



POLITICS OF LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

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Till now we have been trying to understand how the Rajput society was able to integrate an individual into a set pattern of life. Apart from these, there is another set of rituals which centres on biological processes and relating people to the social environment. 'Life cycle rituals are key points at which culture and social structure inter-relate with the biological growth and decay of human bodies.'¹ In accordance to traditional Indian beliefs there are sixteen *sanskars* which form the part of life cycle rituals.

A study of them would help us understand how ritualization provides a definite time and space to everything. By adhering to these collective rhythms people actually 'contribute to the reproduction of the order by producing objectively orchestrated practices'.²

I. Pre-Natal Life Cycle Rituals

There are three pre-natal life cycle rituals in the Rajput society- *garbhadhan*, *punswan* and *seemantonayana*. *Garbhadhan* is conception and it is believed that for a superior progeny, certain vedic rituals should be followed.³ *Punswan* is done in the fifth month of the gestation period. It is actually a ritual done to get a male child. The songs and hymns chanted at this time describe a son and its celebration.⁴ Due to the patriarchal and martial set up of society sons were more desired. We also get details of the celebration in *Bahis*. Such as,

'In V.S. 1822 (1765) on the birth of princess Ratan Kanwar, the following expenditure was incurred:

¹ Roland Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, p. 118.

² Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structure, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power, in Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner (ed.s), *Culture, Power, History*, Princeton, 1993, p. 159.

³ *Jodhpur Rajya ki Dastur Bahi*, Rajasthan Shodh Sansthan, Jodhpur, 1994, p.20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

1)68 Rupees Cash, 2) 552 Rupees for *Panchmashi (Punswan)* on the dark 2nd of Migsar (Margshirsh), 3) 4 Rupees expenditure on the worship of the sacred seat, 4) 1 Rupees expenditure for the *Aarti* , 5) 1 Rupees given to the daughter of the mid-wife, 6) 118 Rupees for the distridution of the coconut, betel nuts and other eatables and 7) 400 Rupees given to the Queen Chunawatji.”⁵

Seemantonayana or *Aagharni* was performed in the eighth month of the gestation period. On this occasion, the timing is decided by the astrologer as per moon’s position with a male planet. On this day, prayers are done in accordance to the vedic rites. We get the account of expenditure on this occasion in Jodhpur *Rajya ki Dastur Bahi*. For instance;

1) 365 Rupees on Aagharni on Magh Bud 5, 2) 25 Rupees expenditure when the queen sat for prayers on the sacred seat, 3) 1 Rupees for *Aarti* to ward off evil eye, 4) 10 Rupees for donation to moon, 5) 1 Rupees for decorating the floor, 6) 86 Rupees for saree for the occasion, 7) 1 Rupees given to the painter to decorate it, 8) 85 Rupees spent on coconuts and betel nuts, 9) 290 Rupees for cooking delicacies, 10) 20 Rupees for preparing offering to the god, 11) 33 Rupees expenditure on the expectant mother, and 12) 25 Rupees donations⁶

Thus we can see that even before the birth certain rituals were performed to include the unborn in the social structure and to reaffirm the belief in the already established society.

About *Aagharni* it is believed that it is done to protect the mother and child from the inauspicious powers. At this occasion the priest gets the “*shreemantonayan* (or *Aagharni*) *sanskar*” on the wife done by the husband. In this, amidst chanting of mantras the husband pours flowers on her hair thrice and finally flowers are tied on her hair. Only husband can do all these rituals and if he is absent then just a simple ceremony is performed in the name. At this time the dancers, prostitutes and other such women perform dance. In *zenana dyodi* the *badaran* (chief attendant) brings the platter of prayer, kettle drums were worshipped by Joshi, *Vedias*, etc. and the drums were worshipped in the harem. The potter makes the clay idol of Ganesha, which is brought in the fort and established in the temple of chief deity. On this occasion *Lapasi* (a sweet dish of wheat) was prepared as offering to god. Before preparing it, the utensil in which it would be cooked was worshipped. Once ready, it was fist of all offered to “*Bhairoo*”.⁷

⁵ Ibid, p. 35

⁶ Ibid., pp. 35-36

⁷ *Hakikat Bahi*, V.S. 1823-38, No. 7, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner, p. 83.

