



## CREATION OF NOBILITY

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The concepts of honour and status have remained pertinent to human civilization and have found expression in the lives of the people, history of the region, political behaviour and social hierarchy in various forms. They acquire distinctive forms in different region and cultural traditions and thus take its unique form in the regions of Rajputana.

The nobility in Rajasthan were sardars. They were a necessary and a usual part of the administrative machinery of a state. The origin of Rajput nobility was closely linked with the origin and the nature of the Rajput states. The Rajput state in Rajasthan comprised a territory over which a particular clan or division of a clan claimed dominion for its ruling chief and had political predominance by the right of occupation or conquest. The ruler was the head of the clan. Instead of being a despot, he exercised a jurisdiction more or less limited over an aristocracy consisting mostly of his own kinsmen. Though the supreme governing authority was concentrated in the hands of the ruling prince of the dominant clan, yet there was a chain of mutual authority and subordination which ran from the chief by gradation downward to the possessor of one or more villages. They addressed their sovereign in a special manner as *bapji*<sup>1</sup> (respected father) meaning thereby that he was the common father or the principal elder representative of the clan. Their fiefs (*jagirs*) were termed as *bapota*<sup>2</sup> (patrimonial inheritance). The state belonged to the clan and the ruler was nothing but a *primus inter pares*.<sup>3</sup>

The nobles in a way formed the court council of the ruler who took important decisions with the consent of his nobles. The nobles rendered service in war with their quotas defined

<sup>1</sup> Dayaldas, *Dayaldas Ri Khyat*, Rajasthan Shodh Sansthan, Jodhpur, Vol.I, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Bisheshwar Nath Reu, *Glories of the Marwar and the Glorious Rathores*, Jaipur, Pustak Prakash, 1969, p. 389.

in their land grants (*patta*). Their levies formed the core of the ruler's army which defended the frontiers and also undertook aggressive expeditions. The prince's military strength depended totally on his nobles' quotas.<sup>4</sup> He was crippled when his nobles were discontented. During seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the rulers in Rajasthan began to engage regular contingents or hire mercenary forces which weakened the influence of the nobles and alarmed and annoyed them and created a political crisis.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it is clear that 'in a cultural system the patterns of regulatory norms (and the other cultural elements which guide choices of concrete actors) could not be made up of random or unrelated elements. If, that it was, a system of culture was to be manifested in the organization of an empirical action system, it must have got a certain degree of consistency.'<sup>6</sup>

The members of the administrative staff were bound by obedience to their superior (s) by custom, by affectual ties, by a purely material complex of interests, or by ideal motives. Purely material interests and calculations of advantage as the basis of solidarity between the chief and the administrative staff resulted in this state of affairs as in other connections in a relatively unstable condition. Normally other elements, affectual and ideal, supplemented such interests.<sup>7</sup> For the ease of study, we will trifurcate the topics and examine how through various means hierarchies were created.

#### A. Rituals of Granting Jagirs

When the incumbent of a *jagir* died his estate was placed under *zabti* (escheat). On the demise of a chief, the prince immediately sent a party consisting of a civil officer and a few soldiers who took possession of the estate in the prince's name. This sequestration in the local language was termed as *zabti* or *qaid khalisa* (in Mewar). The heir of the *jagir* sent his request to the court to be installed as the vassal and offered to pay the proper *nazrana*. The

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, *Towards a General Theory of Action*, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2001., p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, 'Authority and Legitimacy' in Eric A. Nordlinger (ed.), *Politics and Society*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1970, p. 35.

heir having paid the *nazrana* (*hukamnama; peshkash*) repaired to the presence of the Maharaja, where he performed homage and made protestations of service. He received the fresh grant and his investiture was completed with the girding of a sword round his waist by the prince. This was known as *khadag bandhai* or *talwar bandhai*. It was an imposing ceremony, performed in a full assembly of the court. After the *nazrana* was paid, and the sword buckled to his side, the noble received *siropao* and a steed which marked the completion of his investiture. The *zabti* was then recalled and the noble returned to his estate to take over the *jagir* and to receive the congratulations and homage of his sub-vassals.<sup>8</sup>

It is to be observed that this process was done generation after generation to impress on the minds of the new descendents that they are subordinate and dependent on the royal family. This also keeps the memory alive that their estate is not permanent they have to in person express subservience towards the monarch to continue in one's position. A grand ceremony imposes lot of unsaid conditions of gratitude and loyalty in public presence, making it impossible to breach.

