I did not limit it to morphological study, but also examined the spatiotemporal universe of the plot and how this one is organised in the narrative which exposes it (narrative modes and perspectives, temporality, etc). These first two stages made possible to draw the interpretative framework peculiar to each recentering and to bring to light the new meaning that emerges from it. Here are the main conclusions of this third and last hermeneutic stage.

The words bâti, vârtâ and qisso refer to the three oral genres performed by Manganiyar. These genres are linked with distinct groups of performers and patrons and constitute dissimilar interpretative frameworks. Among these three oral genres, two have been studied — the vârtâ, performed for Sodha Rajput patrons, and the qisso, performed for Sindhi patrons.

Within the vârtâ framework, Mumal’s story is both an instrument of exploration of Shakti’s power – conceived at once as autonomous Goddess and convention-bound woman – and an apologue about the prince’s dharma. The prologue, that is peculiar to vârtâ performance tradition, is a kind of mythical narrative in which Mumal is depicted and acts as many other Rajasthani woman-Goddesses\. In the story itself, she embodies the devoted wife (pâtivratâ), of which she however transgresses the code of conduct by journeying unchaperoned. Paradoxically, wifely devotion was the very reason of this transgression.

The story thus represents a conflict between requirements of social code and demands of the crisis to which heroine must face. The breach in everyday life rules of behavior is justified by the special circumstances of the crisis and reasserts supremacy of wifely devotion over all other social customs and duties in hierarchy of women’s dharma. But as in any « social drama » (Turner 1969), crisis is resolved by redressive action and breach is eliminated by reintegration. The satî rite, which proves Mumal’s dedication to her husband and chastity, makes transgression into submission to gender roles and reintegrates the heroine in social structure by transcending the liminal circumstances of her incursion in male space. The story and its prologue thus underlines that women’s autonomy can only be conceived as an attribute of liminal status (either of the wandering Goddess before she is provided with a temple, or of the devoted wife during liminal stage of her journey).

The problem subjected to audience perspicacity is not to decide whether Mumal is a Goddess or a pâtivratâ, but to resolve her paradoxical status of being both. The story doesn’t fully carry on the common split image of Hindu female nature, but proposes a more unified feminine image, which is quite similar to the one revealed in Rajasthani women’s songs and stories. Nevertheless, the problem is finally solved in a male perspective. The satî scenario not only resolves a “social drama” but also creates...
a symbolic solution to spatial discontinuity (between Goddess's outer domain and pātivratā's inner domain), reestablishes symmetry (destructive Goddess vs protective satīmātâ) and transcends the contradictions of the men projected split image of feminine nature.

Either as pātivratā prompting her husband to achieve his duty or as Goddess repudiating the king who transgressed the code of honor by failing in his duty to protect women, Mumal stigmatises Mahendra resorting to a derogatory stereotype articulated in terms of the structural opposition between Merchants and Rajputs (“Take your scale and your weights, your honor is that of a merchant”). Mahendra, who adopted values and customs of Merchants castes, did not behave in accordance with his own dharma. He is not the only character of the vārtā who adopted a life style unsuitable to his svadharma. Events that are analysed as causes of actions on semio-narratologic level are, on another level of reading, as many breaches of dharma which induce disorder. The Goddess's intervention and the kings’ death (in the prolog), then pātivratā's sacrifice, are the only means of putting an end to it. The moral of the story appears rather simple then: each one must live according to its own dharma so as to preserve the world order.

The teaching of the story is rather different when it is recentered in the framework of the qisso performed for Sindhi patrons. This framework enables a Sufi mystic interpretation of the story. However, the story doesn’t lend itself to a linear interpretation where characters would personify the common fixed roles of the Beloved (spiritual guide, the Prophet or God himself) and of the lover (disciple). These roles are related to, and vary according to, the actants (Greimas 1983) embodied by the characters in the original de-centered story. Thus, Mahendra, who successively embodies the Subject and then the Object, successively represents the seeker who, having mastered the “lower soul” (nafs), can progress on the Path (tariqā), and then the Beloved.

