

**A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MENIAL *JATIS* OF 18TH
CENTURY MARWAR**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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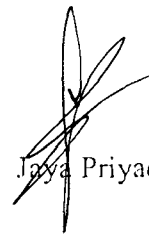
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2009



DECLARATION

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "A Social History of the Menial *jatis* of 18th century Marwar" submitted by Jaya Priyadarshini in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this university is bonafide work and has not been submitted previously for any degree to this or any other university.


Date: 29/07/09



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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that the dissertation may be placed before the examiner for evaluation.


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*To my dear most papa,
who is simply unmatched*

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Acknowledgment

'God sees the truth but waits' – this is just one of the lessons that I learnt during the course of the two years of M.phil programme. If one is honest to her/his work, she/he will always get the returns, no matter how difficult the hurdles and challenges may be. Determined people are never cowed down by what the world thinks about them. At this juncture, I claim to be one such determined person who can face every difficulty and criticism with great ease. This dissertation has infused a sense of confidence, hope, optimism and forward looking attitude in me. Not only have I expanded my academic horizons, but, also learnt the art of living a happy life. This tremendous zeal was derived through a healthy comparison between the first year of sufferings and second year of achievements. I learnt from my mistakes, discovered my strengths and weaknesses as well as friends and foes. Consequently, the world sees a phoenix that rose from its own ashes to fly towards the unlimited horizons of hope, dreams and destiny. The inference drawn from this whole exercise is that there is something good in everything. Unless one does not fall, she/he will never be able to learn and value the achievements later.

I owe a very great debt to all those who stood by me through thick-and-thin and contributed towards my positive development in varying degrees. The first person who has been a great source of help, motivation and inspiration is my supervisor, Dr. Mandita Prasad Sahai. I am extremely thankful for the benevolence endowed upon me when I was still groping in the dark. Her motherly support and fatherly supervision saw me through the difficult times. This work would not have been possible without her cooperation.

I am equally indebted to different people in Bikaner archives who helped me in various ways. My thanksgiving starts with the name of Mr. Khargawat, the Director of the Rajasthan State Archives. He is appreciated for granting the permission to use the archival materials as well as for providing a comfortable accommodation in Bikaner. Mr. Poonam Chand Jaiyya, the research officer at the Bikaner Archives is thanked first to teach me the medieval Marwari language and script and then to suffer without protest the numerous and intractable problems of translations which I inflicted upon him. Further, for the same reason I am greatly obliged to Mr. Karni Prasad Joshi, who not only helped me, but, entertained all my problems and doubts with great enthusiasm, patience and cooperation. Even Mr. Bundela Singh is thanked not only for granting help in transcribing the archival material, but, also for sharing the nuances of Rajasthani culture and society. His fatherly gestures and cordialities are simply unmatched. I would extend my gratitude to Mr. Om Prakash Kapoor for his fatherly disposition, and especially for making my birthday a pleasant surprise! Mr. Inder Kumar Nimoria (staff), Mrs. Kiran Bala(staff), Rishi Raj Thamwi(photocopier), Bhawani bhaiyya(tea stall holder), etc are other good people who made my Bikaner experience comfortable and memorable.

Coming to the informal turf, I record my gratitude to my family and different groups of friends, who have been a constant source of support for me. I thank my parents for reposing tremendous confidence and faith in me and my skills. I am extremely indebted to my father, Mr. M.K. Singh who has always inspired me with his patience and hard work. He is the backbone and the most important lifeline of my life. I can not think of achieving any goal without his unconditional and unconventional blessings, support and guidance. I will always value him for his indispensable role in my life and career. Further, a warm thanksgiving also goes to my mother, Mrs. Puloma Singh, siblings,

Rupam, Pushpam and Karshwardhan and brother-in-law, Karshwardhan for invariably bolstering my confidence, courage and morale.

Amongst friends, Choiki Dondup will remain special for his unhesitating help and support in every possible way. I admire him for keeping up with my frequent bouts of depression and mood swings. Impong Chang is highly appreciated for rendering his constant brotherly affection and help to me. His altruistic concerns for his sister (i.e. me) and others have always been lauded. Nathan, Carissa, Joe, Mausami, John, etc might not be there in JNU anymore, but they are always remembered for their affectionate presence in my life. I will always cherish the memories of the times that we spent together. Further, I thank Megha, who has been a friend more than a senior. I respect her for the steady moral support that she provided in the difficult times. Richa is thanked for all that she has done for me till now.

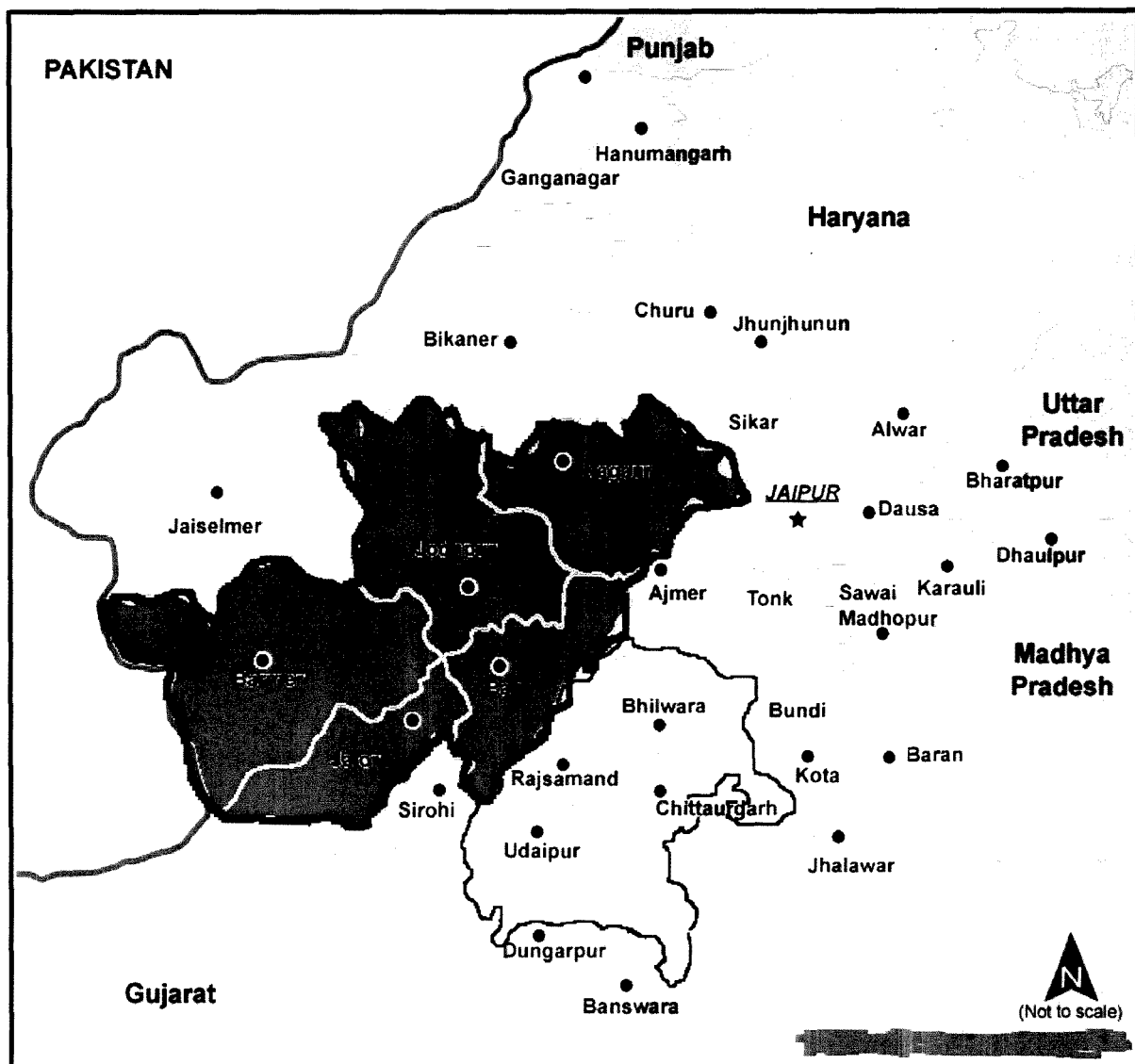
Due to her diligence towards studies and true concerns for me, Shreya remains one of the most inspiring figures in my life. She is also thanked for seeing me through my sufferings. Luna (my best friend), Soham (tikli), Amrita (petu betu), Meenakhi and Srilekha (the mews), Upasana (jatputri), etc hold a pride of place in my heart for their consistent love and concern. Midhi di and Upasana are also thanked for their timely and last moment technical support.

The pages of acknowledgment will be equivalent to those of a dissertation if I go on thanking and elaborating on the people who are behind this achievement, directly or indirectly. Therefore, I end my warm thanksgiving by paying my honest regards to all of them. May god bless all of them and make all their dreams come true.

I have sincerely dedicated my time, energy and efforts in the completion of this work. However, mistakes are to be wholly blamed on me.

Abbreviations

<i>C.E.</i>	<i>Christian Era</i>
<i>E.P.W.</i>	<i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>
<i>I.E.S.H.R.</i>	<i>Indian Economic Social and Historical Review</i>
<i>I.H.R.</i>	<i>Indian Historical Review</i>
<i>I.H.C.</i>	<i>Indian History Congress</i>
<i>J.S.P.B.</i>	<i>Jodhpur Sanad Parwana Bahi</i>
<i>V.S.</i>	<i>Vikram Samvat (57 A.D.)</i>



(Courtesy: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marwar>)

Fig. 1: Location of Marwar

Introduction

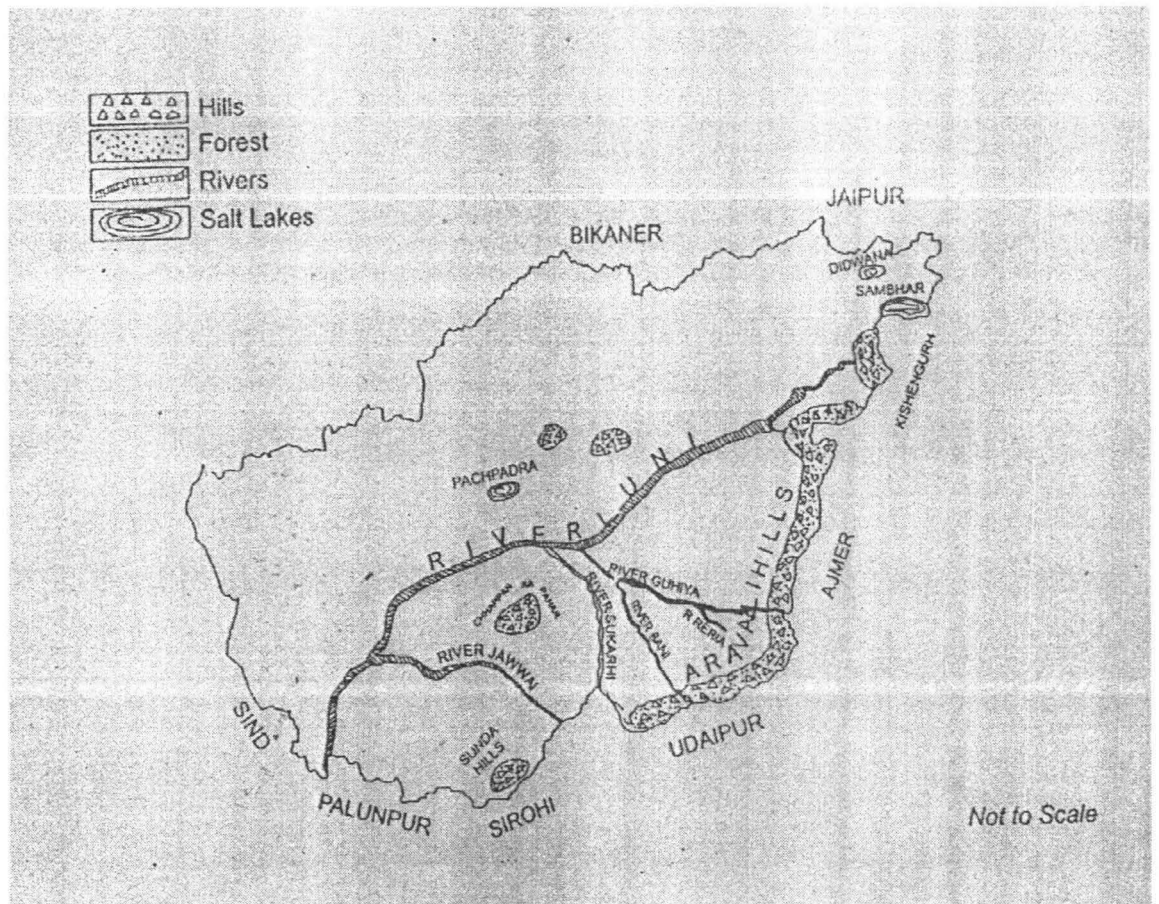
Though the caste society was not exclusively based on occupation, every *jati* was entitled to a particular traditional occupation. To a great extent, the determination of the ritual status of *jatis* was a function of the status of work done by them.¹ Based on this criterion was the underbelly of the caste society, which was largely engaged in the production of handicrafts and services for the higher *jati*/class categories². The menial service *jatis* mostly involved in 'dirty' services or professions were constitutive of this underbelly or lower formations of the society. These *jatis* which mostly performed 'dirty' works or manual labours of removing bodily emissions and carcasses were considered very polluting by the higher counterparts. Their highly low ritual status was almost commensurate with the degraded economic standing in the caste society. This depression in the socio-economic position explained their relative marginalisation in the pages of history vis-a-vis the high *jatis*/class incumbents.

The present study seeks to examine the social existence and experience of these *jatis* of 18th century Marwar. Marwar (or the Jodhpur State) or the 'land of Death' roughly coincides with the region of modern western Rajasthan.³ It was a hot and arid zone in the Thar Desert, roughly divided into two halves by the Luni River.

¹ However, studies have shown that in pre-colonial India, ritual status of *jatis* could be negotiated with the state and society on the basis of their economic or political clout. See Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985; Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India: Caste, Society and Politics in India from Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, IV.3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

² The categories of *jati* and class have been separated because high and low *jatis* were not always coterminous with high or low classes respectively. There were many *jatis* that belonged to the higher class despite their low *jati* status, e.g. the *Baniya jati*. Similarly, not all high *jati* members were of high class. See, B.N.S Yadava, 'Problems of the Interaction between Socio-Economic Classes in the Early Medieval Complex', *IHR*, Vol.3. No. 1 (July, 1976).

³ See fig. 1.



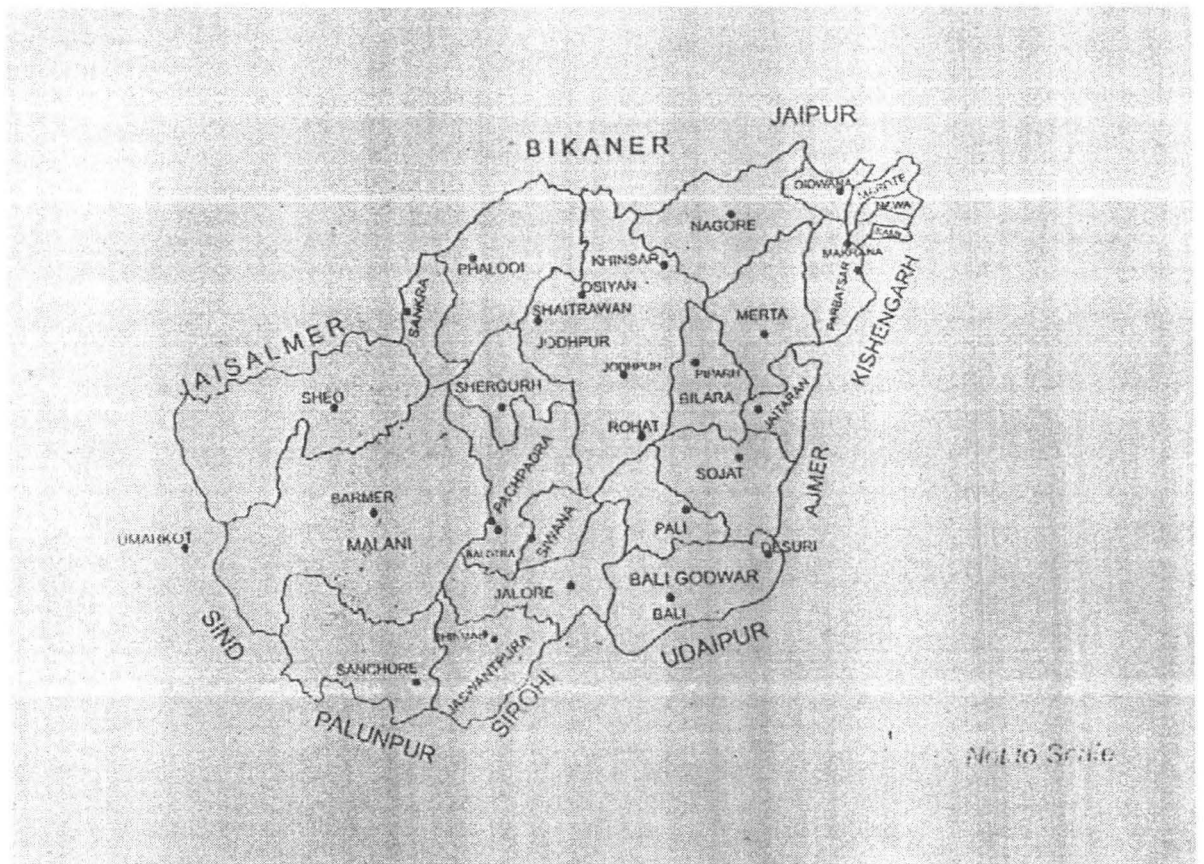
(Courtesy: Nandita Prasad Sahai⁴)

Fig. 2: Physical Features of Marwar

While the eastern region was well inundated, fertile, and hilly, the western was dry, infertile, sandy and a hotbed of famines and droughts.⁵ The vegetation in the western region was very sparse and representative of its dry climate. The scarcity of water and monsoonal showers enabled the cultivation of only drought resistant varieties of kharif crops like jowar, bajra, lentil, sesame, etc. Though agriculture was not very fruitful in the western *parganas* of Sheo, Phalodhi, Malani, Sankara, etc, they had rich pasturelands which facilitated cattle rearing. Therefore, most of the population residing in these areas comprised of semi-nomadic herdsmen who shifted with their herds to greener pastures during monsoon failures. Col. Archibald Adams talks

⁴ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 65.

⁵ See Appendix I for the drought-prone regions of Marwar.



(Courtesy: Nandita Prasad Sahai⁶)

Fig. 3: Parganas and Some Important Thikanas in 18th Century Marwar

about these groups in his travel account.⁷

On the other hand, the eastern region was based more on agriculture and trade due to the relatively favourable climate and drainage pattern. The Luni River overflow in the monsoonal months to bring rich alluvium, which favoured the cultivation of both Rabi and Kharif crops. Cotton, sugarcane, opium, etc were the chief cash crops cultivated and processed for local and interstate trade. The towns of Jodhpur, Nagore, Merta, Jalore, etc were flourishing trade centres having road connectivity with Delhi, Agra, Gujarat, Malwa, etc. G.N. Sharma opines that the agricultural and industrial developments and the military pursuits of the Muslim powers aided the

⁶ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p. 52.

⁷ Lt. Colonel Archibald Adams, *The Western Rajputana States: A Medico-Topographical and General Account of Marwar, Sirohi and Jaisalmer*, London, 1900, p.53.

expansion of trade in Rajasthan.⁸ Due to their strategic locations between Delhi and Gujarat, the regions of Merta, Jalore and Nagore became the strongholds of the Mughals.⁹ The military routes roughly corresponded with the trade routes showing the contributions of the militaristic adventures towards trade. The density and affluence of the eastern region vis-a-vis the western zone could be understood in the light of its geographical advantages and political significance.¹⁰

As far as the Marwari society was concerned, it comprised of people of various religions, castes and tribes, engaged in numerous occupations like agriculture, handicraft making, trade, cattle rearing, manual services, etc. The professions practised by the Marwari inhabitants cut across their *jati* identities. It means that the same profession was practised by many *jatis* for the maximisation of their economic resources and state revenues.¹¹ The dominant *jatis* in most of the regions were the Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans, Jats, etc. Their dominance was mainly in terms of numerical strength, economic position, ritual status, political clout, etc. Most of the lands, state offices, trade networks, etc were held by this affluent section of the Marwari society. The census data of 1891 shows that around forty percent of the population of Marwar comprised of these four *jatis* alone.¹² Apart from these four, there were various other *jatis* of the same category.

On the other hand, there were various artisanal and menial service *jatis* which mostly catered to the needs of the high *jati*/class members. The artisanal *jatis* were the lynchpin of the handicrafts industry of Marwar. Their products were traded by the mercantile communities to areas far and wide. Realising the importance of trade in the state treasury and the artisanal *jatis* in trade, the state gave various economic and other kinds of patronage and protection to these sections. This was done to avoid the emigration of the producers to places with better socio-economic or political

⁸ Sharma, G.N., *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan (1500-1800A.D.)*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal Educational Publishers, Agra, 1968, p. 322.

⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁰ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest* pp. 64-68.

¹¹ Sharma, G.N., *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan (1500-1800A.D.)*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal Educational Publishers, Agra, 1968, p. 78.

¹² The population of Marwar in 1891 was 2,528,178. See *Rajputana Gazetteers: The Western Rajputana States Residency and Bikaner Agency (Statistical Tables)*, compiled by K.D. Erskine, p. 1. The Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans and Jats numbered 211396, 244563, 232351 and 315443 respectively. See *Report Mardum Shumari Raj Marwar, 1891*, 2 vols. (Marwar Census Report 1891), Jodhpur, pp. 137, 2, 420, 47 respectively

conditions. The same was done by the landlord and mercantile classes to avoid any shortage of labour or production respectively.¹³ Since the overall density of population was already low in Marwar, any emigration from the region would have further added to the adverse land-man ratio.¹⁴ Therefore, being a labour intensive economy, the state and the elite classes had to negotiate with the producers for their own survivals. Against this background, the Orientalist vision of the medieval Indian states as despotic remains challenged. Also, it shows the multi polarity in the Marwari society, with different sections and groups of varying powers struggling amongst each other for the furtherance of their own agendas.

The menial *jatis* constituted the lowest rung of this social ladder. As has been shown earlier, these categories were different from the artisanal *jatis* because their traditional occupations were not production of handicrafts but that of services. They performed a wide range of 'dirty' services of cleaning bodily wastes, removing carcasses from human settlements or other such low profile blue-collar jobs. However, one has to heed the fact that they were not type-casted to their traditional occupations. Seeing the adversity of the land-man ratio, the Marwari state and society allowed them to practise various other non-traditional professions, both artisanal and menial services. Therefore, in practical terms, any *jati* was not specifically artisanal or labouring. For example, a *Mochi* or shoe maker whose traditional work was artisanal in nature also rendered services of mending shoes. Similarly, a menial service *jati* of *Bhangi* or scavenger coupled his scavenging job with the artisanal work of production of baskets. Such occupation-based compartmentalisation of *jatis* was done by the British surveyors for the purpose of convenience. For the same reason, even the present work has taken recourse to such erroneous terminologies. However, the fluidity and flexibility in the nature of works done by a *jati* has been kept at the back of the mind.

¹³ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*.

¹⁴ The average population of Marwar in the last three decades of 19th century was 2,073,787. Since the area of Marwar was calculated as 34,963 sq. miles by the British surveyors, the density of population per sq. mile was approximately 59.313. Seeing the population figures in the last three decades of 19th century, one can opine that it would have been lesser in the 18th century. See *Rajputana Gazetteers: The Western Rajputana States Residency and Bikaner Agency (Statistical Tables)*, compiled by K.D. Erskine, p. 1.

For the sole purpose of convenience, this study has been restricted to the four menial *jatis* of the *Nai* or barber, the *Dhobi* or washerman, the *Balai/Meghwal/Dhedh* or carcass remover and the *Bhangi* or scavenger. These four *jatis* performed 'dirty' works of varying degrees. The reason behind choosing four *jatis* of different stature is to study the interrelationships as well as the differences between them in terms of their ritual, socio-economic or political status.

