between China, India and the Far East. Over the next century, the city became a wealthy and powerful centre of the global silk and porcelain trade from China, cotton textiles from Gujarat and Coromandel and spices, gold, camphor, sandalwood and tin from Sumatra, Borneo, Malaya and neighbouring areas.[7] Unlike Ahmedabad, there is an added significance in the Malacca story in that the name of the city was drawn from the site of the myth's enactment. Further, to this day, two mouse deer adorn the Malaccan coat of arms, though further research is needed to determine when exactly this happened. Both the city's name and its emblem are a concrete and self-conscious memorializing of the myth of its founding.

[6] Pires. (1944), pp. 235–37

[7] Lapidus. (2002), pp. 383–84. See also Bowman. (2000), pp. 440–41 and Ricklefs. (2001), pp. 22–23

Vijayanagara

If we were to consider Ahmedabad and Malacca as two end-points in the geography of the occurrence of the hare-hounds myth, it suggests that there could be places in between where the myth might be found. And there are. The next significant location is Vijayanagara, City of Victory (present-day Hampi), established in 1336 as the capital city of what is known as the Vijayanagara Empire. In the early fourteenth century, as the Delhi Sultans pushed southwards, Hoysala vassals Harihara and Bukka (in some versions they are described as Kakatiya vassals) were captured and taken to Delhi and eventually sent back as local chiefs to Kampili from where they had originally fled. There are many accounts of what happened next to the two brothers[8] and what follows is the graphic description of the events leading to the founding of Bisnaga or Vijayanagara by Portuguese traveler and chronicler Fernao Nunes:

> One day, while the King [Harihara] was hunting, as he very often did at a mountain on the other side of the river of Nagumdym (Anegodi), where the city of Bisnaga is today, but in which in those days was a thick wood in which there was much game, which the King had made into a reserve for himself, being there with two dogs and hunting equipments, a hare leapt up, and instead of running away from the dogs, charged at them, and bit them all, and none of them dared to approach her on account of the damage she did. And when the King saw this, he was astonished that so weak a creature could bite the dogs that had seized a tiger and a lion for him, and it seemed to him that it was not a hare but some mystery and he returned to the city of Nagumdim. And on reaching the river, he found a hermit who was wandering there, a holy man amongst them, to whom he recounted what had happened with the hare.[9]

[8] Sewell. (1900), pp. 20–23
[9] Subrahmanyam. (2001), p. 191

The hermit, Vidyaranya, too was struck by the singular event and insisted on visiting the place where it had occurred. On reaching there, he realized the significance of what had happened and told the king that the incident implied that he was the strongest in the world and enemies would never take a city established at the spot. The king followed his advice and built a city named Vydiajuna (Vidyaranya) after the hermit but in the course of time this name has become corrupted and is now called Bisnaga (Vijayanagara).[10]

The *Vidyaranya-krti* has an equally live description in Sanskrit, made more interesting as a first-person narration in hermit Vidyaranya's voice:

> Some time later, the two kings [Harihara and his brother Bukka, who considered Vidyaranya their mentor] decided to go hunting, so they crossed to the south side of the Tungabhadra River. After walking around for a while in a woody grove, they spotted a small rabbit. They released a pair of dogs to catch the rabbit. When the king's hunters caught up with the dogs, they arrived just in time to witness the rabbit turn and attack the dogs. The dogs fled and the rabbit disappeared into thin air. The hunters were surprised to see this amazing sight, so they returned and reported the whole incident to the king. Out of curiosity the two kings asked me about this great wonder, and, when I had heard what they had said, I went together with them to inspect the wood where it had happened. I examined the spot with care and then told them that the place was destined to be the site of a royal capital.[11]

In *Rayavacakamu* it is Vidyaranya himself who is looking for an auspicious spot to found a city. So he climbed the Matanga hill and "scanned the four quarters" and spotted a hare dart out of a cave on the hill and chase a dog. Pondering over the significance of what he had just seen he thought, "In this world,

[10] Sewell, (1900), pp. 299–300
[11] Wagoner. (1993), p. 40

it is the rule for dogs to chase hares, but nowhere have I seen a hare chasing a dog. Might it not be due to some special power that this place possesses?"[12]

Like Ahmedabad and Malacca that it pre-dated, Vijayanagara's location was strategic. The Tungabhadra offered protection on the north and west, the hilly terrain in the surrounding area was ideal for building fortifications and soon a great empire came to be established around that capital city. The only deviation from the Ahmedabad and Malacca stories is that the heroes-hares are unable to understand the significance of the event by themselves and needed it to be interpreted for them by their mentor Vidyaranya, who is able to make the connection between the event, the locale and its significance for their future as rulers.

In the foregoing descriptions we saw the origin myths of three cities, located quite far from each other, bearing common features with minor variations. I have presented them in the order in which I discovered the stories, starting with Ahmedabad because I happened to live there and was writing a book about its history. But chronologically, the dates of their founding were in exactly the reverse order. Vijayanagara was established first, in 1336, Malacca in 1400 and Ahmedabad in 1411. In the sections that follow we shall explore the meaning, circulation and origin of the myth of the hare and hounds.

Meaning of the Myth

Taken separately, in each case we can see that the myth illuminates the rise of a regional power centre. The protagonists were self-made men, breaking out of the political landscape of their time to assert themselves, looking to found their own kingdoms, carving space for themselves. Their basic legitimacy came out of their courage, exactly as the story suggests, not out of inherited genealogies (though they belong to a militarized elite, Hindu or Muslim) or other ascriptive qualities and this is what the myth captures eloquently, imaginatively.