Conversely, Mumal, who is Mahendra’s Object of quest and thus embodies the Beloved, embodies the seeker or the “woman-soul” in her own narrative trajectory, whose analysis showed that it is similar to that of a hero of a roman d’apprentissage. Mumal symbolises the seeker who does not manage to tame the « lower soul ». She did not remain awake to remember the Lord and failed in performing the constant recollection (dhikr). She fell in the “sleep of negligence” (khwâb-i  ghfâfat) and so has to undergo a long and painful purification process.

As in the vārtā, Mumal finally dies on a pyre. But here, the satī scenario represents the final stage of the purification process of the soul and the “extinction of the self in God” (fana), which many mystic poets have illustrated with the metaphor of the moth burning in the flame of a candle. Mumal’s death can be understood as the spiritual resurrection, and as the body’s death, which is welcome for the true lover, because it removes the veil that separated the lover from the Beloved. For the “woman-soul”, death on the Path is the day of her wedding with the Beloved. Within the framework of this bridal symbolism inherited from the Hindu tradition (avâkī mystics and bhakti), the image of the satī fully makes sense. Adorned of all the emblems of marital happiness as the day of her wedding, she dies as a bride.

This interpretation is available only for competent listeners who know both the paratext (Genette 1982) and the intertext in which the qisso is encapsulated. The local oral tradition, which is distinct from performance tradition and contains sub-plots and didactic metanarratives which are never performed, forms the qisso paratext. During the performance, a network of intertextual relations is built by the performer who recenters mystic kâfî songs and verses of Shah Latif’s Sur Mûmal-Râno. Interpretative frameworks of the qisso and of the Sur Mûmal-Râno lend to a rather similar interpretation but are built in quite different ways.

Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit (1689-1752) was the greatest mystical poet in the Sindhi language. He left behind him a collection of thirty poems (sur) that has become known as the Risâlo. As a part of this collection, the Sur Mûmal-Râno is placed in a set with which it creates a meaningful network of textual relations. This collection’s internal network links different stories which all belong to the same generic class, that of “tragic love stories”. In ten of the thirty poems of the Risâlo, Latif recentered such locally well-known oral love tales, of which heroes and heroines are transformed into symbols of God seeking soul.

This internal network is in its turn embedded in two other textual networks. Firstly, it is integrated in an intertextual web, that is global or even universal and woven by Latif who quotes the Quran, the Prophetic tradition and Persian mystical poets. Secondly, it is anchored in the paratextual web of performance traditions, which is local. As we have seen, local oral traditions constitute the paratext of the qisso and are a constitutive part of its interpretative framework. In the Risâlo, the interpretative framework is explicitly given by its author. But the listeners / readers need to know the local performance traditions in order to understand the stories, since Latif never enters into detailed narration of them, but singles out some elements to develop his teachings about suffering and love.

This kind of “metonymic recentering”, the “woman-soul” theme and some other features are common to the other sur. But, as in the qisso, the original actancial structure of the story makes more complex its symbolic interpretation. In the first two chapters of the sur, Mumal symbolises the cruel Beloved. In the six following chapters, she symbolises the “soul that blames” (nafs al-lawwâma). And in the ninth and last chapter, she eventually symbolises the “soul at peace” (nafs al-mutma’ â’inna) when, in a vision of God’s primordial light, she realises that the one she was searching for is in her heart and that “everything is He”. Conversely, Mahendra, who symbolises the Beloved in the last seven chapters, symbolises the seeker in two first ones.