Thus we can see that around a belief, so many rituals were created to attain a realistic feeling. The origin of belief is based on myth, but due to faith it was deemed beyond doubt. The roots of the structuring power of the universe are unquestionable and presents only one way of ordering the universe. Almost all the objects involved in the process were presented as sacred and were to be worshipped. This creates an aura of sanctity around the whole process. Along with this the other expressions of celebratory mood, like music, dance, making Rangoli, etc., were applied.

At the occasion, the in laws of the woman worshipped organizes a feast in which all the relatives are invited and *mehandi*, which was the symbol of marital fortune, was distributed. The parents and brothers of the woman would send yellow dress for her, *siropao* for Maharaja, dresses for her mother in law and sister in laws and *chunris* for her attendants.⁸ For the whole night the prayers would go on outside the *dyodi* and dance inside for entertainment.⁹

Next day the woman is given bath and her hair washed. She would then wear the yellow dress which came from her parental home. The astrologer would tell a *muhurrat* on the basis of Maharaja's lunar position, and on that her bangles were changed. The king and the queen, then offered prayers to Ganesha, Navgraha, sun and eventually do a *havan*.¹⁰ After this an unmarried girl would do the *arti* of the mother to be and her husband applied *sindoor* in her head by a golden stick. If her husband is not around, then a married woman would do so. After this, till the birth of the child, the woman is not supposed to tie her hair and do make up.¹¹ Immediately after this or few days after this, the family members and the in laws pour dry fruits and cash in the edge of her *chunri*. This is known as "God Bharai or Khol Bharai". This is followed by *nichrawal*.¹²

In *Asad Vad* 1 of V.S. 1708, the *Aagharni dastur* of Shekhawatji Shri Anrangdeji was done, the details of that are as follows,

1) 891 Rupees and 37 gold coins distributed to the respected people present there, 2) 4 Rupees distributed to the servants of Shri Nanganechiji (chief deity of Rathores), 3) 13 Rupees to attendants of fort, 4) 10 Rupees to attendants of zenana mahal, 5) 208 Rupees to attendants of artillery, 6) 9 Rupees to attendants of the queen, 7) 63 Rupees to Chand Bai, 8) 66 Rupees miscellaneous, 9) 400 Rupees to Anrangdeji for Aagharni, 10) 203

⁸ Ibid, p. 85.

⁹ Ibid, p. 86.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 87.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 88.

¹² Ibid, p. 90.

gold coins to the members of the royal family, 11) 7 Rupees for eatables, 12) 8 Rupees to Chand Kanwar Bai for *arti*, 13) 7 Rupees to mid wife Sarupa for warding off evil eye by salt, 14) 21 Rupees and 3 gold coins to priest of the chief deity Nangnechiji, 15) 2 Rupees to chamberlain, 16) 2 Rupees to servant responsible for bringing water, 17) 3 Rupees to potter, 18) 3 Rupees to gardener, 19) 3 Rupees to painter, 20) 152 Rupees for the cloth of the dress for Aagharni, 21) 138 Rupees to 2632 coconuts distributed , 22) 220 Rupees to Brahmin, and 23) 34 Rupees to the singers¹³

On the *Aagharni dastur* from all the queens the dresses, sweets, dry fruits, etc. would be brought by the attendants. All these were brought to the palace of the expectant queen with music, dance and great fanfare.¹⁴

As we proceed further with the details of the life cycle rituals, it is becoming clear to us that rituals at regular passage of life, biological processes tie human life. These celebrations were the norms of society which have to be fulfilled by the individual and the people around him. This becomes a way of life and becomes compulsory. The royalty would do it at a grand scale and the common people at an ordinary level. But it has to be accomplished otherwise, the life would be considered devoid of happiness. If the people involved do not do so, the society around would make you feel unhappy and miserable. The culture teaches people how to emote. Without fulfillment of these cultural trends, emotional fulfillment is not attained. Since, there is no other way, leaving these rites unfulfilled would make anyone feel incomplete in life. By these rituals at regular intervals of life people were made to do certain things. With that their lives were controlled and guided by some superior force which ruled the society. Not just certain traditions, there were certain ways of doing them, thus controlling minute details of each one's life along biological evolution. Governing the life of masses by the mandatory norms fixes social and personal life in a non-deviant fashion. Eventually people learn to seek joy and find meanings in that sort of life style. It sets their emotional pattern and they keep them on the defined track.