[12] Ibid. p. 44

Read together, the myths point to the political upheavals that were taking place in the medieval world. Existing state formations, such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Hoysalas in medieval India and the Majapahit Empire in medieval Java, which had dominated the political landscape were beginning to weaken and give way to new configurations. And the myth, with its emphasis on the site where the hare finds it in himself to turn against his predators, suggests that this emergence takes place at specific locations. Reading this aspect in hindsight, we can see the strategic advantages of the location of each city and how the success of these would-be rulers flows from shrewd, timely decisions in the choice of an operational base for political and economic expansion.

A second interpretation emerges if we overlap the political meaning of the myth with the spread of Islam in the region and issues of political legitimacy. We have to remember that Ahmed Shah was a relatively recent, third generation convert to Islam and needed to legitimize his new identity along with his new capital. To do so he sought the guidance of Sheikh Ahmed Khattu, a Maghribi Sufi who had established his *kankhah* on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. Khattu invoked the prophet Khwaja Khizr who directed that the city be established through the blessings of four Ahmeds who had never missed a single namaz, which included the sultan, the sheikh and two others. They were assisted by twelve Babas who were associated with Nizamuddin Auliya, a Chishti saint of Delhi, thus gaining legitimation from influential Islamic figures of the time.

While conversion to Islam is in the background in the Ahmedabad story, we have seen that it is more central in Malacca in that it is a step taken by the protagonist (father or son). Religious conversion figures in Vijayanagara too. It is said that when Harihara and Bukka were captured by soldiers of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq and taken to Delhi, they were forced to convert to Islam. They returned to Kampili and ruled as governors of the Sultanate. Vidyaranya not only helped them to found an independent kingdom but also guided their apostasy

from Islam.[13] Putting these details from the three cities together, would it then be plausible to suggest that the hare and hound story might serve as a metaphor for the encounter between Islam and an older Hindu order in medieval India? We shall return to explore this aspect of connecting the myth with religion later in the essay.

Diffusion of the Myth

The recurrence of the myth in these three locations brings us to the question of circulation: how does the myth occur in three places so widely separated in distance? We can offer possible explanations if we view the three cities in pairs. Let's take Ahmedabad and Malacca. Both cities were established within a decade of each other, Malacca before Ahmedabad. We get the first glimmerings of how the story may have traveled between these two cities by going back to the Portuguese travelogue *Suma Oriental* where the author Tome Pires says, "Cambay chiefly stretches out two arms, with her right arm she reaches out towards Aden and with the other towards Malacca…".[14] As mentioned earlier, Ahmedabad was directly connected with the Cambay trade. Gujarati traders plied on this route and the story could very likely have traveled with them. The Indian Ocean trade circuit connected Vijayanagara and Malacca too and overland subcontinental networks connected Ahmedabad and Vijayanagara. So merchant traffic between these cities could easily have carried this myth.

Another clue to the circulation of the myth lies in Paramesvara's conversion to Islam. The advent of Islam in east Asia is connected to the region's trading relationships and by the thirteenth century, Southeast Asia was in contact with Muslims of China, Bengal, Gujarat, Iran, Yemen and South Arabia. One theory suggests that Gujarati traders brought Islam to the Java region. Along with traders came sufis, saints and religious

[13] Stein. (1989), pp. 19–20
[14] Pires. (1944), p. 42

teachers and local rulers converted to Islam to attract Muslim trade and in the process also offer resistance to the hegemony of the Hinduised Majapahit and repulse the central Javan empires.[15] So it is quite plausible that the myth was circulated by Muslim preachers and scholars who traveled between Ahmedabad and Malacca and were offered patronage by their rulers.

It is possible that Muslim savants and religious figures preachers brought the story from the Maghrib or even further west though research, so far, has not revealed the incidence of the hare-hounds myth in connection with any city in that region. In his work on the foundation myth of the city of Fez in Morocco, O'Meara suggests that foundation myths of Islamic cities are connected to stories from the Prophet Muhammad's life.[16] Both the notion of "Islamic" cities and how it might be relevant to the cities in the subcontinent or Southeast Asia discussed here, as well as whether or not their common foundation myth relates to incidents in the Prophet's life, need further examination before any meaningful insights can be offered.

A further connection between the Malacca region and Vijayanagara was royal marriage alliances. The *Sejarah Melayu* refers to a "raja of the land of Kling" [thought to be a corruption of Kalinga and variously thought to refer in Malay to India, the Coromandel coast, Orissa–Andhra region] Adi Bernilam Raja Mudeliar, raja of the city of Bija Nagara whose granddaughter, Nila Panchadi, married the prince of Singapore.[17] This points to marriage alliances, and cultural exchanges flowing from such alliances, as another possible conduit for the myth's circulation. One could speculate that the myth may have been invoked to explain the rise of two royal families connected subsequently by marriage. This possibility resurfaces when we explore the question of the myth's origin.