To put the matter succinctly, rituals often served to bring awareness to the participants and/or patrons of their social context, to enable them to affirm that they were part of a particular community or socio-political landscape, or could, as if by means of socio-drama, work out the conflicts that their various social alliances might imply. Thus in a Hindu ceremonial the side of ritual might implicitly or explicitly act out the participants' identity as a member of a group.<sup>9</sup>

#### B. Rituals of Visiting the nobles

When a noble expired or was killed in a battle, the Maharaja paid condolence visit to his heir or son, who received him at the gate of his *haveli* (house) while wearing a white turban. After seating the ruler the noble presented two horses to the sovereign which were generally returned. The Maharaja or Maharana presented to the said noble a coloured turban embroidered in gold and of a special design which signified the end of mourning. There was

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<sup>8</sup> Kaviraja Shyamaldas, *Vir Vinod*, Udaipur, Shakhtawat Publishing House, 1974., Vol. II, pp. 74-75.

<sup>9</sup> Fred W. Clothey, *Rhythm and Intent: Ritual Studies from South India*, Blackie, Madras, 1983., p.2.

no time or period fixed for such visits. It could be made any time after the death of the old thakur and the installation of the new one. Often the coloured turban was sent to his residence as a token of ending condolence. If the heir of the thakur was a minor he was brought to the court by his near relatives and the Maharaja conferred on him the *siropa* or turban of *matmi* (condolence). When the Maharaja was himself a minor, the chief noble or the *Pradhan* (who was himself a Rajput) carried the Maharaja's sword to the deceased noble's house in procession attended by the nobles present in the capital, the Diwan and the state officials, and the ceremony of *nakhekh* (visit for condolence) was solemnly performed. The ruler often used to go to enquire about the health of thakurs injured in a recent battle (*Mizajpursi*).<sup>10</sup>

The *naubat* (drum sounds denoting time accompanied by sounds of other musical instruments) sounded four times in a day. Whenever the principal noble of the state died the beating of the drum was suspended for once either in the day or in the night. In Jodhpur the suspension of *naubat* in the nights only was the rule.<sup>11</sup> This is to show, how seriously is affected by the loss of a higher official. It also shows how important he was for the state. State's expression of loss also means respect, which everyone would like to receive, which will require years of service and loyalty. Thus, it shows a path to move on, obliterating the opposite. Likewise, the direction suitable to the state is opened and the opposite is closed.

If a noble was killed in a battle on behalf of the state, his successor was excused from payment of *hukamnama* or *peshkash* (fee of succession). In case a sardar died while on service, either at the state capital or elsewhere, some reduction was made in his son's succession fee. Those who were exempted from payment of succession fee because of their outstanding services or some sacrifice, were issued fresh *pattas* (grants) by the ruler on application without any payment of the *nazrana*.<sup>12</sup>

Subservience to the ruler in all ways and all possible times were redefined to imprint upon the mind of the subordinates and to keep them in their subordinate status. We should also bear in our mind that 'social actors were never able to define the terms of political power and social

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<sup>10</sup> Hakikat Bahi, No. 10, V.S. 1724, Migsar Sud 6, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

hierarchy entirely was fabricated to suit their own requisites'.<sup>13</sup> Keeping this thought in mind let us throw some more light on the ceremonial facets of Rajputana.