II. Post-Natal Life Cycle Rituals

On the birth of the child, *Janmatsava* or *Jaatkarma* (celebration of the birth) is accomplished. On this occasion Brahmins, priests, etc. are given donations. Money is given for the purpose of worship of cow and sun. Singing and dancing is done and a lot of money is given to the performers. On the birth of son or daughter all the rituals are same, but joy on the birth of

¹³ Ibid, pp. 37-38.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 40.

former is comparatively more. Even the money given to the mother of the new born for nutritious diet is more in case of son than in case of daughter.¹⁵

On the birth of a son, bronze plate is beaten to announce the good news, but not so in case of a daughter. The occasion of beating the bronze plate was celebrated in contemporary literature. For example,

“I worship those queens,
who allow us to beat plates;
when they give birth to brave warrior,
who will break all chains binding the motherland.”¹⁶

On the birth of a child, the mid-wife was rewarded, and specially so when a prince was born. On the birth of a prince, Charans were rewarded with cash, elephants, horses, *siropoas*, and villages. For example, ‘on the birth of Maharana Bhim Singh’s son, in 1787 A.D., Charan Khoobchand was given an elephant, *siropao* and an ornament of turban, Barhut Shivdan was given horse, *siropao* and village, Barhut Bhop Singh received horse, *siropao* and village and Aashiya Jaswant Singh was given horse, *siropao*, village and other things’.¹⁷

On the *Chathi* (sixth day) prayers and chanting were used to be done. On *Dasotan* (Tenth Day) a celebration is held in which on the occasion on the birth of a son, relatives, courtiers and others feasted.¹⁸

In V.S. 1709 (1652 A.D.) on the birth of Maharaj Kunwar Prithvi Singh, ‘*Dasotan*’ was celebrated and the worship of sun accomplished. On this occasion, the chief deity of Rathores Nanganечи Mata was sent offerings and cash and drummers and potters were given clothing etc. Cash award was given to make the prince sleep in the cradle. After that a grand feast of ‘*Dasotan*’ was celebrated and all the people related to the royal family received dresses in gifts.¹⁹

Here we can see that a special order being formulated and regenerated around a child and involved all the members to create a particular form of society. This society appears as if it is the only way to live life and throws attention to biological activities and diverts them other (political) activities. So, people are kept engaged in the fulfillment and making

¹⁵ Ibid, p.22.

¹⁶ Suryamal Mishran, *Veer Satsai*, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur. p. 28.

¹⁷ Kaviraja Shyamaldas, *Vir Vinod*, Udaipur, Shakhtawat Publishing House, 1974., Vol. I, p. 1707.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 1710.

¹⁹ Muhto Nainsi, *Marwar Re Pargana Ri Vigat*, Narain Singh Bhati (ed.), Maharana Maan Singh Pustak Prakash, Jodhpur, Vol. II, p. 448.

arrangements for these only generation after generation. ‘Sentiments in relationships and towards events circulate as norms in the form of representation: this is what love looks like, this is how love is expressed...’, The ‘emotional style’ of public culture is the visible preoccupation...’²⁰

Naamkaran or giving of proper name to the child is another of Sixteen *Sanskar*. Usually the tenth day is considered good for giving of proper name . On the basis of the child’s astrological positions, the priest suggested suitable names and received gifts afterwards. The horoscope of the child is also made on that day.²¹

The next *sanskar* is *Karnavedha* or ear-piercing. Amongst Rajputs, there has always been a tradition of ear piercing. This work was accomplished by the gold smiths, who would pierce the lobes of the ears and then tie it around in a circle. For girls, it was customary to pierce the left lobe first.²²

On the occasion of *Annaprashana* (consumption of grains), the child is first time made to eat grains, amidst the prayers and rituals and thus another *sanskar* is accomplished. When a child turns six months old his intestines are ready to digest grains and thus done at a particular time. At this occasion, rice, curd, ghee and honey are mixed and given to the child.²³

On the *sanskar* of *Chuda Karma* (hair shaving), the first hairs of the son are shaven. It is done either in the first or third year as per the family traditions. The hairs which are there from the womb were considered impure and thus to be removed. For this, on an auspicious *muhurat* was decided by the help of astrology , the temple of the chief deity was visited and hair shaven off. For the Amber royal family, this *sanskar* was done at the temple of Jamuvaya Mata, who was the chief deity of Kacchawas.²⁴

On the occasion of Upanayana the male child takes Brahamcharya and goes to a guru and begins his education. It is followed by the *sanskar Vedarambha*, when the child dons yellow clothes and starts studying the Vedas. To what extent, these two were followed is unclear. After that the *sanskar* of *Samavaten* comes when the student completes his education and comes back. We do not get much reference to that in the state records. The

²⁰ Pramod K. Nayar, *States of Sentiment: Exploring the Cultures of Emotion*, Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2011, p. 16.