[15] Ricklefs. (2001), p. 15 and Lapidus. (2002), p. 383
[16] O'Meara. (2007), pp. 27–41
[17] Leyden. (1821), p. 45

Origin of the Myth

We have earlier seen the description of Harihara and Bukka's hunting trip in the Telugu text *Rayavacakamu*. Buried in a footnote in Wagoner's translation of this text is information that the story is also ascribed to the ancient Hoysala capital Shashakapura, about three hundred kilometres southwest of Vijayanagara in present-day Karnataka.[18] The Hoysala Empire is believed to have existed between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries though it is not clear when Shashakapura, The City of the Hare, became its capital. The city is said to have been established by the founder of the dynasty, Sala, at a spot where a hare had chased a tiger. The Hoysala emblem depicted Sala battling a tiger, which may allude to the Hoysala struggles against the Cholas who had a tiger as their emblem.[19] Thus the foundation story, which like Malacca is also reflected in the city's name, directly refers to a small chieftain taking on the powerful Western Chalukyas and/or the Cholas and triumphing. The story also says that Sala was guided by a Jain savant named Sudattacharya, introducing the possibility of a Jain circulation of the myth in early-medieval India.

The antiquity of our myth can now be placed in eleventh-century Deccan. However, the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* pushes the date back further in its reference to the story in connection with the establishment of Patan in the eighth century in western India:

> He [Vanraj of the Chavda dynasty] laid foundation of the great city of Pattan and made it his capital. From that time till the foundation of great Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujerat was the great city of Pattan. It is related that when he intended to lay the foundation of Pattan, he went out for recreation and hunting in search and inquiry of a suitable place. A shepherd named Anhil, getting information about his intention, pointed out to him a (piece of) land agreeable to his wish on condition that his name should be associated

[18] Wagoner. (1993), p. 45
[19] Kamat. (1980), pp. 129–30

> with it. He said, "I saw a hare on a (particular) spot who, with boldness and daring, freed himself from a mouth of a dog and ran away". He prospered the place and named it Anhil warah which gradually became famous as Nahawarah. As it attained good and excellent prosperity, it was called Pattan… It was founded in 802 Bikramjit equivalent to 103 Hijri.[20]

To understand the context of the establishment of Patan we need to clarify the earlier history of western India. The Maitrak dynasty ruled Gujarat between the fifth and eighth centuries from their capital Valabhi. Valabhi was famous for its Buddhist university and is mentioned by contemporary Chinese travellers. Jain sources suggest that Arabs from the Sindh region destroyed Valabhi in the eighth century and the rise of Patan occurred subsequently under the Chavda Rajputs. The early-medieval period saw the strong impact of Jainism and Buddhism in both western India where Patan is located and the Deccan region where Shashakapura is located. Thus, putting Shashakapura and Patan side by side presents the possibility of a Buddhist and/or Jain circulation of the hare-hounds/tiger story—with preachers and traders forming the most likely vectors. In addition, in the eleventh century, one of the Chaulukya (Solanki) Rajput kings of Patan, Karnadev, married princess Mayanalla or Minaldevi from the Goa-Karnataka region, echoing the marriage-alliance conduit for the transmission of the story across the subcontinent.[21]

It is quite striking that there are references to the hare-hounds (or its hare-tiger variation) foundation myth in connection with significant early-medieval capital cities in the very region where Ahmedabad and Vijayanagara were later established. It suggests that the myth was somehow available in the cultural sphere, to explain, justify and legitimize the emergence of a new order, particularly when it occurred in the midst of political upheaval. Unfortunately no similar sources could be located for possible

[20] Khan. (1965), p. 22
[21] Moraes, (1990), p. 277

earlier mentions of the myth in the Malacca region, which leaves us unable to pursue this line of enquiry in our third city.

Unfortunately, this still does not leave us with a firm or conclusive sense of a point of origin for the myth and any discussion of provenance brings us to the issue of the sources from which we come to know about the myth. We shall discuss this a little later in the essay, stepping ahead first to look at the astonishing web of further recurrences of the myth in the subcontinent and the extent to which it becomes available to explain the widespread upheavals in the late-medieval period in the region.

A Web of Hares and Hounds

The three cities we have just visited were founded in the period between the 1330s and early 1400s, each of them emerging out of an assertion against an earlier order. And this motif appears each time the myth resurfaces over the following centuries, but with significant variations. We shall first consider the region north of Vijayanagara. Many scholars of the Deccan have referred to these recurrences but have consigned them to footnotes in their work. In fact the historian Yazdani goes so far as to say that this "tale is not worthy of consideration, for it has been told by Indian writers in connexion with the foundation of other ancient towns".[22] But we shall turn our attention to that very repetition, to pull these cities and towns out of the footnotes and place them in a chronological and geographic framework, within a hierarchy of levels of political significance, and charting the variations to see what the patterns might reveal.

The first of these is Bidar, established by another Ahmad in 1422 at the place where he saw a fox turning and attacking his hunting dogs. Ahmad moved the Bahmani capital from Gulbarga to this spot, moving away from his predecessors. Of course, the 'real' reasons for the choice of Bidar were "its central position

[22] Yazdani. (1995), p. 5

in the kingdom, its natural defences, and its invigorating climate".[23] The story is again mentioned in connection with the post-Bahmani capital of Qutbshahi Golconda where it is attributed to Ibrahim Qutbshah, governor of Telengana, whose dogs were attacked by a hare while he was out hunting on the banks of the Musi river.[24] The exact date for the establishment of Golconda is unclear though we are taking it as a fifteenth century story since the Qutbshahi dynasty held power between 1495 and 1687, though the story is attributed to Ibrahim who ruled between 1550 and 1580.