When summoned by the ruler for consultations on all important matters concerning the state, the nobles of the first grade and the *sirayats* when they came to attend the durbar, could beat their drums up to the main gate of the city. In Udaipur the drums of the nobles sounded up to *Surajpole* (city-gate) except that of Raj Rana Jhala of Sadri who could beat his drums up to the gates of the royal palace.<sup>14</sup>

The nobles of the superior rank were entitled to use some insignia of royalty viz., banners (*nishan*), kettle drums (*nakkara*) preceded by heralds and silver mace bearers (*ballam bardars*; *ghota bardars*, *chaori bardars*). They were also allowed to bear the parasol (*chhatri*) and get the fly whisk (*chanwar*) waved over them. The nobles could use these insignia (*lawazma*) when they were alone or were in their own *jagirs*. It could not be used in the precincts of the royal palace or in presence of the ruler.<sup>15</sup>

The nobles were required to dismount from their steed before entering the palace for attending the durbar. For different ranks of nobles different places were fixed for dismounting. In Marwar, when nobles came to Jodhpur fort and covered the remaining distance on foot, the *Sirayats* had the privilege of dismounting at the upper end of Jodhaji's *Falsa* (Jodha pillar near entrance to the fort) whereas the nobles of the lower grade dismounted between *Imartipole* (gate) and Jodhaji's *Falsa* according to their rank. The brothers of the ruling prince dismounted inside the Lohapole and the Rao Rajas outside the Lohapole.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we can see that by rituals, a distinction is created in between nobles. Some are high and others low just on the basis of rituals accorded to them. If all are equal then they will be united and there will be no competition to grow. Inequalities show the way towards

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<sup>13</sup> Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Pre-colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Col. James Tod, *Annales and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, KMN Publishers, New Delhi, 1971, Vol. I, p. 270.

<sup>15</sup> Hakikat Bahi, V.S. 1722, No. 2, Magh Sud 2, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

growth-loyalty, dedication, service in war, etc. So, people are inspired to strengthened the throne in order to strengthen the superiority over others.

Whenever the ruler visited his noble's *haveli* (residence) the concerned noble received the ruler outside the gate of his residence (*deodhi* or *haveli*) and advanced a few paces to welcome the prince. A red strip of cloth was spread (*pagmanda*) on which the ruler walked and entered the gate. A small crimson *shamiana* with raised cushion (*gaddi*) was arranged inside the *haveli*. The ruler occupied his seat on *gaddi*. The noble then made a *nazar* of two horses or an elephant according to his rank. If the Maharaja had come to condole, the horses were returned otherwise one horse would be accepted and the other returned. The noble then offered *nichrawal*, followed by his sub-vassals who made appropriate *nazars* and *nichrawals*. On festive occasions the ruler spent sufficient time at the noble's house and often had his dinner there. The nobles had to present a big sum of money on such an occasion. The ruler, before returning, conferred *siropao* on the noble in accordance with his rank and bestowed gifts on his followers and family members. The ruler was often given a banquet where dancers and singers tried to amuse the prince.<sup>17</sup> Without rituals there is no distinction between superior and inferior. Thus, it becomes mandatory to follow the rituals of royalty with the monarch. This way it is established, maintained and propagated to all the onlookers.<sup>18</sup>

The protocol and formalities were different on different occasions. The formalities of *pagmandas* and *nazar-nichrawal* were not necessary at the time of condolence visit of the ruler.

When the ruler, due to illness or his minority, was not in a position to go in person his sword and shield were carried with solemnity to the noble's residence where it was placed on the crimson cushion. *Nazars* and *nichrawal* followed as usual. The principal noble who carried the sword to this place would then offer *siropaos* on behalf of the ruler.<sup>19</sup> This is a way to establish order by means of rituals. By mere display of some artifacts, attachment of beliefs to them and performing the rituals around them can govern the minds in the real way and make them obey the authority.

Thus it is clear that a creation of a regime of truth was necessary art of state-craft. In the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-70.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 223.

form of this hierarchization or limitation, one was constantly reminded of and made to accept one's truth. 'Philosophers or even, more generally, intellectuals justified and marked out their identity by trying to establish almost uncrossable line between the domain of knowledge, seen as that of truth and freedom, and the domain of the exercise of power'.<sup>20</sup>

### C. The Appointment of Officers

Though the nobility formed a majority in the courts of Rajasthan, yet the civilian ministers wielded a great influence in the administration of the state. The nobility consisted of the Rajputs while the ministers hailed from non-warrior classes- Vaishyas, Kayasthas and often Brahmanas.