²¹ Ibid, P.21.

²² Raghavendra Singh Manohar, *Rajasthan ke Rajgharon ka Sanskritik Adhyayana*, Panchsheel Prakashan, Jaipur, 1991, p. 188.

²³ Ibid, p. 190.

²⁴ *Dastur Komwar Bahi*, Rajasthan State Archives, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner, p. 361.

next *sanskar* of *Vivaah* or marriage has already been discussed in an earlier chapter and understood how culture is designed by it. This is followed by *Vanaprashtha* and *Sanyasa*-hardly unheard of in the state records. The last *sanskar* of death is already discussed earlier.²⁵

One of the peculiar features of the ritualistic society is that all the members are bound to each other through links of liability. We have seen that almost all the family members and relatives participated in all the ceremonies. On any occasion, the way to feel joy is to organize prayers, dance and music and gift or cash giving. The close relatives and elders give the maximum amount and the most expensive gifts but the distant relatives offer only nominal gifts (but they still give). This binds the receiver by the obligation to return on the suitable occasion. Therefore, a network of give and take is established and all are bound to each other in this. One cannot come out from this web. It also began much before one gains consciousness. It becomes the form of living life. On returning the obligation, the things come full circle and become unending. If one does not celebrate in the prescribed way, then other do not obtain the opportunity to return the obligation. This was, no doubt, rude and undesirable. So, people were bound to follow the cycle and live in the set pattern of life. It becomes not just difficult to come out, but impossible.²⁶ People had no choice but to follow the pattern and contribute in its reproduction.

“ Almost all the rituals were followed by common people also, but lacks detailed recording. The rituals were accomplished according to the status of the people and thus became symbolic of status. People were totally obsessed by the culture and were driven around by it. They were following them brainlessly and could not move out of the vicious circle. Fulfilling the traditions became the motive of their lives. They would do it all cost, regardless of their affordability. This led to large scale loans, mortgaging and other forms of economic disturbances. When the Britishers came to India they were shocked to prevent it.²⁷ One such document is issued by them through the means of Maharana of Mewar. It is as follows,

“ Shri Ekling Ji Shri Ramji Order by the will of supreme Shri
Durbar of Udaipur state Issued on Jaishtha Sud 1, V.S. 1979 and
date 15 June 1923 A.D.”²⁸

²⁵ Ibid, p. 370.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 373.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 375.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 376.

Regarding organizing the feast on marriage and death orders were issued for the improvement of the subjects.²⁹ In that reasonable amendments have been made and is being declared that every person should follow it from V.S. 1980 or date July 1 onwards. In this regard, people are asked to be particular and follow it fully. First, within the prescribed limit, people need not take permission, and secondly, police and officers would give permission beyond the prescribed limit, the information about that will be recorded in jail.”³⁰

From this it becomes clear that the state is concerned about the excessive spending on various rituals and wants to control by setting a limit. If someone wanted to spend beyond the recognized limit, then he had to take permission of state officers. The categories of expenditure on different occasions are given caste-wise.

Caste			Without Permission		With permission	
			Feast with Sugar	Feast with Jaggry	Feast with Sugar	Feast with Jaggry
For Brahmin Caste	Marriage	Feast of Juneau	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 10	Rupees 5
		Marriage of Boy or Girl	Rupees 10	Rupees 5	Rupees 20	Rupees 10
		Gangoj (Feast after returning from Ganga Aagharani)	Rupees 3	Rupees 2	Rupees 6	Rupees 3
	Death	Feast on the 12 th or 13 th Day	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 3	Rupees 2
		After one month	Rupees 8	Rupees 5	Rupees 15	Rupees 8
		After six months	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 3	Rupees 2
		After one year	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 5	Rupees 2
		First shraddha	Rupees 3	Rupees 2	Rupees 6	Rupees 3
		Gorniya (Feast in memory of women whole husband is	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 3	Rupees 2
			Rupees 3	Rupees 2	Rupees 6	Rupees 3

²⁹ order no. 1600 issued on Paush Vid 1, 1963.