Further, the selection of 18th century is led by the researcher's interest in mining the implications of the post-Mughal political insecurity in the Marwar state, for the menial *jatis*. As is widely known, the 18th century had been a period of political flux when most of the new independent principalities emerged from the grave of the Mughal Empire. However, with the lapse of the Mughal patrimonial hegemony, the states were more exposed to invasions from other neighbouring states or ambitious groups. The ambitious men of prowess or 'political dynasts' were in search of ways of either coming to power or retaining the old one respectively. Such political fluidity and confusion had inextricable links with the caste order. Political instability was feared even by the ancient brahmanical society for the consequent fissions and fusions that it brought about between different castes. In such times, the rigidity that caste order enjoyed in settled times was replaced by the acceleration of the coincidence between caste and class.¹⁵ Not only did numerous new social groups come up, but non-Kshatriya groups ascended to kingly positions with the help of merchants, priests, artisans, tribals, etc.¹⁶ Consequently, many low or newly known *jatis* acquired higher status due to their proximities with the crown.

Similar was the case with 18th century Marwar. It became a victim of internal feuds between the ambitious local potentates on the one hand, and the frequent Maratha incursions on the other. The first Maratha attacks were evidenced in the reign of Maharaja Abhay Singh (1724-1749). The initial loots and raids in villages and towns were replaced by bigger attacks with the help of local *zamindars*. Later, the garrisoned forts and towns were pillaged which greatly affected trade and communications.

¹⁵ Jaiswal, Suvira, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1998, p. 55.

¹⁶ Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India: Caste, Society and Politics in India from Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age, IV.3*, pp. 25-63.

The conditions worsened under Vijay Singh (1752- 93) due to the constant attacks from 1752-56. The Maratha threat led to a territorial division of Marwar into the eastern and western regions under Ram Singh and Vijay Singh respectively. Even after handing over Ajmer to the Marathas, their incursions into Marwar were not stopped. The continuous Maratha raids greatly affected the society and economy of Marwar, so much so that the Marwari people were forced to flee to the neighbouring regions for peace, security and livelihood. However, the defeat of the Marathas at the hands of Ahmad Shah Abdali in the Third Battle of Panipat brought temporary relief to Marwar. Vijay Singh combined the eastern and western zones and consolidated his position to some extent. The payment of tributes to the Marathas was still a political obligation on the crown of Jodhpur state.

The ultimate bearers of this political turmoil and tribute were the masses of Marwar who were overburdened by the state's demand of increasing revenues as well as the frequent Maratha loot and banditry. Emigration was the only solution to all their woes. Since migration of the work force to other states would have further depreciated the economic conditions of the state, it was coaxed to sort out new ways of binding the lower formations to Marwar. Being a part of the underbelly, the political turbulence affected the menial *jatis* as well. It would be interesting to churn out the effects of such situations on these groups. However, an understanding of the menial *jatis* in their own terms would be the prelude to this study. Their social condition and existence would be delved into to further grasp the nature and extent of changes in their situation in the 18th century.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The nature of historical scholarship on menial service *jatis* has been different for the different phases of history. The scholarship on early India has successfully analysed the inception, nature and extent of the exploitation of the subordinate groups under the larger umbrella of the *Sudra varna*. This was mainly due to the nature of the sources like the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Smritis* and other normative texts which talked about the marginalised sections under one single term called the *sudra*. Though many occupational groups had branched out of the lowest *varna* by this time, the sources give little information on specific *jatis*. Nevertheless, the ancient works

greatly aid in understanding the brahmanical society, the underlying value systems and its gradual transformation in time and space. Such readings further help in gaining extensive knowledge on the ritually lower sections of the society and to understand their plight in the medieval or modern periods.

To start with, R.S. Sharma remains the pioneer in the field of subaltern history. His work, *Sudras in Ancient India: A Social History of the Lower Order down to circa A.D. 600*¹⁷ seeks to explore the field of 'labour economics in Ancient India'. Not only does he adequately treat the socio-economic position of the *Sudras* in Ancient India, but, also efficiently outlines the temporal occupational fission in the *Sudra* order from slaves to artisans, agricultural labourers, government servants, etc. The modifications in the order have been analysed in terms of the economic and political developments of the times. Contrary to the Orientalist vision of the *varna* order as a religious turf, Sharma shows the *varna* order not as a religious entity alone, but one that was created and changed by the political and economic processes of the times. The origin and growth of the *Chandalas* or the untouchable groups has also been dealt with. Quite implicit in this dealing is the hierarchy among the lower orders right since the ancient times. This is to say that even though all the occupational groups emerged from the *sudra varna*, the *Chandalas* stood at the lowest rung of the ritual ladder.

As an important theme on the lower orders, untouchability has been adequately dealt with by the ancient scholarship. In a series of articles, Vivekanand Jha¹⁸ shows the origin and processual developments in the status of the untouchable groups in India. He sees the origin of the practice of untouchability in the expansion of spatial extent of the brahmanical tradition and the consequent assimilation of foreign elements and tribes into its fold. It means that the economic status of the assimilated entities were responsible for the adoption of low status occupations. The economic origin of the practice of untouchability has been approved even by B.N.S. Yadav¹⁹, Suvira

¹⁷ R.S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India: A Social History of the Lower Order down to circa A.D. 600*, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1958 (third revised edn., 1990).

¹⁸ Vivekanand Jha, 'Stages in the History of Untouchables', *IHR*, Vol.2, No. 1(July 1975); and 'Chandala and the Origin of Untouchability, in Aloka Parasher-Sen(ed.), *Subordinate and the Marginal Groups in Early India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001; and 'Caste, Untouchability and Social Justice: Early North Indian perspective', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 25(November-December 1997), etc.

¹⁹ B.N.S. Yadav, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century*, Allahabad, 1973.

Jaiswal²⁰, etc. Further, Jha even elucidates the fact that the categories of *Sudra* or *Chandalas* were not homogeneous units. They were characterised by extreme divisions in the social and economic status, which in turn averted any fights for 'social justice' on their part. Also, the state and society maintained the caste order for the maintenance and allocation of cheap labour for various skilled and unskilled works.

As against the ancient historiographical approaches towards the subordinate groups, the medieval scholarship has remained handicapped by the unavailability of sources or the inadequate interest shown by the medieval scholars. The phallogocentric and elitist nature of most of the medieval literary sources left lesser scope for gender and subaltern studies respectively. Since most of the historical writings on Medieval India revolved around royalty, nobility, rural *zamindars*, chieftains, trading groups, etc, the mention of subordinate groups was restricted only to passing references on the larger canvas of the Medieval Indian state and nobility. One such work is Mohammad Habib's 'Some Aspects of the Foundation of Delhi Sultanat'. While eulogising the egalitarianism of the Islamic faith and the non proselytizing mission of the Muslim conquerors of India, he contends that the *Chandalas* or untouchables converted to the new faith in groups to escape the inequalities of the Hindu religion. Mohammad Habib also linked up the 'Urban Revolution' of the Sultanate period with the independence of the *Chandalas* living outside the precincts of villages and towns in northern India. He contended that, since these groups were incorporated into the main settlements after conversion, they contributed immensely to agriculture and economic activities. Habib has tried to show the sympathy and efforts of the state in the amelioration of the untouchable groups.

However, recent historiographical trends have already questioned the veracity of such contentions by proposing that every regime, irrespective of its spatial origin, used the caste system for its own economic or other needs. In his article named 'caste in Indian history'²¹, Irfan Habib has explained the continuation of the caste system in medieval India in terms of relations of production between the ruling class and the producers. He contends that the Muslim rulers never disapproved of the

²⁰ Jaiswal, Suvira, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1998.

²¹ Irfan Habib, 'Caste in Indian history', in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perspective*, Tulika books, 2007 (seventh rpr.).

caste system even when their own religion preached egalitarianism. Since caste system helped in generating greater revenues due to low wage costs, the Muslim rulers could not have shown disapprobation towards it. Further, in the times of swelling demands of the ruling class, the number of artisanal occupations went up and mostly relied on caste system and slave labour. Also, many new occupational groups emerged to form sub-caste endogamous categories. This is how Habib shows the intensification of caste system in the medieval period, which in turn dragged the subordinate categories more into the vicious circle of poverty and exploitation.

The aforesaid works show that the medieval sources of the dominant Muslim regime have left almost negligible information on the subaltern groups. It is very difficult to construct the histories of these groups independently and in their own terms. Nevertheless, some regional medieval sources give sizeable information to reconstruct the 'history from below'. Though the number of such works is very limited even now, they are very important for unravelling the historical past of the depressed categories. Vijaya Ramaswamy's *Textiles and Weavers in South India*²² is one such important contribution to medieval scholarship. It studies the fluctuations in the social and economic position of the weaver communities of south India from the tenth century to seventeenth centuries under the regimes of the Chola, the Vijayanagara empires and the East India Company respectively. The book heavily relies on various genres of sources to expose the histories of the weavers in their own terms. Ramaswamy shows that due to their important contributions to the economy, the weavers were able to buy or negotiate economic concessions and privileges from the state and new ritual or social status from the society. Both individual and group donations were made to the temples in order to win a higher ritual status and position. Otherwise, through myths of origin, social protest, participation in *Vira Saiva* movement, these groups constantly tried to uplift their social position. This constant contestation and negotiation between the south Indian state and society and the weaver communities characterised the south Indian polity and society which were interdependent upon each other. However, the balance was disturbed with the entrance of the East India Company in the field of South Indian trade and commerce. Ramaswamy argues that the weaving communities declined in

²² Vijaya Ramaswamy's *Textiles and Weavers in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985

the 17th century in the absence of state protection, introduction of the advance payment system by the company's agents, etc.

Ramaswamy's work is important in many ways. Firstly, the use of various methodologies to reach the socio-economic past of the weavers is praiseworthy. Her use of literary and epigraphic sources, oral traditions, travelogues, English factory records, etc inspires a nascent researcher to delve into as many genres of sources as possible to elucidate subaltern history. Secondly, it delineates the multi-polarity of power in medieval states, where the state machinery was moved by many social groups. For their own survival, both negotiated with each other and maintained a symbiotic relationship. Thirdly, the rejection of the necessary link up of caste and class demonstrates the heterogeneity of the caste groups and order.

The availability of rich sources from the regional principalities of post-Mughal India has greatly helped in the reconstruction of subaltern history. The judicial records, revenue accounts, etc from eighteenth century Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bengal, and other regions have readily aided in finding the socio-economic aspects of these societies. This pool of varied sources has been harnessed by many historians in various ways. *Politics of Patronage and Protest: The State, Society, and Artisans in Early Modern Rajasthan* by Nandita Prasad Sahai²³ is a work on the artisanal *jatis* of early modern Jodhpur state. It is an attempt towards understanding the multiple dimensionalities of craft societies in their own terms and not as appendages to the state or elite classes. She presents a highly dynamic picture of the artisanal societies where rights and obligations were constantly negotiated, with or without conformity to religious norms. Like Ramaswamy, Sahai also argues that the state-artisan relationship was not marked by unilateral coercion and suppression. She contends that, in order to survive and rule, the state had to take recourse to a mixture of coercive as well as consent-building strategies towards the artisanates. In fact, she also shows the same relationship between the elites and labouring classes which needed each other for their respective survivals. This relationship was marked by the compliance to *wajabi* or the appropriate course of conduct. The state asserted its rights of mediation in the high-low *jati* disputes to restore peace and harmony. However, not only did it recognize, but, also collaborate with the artisanal *jati*

²³,Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

panchayats due to its own weaknesses, as also to gain artisanal support. All these strategies acted as cultural tools of legitimisation of its rule, which were very much required to face the potential political threat posed by the Marathas towards the end of eighteenth century.

Sahai's work is noted for its vivid description of experiences of the so-called *neech jatis* in their everyday life. By counterpointing the weaknesses of the subaltern groups with their strengths, she gives a glimpse of their multiple existences in the early modern society and polity. This is important for the quashing of the orientalist idea of 'Oriental Despotism' of medieval Indian states and the furtherance of the conception of multiple polarities. Therefore, hers is a pioneering work on the subordinate groups of early modern Rajasthan.

There are various articles on the menial groups of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Maharashtra, which raise the curtains of the menial histories to a certain extent. In fact, these works could be seen as preludes to such initiatives in the field of subaltern studies. Hiroyuki Kotani's article 'Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan'²⁴ on the untouchable *jatis* (i.e. *Mahars*, *Mangs*, and *Chambhars* or the different leather worker *jatis*) of Maharashtra is one such work. It begins by showing the multi faceted discrimination faced by the untouchable *jatis* at the hands of both the superior or marginally higher *jatis*. Kotani briefly shows the internal organisation of these *jatis*, the struggle between different untouchable *jatis* for higher ritual status and their multiple modes of existence in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Maharashtra. Based on these bits of information, he constructs the edifice of his argument of the ambivalent status of the untouchable *jatis*. He contends that while on the one hand, they were treated as untouchables, on the other, their tribal origins made them ritually significant in village boundary disputes and *Santi* ceremonies to ward off natural calamities. However, Kotani fails to realise the reasons behind choosing only the untouchable *jatis* and not the superior ones. Since the aforesaid rituals either involved physical injury or death pollutions they were thrust upon the ritually low *jatis*. It is erroneous to couple the ritual significance of the untouchable

²⁴ Kotani, Hiroyuki, 'Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan', in H.Kotani (ed.) *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997.

jatis with any kind of spiritual significance. Nevertheless, the article breaks new grounds in the direction of writing histories of menial *jatis*.

Further, Masanori Sato's 'The Chamars of South Eastern Rajasthan A.D.1650-1800'²⁵ discussed the community structure of the *Chamars* (or leather workers), state's mechanism of controlling them, and most importantly their disintegration under the state's policies and the socio-economic change of the period. Sato begins by locating the *Chamars* as socio-economic units in the village community. This involves a discussion of the different kinds of occupations adopted, their rights and obligations and their subordination in every field. Further, Sato also throws light on the community organisation of the *Chamars* and the way in which the state exercised both traditional and official control over them. It also includes a discussion of the revenue administration in order to fully understand the extent of state control on an individual *Chamar*.

Lastly, based on the evidence of changes in landholding pattern of the *Chamars*, Sato concludes that the state policies led to the decline of the *Chamars* in the latter half of the 18th century.

Though the article is very insightful as far as the overall standing and the changing status of the *Chamars* of south-eastern Rajasthan is concerned, it ends abruptly. Sato does not mention or explicate the possible reasons or policies of the state that led to this decline. On the other hand, he did not visualise any connection between the political turmoil of 18th century and the degrading status of the underbelly. Also, the restriction of the source material to revenue accounts and judicial documents brings about a sort of monotony in the work. Such shortcomings could be tackled through an in depth analysis of the political conditions of the times as well as the use of a diverse range of textual and non-textual sources. Nonetheless, one cannot undermine Sato's contribution towards the construction of menial *jatis*' history. He concludes on a very insightful note that, even though his paper dealt with the *Chamar* community, some of his inferences could be applied to other contemporary social groups as well. The findings of Ramaswamy and Sahai corroborate this contention of Sato.

²⁵ Masanori Sato's 'The Chamars of South Eastern Rajasthan A.D.1650-1800', in H.Kotani (ed.) *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997.

The relative vacuum left by the medieval scholarship in the field of subaltern history was overtaken by a rigorous representation of the subalternity in modern history. Presently, this field remains imbued with multifarious works on the various aspects of the subaltern's existence. The British 'objectification' of caste identities through surveys and census reports and the consequent intensification of the caste system were developments almost simultaneous with the rising consciousness of the lower *jatis* towards their depressed identities. The social and political awakening of the marginalised and depressed brought about by educated leaders of high and low *jatis* in the 19th and 20th centuries culminated in various socio-religious reform movements. Consequently, the modern historical scholarship was provided with an inexhaustible supply of information on the lowly, which could be readily used for realising the activities and experience of the low in the changing times.

Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*²⁶ is a collection of sixteen essays describing the course of resistance by the untouchables of Maharashtra under political or spiritual leaders. The first two essays are on the two Bhakti saints, Chokhamela and Eknath of fourteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively; and the two 19th century social reformers, Jotiba Phule and Gopal Baba Walangkar. Chokhamela, the only untouchable (of *Mahar jati*) Bhakti saint in Maharashtra, expressed his anguish and protest against untouchability and his despised position in the society. On the other hand was Eknath, a Brahmin from a reputed scholarly family, who eulogised Chokhamela as a *Mahar* wiser than Brahmins in spiritual matters.

Phule, belonging to the low *Mali* caste (gardeners), served as a link between the *Mahars* and the society as a whole. His schools for the untouchable children in Pune were the earliest non-missionary efforts for the depressed classes. The Satya Shodhak Samaj of 1873 was founded by Phule in Pune to emphasise on the education of the masses and the reduction of the ritual administrative power of Brahmins. Similarly, Walangkar, a pensioned *Mahar* soldier from Ratnagiri, started the first *Mahar* newspaper with the help of Phule. It was introduced to protest against the British policy of closure of army services to the untouchables. He also petitioned against the Shankaracharya and other Hindu leaders for better treatment

²⁶ Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

of the untouchables and the redressal of their grievances. Zelliott argues that with the growth of nationalism and awakening of interest in Maharashtra's past, the two *Bhakti* figures had been invoked for the decimation of the practice of untouchability and legitimisation of the modern ideas of social justice, spirit of quality, and brotherhood. However, these two *Bhakti* modes of legitimacy did not appease the well educated Ambedkar because of his inclination towards political means to raise status of the low, than through religious or spiritual ways.

The next five essays are on politics are based on Ambedkar's leadership, his American experience, use of political means for enhancing the status of the *Mahars*, Buddhist conversion movement and his encounter and bitter experience with Gandhi and the congress. The later six essays on religion deal with different aspects of Buddhism in modern India. These include the revival of Buddhism by Ambedkar, its present state, the psychological dimensions of the Buddhist converts, activities and observances of the Buddhist society, identity and organisation of the Buddhist sects and literature of post-Ambedkar Maharashtra. Zelliott's important insights from these essays are that the rationale for the conversions was psychological. The psychological freedom from the bondage of untouchability was a major achievement of the conversions, to an effect that, the urban converts became more confident after conversions. The last two essays on *Dalit* literature are closely related to this transformation. Apart from being an interesting read, this book elucidates the varying initiatives of the spiritual and political leaders to upgrade the status of the untouchable *jatis*.

Various other such works by Rosalind O'Hanlon²⁷, Eugene Irschick²⁸, Gail Omvedt²⁹, etc elucidate and elaborate on the rising consciousness of the lower *jatis*, which culminated in the non-Brahmin movements of 19th and 20th centuries in Maharashtra, south and western India, respectively. Apart from these, there are interesting works like *Rajasthan an Oral History: Conversations with Komal*

²⁷ Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Orient Longman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

²⁸ Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The non- Brahmin movement and Tamil Separatism 1916-1929*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969.

²⁹ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The non-Brahmin Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976.

*Kothari*³⁰ of Rustam Bharucha, which hark on social experience, folklores and oral traditions to bring out the status of the subordinate groups of Rajasthan. By giving a glimpse of the rural society of Rajasthan, it represents the continuing social traditions among the high and the low *jatis*, being passed down to generations since time immemorial.

GAPS IN EXTANT KNOWLEDGE AND AGENDA OF STUDY

The historiography on the subaltern groups evidently shows various gaps in the received wisdom. First and foremost, the menial *jatis* as a unit of subalternity has never been explored in their entirety in the medieval period. Even when the 17th- 18th century sources provide wide ranging information on them, their study had been restricted to articles alone. Secondly, they have not been seen as separate entities with their own social and cultural paraphernalia. Their representation is always in the context of the state or the higher *jatis*. For the same reason, they have been viewed as the suppressed groups with considerable homogeneity. Though the works of Kotani and Sato give an ephemeral view of the marked socio-economic and other types of heterogeneity of these groups, they form a part of a discussion rather than one on which a discussion is based.

Thirdly, their participation in the *jati* system remains largely invisible. Once again, this was due to their stereotyping as the oppressed sections of society and placing them at the receiving end of the brahmanical traditions. Even when the sources permit, their roles as oppressors or *jati* chauvinists have not been explored in our period of study.

Thus, this study on the menial *jatis* of 18th century Marwar seeks to fill up all these gaps in the extant knowledge, in order to receive a clear picture of their overall status in the Marwari society. For the time being, all the above gaps could be clubbed together into a couple of questions that the study will be focussing on. They are –

³⁰ Bharucha, Rustom, *Rajasthan An Oral History: Conversations With Komal Kothari*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2003.

How far did the *jati* status of the menials influence their relationship with the other *jatis* and the state?

Or

To what extent did the state and the society follow prescriptive/scriptural norms in dealing with the menial castes especially in the context of the political turbulence of 18th century?

SOURCES

To address the above questions three different types of primary sources have been used. First and the most important are the *Jodhpur Sanad Parwana Bahis* nos. 1- 10, roughly covering the period between 1764- 1770. Literally, *sanad* meant a royal order and *parwana* was 'a letter of authorisation citing the state directives to officials who had to implement state decisions'.³¹ Therefore, the etymological meaning is a royal order which was to be implemented by the state officials. These *bahis* were judicial records comprising of petitions from a disparate group of people, both high and low, regarding a wide range of social and economic disputes. The lodged complaints/ petitions or *arzees* were always followed by the state's order of enquiry of the cases for the restitution of *wajabi* or the customarily legitimate and 'appropriate' order. If the complaints remained unsolved in the *jati* or village panchayats, they were brought to the notice of the official judicial bodies like the *pargana kachedi* at the *pargana* level, *kotwali chauntara* or city magistrate at the city level or *darbar* or the king's court at the central level respectively. Apart from the petitions from subjects, the *bahis* also acted as the official podium for the announcement of state orders. Even the intelligence reports or other information from the *kasids* or news runners were also enumerated at the end of the *bahis*.

Looking at the petitions intricately, one can figure out a sequential listing of the complainant's name, *jati*, village, a description of the dispute with the conflicting individual or group and lastly the state's response respectively.³² It ended with the

³¹ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p.33. Sahai has efficiently described the utility and the shortcomings of this archival source.

³² See Appendix II to get a sense of a Marwari document in its original language and script.

signature of the scribe who lodged the complaint. The *bahis* were written in classical Marwari language in the *devanagari* script. The language used was both respectful towards the complainant irrespective of his/her socio-economic position, as well as authoritative towards the officials for undertaking a proper enquiry of the case (.....*hukam huvo chhai a kin tare hai su sari hakikat vigatwar likh jo* or write in detail how did this happen). The state's response was read in the name of *Shri Huzur* or the king (....*Shri Huzur ro hukum chhai* or the king has ordered) even though the orders came from the magistrates or other local powerhouses like the *jagirdars*, *thakurs*, *patwaris*, village headman, etc.

These archival records are the most important source for the elucidation of the history of menial *jatis* of Marwar. This is because they revolve around the everyday problems or conflicts of the menials, thereby giving a sketchy yet readily available picture of the life and conditions of subordinate *jatis*. They help in constructing a 'history from below', which most of the elitist sources of medieval history discourage due to negligible available knowledge on these groups. Further, the state responses and orders regarding these *jatis* equip the researchers with the tools to weave the fabric of state-menial relationship, which is more or less free from gross conjectures.

However, these advantages of using the *bahis* as primary sources come with a pack of bottlenecks. Considering that the scribes/notaries or the judicial officials mostly hailed from the upper strata of Marwari society (both class/*jati* wise), one cannot take the archival material at face value. Since the petitioners were illiterate lots with little or no political power, it would have been very easy for the elitist notaries to defy or colour the truth according to their own wishes. Even the judicial officials would have added to this injustice by refusing to enquire the cases which went against their kinships and affinities. Moreover, one has to heed the fact that the reported cases were just a fraction of the total cases that happened in reality. Many cases would have been turned down due to the biases of the office holders. Also, the brief nature of the documents makes it difficult to assess the problems or conflicts in their entirety.

Nevertheless, such shortcomings cannot attenuate the overall significance of the *bahis* in the construction of menial history. Certain measures and alertness on the

part of a researcher can aid an objective finding. As Nandita Prasad Sahai opines, ‘a scrutiny and critical analysis of these petitions, a reading against the grain, between the lines, and often deductions and inferences from the latent suggestions, hints, and implications in the petitions’, should be heeded while dealing with the documents. One has to carefully observe the trend of documentation, i.e., what is reported and what is not. For example, little or no documents from women or the Bhangis prompts certain questions of inequality in one’s mind. These inklings are to be corroborated with the modern findings or anthropological works in that region. The time lag between the social fabrics of the present and the past do not pose as a hurdle in one’s way of historical findings. This is because the social trends do not change easily with time. Normally, societal customs, traditions and practices are passed on from one generation to another. The biggest example is the *jati* system that originated in the beginning of the Christian era and found its way into the modern age with some modifications. The eddy currents in the normal flow of the social processes could be studied and analysed with the help of other sources as well.

