

Crafts and Statecraft in Eighteenth Century Jodhpur

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Abstract

This essay argues that too much of scholarship on state formation in late pre-colonial India has displayed an elitist bias and focused exclusively on the activities and concerns of upper-caste ruling groups alone. Building upon recent trends that have brought into view the roles of a greater diversity of groups, this article explores the agentive role of the crafts and artisan communities in the state formation of Jodhpur during the eighteenth century. This was a period when the Rathor rulers of Jodhpur were unable to rely on the external support of the Mughal Empire and felt compelled to forge alliances with new groups who, perhaps, were previously marginal to political processes in the region. This, of course, did not dissolve the difficult and often exploitative conditions under which artisans worked, and though their agency was more *reactive* than *creative*, it did serve to define and limit the levels of state appropriations in revenues and labour.

It is passé to acknowledge that history-writing has been marked by discourses on elites by elites. This elitist colonization of the discipline continues to persist in large measure, coloring our vision of state-formation and statecraft. In more recent writings, however, the scope of statecraft has gradually expanded to include not just elites but ‘middle classes’ too, and especially after the interventions of Chris Bayly, a host of regional studies probing the transitory phase of the eighteenth century, have discussed the inclusion of intermediate groups like merchants, traders and townsmen, and a rural gentry in the constitution of state power.¹ Though they have indeed abandoned

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¹ For early works see Richard B. Barnett’s *North India Between Empires*; M. N. Pearson’s *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*; or Frank Perlin’s, ‘Of White Whales and Countrymen in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Deccan’, pp. 172–237. After Bayly’s

Orientalist and Marxist notions of a dichotomy and a hiatus between the Indian State and Society, and built paradigms that recognize the existence of a close nexus between ruling dynasties and dominant groups, they have tended to limit themselves to defining 'history' and 'politics' almost exclusively in terms of the ideas and activities of the socially superior groups. Numerous works can be cited to support this thesis, and to name a few outstanding ones I might mention those of Peabody on Kota in north-western India, of Dirks on Pudukottai down south, of Wink describing Peshwa Maharashtra, or of Sushil Chaudhary writing about Bengal.²

Extremely significant as the contributions of these works may be, they are responsible for generating the impression that none but those from the upper echelons of society were relevant to the processes of power and state building in pre-colonial India. Was political expediency and concerns of statecraft limited to the dominant elite groups alone? Were the lower segments and their politics external to the construction of state policies in all regions at all points in time? Indeed, the studies of Habib, Muzaffar Alam, and R. P. Rana on peasant rebellions during the century of transition from Mughal to British imperial authority focused on the play of politics between peasants, the rural gentry, and the state.³ Writing about peasants in

Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, Muzaffar Alam's *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India* Also see Perlin, 'Proto-Industrialization and Pre-colonial South Asia' in *Past and Present*, No. 89, (1983), pp. 30–95. In his work Perlin studied the great 'households' of Maratha revenue collectors and the processes by which they used their positions as village headmen to weave their webs of kinship in the countryside, tracing the local level networks of support spreading along primordial lines that sustained the Maratha regional polity. More recently, Nandini Sinha Kapur, in her study of state-formation in early medieval Mewar, takes cognisance of autochthonous tribal chiefs like the Bhils and their incorporation in the political structure of the state; see her work, *State Formation in Rajasthan: Mewar during the Seventh-Fifteenth Centuries* (Manohar, Delhi, 2002).

² See Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (Cambridge, 2003); Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987); André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986); Sushil Chaudhary, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal* (Delhi, 1995).

³ See Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India: 1556–1707* (Bombay, 1963), Alam's 'Aspects of Agrarian Uprisings in North India in the Early Eighteenth Century' in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar (eds.), *Situating Indian History for Sarvepalli Gopal* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 146–66; and two essays by R. P. Rana entitled 'A Dominant Class in Upheaval: The Zamindars of a North Indian Region in the Late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*) vol. 25, No. 4, (1987), pp. 395–410; and 'Agrarian Revolts in Northern India During the Late 17th and Early 18th Centuries' in *IESHR*, Vol. 17, Nos. 3 and 4, (1981), pp. 287–326.

their capacity as tax payers, or when they desisted from doing so, the central thrust of their explorations was essentially about why peasants collaborated with zamindars to cease the submission of revenues and defy Mughal authority at certain junctures in late 18th century. But were peasants the only significant subordinate formation worthy of notice, all other 'inferior' castes bereft of any form of political presence and participation in pre-colonial India?

Reacting against this elitist orientation of history-writing on pre-colonial India that has scholarship embracing the agrarian sector at the most, this paper shifts its gaze from 'high politics' to grass roots politics, and from the world of peasants to that of artisans and statecraft they found themselves embroiled in. Indeed, many artisans were agriculturists as well, and the two worlds were far from apart; but I am interested here in focusing on the differences that distinguished them. I perceive state-formation as an aggregative process that provided a legitimating umbrella for the actions of various structures and agents, and I include artisans as part of the political processes to suggest that historians cast their net wider when they discuss the scope of its constitution, the processes of its formation, and the range of its concerns. Since power was fragmented, dispersed and diffused among a large number of actors, and there was no single monolithic social group in whom all authority resided, I am arguing for state formation to be recognized, at least in certain spatial and temporal contexts, as a much more incorporative process than is usually done.

A strong argument for noticing the state and its power relations as an incorporative process has recently been made in an important study by Farhat Hasan. Noticing the politics of the lower strata of the bureaucracy—the *mutsaddis*, *faujders*, *qazis*, and *kotwals*—and corporate bodies of *bania* mercantile interests in the ports of Surat and Cambay in Suba Gujarat during the Mughal period, Hasan rightly argues that 'imperial sovereignty entailed a politic incorporation of an ever-increasing number of local intermediaries, on the principle of shared sovereignty.' And again, that the 'center of political gravity, as it were, was shifting downward to the lower, more locally rooted, links in the system.'⁴ Most importantly, from my perspective, he points out that 'the political sphere was quite inclusive and included even the *common subjects*. Their acquiescence was indeed crucial for the success of

⁴ See Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572–1730* (Cambridge, 2004).

any political expedition or conquest.⁵ (my emphasis) Unfortunately, however, his study leaves undefined and undifferentiated terms like 'common subjects' and 'urban dwellers', and presenting negligible documentation on the state's power relations with peasants, artisans and other 'common subjects', appears to define the lower and the subaltern primarily in terms of the *baniyas*!

This paper focuses on craft groups, a numerically substantial low caste *mélange* of communities who come across as being of immense importance to the economy of Marwar. Scholars on medieval India did often concede the significance of artisans to the Mughals, but they failed to view craftsmen as social entities to be studied on their own terms.⁶ Whether proponents or detractors of the 'deindustrialisation' thesis, a majority of them mentioned artisans in passing, as a template used to measure the 'health' of the Mughal economy. The issue that dominated the historiography thereafter was to gauge the potentialities of capitalistic development in Mughal India, and to assess the degree of subordination of craft production to mercantile capital.⁷ Yet other studies focused on the eighteenth century, mentioning artisans to prove the hypothesis of economic resurgence in certain pockets of the Mughal empire, or to argue for

⁵ See Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India*, p. 30.

⁶ See W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar* (London, 1920), and its sequel, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* (London, 1923); Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*; Hamida Khatoon Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India, 1556-1803* (Bombay, 1968); and Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739* (Cambridge, 1991) pp. 104-12.

⁷ Irfan Habib argued that no such transformation was imminent and that the economy of north India as late as the eighteenth century showed negligible signs of moving in this direction; see Habib, 'Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India', *Journal of Economic History* (U.S.) vol. XXIX, No. 1, March 1969; also in *Enquiry*, N.S. Vol. III, No. 3, 1971. Expressing diametrically opposite views were the two Soviet scholars V. Pavlov, *Historical Premises for India's Transition to Capitalism* (Moscow, 1978) and A. I. Tchicherov, *India: Economic Development in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, Outline History of Crafts and Trade* (Moscow, 1971). Tapan Raychaudhuri took a more sophisticated position on the issue, postulating that traditional forms of artisanal production and relationships coexisted with large-scale production for the market. Noticing a gradual progression of the artisans from the *ajmani* system to production for the market, he argued that in this process craftsmen became dependent on merchant capital. However, despite the clearly attested increase in external and internal demand for goods, he saw no major structural changes either in the manufacturing sector or in financing and marketing, and thus contrasting the European 'putting-out' system with the Indian 'advance and order system', he maintained a balance between the power of the merchant and the vulnerability of the artisan. See Raychaudhuri, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge, 1982). See Chapter on Non-Agricultural Production.

economic deprivation and hence a dark century where the processes of deindustrialisation were manifest.⁸ Common to all these studies was the use of artisans as some kind of yardstick to measure the vibrance of the Mughal economy in contrast to the colonial economy that followed. Recently, Eugenia Vanina's monograph on urban crafts, for instance, explicitly stated the laudable objective of studying not only the technology and organisation of craft production but also the people who crafted them, and the social relations they were embroiled in. The discussion that followed, however, failed to recognize artisans as anything more than economic units, and did not analyze the politics of their life worlds.⁹ Historical scholarship is clearly not convinced about viewing artisans as politically significant members of the state whose relevance to politics and statecraft can be a meaningful subject of analysis. This paper, instead, focuses its gaze on artisans, and unravels competing agendas of the Jodhpur state in its interactions with manufacturing castes during the latter half of the eighteenth century (roughly contemporaneous with the Rathor Maharaja Vijai Singh's reign).¹⁰

The repeated references I find in Marwari literature, even when of different genres, of a group name for craft castes is *pavan jatiyan*. Both Nainsi's *Vigat*¹¹ and the *ghazals* (poems) of the *Jainyatis* (saints) refer to lowly occupational groups by this term.¹² Said to be a group of thirty-six

⁸ Christopher Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars* (Cambridge, 1983) falls in the former category while B. L. Bhadani, *Peasants, Artisans and Entrepreneurs: Economy of Marwar in the Seventeenth Century* (Jaipur, 1999) for instance, subscribes to the latter view; see pp. 360–73.

⁹ See Eugenia Vanina, *Urban Crafts and Craftsmen in Medieval India* (Delhi, 2004).

¹⁰ I am aware of only two studies on artisanal struggles during the pre-colonial period: the first is Irfan Habib's 'Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India: Peasant and Artisan Resistance', in his collection of articles titled *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi, 1995). The second is Gautam Bhadra's essay entitled 'Two Frontier Uprisings' *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. 2 (ed.) Ranajit Guha (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 43–59. The essay describes two revolts from the Bengal and Assam region, provoked by a major change in the Mughal policy towards particular occupational groups. Both however, tackle only minimally and superficially the engagements between artisans and their antagonists, and notice no identity of interests, no ambiguities, and no inconsistencies in the agendas of the dominant and the subordinate.