The third in this group is Nizamshahi Ahmadnagar, established in 1494 by yet another Ahmad. Once again it is a fox that is the protagonist of the tale:

> …Ahmad was very fond of hunting. One day he saw a fox in the plain, on which Ahmadnagar now stands and ordered that hounds should be let lose after it. The fox tried to save itself, but when it became impossible, it turned round and began to face the hounds. The scene astonished Ahmad Nizam Shah, who decided to found a new city on that spot.[25]

This set of three tellings eloquently sums up the rivalries and power struggles in the Deccan at the end of the fifteenth century and the indomitable courage of the emerging regional sultanates. Clearly, while the myth may not have historical value for many scholars it becomes the singular expressive mode to capture the spirit of the time.

In the fifteenth century, the myth also moves north into Gond territory in the Vidarbha region. What makes this incidence interesting is that the Gonds are one of India's largest indigenous-tribal communities and the occurrence of the myth to explain their rise too is striking. The fall of the Yadavas of Devagiri and the

[23] Ibid. p. 5. See also Sewell. (1900), p. 299 fn 1 and Haig. (1907), p. 96
[24] Guha. (2009), p. 278
[25] Shyam. (1966), p. 53 fn 82. See also Sohoni. (2007), p. 75 fn 20

Kakatiyas of Warangal saw the rise of the Gond kingdoms of the Chandrapur-Gadhchiroli belt. Chandrapur was established in 1450 and this time the protagonist who witnesses the hare frighten away dogs is the Gond king, Khandakya Ballal Shah, who saw it as a sign to build a new capital city.[26] The story, which begins with Ballal Shah building a temple to Achuleshwur, differs significantly from the accounts we have seen so far and merits being cited in some detail:

> He [Ballal Shah] took a great interest in its [the construction of the temple] progress and one morning after his daily visit was riding away when a hare darted out of a bush and pursued his dog, which fled. Astonished at the sight, he followed it; the dog ran in a wide circle, while the hare took zig-zag cuts to catch it. At one point it closed with the dog, which however shook it off and continued its flight. On nearing the point where the chase had commenced, the dog turned on and killed the hare, and the king then saw that on the forehead of the latter was marked a white spot. Pondering what this might mean, he rode home and recounted to his wife all that he had seen. That wise woman counselled that the occurrence was of good omen, and that a fortified city should be built within the circuit of the chase, the walls following the hare's track. She further advised that special bastions should be erected, both where the hare had closed with the dog, and where the dog had killed the hare, expressing her belief that the latter point would prove the point of danger to the future city. … Thus began the building of the city of Chanda or Chundurpoor. The learned derive the name from Indoopoor (city of the Moon) which stood near the [river] Jhurput in the Treeta Yooga, but the common people see its origin in the white spot (Chundur) which marked the forehead of the wondrous hare.[27]

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[26] http://cultural.maharashtra.gov.in/english/gazetteer/CHANDRAPUR/places_ Chandrapur.html [accessed 23.5.2013]. Some accounts ascribe a date about two centuries earlier at 1242, see Lucie-Smith. (1870), p. 64

[27] Lucie-Smith. (1870), p. 65

In the mid-eighteenth century the region came under Maratha rule and, later, under British attack in the early nineteenth century. In 1818, the British breached Chandrapur fort "in the line of curtain between the Puthanpoora gate and the Hanooman wicket" which is considered to be the exact spot the queen had identified as vulnerable four hundred years earlier.[28]

While the myth had become 'available' as a handy explanation for emerging political formations in the medieval period, the detail in this version is remarkable for the way it draws the contours of the space to which it refers (this cartographic gesture occurs in Hebbur where the limits of the fort were drawn with the ashes of the dead tiger's carcass). The elements of the story cast a long shadow on the life of the city, a proleptic telling, containing in itself the shape of the city's future. Or so its tellers and writers and listeners and readers thought.

Hare and Hound Alliances

By the late fifteenth century, and continuing over the sixteenth century, we find the myth appearing in many small towns and mofussil places south of Vijayanagara (present-day Mysore region). These are almost like second-generation hare-hounds tellings where smaller principalities owing allegiance to Vijayanagara break away, often with the blessings of the ruler, and yet 'use' the hare and hound story as their origin myth. It is almost as if the hares and hounds are in alliance at this stage!

Take, for example, Chikkaballapur, a small town southeast of Vijayanagara, founded by one Malla Baire Gauda in 1479. On his hunting trip he observed a hare turn upon his hounds and "was led by this indication of *ganda bhumi* or male soil, to make proposals for the erection of a fort and *petta* there". But the permission of the Vijayanagara sovereign was needed, sought and received and the fort was built. The myth recurs in a series of

[28] Ibid. p. 74

places in the region, for many of which we have no reliable date. Some of these are Budihal to the northwest in present Tumkur district, which was established by an officer from Vijayanagara; or Sira, also in Tumkur district, where the "heroic soil" was recognised by Rangappa Nayak (this may be a seventeenth century story); or Hebbur, close to Tumkur town, where a bullock drove away a tiger, pursuing it till it was killed and the limits of the fort determined by the dead animal's ashes (like the Chandrapur story we just saw) and built with the "countenance of the Vijayanagara king".[29]

We have the date, 1537, for Bangalore where Kempe Gowda I, a feudatory ruler under the fading Vijayanagara empire had the same experience of recognizing a *gandu bhumi* while on a hunt. Chavuda Gauda changed his town from Keladi to Ikkeri in 1560 after the "heroic virtue of the soil" was revealed to him when a hare turned on his hunting hounds there. Tarikere, also mentioned in the Shashakapura footnote by Wagoner cited earlier, was the spot where Sarja Hanumanappa Nayak erected a fort and town in 1569 after his hunting experience, and, like Malacca, named it after the *tari* (*mimosa catechu*) trees growing in the place where the incident occurred. What is significant about these set of recurrences is the self-conscious use of the term *gandu bhumi* or virile soil for the site where the dramatic event is enacted, legitimising its consecration as a capital.[30]