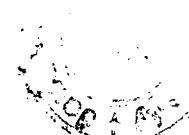
The second primary source that has facilitated the researcher’s initiative of delving into the menial history is the *Report Mardum Shumari Raj Marwar* or the Marwar Census Report 1891. It enumerates the different *jatis* and tribes of Marwar with their further categorisation into six classes mostly on the occupational basis. Class A consists of the *sipahi aur raj karnewali kaumein* or the warrior and ruling groups. Class B enumerates the *mazhabi kaumein* or religious groups. Class C includes *vyopar karnewali kaumein* or the mercantile communities, while Class D contains the *karigar kaumein* or groups involved in art and crafts. Further, Class E enumerates the *phutkar aur majdoori pasha kaumein* or the labourer communities. The last group contains *bahar ki ayi hui jatein* or the communities from outside India. All these 6 Groups include people of several *jatis*, religions and regions of Marwar.

Since *Mardum shumari* gives a wide range of information on the social life of the menial *jatis*, it stands out as a very important source again. Along with the population data, it also outlines the myths of origin of various *jatis*, their internal organisation, marriage customs, death ceremonies and other such group activities, religious beliefs and taboos, etc. All these information help a researcher to get a sense of a *jati*’s socio-economic identity and standing in the Marwari society to a

great extent. However, the census report remains invaluable for its knowledge supply on various *upjatis* within a single *jati*. It presents a rough idea of the social hierarchy among the *upjatis*, thereby showing a *jati* as a microcosmic unit of the *jati* system which represented inequality. Further, the narration of social existence of *jatis* is interspersed with many *aukharas* or local idioms, which are quite reflective of the reputation of various *jatis* in the Marwari society. Since they seem to be the rhetoric of the higher class/*jati* of Marwari society³³, they indicate the tensions and contestations between the high and the low. These idioms act as trailers for the extensive use of oral literature in future. However, as a colonial venture, the census report is marked by many flaws. Firstly, since the informants and volunteers of the British ethnographers were literate native Indians from high *jati*/class, the description and characterisation of the menial *jatis* is elitist and biased against them. It sees the subordinate *jatis* through the spectacles of the high. Therefore, many-a-times they portray the *neech* in a bad light. Secondly, the categorisation of the different *jatis* and tribes on the basis of occupation is highly questionable. This is because the occupational flexibility in the Marwari society assigned freedom to its subjects to practise as many professions as possible for the maximum generation of revenues for the state. Naming any *jati* as religious or martial was un-called for because not all bramhins were priests or all rajput warriors and so on and so forth. By correlating a *jati* with traditional occupation and class, this classification defies proper class differentiation.

Thirdly, choosing *jati* as the basis of categorising a pluralistic society is highly erroneous. Even though many non-Hindu subjects of Marwar state performed menial tasks, they cannot be grouped together with the 'Hindu' menials practising the same occupation. In fact, the tribals, Muslims or other religious groups cannot be named as '*jatis*' because the *jati* system which originated from the *varna* order was exclusively 'Hindu' in nature.

TH-17300



³³This insight is drawn from the fact that most of the informers of the British ethnographers were literate members from high *jati*/class. See, Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2001; Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, OUP, 1987, p.243.

Since, this 'objectification' and categorisation of the Marwari subjects into water tight compartments based on the *varna* order is erroneous, one has to study the objectives and methods of the British ethnographical surveys. This will equip oneself with the tools for analysing the census report with a pinch of salt. As Nicholas Dirks opines, the British ethnographical searches were meant to be used as 'reference works' by the colonial administrators, police, revenue agents, district magistrates, army recruiters, etc.³⁴ Therefore, caste as a category was seen as a profitable fundamental base of classification. This was due to the fact that the various *jatis* could be easily classified under the main *varna* categories, thereby aiding the British raj in employing the *jatis* in different fields according to their qualities. Leaving aside the questions of casteist, communal, racist and other such differentiation engendered by the British ethnographical surveys³⁵, one can say that the ethnographical findings have to be critically analysed and corroborated with other evidences to come to the historical truth.

The European official or travel accounts like those of James Todd, John Malcolm, Rev. Reginald Heber, etc are the third type of primary resources used in the present work. These sources could be used for the corroboration of the findings from the above two sources. Though very little is known about the menial *jatis* from these accounts, the overall know-how on the state and society of Marwar or other regions of India can help this research in conceptualisation of the late medieval processes.

Keeping in mind all the haves and have-nots of the primary sources, comparing and contrasting one with the other, drawing out the commonalities from them, corroboration of ideas from modern secondary readings, etc can help to reach the historical past. Also, one has to understand the happenings and developments in the menial world in the light of the political and economic developments of the 18th century in India as a whole, and not Marwar alone. This proposition stems from the fact that Marwar wasn't a closed political structure or economy, but a region characterised by vibrant economy and political system, having relations with other regions of India. Thus, it was susceptible to the political or economic changes taking place in the Indian sub-continent. Based on these guidelines, three chapters have been written to elucidate the menial social history of 18th century Marwar.

³⁴ Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p.50.

³⁵ These discourses have not been explored because they don't fall within the ambit of this research.

Chapter 2 seeks to undertake a nuanced study of the overall status of the menials in Marwari society. Beginning with a description of their basic needs like food, clothes and settlements, occupation, etc., it shows that such facets of a menial's life were governed more by the caste principles, caste society and state. Also, a comparison of these aspects has been attempted to represent the *jati* hierarchy among the four *jatis*. Through an examination of the intra- and inter-community relationships of the menial *jatis* among themselves, and with the upper *jatis*, the chapter tries to demonstrate the involvement of the so-called *neech jatis* in the *jati* system as victims or victimizers. The questions of oppression/resistance and social mobility constitute a brief part of the chapter.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role and position of menial *jati* women inside and outside the menial household. It delves into the questions of patriarchy and subordinate *jati* status, which coalesced together to affect their everyday life in various ways. A comparison with the status of upper *jati* women has been undertaken not to differentiate between the two categories of women, but, to show the way in which patriarchy manifested itself in different locales to affect women in general.

Chapter 4 studies the interaction between the state and the menials at various levels. It seeks to highlight as well as analyse the roles of the state as an employer, tax collector, adjudicator, etc. Such functions have been canvassed to realise the underlying ambivalence in the state's attitude towards the menials, thereby giving a set back to the oriental despotism theory. The depressed status of the menials has been highlighted to show their difficult socio-economic experiences. Simultaneously, it has also been shown that the state wasn't strictly bound by any scriptural laws in its treatment of the downtrodden. In reality, it was both the social obligation of the state as the upholder of social order and the political and economic exigencies in the 18th century, which determined its responses towards them.

The Endogenous and Exogenous worlds of the Menial *jatis*

This chapter intends to examine the overall standing of the menial *jatis* in the Marwari society along with the variations and exceptions. It starts with the elucidation of the various facets of everyday life like food, shelter, clothing, occupation, property, etc and tries to show their connection or disjunction with the ritual status of the menial *jatis* and the relevant explication as well. It seeks to show the nature and multiple dimensionalities of upper and lower caste struggle. What were the different ways of exploitation of the menial *jatis*? Was caste struggle a homogenous entity where the lower *jatis* were always oppressed? Did caste unequivocally determine the socio-economic position of the high and the low? If no, then why and what were the determinants of an alternate status? These are the questions which will be answered during the course of depiction of the menial *jati* status.

BEING A MENIAL

As a water scarce region, Marwar was always inhospitable to all in general. However, the low ritual status of certain groups complemented the harsh climatic conditions in further depressing their status. The extent of this depressed status can be gleaned through the analysis of the various aspects of their lives.

Food: *Mardum Shumari Raj Marwar* shows that the practice of eating the left over food of the superior *jatis* or even those marginally higher than them was prevalent among the four menial *jatis* under consideration. In fact, the following document of C.E. 1769 shows that they were entitled to take the left over food of feasts as well¹ -

Nai Gumana of village Repakhanch said that there was a feast in the village. After all the people had eaten, Nai Ganga started taking the left over food in the cooking

¹ *Jodhpur Sanad Parwana Bahi 9*, V.S.1826/1769, f. 78B

vessel (*kadhaayaa ri khurchan*). Then his father Kanna asked Ganga since it was his turn to have the left over, why Ganga was taking it. Then, they fought over it and Ganga threw Kanna in the furnace. Around ten days hence, Kanna passed away. The state ordered to call the Nais of the village and tell them to make Ganga give compensation to Gumana according to their *Nyat* or community rules.

This document unravels many interesting facts about the Nais which further aid in understanding the status of the other three *jatis* (Dhobi, Bhambhi, Bhangi) as well. Firstly, the very practice of accepting the left over after feasts elucidates the penurious state of the Nais. Secondly, there was immense competition for the left over food, which normally was worth throwing. Thirdly, the left overs were to be taken by each Nai according to his turn. This systematisation of fixing turn shows the wide prevalence of this practice among the Nais. All this appears perplexing given the fact that the Nais had a better ritual and social status than the other three *jatis*.

Mardum Shumari points out that these four *jatis* did not accept left over food from those *jatis* which they considered lower (*neech*) than themselves. For example, a Nai never accepted it from *Mochi* or *Ghachi jatis* (*ye mochi ghachi vagaira neech kaum ki roti nahi khate*).² The Dhobis did the same with Bhangis and *Chamars*.³ Interestingly, even the Bhangis maintained the same disgust towards the Dhobis, *Sansis*, *Dholis* and *Satiyas*.⁴ A further explication of such apprehensions will be provided a little later.

Feeding on carcasses was yet another practice which was very widespread in the two untouchable *jatis*, i.e., Bhambhi and Bhangi. Still there were some differences in the culinary habits of the two. While the Bhambhis ate almost all dead animals including cow, bull, buffalo, sheep and goat, they did not consume pig⁵ or dog. On

² *Mardum Shumari Raj Marwar*, pp.458

³ *Ibid.* p. 554. *Mardum Shumari* says that the *Sansis* were lower than the Bhangis in the caste hierarchy. Perhaps they were nomadic groups involved in miscellaneous activities including pilferage of cattle, etc (pp. 585-589); *Dholis* were musicians groups who used to play different kinds of instruments on various occasions and festivities. They were also thought to be polluted *jatis*. (p. 364-369). *Satiyas* were those groups whose daughters worked as sex workers, catering to the needs of the lower *jatis* of Marwari society(pp. 389-391)

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 585.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 527, 533.

the other hand, the Bhangis ate dead cow, buffalo, camel, horse as well as pig and dog.⁶

Clearly, while all these *jatis* were menial, there was a hierarchy among them as well. To start with, food represented this hierarchy. It is to be noted that both left over food and dead animals⁷ were thought to be polluted in the brahmanical society. However the degree of pollution depended upon the status of the *jati* whose left over it was or the type of the dead animal. Since cow was considered holy in the brahmanical society, the *jatis* eating them were looked down upon. This is evident from the way in which *Mardum Shumari* talks about the habit among the Bhambhis of eating beef - *khaane mein itne sarableel hain ki mari hui guy bhi kha jaate hain*. It means that they are omnivorous to such an extent that they even eat dead cow. Similarly, pig was considered a very dirty animal in the brahmanical faith. The *jatis* which ate pork were considered very lowly or *neech*. Therefore, even though the Bhambhis were a *neech jati* in the Marwari society, they were better than the Bhangis as they ate just cow and not pig.

The myths of origin of these *jatis* showed them as the sons of higher *jatis*, having been created from god's body itself. It is said that they were relegated to such a status as a result of eating dead animals or doing 'dirty' works. For example, both Bhambhi⁸ and Bhangi⁹ were seen to have devolved from their initial status after eating dead animals. Similarly, the Nais lost their stature as Rajputs after performing dirty works of cutting hair or dressing wounds. The same happened to the Baid Nais once their wives adopted the midwifery profession.¹⁰ To save themselves from further pollution, the parent *upjati* or sub-caste of Maru Nais stopped dining with the daughter *upjati*, i.e., the Baid Nais. Such myths clearly show that the practice of eating of dead animals was a taboo for the high *jatis*. Similarly, eating with the comparatively 'unclean' *jatis* was dreaded by the higher *jati* or *upjati* for the fear of losing one's own ritual status.

⁶ Ibid. p. 585.

⁷ The term 'dead animals' refers to animals which were eaten after their death due to some other reason; they were not killed especially for eating. Due to poverty, many low *jatis* could not afford fresh animals for eating. Therefore, they consumed the already dead ones.

⁸ Ibid. p. 527.

⁹ Ibid. p. 583.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 457.

Nevertheless, one has to heed the fact that food was not the primary reason that determined one's *jati* status, even though such stories do the same; it merely fixed one's status in the ritual hierarchy. Rather, it was the economic status of the *jati* that made its members consume 'unclean' or 'polluted' food. This clearly comes out of the mythical origin story of the Bhangis, where they ate dead animals due to abject poverty. Therefore, the nature of food eaten was not the cause of one's *jati* status but its effect. However, such practices became historically crystallized to form a part of the identity of a *jati*. Against this background it could be suggested that there could have been better-off *jati* members who stayed away from such practices. In fact, *Mardum Shumari* shows that some members of the Bhangji *jati* did not eat dead animals.¹¹ Perhaps, they were the comparatively richer members who could afford other types of meat. Moreover, as *Mardum Shumari* shows some rich foods like ghee, jaggery, etc were also eaten by these *jatis*. Since cattle were reared by these *jatis*, milk products were available. It was the availability or unavailability of food stuffs which determined the culinary habits of these *jatis*. Their situation is the same as that of Dhobis of Marwar who were accused of never buying clothes, but using those of their customers.¹² In this case the Dhobis did not do so as a tradition but only due to their necessity and availability of clothes. Hence it could be suggested that consumption of 'dirty' food was not a *jati* tradition, but was due to poverty.

Apparel and accessories: As far as these two categories were concerned, it was both affordability as well as the tradition in the caste society at large that determined them. The typical clothes for 'Hindu' menial caste men were *dhoti kurta* and *pagdi* or turban. The Muslim menials by profession wore *pyajama kurta*. Maru Nais used to wear *dhoti* and *pagdi*. *Rachchaani* or instrument box of leather carrying the tools of Nais was a mark of identification for these Nais. Similarly, Naayata Nais who were Muslims wore *lambaa angrakhi* or long coat and *pyajama*.¹³ Their instrument box carried tools and ointments for operating and dressing wounds (*marham nashtar aur katarni vagaire ki peti*). Even Bhangis carried broom and basket in the market place as a mark of their identity.¹⁴ As said earlier, it was believed that the dhobis in Marwar never bought clothes; rather wore those of their customers. There were

¹¹Ibid. p. 585.

¹²Ibid. p. 553.

¹³Ibid. pp. 457-459.

¹⁴Ibid. p. 584.

remarkable differences in the dresses and ornaments worn by the menial *jati* women.¹⁵

Since the expensive wears like ritzy clothes, gold, silver, ivory, etc were insignia of high caste or political status, any menial *jati* member was not free to wear them.¹⁶ Bhangi women, who were accustomed to wearing lacquer ornaments, were not allowed to freely wear those of tusk without the state's permission.¹⁷ In fact clothes and accessories constituted one of the factors which distinguished between low and high *jatis*. Therefore, even the state protected such rights of the latter in order to maintain the social order. However, the few members of the menial *jatis* who were allowed to show off luxuries were the people with power. For example, through the custom of *Paghbandhai* (or wrapping turban), the *Gaon Bhambhi* or head of the Bhambhis of a village was given a special turban and a baton by the state.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, these two constituted the badges of power of the village Bhambhi. Similarly, his wife wore silver anklets and gold necklaces. The following document of C.E.1769 from Daulatpur shows the prevalence of the formal custom of *Paghbandhai*¹⁹ –

Bhambhi Udai of Daulatpur came and said that in October 1820 (C.E. 1763), he underwent the ritual of *Paghbandhai* for the supervision and collection of the *Vambh* tax. He was supposed to pay Rs.41 for this post (*Gaon Bhambhi*), out of which he had already paid Rs.30. The agrarian tax on his crops was Rs.7. Approximately eight months later Bhambhi Nath underwent the same ritual. Till now, Rs. 11 has not been paid by him. For the appropriation of the remaining amount from him, a man has been hired by the authorities. This man is to be paid Rs. 50.

The State ordered for the veracity of his statement to be checked. (he is to pay Rs.11 and the hired man to be given Rs. 50) He was not supposed to pay the money if he was found correct.

In actuality, these differences were not just a part of their distinct identity, but were also elements of differentiation between one *jati* or *upjati* and the other. Since this

¹⁵ For more details on the clothes and accessories of menial women, see chapter (Between the Devil and the Deep Sea).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 584.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.527

¹⁹ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f.178 B.

distinction was necessary for the protection of the caste society, they were guarded by both society and the state.

Morphology and Residencial pattern: Evidences show that in comparison with the Nais, the Bhambhi or Meghwal *jatis* lived in separate colonies (*baas*). The following petition report of C.E. 1765 from Bilada shows this²⁰ -

A Meghwal from Uchiyada village said that in the village there were four hamlets of Meghwals, which were divided into sixteen divisions. All the houses had some space (or *chauntari*) in front of their gates. No *Patta* was made or money was charged for this *chauntari*. However, only he had been given a *patta* of Rs.31. though he hadn't paid the amount till recent times, he was made to pay Rs.5 in the Darbar. The State asked to enquire this case where the other Meghwals weren't given *pattas* for the *Chauntaris*, except for the complainant. It also asked for the details of the case.

[C.E. 1769, Nagore Chauntara, evidence of Nai living among the higher *jatis*]²¹ :

A Khandelwaal (Baniya *jati*/ a trader community) Dev of Nagore came here and said that on the other side of his house wall was an *ora* (a store or warehouse) of Nai Lachiya. Above this room he made a *maliya* (room on the terrace). The *kadiya* or wooden beams for creating this *maliya* penetrated my wall. The Nai took a personal loan of Rs.40 from Khandelwal Maujya and Balu. But both of them died. Their wives are selling the house for Rs.225 to Bhagchand Chhitar. I made him resolve to give Rs.250 to these women and take Rs.40 for me. Therefore, Rs.265 is to be taken. Rs. 40 will be given for registry. The state ordered to have *char thava admi* (or four important men) who could make them understand the legitimate course of action.

[C.E.1767, Pargana Phalodhi, indicates the same as the above document]²² :

²⁰ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f.89 B, document no. 422.

²¹ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 58 B. This document is unclear in various ways. However, one of the facts that comes out clearly is that the Nais lived with the higher *jatis* in the same locality.

²² JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 109 A.

Brahmin Bhagwandas of village Savrij came here and said that in 1810 (C.E.1753) *Jagirdar* Karannot Surat Singh fought with me. Then I had to leave the village and go to village Dahiya Kohar. I had a field in Savrij which I used to till from the other village. In 1821, Surat Singh grabbed this land too. Now Savrij has been given to another I named Surat Singh. However, still Surat Singh isn't leaving my land. His Nai stays in my house now. *Sri Huzoor* ordered that after a proper enquiry *wajabi* (or appropriate as per normative conduct) should be done.

The second document shows that the side walls of the houses in the cities of Marwar had no space between them and were quite close to each other. The Nais lived in such close proximities with the higher *jatis*. Even the third document indicates that the Nais lived very much inside the villages. On the contrary, the Meghwals lived in their own *jati* colonies or hamlets. Presently, it's difficult to give the exact location of the settlements of the untouchable *jatis* – in or outside the village or on the periphery. However, we already know from Alberuni's (an eleventh century historian) details on Indian villages that there were certain groups which stayed outside the village or city boundary walls. These were the *achut* or untouchable *jatis* who were made to live away from the main settlement. While referring to the *Chamars* or leather workers, even Sir John Malcolm informs that in Central India and elsewhere these *jatis* were supposed to be so unclean that they weren't allowed to reside within the boundaries of the villages.²³ Similarly, Bishop Heber describes the filthy and penurious conditions in which the leather workers lived in 18th century Jaipur – 'there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth'.²⁴

By calling the residential patterns as the indicators of caste discrimination, Masanori Sato shows that the *Chamars*, almost an equally *neech jati* like the Bhambhis, lived on the peripheries of the villages or even farther away in the 17th-19th centuries South-Eastern Rajasthan.²⁵ Furthermore, researches show that in contemporary Maharashtra the *Mahars*, (one of the *ati-Sudra* or untouchable *jatis*) who were very

²³ Sir John Malcolm, A Memoir of Central India including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces, 2 vols., Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 2001 (1st Indian rpr.).

²⁴ M.A. Laird (ed.), Bishop Heber in Northern India: Selections from Heber's Journal, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1971, pp.259-260.

²⁵ Masanori Sato, 'The Chamars of South Eastern Rajasthan A.D.1650-1800, in H. Kotani ed. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997, p.32.

much similar to the Balais/Meghwals of Marwar, lived on the periphery of the villages.²⁶ In fact, both the society and state maintained a reasonable distance between the real village and the *Maharvada* or *Mahar* hamlet. The location of these *Maharvadas* could be easily changed according to the requirements of the villagers. The state paid them a small compensation and resettled their hamlets.²⁷ In the light of the untouchable status of the *jatis* like Balai and Bhangi as well as the various restrictions imposed on them²⁸, it could be suggested that they were made to live outside the precincts of the settlements. Once again, this was done to maintain a considerable distance between the comparatively 'cleaner' *jatis* on the one hand and the 'unclean' ones on the other.

Occupation: It is important to study the occupational structure of the *neech jatis*. Not only is it a scale to gauge the socio-economic position of these *jatis* in the Marwari society, but also a balance for the comparison of the ritual status of different *jatis* in medieval Marwar. *Mardum Shumari* shows that the nature of work done was one of the important determinants of pure or impure status of the *jatis*. The respective discriminations between the *upjatis* of a *jati* were also based on the status of work performed. In reality, the *upjatis* had a specific consciousness regarding the type of work undertaken. Any work which could have defiled their ritual status was averted. For example, as aforesaid, a Maru Nai avoided the surgical works of the Baid Nais for the fear of losing his comparative purity.

In order to understand the socio-economic status of the four menial *jatis*, it is imperative that we scan their varying modes of existence one by one. As far as the Nais were concerned, hair dressing was their traditional occupation. Apart from that, there were various other types of works done by the different *upjatis*.²⁹ The Maru Nais were involved in works like hair dressing, lighting candle, massaging, washing dirty dishes, working in their *jajmans* or patron's houses during marriages, inviting people for marriages and deaths to the *jajman's* house, etc. The Jangada Nais were

²⁶ For details on the Mahars, see H. Kotani, 'Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan', in H. Kotani ed. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997, New Delhi and Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16th-18th centuries*, New Delhi, OUP, 1991, rpr. 1998.

²⁷ H.Kotani, 'Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan', in H. Kotani ed. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997, pp. 58-59.

²⁸ Other restrictions will be dealt with in the next section on purity and pollution.

²⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 454-459.

almost similar to the Maru Nais. Baid Nais used to operate wounds, clean and dress them. Midwifery was the occupation of the females. The Nayata Nais had the same occupation as the Baid Nais. Since they were hair dressers of the Muslims, they even performed circumcision of the Muslim boys. The Musalman Nais used to work as hair dressers of the elites as well as the Muslim *jajmans* in Marwar. The Babar Nais were involved in hair cutting of camels, inviting guests during occasions in *jajman*'s house. Their women worked as maids.

Apart from such traditional works, the Nais were involved in various other kinds of work. This will be gleaned from the following documents.–

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Phalodhi, shows a Nai as a revenue farmer]³⁰ :

Darji Dharma of Pargana Phalodhi said that he had a *pasavato khet* (or ancestral land) which he gave to a Nai on *muqata* tenure (for revenue farming). Till recent times the Nai had been paying the money for cultivating the land. But now he had stopped. The State ordered to enquire the case, do what is legitimate or *wajib* and make them understand.

[C.E.1768, Nagore Kachedi, evidence of a Nai working in temple]³¹ :

Nai Khushyalo came here and said that since a long time he had been working in the temple of Thakurji Shri Murlidharji. During festivals, he used to light candles and work there like that. Now Mahesri Mahajan had employed a new Nai in his place. The State ordered to explain how this happened, as also to investigate the case.

[C.E. 1770, Parbatsar, indicates the miscellaneous works done by Nais under the system of *begar*]³² :

Nai Kojje and others came here and said that in these years they were made to do new types of work – cutting camel's hair, cleaning and plastering of floor on Diwali, fanning the deity in *Ganwar* festival, bringing *datun* or wooden sticks used as tooth

³⁰ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 109 B.

³¹ JSPB 6, V.S.1825/1768, f. 21 A.

³² JSPB 10, V.S.1827/1770, f. 263A.

brush for officials. The State ordered that if the services had been introduced only that year, then the Nais should be excused from them.

[C.E. 1767, Nagore Kachedi, document in the form of State order showing Nais employed as night guards]³³ :

In the months of November and December, *Hakam, Karkun, Kotwal*, etc had appointed Nai as guards for night patrolling (of cities). Now bid them farewell (*tina nu to rukhsad kar dejo*) and send them to work as guards on daily wages basis.

All the above documents show that the Nais were involved in various non-traditional works like agriculture, night guard service, religious services and various other kinds of miscellaneous jobs under the *begar* or unpaid labour system(as shown in the third document).