¹¹ See Muhnot Nainsi's *Marwar ra Parganan ri Vigat* (ed.) Narain Singh Bhati (Jodhpur, 1968–69), Vol. I, pp. 390–1, and p. 497; and Vol. II, p. 10, pp. 85–6, and p. 310; A gazetteer-like compendium that enumerates the major castes residing in the different parganas and major qasbas of the Jodhpur kingdom, the *Vigat* includes the first crude census for the region.

¹² See Yati Shri Manrup's 'Nagaur Ki Ghazal' in *Parampara, Rajasthani Ghazal Sangrah*, (ed.) Vikram Singh Rathor (Chaupasani Shodh Sansthan, Jodhpur, 1964),

occupational castes, the term includes a diverse range of people from artisans and professionals, service castes, performing artists, to even prostitutes and beggars. Including textile spinners (pinjaras), weavers (julahas), dyers (rangrez, rangara, Nilgar or indigo-dyers), printers (chhipa), tailors (darzi), goldsmiths (sunar), copper and bronze casters (kansara/thathara), gold in-lay workers (chitara), carpenters (khati), potters (kumhar), stone-workers (silawat), laquer bangle-makers (lakhara), washer-men (dhobi), cobblers (mochi), barbers (nai), soap-makers (sabangar), beggars (kunjarha), gardeners (mali), oil-pressers (teli), liquor-brewers (kallal), and prostitutes (nagar nayika), the deployment of this encompassing category lumped together the socially down-trodden, the materially impoverished, and the politically marginalised. Etymologically, the epithet *pavan jat* is derived from the term *pavan*- 'the recipient'- implying those castes who received patronage from the superior castes.¹³ Other local terms to refer to artisans are *pun jat* or *nauni-pauni*, said to be derived from *paun* or *pun* - 'little less than one'- implying an 'incomplete' person. Obviously, this was to indicate the low status of this section in the perception of the higher castes, further corroborated by the use of another term *kamin* (the lowly) for them. The fact that all these groups belonged to the Shudra varna at the lowest rungs of the caste ladder explains these derogatory terms of reference used for subordinate groups.

Indeed, poverty and inferior social status combined to render them vulnerable. Was their clout in society, however, as minimal as their social rank would seem to promise and allow? What were the temporal and spatial constraints of Marwar that made crafts and its manufacturers more germane to state concerns than usually imagined? Especially in the context of eighteenth century Marwar, why do records suggest vigorous efforts on the part of the Rathors to court, appease and incorporate craft castes, and what strategies did they employ to achieve their agenda? This paper tries to address the above questions; and finally, it also focuses on the competing agendas of the rulers that often caused contradictory, ambiguous trends in

pp. 48–9. Written in the folk literature tradition, Marwari *ghazals* give descriptions of contemporary urban centres of Marwar.

¹³ I derive the etymological origin of the term *pavan* (recipient) from Sitaram Lalas, *Rajasthani Sabad Kosh. (Tritiya Khand, Pratham Jild)*, p. 2410. Norbert Peabody, however, translates the term as 'purifying castes', though he does not offer any explanation or source for his somewhat different rendering of the meaning; see his essay 'Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Early Colonial India' *Comparative Study in Society and History* (2001), pp. 827–8.

their policies, and notices the multiple and shifting concerns of the state get reflected in variable experiences of artisans.

Politics of Incorporation in the Eighteenth Century Context

That military might and coercive strength have historically been the primary bulwark of state power is beyond dispute. Political theorists, from the classical to the modern, however, recognize that there were other more subtle ingredients as well that went into the crucible to produce power. Classical cultural prescriptions on statecraft (*rajniti*) and the art of kingship (*rajdharmā*), believed to be the foundation of relations between the ruler and the ruled in pre-colonial India, had supported a broad based incorporative politics structured to protect its weakest subjects. Though descent from an eminent lineage, a commanding personal presence, competence at courtly etiquette, and bravery in the battlefield were important indices that determined the legitimacy of royalty, the one requisite that stands out as being basic was that the king be a defender of his people, capable of preserving internal order and preventing external aggression. Differences in emphasis may be discerned, but classical texts on kingship, from the ancient *Dharmasastra*¹⁴ and the *Arthasastra*,¹⁵ the *Manu-smṛitii*,¹⁶ to the eighteenth-century *Ajnapatra*,¹⁷ displayed a striking continuity in regard to the duties and obligations they advised for a righteous ruler. Protection of the subjects also meant attempts to maintain their economic well-being, and in fact most political treatises emphasised the upliftment of the people as fundamental to the enrichment of the treasury since the two were intimately linked and fundamental to each other.¹⁸ Several texts also emphasized charity, gift-giving and munificence as a religious duty of rulers, especially in times of crises.¹⁹

¹⁴ P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmashastras*, 3 vols (Poona, 1946), pp. 210 and 223.

¹⁵ R. P. Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthashastra: An English Translation* (University of Bombay Studies in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali, 1963), No. 2, Part II, pp. 364–5.

¹⁶ *Manu-smṛiti* with the *Manubhasya of Medhatithi*, ed. Ganganath Jha, 2 vols.

¹⁷ Strikingly reminiscent of the *Arthasastra*, the *Ajnapatra* was written between 1700–1716 by Ramchandra Nilkant, one of the senior ministers of the Marathas. See S. V. Puntambekar, 'The Ajnapatra or Royal Edict' in *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. VIII, (1), April 1929, p. 104.

¹⁸ For an elaboration of these ideas, see Eugenia Vanina, *Ideas and Society In India: from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 16–51.

¹⁹ Prasannan Parthasarathi's recent study *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720–1800* (Cambridge, 2002) pp. 121–48 elaborates at length the cultural context of 'moral polity' that characterised the

Though chronicles that cite these obligations on the part of Kings and notables are often panegyric works built around the generosity of the politically powerful, the significance of these sources lies in pointing to the expectations from 'good rulers' and the attributes of just and benevolent kings.²⁰ The rulers' role as a magnanimous donor, bestowing alms upon religious mendicants, supporting eleemosynary for religious establishments, feeding the subjects when crop failures occurred, extending *taccavi* advances to finance cultivation and construction of wells, sponsoring the construction of water reservoirs, and rescuing dependents through relief and rehabilitation, finds mention in numerous early modern textual narratives.

At least in rhetoric if not in reality, this ethico-political terrain of state building was acknowledged in Marwar too, evident in a proverb popular in the Jodhpur region that runs: *Raja rau daan are paraja rau samman* i.e. 'it is befitting for a King to be generous with charity and the subjects to be deferential towards him'.²¹ In the eighteenth century environment of political instability and struggles for the throne, a 'fit' between the office of the king and the actual ruler was more critical than ever to his popular acceptance as legitimate. This rhetoric constituted the guiding principle for kings and subjects in the eighteenth century, though how far they adhered to its dictates varied in different contexts.²²

Thinkers in modern times, whether Weber or Foucault, had emphasized that few regimes could sustain themselves on appeals to coercive power alone, and Foucauldian interpretations of power elaborated that state power has always rested not only in the influence of dominant social groups and their brute capacity to discipline but also in political and ideological traditions of conciliation and building

pre-colonial South Indian state. He traces the transformation in the nature of the state with the inception of British colonialism, and emphasises that they experienced no such constraints of legitimacy that would check and limit their power. Though relatively less direct on pre-colonial polity, Radhika Singha's conclusions about the colonial state also suggest similar distinctions between the pre-colonial and colonial polities; see Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi, 1998).

²⁰ For an elaboration of these ideas, see Sanjay Sharma's *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Delhi, 2001), pp. 171–81.

²¹ See Vijay Dan Detha, *Rajasthani-Hindi Kahavat Kosh*, (new series) Vol. 5 (Borunda, 2002), p. 3053.

²² See Stewart Gordon, 'Legitimacy and Loyalty in Some Successor States of the Eighteenth Century' in J. F. Richards (ed.) *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1978).

consent.²³ The core problem of governance lay in the success of the efforts to incorporate people into a polity and economy in such a way that they accepted the political and legal authority centered on the state. These processes appear to have been at work since long in the construction of kingship in pre-colonial India, demanding and necessitating an administrative strategy cast in a politically incorporative idiom.

This concern was more pronounced in the eighteenth century when the Rathor Rajput rulers of Jodhpur gradually lost the backing of the imperial Mughals and experienced intense stresses and instability. During the phase of Mughal support, the threat of internal revolts had diminished, refractory nobles had succumbed before a superior force, and the concept of monarchical absolutism that was a characteristic feature of Mughal imperial authority, had infiltrated Rajput notions of kingship, making for stricter subordination of the clan leaders to Rathor monarchical authority. But with increasing instability at the core of the Mughal centre, it became necessary for the local rulers of Marwar to consolidate their autonomous hold over their patrimonial homelands (*watan*) and negotiate with myriad forces to maintain their regime. Jodhpur was now increasingly suffused with internal tensions, contradictions, factionalism at the court, and increased economic impoverishment.²⁴ Leading nobles such as the *thakurs* of Pokharan, Aua, Nimaj, Rian, Asop, Kuchaman, Ras, Khairwa, Bhadrajun and Raipur, or the heads of the *Champawats*, *Udawats*, *Mertia*, *Kumpawats*, *Karnot* and *Karamsot* clans again wielded immense power by virtue of their claiming coparcenership with the Rathor ruling dynasty.²⁵ The land holdings of these local aristocrats became practically hereditary now, the nobles and clan leaders regaining their old power in Marwar.²⁶ In the absence of imperial sanction of

²³ See Max Weber in 'Politics as a Vocation' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), p. 78; and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1991).

²⁴ Shiv Dutt Dan Barhat, *Jodhpur Rajya Ka Itihas, 1753-1800* (Jaipur, 1982), pp. 137-47.

²⁵ See Visheshwarswami Reu's 'Marwar Ki Samant Pratha' in *Parampara*, No. 95-96, in which he analyses the pressures that these subordinate Rajput *sardars* constantly exerted on the Rathor rulers. For a general argument analysing the decentralised stresses of Rajput polity see Richard G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule: State-Hinterland Relations in Pre-Industrial India* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971).