Many of the scholars we have quoted seem to consider the myth a quintessentially Deccani feature, and regard its recurrence in the region as a "fractal-like network of culture".[31] But it is not a Deccani feature alone. In 1510, we find the story appearing northwest of Ahmedabad, in Bhuj. In fact, this is the only location west of Ahmedabad where this myth has been found, somewhat illustrating Tome Pires's description of the reach of Cambay stretching all the way to Aden. In Bhuj, the setting is of warring

[29] Rice. (2001), pp. 124, 175, 180–1, 198
[30] Ibid. pp. 21, 411–12, 458–9
[31] Jackson. (2005), p. 12

Rajput rulers fighting for supremacy in Kutch. In the early sixteenth century, Jadeja rulers began to rise to power and the story is ascribed to Rao Khengarji I who consolidated Jadeja rule in Kutch and recaptured his late father's throne from his murderous uncles:

> The Rao's quest for a suitable capital brought him to Bhujiyo Hill, considered in popular legend to be the abode of the serpent king Bhujiyo. Nearby was small tank, Hamir-rai, used by a shepherd, Hamir, as a watering hole for his animals. Khengarji is reputed to have seen a hare confront a dog, and to have been inspired to build a capital at the spot.[32]

Khengarji was able to achieve his political ambitions with military help from Sultan Mehmud Begada (Ahmed Shah's grandson) to defeat local chieftains and reclaim his father's territories and the adjoining areas to consolidate his rule in Kutch. The myth is invoked to justify the location of a new capital, a new centre of power, one that was not necessarily an assertion against an existing power structure but, in Khengarji's case, certainly a struggle against strong local political rivals.

It is clear that these are a set of second-generation tellings, where emerging-chieftain hares and central/regional-sovereign hounds find it advantageous to forge alliances and the myth serves more as a place-marker justification or a way to legitimize these local leaders by reporting that they had been blessed by a miracle. While Bhuj is the only western Indian example we have been able to find, there are numerous contemporaneous accounts from eastern India, specifically Orissa. While they follow the basic structure of the myth we have seen so far, there is significant osmosis into the local mythic landscape.

[32] Tyabji. (2006), p. 266 fn 6, 7

Eastward Movement of the Myth

By the sixteenth century, almost the whole of west Orissa came under the political sway of the Chauhan Rajas of Patna. The twelfth king Narasingha Dev and his younger brother Balaram Dev quarreled about the extent of their respective territories. The Queen mother intervened and told them that the river Surangi should form the dividing line: the elder son should enjoy the territory to the right of the river and the younger one to the left of it. Narasingha Dev kept Patna and Balaram Dev was given the tract with its seat at Chaurpur on the southern bank of the river Mahanadi. Here's what happened next:

> One day, the story goes, he crossed the river, while out hunting, and set his hounds at a hare. After a long chase, he found, to his surprise, that the dogs had been repulsed by the hare, and struck by this extraordinary courage in the most timid of animals, concluded that there must be some supernatural virtue in the land. He therefore determined to build a fort there, and in it installed Samlei, the tutelary goddess of his family. The town thus established is the modern Sambalpur. A similar legend is still current regarding the foundation of Kharagpur, the city of the hare, in the Monghyr district [present Bihar].[33]

An associated myth is that on the night of the incident, Goddess Samalei or Semelai appeared in Balaram Dev's dream and assured him that there was no mistake in his decision to build a fort at the spot, adding that if he worshipped her all his hopes would be fulfilled. The next day Balaram Dev discovered the deity in the form of a stone under a Semel (silkcotton) tree, installed it and built his fort. Identical stories prevail about the origin of other places in Orissa like Cuttack, Talcher and Baripada.[34]

We now see the hare-hounds myth osmosing into other local myths and practices, pointing to a process of state formation

[33] O'Malley. (2007), p. 21
[34] Pasayat, (n.d.), n.p

through the absorption/subjugation of local communities. The historian Hermann Kulke illuminates this phenomenon in the following compound myth told of the Baramba State in central Orissa:

> According to the *Baramba Rajvamsara Itihasa*, the legendary founder of Baramba, Hatakesvara Raut, met near his future fort a pregnant (*garbhabasa*) Saora woman, Sabaruni. He told her, "I shall cut your head and you will be our thakurani; we shall keep your head and worship will be done! Sabaruni then told him about the miracles of the place, 'This is a piece of land which produces heroes because a hare wounded a dog and a crane plunged on a falcon … Hatakesvara then killed her and kept her head at the gate of his fort.[35]

Kulke describes a similar tale, which he estimates to be from the late seventeenth century, of Balabhadra Dhala, the founder of the Dhala dynasty who was on his way back from a pilgrimage to Puri and was in search of a suitable place for his fort. Balabhadra met a washerman who told him of the miracles of a spot where a crane pounced upon and eagle and Balabhadra built his fort there. Similar tales are reported from Cuttack and Talcher, the latter named so after the *tala* (palmyra palms) trees in the area. We can see that our myth is now combined with other prey-predator pairs though its main message remains undisturbed.[36]

In each of these cases, the man or woman sacrificed becomes a revered figure in the future dispensation and worshipped by the ruler. It points to the subjugation-assimilation of local challenges to state formation (recall Asha Bhil in our first city, Ahmedabad), the stage that precedes the foundation of the city. In addition, the prey-predator pairs in these Orissa versions are not actually witnessed in the myth and are recounted as still-older miracles, which were being combined into a composite narrative to justify the selection of a particular location.