In the case of the Dhobis, *Mardum Shumari* demonstrates that apart from their traditional work of washing clothes, they were involved in *pinjare* or cotton ginning, *rangrez* or dyeing, *silawat* or stone masonry and *nalbandi* or work of farriers.³⁴ The state order of C.E.1764 from Jodhpur Kachedi displays the religious or temple services of the Dhobis³⁵ -

A Washer man Khushala is to be employed in the temple of Thakurji Shri Anad Dhanji for Rs.2 per month. Therefore, give him two rupees in the first month and later according to his performance.

Similarly, even the Balais or Bhambhis were involved in tasks ranging from traditional ones of dragging the carcasses out of the villages and towns to colouring of leather, tanning³⁶, making shoes, weaving clothes,etc.³⁷ The other kinds of works for them were in agriculture as owners of land or as *halis* or labourers, government service, etc. The following two documents prove this point.

³³ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 30A.

³⁴ *Mardum Shumari*, p.554.

³⁵ JSPB 1, V.S.1821/1764, f. 9B.

³⁶ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 527.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

[C.E.1769, Pargana Siwana, evidence of a Meghwal as a *hali* or labourer]³⁸ :

In village Asadha, Mheche Dev (an upper caste man) had kept a Meghwal Champala as a bonded ploughman for twelve years. Now the *Vambh* tax was to be paid to the state. The high caste man gave his bull to Champa for Rs.9 (till the contract lasted). The contract or the term was over between the two, but the Mheche has delayed the payment of the bull. The state has ordered to call both the parties and make them understand what is right or *wajib*.

[C.E.1769, Sojhat Kachedi, evidence of a Bhambhi as a government servant]³⁹ :

Brahmin Gordhan deep of Bhitora village came here and said that he had never paid *Dhibro* tax to the *chowkis* (posts) of government servants, Bhambhi and Sansir. However, now the *Jagirdar* of his village was asking him for it. The state ordered that if the tax hadn't been imposed before, then problems should not be created by freshly imposing it.

Lastly, the Bhangis who were traditional scavengers, produced and sold *chhajle* (or open wooden tray for collecting and picking up trash) as well and even dragged the carcasses of horses, asses and dogs out of the villages and cities.⁴⁰

In the occupational arena of all the four *jatis*, agriculture was a commonality. This was atypical of the scriptural codes, which restricted *jatis* from taking up profession unrelated to their *jati* identity. Nevertheless, agriculture was altogether a different occupation which was adopted by almost all the *jatis* in general. B N S Yadav has efficiently laid out the way in which such religious norms were not adhered to even in the ancient society. He has shown that in reality, it was the economic status of a

³⁸ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 146B.

³⁹ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 123A.

⁴⁰ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 584-585.

person that determined the occupation adopted. Therefore, even the poor among the higher *jatis* took to agriculture.⁴¹

Agriculture was a seasonal occupation that gave ample opportunities for engaging in other professions, thereby helping in further increments in income. Apart from that, possession of land was a prestige factor in the Marwari society. Nandita Prasad Sahai proposes that land constituted 'the plinth on which power and position rested'; since the possession of land and agricultural implements gave economic security and prestige, the professional artisanal *jatis* of Marwar undertook agriculture side-by-side with their artisanal occupations.⁴² Ownership of agricultural implements did increase possibilities of enhancing one's economic and social status. Satish Chandra contends that in 18th century North India, *Pahi kashts* (or 'tenants-at-will' who came from other village to till land), were welcomed if they owned their own agricultural accessories. They were even given concessions by village headman to bring new lands under cultivation.⁴³ A menial labourer without agricultural implements was to pay for using the master's tools. The aforesaid case of Meghwal Champala in which he paid for using the bull of a man is an example. Incidentally, it was the same man whose field he tilled for twelve years as a *hali*. The non possession of land or resources further increased the vulnerability of a menial vis-à-vis the dominant *jatis*. This could be said because non possession of resources by an agricultural labourer meant complete dependence on the landlord; on the other hand, the mere possession of resources gave choices of work to the labourer. As said earlier, labourers with tools were received gladly by villagers.

Evidences show that the menials were involved in cultivation as owners of *bapoti* or ancestral land and bought lands, tenants of landlords or state, *muqata* holders or revenue farmers or labourers of various kinds (*hali* or *vasidar*). The following documents show the varying status of the menials in agriculture.

⁴¹ B N S Yadav has efficiently shown the transition of the *varna* specific ancient Indian society where physical labour was looked down upon by the higher *varnas* or assigned only to the lower *varnas* to one, where the depressed economic state of higher *varnas* made them dependent on agriculture. Therefore, even in the early medieval period, agriculture was an occupation adopted by almost all the *jatis*. See B.N.S Yadava, "Problems of the Interaction between Socio-Economic Classes in the Early Medieval Complex", *IHR*, Vol.3. No. 1, July 1976.

⁴² Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p. 126.

⁴³ Satish Chandra, "Some Aspects of Indian Village Society in Northern India during the 18th century", *IHR*, 1975.

[C.E. 1767, Jodhpur Kachedi, evidence of a Balai as a buyer of land]⁴⁴ :

Jat Pema of Bhavi came here and said that when he went to Malwa, the *Chaudhary* Karsa, the Patwari and eight other people of Base village together sold off his land to Balai Jeevan in exchange of an advance payment. The state ordered that if the reality is like that then give back the land to Pema and do something about the advance payment as well(*sukra rupiya liya batawe chhai jin ri theek kar dejo*).

[C.E. 1769, Bilada, a state order regarding the Meghwals/Bhambhis working on crown lands]⁴⁵ :

The state servants are to take Rs.7.50 as agrarian tax on Rabi crops from the Meghwals working on crown lands.

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Phalodhi, evidence of a Nai as a revenue farmer]⁴⁶ :

The earlier mentioned case of Darji Dharma who gave his field to a Nai on *muqata* tenure. After sometime the Nai stopped giving the requisite amount to the Darji.

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Merta, shows a Balai as a cultivator for a higher *jati* of Rajputs]⁴⁷ :

A Rajput named Lagdhiram Singhot of clan Mertiya Madho Dasot complained that he has his share of field in Parubadi village. Even Rajput Jalam Singh Salam Singh has a field there. However, his share of the field is cultivated by Salam Singh's Balai Bhogina. Since two years he hasn't paid the returns to him. Then, my son said that if the Balai won't give the returns, then they will cut the required amount from the cost of *kadab* or the left over crops in the field. But Salam Singh made the Balai burn this

⁴⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 8A.

⁴⁵ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 163A.

⁴⁶ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 109B.

⁴⁷ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 54A.

kadab also. Then, my son beat up the Balai (*balai ra mathe mein divi*). Around two days after this, my son went to Itavada village. Jalam Singh Salam Singh sent his son to fight. Suddenly, around midnight they started beating up my son with stick. Even my son got hold of it and beat them up. But, they battered my son so much that for days he couldn't speak or move. This isn't the only offence done, but there are many other crimes as well.⁴⁸ The state asked to enquire the case and give the reply.

All these documents propose that the agricultural pursuit of the menials was marked by extreme heterogeneity. While one was an owner of land, the other was a mere labourer without implements. This shows that there were varying economic status of the menials. Since this contention awaits yet more information on the material world of the menials, it will be further explored a little later.

Other than cultivation, there were various other jobs which were appendages of the main occupation of a *jati*. For the Bhambhis, works like hiding and colouring leather were extensions of the traditional work of removing carcasses of dead animals from the settlement areas. Similarly, even operating and dressing of wounds almost complemented the typical occupation of hair dressing for the Nais. All these works aided in maximisation of one's profits without affecting the caste hierarchy.

It is to be noted that while Nais and dhobis were employed in temple service, Balais and Bhangis were completely out of the picture. This further corroborates the earlier argument of Nai and Dhobi being above the latter two in the *jati* hierarchy. At the same time, it even shows that though the menials were allowed to practice different types of occupation, those related to the religious orthodoxies of the high *jatis* were not open to them. It is known that untouchable *jatis* were disallowed from entering temples in contemporary Maharashtra as well.⁴⁹ Any potential threat to the purity of *devi-devatas* as well as the upper castes from the 'polluted' *jatis* was averted. Cooked food, which was related to one's ritual purity, was thought to be vulnerable to such pollutions. Therefore, so far, all the four menial *jatis* were never seen cooking for or serving the higher *jati* members.

⁴⁸ This is a very lengthy document enumerating the evil deeds of Jalam Singh Salam Singh. Since these aren't relevant to the topic, they haven't been mentioned.

⁴⁹ Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16th-18th centuries*, p. 106.

It could be suggested that the menials of Marwar were involved in various traditional and non-traditional tasks for various reasons. Firstly, due to the difficult and harsh geographical conditions and adverse land-man ratio of Marwar, subsistence on the basis of a single traditional occupation was difficult. Even G.N. Sharma shows that almost all *jatis*, high or low, practised different non-traditional occupations. He contends that in medieval Marwar, 'occupations were not wholly exclusive' of one's *jati* status, but, were 'independent' and 'flexible'.⁵⁰ In fact, multiple modes of livelihood were a necessity for survival. Therefore, the menials took to different other works, some different and some extensions of their traditional works.

Secondly, both the society and state aimed at the maximum utilization of the available human capital. Restricting one to one type of work was not beneficial for both the entities. In general, service castes proved to be profitable because one could extract as much labour as possible. *Mardum Shumari* shows the inevitability and usefulness of the Bhambhi *jati* to the Marwari society. It says that even though they were *neech*, they were very important to the common man. This was because this *jati* was very *kaamkaaju* or laborious and it rendered many types of free labour to the villagers under the institution of *begar* or bonded labour.⁵¹ Having evolved from the ancient institution of *vishti* or forced labour⁵², this system of *begar* ensured various types of work to the patrons or *jajmans* as well as the state. The earlier stated petition report on Nai Kojje and others, where they were asked to render fresh type of services⁵³ shows that exploitative tendencies in the society were unreasonably high. Since the demand for labour was very high in sparsely populated Marwar, every attempt was made to appropriate the maximum possible labour out of a unit. Many-a-times even false claims were made on the labour of the menials for the utilization of their potential. The following documents prove this point. -

⁵⁰ G.N. Sharma, *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan(1500-1800A.D.)*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal Educational Publishers, Agra, 1968, pp. 78.

⁵¹ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 534.

⁵² For a better understanding of the transition of the institution of *vishti* from the ancient period to the late medieval system of *begar*, see G.K. Rai, "Forced Labour in Ancient and Early Medieval India", *IHR*, Vol.3, No.1, July 1976.

⁵³ For the details of the document, see p. 32.

[C.E. 1767, Mukam Merta]⁵⁴ :

Rajputs Devrajot Bhiyo Jaitaro and Sawai Deepa of village Karaejada claim that Balai Gordhan of qasba Kuchora is under their *begar* services (*Bassipana*). The state says that the Balai has been a *raiya*t or cultivator of a lower caste⁵⁵ of the state since forty years and has lived in Kuchora ever since then. Therefore, don't make such claims of *begar* on him. It is his will to earn and eat freely.

[C.E. 1768, Merta Kachedi]⁵⁶ :

Bhambhi Jeev of village Kudli said that in V.S.1823 (C.E. 1766), Mahavat Singh had kept him as a servant and he was content to stay like that. Now the Hada says that he is my *vasira* (or permanent master of a labourer). The state authorities ordered to bring the document of occupancy. It ordered that work has to be rendered according to the deals of the document.

[C.E.1769, Nagore Kachedi, a case where a high caste landlord claimed to be *vasira* of a low caste woman]⁵⁷ :

The step mother of the Meghwal of Doha village complained that the Bhomiya Chandawat Dhano used to say that he was her *vasira*, while Meghwaal ram said that he isn't. The state ordered that the known people of the village should be asked and if they say no then set her free.

Many-a-times the menials were found trapped between the contesting claims of two parties of equal vigour. The higher *jatis* fought for their ownership rights over the menials. Undoubtedly, the labour potential of the menials was the bone of contention in such conflicts. The following document of C.E. 1765 from Merta Kachedi stands as evidence to this proposition.⁵⁸ Charans Lakha and Hethu have a conflict regarding

⁵⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 180A.

⁵⁵ Dilbagh Singh, "Caste and the Structure of the Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan during the Eighteenth Century", *IHR*, Vol.2, No.2, 1976.

⁵⁶ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 74A.

⁵⁷ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 20A.

⁵⁸ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 45B, document no. 240.

a well, a house and a Bhambhi in village Bachchwas. The State asked the authorities to make the parties understand what was *wajib* or the right thing.

On the part of the state, it rather encouraged menials to do various types of work. The sole motive behind this encouragement was to enhancing its revenue potentials. It was evidenced that in the medieval Marwar state, imposition of taxes wasn't done indiscriminately on the basis of one's *jati* status; rather it depended on the type of work performed. For example, a Balai who did agriculture wasn't asked for the *Vambh Bab* (a tax paid by those Bhambhis/Balais who removed carcasses from villages and performed other related tasks), but for agrarian tax. This is known from the following documents--

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Daulatpur]⁵⁹-

Khadiya Jeevaram informed that Balai of village Saduvaas has been asked for *Vaambh Baab*. That Balai was called from Barla village and made to reside in Saduvaas by me. He doesn't do the work (traditional occupation) of Balais. The state ordered not to pester the Balai for the tax.

[C.E. 1769, Bilada, a state order to take agrarian tax from Meghwal cultivators]⁶⁰-

The state servants are to take Rs. 7.50 as agrarian tax on Rabi crops from the Meghwals working on crown lands.

Therefore, the state could be seen as a co-partner of the menials in the process of earning as much was possible from different occupations. In fact, in agricultural initiatives, it gave all support to the lower *jatis*. Various concessions were given for bringing virgin lands under cultivation.

Another reason behind adopting or being open to non- traditional professions was the turbulence in the political economy of Marwar in the latter half of the 18th century due to increased Maratha incursions. The frequent migration of people to

⁵⁹ JSPB 7, V.S.1824/1767, f. 147B.

⁶⁰ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 163A.

Malwa⁶¹ was an outcome of this political development. It could be suggested that the menials were compatible with non-traditional occupations in Malwa because the sole motive of their migration was to earn as much as possible. It is quite possible that their status as migrants was better than that in Marwar. Perhaps their *jati* affiliations posed lesser problems. The willingness to migrate to some other region for earning proposes many things. Firstly, the political turmoil in Marwar had a considerable bearing on the economy as well. Secondly, even in such conditions, the menials were willing to brave the odd ends by working in some other place. Thirdly, the low competitiveness of Marwar vis-a-vis Malwa in terms of labour payments convinced the menials to migrate to the latter to earn more. The out migrations are known from these documents –

[C.E. 1768, Nagore Kachedi, evidence of Marwari people earning in Malwa]:

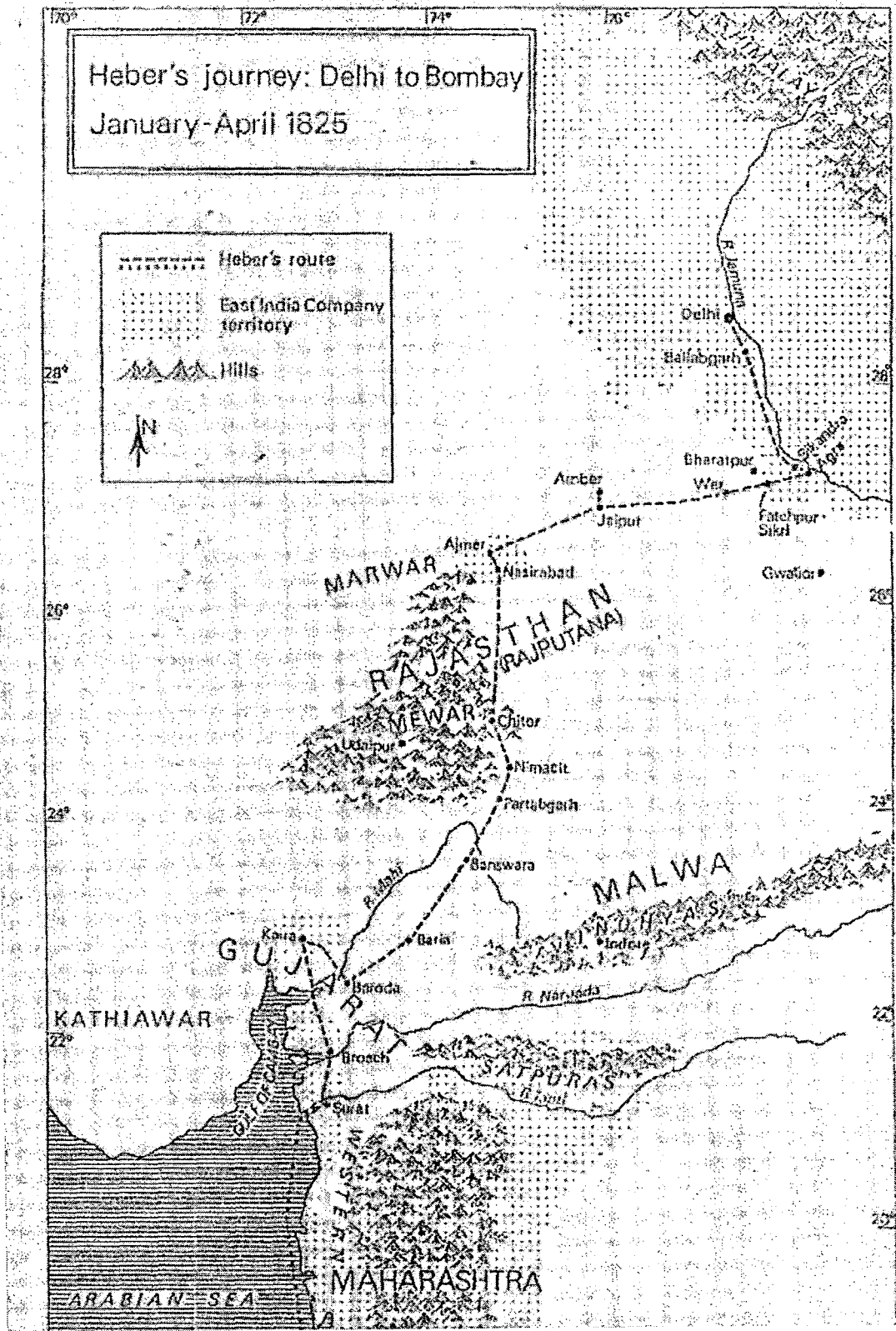
Jat Veed of Phidod came here and said that he went to Malwa and earned Rs.5. by working as *hali* or paid labourer. Even Nai Dana was there. He asked for Rs.40 which the Jat gave. Later, when the Jat asked him for the sum, the Nai declined to pay back. The state ordered to do what was *wajib* or right. If the Nai had borrowed the money, make him pay.

[C.E.1767, Merta, evidence of a Nayan's movement towards Malwa]⁶²:

The wife of Nai Dhana of Bholasar village was abducted by Sankhala Dhana of village Palriwari when she was going to Malwa. The state asked him to return the lady, else to come and give an answer to it.

⁶¹ See fig. 4 on the next page.

⁶² JSPB 7, V.S.1824/1767, f. 198A.



(Courtesy: M.A. Laird)*

Fig.4: Location of Malwa

* M.A. Laird (ed.), *Bishop Heber in Northern India: Selections from Heber's Journal*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, New York.

[C.E.1765, Merta Kachedi, a similar case of movement of a Nai towards Malwa]⁶³:

Nai Raja from Kaekeeda village complained that in 1822/1765 when Musraf Maoodas was the *hawaldar* in a village in south, the Village *Chaudhary* bought his niece (Raja's niece). She was sold for one rupee by Raja's nephews. However, the payment was never made. After I came back from Malwa, hawaldar Ratanbhan asked the *Chaudhary* to take five rupees and release the girl as she was to be married; but to no avail. The state ordered that after compensating for the money that *Chaudhary* spent on the upkeep of the girl, she should be returned to Raja.

Thus, it could be suggested that owing to the socio-economic and political expediency of the times, the menials were allowed to engage in a wide range of occupations. It benefitted them as well as the upper caste/class and the state. However, the expanse of this freedom ended where it seemed to encroach upon the boundaries of ritual purity of the higher *jatis*. No such profession was undertaken by them or allowed to them which could have breached the purity and sanctity of the higher *jati* status. Therefore, occupational arena of the menials was placed on a balance between the orthodox brahmanical scriptural norms and the societal needs for their labour.

Ritual status and the issues of purity/pollution: Evidences show that the menials were looked down upon as *napak* or 'dirty' *jatis* by the higher ones. It could be gleaned from *Mardum Shumari* that this differentiation was maintained due to the 'dirty' professions practiced by the four *jatis*. Interestingly, the degree of the discrimination was inversely proportional to the rank of the *jati* in the caste hierarchy. This is to say that, the lower a *jati*, the higher was the level of discrimination faced by it. Similarly, a lesser degree of differentiation was experienced by the *jati* higher than this *jati*.

The aforementioned empirical surmisal of the Nai and Dhobi standing above the Balai and Bhangi in the *jati* hierarchy finds its definite proof in this sub-section.

⁶³ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 39A, document no. 197.

Mardum Shumari shows that the Nai and Dhobi were termed as *napak jatis* due to their involvement in dirty works where they were in constant touch with bodily filth of others. This could be judged through a quote from *Mardum Shumari*⁶⁴ –

. . . *Nai ka haath jis se hazamat aur zakhmo ka khoon laga karta hai hamesha napak rehta hai. Nai ke siwaye aur bhi aisa hi peshwa karnewali jatein achhep samjhi jati hain.; jaise baid jo har kism ke rog ko hath lagata hai, aur dai jo lugaiyon ko janati hai, aur kasai jo jeev hinsa karta hai.*

It means that since Nai's hands touch blood of cuts and wounds during shaving, they always remain polluted. Apart from the Nais, other *jatis* practising this kind of profession are thought to be polluting; for example, the Baid or doctors who deal with every kind of ailment, midwives who help in delivery of wives and butcher who kills animals. A well known saying in Marwar can be quoted to complement this point further,–

*Nai dai baid kasai, inka sutak kabhi na jaae*⁶⁵ – it means that the pollution created by Nai, midwife, doctor and butcher can never be done away with.

Likewise, even Dhobis were thought to be *napak* because they touched different types of dirty clothes. In fact, the *kund* or pond where they washed the clothes was thought to be a pond of hell. It was dreaded by the society due to its extremely defiling character. The Dhobi's *kund* was referred to in a derogatory sense – *jo vachan chooke to dhobi ke kund mein padhe*⁶⁶, meaning those who fail to keep promises should fall in Dhobi's pond.

Even the touch of Nais and Dhobis was considered polluting, so much so that purification rites were performed to relieve oneself of it. For example, people always bathed after a hair cut. Also, the more religious ones never accepted water touched by the Nais. On the other hand, the clothes washed by Dhobis were purified by sprinkling water touched by gold. A Marwari saying brings forth this belief system prevalent in the Marwari society –

⁶⁴ *Mardum Shumari*, pp.459.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.459. There is no appropriate English word for the Marwari term '*sutak*'. It roughly means the ritual pollution created by a *neech jati*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.553.

*Aar, dhaar aur suskaar*⁶⁷ – It refers to the three *jatis* of Teli (or oil presser), Nai and Dhobi. *Aar* means the oil pressing rudimentary machine driven by bull. *Dhaar* refers to the sharpness of Nai's tools and *suskaar* is the sighs of a dhobi on work. Basically, all the three words refer to the three *neech jatis* who did 'dirty' works. Therefore, this idiom was used in a derogatory sense.

Nevertheless, both these *jatis* worked in temples. This could be gleaned from the earlier mentioned documents. Nais used to light candles in temples or fanned deities during religious processions called *Ganwar*. Similarly, even the Dhobis were employed for washing the clothes of the deities.

In retrospect to these two *jatis*, the Balais and the Bhangis had a more degraded status. On the pretext of their 'dirty' profession, they were called *achhut* or untouchables. Untouchability was visible in their everyday life, etc. They lived in separate hamlets, perhaps outside the village, drank water from separate wells. The following petition reports show that the Balais had separate drinking water pool and they weren't allowed to have water from the village wells.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi]⁶⁸ :

A Balai from village Mahewada complained that he had always been drinking water from his *judi kundi* (or a separate water container near well). But now the villagers stop him from having it. The State ordered that if he had been drinking water from a *judi kundi*, then the villagers shouldn't be allowed to say anything.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi, a State Order for the authorities as a response to the previous document]⁶⁹ :

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.459, 553.