²⁶ Rosemary Crill, in her recently published work notes that during the early decades of the eighteenth century several *thikanas* had become powerful enough to

legitimacy to a specific contender for the throne, struggles among Rathor kinsmen for acceptance as the rightful ruler were perennial.²⁷

Simultaneously, the collapse of the Mughal umbrella facilitated the Marathas to gain leverage in the power politics of Marwar. Under the Holkars and the Scindias, Marathas began to attack garrisoned forts and towns of Jodhpur, and cut off communications that adversely impacted on the trade of the affected regions. Five years of incursions from 1752–56 depleted the Rathor treasury and left the crownlands uncultivated. The peasantry dispersed, commerce diminished owing to the pillage at the behest of mercenary Pindari troops in the employ of Marathas.²⁸ Under increasing Maratha pressure, the Rathor ruler Vijai Singh bought peace in 1756 and agreed to cede Ajmer to them. He also agreed to surrender huge sums of money as war indemnity and tribute and the chieftaincy was thus reduced to a tribute-paying vassal status of the *Dakhaniyas*, the local term used by the Marwaris for the Marathas.²⁹ Maratha defeat in the battle of Panipat provided temporary relief to Vijai Singh, but their demands for tribute remained a constant financial burden on Vijai Singh's depleted exchequer.³⁰

The Maharaja tried to put his house in order, consolidate his position and strengthen his military preparedness. This entailed an astronomical rise in the demand for cash. European use of artillery and gunfire put a pressure on eighteenth-century patrimonial regimes, requiring investments towards the recruitment of standing armies

develop their own ateliers where patronage to renowned artists was extended on a scale parallel to that of the Jodhpur Durbar; see Crill's *Marwar Paintings: A History of the Jodhpur Style* (Jodhpur, 2000), pp. 54–115.

²⁷ For instance, in the middle of the century a bitter conflict ensued after Maharaja Abhay Singh died; his son Ram Singh and brother Bakhat Singh vied for the throne, could enjoy extremely short-lived reigns of less than an year each, with the conflict persisting thereafter between Ram Singh and Bakhat's son Vijai Singh. Similarly, the last decade of the century saw the cousins Bhim Singh and Man Singh simultaneously claim the throne of the state; See Jagdish Singh Gehlot's *Marwar Rajya Ka Itihas*, p. 132–46.

²⁸ For details on Pindarees' mode of operation, see Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India* (Oxford, 1994); also see G. R. Parihar, *Marwar and the Marathas* (Jodhpur, 1968), pp. 90–1.

²⁹ A letter from Mahad ji Scindia to Vijai Singh dated June 8th, 1769, outlines the terms and conditions for these payments; also see G. R. Parihar, *Marwar and the Marathas* (Jodhpur, 1968), pp. 85–9. A whopping sum to the tune of fifty lacs was demanded by the Marathas as war indemnity, and a regular annual tribute of hundred and fifty thousand rupees too.

³⁰ The Marathas demanded three lacs of rupees in 1761 and another ten lacs in 1765. See *Marwar Khyat*, Vol. 111, pp. 34–7.

manned by mercenary soldiers, preferably adept in the use of firearms, as well as the need to import large numbers of war-horses. While the urgency to respond quickly to this challenge was felt far more acutely by kingdoms in the east and the south of the subcontinent than by Jodhpur, military fiscalism was indeed a reality that made the regularity if not the expansion of revenue generation an even more pressing necessity.³¹ The Maharaja tried to meet the financial crisis by levying new taxes and raising rates of existing ones, but in a situation of Maratha invasions, revolts of recalcitrant jagirdars, political turbulence and economic dislocation, the people of Marwar resented the Maharaja's attempts at tightening the purse strings. In this unstable environment of the century once Mughal protection was no longer available to the Marwar rulers, military threats from within and without had to be faced by them through their own internal resources. Rathor rulers now often found their hold over the *gaddi* fragile and precarious.

In a recent study, Mridu Rai convincingly argued that despite failing to employ incorporative strategies towards the Muslim populace, a Hindu Dogra regime was able to establish and sustain its sovereignty over the Muslim subjects of the Kashmir valley due to British authorization and support to their rule.³² Exclusionary policies negligent towards substantial sections of subjects were perhaps possible where strong imperialist powers buttressed the authority of local Rajas. But when circumstances caused such support to be withdrawn, as in the case of the Rathor rulers of Jodhpur after the weakening and collapse of Mughal authority and support, would the local rulers not experience an exaggerated sense of precariousness, and feel constrained to build a more incorporative state? Received wisdom on this issue after all emphasises that the power base of the state tends to be too narrow unless it is able to achieve legitimation through politico-ideological processes grounded in a broad consensus.

The wide-ranging pressures discussed above caused in eighteenth century Jodhpur a tremendous hunger for both material and

³¹ See Burton Stein, 'State Formation and Economy Reconsidered' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19 (3), 1985, pp. 387–413.

³² See Mridu Rai, *Hindu Kings, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* (Delhi, 2004). She rightly contends that Dogra identification and promotion of Hindu interests, especially those of Kashmiri Pandits, to the exclusion of Muslim sentiments, and harnessing of Hindu legitimising devices alone at the cost of hurting Muslim religious sentiments, could not have been possible without British imperialist backing to these policies. Their support, in effect, abrogated the need for a broad-based state.

manpower resources. The acute aridity and adverse ecological conditions of the region, however, meant that physical resources were inflexible, and not much wealth could be generated by a more efficient exploitation of the same. As for human resources, nature repeatedly depleted them, but in a pre-machine age, human labour was crucial to production. Skilled manpower was the natural option that needed to be developed and harnessed effectively. The Rathors therefore fully realized the need to invest not only in forging alliances with powerful lineage chiefs and politically influential clansmen but also in their productive forces, in particular, those in possession of special skills so that they remained within rather than abandoned the harsh environs of Marwar.

That the Jodhpur rulers realized the importance of productive labour even earlier is apparent in their early efforts at enumeration of caste data, as in Nainsi's *Marwar ra Parganan ri Vigat*. Peabody and Arjun Appadurai argued that such computations of human inventories were 'tied, in these pre-colonial regimes, to taxation, to accounting, and to land revenue...'³³ Making a distinction between the logic of taxation and social control, Peabody asserted that caste-sensitive lists of households (*gharam ri vigat*) tabulated by Nainsi were for fiscal purposes. Sumit Guha, on the other hand, argued that these are indicative of the state's interest in policing and social control that would of course require knowing the country.³⁴ Whether geared primarily to the goal of revenue collection or social governance, these census operations were mired by primitive methods of a state whose information system was dependent on the collaboration of local elites to keep the news runners moving and the newsletters flowing in. Political surveillance had clearly not developed too far, and early modern means of transport and communication disabled the state to predict and monitor signs of agitation among the labouring groups.

In these conditions of relatively low levels of administrative control and coercive capacity, the systematic maintenance of records of popular grievances, as in the *Jodhpur Sanad Parwana Bahis*, the primary source of evidence from which I derive my argument, was more than

³³ Peabody, 'Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Early Colonial India' pp. 819–50; and Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination' in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 329–30.

³⁴ Sumit Guha, 'The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India c. 1600–1990', *Comparative Study in Society and History*, 2003, pp. 148–67.

a mere academic exercise.³⁵ Its purpose, I submit, was to catalogue information pertaining to the different people residing in Marwar in an effort to penetrate deeper and know the realm, thereby gaining better control over them. It was a political strategy that signalled a programme of political incorporation, and though clothed in a discourse of patriarchal benevolence and paternal concern, in fact the state exerted to discipline firmly its subjects. Even if the effectiveness of their project is debatable, that ‘knowing’ and monitoring the populace was part of the royal agenda of ‘dominating and mastering’ is not.³⁶ Intelligence gathering, written documentation, and political reporting became imperative in eighteenth century states, and in the intense competition for resources among the newly emergent successor regimes, the Rathor elite came to grips with their needs of lucre and labour by evolving a different idiom and vocabulary of politics that was acutely sensitive to the need for carrying the ‘people’ along.

This is not to say that in the earlier periods repression was the only form of exercising power; in fact my argument is based on the premise that the exercise of power generally entailed a combination of the ‘carrot and the stick’. But in view of the aggravation in tensions and increased competition for resources, there seems to have been a more intense need to be placatory if not solicitous, particularly towards those who tilled and toiled. This trend was possibly a wider one, where regional states in the eighteenth century grew closer to their ‘people’ than ever before, the political institutions more democratic in some senses. Being far smaller in size, their reach was deeper, and they were far more closely integrated and responsive towards their realm than the erstwhile larger imperial government with its wider concerns.

³⁵ These were collated in the *Jodhpur Sanad Parwana Bahis* (henceforth J.S.P.B.) that have been composed in ‘Old Western Rajasthani’ or ‘medieval Marwari’ language and written in the Devanagari script. These *bahis* have been systematically arranged chronologically in a hundred and two volumes covering V.S. 1821–1995 or A.D. 1764–1938, preserved at RSAB, JRS. Records have been arranged *pargana*-wise, with documented provenance starting from the Vikrami Samvat month of *Chait Sudi 1* up to *Falgun*, and ending on *Chait Badi 15*. Each folio is numbered, the sides conventionally identified as ‘A’ and ‘B’, and bears the name of the *pargana* and the name of the *Kachedi*, *Chauntara* or *Sayar* at which the dispute was registered. I have used the first sixty *bahis* covering the period up to A.D. 1818 when contact with the British government and their intervention in the affairs of Jodhpur began.

³⁶ I derive this line of argument from Bayly, *Empire and Information* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 365–70, where the context is different but the state’s concerns seem similar to me.

Without having examined and studied the records of other periods and regions, however, this formulation is hypothetical, and I must restrict my comments to eighteenth century Marwar alone. The question to then address is: which social groups did the Jodhpur state need to court and incorporate, and which alliances did it forge for economic and political stability?

Artisans, the Criticality of Commercial Stability, and the Paradox of Caste

That the Rathors forged a web of political networks, geared to form stable alliances for aligning powerful lineage heads and collateral chiefs on their side is well known; yet it is this ‘high politics’ that continues to draw attention. It remains completely unnoticed and devoid of comment, however, that the rulers were also engaged in assiduous courting of mercantile and artisanal talent, and that this too was central to Rathor politics, especially at the ground level. What explains Rathor statecraft and efforts to conciliate, accommodate, and integrate groups engaged in manufacturing and commerce into the body politic?

Christopher Bayly’s examination of the North Indian doab regions and Sumit Guha’s exploration of materials from eighteenth century Maharashtra have revealed that landed potentates recognised the potential value of commerce for their regimes, and that consequent eagerness to concentrate mercantile and artisanal forces in their territories saw them embroiled in an unceasing competition for productive forces.³⁷ Bayly also pointed out that a state ‘could only survive if it penetrated further beneath the level of the *pargana* administration and into the tight clan-like brotherhood of peasant farmers...’³⁸ Would these tendencies, I argue, not be much more intense in Marwar, the ‘Land of Death’ whose arid, desert-like landscape incapable of supporting high agricultural yields put an unusually high premium on mercantile capital and artisanal labour that together generated the wealth of Marwar? Located in the western part of modern-day Rajasthan, Marwar suffered frequent

³⁷ See Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*; and Guha’s ‘Potentates, Traders and Peasants: Western India, c. 1700–1870’ in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 71–84.