³⁰ *The rules of Feast at the Occasion of Marriage and Death*, Mazariya Rajya Sri Mahakamakhas Shri Durbar Mewar, V.S. 1980, Sajjan Yantralaya, Udaipur, p. 1.

		alive)					
For Mahajan Caste	Marriage	For Girl's Marriage	Rupees 22	Rupees 10	Rupees 30	Rupees 15	
		Boy's Marriage	Rupees 18	Rupees 10	Rupees 28	Rupees 12	
		<i>Gangoj</i>	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 10	Rupees 5	
		<i>Aagharani</i>	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 8	Rupees 4	
		<i>Vanola</i>	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	
		(Feast given by other relatives on marriage)					
	Death	Death	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	
		Feast on the 12 th or 13 th Day	Rupees 8	Rupees 5	Rupees 15	Rupees 8	
		After one month	Rupees 20	Rupees 10	Rupees 30	Rupees 15	
		After six months	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 3	Rupees 2	
After one year		Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 3	Rupees 2		
First <i>shraddha</i>		Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 5	Rupees 3		
<i>Gorniya</i>		Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 8	Rupees 5		
For Kayastha Caste	Marriage	For boy's or Girl's Marriage	Rupees 10	Rupees 8	Rupees 20	Rupees 10	
		<i>Aagharani</i>	Rupees 4	Rupees 2	Rupees 8	Rupees 4	
		<i>Gangoj</i>	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 10	Rupees 5	
		Death	Feast on the 12 th day	Rupees 10	Rupees 5	Rupees 20	Rupees 10
		After three month	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	
	After six months	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 10	Rupees 5		
	After one year	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 10	Rupees 5		
	<i>Gorniya</i>	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 5	Rupees 2		
	First <i>shraddha</i>	Rupees 5	Rupees 2	Rupees 10	Rupees 5		
	For Other Castes	Marriage	For boy's or Girl's Marriage	Rupees 8	Rupees 4	Rupees 12	Rupees 6
<i>Aagharani</i>			Rupees 3	Rupees 2	Rupees 6	Rupees 3	
<i>Gangoj</i>			Rupees 3	Rupees 2	Rupees 6	Rupees 3	
Death		On death	Rupees 10	Rupees 5	Rupees 13	Rupees 7	
		On the 12 th or 13 th day	Rupees 2	Rupees 1	Rupees 3	Rupees 2	

Here, we can clearly observe that an attempt has been made by the state to control wasteful expenses on life cycle rituals. Yet, the upper castes were allowed more expenditure than the lower castes to maintain their position in social hierarchy. The order further says,

“ Police and district officers and the *Umraos* of *Thikanas* should send these books to every village. If the village is big, then it should be distributed caste-wise. If the village is small the two copies be given to responsible and be made accountable that the order is followed and they should keep vigil. If there is any need to report then they must do so with a qualified officer... if the order is not followed then after enquiry punishment should be given.”³¹

Though these rules were formed but on the basis of practical experience we can say that these were not followed, since it continues till date. This is the power of rituals that in spite of such legislations, these traditions continues without break till the present times.

This is in fact, another method of hierarchization by means of life cycle rituals. Thus we can say that the society was constantly shaped by the rituals and evolved into a certain shape. As a result, people will think, emote and act in a desired way without their knowledge. The evolution of this form was suitable for the ruling class.

In this chapter by the means of rituals of festivals and life cycle rites we have seen how the naturalness of the established order takes place. This system also works as the automatic self reproducing machine in a concealed and natural way. One of the most important use of ritualization is the naturalization of practices by a given way of time, place and mode of everything. The human life, thus becomes a medium to accomplish these rituals as a way of life. Once the submission to these rituals is attained, the cycle is completed, the process of ordering the world is completed.

The social calendar tends to secure integration by compounding the synchronization of identical practices with the orchestration of different but structurally homologous practices. All the divisions of the group are projected at every moment into the spatio-temporal organization which assigns each category its pace and time; it is here that the fuzzy logic of practice works wonders in enabling the group as much as social and logical integration as is compatible with the diversity imposed on the sexes, ages, and the “occupation”. Synchronization in the case of rites is much more associated with the spatial grouping the more there is collectively at stake: rites thus range in importance from the great solemn rites enacted by everyone at the same time, through the rites performed at the same time by each family separately, through those which may be practiced at any time.³²

³¹ Ibid, p. 5.

³² Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Sage Publishers, Cambridge, 1991., p. 159.