⁶⁸ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 260. Also see Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan An Oral History: Conversations With Komal Kothari*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2003, p. 106. The drinking water arrangement in the Rajasthani villages was one where water was drawn out of wells manually or with the help of animals, and was poured into a nearby ditch or water container called *kheli*. The above document reveals that there were different *khelis* for the high and the low *jatis*. While the higher ones had big *khelis*, their lower counterparts had smaller ones. Perhaps the size of the *khelis* depended upon the population.

In Mahewada village, the Dhedhs (or Balais) have a different drinking water container (or *alayadi kheli*). Let them have water from here. There is a *kotho kheli* or bigger drinking water container for the villagers. Don't let the Dhedhs have water from here.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi, a State Order related to the earlier two cases]⁷⁰ :

In village Mahewada, Brahmin, Baniya, Jat, etc fill up water from the upper *kundi*. For the Balais, there is a separate lower *kundi*. Musalmans bury their corpses near the earthen boundary near the *kundi*. The state ordered the authorities not to let them bury near the pool but somewhere far from it. Similarly, the Hindus were ordered to cremate their corpses away from this pool. The papers of this order were to be copied and sent to the villagers. It also asked to give it in a written form to the Hindus that they should not burn their corpses near this pond.

These documents show that both the society and state cooperated with each other in containing the pollution created by the Balais in order to preserve the purity of higher *jatis*. Nevertheless, the degree of pollution in the case of the Bhangis was probably more than this. *Mardum Shumari* says that while moving into the market places they were to announce the term '*pois*'.⁷¹ Such announcements were made to make the higher *jatis* wary of the presence of these 'polluting' people. Undoubtedly, the sight of these people was thought to be a source of pollution for the higher *jatis*.

Thus, it's evident that all the four *jatis* were thought to be sources of pollution, but of varying degrees. But, why was there a variance in this degree? What were the main factors transmitting this pollution? Was the nature of occupation the lone criteria in the determination of one's ritual status? These are some of the queries which will help in understanding the questions of purity and pollution in their entirety.

⁶⁹JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 261.

⁷⁰JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 49A, document no. 262.

⁷¹*Mardum Shumari*, p.584.

Louis Dumont saw organic wastes in the human world as the source of all pollution.⁷² All the *jatis* involved in occupations of eliminating these wastes were thought to be 'polluted'. The dirtier the waste, the lower was the ritual status of the *jati*. For example, the Nais who used to cut others hair or operate and dress their wounds were considered a 'dirty' *jati*. However, the Bhangis who removed human waste were even 'dirtier' than the Nais. Even though this inference is true the assertion isn't. This is because organic waste alone can't be viewed as the sole criteria of pollution in the brahmanical world.

Many scholars have seen death as a 'more potent' source of pollution than bodily emissions.⁷³ In fact Declan Quigley has shown the way in which the pollution emanating from death created divisions even among the highest *jati* of the Brahmins.⁷⁴ He efficiently lays out the hierarchy within this *jati* which was based on the degrees of involvement in the world. A Brahmin who renounced the world was thought to be the purest and free from all worldly pollutions. Therefore, he led this hierarchy. On the contrary, a Brahmin officiating at funeral rites is considered the most polluted among all the Brahmins. Ritual differentiation based on the levels of purity occurred between the different types of Brahmins.

Based on this hierarchy even among the highest *jati*, it could be suggested that the purity/pollution quotients among the untouchables were based on the notion of death as well, and not alone the contact with organic wastes. In fact there were many other factors which determined the degree of pollution attached to a *jati*. Where these two combined, the degree was the greatest. These could be harvested from the mythical stories of origin of these *jatis* as well. The Bhambhis were relegated to this status on eating dead goat in times of emergency.⁷⁵ Similarly, even the Bhangis did the same; but, they also went to *Matangi Devi*'s temple without attending to the daily business (*bin shauch kiye maatangi devi ke mandir mein chale gaye*).⁷⁶ The enraged goddess cursed them that they will always remain devoid of the daily routines of attending to nature's call, bathing, etc (or *kriyabhang*) and will work as scavengers. Therefore, both the types of pollution combined to give a yet lower status to the Bhangis vis-a-

⁷² Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 30.

⁷³ M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, OUP, New York, 2002, pp. 183-186.

⁷⁴ See ch. 4, The Pure Brahmin and the Impure Priest, in Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, pp. 54-86.

⁷⁵ *Mardum Shumari*, p.527.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.583.

vis the Bhambhis. Here, another factor worth noting is the type of animal touched or eaten by the *jatis*. While the Bhambhis removed only hoofed and edible animals of high status like cow, goat, bull, sheep, etc, the Bhangis removed all sorts of animals, both edible and non-edible e.g. dog, cat, pig, etc. In this case death conflated with the status of animal touched in the further deterioration of the ritual status of the Bhangis.⁷⁷ Therefore, it isn't wrong to say that the actual criteria of pollution were many. All coalesced in different proportions to form a complex web of levels of purity and pollution. In this context, Declan Quigley⁷⁸ holds –

..... ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status. The actual criteria of purity are, however, various – for example tolerance of widow remarriage, or diet (which can always be manipulated to set one's own group apart) – and this quickly generates a complicated system of ranked groups. Using whichever criteria are to its own advantage, each group can find others who are inferior. The process of differentiation is potentially capable of infinite extension and refraction.

The explication of the degradation of various *jatis* and *upjatis* are again based on these multiple criteria. For example, the Nais who thought themselves to have emerged from the Rajputs, underwent debasement in status due to the practise of *niyoga* or levirate.⁷⁹ This practice was looked down upon in the higher *jatis*. Moreover, the very institution of widow remarriage was considered highly despicable in the quarters of the 'superior' *jatis*. As Quigley pointed out, widow remarriage was another criterion of pollution. All the *jatis* practising it were considered polluted and it became one of the distinguishing features between the high and the low *jatis*. Marital alliance with lower *jatis* was yet another standard of measuring one's impurity.

Similarly, even food was a source of pollution. Eating 'dirty' and unhoofed animals was again looked down upon and it also became a criterion of calling oneself high vis-a-vis the other. Further, eating the food touched by a menial *jati* member was thought to have befouled the ritual status of higher *jatis*. In the brahmanical tradition, eating or drinking were considered 'magico-religious activities of

⁷⁷ M.N.Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, p. 184.

⁷⁸ Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 455.

mysterious significance⁸⁰. *Kacca* or food cooked in water was very vulnerable to pollution.⁸¹ In fact water itself was the main reason behind this vulnerability. The aforesaid separation of the drinking water pools of the higher and lower *jatis* can be understood in this light. At first the Brahmins, and then the other *jatis* as well adopted the practice of not accepting *kacca* food from any lower *jati* than them. However, such apprehensions weren't maintained in the case of uncooked food. This could be assessed from the following document of C.E. 1824 from Pargana Siwana, where the grains of a higher *jati* were kept in the house of a Balai.⁸²

Bhayal Beeja (a Jat by *jati*) lived in village Googhrote. In 1815, Baniya Gele of Siwana kept a pot of *dhan* (or uncooked grain) in Balai Purkha's house. This pot was grabbed by the Jat without the Baniya's permission. At that time, the price of the grains was Rs. 4-5 a ser (a unit of measurement). Now, after so many years, the Jat was giving the grains to hi and he didn't know at what price he should take it. The state ordered that the grains should be taken at the present price.

If one looks carefully at the reasons given for the relegation of a *jati* or *upjati*'s ritual status, all these aforesaid factors are found actively at play. The Maru Bhambhis (the highest *upjati* among the Bhambhis) believed that they were degraded from the Rajput status due to the following reasons:-

1. became Bhambhis for the fear of losing their religion during Muslim invasions (a political reason)
2. By throwing away dead cow or calf on the order of their brother or sister-in-law (death pollution)
3. After falling in love with Meghwal women (marital pollution)
4. On eating or drinking water from Meghwal's house in times of great need (food pollution).

Thus, it is evident that there were many criteria on which the notion of pollution was based, like organic wastes, death, widow remarriage, food, marriage with lower

⁸⁰ Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publishers, 1998, p. 83.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸² JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 150B.

jatis, etc. However, these were just a few to name. As Quigley says these were innumerable in number and one *jati* took recourse to one or more reasons to call the other *jati* lower than itself. For example, one knows that the Dhobi was higher than the Bhangi, but the former was untouchable for the latter. In fact the Bhangis maintained untouchability towards the *Sansi*, *Dholi* and *Santiya jatis* as well.⁸³ However, the varying 'levels of respectability'⁸⁴ maintained by the Bhangis towards these *jatis* could be gleaned from the fact that even though the Bhangis considered the *Sansis* as lower than themselves, they provided *chilam* (or traditional cigar) to them. On the other hand, even if the shadow of a *Dholi* touched a Bhangi's chapatti, he used to throw it away. A possible explanation could be that while the *Sansis* relied on nomadic and criminal activities, the *Dholis* practised singing and dancing professions. The profession of the latter could have been detestable to the Bhangis. Perhaps this is an example of occupational chauvinism, wherein the Bhangis saw their profession as more 'moral' than that of the *Dholis*. Therefore, for the Bhangis, the *Sansis* constituted a relatively upper *jati* than the *Dholis*.

Similarly, the Dhobis accepted left over food from all *jatis* except the Bhangis and *Chamars* (or leather workers). The internal divisions in the *jatis* themselves could also be explained in the same light. Such hierarchies in the lower *jatis* based of different criteria of purity and pollution were omnipresent and an interesting fact of the caste society of Marwar.

It has been demonstrated that both the Nais and the Dhobis had better ritual status vis-a-vis the untouchable *jatis*. As shown earlier, they worked in temples as well. In fact, the Nais had a very important role to play in the marriages in Marwar, so much so that, they were equated with the Brahmins in this regard. Further, if one was going for some important work, then meeting either the Nai or Dhobi on the way was thought to be auspicious or *sukan*. This could be gleaned from the following Marwari sayings:

Nai sama avato darpan liya hath,

⁸³ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 585.

⁸⁴ Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan An Oral History: Conversations With Komal Kothari*, p. 31.

*shakun vicharo pathiya sammat ave sath.*⁸⁵

It means that if a Nai is coming in front of you with a mirror in hand, o pedestrian think of good omen because happiness is coming towards you.

Similarly, if a Dhobi with washed clothes is seen by someone who is going for a job, it is supposed to be a good omen for him. This comes out from the following document.

Dhobi dhoya kapda, saamo aayaa milant,

*Shakun vicharo panthiya, pag pag theekh karant.*⁸⁶

This saying means that if you see a Dhobi in front of you with his washed clothes, O pedestrian, think of good omen because this will brighten up your future.

Since no material was found on the untouchable *jatis* so far, one can not argue on their relevance or irrelevance on the religious arena, they have not been mentioned. However, Hiroyuki Kotani elucidates the case of the *Mahar* and *Mang jatis* in the Medieval Deccan, who had great significance in the boundary disputes of the village or the ceremony of *devi santi*. In the former, the *Mahars* played a very important role. They underwent a custom equivalent to the *ghijpani*⁸⁷ system in Marwar, where the *Mahar* of a particular village was to put his hand in a vessel full of boiled oil and *ghi* and take out a piece of iron or *Rava* from it. This was called the *Rava Divya* custom which was performed to hear the divine will. It was believed that if the *Mahar*'s hand wasn't burnt, his village's demarcation of boundary was correct. If it was burnt, then the village was at fault.⁸⁸ The religious ceremony of *Santi* was performed in times of natural calamities or epidemics. In this ritual, both the *Mahars* and *Mangs* (another *jati* involved in leather works) were involved. They were to walk along the village boundaries along with a bull, which was to be sacrificed by

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 462.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 553.

⁸⁷ This was performed in cases of adultery. If the hands of the person under suspect were burnt, he or she was at fault and if not then he/she wasn't.

⁸⁸Hiroyuki Kotani, "Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan" in H.Kotani (ed.) *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, pp. 64-67.

them in stages. The head of the bull was to be offered in the *devi*'s temple and later was thrown outside the village boundary by them.⁸⁹

On the pretext of these two customs, Kotani contends that the existence of the untouchable *jatis* in medieval Maharashtra was marked by ambivalence, wherein 'discrimination in everyday life and spiritual significance in the animistic world counterbalanced each other in their very existence'.⁹⁰ If we place the case of the Marwari Nais and dhobis here, can one draw a similar inference?

It is to be noted that in the case of the untouchable *jatis* of Maharashtra, the 'spiritual superiority' that Kotani talks about is actually a further indication of their depressed status. One should heed the fact that the *Rava Divya* custom was nothing less than exploitation in the name of religion or spirituality. No high caste would have undergone such an atrocious ritual. Similarly, the ceremony of *Santi* involved the notions of purity and pollution. The ritual involved beheading of bull, which could have invoked death or other kinds of pollution for the higher castes. Therefore, not even the lower *jatis* but the untouchables were chosen.

So can one speak of the religious or spiritual significance of the two *jatis* in the Marwari society? *Mardum Shumari* shows that even though the Nais were paired with the Brahmins in marriages, this didn't mean that the former were equivalent to the latter. This is because while the Brahmins were thought to be *sarvottam* or supreme due to their works, the Nais were considered *agham* or low due to their 'dirty' works of hair-dressing, surgery and midwifery. This could be sensed from the following idiom –

*Kathe raja ri rewari, kathe nai ro thecha kuto*⁹¹ – It compares the status of a king to that of a masseur Nai.

Generally, the Nais did various kinds of work in marriages, e.g. looked for matches for girls, distributed invitations of marriage to people, helped in washing their hands, collected and disposed off the leaf plates after the marriage meals, etc. Therefore, in this case it could be said that it was the importance of the Nai's labour in the marriages, and not any kind of religious significance, that he was paired with a

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 67-69.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 459.

Brahmin. The same kind of objective was involved in employing the two *jatis* for works in the temples as well. But, it has to be kept in mind that the sole right of touching the deity was with the priest. A considerable distance was maintained between the deity and the lower *jatis*. However, the works which were the traditional works of these *jatis* were given to them only. A dhobi would wash the clothes of deities, but with special care and perhaps not in the same *kund* where people's clothes were washed. However, this contention need not be taken at face value as it needs further support from other evidences.

Further, the explication of relating good omen with the Nai and dhobi *jatis* is difficult to explain at this juncture. However, it has to be kept in mind that both the *jatis* were considered auspicious only when they were found with some symbol of their profession. While the Nai carried his mirror, the dhobi was to be with his washed clothes. Secondly, even though these *jatis* were considered 'dirty', the symbols in some way signified purity and not pollution. A Nai carrying his mirror was considered auspicious and not one carrying his tools of hair dressing or surgery. Similarly, a dhobi with washed clothes was a good omen for a job seeker and not one with dirty ones. In some sense, it could be perceived as a celebration of purity. These extractions from the idioms need further corroboration through in-depth analysis of the Marwari society.

Therefore, it could be suggested that the caste society was internally divided into innumerable units and sub units by the divisor of the factors of purity and pollution. These constituents of the society were at constant conflicts and negotiations with each other in order to valorise their own status and degrade the others on any of the criteria of pollution

OPPRESSION AND THE MENIAL JATIS

Evidences readily show that the menials reeled under high caste oppression and suppression. Their subjugation by these elements was an active function of their penurious state and low ritual status. There were various fronts on which they were exploited. However, its discussion has to be preceded by an elucidation of the types

of property owned by the menials. This is because most of the conflicts arose on the issues of property.

As had been shown earlier, land constituted a very important form of property in Marwar. Studies on Rajasthan reveal that even the lower *jatis* had some share in this arena.⁹² They had different status in this field. Some were land holders, tenants, revenue farmers, while most of them were agricultural labourers. The evidences so far show that there were few land owners.

The other forms of property were agricultural tools and cattle. Bull constituted the most important cattle wealth of the menials. These were utilised in agriculture by the menials as land owners or agricultural labourers. The possession of bull and other agricultural implements increased the chances of getting employment in the village. This was due to the fact that *halis* or agricultural labourers with their own implements were welcomed by the employers. Camel was another animal possessed mostly by the Nais. Perhaps these were rented out to the trading communities. Land and cattle constituted the most important arena on which most of the high and low *jati* disputes were based. House was yet another type of property of the menials, which mostly involved intra family disputes.⁹³

Women of the family served as human capital in the menial *jatis*. Not only did they take care of the household, but also contributed towards the household economy. For the same reason, on various fronts their existence was negotiated by the natal as well as the in-laws families. Contrary to the higher *jatis*, the abduction of menial women was an economic issue, and not alone of honour.⁹⁴

As far as the intangible forms of property were concerned, *virat* and labour were the most important. Sources show that *virat* system, a derivation of *jajmani* system was prevalent in medieval Marwar. It was a social system based on the caste system, with an effective economic angle to it. To make things clearer, there is a need to

⁹² Dilbagh Singh, "Caste and the Structure of Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan during the Eighteenth Century, *IHR*, Vol.2 No.2, 1976, p.299-311. He shows that the *Raiyatis* or the cultivators of lower *jatis* comprised of both *maliks* or land owners as well as landless cultivators.

⁹³ Nai Gordhan appealed that his paternal aunty, who did not have any child stayed with his father's family after her husband's death. She left behind her share of house which wasn't being given to him by the *Nyat* members. Gordhan claimed to be the heir of this house, JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 17B.

⁹⁴ For more details see chapter 3 (Between the Devil and the Deep Sea).

quote Nandita Prasad Sahai who has intricately looked into the working of this system in early modern Marwar.⁹⁵

.... upper caste landed patrons established affective ties with artisanal and service castes to control their labour and in turn took upon themselves the obligation to meet the minimal subsistence requirements of clients through a customary apportioning of a part of their harvest as compensation. The latter known in the region as *biratkaris* entered these social arrangements to find protection against dearth and deprivation in difficult times, exclusive bonds with their *birat* households a guarantee of their support, and also meant to act as exclusive catchment areas for distribution of their produce.

Therefore, *virat* or patron families were nothing less a form of property to the menials which gave them employment in normal times and some respite during calamities. Many intra-*jati* conflicts arose on the question of ownership of *virat*. Nai Jagmal of Rahin complained against Nai Jorawari of Nikhela that he had been trying to get into his perpetual *virat* in Rahin.⁹⁶ Similarly, even Nai Lala and Nayan Chaina had a dispute regarding the *virat* of a family (*ghara ri virat babat mahomahi asarcho tho*). The state entrusted the case with the *nyat* of the Nais.⁹⁷

Labour, which rested in the person of the menial *jati* members, was one of the most sought after things in the agricultural society of Marwar. This was precisely due to its multifarious uses both in the agricultural and non-agricultural domains. The *Riyayatis* or high caste landlords tried to retain the labourers under any condition. Most of the times, it happened in the form of oppression of the local elements. Many issues arose between the landlords and the labourers during different phases of this relationship. The different dimensions will be revealed a little later.

Source of oppression : According to M.N. Srinivas the various elements of dominance in the rural society are numerical strength, economic and political power, ritual status and western education and occupations.⁹⁸ In the case of medieval Marwar, all the five factors except western education held great significance. They were intertwined with each other in different proportions to provide relative dominance to various *jatis* vis-a-vis the others. The calibration of the four menial

⁹⁵ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, pp. 129- 136.

⁹⁶ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 56B.

⁹⁷ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 108B.

⁹⁸ M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, pp. 91-92.

jatis under study on the scale of these indices would help in estimating the extent and degree of oppression faced by them at the hands of the dominant castes.

TABLE: 1 POPULATION OF SOME MENIAL JATIS IN 1891

Jati	Population
Nai	34418
Dhobi	5124
Balai	Not Available
Bhangi	12272

TABLE: 2 POPULATION OF SOME DOMINANT JATIS IN 1891

Jati	Population
Brahmin	211396
Rajput	244563
Mahajan	232351
Jat	315443

As far as the numerical strength is concerned, the Nais had upper hand over the other three. Their total strength in Marwar in 1891 was 34418. On the other hand, the Dhobis and the Bhangis were 5124 and 12272 respectively. The figure for Bhambhis isn't available in *Mardum Shumari*. However, provided the number of documents available on them vis-a-vis the latter two *jatis*, it could be suggested that they were more numerous than the two, but less than the Nais. The maximum number of documents pertains to the Nais. Though there were other factors like proximity of the Nais with the high *jatis*, etc behind this development, the population factor can't be denied. On the other hand, the Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans and Jats, the so-

called dominant *jatis* of Marwar were 211396, 244563, 232351 and 315443 respectively in number.

In the sphere of economic power, all the four *jatis* were highly divided on the basis of occupation. Whosoever was in a better profession and possessed considerable resources was better off than the rest. However, taking a generalized review, it could be said that the Nais and Dhobis were better off than the untouchables. On the contrary, the Mahajans or the Baniyas were one of the most affluent *jatis* in Marwar. As a populous cultivating class, even the Jats were affluent. Both the Rajputs and the Brahmins were better than the menials in this respect.

Political power was not the terrain of the menials. However, there were certain elements in each *jati* who held government posts, or were *mehatar* or head of their *jati* and acted as intermediary between the state and the *jati*. They had more political power than the other units in the same *jati*. Undoubtedly, the Rajputs were the main centres of political power. They were found as *jagirdars*, *zamindars*, *ijaradars*, etc. Nevertheless, political power was also bought by richer sections of the society like the Mahajans⁹⁹ or Jats.

The hierarchy of the four *jatis* on the basis of their ritual status has already been depicted. Useless to say, but, the Brahmins and the Rajputs were high above the others. Both Mahajans and the Jats¹⁰⁰ emerged from *Vaisya* or *Sudra jatis*, but succeeded in negotiating their status with the state and society on the pretext of their affluence.¹⁰¹

Lastly, the occupation of a *jati* was greatly responsible in rating it as high or low in the society. According to the earlier demonstration, the menials were looked down upon due to the 'dirty' nature of their work. As shown earlier, on the pretext of their economic power, the Mahajans earned better status in the society. Their involvement

⁹⁹ Dilbagh Singh, 'The Role of the Mahajans in the Rural Economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century', in *Social Scientist*, Vol.2, No.10 (May, 1974), p.26. Dilbagh Singh has shown that the Mahajans of Eastern Rajasthan used to buy hereditary official posts in villages, e.g. *patel*, *patwari*, *chaudhary*, etc by paying *nazrana* to the state.

¹⁰⁰ *Mardum Shumari* says that they were *jatis* engaged in cultivation and who weren't considered that high (*kuchh badhe darze ke nahi samjhe jate*), p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India: Caste, Society and Politics in India from Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age, IV.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Bayly argues that caste had always been a fluid entity in India, which could be negotiated and improved in times of political exigencies and otherwise.

in trade and commerce made them such important factors in the villages and towns that the economy was completely unthinkable without them.

It is to be noted that on all the above domains, the menials stood as inferiors. This made them vulnerable to the exploitative tendencies of those in dominance and power. In the village economy, most of the official posts vested with the high or rich *jatis*. Therefore, the major power holders were the *amils*, *patwaris*, *mahajans*, *ijaradars*, *jagirdars*, *zamindars*, etc. Studies on Rajasthan history reveal that giving gifts and rendering services to the dominant *jatis* was a customary practice among the lower *jatis*. Giving milk, curd, cots, beddings, gifts on special occasions and festivities to the dominant ones was necessary to have a better relationship with them. *Mardum Shumari* shows that the Bhambhis gifted cotton cloth or leather belt to the *jagirdar* or *hawaldar* on diwali and holi (*.....holi diwali ko jab jagirdar ya gaon ke hawaldar se ramram karne ko jate hain to aksar soot ki ati ya chamde ka kassa jaisa dhanda ho le jakar bhent dharte hain khali haath jana theek nahi samajhta*).¹⁰² Similarly, they even rendered *begar* services in agricultural as well as non-agricultural fields. In return for these, the higher men gave some money or grains to them.

There was a limit to all this giving and taking. When the demands of the power holders exceeded these limits, it was called 'illegal' exactions or extortions.¹⁰³ It was the misuse of this power and position that oppressed the menials of Marwar up to a great extent. The multifarious extortions were both monetary and non-monetary in nature. The monetary exactions ranged from a simple illegal exaction from the menial to a denial of his wage. The various types of exactions could be assessed from the following documents –

[C.E. 1770, Merta Kachedi, evidence of illegal monetary exactions along with various other exactions] -

Balai Jagiyo of village Paldi came and said that in 1811(C.E. 1754), he had tilled Siri Mali Harkaran's field. It had 60 *mann* of crops. Since there was Maratha threat

¹⁰² *Mardum Shumari*, p. 534.

¹⁰³ Harbans Mukhia, "Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans and Menials in Eighteenth Century Eastern Rajasthan", *IESHR*, Vol.XIV, No.2 (April-June), 1997, p. 231.

in that region, Harkaran asked Sita to save his harvest. However, Sita said that he would help the Mali only if he gave his land to him. So after harvest, Sita took away everything. Later, when a Jat died, he took away his corn as well. Sita asked the Balai also to regularly provide three and half *ser* of crops and one-fourth of the price of the bull used. While the Balai gave the former, he could not give the latter. Therefore, Sita forcibly took away the fresh harvests, a bull and sixteen rupees of the Balai. Further, when the Balai went to Malwa, Sita lifted all his cattle: 1-buffalo, 3-cows, 1- female buffalo, and 1-bull. The state ordered to ask the *panchas* of the neighbouring villages to fix the problem.