³⁸ See Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 5.

droughts, famines and epidemics, and was also therefore called Marudhar, Marusthal, and Marudesh due to its high mortality rates. The silver lining to this harsh reality was that it left the road network dry and traversable through the year, even during monsoons, and merchandise laden on bullockcarts, moving from the hinterland to the Gujarat ports of Surat, Cambay, etc., could be transported comfortably through Marwar.³⁹ Its geographical location made Marwar the only viable commercial channel in western India, crucial to the economy of not only Rajputana but all of north India. Low monsoonal rains and seasonal rivers rendered complete reliance on agriculture impractical, and the focus of the economy turned to trade and animal husbandry from the earliest times, relying on the in-built advantages of a relatively arid environment. Placement in the transit trade of the region encouraged the emergence of market towns and manufactures.⁴⁰ Though the seventeenth century commentator Nainsi described merely nine cities in his *des*, listing Jodhpur, Merta, Sojhat, Jaitaran, Siwana, Jalor, Sanchor, Pokharan and Phalodi, the nineteenth century *Mardum Shumari* mentioned about two-dozen cities, and many more rurban qasbas.

Data from the region reveal that a larger proportion of the revenue earnings of the Rathors of Jodhpur came from the non-agricultural sector of the economy than from the agrarian. The huge quantum of income from the commercial domain impressed upon the rulers the absolute criticality of the stability of trade and transport for the vibrance of the economy and political viability.⁴¹ The Rathors therefore actively courted mercantile and artisanal talent, their efforts calculated to ensure that the presence of commercial castes and their productive labour would enrich the kingdom's coffers, discouraging

³⁹ See V. K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India, 1000–1300* (New Delhi, 1990).

⁴⁰ See B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994), Chapter 4, 'Markets and Merchants in Early Medieval Rajasthan', pp. 89–119. The author has noticed the emergence of two clusters of commercial settlements in the region during the pre-twelfth century period. Inscriptional evidence points to Ghatiyal, Mandor, and Ratanpur as substantial exchange centres around Jodhpur, and another cluster around Nadol, at Narlai, Dhalop, Sevadi and Badari. Chattopadhyaya postulates that despite being local centres of exchange, they were nevertheless points of intersection for traffic of varying origins, and it is perhaps the nature of interaction with traffic from the outside that gave rise to a certain measure of hierarchy among exchange centres.

⁴¹ From the late seventeenth century, a rapid rise in the proportion of non-agrarian to agrarian taxes is evident, and the percentage of the former, called *Bija Rakama* (other amounts) or *sair*, went up to 44% of the total revenue collected in the year 1682 A.D.; see *Vigat* I, pp. 167–8.

them to emigrate and contribute to the neighbours' wealth. The rulers saw in this sphere an opportunity to raise finances through trade-related levies, and made vigorous attempts to create infrastructural facilities, carefully enhancing and nurturing the transport, credit, and market mechanisms to transform the arid uninviting landscape into one of the most vibrant commercial economies of contemporary India.

That trade and commerce had become very important to this kingdom is evident from the immense concentration of mercantile groups in the urban centres of Marwar. This is evident in Nainsi's census figures that indicate that by the mid-seventeenth century Mahajans owned over one-third of the inhabited dwellings in the cities of the region.⁴² Prominent merchants were invited by the rulers to settle in Marwar, and with state help in the shape of free land to build shops and houses, established their business houses in the region.⁴³ During the initial stage of establishing their business in Marwar, many were given partial or full exemption from payment of taxes.⁴⁴ The Rathor Maharajas gave them robes of honour (*Sirapaos*) as well, in addition to jagirs and numerous expensive gifts of elephants, horses, jewels, palanquins, etc.⁴⁵ The state often stood guarantee for the loans taken by traders, and even mediated when they ran into trouble with money-lending *sahukars*.⁴⁶ The subsequent spread of Marwari merchants across the North Indian plains, right up to the eastern

⁴² See Nainsi's *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 391 and 497; and Vol. II, pp. 9, 83, 224, 310. The city of Jodhpur had 616 shops owned by mahajans according to the same source; see *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 186–7.

⁴³ For instance, Heera Nand Manak Chand Jewellers were given a haveli to live in and five bighas of land free of cost in Merta. See J.S.P.B. 2, 1822/1765, f. 42A. Money-lenders Sada Ram and Shri Ram were given in gratis one bigha of land in Jodhpur. See *Khas Rukka Parwana Bahi* No. 1, document dated *Asoj vadi* 13, 1842/1785, Jodhpur Records.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, document dated *Posh Sudi* 2, 1824/1767. Records mention Shah Bhola Nath of Agra, who set up shop in Jodhpur, as having received fifty percent exemption from the payment of *dan*, *mapa*, *rahdari*, and other taxes. Similar concessions were extended to Bal Kishandas Gangadas Khandelwal of Bharatpur, whose business straddled the chieftaincies of Jodhpur and Bharatpur; *ibid.*, document dated *Shrawan vadi* 12, 1847/1790.

⁴⁵ J.S.P.B. 9, document dated *Kartik vadi* 13 (folio number is not clear) 1826/1769, Jodhpur records, R.S.A.B.

⁴⁶ J.S.P.B. 14, 1831/1774, ff. 44–45. When Jivandas Lohiya of Nagaur, for instance, incurred tremendous losses in his business, and the money-lenders were pressurising him for an early repayment of the loan, he sought the Maharaja's (Durbar's) intervention. On his request the Durbar persuaded the creditors to accept that Jivandas would pay fifty percent of the loan immediately and the rest through

peripheries of the subcontinent, is a success story whose antecedents can be traced to this early period of growth.

The rulers also attracted artisans and craftsmen to gravitate to this region, for as mentioned earlier, human labour was in high demand in the pre-industrial age, and eighteenth-century kingdoms constantly competed not only for material but also manpower resources. Artisans of course belonged to the *Shudra* varna constituting the underbelly of society, but in fact they occupied a far more ambiguous position than usually imagined, and much of the richly textured realities of their lifeworlds get compromised when we ignore these anomalous facets in their social standing. The shifting contours of the boundaries defining their position, and the fuzziness of agendas the dominant pursued in their relationships with artisans is perplexing at first glance, but a closer look helps these to emerge more clearly.

It is well known that the caste system inscribed craft castes with a ritually impure status and this constituted the source of their subordination. Paradoxically, artisanal manipulation of their polluting functions and status simultaneously lent them strength. Different artisanal groups possessed specific skills for the manufacture of craft goods and the caste system prescribed that these be practised exclusively by the particular craft group. None but the *luhars* could craft ploughshares and iron tools; the *khatīs* alone manufactured the Persian wheel for irrigation, the cots and stools that made homes comfortable, and different wooden implements. The presence of *kumhars* was essential for every household to procure cooking and storing vessels of clay. Equally indispensable to every settlement were *bhambhi*, *raigar*, and *mochis* for none other than one from their caste would remove dead carcasses, flay rotting animals, and manufacture commodities of routine use from the hides thus procured. Similarly, the presence of *julahas*, *rangrez*, *nilgar*, *charhawas*, and *chhipas* was extremely critical, as were the roles of *sunars*, *churigars* and *lakharas*. It was inconceivable for rulers to perpetuate their glory without *silawats* and *chejaras* who would erect magnificent monuments that future generations may remember them by. A vast presence of political and mercantile elites resulted in a substantial demand for manufactured goods, and the monopoly of single castes over particular trades caused extreme dependence for the fulfilment of these myriad needs. Both functional requirements as well as those for

instalments. *Jivandas* was indeed relieved and the claims of the *sahukars* settled amicably.

pomp and ceremony needed large numbers of artisans. Thus though shunned for their ritually unclean status and functions and exploited due to their socio-economic vulnerabilities, the services they provided to caste society made artisanal roles vital and their work indispensable. This possession of skills and their non-substitutability due to caste rigidities lent strength, albeit limited, to the position of craftsmen and ensured that the elites do not oppress them beyond limits, without due consideration of the repercussions of their actions.⁴⁷ Retention of these productive castes in their respective territories by spatially fixing them within their bounds was critical to the elites and the state felt compelled to employ statecraft not only in their dealings with dominant sections but also with productive labour.⁴⁸

This need for holding on to skilled workers in their territories was accentuated by the fact that Marwari craftsmen were habituated to recurrent emigrations. Harsh environmental conditions and few possessions that often did not include land to tie them down, rendered craftsmen unusually mobile. Their relocation from one to another *gasba* or village is in fact the most noticeable feature about Marwari artisans' lives in the state records, recording of these movements reflective of the anxiety that it caused the rulers.⁴⁹ A favourable land-man ratio ensured that there was enough space where an aggrieved artisan could settle and find alternate patrons. Hence artisans often deserted their ancestral homes for more conducive locales and the elites felt constrained to devise ways of retaining them. Khati Hire of village Angota, for instance, migrated away due to Jat harassment in his village. His expertise in his craft led the Chaudhari of the village to persuade him to return, with the promise that he alone would monopolise the khati's labour and in exchange would give the khati land to cultivate. The Chaudhari assured Hire that he would not allow the Jats to harass him. Instead, three other khatis

⁴⁷ See J.S.P.B. 50, 1854/1797, f. 85A.

⁴⁸ In situations where the local khati or kumhar had migrated out, the agriculturists suffered immense inconveniences, and the village elites had few options but to try and coax or even cajole the aggrieved artisan to return. The artisans leveraged on this clout, and documents reveal that the dominant castes were forced to offer a range of concessions to have the *pavan jat* relent.

⁴⁹ Chhipa Mahmud of Piparh, Nilgar Fazal of Nagaur, Darzi Mohan of Jaitaran, Khati Dhaniye of Village Saisada, Julaha Jivadan of Didwana, Luhar Rohtas of Village Sihat, and many others are recorded to have relocated, their prolonged absence causing property disputes when they returned; see J.S.P.B. 8, 1826/1769, f. 2B, *ibid.*, No. 9, 1827/1770, f. 62A, *ibid.*, No. 11, 1829/1772, f. 175A, *ibid.*, No. 15, 1832/1775, f. 561; *ibid.*, No. 16, 1833/1776, f. 127B, *ibid.*, No. 18, 1835/1778, f. 18B, respectively.

were induced by the Chaudhari to settle in the village to carry out woodwork for the Jats and the village community at large.⁵⁰ Clearly, administrative authorities had few options but to adopt strategies of integration for keeping their productive forces within the territories of Jodhpur.