[35] Kulke. (1992), p. 61
[36] Ibid. pp. 66–67, p. 61 fn 9

The Final Echoes of the Myth

We began with three narrations of the hare-hounds myth in the mid-fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. We now conclude this exploration of its recurrences across the subcontinent with three final instances from the eighteenth century. These are references from Vizianagaram in northern Andhra in 1713–14, Panchalankuruchi in Tamilnadu in 1730, and from Poona in Maharashtra in 1746.

The special quality of the Vizianagaram site was revealed to the Pasupati king Peda Vijaya Rama Raju while he was on a hunting trip in the area. Like some of the other rulers we have met earlier, Vijaya Rama Raju was unable to understand how the rabbits his dogs were chasing could turn around and attack them. He approached a local Muslim ascetic, Denkha Shah Wali Baba for an explanation. The Baba, who was meditating in the shade of a tree, was able to decode the event as an indication that Vijaya Rama Raju's present capital Kumili would soon be ruined. Further, it was time to build a new fort at the spot where the rabbits attacked the dogs as there was *paurusham* or heroic manliness in the soil. So Vijaya Rama Raju moved his kingdom to this new site in 1713–14 and named it Vizianagaram, "City of Victory". Of course the site was strategically ideal, as we are familiar by now, with hills to the east and north and ready access to water from a lake nearby.[37]

The next sighting of our story is in the eighteenth century, possibly around the 1730s, at Panchalankuruchi near Tuticorn in Tamilnadu. A small kingdom was established by the Kattabomman chieftains at Panchalankuruchi in resistance to the Nayakas of Madura. It is said that the fort at Panchalankuruchi was built at the site where a hare chased seven hounds. Later tellings of the myth refer to the story within a expression of the beauty and goodness of the kingdom:

[37] Handelman et al. (2013 forthcoming), pp.132–33

> In the southern Pancai country, it is the hare that turns round to chase away the hounds. Yes, in the courageous Pancala country the hares chase away the hounds. Cows and tigers come together to the ghat to drink water and nurse their young.[38]

And, finally, Peshwa Poona, where the myth is associated with the construction of Shaniwarwada fort in 1730:

> The Shanwar Wada was the most magnificent and stately mansion that was ever built in Poona by the Peshwas in the 18th century. The foundation stone of the building was laid by Bajirao I (1720–40) on Saturday, the 10th of January 1730, being an auspicious day. … There is an interesting legend about the site selected for this historic building. While riding over this ground, the Peshwa Bajirao saw, to his great astonishment, a hare chasing a hound, which struck to his mind that there must be something very auspicious in this place, where a hare forgetting its natural timidity boldly chased a dog. He at once resolved to secure the site and build there a house for himself and his family.[39]

This is the final reference to the hare-hounds story as a city-foundation myth that we have been able to locate in the present exploration and it gives us a chronological span of a thousand years—from Patan in the eighth century to Poona in the eighteenth. The repetitive features of the story have been remarkably stable over this period: The would-be chieftain/ruler/king/sultan goes on a hunt in a locale that has a river, woods, often a specific tree. He witnesses a prey-predator pair consisting of a hare and hound; in some instances, other animals and birds replace them. An astonishing reversal takes place as their natural roles are upturned with the prey turning on the predator and triumphing. The witness is astonished and either comprehends the 'true' meaning of the scene enacted before him or has to get assistance in interpreting what he has just seen; sometimes he

[38] Dirks. (1987), p. 64
[39] Paranis. (1921), p. 1

needs help to overcome doubt and confirm the meaning he intuitively grasps. This interpretation-confirmation is usually provided by a religious figure—a hermit, a sufi saint, maybe Jain/Buddhist teacher, a goddess, and occasionally, a wife—who is able to go beyond the singularity of the event to point out its real significance – the importance of the *site* where it was enacted. Sometimes the site is revisited for confirmation. Simultaneously, the heroic qualities of the prey-protagonist in the story get transferred to the site where the story is enacted and the soil becomes 'heroic', 'virile'. These qualities make it ideal as a capital city, the nucleus of a successful principality/kingdom/sultanate/empire. Alternatively, the naturally weak is thought to have derived its courage and strength from the virile properties of the spot. Finally, the capital so established is named after the flora at the site (Malacca, Talcher), the protagonist of the scene (Shashakapura, Kharagpur), one who witnesses the scene (Ahmedabad, Ahmadnagar), the triumph of the protagonist (Vijayanagara, Vizianagaram), or the interpreter of the event (Vidyanagar, Sambalpur). The narrations—first oral and later written—are a post facto foretelling of a would-be ruler, his would-be kingdom and his would-be prosperity. This brings us to a discussion of our access to the narrations, that is, the sources for this essay.