Even if, unlike qisso performers, Latif didn’t resort to satī scenario to represent the final “annihilation” stage, he didn’t change anything in the story’s action and Mumal finally dies as in all the other recenteerings of the story, except one.
The recentering done by the Rajasthani playwright Tej Kavi (1881-1926) is the only one with a happy ending. One can ask why? Tej Kavi adapted Mumal’s story for a dramatic folkgenre known as rammat in the Jaisalmer and Bikaner area. Rammat shares many thematic, formal and contextual characteristics with the Rajasthani Khêyl. But first and foremost local definitional criterion is that actors and patrons belong to Merchants castes. Tej Kavi relied on vârtâ and bêt performance traditions, which are anchored in Rajput cultural world and so conveys ethic, and other values which are alien or even opposed to the Merchants castes system of values. Mumal’s narrative world and its values clashed with the cultural universe of the agents of the recentering. This was not the only incompatibility which Tej Kavi had to deal with. Rammat performances mainly took place during Holi festival. Apart from the fact that the tragic end of the story was discordant with the jubilation atmosphere of Holi festival, Mumal’s death almost always represents the restoration of social order and the victory of the society for which “non-standard” love experience represents a threat. This representation of the supremacy of the structure and collective norm over the individual “deviance” of ecstatic love was much more dissonant with the context of Holi festival, which is an inversion ritual during which man and woman are temporarily released from their statuses.

Tej Kavi didn’t only change the representative mode (from narrative to dramatic), but also deeply modified the story’s action. This pragmatic transposition (Genette 1982) relies on changes in motivations and modifies characters’ valorisation. These modifications (valorisation / de-valorisation) are fully actualised only because a new system of values has been set up. The Being and the Doing of the characters, even when they remain unchanged, are revalued with the alder of this new system.

On a stage where there isn’t anymore any representative of the social structure, characters are freed from the corset of the behavioral norms and gain in individuality and humanity. Mahendra is a sensualist who has “weaknesses”, but he also has wisdom. Mumal does not reproach him anymore his breach in code of honour, but she praises his intelligence. In the renewed system of values of the rammat, the pragmatic and psychological transformations give to Mahendra’s character a more “sympathetic” part than in the vârtâ, where his nonconformity with the ideal Rajput devalued him.

Conversely, all these changes partially devalue Mumal’s character. Neither Goddess, neither patîvatâ, nor satî, Mumal doesn’t belong anymore to any one of the prototypic categories of the feminine nature. Deprived of the sanctifying trials of virah and suicide, she’s now nothing more than a representative of her “species”, of which Tej Kavi gives an unflattering image. This pejorative stereotype of womanhood goes together with the new freedom that Mumal enjoys in the rammat. This freedom, which is different from the one the virgin Goddess of the vârtâ enjoyed, is wholly exerted in the field of sexuality. The importance given to the sexual aspect of the relation is a characteristic that distinguishes the rammat from the other recenterings, where it is at most evoked through conventional images. This element is certainly related to the context of the Holi festival, but it is also a feature that distinguishes the Rajput tales from the Merchants tales.

Unlike Tej Kavi, L.K. Chundawat did not change the action. The transformations which she carried out are less visible but however quite as deep. When we compare the text she has written and published in 1959 with its hypotext, a Caran manuscript of the 18th century (MSS 210/20), it is revealed.

The quantitative analysis of these two texts shows that Chundawat practiced many excisions and amplifications. The excisions lead to the disappearance of the actors’ social universe. Some of them can be perceived like expurgations underlain by the ideology of social progress. The amplifications give a new prominence to the characters’ Doing and Being. Some of them are borrowings to Rajasthani oral traditions and include the story in a Pan-Rajasthani intertextual network.

The narratologic study reveals that Chundawat also carried out modifications on the discursive and semio-narrative levels. She developed the characters’ cognitive and pathemic trajectories and so gave them the depth and the inwardness of which they were previously deprived. Thus, they also acquire freedom to act and choose. But the eruption of feelings, sensations and of the doubt about oneself and the world complicates their choices and hampers their new freedom. The subject seems to keep itself aloof from action and from world. Action is not any more the object of a judgment a posteriori, but of a preliminary reflection. The world is not any more the symbiotic environment on which the subject has a good hold, but the object of a perceptive experience. The temporality of the two narratives is also rather different. For the cyclic time of the narrated world of the hypotext, Chundawat substitutes the linear time of a world which has lost its stability and which in its dilations and contractions seems to follow the variations of the actors’ states.