The fact that pre-colonial states such as that of Marwar did not possess adequate resources to exercise sustained coercion and ensure the submission of the subordinate over prolonged periods of time was another reason for the Rathors' efforts to limit their extortions and employ the rhetoric of righteous rule. I am by no means suggesting that the maximisation of revenue and labour appropriation did not constitute the central concerns of a state, especially when unable to make substantial technological breakthroughs; indeed, expanding the material resources was fundamental to the logic of survival of an early modern state. The thrust of my argument, rather, is that appeasement of the productive castes and investments towards assiduously courting mercantile and artisanal talent also constituted a basic tenet of the rulers' policies. Artisans' impure status paradoxically crystallised into a source of their 'power'. If every kind of artisanal service was to be had, contenders for authority had to display a certain degree of piety and extend patronage towards the crafts. To enjoy uninterrupted services from the *pavan jat*, without fears of shortage of labour or disruption of services, dominant castes were forced to offer a range of concessions. The imperative of self-preservation and promotion was paramount and both the rulers and the ruled were locked in mutual dependence. The point I am making is that incorporative politics were practised and new alliances forged without dismantling old ones with powerful lineage heads and mercantile cliques. The following sections discuss how the rulers sought to spatially fix within the territories of Jodhpur, artisans, a group of castes habituated to frequent and recurrent migrations.

Courting Artisans and Strategies of Integration

If penetration of state power 'required not only the coercive force of the state, but also an ideology which justified the appropriation of growing quantities of revenue'⁵¹ a variety of subtle strategies needed to be employed for the purpose. I discuss below multiple initiatives at

⁵⁰ J.S.P.B. 24, 1837/1780, Fol. 174B.

⁵¹ See Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 11.

legitimation, some directed towards wooing the non-elite populace at large, and others addressing more specifically artisanal interests.

At the ideological level, the fact that Vijai Singh actively opted for the devotional (*bhakti*) tradition of worship that emphasized egalitarian values and had a positive appreciation of a householder's concerns, perhaps had something to do with his anxiety to legitimate kingship in the perception of the widest possible numbers of his subjects. As opposed to adopting Brahmanical Hinduism which was associated with caste hierarchy and a belief in liberation from the cycle of rebirths (*moksa*) through renunciation (*sanyas*), the Maharaja's adherence to the principles of *bhakti* was perhaps geared to a larger agenda that was not merely religious in nature. Vijai Singh became a devotee of the Vaishnava sect and extended lavish patronage to the *Vallabh Sampradaya* that believed in the worship of Krishna. More than simply representing Krishna, notes Peabody, 'Vallabha idols were believed to contain the deity's immanent presence and to possess (and emanate) his mystical powers.'⁵² Rather than worshipping images of Krishna in dalliance with his beloved Radha, the Vallabha sect that Vijai Singh chose to adopt and popularise believed in the maternal or familial love that Krishna's foster mother Yashoda felt for her 'divine charge when he was an infant.' Was Vijai Singh suggesting the replication of the mother-child bond between himself and his subjects, or perhaps that if people would worship him as they did Lord Krishna, he too had the divine power to shower benedictions on them? One can only conjecture on these issues, and what I strongly suspect is that he attempted the accumulation of 'symbolic capital', to quote Pierre Bourdieu, by binding the supernatural powers of Krishna's deity to the service of his rule, and thereby buttressed the legitimacy of his kingly authority.⁵³ The sect's distinctive non-ascetic position, the musical and congregational styles of worship, offerings of food, and the observation of daily routines of the Lord that closely resembled those of the domestic lives of ordinary people, helped the development of intimacy between the disciples and their Lord. Vallabha deities were renowned for satisfying various pleas of their devotees, which further aided the process of bonding between the ruler and his subjects.

⁵² Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity*, p. 51.

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977). I owe this line of argument to Peabody's case study of Kota, where he has meticulously traced somewhat similar trends.

His active patronage and grants of land to the sect helped Vijai Singh earn personal merit, and the propitious effect of lavish benefactions, it was hoped, would protect dynastic stability. Devotees from all over the kingdom congregated at Jodhpur for special occasions, and festivals like the *Annakut* and the *Mahotsav* witnessed the distribution of lavish gifts by the state. Under the influence of this sect, Vijai Singh banned cow slaughter and the consumption of meat and alcohol, and instead ordered those engaged in the professions of slaughtering animals and brewing liquor to take up masonry and construction work.⁵⁴ Nobles and rich merchants became enthusiastic devotees particularly drawn to this *sampradaya*, though contrary perhaps to Vijai Singh's hopes, its popularity remained limited to those with large resources. Elaborate rituals associated with the *Vallbha Sampradaya* entailed huge expenditures and unfortunately failed to attract the common masses in any substantial numbers.⁵⁵ Even so, the greater support of the populace and access to vastly increased amounts of merchant capital helped Vijai Singh counter rival contenders to the throne. By linking royal and sectarian authority and by closely identifying polity with religion, Vijai Singh sought to restore the political fortunes of the regime and achieve greater alignment between his interests and those of the wider community. Since the Mughals had declined and their ability to bolster tributary rulers and their regimes had diminished, these strategies of statecraft appear to be experiments aimed at stabilizing the regime.

Petitions, Judicial Dispensation and Legitimation

The Rathor state also garnered popular support by making the instrument of petition available to its subjects, and maintaining records of their grievances. They entertained these petitions regularly, dispensing justice to resolve not only intra-caste and inter-caste disputes, but even complaints against their own state functionaries.

⁵⁴ See J.S.P.B. 1, 1821/1764, f. 67B; *ibid.*, 25, 1832/1775, f. 406; *ibid.*, 28, 1839/1782, f. 199B *ibid.*, 40, 1846/1789, f. 115B. The killing of animals and consumption of their flesh was strictly forbidden by the Maharaja in the khalisa territories, and *gunegari* fines imposed on defaulters. There were, thus, numerous petitions for mercy, informing that the culprit had been wrongly identified. For the decree putting restrictions on the consumption of liquor see J.S.P.B.16, 1833/1776, f. 40B.

⁵⁵ Vikram Singh Rathor, *Marwar Ka Sanskritik Itihas* (Jodhpur, 1996), pp. 27–30.

A Rangrez of Pali, for example, complained of harassment at the behest of the Pali District Magistrate (*Hakim*) and subordinate officer (*Silepos*). The dyer was using an expensive opium dye *kasumba* to colour fabrics when the two officials were passing through the area in the midst of Holi celebrations. Without a thought about how much it would cost the poor man, they wasted six buckets of his dye in playing Holi. When the Rangrez objected, they beat him till he bled. In response to his appeals, the state reprimanded the errant officials and ordered that the *Silepos* compensate the dyer by paying rupees two, not so insignificant an amount in the eighteenth century.⁵⁶ In another instance, the kumhars of Desuri complained at the Durbar that a petty official had misbehaved with the daughter-in-law of their caste-fellow kumhar Rupla. They asserted that the official Ahmad Khan had insulted another woman on an earlier occasion, and the *Hakim* had desisted from taking Ahmad to task. Despite the *Hakim's* best efforts to save the official, the Durbar thought it expedient to dismiss Ahmad Khan.⁵⁷ Darzis of Merta complained that the City Magistrate (*Kotwal*) had demanded of them a new tax in the shape of food (*kansa*) on certain ritual occasions. The tailors objected and invoked lack of precedent as the ground for their protest against this new demand. The state forbade the *Kotwal*, emphasising that past practice and custom of the area did not support such levies.⁵⁸ In fact innumerable records cite artisanal complaints against state officials (*ohdadars*), village functionaries and those from superior castes, detailing persecution, abuse, victimisation and violation of their rights. The Durbar's orders in most cases reflect the patriarchal rhetoric of the rulers, aimed both at curbing the discriminatory and oppressive conduct of its subordinates and disallowing them from breaching the limits of their jurisdiction.

This concern to curb the indiscriminate exercise of power by subordinate officials was a result of the fact that the state or the ruling class comprised a complex structured hierarchy with dispersed foci of power, several layers of authority and multiple levels of command. Rather than being a monolith or one single entity which adopted a uniform policy on all issues, different groups of those invested with power often developed a relationship of friction with one another, and worked at cross-purposes in a struggle to check the other. Given

⁵⁶ J.S.P.B. 8, 1825/1768, f. 58A.

⁵⁷ J.S.P.B. 53, 1856/1799, f. 162A.

⁵⁸ See J.S.P.B. 19, 1834/1777, f. 82A.

this multi-centred diffusion of power, the manufacturing and service castes found themselves confronted with oppression from certain state authorities and patronage or protection from those trying to counterpoise them, thus resulting in variable experiences. The mutual rivalries among members of the ruling class ensured that some of the undue demands and deviations of errant officials were corrected by the superior power centre. The central administration tended to be vigilant about the conduct of the local officials, and artisanal petitions against petty officials often drew a favourable response from *Shri Huzur's Durbar*.

The fact that the *Durbar* was exercised with the need to dissolve tensions and remove grievances by allowing the subjects to petition was, I believe, the result of a calculated move on the part of the state, a matter of deliberate policy born out of the state's keenness to provide to its subjects a legal channel of communication and protest. Their intention was to stay abreast with popular grievances, not just those that elites regularly communicated to them due to their close access to the rulers, but also those of the lower formations like the artisans so that the rulers could take remedial action before resentments and frustrations boiled over in the shape of revolts against the state. The artisans, on their part, learnt quickly about the inherent value of petitioning to remind *Shri Huzur*, the Maharaja, of his paternalistic responsibilities and frequently appealed against illegitimate (*gair wajib*) demands perceived as unjust by them. Differences between the state's and the subjects' readings of legitimate and illegitimate exactions were of course numerous, and tensions born out of divergent interpretations a question of enquiry that I address in another essay.⁵⁹

Acute awareness of the need for broad-based support encouraged the state authorities not to impose elite prescriptions in matters of civil law and instead honour the customary laws of different craft communities in matters pertaining to commensal practices, marriage customs, property and inheritance disputes etc. Since the conventions and usages differed from one to another community, and these were traditionally enforced by caste councils (*jati panchayats*) of every craft, the state co-opted these ground level organs of self-governance to administer assemblies of artisans in

⁵⁹ See Nandita Prasad Sahai, 'Artisans, the State and the Politics of *Wajabi* in Eighteenth Century Jodhpur', *IESHR*, Vol. 42, (1), 2005, pp. 41–68.

their routine lives.⁶⁰ Administrative exigencies of ensuring efficient and economically cheap governance of the lower formations also dictated that the Jodhpur state work in tandem with the caste councils of artisans. Considerations of statecraft discouraged the state administration from disrupting locally embedded bodies, for that would offend popular sensibilities, and invite their protest. In fact, rather than erode the authority of this competing centre of power, the state encouraged artisans to approach their caste council for the restoration of social harmony. In an interesting case, a darzi of village Bilu was punished by the Parbatsar District Court (Kachedi) for defying the law instead of taking his grievance to his *jati panch*.⁶¹ Bilu, enraged over his sister's miseries when her husband brought another woman to live with him, had murdered his brother-in-law. Even when approached for direct intervention, the state often referred disputes to pre-existing caste councils for resolution. To mention a few, the disputes over betrothal issues between julahas Badha and Nura of Nagaur,⁶² between suthars Toghale of village Dhaharhin and Bhagwan of Taranki,⁶³ or between luhars Basta of village Lambiya and Gordhan from Devali,⁶⁴ were delegated to their respective *jati panchayats* to resolve. As local grass-roots institutions for human and resource management at the community level, caste councils were made participatory organs that effectively mediated state-artisan relations. This participative, collaborative exercise of power through an agency internal to those governed, and therefore relatively unobtrusive and invisible, was crucial in making the administrative system more acceptable to the subjects.