Sources of the Myth

So far we have been able to draw a chronological map of the myth based on the founding dates of the cities to which the story is attributed. Yet, the fact is that our written sources for this information about the myth being ascribed to each of these cities are, in each case, from a much later period. And if we create a chronological map of the sources, a different picture emerges. The earliest incidence of the myth is at Patan, established in the mid-eighth century, and the earliest reference that we have been able to locate for this is the Sanskrit play *Moharajaparajaya* written in 1174 by poet Yashapal, a minister in the Chaulukya (Solanki) court at Patan. A mention is also found in a work by the Jain savant Abhaytilakgan in 1256, based on Hemchandracharya's

Dvyasraya.[40] These Sanskrit works are composed four and five hundred years respectively after the event they describe. The next reference to Patan's founding myth is in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, a Persian history of Gujarat written in 1761, and again, after about a 150 years in the Imperial Gazetteer written by British administrators in 1908.[41]

The next city is Shashakapura, which we estimate to have been established in the tenth century or thereabouts. The reference to its foundation myth appears in a twelfth century inscription from the Belur region (which came to light in the early twentieth century after colonial archaeological efforts).[42] After about a four-century interval, Shashakapura's myth seems to have been invoked to explain the founding of Vijayanagara in 1336. However, the first written references about Vijayanagara's founding appear in the sixteenth century and early seventeenth centuries in Portuguese, Sanskrit and Telugu travelogues and texts. Nunes wrote *Cronica dos reis de Bisnaga* in Portuguese in the mid-1530s, the *Vidyaranya-krti* in Sanskrit is an account from the late sixteenth century and the Telugu *Rayavacakamu* is thought to be from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Thus the written accounts of Vijayanagara's founding appear between two and three hundred years later.

This gap between city foundation and written accounts of the associated foundation myth appears in the case of Malacca too. The Portuguese account, Tome Pires's *Suma Oriental*, was written in 1512–15. The *Sejarah Melayu* in old Malay is variously thought to have been composed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Malacca was established in 1400 A.D., so we can see that here too written accounts in Portuguese appear a century later and the Malay versions are recorded after two hundred years.

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[40] Parikh et al. (1972–87), Vol. 3 p. 123, 133 fn 73, 74; Vol 4, pp. 302, 322–23.
[41] *Imperial Gazetteer of India.* (1908), p. 381
[42] Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the year 1932. (1935), p.110

Following the sequence traced above, we find that the longest delay occurs in the appearance of written references to Ahmedabad. As mentioned earlier, the Mirat-i-Ahmadi describes the founding of Patan and the city's foundation myth. This is followed by detailed descriptions of Ahmedabad in the Sultanate time and during the periods of Mughal and Maratha rule that followed. Curiously, it does not mention that Ahmedabad shared its founding myth with Patan. In fact, the first mention of this appears over four hundred years after the city's establishment in Maganlal Vakhatchand's *Amdavadno Itihas*, written in 1851. Maganlal had absorbed colonial history-writing styles from his close association with Alexander Forbes, a British administrator who had collected oral Rajput legends in the Gujarat region into a two-volume work titled *Ras Mala*.

Another British administrator, Colin Mackenzie, made a similar collection in the early nineteenth century in south India and his collection of *kaifiyats* (tale or incident) is the source for many of the Deccan hare-hounds stories. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries we find reports of the oral circulation of the myth in the small towns we visited earlier from gazetteers compiled by British administrators in the presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal. Most of them are passing mentions since their main purpose was to record land and population details to aid governance.

It is worth pointing out here that the story was undoubtedly in oral circulation much before the written references and this was its most likely medium of circulation—by word of mouth. This oral-aural quality, with rich details, the dramatic pacing of the narrative is captured in all the medieval sources we have quoted here. We have seen the eyewitness-like richness of detail in the Portuguese travelogues; in fact, a greater study of these sources may give us a clearer idea of what role the Portuguese played in the circulation of the myth. The sources are also shaped by the literary traditions that they are a part of. Thus, the *Sejarah Melayu* though composed in old Malay, are part of the genre of Persian historical chronicles, written as a genealogy on the request

of the Johor sultans. Following the Persian model, the *Sejarah Melayu* are hagiographic in approach and it is in this context that we learn about the myth in Malacca.

In their own way, the colonial gazetteers too have come to represent a literary tradition. Written from the early nineteenth century onwards they are our source for reports of the myth in the small towns and cities we have visited earlier. These accounts do not have the dramatic descriptions and detail of the earlier medieval sources. Nor do they make any references to these earlier texts and record the myth from local oral reports, in the same way they record details of population, social groups, natural resources in the region and related official data. Descriptions are sparse and the tone matter-of-fact since their main emphasis is on administrative information. Even so, they are an invaluable source for the mapping the recurrence of the hare-hounds story.

Finally, all these sources—Sanskrit, Portuguese, Telugu, English, Gujarati, Oriya, Malay—have come together for us through social science research—archaeological, philological, historical, ethnographical and anthropological—mainly in the twentieth century. The historians of the early phase, particularly from the first half of the twentieth century, are in quest of objective history and so the myth is dismissed as unverifiable story of uncertain origin and its repetitiveness viewed as an index of its unreliability. In the later part of twentieth century, the myth is recounted as part of an analysis of state formation or development of literary culture. By this time, the empathic and engaged social scientist has emerged and the dismissive tone is no longer present. However, though they note the myth's repetitiveness they relegate it to an aside or a footnote.

Making Sense of the Myth

We have now amassed a great deal of material from diverse sources and have tried to make sense of the myth in its individual context in each occurrence. Distilling its repetitive features, we have tried to speculate what its recurrence in each subsequent

period might indicate about the times. We have seen that the story has been in oral circulation and continues in this mode while entering written accounts. Several more questions come to mind, none of which we may be able to answer satisfactorily. Where *did* the myth originate? Could Patan be considered the point of origin just because it is the oldest town associated with it and we have the oldest written sources for it? What did it mean to the people who spoke of it? If the myth was circulating, and therefore equally available, why do some cities have the myth ascribed to their founding and not others whose circumstances may equally fit? And why do we not hear of it, the myth, being associated with cities after the mid-eighteenth century?