Analysing the evaluations (Hamon 1997), one can see that in Chundawat’s narrative they focus on the actors’ environment and states, while in the hypotext they primarily focus on the actors’ Doing and on its conformity to social standards. While the hypotext stages and conveys a system of values, Chundawat’s narrative rather pertains to a phenomenological and knowledge enterprise. This difference also appears in the way in which the characters’ physical body emerges in the discourse. In the hypotext, this organic emergence of the body is related to the actor’s Doing and signals the outcrop of a normative system. In Chundawat’s narrative, it is associated to the actor’s states and signals a pathemic apex.

The narrative of the hypotext shares much more characteristics with what we usually call a “tale”, than Chundawat’s. Even if she herself calls it a “Rajasthani folktale”, her narrative is much closer to modern short story. The narrative universe created by Chundawat singles out her recentering among all those which were studied and seems to signal Mumal’s entry in the era of modernity. Chundawat’s recentering is the only one which presents a feminine point of view on woman and a unified image of Mumal’s character. It is
perhaps in this way, by conveying a woman’s image peculiar to Rajasthani women oral traditions, that Chundawat’s recentering genuinely roots in a Rajasthani folk tradition.

Well before the 18th century, Carans and other bards had produced many written versions of Mumal’s story, which they spread beyond the limits of Thar on the whole of the geographical area of the future state of Rajasthan. These texts were rediscovered by the learned elites who, shortly after the creation of the state of Rajasthan in 1949, undertook to preserve their cultural heritage and to build a regional identity. Published in 1957 in one of the many folkloristic reviews which had just sprung up, one of these manuscripts constituted the hypotext of Chundawat’s retelling. Chundawat added a new link to the already long chain of recenterings and thus participated to the traditionalisation and regionalisation of the story. The study of the successive recentrings does not only make it possible to discover the various meanings which were given to the story, but also illuminates the way this story of Thar became a story of Rajasthan. The investigation of recentering is thus meaningful in more than one way.

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Singing Texts and Reading Chapbooks: the Bhojpuri Tradition
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In spite of the conventional assertion that India favours oral culture, compared to the West, in many a case, several factors show that the world of the oral performance is not cut off from other medias, whether graphic or written expressions. Long before the popularisation of printing, those of the singers who could write and read would note down the content of their songs in small exercise-books known as puthi. But what is true for traditional village singers, both man or woman, is even more in the case of the wandering singers. Regarding the long medieval epics, or gatha, sung by the bhojpuri wandering singers, their memorisation is the more difficult, as musical rhythm is quite irregular and contents are not necessarily versified. Furthermore, as the singers most often perform outside the native village, they cannot bring their children along to train them, and let them benefit the performing moment to impregnate themselves with the gathas contents, as it is the case in the qawwali tradition, for instance, where children often attend the singing session inside the very singing group. Such reasons may lead a singer to readily appeal to the help either of puthi or of printed booklets. In the same time, the public’s taste for the gathas auditions and the eagerness to await the arrival of the wandering singers are undoubtedly reinforced by the purchase and reading of gatha under the form chapbooks versions. Hence, the question of the memorisation and transmission of bhojpuri gathas cannot be broached without an inquiry into the chapbook printing industry.

1. Oral performance and the selling of chapbooks: striking coincidences
Among the four main trends which have inspired the bhojpuri tradition of gatha (the mystic quest of the Shaivite Naths, the desire to glorify the chivalric tradition of the Rajputs, the mercantile vocation of the nomadic castes, and the pervasiveness of Sufism), all the repertories have striking coincidences. Among the four main trends which have inspired the bhojpuri tradition of gatha (the mystic quest of the Shaivite Naths, the desire to glorify the chivalric tradition of the Rajputs, the mercantile vocation of the nomadic castes, and the pervasiveness of Sufism), all the repertories have