When, however, the caste councils' efforts to discipline its members clashed with the state's concerns of realpolitik, their mutually conflictual agendas caused tensions too. Accommodations with the space the caste leaders (*Jati Panch*) enjoyed as dispensers of justice in civil suits involving customary laws were common, but the state administration invariably clashed with these caste bodies when the latter expelled any of its caste members. Temporary ostracisation

⁶⁰ For an elaboration on the interface between craft caste councils and the Jodhpur state, see Nandita Prasad Sahai, 'Collaboration and Conflict: Artisanal *Jati Panchayats* and the Eighteenth Century Jodhpur State', *The Medieval History Journal*, Vol. 5:1 (2002): 77–102.

⁶¹ See J.S.P.B. 5, 1823/1766, f. 236A.

⁶² J.S.P.B. 18, 1834/1777, f. 26A.

⁶³ J.S.P.B. 36, 1844/1787, f. 34A.

⁶⁴ J.S.P.B. 6, 1824/1767, f. 97A.

by the community was not objected to, but when the *Panch* ordered permanent excommunication (*jat bahar kadh devo*), the state generally exercised its appellate authority in a more decisive way and often over-ruled the verdict of the caste bodies, causing discordant notes in their mutual relations.⁶⁵ In the case of Darzi Kisora the caste council ordered his boycott since, despite repeated warnings and milder forms of punishment, he did not terminate his illicit relations with Darzi Naga's wife. The state, however, looked for ways whereby he may be reinstated after paying fines, performing penance and promising to reform himself in future.⁶⁶

The state's pro-active stand arguing for reintegration of the outcaste, even at the cost of intensifying tensions with the caste council concerned, was prompted by the severe implications of boycott and excommunication both for the individual as well as the state. An order of expulsion from a caste was like the passing of a death sentence that deprived the person of his only source of livelihood.⁶⁷ An expelled person could no longer practice the occupation of his former caste. Neither could he become a member of any other caste since membership could be acquired only by birth, and the right to practice a particular occupation was hereditary. Social ostracisation in such cases was so acute that even if he did try to continue practising his vocation, the village folk refused to accept him as a client and he lost all erstwhile patrons. Strict censure implied that if despite the ban, a husband took back an erring wife or a father received home an outcaste son, they too were liable to be outcaste. It was this principle that led the *jati panchayat* of Jodhpur to order the excommunication of Chhipa Isak for allegedly helping his brother escape after raping a chhipi. They alleged that Isak had extended shelter to his errant brother and therefore insisted that Isak bear the brunt of his brother's misdemeanour. The state however ordered the caste council to revoke their verdict.⁶⁸

The state's interest in ensuring the reinstatement of excommunicated individuals into their communities was dictated by a number

⁶⁵ For a fuller discussion of these issues see Nandita Prasad Sahai, 'Collaboration and Conflict', pp. 77–102.

⁶⁶ J.S.P.B. 16, 1833/1776, f. 69B, and J.S.P.B. 18, 1834/1777, f. 52A.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* In Padam Kumhar Paima's case mentioned above, the *jati panchayat* not only excommunicated him but also threatened to boycott him professionally, i.e., they ordered that none of the villagers would buy earthen vessels from him. The loss of market and therefore a livelihood was sure to bring any erring person to heel!

⁶⁸ J.S.P.B. 11, 1828/1771, f. 184A.

of factors. In the case of artisans in particular, every individual represented a productive resource that was extremely valuable to a labour-starved economy. As part of a community, every craftsman generated a certain surplus that the state valued and wished to extract, while an expelled artisan, in the absence of a source of livelihood, was a burden both on himself as well as on the authorities. He was likely to migrate, and this would mean complete loss of control over his surplus labour. In such cases, therefore, the state generally chose to project its 'patriarchal' posture and rescued from starvation and 'social death' subjects who appealed for pardon. After all, once expelled from his caste, the only patron an individual could plead with was his king- the '*pater familias*'. More generally speaking too, free-floating individuals bereft of a community identity were potential criminals who often took to breaking the law. Devoid of social ties and pressures, the likelihood of their refusal to abide by social rules and norms was high. As such, it was in the state's interest to have everyone fully integrated and well settled in his or her respective community. Evidence from other regions like Maharashtra and Bengal also suggests similar concerns of the state since dispensation of justice had, as already noticed, a much larger role in local politics than mere implementation of righteous rule and enforcement of law and order.⁶⁹

Even in cases that did not relate to severe penalties like expulsion, the domain of justice was an arena of negotiation and contest, and as much as the former had an impact on politics, politics too shaped the outcome of the judicial process. Much as the state desired to conciliate productive labour, competing agendas ensured that justice dispensed by the rulers was attenuated by factors such as their need to avoid offending powerful potentates and individuals whose wealth and command of military strength may threaten their own position. The state was far from being omnipotent, and in fact had to constantly reckon with the relative power and resources of rival foci of power, many of whom were often the offenders and the accused. They posed threats of retaliation against any penal action curbing their unjust ways, and the state had few options but to reconcile to their status and accommodate their excesses. A news report of 1781 cites that Kumhar Narano of village Dudhorh in Sojhat was murdered by the jagirdar's men, allegedly on the ground that the Kumhar had made an

⁶⁹ On Maharashtra, see Sumit Guha, 'An Indian Penal Regime: Maharashtra in the Eighteenth Century', in *Past and Present*, No. 147, 1995, pp. 101–26. For Bengal see Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law*.

attempt to steal from the fortress. They claimed that on seeing him prowl around in the night, they had presumed him to be a thief and stabbed him to death. Though the Kumhar's family brought the facts to light that the Kumhar was involved in a love affair with the jagirdar's slave (*goli*), and this indiscretion had cost him his life, the state merely ordered for verification of the allegation of theft and penalties to be decided accordingly.⁷⁰ The fact that even on suspicion of theft, the guards should have done no more than arresting the kumhar, and that killing him was clearly an abuse of their power, was neither noticed nor commented upon by the state authorities. In many contexts, indeed, extra-ordinary justice was devised for extraordinary individuals, and rather than causing public humiliation or awarding incarceration, mutilation or capital punishment to powerful culprits, the rulers imposed fines and mildly chastised the defendant. In view of contradictory pressures of the need to ally with the strong without antagonising the 'weak', of curbing the excesses of the powerful to maintain control over them without earning their exaggerated hostility, the state policy appears fuzzy, artisans at the receiving end of variable experiences vis-à-vis the state. Judicial dispensations of the state most definitely fail to construct any consistent pattern in this regard.

Concerns of Revenue and Begar

While the role of judicial dispensations in the unfolding of the rhetoric of *rajdharm* was restricted to the litigants, the one area where all artisans felt the impact of state policies was that of revenue appropriations. The plethora of taxes imposed by the state was a burden that artisans, many of whom living on a bare subsistence level and unable to put aside anything but a negligible surplus to submit as taxes, could ill afford to pay. The state therefore often granted tax exemptions or concessions as a conscious part of state policy, these making immense political sense in an environment where artisans may migrate if their pleas for relief were not heard. Several documents record that artisans cited indigence (*nandari*) and deprivation as grounds for their appeals for mercy, and the durbar

⁷⁰ The jagirdar's version was that the Kumhar had made a hole in the fortress wall with the intention of stealing, and that when the night watchmen saw him, they stabbed him on the assumption that he was a thief. J.S.P.B. 25, 1838/1781, f. 246B.

was empathetic to their appeals for mercy, ordering concessions in the taxes demanded of them.

The rulers generally pegged their revenue demands as per past practice, and any levy beyond customary levels could be petitioned against as being illegitimate (*gair wajib*), the rulers compelled to withdraw demands that were lacking in precedent. Khatis of Sojhat, for instance, claimed they had enjoyed exemption from paying tax on transporting cartloads of timber (*kabada*). When asked to pay the same, they requested the authorities to desist from flouting traditions. Their petition found a favourable response, and the authorities ordered that the convention in this matter should continue to be honoured.⁷¹ Rather than demand taxes, the subsistence of the destitute was subsidised by the state, and the rulers felt obliged to honour precedents. A document of 1791 from the Merta Kachedi states that:

A petition is recorded here that the blind, lame, insane, childless men and supportless/abandoned women in the pargana used to receive grains [subsistence] earlier. Since the *danga* [disruption of law and order due to Maratha raids] [they] have not been receiving this aid. There are only about thirty-fourty persons in need of such support, and if each could be given *dhai pav* [little over half a kilo] of grains, they would be able to manage. The Durbar has ordered grains for rupees one each to be given per person.⁷²

In bad years especially, the state, even if reluctantly, granted remissions for whole parganas hit by drought, famine, floods, or pests. Rioting in the wake of Maratha raids, and internal feuds that got a spurt, affected production adversely and became an occasion for demanding concessions. Lakhara Sade Khan of Merta had to pay tribute (*rekh*) to the state for the two villages he held; but since they were low-yielding and had produced a particularly poor harvest in 1785, he sought and was granted exemption.⁷³ Similarly the julahas claimed they were impoverished due to riots caused by Lodha Sahmal and petitioned for tax concessions; the state ruled in their favour and reduced the revenue demand.⁷⁴

Anxious that the numbers of the producing groups residing in their kingdom must not dwindle, the rulers tried to restrain oppressive officials and local authorities whose exactions threatened to cause emigration. The demand for goods and services in *begar*

⁷¹ See J.S.P.B. 6, 1824/1767, f. 88B.

⁷² See J.S.P.B. 43, 1848/1791, Fol. 105A.

⁷³ See J.S.P.B. 32, 1842/1785, f. 57A.

⁷⁴ See J.S.P.B. 47, 1853/1796, f. 88B.