As we have seen, the question of origin is impossible to answer; the search for the earliest mention may go on forever and the earliest oral telling would be impossible to record. Trade routes have crisscrossed the globe since prehistoric times, people have been on the move and ideas have osmosed in ways that cannot be pinned down. We know of ancient contacts between the subcontinent and Egypt and Mesopotamia. We could possibly explore these areas for evidence of the story. So, too, for the east and all the comings and goings along the Silk Route suggesting that we could look eastwards for the origin of this myth. In fact, there are Chinese accounts of Malacca which could not be consulted but may well have useful material.

The second question is a little more interesting to explore. What did the myth mean to the people who lived in the cities founded upon it? Any new order needs ideological and psychological elements to bring the cohesion that would ensure its continuity. Equally, it is necessary to create a collective memory that would explain and historically endorse the emergence of this new order and translate it into a self-awareness of belonging to this new order. Telling and hearing this foundation story, and eventually recording it in writing, gives expression to this self-awareness. So the repetitive features summed up in the last section – as it charts the unaware, would-be ruler becoming a legitimate ruler, confirmed by someone whose authority matters

in that time—point to this gradually coalescing self-awareness with narration becoming its expression. In some cities, like Ahmedabad and Chikkaballapur, the hunting incident and its dawning significance is followed by the drawing up of horoscopes and the selection of an auspicious moment to commence actual construction. The new order is thus materialized.

So its not just the awareness of a new order but the association of the new order with a territory has to be cemented for all those affected by it or invited to participate in it (Ahmedabad, Malacca and Vijayanagara, to mention just our first three cities, all drew skilled migrants as they rose to prosperity in the time following their inception). By emphasizing the territory somewhat more than the would-be ruler, the myth celebrates the city, thus giving migrants, as well as future citizens, the possibility of a sense of belonging to a special place long after its inception. In the Deccan region second-generation retellings, the myth also affords the chance to associate with the reflected glory of an erstwhile empire.

In each story there is an emphasis on the site, the virile-heroic soil, where the hare is able to overcome its predator. Only this detail can justify the building of a city and it becomes clearer when we consider the local opposition which the new rulers faced. This aspect, indicated by a number of satellite myths in each of these cities (such as the repeatedly falling fort walls in Ahmedabad or the mysterious infestation by monitor lizards in Malacca) we have visited, has to be left for another occasion but, in short, establishing the heroic qualities of the spot later justifies the human sacrifice we saw in the Orissa stories or the subjugation of earlier populations such as Asha Bhil in Ahmedabad. Shepherds appear in some of the places we have visited, for example in Patan, and this opens up another area of examination—the subjugation-assimilation of nomadic communities by agricultural-urban communities.

The myth also communicates that its tellers know, and its listeners learn, that a process of consolidation follows the

emergence and establishment of a new regime when local challenges are dealt with. This may explain the delay in the appearance of written references during which the actual process of state formation solidifies and takes root. Alternatively, the delay may signify the end of that 'new' order, which made the writers look back and identify its beginnings. So in the case of Patan, the twelfth century reference comes at a time when Chaulukya rule is moving towards an end, or is threatened with challenges; the mid-nineteenth century account of Ahmedabad is written as the British take charge of the city. The Vijayanagara references are from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when its glory was well on its way to being extinguished, the Malacca accounts emerge on the eve of colonial rule. And all the small towns and mofussil places appear in British administrative records, long after their local rulers have become mere figureheads.

Without force-fitting the story or stretching speculation out of shape, we can safely say that in their oral form, the myth must have eloquently spoken to people of a situation in the past of their city, of its political, social and religious aspects with all their inherent conflicts and contradictions. As such, the story becomes 'available', through its circulation, to all people seeking to record such upheavals in their regions. It is impossible, however, to offer at this point an explanation for why some cities chose this myth and not others and why it does not recur after the eighteenth century. Given the minimum time-lapse of a century or two, we may have to wait a while for some indication of a later recurrence.

Coming Back to Ahmedabad

This exploratory paper has taken us through the multiple lives of the hare-hounds myth, oral and written, recorded with hagiographic subjectivity and academic objectivity. We shall end with a brief look at a painting of the myth, the only one we have been able to locate (aside from the visual representation in Malacca's coat of arms bringing us back to the city where we began). For about a decade now, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has been organizing a 'heritage walk' around the

medieval core of the city. The walk starts with a slide show introducing visitors to Ahmedabad's inception and one of the first images in that slide show is a visual depiction of the city's foundation story. It is a watercolour painting entitled Warrior-1 by a well-known Ahmedabadi figurative painter, Amit Ambalal. It shows Sultan Ahmed Shah on a horse on the bank of a river and three hares repulsing two dogs. It self-consciously borrows its visual style from a Jainesque Shahnama painted in 1425–50, thus trying to recreate the event in the twenty-first century in the visual vocabulary of the time of the city's inception.[43] It suggests that the myth is still available for being invoked right up to the present. Its audience now is tourists, foreign and from the rest of India, seeking to engage with that very modern notion, 'heritage', guaranteeing the myth will still be alive in the foreseeable future in complex, unpredictable ways.

[43] The image can seen at http://www.saffronart.com/fixed/ItemDetails.aspx?iid=17234&a=Amit%20%20Ambalal&pt=2&eid=44

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