[C.E. 1770, Parbatsar, evidence of monetary exaction on false grounds]¹⁰⁴-

Nai Badre of village Rohri complained that Jagirdar Haknak asked him to pay Rs. 100, which he revealed to the Parbatsar court. After its writings, he paid the money but still the *jagirdar* used to fight with him. The state ordered not to let the *jagirdar* do so.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi, evidence of mahajan's denial to give wages to the menials]¹⁰⁵-

Mahajan Chutro of village Kaekeedda says that till now on any marriage occasion in a Mahajan's house Rs.27(under a custom of giving money to other *jati* members) were distributed likewise :- Rs.2.25 – *Bhomiya*; Rs.2 – *Chaudhary*; Rs.6 – *Thanayat* Brahmin; Re.1 – *Charan, Bhojak, Sami Sanyasi, Teli, Kumbhar, Bhambhi, Fakir, Balai* ; Rs.3 – *Bajdar*.

It's been seven years that Mahajan Bijo Gordhan distributes Rs.10 like this: - Rs.2 – *Bhomiya, Chaudhary*; Rs.6 – *Thanayat* Brahmin. The remaining Rs.17 is eaten away by him. Therefore, Mahajan Chutro asked him to give away to the people who were supposed to get it. On this, Bijo Gordhan threw Chutro on the ground and kicked

¹⁰⁴ JSPB 10, V.S.1827/1770, f. 251A. Another such case was of a fight between a Mahajan and a Balai the Balai was fined Rs.25 after his falsity was proven. However, the fact that the state set him free without any payment of fine suggests that perhaps the Balai was falsely accused by the Mahajan, JSPB 2, V.S.1822/1765, f. 70B, document no. 481.

¹⁰⁵ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 50A, document no. 270.

him many times. The state ordered to do the enquiry and do the legitimate thing. It also said that Chutro and Bija Gordhan had some transactional dispute, and that this dispute should be sorted out.

The earlier case of a Meghwal from village Uchiyada who was asked to have a *patta* for the *chauntari* outside his house, is also a case in point. He was the only one to have been issued such a *patta* in his Meghwal colony. This shows that it must have been somebody's hidden intention to exact money from him or to avenge him.¹⁰⁶

The non-monetary exaction or exploitation was also miscellaneous in character. Land, labour, cattle, women of family, etc were misused or taken away. The earlier case of the oppressive Mahajan Sitapokar shows that the powerful left no stone unturned to increase their resources. It was easier to enhance one's economic status at the cost of the menials than any other section. This was because comparatively they were economically weak and readily available for *begar*.

As shown earlier, the labour of the menials was a potential resource which was very important for the *riyayati* class. The menials were employed in agriculture, domestic and non-domestic activities. According to Harbans Mukhia, customs subjected the economically and socially deprived group of menials to the largest burden of *begar*.¹⁰⁷ The complaint of the Nai Kojje and others against the officials for extracting more than customary *begar* is a case in point.¹⁰⁸ Anything extending the limit was unacceptable to the menials. However, provided that not many cases of the manipulation of the limits of *begar* are there, it could be suggested that many of the cases remained internally settled in the village or completely unreported. Further, the demand for labour even led to fights between the powerful themselves.¹⁰⁹

Other than labour, cattle were the most sought after factor of production for the powerful. The numerous instances of cattle lifting prove this point. It was used in agriculture or simply sold off for monetary gains. The earlier case of Mahajan Sitapokar gives insights into the ways in which the higher classes lifted the cattle of

¹⁰⁶ See p. 29 for the details of this document.

¹⁰⁷ Harbans Mukhia, "Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans and Menials in Eighteenth Century Eastern Rajasthan", p. 232.

¹⁰⁸ For the details of the document, see pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁹ See the documents on pp. 39-40.

the menials whenever they got the chance. The same happened with the Bhambhi of village Nuhan. Two of his buffaloes were taken away by a Jat named dev from village Chokhli.¹¹⁰ This case shows that powerful men from other villages also stole the cattle wealth of the menials.

The assessment of cattle crime in pre-modern Punjab by David Gilmartin shows that such cases were not simple robberies, but rather meticulously planned activities which involved people from influential classes of society who were related to the cattle markets in commercial centres like Delhi, Multan, Peshawar, etc. He efficiently portrays the dilemma of the British government between doing justice with the poor aggrieved parties on the one hand and the local leaders who were involved in the crime but at the same time were the props of the British government in the rural areas as well. He even displays the multiple contradictory roles played by these leaders as 'a hinge between structures of local community leadership and authority, and the operation of professional networks of cattle disposal and marketing'¹¹¹. Such cattle theft operations were as far-flung as Uttar Pradesh. The cases of stolen cattle were first enquired by trackers who checked the *baras* or cattle sheds of the brokers in the crime who were given the cattle by the thieves. If nothing came out of it, an ad hoc panchayat constituting of a few friendly authoritative men, friends and the chief suspect of the crime was called. Strong evidences and foolproof support of powerful men were very much required to get justice. Even after promising the panchayat to return the cattle, they rarely did that. With the addition of more powerful elements from the neighbouring villages as well, this struggle went on between the two parties till one bowed down. Many-a-times, some weaker elements were also falsely accused. This is how many of the cases remained unreported.

Norbert Peabody gives a glimpse of the cattle lifting activities of the local chieftains in eighteenth century Rajasthan. He calls it a consequence of the increased affinities between the crown and capital or the king and the merchants, which in turn

¹¹⁰ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 105B. Another case of cattle theft was of Nai of Jatasar whose camel was stolen by a thief from another village called Kasubi Gudiya Alipur, JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 21A, document no. 111.

¹¹¹ David Gilmartin, 'Cattle, Crime and Colonialism: Property as Negotiation in North India', *JESHR*, Vol. XL, No.1, Jan-March, 2003, p. 40.

marginalized the landed aristocracy.¹¹² Therefore, Gilmartin's assessment gives reasons to believe that perhaps such networks were rampant in Marwar as well. However, in this region it wasn't just cattle but also other types of beasts which were stolen. Firstly, the frequency of beast pilferage in Marwar was very high. In reality, most of the tangible property related complaints from the menials were of animal thefts.

Secondly, the case of Nai Sadupa gives many insights which cohere with Gilmartin's contentions. Nai Sadupa of Jetasar village complained that *jagirdar* Bharatsingh Lakhdeher of Kasubi village took away his female camel. Later, Sadupa recognized his camel in Kasubi and reported it to the police station of Ladnoo. The *jagirdar* was called and asked as to how he got the camel. Afterwards, he sent for a man to get the camel, but the man never returned with the camel. Therefore, the policeman asked him to give a bull in place of the camel. However, Sadupo never got back his camel. The state simply asked to give back the camel to Sadupa whosoever had it.¹¹³ Firstly, it has to be heeded that the case was reported to some third village so that the *jagirdar* was out of his sphere of influence. Perhaps the Nai had some powerful friends in that region to side with him. Secondly, it shows the vulnerability of the menials in front of the political and administrative power holders. Both the power holders must have allied for mutual benefits. Thirdly, the hesitation of the *jagirdar* and the exchange proposal of the police prove that probably the camel was already sold. Thirdly, as Gilmartin says, the accused rarely gave back the beast.

Thirdly, the case of Jat Nimba who found a dead village goat in the *bara* of Bhambhi Kisna is important. He was beaten up by the Bhambhi and a *kanvariya* or government servant. After getting some bribe (wheat, jiggery, *ghi* and money) from the *Chaudhary*, the *hawaldar* or policeman, he gave wrong evidence against the Jat. Then the Jat was also beaten up by Lodha Sultanmal. The state admonished its officials for framing a false case against Jat Nimba.¹¹⁴ Gilmartin's contention of locating the lost animal in the *bara* of potential offenders is visible here. To some

¹¹² Norbert Peabody, "Cents, Sense and Census: Human Inventories in Late Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 4(October 2001), p. 839.

¹¹³ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 21B, document no.117.

¹¹⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 31A.

extent this case does point at a joint collaboration between various elements in the thefts of beasts.

Leaving aside the cattle thefts network, it could be suggested that many-a-times the menials were found accused of cattle robbery¹¹⁵ or other robberies and were made to pay fine in terms of animals. For example, Bhangi Dungariya of Jalpur village was accused of theft by Rajput Bahadur Singh Surtaj Singh. He was to pay Rs.6 and a bull to the Rajput. The Bhangi said that he hadn't stolen it and that the state could investigate the case. He demanded his bull back if he wasn't found guilty. The state asked for proper enquiry of the case and if the Bhangi wasn't at fault, then his money and bull were to be returned back.¹¹⁶ Comparing the penultimate case with the last one, it could be suggested that the menials were both victims and accused in such cases of cattle thefts. However, both the types of cases show the omnipresence of powerful men who employed or harassed the menials for their gains.

There were yet other types of cruelties done on the menials due to their weak economic and ritual positions. The occupation of the menials under the high class/caste made them vulnerable to their atrocities. Their status solely depended upon their relation with their masters. Dhobi Khushala was employed in the temple of Thakurji Shri Anad Dhanji. The state ordered that he was to be given Rs.2 in the first month, and thereafter according to the wishes of the priest of the temple.¹¹⁷ They could be easily fired according to the wishes of the masters. This is known from the case of the Nais of Merta who worked in the *virat* of the Oswal of Merta. They were replaced by some new Nais from outside the *Nyat*. The state also sided with the Oswal and said that mutual willingness of both the Oswal or Mahajan and the Nais was required for working in the *virat*; it wasn't possible without this readiness. The state also sought the suppression of the *gair wajabi* or illegitimate voices.¹¹⁸ This case also shows that the employers could do so even without the permission of the employees.¹¹⁹ The delay or refusal to give wages in cash or kind

¹¹⁵ The state ordered to release Nai Mauro who was arrested for stealing a bull, JSPB 2, V.S.1822/1765, f. 54B.

¹¹⁶ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 64B.

¹¹⁷ JSPB 1, V.S.1821/1764, f. 9B.

¹¹⁸ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 78A.

¹¹⁹ Even Nai Khushyala was ousted from his service in temple by Mahesri Mahajan. See p. 32 for further details.

could be gleaned from the complaints of Mahajan Chutro¹²⁰ and Dhedh of village Dasya¹²¹ respectively. The powerful men even beat up¹²² or ousted the weak from the village¹²³ according to their wishes. Discrimination and oppression on the basis of low ritual status was yet another form of oppression. However, one has to keep in mind that the practices of purity/pollution and untouchability were maintained by the high caste/class according to their own convenience. It seems molesting, abducting or outraging the modesty of menial caste women never polluted them. Similarly, the same leather which made the Bhambhis an untouchable *jati* was accepted by the powerful as gifts on festivities.¹²⁴ Wherever benefit through the breach of the religious laws was seen, they readily breached; otherwise, on general occasions, these laws were conjured up to tighten their control on the *neech* or lowly.

One got temporary relief from such exploitation in cases of clash of interests of two powerful parties. Cases of exploitation were brought to the fore by such conflicts. For example, the complaint of Mahajan Chutro against Mahajan Bijo Gordhan did intimate the state on the fact that since a long time Gordhan had been eating away the wages that the menials used to get on the occasion of marriage.¹²⁵ Similarly, the atrocities of Jalam Singh Salam Singh were elucidated by Laghdhi ram Singhot.¹²⁶ On the contrary, this case also shows the vulnerability of the menials in the clashes between two strong men. Balai Bhogina was beaten up by the former just because he adhered to the instructions of his master, which went against the former's interests. Therefore, even in such high class/caste conflicts, the menials remained susceptible to exploitation. Nevertheless good relationship with the high and rich was very important. Therefore, it was valued and maintained through customary practices of gift giving.

¹²⁰ See pp. 59-60 for the further details of the case.

¹²¹ Dhedh of Dasya complained that the *jagirdar* made him work but didn't give him the stipulated amount of bajra as a compensation for his service. The state ordered to call a man of the *jagirdar*'s and ask him to pay the Dhedh for the services, JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 114A.

¹²² Without any fault the Meghwal of village Vambhseen was beaten up by the *jagirdar* of Umarlaai, JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 150B.

¹²³ Over an issue of a field, Nai Lakha was ousted by the *Chaudhary* and others of the village. The state simply asked to do the legitimate thing after listening to the *Chaudhary*, JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 46A.

¹²⁴ It was a tradition among the Bhambhis to gift *chamde ka kassa* or leather belts to the powerful men in the village on festivals, *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 534.

¹²⁵ See p. 59-60.

¹²⁶ See pp. 36-37.

Therefore, it is quite evident that the powerful often misused their power against the menials for their personal gains. The analysis of different cases suggests that not only the elites of one's own village, but even those of the neighbouring villages were readily engaged in this exploitation of the weak. Most of the times the property of the menials was seen either as personal terrains or sought after areas by the affluent classes. On the pretext of the socially and economically depressed status of the menials, their property could be easily appropriated. The only way to survive in this situation was by befriending stronger elements who could decimate the extent of this oppression. Even the clash between two strong parties brought some solace to the menials. However, even these safety valves weren't without dangers to the weak. The bottom line remains that the menials were always vulnerable to all round exploitation by the strong. The only difference was that some were saved but some were badly trapped in the cobweb of exploitation.

Resistance by the weak: It is seen that dominance and resistance are two sides of the same coin. Both coexist to complement each other and this combination contrasts the monolithic social order of one sided dominance or resistance. Resistance could be defined as 'those behaviours and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations, that threaten to unravel the strategies of domination; consciousness need not be essential to its constitution'¹²⁷. It is seen that the menials resisted in a number of ways, both consciously and sub consciously.

The basis of any resistance by the menials was a realisation of their depressed status in every sense. The doctrine of karma or deeds in the previous birth weren't always used to reconcile to one's low status. In fact, many-a-times they questioned the 'historicity' of the caste order and its preceptors which always degraded them. This happened in the form of 'cultural resistance'. The 'everydayness of resistance' could be gleaned from the mythical stories of the menials. These stories always portrayed them originally as high *jatis* who devolved into menials due to circumstances. In the context of the Bhuinyas (an untouchable *jati*) of Bihar, Gyan Prakash says that such stories seeked to depict the status of the untouchables as 'historical' and 'not

¹²⁷ Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash(ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, OUP, Delhi, 1999, p. 3.

natural'.¹²⁸ Further, the myths of their creation from the body of god contested the practices of untouchability. Interestingly, this practice was also manipulated to mock those who practiced it. The Bhangis, who were considered the most depressed of the four *jatis* eulogized their identity through a belief of the attainment of *nirvana* only by the touch of the dirt of their broom. On the pretext of their highly 'impure' ritual status, the Marwari people refrained from inviting them for food. This practice was given a full turn of three sixty degrees to upgrade the Bhangis and degrade those who practiced it. The Bhangis held that they never ate at anybody's home unless until the host gave them golden broom and basket.¹²⁹ The ritual chauvinism of the high *jatis* was mocked and subtly portrayed as their inability to give expensive gifts. The denial of the Bhangis to announce their arrival in crowded places¹³⁰ at a later period also shows their everyday resistance to the caste ideology.

The very act of petitioning against the rural dignitaries or office holders was a form of protest which was sanctioned by the state itself. To pressurise the judicial authorities for speedy justice, many times they went collectively in a group (*samsat* or *vagaire*) for lodging complaints. Even though the menials couldn't have got justice without a powerful saviour, at least they could exercise their right to legal protest. In times of severe exploitation, the menials took recourse to 'avoidance resistance'¹³¹. They migrated to neighbouring places to evade the exploitation.

In very rare cases, they took recourse to open protest or violence. The present evidences show that the use of violence by the menials was only at the behest of the men of power. These men had their own reasons for physically avenging other high units of power. In the rarest of the rare cases the menials took to arms against the high caste/class for their own purpose. Such cases were rare due to the realisation of the harmful consequences which could've even threatened their own existence.

¹²⁸ Gyan Prakash, "Becoming a Bhuinya in Eastern India", in Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, p. 159.

¹²⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 584-585.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 584.

¹³¹ Avoidance resistance is one where the 'dissatisfied groups seek to attenuate their hardships and express their discontent through flight, sectarian withdrawal, or other activities that minimize challenges to or clashes with those whom they view as their oppressors', Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash(ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, p. 9.

Furthermore both the society and state¹³² were incompatible to such excesses on the part of the *neech*.

Hence it could be suggested that even though the menials understood their depressed status and showed their everyday resistance against oppression in many ways, they could do little to ameliorate their conditions. Though violence was the last recourse on their list, it helped little in bringing about any change in their status and condition. Seeking help from powerful group seemed to be the best option for them to get justice.

The oppressed as the oppressors: Till now, the overall picture that has emerged of the menial *jatis* is that of a poverty stricken group that was always oppressed by the upper *jatis*. However, the picture is incomplete without the demarcation of the grey areas between the complete black and white shades. This is to say that on the one hand, not all menials were poor and depressed, and on the other, not all the high *jatis* were rich and oppressors. When Jat Pema went to Malwa, the *Chaudhary*, Karsa and the *Patwari* sold off his field to a Balai Jeeven.¹³³ It is to be noted that if a Balai was buying the land of a high status jati like Jat, he must be rich. This contention is corroborated by the fact that the land was sold to him by some influential men.

Further, many documents show that many menials had good cattle wealth. This is known from the earlier discussed case of Balai Jagiya whose grains, cattle and money were taken away by Mahajan Sitapokar, when the Balai had gone to Malwa.¹³⁴ As has been said earlier, the *gaon* Bhambhi's wife had the permission to wear gold and silver ornaments. Even this displays the affluence of these men of power in the lower orders. The influence and affluence of the village balais (or bhambhis) of central india were so conspicuous that they were noted by John Malcolm (an English official). While talking about the powerful status and importance of the Dhedhs or Balais of central india he says¹³⁵ –

The Bullaee (or Balais) or Dher (or dhedh) of the village, though of low caste, is in Central India considered as one of the most important village officers. He is paid by a free grant of land, and some

¹³² In the case of Jat Nimba where he was beaten up by a Balai, the state replied in a very harsh to give reply for such misdemeanor,

¹³³ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 8A.

¹³⁴ See pp. 58-59 for the details of the document.

¹³⁵ Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, 2 vols., p. 18.

small fees on the produce of the village, from the cultivators of which, when the lands are not rented, he collects the revenue, and gives it to the Potal (Patil/Patel or the village headmen). The Bullae ought not only to be acquainted with the name and quality of every inhabitant, but with his occupations and exact possessions. In short, he is, ex-officio, the Potal's spy and he reports all improper transactions that take place in the community. The Bullae is expected to be informed minutely of every house, tank, well, tree and field, appertaining to his village. He notes every landmark and boundary, which he is expected to know either from tradition or observation. His evidence in all disputes about land is the most essential: he is the appointed guide of travellers through his limits, and must also carry all burdens that the Potal directs; but, this is, if frequent, generally performed by persons of his family or tribe, who are settled in the village, and work also as labourers in cultivation.

Perhaps almost the same status was enjoyed by the Balais of Marwar as well. This proposition could be buttressed by citing the numerical strength of the Balais in this region. As has been shown earlier, they were more numerous than the Dhobis or Bhangis. The more number of documents pertaining to the Balais vis-a-vis the two jatis ascertains this contention. Further, There were many other menials who worked as government servants. Like the high caste/class oppressors, making money by oppressing weaker elements was easy for them as well.

There are evidences of the menials harassing higher and lower *jati* elements. Brahmin Gordhan Deep of village Bhitara complained that he had never paid *dhibro* tax in the *chowkis* or posts of Bhambhi and Sansir. But now the *jagirdar* was asking for it.¹³⁶ This shows some kind of collaboration between the high and the low *jatis* power holders to oppress a poor high *jati* member. Similarly, Jat Nimba was also beaten up by Bhambhi Kisna with the support of other men of power.¹³⁷ Another case shows that due to high contacts, a Nai was living in a Brahmin's house.¹³⁸ Although the menials oppressed the high *jati* members in these cases, they didn't do that independently. In fact, they simply gave shape to the plans of the high caste/class oppressors. On the contrary, there were instances showing the ways in which the menials persecuted those below them. A Nai got Darji Dharma's land on *muqata* tenure (revenue farming). After a few years he stopped paying the rents, and later even refused to give back the land. Moreover, he had passed on the land of the

¹³⁶ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 123A.

¹³⁷ See p. 62.

¹³⁸ See p 30.

Darji to his cousin.¹³⁹ Another case is of Jat Vid who lent some money to Nai Dana in Malwa. Later the Nai refused to pay back the sum. In comparison to the earlier cases where the menials indirectly exploited high *jati* men due to their high contacts, these are cases of harassment of the poor members of both of high and low *jatis*.

Mardum Shumari shows that there were *jatis* and groups which were even lower than our four *jatis* in social or economic standing. These groups were treated in the same way as the higher *jatis* treated the four lower *jatis*. Therefore, in many ways the oppressed acted like oppressors. The following case of C.E.1764 from Sojhat Kachedi¹⁴⁰ shows that the menials could easily deny services to *jatis* lower than them –

The Khalpiya (a Muslim butcher *jati*) of Sojhat came here and complained that a Nai who had always been doing his *hajamat* or shaving, refused to do it now. The state ordered the Nai that if he had always been doing it, he should not discontinue now.

All the above examples depict the heterogeneity of the Marwari society in terms of the social and economic status of its members. A high caste didn't necessarily mean high economic and social placement, and likewise, a low caste wasn't always coterminous with sufferings and exploitation. The rich and the powerful were almost always exploitative towards all, irrespective of their *jati* status. The only difference lied in the degrees of oppression faced by the high or low *jati* units. While a poor high *jati* member was exploited on the pretext of his low economic status or comparatively lower social position, a low social unit faced double repression based on his economic and ritual positions. However, even among the oppressed, there were certain rich and influential elements that oppressed those lower than them. Therefore, a hierarchy of oppression could be visualised where the high oppressed the low. And, the menials were no exception to this hierarchy.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

It is evident from *Mardum shumari* shows that though the Mahajans were not a ritually high group, their affluence gave them a politically and economically strong

¹³⁹ See p 32. Also see chapter 4 for the further analysis of this case.

¹⁴⁰ JSPB 1, V.S. 1821/1764, f. 78A.

position in the Marwari society. Such a position underestimated their low ritual status and placed them almost equal to the Brahmins or the Rajputs in social status. This is an example of collective social mobility of the Mahajans which took place as a result of the negotiations between the economic and ritual status. Was there any possibility of any kind of social mobility in the case of the menial *jatis*?

Before answering this question, one has to keep in mind that the menials belonged to the *sudra* order. Considerable distances were maintained from them for the fear of ritual pollution. Nevertheless, examples from medieval South India show that groups with such status did succeed in negotiating with the state for a better status. The works of Vijaya Ramaswamy¹⁴¹ on the artisanal castes of south India give a positive signal to this transformation. She efficiently outlines the ways in which the artisanal *jatis* enhanced their economic status in the booming markets of medieval south India. It has been shown that the escalation in economic ladder equipped the artisanal groups to negotiate with the higher *jatis* and the state for a better ritual or theoretical status in the *varna* system. In fact, the various disunited components, i.e., the *Idangai* or left-hand and the *Valangai* or right-hand in the artisanal groups stood as a united body in times of need. Considering their importance in the economy, even the state couldn't refuse this demand of ritual upgradation.

Similarly, even Cynthia Talbot¹⁴² has shown that on the basis of one's military skills, a low *jati* unit could upgrade his status in the Kakatiya Andhra state. While Ramaswamy talks of group mobility, Talbot indicates mobility on the basis of individual skills. Talbot says that due to the military adventurism of the Kakatiya state, it honoured anybody with military skills. Here lied the opportunity for the lower *jatis* to enhance their state.

In retrospect to both these cases from south India, medieval Maharashtra gives a completely different picture. Hiroyuki Kotani¹⁴³ illustrates the 'spiritual superiority' of the *Ati Sudra jatis* of medieval Maharashtra in boundary disputes of villages or during natural calamities. He even shows the differential occupational structure of

¹⁴¹ Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in South India*, New Delhi, 1985 and "Crafts and Artisans in South Indian History, *Indian History Congress*, 64th session, Mysore (December 28-30, 2003).

¹⁴² Cynthia Talbot, *Pre-colonial India in Practice*, OUP, New Delhi, 2001.