(free, unremunerated) exceeded the capacity or willingness of the artisanate, and frictions due to forced extractions both by hereditary officials of the village and state functionaries were common. The *Chaudhari* of village Phidoth demanded water pots (*matkis* and *ghara*) in *begar* from Kumhar Amare of the village. Asserting that these were an illegitimate demand, the Kumhar refused to part with the same without payment. The *Chaudhari*, in retaliation, assaulted him and took away the kumhar's pots and pans forcibly, compelling Amare to complain. The state empathised with the kumhar's sense of outrage, forbade future extortions, and ordered the *Chaudhari* to return all that he had forcibly taken from the kumhar.⁷⁵ Kumhars and Nais of village Khatu had a conflict with their jagirdar over his demand for *beth begar*, and threatened to leave their homesteads.⁷⁶ Kumhars of Sambhar did not merely warn but actually implemented their threat by abandoning their homes and moving away to Parbatsar. The provocation for this extreme step was the persistent harassment they were faced with due to ceaseless forced extractions of clayware by the local gentry.⁷⁷ Though deteriorating central control was not always successful in curbing the exploitative proclivities of lower state functionaries, the state certainly appears to be struggling to prevent *gair-wajib* conduct on the part of their *ohdadars*.

In years of financial distress, especially in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the state's proclivity to enhance its revenues increased. Depleted coffers were unable to cough up enough funds and on one pretext or another, the state levied new taxes on different communities or enhanced the quantum of money to be paid for the extant ones. The year 1789 seems to have been particularly difficult for the administration, forcing them to throw caution to the winds in making fresh demands time and again. *Pinjar bab*, for instance, had never been imposed on the cotton-carders of the villages of Gorwad in Desuri, but was demanded in 1789.⁷⁸ The dyers of Pali had traditionally been dyeing with *kasumba*, an expensive dyeing material, without paying any special tax for it. In 1788 Khatri and Chhipas got permission to use *kasumba* after depositing a tax, and the state

⁷⁵ J.S.P.B. 13, 1830/1773, f. 49A.

⁷⁶ J.S.P.B. 22, 1836/1779, f. 18A. For an elaborate discussion on this issue, see G. S. L. Devara, 'Bikaner Niwasi aur Deshantar Gaman Pravarti: Satrahavin avam Atharvin Shatabdi mein', in *Proceedings of Rajasthan History Congress* (1974), pp. 42–8.

⁷⁷ J.S.P.B. 16, 1833/1776, f. 151A.

⁷⁸ See J.S.P.B. 41, 1846/1789, f. 364B. The cotton-carders appealed against the demand.

now decided to use this opportunity to earn extra revenue by taxing the rangrez community's consumption of *kasumba* as well. A *sanad* of 1789 therefore ordered that all the dyers residing in Pali must deposit a rupee with the Durbar on using about forty kilos (*man*) of *kasumba*.⁷⁹ Again in the same year, a house tax (*ghar ginti*) was imposed on the kumhars of village Dhakarhi in Sojhat, while those of kasba Maroth too complained that a *sanad* of V.S. 1822 had exempted them from paying *dand kholarhi* tax but this was again being demanded of them in 1789.⁸⁰ Yet again, we have the printers, basket-makers, goldsmiths, cobblers and other leather-workers from Pali complain that a maintenance tax for the village headman (*chaudhar bab*) had earlier been levied at the rate of rupees three per household from those living in old Pali alone, but now in 1789, craftsmen residing in the market area of the new city had also been asked to deposit the same.⁸¹ Towards the end of the century the additive impact of raised taxes had tormented people such that those with meagre resources were left completely indigent. Julahas Imambagas and Isakh of Nagaur, for instance, cited their reduction to complete impoverishment (*nandari*) as the cause for their petition for tax concessions.⁸² These pressures reached such a point that the Darzis of Didwana ultimately complained in a petition of 1797, lamenting their plight due to the levy of new taxes. They remembered fondly the 'good old' days when tax burdens were smaller and prompt payment of wages marked Rathor rule, and asked of the state how the poor were expected to manage with heavy taxes and irregular wages? '*Irhn tare garib log majuri kirhn tare nibhe?*'⁸³ Equally apparent in the documents is a parallel process where artisanal petitions against enhanced taxation and other transgressions in customary usage saw the state backtrack and withdraw the new levies.

The fear of production, agrarian and commercial, coming to a halt as a result of artisanal migration, also pushed the rulers to provide collective public good in the difficult times of the latter decades of the century. The Durbar arranged for loans for the purchase of seeds, and it ordered the local village authorities to reduce or

⁷⁹ See J.S.P.B. 41, 1846/1789, f. 325A.

⁸⁰ See J.S.P.B. 41, 1846/1789, f. 199B; J.S.P.B. 41, 1846/1789, f. 441B respectively.

⁸¹ See J.S.P.B. 41, 1846/1789, f. 339B.

⁸² In view of their problem, they were allowed exemption from payment of *sal bab*; see J.S.P.B. 47, 1853/1796, f. 88B.

⁸³ See J.S.P.B. 49, 1854/1797, f. 112A.

withdraw their revenue pressures to endurable levels.⁸⁴ The remission depended either on the will of the ruler or in proportion to the loss suffered. Traders were prohibited from exporting foodgrains during famines so that the local people's requirements may be adequately met.⁸⁵ The *Hakims* were ordered by the state to distribute cooked food everyday, especially amongst people unable to work—the blind, insane, handicapped and orphans.⁸⁶ In fact in the last two decades of the century, the major dilemma of Rathor statecraft seems to have been to raise enough revenue to maintain the court, without raising the quantum of enhancement so much as to drive the labouring population out of the territories of Jodhpur.

Such a situation, for instance, arose in the year 1782 when the state's burden of taxes was perceived as unendurable, and craftsmen asserted their resentment by refusing to work. The news report states that:

the khatis of Bilarha were ordered to pay *vachh virad* tax. Claiming that the *Hakim's parwana* (order) of **A.D.** 1763 (**V.S.** 1820) had granted them exemption, they insisted that the state demand be withdrawn. The Durbar enquired from the local people, and learnt that in fact the khatis had paid this tax traditionally (*sadamad*); hence they refused to grant exemption. . . .

All the khatis then got together as one (*eko kar nei*) and struck work (*kam chhod baitha*). The state was alarmed and decided to appoint substitutes to replace the errant khatis. The administration further retaliated by banishing the defiant khatis, and also ordered that the rebels would be severely punished if they tried to influence the new recruits.⁸⁷ In their view, petitions were legitimate but refusal to pay a tax that had traditional sanction and had only been withdrawn as a temporary concession amounted to revolt and necessitated repression.⁸⁸ The khatis, on the other hand, contested this reading of the tax demand, convinced that a long-standing exemption had its own sanctity that could not be violated. Negotiations broke down and

⁸⁴ See J.S.P.B. 30, 1840/1783, f. 355A.

⁸⁵ See J.S.P.B. 30, 1840/1783, f. 456B.

⁸⁶ See J.S.P.B. 30, 1840/1783, f. 460A.

⁸⁷ See J.S.P.B. 28, 1839/1782, Fol. 276A.

⁸⁸ The churigars (ivory bangle-makers) of Jalor, for instance, had petitioned that the previous administration had exempted them from payment of the *chothai* tax. Despite the resource crunch by mid 1770's, the Jodhpur Durbar sent an order (*parwana*) to the officers of the Jalor customs' treasury (*Sair*) not to demand this tax from them; see J.S.P.B. 14, 1831/1774, Fol. 135. Confrontation, however, was *gair-wajib*, and needed to be summarily crushed.

the rebels were banished. The outcome notwithstanding, let us not lose sight of the caution displayed by the state in first determining the validity of the petition from the artisans. Nor should we lose sight of the momentary self-confidence and the resoluteness with which the khatis defended their customary rights. Between the two lay the spaces where the rulers and the ruled defined, transgressed, contested, and reformulated the limits of 'appropriate' (*wajib*) conduct.

Artisanal Wage Labour and the State

To prevent labour unrest, the rhetoric if not the practice of *wajabi* was employed just as much when the state invited talented craftsmen to settle in their territory and offered lucrative terms of employment. Their extension of incentives to attract skilled labour to migrate and add to Marwar's material wealth, and their active patronage and protection ensured the relocation of artisans to their kingdom.⁸⁹ Artisanal settlements in *muhallas* were facilitated by the state, and they were sensitive to the needs of caste members to reside in their own colonies. When the houses of many *luhars* of Luharpura in Nagaur collapsed due to the Maratha raids, the state was keen to ensure that they did not abandon the city.⁹⁰ The Durbar therefore ordered for the *luhars* to be given substitute houses on the crownlands in the city.⁹¹ Not only this, the local administration was specially directed to charge the same low rate of taxation from them that they were paying while living in Luharpura, a low class colony located on the fringes of the city. Though the rates of taxation were higher in the heart of the city, these *luhars* were protected against higher revenues as a special favour. In addition the state took care to ensure that they settle together in the same *muhalla* since they preferred to live close to their caste-fellows. As mentioned before, different craft communities observed distinct customs and religious practices, and worshipped specific caste deities. The rulers were generous with grants of land as religious

⁸⁹ Gulam Muhammad, a well-known calico-printer of Nagaur, hailed from Multan; See J.S.P.B. 25, 1838/1781, f. 216.

⁹⁰ J.S.P.B. 42, 1847/1790, f. 28A.

⁹¹ Plots of 20 *gaz* by 12 *gaz* were ordered to be measured and given from Khalisa territory in the city of Nagaur to *Luhars* Alabagas, Yaru, Kayam, Bajid, Bahdar and Jamal of Luharpura; The authorities order that pattas for the same be issued after taking rupees 20/ each from every *Luhar*; J.S.P.B. 43, 1848/1791, f. 84B, *ibid.*, 44, 1849/1792, f. 170A, *ibid.*, 44, 1849/1792, f. 188A, *ibid.*, 48, 1853/1796, f. 9A.

charities so that artisans may have their preferred shrine in their colony.⁹² Patriarchal postures to validate their rule softened the stark material interest of the rulers, and led them to combine coercion with pacification in their struggle to contain the inherently tension-ridden relations between the dominant and the subordinate.

Artisans who acquired exceptional proficiency in their trade were often recruited by the state to work in state workshops (*karkhanas*) and meet the demands of the royalty. Alternately, Marwari elites tended to meet their needs by commissioning contracts with independent artisans who were summoned for a fixed period and given wage employment.⁹³ Many craftsmen in fact alternated between working temporarily for the state authorities, and then reverted to crafting commodities for sale in the market. Such wage-based project-oriented contracts, at least theoretically, tended to have the benefit of allowing the employer and the employee freedom to enter other relationships with suitable partners in future.⁹⁴

In addition to wages, allowances in kind, mostly in the shape of grains, were a critical element in the strategy of legitimation.⁹⁵ Termed *petia* (from the generic word *pet* or stomach), this gift of grains (*anna*) represented the touchstone of royal character, and constituted an emotional and symbolic investment towards close bonds in a patron-client relationship. The embedded meaning in this gift of grains/food from the master carried immense significance in an environment of hunger and dearth, reinforcing the equation between the 'giver' and the 'recipient' as one of 'nurturer' and 'nurtured'. It was a structured and institutionalised form of *annadana*, and I would even argue that though its economic rationale of facilitating distribution of produce cannot be ignored, this ideological basis of symbolically buttressing the relationship between the employer and the employee needs as much reiteration. A record of 1768, for instance, states:

⁹² The khatis and luhars of the city were wooed with land grants for building temples within their colonies, specifically for their use; J.S.P.B. 1, 1821/1764, f. 36A; *ibid.*, 1821/1764, f. 25B.