The appointment was accompanied with robes of honour (*siropa*) and ornaments in accordance with the rank and file of the post. The following presents were bestowed on the person appointed as *diwan*: *Siropao* (Robes of honour) consisting of *pagh* (turban), *kurti* (coat), *bago* (dhoti) and *potio* (payjama). Ornaments: *kada* (bracelets), *moti* (pearls), *motiyan ri kanthi* (necklace of pearls), *sirpech jadau* (studded ornament worn on turban) and *Palkhi* (palanquin).<sup>21</sup>

He used to put on the dress and ornaments awarded to him and made *juhar-mujra* (salutations), offered *nazar* and *nichrawal* and went to his *haveli* (residence) in the *palkhi*. The charge of office was signified by handing over of the seals of the office and the *kalamdan* (inkpot and pen placed in a small wooden box). Additional gifts and the honour of *tazim* were conferred on these officers as a token of appreciation for their success in some expedition or on account of their meritorious services. In return by tradition they were required to offer *nazar* and *nichrawal*.<sup>22</sup>

In Marwar the post of *Pradhan* was synonymous with that of the *Diwan* in Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner. Nearly the same gifts were conferred on the *Pradhan* at the time of appointment.<sup>23</sup> The next to the *Diwan* was the *Bakhshi*, whose appointment was generally accompanied with the following gifts from the ruler. *Siropao* consisting of *pagh*, *vago*, *potio* and ornaments *kada*, *moti*, *motiyan ri kanthi*, and a *palkhi*.<sup>24</sup>

All other honours and privileges were similar to those of the *Diwan*. It seems that the posts of *Diwan* and *Bakhshi* were equivalent posts in all respects except that their spheres of work

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Michel Foucault; Political, Philosophy and Culture, Interview and Other Writing 1977-1484*, London, Routledge, 1988, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> *Hakikat Bahi*, V. S. 1725, No. 8, Kati Bud 10, p. 1327.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1328.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1330.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1331.

were quite different. The appointments on second grade posts viz., *karkun* and *hakim* of a town or district, *kotwal*, *darogah*, *bakhshi* of a *Sarkar* (Crown-land), *kiledar* (keeper of the fort), etc., were accompanied by a *siropao*, *kada* or *thermo* which was worn by the incumbent who saluted the ruler in the court as usual.<sup>25</sup> The *kiledar* of Jodhpur fort on appointment got *siropao* with *kada* and *moti* which shows that this post was somewhat higher and important in nature.<sup>26</sup> The *musahib* (advisor) got a *siropao* and an elephant besides the *patta* (grant) of a village. Appointments to other administrative and civil posts were announced in the *darbar* and the incumbent was asked to make salutation which was considered enough to invest him with the power and functions of the post. No material gifts were bestowed on them. The non-brahmanas made *mujra* but brahmanas gave their blessings (*ashirvad*) to the ruler.<sup>27</sup>

By ritual we can tell the position of a person on the ladder of official hierarchy. The holding of a ceremony in a grandiose way was to impose upon the minds of the people that only through service of their lord that they could advance in their carrier and bring glory to their lineage. The spectatorship acted as a witness and imposed a moral obligation of the new appointee to stay loyal. So spectatorship was not just about seeing but also about arousing the emotions. It was not just about observation of an artwork but the ‘mind food’ that the scene provided for the spectator, involving a fusion of intellectual exercises and emotional as well as religious investment. All in all, it made for a Moebius strip between feeling as thought and thought as feeling.<sup>28</sup>

These cultural trends show that ‘the cultural hegemony was expressed by a dominant discourse legitimizing the ruler’s political economic position.’<sup>29</sup>

In this article we have tried to explore some of the ways by which attempts were made to create hierarchy in the ruling class. A variety of rituals were employed to establish everyone’s specific position in the hierarchy. We could also see that things were idealized to become acceptable. Thus, we can infer that ‘ideological power derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetics and ritual practices. Control of ideology, that combines ultimate meanings, values, norms, aesthetics and rituals , used to bring general social power’.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 1332.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 1334.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 1335.

<sup>28</sup> Raminder Kaur, *Performative Politics and the Culture of Hinduism*, Public Uses of Religion in Western India, Anthem Press, London, 2003, p. 113.

<sup>29</sup> Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, Op. Cit., p. 72.