¹⁴³ Hiroyuki Kotani, "Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan" in H. Kotani (ed.) *Caste System, Untouchability and the depressed*.

the *Mahar jati* to indicate heterogeneity of status of the people in the same *jati*. Like Talbot, even Kotani demarcates the raised status of the *Mahars* as mountain soldier or police. The considerable unity in the lower artisanal *jati* against a common enemy as depicted by Ramaswamy was also found in the *Mahar jati* members of varying status. Despite all this, the untouchable *jatis* failed to experience group mobility. In fact, here the state ensured the strict demarcation between the ritual status of the high and the low. It was more serious in cases of breach of the Brahmin honour or moves towards brahmanization. Even Hiroshi Fukazawa¹⁴⁴ shows that though the *Mahars* demanded a better treatment at the hands of the society and state, they were never given one. On the contrary, the government tried restoring the social order by being unreasonable to the untouchables most of the times.

Perhaps the same line was toed by the Marwar state as well. Till now no evidences of social uplift of the lower *jatis* have been found. In fact, *Mardum Shumari* presents a depressed picture of these *jatis*. At one place, it even indicates the frustration of the census reporters towards any breach of the general norm in the lower orders. At a later period, the Bhangis were rebuked for not announcing their arrival in the market places – *magar jo raj mein naukar hain ve apni aukat bhool gaye hai*¹⁴⁵. It says that the servants of the state have forgotten their status that they don't announce before arriving. As shown earlier, all these *jatis* were discriminated on the basis of their ritual status. Further, even the works on the artisanal *jatis* do not show the same trend of south India whereby the relative economic strength of the artisans made them pressurise the state for better status. Though a comparative study of the western and south Indian regions will be an interesting endeavour in this regard, it is difficult to explicate this difference at this point.

But, why the menials could not experience such mobility? M.N. Srinivas opines that there exists a 'hiatus' between the ritual status of a *jati* and its politico-economic standing. Most of the times, the achievement of one is followed by the other two.¹⁴⁶ An evaluation of the menials on all these three grounds shows their depressed status which was difficult to uplift. As indicated earlier, the occupations practised by them were mere extensions of their traditional works, which gave them very less

¹⁴⁴Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16th-18th centuries*, Ch.4 (The State and the Caste System).

¹⁴⁵ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 584.

¹⁴⁶ M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, p. 203.

opportunities to enhance their economic position. The presence of certain affluent elements in every *jati* couldn't have stimulated the process of collective social mobility; rather these were instances of individual mobility. The example of the Mahajans shows that only reasonably good economic position could win higher status for lower groups. The indispensability of such groups was to be felt by the society and state.¹⁴⁷ This was never the case with the menials in terms of their economic resources. In fact they were indispensable, but in the service sector. Even in the political arena, rather than being the main actors, they assumed the side roles as head of the *jati* or low government servants. Thus, a 'corporate' mobility of these groups was not just difficult, but near to impossible.

CONCLUSION

The colonial construction of the myth of static nature of caste order gave rise to various misconceptions about the Indian society. The homogenisation of the religious, socio-economic or occupational political stature of the different units of a *jati* was just one of those. The myth failed to oversee the varying contours in the internal walls of a *jati*. This study of the status of the menials of Marwar tried to unravel the internal mechanism of these highly heterogeneous *jatis*. The multiple levels of status in a single *jati* were shown to prove that every *jati* was like a micro organism in the body of caste society with the same differential in status. The treatment of the lower *upjatis* by the higher ones was almost a replica of that of the lower *jatis* by the higher counterparts. The inter-relationship between lower *jatis* also resembled this picture. However, the difference in economic status again cut across the ritual differences to upgrade the low.

Furthermore, oppression was an omnipresent phenomenon in medieval Marwar. The only recognizable difference was between the degrees of oppression faced by one. Also, the caste society wasn't unidirectional in terms of the oppression or subordination faced by the lower *jatis* at the hands of the higher. In fact it was a three dimensional unit in which the different blocks were at constant conflict to

¹⁴⁷ Dilbagh Singh, 'The Role of the Mahajans in the Rural Economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century', *Social Scientist*. He has shown that the Mahajans played a very important role in the rural economy. Not alone to the peasants, but they also advanced loans to the *jagirdars* and the state.

show their comparative strength over the other. Ritual status was not the only criteria of being placed over the others. Even economic and political clout gave considerable lift to one's status. Though one can generalize that the sum total of the status of all Rajputs or Brahmins (or any other high *jati*) was better than the Balai or Bhangi, he/she can't underestimate the fact that many-a-times high contacts or economic uplift did make them stronger than many high *jati* members. Therefore, there is nothing wrong in contending that in 18th century Marwar, caste was not always coterminous with class. Despite all these nuances in the inter relationship of the various *jatis* of Marwar, it could be said that the menials could've never experienced a collective social mobility due to an overall low ritual status as well as a lack of opportunity to avail a unified high economic status of a *jati*. This was one of the reasons of their adoption of sanskritised ways of life later.

Between the Devil and the Deep Sea

History reflects the marginalisation of women on every front. The silence of historians on women's issues shows that they were seen as mere appendages to men. Even though recent feminist scholars have traced the histories of royal or elite women, those of the lower caste/class women are still shrouded in darkness. This chapter on the menial caste women of Marwar is a modest contribution in this direction.

Based on their day-to-day experience, this chapter seeks to explore the status of these women in and outside their households. It analyses the ways in which the subordinate sex status as well as subordinate *jati* status affected the lives of the menial caste women. This examination finds relevant sprinkling of comparisons between the high and low caste women, in terms of particular customs and practices. The sole motive of this comparative exercise is to better understand the omnipresent patriarchal set-up and its convoluted manifestations. For the purpose of convenience, this chapter has been divided into two parts: the first one, *Me, My Family and My World* deals with the inner circle of the lives of menial caste women, which was occupied by family life and related issues. The second one, *Me, My Security and the Outer World* elucidates their interface with the world outside their family.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

Before moving on to the main theme, it is necessary to have a quick overview of the works done on lower caste/class women of medieval period. Though there are no particular works on menial caste women per se, there are some on lower caste women. Most of them tend to show the different dimensions of women's work in the different phases of medieval period. Some attempt at showing the status of these women in the background of the practices prevalent among the lower castes. The further details will be discussed during the course of the discussion.

The first work is '*Women and Work in Indian History*' of Vijaya Ramaswamy¹. This presidential address of Ramaswamy opens the floodgates of knowledge regarding the 'most neglected segment' of women's studies. She has briefly reviewed the efforts of looking at women and work in the broader historical context of peninsular India. Though her work deals with the work participation of women from different strata of society, it focuses more on the lower caste/class women of south India. Since this work provides the historical methods for scrutinizing the correlation between women and work in the ancient, medieval and modern periods, it is mandatory to discuss it at greater lengths.

Ramaswamy begins by saying that women's work has been neglected so much on the pretext of being unrecorded, informal and unproductive that not only men, but even women fail to view the productivity and utility sides of their works. She deprecates the representation of women in terms of polarities – 'private' and 'public' women, and goes on to explain this division on the basis of traditional values attributed to women in the Manusmriti. For a better understanding of women's participation in work, the different sectors have been categorised as follows – farm work, dairy farming, handloom sector, craft industry(pottery, basketry, mat-weaving, pith work and garland making), high profile work spheres, entertainment industry(dancing girls, *devadasis* and prostitutes), maids and menials and wet nurses, foster wives and midwives. This work not only shows the various kinds of tasks and trades performed by women in these sectors, but also attempts at understanding the social and economic status of women in peninsular India through the medium of folk songs. In the face of the availability of andocentric historical texts alone, the folk song genre of sources contributes immensely to the understanding of women's status in historical societies as perceived by women themselves.

As far as possible, Ramaswamy has tried to present the economic dimensions of women's work in the past. Moreover, she tries to trace the continuity of various works done by women in ancient and medieval periods and duly carried on in the modern times with minor alterations. Such a methodology will be of great help to the young scholars of social and economic history.

¹ Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Women and Work in Indian History', Mamidipudi Venkata Rangaiya Memorial Lecture, *Andhra Pradesh History Congress*, Nagarjunakonda, 2005.

Further, Ramaswamy elucidates the changing perspectives on women's work, which are otherwise considered as nothing more than an extension of the domestic works. She argues that in the modern times, the so-called women's work or profession were taken over by men once they became profitable. For example, breweries, cooking and catering, fisheries, etc. Finally, she looks at women's history as a part and parcel of broader political and socio-economic movements like communists, *dalits* and the naxalites where, by and large, patriarchal roles of women are carried forward.

This work is an honest attempt at examining the socio-economic contours of women's work in the past. An exhaustive bibliography, adoption of new methodologies, free movement up and down the time scale proves this point. However, the only lacuna is the neglect of other genre of sources, such as paintings. Art historians often point out that at times pictorial evidences speak more than textual informants. This source would have definitely provided newer angles to Ramaswamy's arguments. Nevertheless, in view of the scarcity of works on lower caste/class women, this article stands out as a milestone.

A similar work mostly focussing on the types of work done by lower class women of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh in the pre-colonial times is '*Work and Gender in Pre-Colonial India*' by Shireen Moosvi². In a similar fashion as Ramaswamy, Moosvi has represented women's roles in the different sectors in medieval India. Such fields are agriculture, industry, sundry professions like inn-keeping, serving wine in taverns, singing and dancing, performing acrobatic stunts, working as physicians, domestic servants, etc and in elite professions (managing lands, trade and property, writing Persian poetry, artistry such as painting). It is quite obvious that barring the elite professions, all other works were mostly done by the lower caste/class women in Indian history. Further, she questions the lower sex ratios even among the economically significant lower caste women, without explicating it.

The concluding remarks seek to show the independent status of the labouring class women as well as the property rights and better economic status of elite women in Mughal India. She contends that lower class women were given easier and convenient works so that they could contribute to the household economy without

² Shireen Moosvi, 'Work and Gender in Pre-Colonial India', in *Socio-economic Consequences of Sex-Ratios in Historical Perspective, 1500-1900*, Milan, 1994, pp. 105-116.

doing much labour or hampering the household chores. However, the article ends abruptly after devoting a small paragraph to the changes in women's work status in the colonial times.

Though the article is an interesting read for a layman, it is full of flaws for a historian. The upcoming theme of work and gender needs a clear understanding of the changing contours of the Indian society along with corroboration from various genres of sources. This has been completely ignored by Moosvi. Though Moosvi cites pictorial evidences from various regions of India, the British surveys of only eastern UP and Bihar have been referred to. It is a noted fact that cultural traditions which shape women's roles in society vary according to class, caste, region, religion, etc. Any attempt at homogenizing various regions on the pretext of gendered role depiction is uncalled for. Nevertheless, the useful thought provoking point raised for the socio-economic historians is the receding sex ratios in the lower classes as early as the 19th century.

Medieval Indian scholars have given special attention to women slaves in medieval history. Before discussing their works in detail, it has to be born in mind that these girls came from different backgrounds. Most of them were prisoners of war. Apart from that they were born to slave women or were sold as commodities in markets. There were both Hindu and Muslim slave girls. Their sources show that they mostly hailed from the lower classes. A sizeable portion of this group must have been from the lower castes as well. Researches show that their status and experience were related to the political scenario of the times. Many of them rose from poverty and went on to becoming influential figures of all times.

Works depicting their changing status under varying conditions are numerous. One such work is '*Women Slaves in Medieval India*' by Shadab Bano.³ This article focuses on the fluctuations in the status and role of slave girls in the Mughal harems of Babur, Humayun and Akbar and Jahangir. She starts with the elucidation of the miserable condition of slave girls as shown in the *Lekhpadhati* documents of Gujarat. However, she goes on to depicting this class as a 'category of privileged slaves' under the Mughals. Slave girls were readily seen assuming the status of

³ Shadab Bano, "Women Slaves in Medieval India", *Indian History Congress*, 65th Session, Bareilly, 2004, pp. 116-124.

concubines of the ruler. In Babur's harem, they constituted a class of women of honour and exalted status. Depending upon the proximities with the ruler and by virtue of motherhood, they could become begums or queens as well. However, such a respectable position was lost with the expansion of the harem. There was marked differentiation between the wives and concubines since Akbar's reign onwards. While the concubines were called *paristan* (or worshippers or attendants) in Akbar's times, they were addressed as *khawas-i-khidmatgaran* (or lady servants) during Jahangir's period. Therefore, there was a marked difference in their status since the centralisation of the Mughal Empire started. The explication or correlation of their status to the political conditions of the times is completely missing in the article. Though Bano's work is engaging, it lacks a central theme which binds together any work. This could be the reason behind an abrupt end of the article.

During the course of their life, slave girls were related to a myriad of professions. The profession of performing artists or courtesans was just one of it.⁴ Scholars have shown that the careers of courtesans weren't restricted to their profession alone. In fact, a few figures rose to great heights in the political arena due to their capabilities. One such woman was Munni Begum, the widow of Meer Ja'afar of Bengal. In his article named '*Profile of a Slave Girl Munni Begam, a Widow of Meer Ja'afar*', Z.U.Malik⁵ traces the social mobility in the career of Munni Begum from a slave girl to a trusted friend of Warren Hastings. Not only was she the principal manager of the household establishments of Bengal, but also enjoyed far more wealth, power and popularity than the *Nawab* of Bengal himself. She sailed through the crests and troughs of her political career along with Hastings to become the potent force behind the *Nizamat* of Bengal.

Such a rise could be attributed to her intelligence, political acumen as well as the social environment. Malik explicates her ascension to power by calling it as a social phenomenon of the 18th century, which gave opportunities to the women of this class 'to break into the close aristocracies of birth and wealth' and acquire higher status.

⁴ See Madhu Trivedi, 'Female Performing Artists in North India: A Survey', in A.J. Qaisar and S.P.Verma (ed.) *Art and Culture: Painting and Perspective*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1997. Trivedi traces the change in the status and function of the female performing artists from the ancient to the modern times.

⁵ Z.U Malik, 'Profile of a Slave Girl Munni Begam, A Widow of Meer Ja'afar', in Kiran Pawar (ed.) *Women in Indian History*, Vision and Venture Publishers, New Delhi, 1996.

Similar were the cases of Mastani and Udhan Bai, the concubines of Baji Rao I and Mohammad Shah respectively.

This article truly depicts the changing configurations in the status of women of humble origins in the 18th century vis-a-vis those in the 16th and 17th. The social mobility of slave girls which was restricted only to the harems in the previous two centuries, gave way to one where they saw new horizons in the political arena. Z.U. Malik's work stands out as far as the changing status of slave women in the 18th century is concerned.

Irfan Habib's '*Exploring Medieval Gender History*'⁶ seeks to investigate the plight of women of all strata in medieval India. The conceptualization of women and work is just a part of it. Habib reflects on the underestimation of women's work in history. He gives a vivid picture of the works done by the lower class women in the agricultural and textile sectors. Certain evidences are churned out of medieval texts to show the underpayment of women workers in comparison to their male counterparts. Lower payment of the low caste women has been related to the production relations between the high and the low castes in society, wherein the lower payment is seen as a strategy to make goods cheaper for them. He talks of 'gender oppression and caste exploitation' in medieval India, but fails to explain his contention in detail. Habib involves the themes of oppression in the higher class women as well, but, once again does it in haste without much involvement. Moreover, while talking of medieval gender history, the scenario in the sultanate period has almost been neglected.

Apart from the aforesaid works which deal with the nature and features of economic participation of lower caste women, there are others which seek to show their social status through an in depth study and analysis of certain practices prevalent among them. Widowhood remains a hotspot of such initiatives. Many works have tried understanding this practice under the dominant patriarchal umbrella of the Indian society. One such work is '*The 'Other' Culture: Craft Societies and Widow Remarriage in Early Modern India*' by Nandita Prasad Sahai⁷. She attempts to

⁶ Irfan Habib, "Exploring Medieval Gender History", Paper for Symposium: Gender in Indian History, IHC, (61st) Millennium Session, Calicut, 2000.

⁷ Nandita Prasad Sahai, "The Other Culture: Craft Societies and Widow Remarriage in Early Modern India", *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 19, No.2, (summer 2007), pp. 36-58.

display the multicultural picture of India through the elucidation of widowhood among the lower castes of western Rajasthan. This study locates India on a different canvas that is free of the clichéd strokes of sati and widow seclusion as the only options for widows.

The artisanal society has been focussed to show the practice of *nata* or widow remarriage with all its prescriptions and proscriptions from the lower and higher *jatis*. Sahai contends that the practice of widow remarriage was driven by the economic necessity of the poor artisanal society and not by the will to grant sexual freedom to women. In fact, while marrying off a widow, practices like caste endogamy, levirate, incest taboos, etc were heeded by the community as a whole. Women constituted an important economic unit, both in natal or in-laws households. The prevalence of the practice of bride price showed the commoditization of their person in the institution of marriage. Since widows made cheaper wives than virgins they were preferred more by poor artisans who wanted both an earning hand as well as a fertile womb. On the other hand, the community, the power holders and the state were yet another partner in this economic transaction as revenue generators. Further, ideologically the higher *jatis* differentiated between high and the low on the basis of the practise of remarriage. Moreover, it also increased the human capital under their command. Therefore, widow remarriage wasn't for the good of the widows, but that of the society and state at large. Against this background it could be suggested that the destiny of widows was not left to her, but was decided by her families, society and state. As Sahai puts it, 'women were treated as mere conduits of relationships rather than equal partners in these transactions'. She concludes with the contention of the omnipresence of patriarchy in all castes. It is only the manifestation of the dominant practice that changes in different locales, thereby always leaving women at the receiving end.

Pauline Kolenda attempts at doing something different in her article headed as '*Widowhood among "Untouchable" Chuhras*'.⁸ She has given a view of the kinship patterns of the Rajputs and *Chuhras* or scavenger *jati* of Khalalpur village in UP. The latter and the former have been compared to show that they share a common kinship pattern to a considerable extent, and that the differences between them are

⁸ Pauline Kolenda, "Widowhood among Untouchable Chuhras", in Akos Astor, Lina Fruzzeti, Steve Barnett (ed.), *Kinship, Caste and Marriage in India*, OUP 1983, pp.172-220.

issues of conformity or defiance of the shared traditional norms. Here, Kolenda shows the prevalence of widow remarriage and *Niyoga* or levirate in traditional Brahmanism, thus, showing that these practices weren't unsanskritic since the beginning. While the higher *jatis* arrested their practise at some point in history, their lower caste brothers continued them for economic reasons. This later on became the basis of differentiation between the two. As is evident, Kolenda has shown the kinship pattern of the two through the in depth study of the practice of widowhood among the *Chuhras*.

Further, Kolenda also comes up with an interesting depiction of the hierarchy of status of *Chuhra* widows depending upon the distance between the new groom and the dead husband as also the sexual conduct of the widow. The practice of levirate led this socio-cultural ladder of status. This is to say that, remarriage with brother-in-law was considered the most favoured option. The consent of the widow and her natal family was to be taken before that. Next were the secondary marriages with the deceased husband's paternal or maternal cousins respectively. The last type of marriage in this hierarchy was that with a stranger. Here, an interesting observation was that the widow could be sold by the cross cousins after mating. The same could be done in cases of adultery as well. This shows that once again women were like puppets in the hands of patriarchal traditions; the sexuality of the widow was conditioned by the in-laws family (as in the higher *jatis*). This confronts the earlier contention of Kolenda that as wage earners, the lower caste women stood 'close to equal' to their husbands. Unlike their upper caste counterparts, they remained free of assimilation to their husbands. Also, they weren't considered 'spiritual hazards' to their men's lives as in the case of the higher *jatis*. The conditioning or punishing of the sexuality of widows through their sale and resale questions the veracity of Kolenda's proposition. Therefore, one can confidently accept Uma Chakravarti's opinion that 'while enforced widowhood was the rule among the high castes, enforced cohabitation maybe said to be the rule for widows of the lowest castes'⁹.

It could be said that in comparison to other aspects of history, gender history from below still remains immensely peripheral to historical concerns. All the aforesaid works give a microscopic view of some or the other aspect in the life of the lower

⁹ Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.30, No.36 (September 9, 1995), p. 2248-2256.

jati women. An in depth and focused study of these women in and outside the household is yet to be explored. One has to pick up microcosmic units of a larger whole to weave the social history of the menial *jati* women. The present chapter is one such attempt to elucidate the history of Marwari menial *jati* women.

ME, MY FAMILY AND MY WORLD

In the brahmanical tradition, the careers of caste and women were inextricably intertwined. As 'gateways' or 'points of entrance into the caste system'¹⁰, women were both affected by as well as affected the caste order. This ancient Indian truism was found in the menial caste society of Marwar as well. The menial caste women were blamed of affecting the *jati* order in different ways. Most often, they were seen as the reason behind the relegation of a *jati* or *upjati* to a lower *jati* status. For example, *Mardum shumari Raj Marwar* reports that one of the four ways in which rajput men were relegated to the status of Bhambhis was when they fell in love with a Meghwal women (*meghwal aurato ke moh se*).¹¹ Further, the Baid Nais (an *upjati* or sub-caste of Nai *jati*) were seen as mere offshoots of the Maru Nais (another *upjati*). The cause of this fission in the much esteemed parent *upjati* (ie, Maru Nai) was the midwifery occupation of the wives of some Nais. It resulted in the initial abrogation of interdining practices and marriages with this 'unclean' group and later in the formation of the *upjati* of Baid Nai.¹²

Apart from affecting the *jati* order, the menial caste women were also affected by it in innumerable ways. In actuality, caste impinged on every terrain of their lives, ranging from aspects as simple as food habits and dress codes to their overall status in society. As the most significant custodians of their *jati* traditions, they were the markers of the socio-economic hierarchy in ways more than one.

¹⁰ Uma Chakravarti, "Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State, *EPW*, Vol.28, No.14, April 1993, p. 273.

¹¹ *Mardum shumari*, p. 528.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 457.

As an important factor in the 'ritual idiom of purity and pollution', food made women the key players in the hierarchical ordering of castes.¹³ The deficiency of information on the food related customs and habits of the menial caste women at this juncture severely handicap any discussion on the subject. Nevertheless, the practice of feeding on left over food of higher castes or carrions prevalent among the menial *jatis* reflected their subordinate status.

Clothes and accessories constituted a definite factor representing their distinct and subjugated identities. For example, the female attires and ornaments of even the different sub-castes of the Meghwal/Bhambhi *jati* were different.¹⁴ If this variance is to be hypothesized, it could be suggested that the differences in attires and ornaments were maintained to mark out the social, economic and political statures of the different sub-units of the same *jati*. For instance, believed to have evolved from the Rajputs, Jats or Charans, the various sub-castes of Bhambhis saw some similarities in their women's clothes and accessories with those of the parent *jatis*. Such similarities were also found in the marriage rituals as well¹⁵. The *upjati* hierarchy within the Bhambhi *jati* resembled the *jati* hierarchy of the caste society. This is to say that the Maru Bhambhis were seen as socially superior to the Jata or Charaniya Bhambhis. Political superiority was also marked by such differences in clothes and ornaments. While Maru or Jat Bhambhi women could only wear bronze or brass ornaments, the wives of Village Bhambhis (*Gaon* Bhambhis) had the right to wear silver anklets and gold necklaces. In the absence of information on men's attires and accessories, it cannot be said as to what extent their *jati* or *upjati* status determined the type of dresses and ornaments worn. However, *Mardum Shumari* does specify that not much difference was found between the various subcastes of Bhambhi in this arena. Also, the Village Bhambhi was given a special turban and a stick by the state on his assumption of the post.

As said earlier, such distinctions in a private arena like dress and ornaments were maintained to recognize one *upjati* or *jati* from the other. It was seen that even though the women of the offspring *jatis* like Jat or Charaniya Bhambhis wore certain

¹³ Leela Dube, 'Caste and Women', in Anupama Rao (ed.), *Gender and Caste: Issues in Contemporary Feminism*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2003. (I rely immensely on this work because Dube's arguments greatly support my insights from the archival sources.)

¹⁴ *Mardum shumari*, pp. 528-529

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

clothes and ornaments like those of the parent *jatis*, they could not use insignia of royalty or high caste status. This is quite evident from the fact that while Jat women wore both tusk and lacquer bangles, their Jata Bhambhi counterparts could wear only lacquer bangles. Perhaps the local community bodies were responsible for the maintenance of such customary differences.¹⁶ As the upholder of social order, even the state protected or guarded the distinctions between such customs of the high and the low castes. *Mardum shumari* informs that Bhangi women, who normally wore lacquer bangles, could wear those of tusk only with the state's permission.¹⁷ It simply shows that aspects as simple as dress and jewellery which normally depend upon the personal choice of a woman were determined by the society and state in the case of menial caste women of Marwar. The sole reason behind it was for demarcating clear cut boundaries between the castes.