⁹³ Khati Reham Ali and some luhars were summoned to build a staircase, Luhar Ajmeri was summoned for ironwork, and numerous construction workers were periodically summoned for building work; see J.S.P.B. 1, 1821/1764, f. 17B; J.S.P.B. 23, 1836/1779, f. 35B; J.S.P.B. 43, 1848/1791, f. 41A, J.S.P.B. 23, 1836/1779, f. 201B, and J.S.P.B. 23, 1836/1779, f. 184B, respectively.

⁹⁴ That artisans in fact enjoyed negligible freedom to refuse state employment is an issue I discuss later in this section.

⁹⁵ On related issues, see Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift: Religious Prestation and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village* (Chicago, 1988).

Mochi Mohammad used to receive grains and allowances [*petiya*] [from the government]. After he died, [*faut huvo*], the grant of allowances is reported to have ceased. Mohammad's son Kamal has petitioned for these to be resumed. Shri Huzur has therefore ordered that the amount of grains and allowances that Mohammad was granted may now be given to his son Kamal. The same may be drawn on the Chauntara accounts.⁹⁶

Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam draw attention to the shift from land-based *dana* in earlier periods to this 'gift of grains' as representing a changing context where the gift is consumed soon after it is given. It leaves no residual that would support further claims on the donor or encourage a binding web of bilateral relations between the donor and the donee. Though their analysis has emerged from a different context of late sixteenth century Nayaka period South India, it is indeed interesting and plausible, requiring further investigation.⁹⁷

Wages and *petia* allowances were combined with liberal doles to attract artisans to participate in state service as and when required, and to encourage them to continue in service. Artisans in state employment often pleaded for material assistance during life cycle rituals, and many had the government rescue them in moments of need. The state, for instance, ordered the Merta Kachedi to grant Darzi Dolo twelve rupees for his marriage.⁹⁸ When Darzi Asa and Khati Rupa petitioned for monetary help for their daughters' weddings, the rulers ordered the Nagaur *Sayar* to give hundred rupees for the marriage expenses of the former and thirty for the latter.⁹⁹ Generosity was shown not only towards currently employed craftsmen but ex-employees as well, as in the case of a Khati who was given reemployment with all the allowances, and advance salary too was extended so that he may meet the marriage expenses of his daughter comfortably.¹⁰⁰ Darzi Rupo, who had been a *Gajdhar* (those carrying

⁹⁶ See J.S.P.B. 8, 1825/1768, f. 58A. Kamal's petition also demonstrates that underlying the placid plea he made, he was conscious of the impropriety, and thought it judicious to draw the state's attention. His petition is an expression of a knowledge not dominated by power.

⁹⁷ See Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu* (Delhi, 1992), especially pp. 57–73.

⁹⁸ J.S.P.B. 9, 1826/1769, f. 82A.

⁹⁹ See J.S.P.B. 13, 1830/1773, f. 64B; *ibid.*, 13, f. 1A. The much larger amount for Asa was perhaps a result of the much longer period for which he and his ancestors had served the state.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 1828/1771, f. 14B. The administration arranged for an impermanent house and a large cooking vessel (*karhaw*) when the wedding of a churigar's daughter was due; see J.S.P.B. 14, 1831/1774, f. 227A.

out measurements on land etc.) with the state, continued to receive a small daily allowance even when he injured his eyes and could not serve the state any longer.¹⁰¹ A sense of obligation characterised state interactions with employees whose ancestors had been in state service. The following record is a case in point:

Songar (leather-worker) Udayraj of Jaitaran petitioned that three years ago he had served with the Merta army, and before that in the forces of Sambhar. He was present in the battles of Tunga and Khirima and served well. His marriage is due, hence Shri Huzur has ordered that rupees twenty five be presented to him from the Jaitaran Kachedi.¹⁰²

Other initiatives to draw artisans close to the state and win their support for the ruler included rewarding outstanding workmanship with *inam* in the shape of cash, land, or an honour like the presentation of a turban (*pag*) from the Maharaja.¹⁰³ The Kachhwahas of Amber, Ranas of Udaipur, rulers of Kota and Bundi, of Sirohi, Alwar, as also Malwa, and the Peshwas in the Deccan, were all engaged in enticing skilled manpower to make their home in their respective states, extending patronage in different forms, and the Rathors felt pressured to outdo the others to protect their interests.¹⁰⁴

Wage relationships had to be at least partially voluntary if mass desertion was not to jeopardize the state's interests. To an extent, not withstanding Gyan Prakash's rejection of the relevance of the term 'free' in the Indian context, one may label such 'wage labourers' as unaccustomed to coercion and therefore 'free'.¹⁰⁵ A cursory examination leads to the impression that artisanal labour relations in the cities of Marwar were totally contractual, forged between formally free and equal parties, starkly contrasting those in the countryside where they were constantly exposed to asymmetrical relations with the landlords and village money-lenders. A closer look, however, reveals that even in urban centres, the feudal ethos saw extra-economic

¹⁰¹ J.S.P.B. 9, 1826/1769, f. 70A.

¹⁰² J.S.P.B. 39, 1845/1788, f. 235B.

¹⁰³ *Kotwali-Chabutara-Jamabandi Bahi* No.754 of *Pargana* Jalor records that *Songar* (gunpowder maker) Lala was given a turban as *inam* by the Durbar; see f. 25.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, *Dastur Komwar*, Jaipur Records Section, R.S.A.B; or Edward Haynes, 'Patronage for the Arts and the Rise of the Alwar State' in Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick and Lloyd I. Rudolph, (eds.), *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity*, (American Institute of Indian Studies, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1994), Vol. II, pp. 265–89.

¹⁰⁵ Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 1–12, 218–25.

coercion being used, artisanal concurrence to work for the state often presumed rather than sought. The latter decades of the century, for instance, saw delays and default in payment of wages and artisans became reluctant to work for the state, dithering from reporting when summoned. Record after record from this period emphasised the date by when khatis, silawats, luhars etc. had to report for duty.¹⁰⁶ Assurances that they would receive their wages without delay were also given to induce them to come.¹⁰⁷ If resistance on the part of artisans persisted, the state used coercive ploys to impress them into service by overawing them. A document of 1800 reports an incident where the state administration, in its desperation, had sent messengers on horse-back to scare the *silawats* of Makrana into immediately reporting for work. Disinclined to obey but fearful about the consequences of defiance, the stone-workers fled from their village with their families. The resultant chaos saw one of them lose an infant and another's wife had a miscarriage.¹⁰⁸ Such militarised recruitments became much more common during the colonial era, but that they were being practised when necessary even by indigenous rulers during the pre-colonial era cannot be disputed.

Another case in point is that of Luhar Ajmeri of village Rohal. A fine of rupees forty-one, indeed a huge amount in the eighteenth century, especially for a low income individual, was imposed on him on grounds of non-obedience of state orders. His crime was that when the caste head (*Luhar Mehatar*) arrived in the evening with summons for work at the Nagaur wood-cum-iron workshop (*Kilikhana*), Ajmeri deferred his departure till the next morning. The *Mehatar* asked him to furnish the raw materials, the collection of which needed some time. The *Mehatar* chose to read the delay as defiance, and his complaint cost the luhar dear, burning a huge hole in his pocket.¹⁰⁹ Though he petitioned, the fine on Ajmeri was merely reduced but not withdrawn.¹¹⁰ Ajmeri and other subalterns neither enjoyed the option

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21, 1835/1778, f. 300B; *ibid.*, 23, 1836/1779), f. 130A and 184B; *ibid.*, 25, 1838/1781, f. 90B; *ibid.*, 41, f. 105B.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 25, f. 92B; *ibid.*, 41, 1846/1789, f. 102A.

¹⁰⁸ See J.S.P.B. 54, 1857/1800, f268B.

¹⁰⁹ The fact that despite being a caste-fellow, the Mehtar complained is indicative of multiple and fragmented identities, ambiguous relationships among artisans. For more on this, see Nandita Prasad Sahai, 'Crafts in Eighteenth Century Jodhpur: Questions of Class, Caste, and Community Identities' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 48(4), 2005.

¹¹⁰ J.S.P.B. 23, 1836/1779, f. 35B.

to refuse state summons nor did his convenience in the matter carry any weight. If the requirement of the state was urgent, he had no choice but to comply immediately. Shifting agendas of the state implied that though realpolitik may require the rulers to placate artisans, other objectives often enjoyed precedence.

Concluding Remarks

Arguing that state politics need not necessarily be studied in the context of elites to the exclusion of lower formations, this paper examined the Jodhpur rulers' constraints and concerns in devising conscious policies for incorporating craft groups into the body politic. This mapping of the rulers' efforts to court artisans and the perception that they too were inclusive to considerations of statecraft, integral to the 'low politics' of the state, does not imply that artisans led privileged lives, sheltered from exploitation and oppression that was their lot in other regions. The logic of the state's survival dictated maximisation of resources, appropriated largely from the toiling lot, and this basic agenda remained the predominant guiding principle of governance in Marwar too. Rather, the thrust of the argument is that the rigours and excesses of revenue and labour appropriations were mitigated and partially checked by considerations that are rarely noticed when studies insist on harping on the predator-prey equation between the rulers and the workers, to the exclusion of all other dimensions of the relationship. In practise, the exchanges between the state and the crafts implied numerous ambiguities, the petitions revealing exploitative tendencies, artisanal lament against abuse and oppression of a diverse nature, as well as paternalistic postures adopted by the state. Subtle forms of discipline and control over the people, the productive assets of the state, were devised and the picture of statecraft that emerges from the dialogue between those 'above' with artisans 'below' is indeed complicated by contradictory impulses, competing agendas, and confusing anomalies.

Since Marwari sources from different genres strongly suggested the participation of lower strata like artisans in the pre-colonial polity, this paper used their case study to argue for the acknowledgement of the place and role of a wider spectrum of groups in politics and statecraft. Though elitist sources and their production of knowledges desist from admitting as such, a teasing of historical materials from other regions too, I suspect, would be indicative of the role of lower

formations in contemporary politics. I submit therefore that scholarly interest, at least in post-modern times, develop in those directions rather than conniving with the neglect and biases embedded in elitist sources vis-à-vis the lower castes.¹¹¹

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¹¹¹ Scholarly indifference and lack of interest, as well as the silence or inadequacy of source materials have been mutually reinforcing the exclusion of the study of issues pertaining to the subordinate groups like artisans.

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