Marriage was yet another entity which not only showed the status and identity of the menial jati women but also distinguished between the high and the low *jatis*. As far as the sacred institution of marriage was concerned, it implied much more than a legal sanction for sexual gratification and reproduction. In actuality, it was an 'economic necessity'¹⁸ for all, be it the menial castes, their community, the higher castes or even the state. In the case of the menial castes, marriage (*vyaah/shadi*) or widow remarriage (*nata*) were more like economic transactions where bride price (*reet/reeti ke paise*) was paid by the groom's family to relinquish all claims of the bride's family on her labour and fertility. The following documents demonstrate the prevalence of the system of bride price.

A petition report of C.E. 1770 from Merta *kachedi* reads¹⁹ -

A Dhobi named Nath came and said that a Dhoban from Kaekeed was wed in a village named Peepadh and was staying in Devgarh. In the month of *Asoj* (roughly October) her husband died. On her way to Peepadh, she was abducted by the Mers (a criminal caste). She was released after two months by a Jain from Devgarh. She

¹⁶ So far no evidences have been found in the support of this proposition. However, since the caste communities were responsible for conditioning the conduct of its members, there are fair chances of them dictating the women on the types of clothes and jewellery to be worn.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 584

¹⁸ Prem Chowdhry, 'Customs in a Peasant Economy: Women in Colonial Haryana', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989, p. 310.

¹⁹ JSPB 10, V.S.1827/1770, f. 118A.

gave birth to a girl child in the month of *Chait* (roughly April), who died after a month. In the month of *Jaith* (June), Nath sent remarriage papers to her natal and in-laws families. He was ready to pay the bride price. However, another Dhobi named Jodhi complained that the father of the girl child wasn't known. Therefore, Nath had to pay a fine of Rs.16. The Dhoban's uncle also paid Rs.16 because the delivery happened in his house. Other four men present during the delivery were also fined Rs.10. Nath had paid Rs.13. The state ordered that Nath need not pay the fine if the truth was like that.

A document of C.E.1769 from Siwan Kachedi reports²⁰ -

Dhedh Lakhiya of village Vithoja came and said that his brother Kasae married the sister (a widow) of Dhedh Kana of village Thapan. He was to pay fifty rupees (as bride price). Rupees twelve had already been paid. Later the girl's mother fixed her marriage elsewhere. Rs. twenty-five were to be taken from Lakhiya by the Darbar or *kachedi* (perhaps as marriage tax). Lakhiya went and fought in the *kachedi* when a Dhedh there asked him to pay Rs. twenty-five more. (Since the bride wasn't given to Kasae, his brother Lakhiya wasn't supposed to pay marriage tax. Problems cropped up when he was asked to pay it.) The state asked as to why the authorities took twenty five rupees like that. It ordered that if the truth was like that then they had to give an answer, as also give back the amount to Lakhiya's brother Kasiya.

Mardum shumari shows that the quantum of bride price was different in the four different *jatis* (Nai, Dhobi, Balai, Bhangi). While the Nais paid the highest, the Balais paid the lowest (the rate for the Bhangi *jati* isn't available). Interestingly, the quantum paid by the menial *jatis* was directly proportional to their social status in the caste hierarchy. This is to say that the higher the menial *jati* ranked in the caste ladder, the more bride price it paid. Another way of looking at this information is that since a *jati* was comparatively better off, it paid more and likewise in the case of the poorer *jatis*. For example, even if the Baid Nais generally paid more (35 rupees) than the Balais(7 rupees) or the Dhobis(13 rupees) in marriages, they paid lesser

²⁰ JSPB 9, V.S. 1826/1769, f.149A.

than Maru Nais(40-60 rupees). As said earlier, Maru Nais were higher than the Baid Nais in the ritual hierarchy. However, exceptions were there in every *jati*.²¹

Another interesting fact gleaned from the readings of *Mardum Shumari* is that probably the groom's family spent equally or more than the bride's family. Apart from the bride price, perhaps the marriage tax to the community was also paid by them. This was gleaned from the case of Baid Nais, which has been discussed a little later. Further, they spent in the wedding rituals as well. In fact, among the Balais, if the father of the groom didn't have the capacity to spend around hundred rupees in customs like *odawani* (a ritual performed by the bride's father, in return of which the groom's father was supposed to give money) in the *barat* or marriage procession, he was supposed to refrain from going in the *barat*.²² Perhaps this rule might have been a kind of status symbol, where groom's fathers shunning the procession were mocked by the society.²³ Undoubtedly, the reason behind all this investment was to acquire a girl for both production and reproduction. Her potentials were utilised till the marriage lasted.

Similarly, even the Caste Panchayats and the State were entitled to get marriage (*vyohaar ke paise*²⁴) or remarriage taxes. The evidence for the former is again derived from *Mardum Shumari*. The Baid Nais paid five rupees to the *Panchas*.²⁵ Perhaps this amount was also paid by the groom's family.²⁶ The latter was claimed by the State, and no nuptial ties could legally materialize without the state's permission. This is known from the complaint of Lakhiya, in which, unknowingly the state asked for the tax even when the marriage didn't take place.²⁷

The *jatis* under discussion practised widow remarriage (*nata*) as well. The marriage either happened from the natal (*peehar*) or in-laws house, (*sasra/sasri*). While in the

²¹ See the section on social mobility in chapter 2.

²² *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 531-532.

²³ In contemporary north India, the bride's family undergoes same humiliation if it doesn't spend according the wishes of the groom's family or community rules.

²⁴ The same term has been used for bride price as well. Therefore, it's not an independent term for marriage tax to the community Panchayat.

²⁵ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 457.

²⁶ This could be proposed from the way in which *Mardum Shumari* talks about the money given to the bride's parents and *panchas* - *vidhwa aurat ka nata sanichar ki raat ko hota hai jiske vyohar ke 15/- aurat ke maa baap aur 5/- panch lete hain*, meaning a widow is wedded on Saturday night, for which her parents take 15/- and *panchas* take 5/- .

²⁷ See the last page for more details of the document.

case of Maru and Baid Nais²⁸, it happened in the natal house; in the Bhangis²⁹ it took place in that of the in-laws. The earlier document of a Dhobi Nath who wanted to marry a widow,³⁰ shows that perhaps in the Dhobi community, permission was sought from both the families of the widow. It could be the same in the other three *jatis* as well. The document also shows that the sanctification of marriage required documentation (*kagad karaye*) as well. By far more cases of remarriage have been found than marriage. Not that marriage with virgins wasn't liked, but to the lower caste men, marriage with a widow was 'a pragmatic choice'³¹ that entailed less expensive economic transaction for a woman's labour and fertility. *Mardum shumari Raj Marwar*, shows that in all the four *jatis*, lesser bride price was to be paid for widows than virgins. If seen in a coarse sense, then, a widow could be equated to a used second hand commodity which is always cheaper than a new one. The issue of virginity made them cheaper in these socio-economic transactions. This again points out that even though the menial *jatis* weren't obsessed with the virginity or chastity of their women, it did have some significance. This very significance made the virgins costlier than the widows in the marriage market.

Widow Remarriage was beneficial to the higher castes as well. Not only did it provide an ideological basis to them to demean the lower castes but also the material basis to exploit their productive potentials to the maximum. In many parts of India, the lower castes were identified in a pejorative sense as widow remarrying castes or *natrayat jatis*³². In this context, Uma Chakravarti's³³ contention becomes indispensable –

'The stringent control of female sexuality among other 'non-labouring' high castes with permanent enforced widowhood at the apex of the cultural codes becomes the index for establishing the highest rank in the caste system.'

Therefore, the upper caste/class women were given 'social death' after husband's death and were forced to undergo 'brutal defeminisation rituals' like tonsure and

²⁸ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 456-457.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 583.

³⁰ For more details of the document, see the last page.

³¹ For more details on the question of widow remarriage in lower castes, especially the artisanal castes of Marwar, see Nandita Prasad Sahai, "The Other Culture: Craft Societies and Widow Remarriage in Early Modern India", *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.19, No.2, (summer 2007).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 37

³³ Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.30,no.36(September 9, 1995), p. 2248

were used as 'drudge labour' in in-laws or natal families.³⁴ On the contrary, after widowhood lower caste women weren't considered 'sexually or socially dead'. However, this wasn't out of any concern for the widow, but for the benefit of the caste society at large. As shown earlier, there were various partners in the commodification of women with their own vested interests. By emphasizing upon the chastity of the widows of their communities, the higher castes ideologically legitimized their superior status over the lower castes. Moreover, this practice increased the human capital under their control. High population in the lower *jatis* provided more working hands, which were used in providing goods and services to the higher castes/class. Since widow remarriage provided double advantage to the 'superior' castes and economic benefits to the caste society and state at large, they protected and encouraged it. This comes forth in the following petition of C.E. 1764 from Merta *kachedi*³⁵ –

A Nai from Merta had taken 25 rupees from Surana Manak Chand (a rural banker). And the Nai was getting his widowed daughter remarried. Manak Chand took promise from the Nai and didn't let the remarriage materialise (he held back the marriage as the loan wasn't paid). The state ordered that since such transactions kept happening between people, remarriages couldn't be stopped on the pretext of failure to pay back loans.

Hence, widow remarriage in the lower castes could be easily termed as a patriarchal arrangement for the fuller utilisation of the productive and reproductive potentials of women by the society and state at large. For the same reason, both marriage and remarriage were made negotiable in many ways. The following document of C.E.1769 from Siwan *kachedi*³⁶ clarifies this point -

Dhedh Lakhiya of village Vithoja came and said that his brother Kasae married the sister (a widow) of Dhedh Kana of village Thapan. He was to pay fifty rupees (as bride price). Rupees twelve had already been paid. Later the girl's mother fixed her marriage elsewhere. Rs. twenty-five were to be taken from Lakhiya by the Darbar or *kachedi* (perhaps as marriage tax). Lakhiya went and fought in the *kachedi* when a

³⁴ Uma Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs and Domestic Drudges: Widowhood among Nineteenth Century Poona Brahmins", *Social Scientist*, Vol.21, No.9-11, (Sep-Nov 1993).

³⁵ JSPB No.1, V.S.1821/1764, F.62B. In such cases, the paternal concerns of the state towards its subjects were also involved.

³⁶ JSPB 9, V.S. 1826/1769, f. 149A.

Dhedh there asked him to pay Rs. twenty-five more. (Since the bride wasn't given to Kasae, his brother Lakhiya wasn't supposed to pay marriage tax. Problems cropped up when he was asked to pay it). The state asked as to why the authorities took twenty five rupees like that. It ordered that if the truth was like that then they had to give an answer, as also give back the amount to Lakhiya's brother Kasiya.

Perhaps the institution of marriage was negotiable between the giver and the taker of the bride, and she was given to the best payer. This inference is drawn from the fact that even after the breach of contract, the state did not ask its authorities to take actions against the defaulter woman. This negotiable character is also evident from the case of a Bhangi³⁷ who kept somebody else's wife in their house. In that case, he was free to ask the Caste Panchayat for help and even the *Panchas* granted the permission to keep the woman if she was ready. Such cases were also found in the artisanal *jatis* of Marwar, where a married woman's lover could marry her after paying some money (*bair ke paise*) to her husband.³⁸

The ways of channelization of the productive and reproductive potentials of the menial caste women constituted one of the ideological basis on which these castes were termed as '*kamins*' or low. Under the same patriarchal umbrella, their physical labour was thoroughly exploited. Unlike their upper caste counterparts for whom physical labour outside the house was a social taboo, the menial caste women were active players in the household economy. Out of all the household chores, fetching water from wells was one of the most difficult jobs in the water scarce region of Marwar. Fetching water from well is a typical of a woman's job even today. It was all the more difficult for the women of untouchable *jatis*.³⁹ Scarcity of clean drinking water, humiliation at the hands of upper caste women was a part of their daily experience in this job⁴⁰.

³⁷ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 583.

³⁸ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp.91.

³⁹ The untouchable *jatis* had different wells for drinking water. The state kept a strict vigil on them and disallowed them from having water from the common well of the villagers. This could be seen in the following documents – JSPB 3, V.S. 1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 260,261; JSPB 3, V.S. 1822/1765, f.49A, document no. 262.

⁴⁰ Bela malik, 'Untouchability and Dalit Women's Oppression', *Gender and Caste: Issues in Contemporary Feminism*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2003, p. 105. For more details, see the section on untouchability in chapter 1.

As discussed in chapter 2, the society and state maintained different wells for the untouchable *jatis*. The right to drinking water even from their community well could be randomly abrogated by the other higher caste villagers. The following document of C.E. 1765 from Merta *kachedi*⁴¹ clearly shows that –

A Balai from Mahevda village complained that he had always been drinking water from a separate well. But now, the villagers stop him from doing so. The state ordered that the Balai had been drinking water from his well. Therefore, the villagers shouldn't be allowed to say anything to him.

Since women fetched drinking water for their households, they would have been the worst sufferers of such caste based discrimination.

As 'productive' labourers, the wives worked with their men in the patron (*jajmans*) families or *Virats*.⁴² Either agriculture or any traditional occupation, the works done by these women contributed to the 'occupational continuity' of their *jatis*.⁴³ For instance a Baid Nai's (an *upjati* of Nai specializing in medical /surgical field) wife would specialize in midwifery (*bachche janana*) or other related 'dirty' works.⁴⁴ Caste endogamy was preferred to conserve this continuity. In fact *Mardum Shumari* shows that even the different *upjatis* within the same *jatis* did not prefer inter marriage. This hesitation was again occupation based. As shown earlier, the *upjati* of Baid Nai came into being when the parent *upjati* of Maru Nai underwent fission. This fission was due to certain groups among the Maru Nais whose wives took up the 'dirty' occupation of midwifery, and later who formed the Baid Nai *upjati*. Therefore, the *jatis* which needed their women to work gave *upjati* and *jati* specific works to them. In this sense it could be suggested that the cultural and economic needs for women's labour not only eclipsed their own interests but were culturally moulded in subtle ways to revolve around their caste occupations. At a greater level, such continuities were safeguarded by the state. The following document of C.E.1765 from *Pargana Sojhat*⁴⁵ shows that –

⁴¹ JSPB 3, V.S. 1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 260.

⁴² For more information on the concept, function and utility of *virat*, see Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 129-137.

⁴³ Leela Dube gives a brief account of women's works in Nai, Dhobi and untouchable *jatis* in North and Central India, "Gender and Caste", pp. 224-227.

⁴⁴ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 457-458

⁴⁵ JSPB 2, V.S.1822/1765, f. 68A

“The wife of a trader (*Oswal*) goes for collecting cow dung. Now, don’t let her go for dung collection.”

A possible explanation of this strict state order could be to maintain the caste distinctions by thrusting such ‘dirty’ works on the menial *jatis*. Just like fetching water from wells, even collection of cow dung and preparation of dung cakes were also meant to be done by women. Taking into consideration the household and the outdoor works, it could be suggested that not only did the menial caste women perform more works than their male counterparts, but they even did ‘dirtier’ works. This clearly brings out their status as the ‘downtrodden among the downtrodden’ in the sphere of work.

Undoubtedly, not work interest, but poverty was the reason behind women’s economic involvement in the public sphere. For the same reason their economic utility was given more importance than the control over their sexuality. This is not to say that they enjoyed ‘great sexual choices’⁴⁶ on the pretext of their economic importance, but just to underline the fact that cases of adultery (*chamchori*) or widow remarriage (*nata*) were negotiated and not stigmatized. As said before, such practices or customs were woven into the cultural fabric for the maximum utilization of women’s productive and reproductive capacities and not at all to provide sexual freedom to them.

Even though chastity wasn’t a social obsession⁴⁷ with the menials, their customary laws and caste councils aimed at moral policing of its members. The case of Dhobi Nath who was fined for the delivery of a Dhoban (washer woman) in his house because the father of the child wasn’t known is a case in point.⁴⁸ The reason behind fining Nath and others involved in the delivery could be two. Firstly, the complainant dhobi as well as the Dhobi community misunderstood Nath as the father of the child and fined him for getting involved in sexual activity before marriage. Secondly, Nath was accused of aiding and abetting a delivery where the father of the child wasn’t known. The commonality between both the reasons is the case of sexual misdemeanour. Anyone indulging in or abetting this offence was seen

⁴⁶ Nirmal Kumar, “Caste and Gender in Eighteenth Century Rajasthan”, *IHR*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Women were easily married off even after widowhood, rape, adultery, etc to reap their productive and reproductive benefits. For more details see, Nirmal Kumar, ‘Caste and Gender in Eighteenth Century Rajasthan’, *IHR*, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁸ For details of the document see p. 84-85.

as a defaulter. In *Mardum Shumari*, information on adultery and the related punishments are only available in the case of the Bhangis.⁴⁹ It shows that both men and women (widow or virgin) Bhangis getting involved in illegitimate relationships with other *jatis* were excommunicated. While men were taken back on the payment of fines (or *gunegari*), pregnant women were forgiven if they revealed the name of the man involved.⁵⁰ Further, if a Bhangi man brought along a married woman in his house (his beloved), and asked the *panchas* for help, after discussion among themselves the *panchas* used to give the permission to keep the woman. In cases where the women refused to stay with the man, the *panchas* made him pay hundred to hundred fifty rupees to the woman.

These cases definitely show both moral policing as well as the lax attitude of the community towards adultery in comparison to the higher castes, where adultery meant social death only for women. The punishments were negotiable but economically harsh for the Bhangis. Even when both worked, fines were collected only from men and not from women. In a sense, this could suggest that the resources of the family were more in the hands of men than women. The other possibility could be that women were thought to be economic assets for the society and state at large. Not in terms of money, but in that of addition of human capital, they paid their fines. For the same reason they weren't asked to abort the illegitimate child. The scarcity of information in the case of other *jatis* in this respect holds one from drawing conclusions in a collective sense. However, the attitude of the communities towards their adulterous members could be somewhat similar to that in the case of Bhangis.

At a higher level, even state judicial authorities did the same as the Caste Panchayats, if at all approached. Other types of punishments were confiscation of property, jail, rustication from job, expulsion from city, etc.⁵¹ Against this background, it could be said that there must have been 'constant tension between the

⁴⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 583.

⁵⁰ The further elaboration of this point will be possible with appropriate citations from archival sources, which haven't been obtained in their examination so far.

⁵¹ Nirmal Kumar, pp. 47-49.

need to allow women autonomy to conduct work in public spaces, and patriarchal imperatives of policing their sexuality and tightly disciplining their lives⁵².

The economic value of the menial caste women to the society and state entailed some kind of property rights as well. *Mardum Shumari* does give some information regarding the *stridhan*, literally meaning a woman's wealth, which the Bhambhi women got during marriage. They received jewellerys like ear-rings (*kano ke jhoontne*), bracelets (*kakni*) or worth five to ten rupees from their father and silver necklace (*chandi ki hansli*) of two rupees from their father-in-law.⁵³ It seems they were entitled to get their share in the husband's property as well. This is understood from the following document of C.E.1767 from Nagore *kachedi* -

Nai Gordhan, son of Kusala nai came and said that Aedan (his great grandfather) had two sons- Neta and Dhola. While the former had two grandsons, the latter didn't even have a son. Dhola's wife stayed with his father Kusala, but died in her original home. After her death, community meeting was held and it was decided that since she didn't have an heir her house should be left vacant. It had been lying vacant ever since then. Gordhan claimed that he was her heir. The State ordered to ask people who knew about the case; and if it happened like that then the house was to be given to Gordhan.⁵⁴

This document is important in many ways. Firstly, it shows the proprietary rights of women. Secondly, since an heirless widow was like a bank to her in-laws family, they would have been pleased to provide refuge to her. Thirdly, the property of a widow wasn't that easy to inherit. Though quite obvious from the above document, these hypotheses need further corroboration.

If seen as a form of property, then *virat* entailed the proprietary rights of its holders. Even women fought for their rights over their *virat*. One such document in the form of State order is of C.E. 1768 from Merta *Chauntara*⁵⁵-

⁵² Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p. 89.

⁵³ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 532-533.

⁵⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 17B.

⁵⁵ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 108B.

There is a dispute between Nai Lala and Nayan Chaina regarding *virat* or the area of work. So let their community (*nyat*) look into the matter and decide it. Keep it in a written form. Don't let them do anything which goes against this decision.

On the contrary, women also fought against the claims of pseudo patrons. The following document of C.E. 1769 from Nagore *kachedi*⁵⁶ presents one such case –

The step mother of the Meghwal of Doha village complained here that the Bhomiya Chandawat Dhano says that he is her patron master (*vasira*), while Meghwal ram says he isn't. The state ordered that *janiya* (or people who knew about the affair) from the village should be asked. If they said no, then she was to be freed.

It was more difficult for women to fight for their *virat* rights or the pseudo claims of the elites and local landlords over their labour. The menial caste men were oppressed by these elements on the pretext of their caste status but for women, it was their depressed caste status as well as subordinate sex status that made them doubly vulnerable.

In their lifetime, menial caste women got some respite from commodification and physical exploitation only in old age. Moreover, having passed their reproductive age, they were considered least 'dangerous' for the caste society and hence deserved some respect in their family as 'patriarchal elders'. Many-a-times they even took important decisions in the family. The earlier mentioned case of Lakhiya's brother, where his marriage didn't materialize even after some payment of bride price⁵⁷ is a case in point. Here, the mother of the girl fixed her marriage elsewhere even when Lakhiya's brother had paid some portion of the bride price. It definitely shows some agency of power in these women as elders in the family. However, the extent of androcentricism could be gleaned from the fact that even the older women weren't addressed by name, but in relation to their male relatives; Thus, signifying that women were seen as mere second fiddle to men and devoid of any selfhood.

⁵⁶ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 20A.

⁵⁷ For the whole document, see p. 85.

ME, MY SECURITY AND THE OUTER WORLD

Subordinate caste and sex status along with grinding poverty made the menial caste women highly susceptible to both low and high caste/class oppression. *Mardum shumari* reports that if a married Bhangi woman was brought by a Bhangi man to his house (*kisi doosre ki aurat ko ghar mein dal le*), he could seek permission from the *panchas* to keep her with him. However, if she wasn't ready then the Bhangi man was to pay her hundred to hundred fifty rupees. This clearly shows that punishments for crime against woman were mostly in terms of monetary fines.⁵⁸ Even though the amount was quite big for a poor Bhangi, it wasn't the same for richer ones. Measurement of the honour of women in terms of money had encouraged the victimisation of women not only in the menial and lower *jati* community but in the society at large. For the same reason the cases of such crimes were quite common in 18th century Marwar.

Over and above their 'subordinate sex' status, the subordinate caste status of women made them victims of high caste sexual exploitation. Since most of the menial caste people were poor, it was very easy for the upper caste/class men to victimize their women without facing much opposition. The fear of the powerful man mostly made the family of the victim silent in such cases.

A petition report of C.E.1768 from Parbatsar supports this contention⁵⁹-

At midnight, Singhvi Bhagwandas went to Nai Jagga's house. He sat on the Nayan's (Barber's wife) bed. Then she started shouting and gathered a crowd. The Singhvi ran away. The brother and nephews (her in-laws) asked her not to shout and they didn't even report the case. Therefore, the state has asked as to why no enquiry was done in this case and also ordered to do it.

⁵⁸ See Nirmal Kumar, "Crime and Gender in Eighteenth Century Rajasthan", *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XXX, no.1-2, Jan-July 2003.

⁵⁹ JSPB 8, V.S. 1825/1768, f. 215B.

Similarly, a case of 1765 from Merta reads⁶⁰ -

Wife of Nai Dhana of Bholasar village was abducted by Sankhala Dhana of village Palriwari in 1815(C.E.1758) when she was going to Malwa. The state has asked him to return the lady or to give an answer for this misconduct.

The last case shows the way in which both the state and society joined hands in doing injustice on a menial caste woman. Even after nine years of abduction, no punishment was given to the culprit. In fact he was simply asked either to return the lady or give an answer for abducting her. In this case, the question of monetary compensation stood out of question, simply because a rich and powerful man was involved. It shows the gross trivialization of a woman's person and honour, wholly attributed to her depressed caste status.

Abduction or 'casual robbery' often resulted in slavery like situation.⁶¹ Female family members voluntarily sold during famines or otherwise also met with the same fate. Once sold, it was very difficult to retrieve them. The following document of C.E.1765 from Merta *kachedi* supports this contention⁶² -

Nai Raja from Kaekeeda village complained that in 1822/1765 when Musraf Maoodas was the *hawaldar* in a village in south, the Village *Chaudhary* bought his niece (Raja's niece). She was sold for one rupee by Raja's nephews. However, the payment was never made. After I came back from Malwa, *hawaldar* Ratanbhan asked the *Chaudhary* to take five rupees and release the girl as she was to be married; but to no avail. The state ordered that after compensating for the money that *Chaudhary* spent on the upkeep of the girl, she should be returned to Raja.⁶³

This document further corroborates the argument of commoditisation of women. The extent to which the rules of economics were involved here could be gleaned from the simple fact that even the State official asked for the *Chaudhary* being compensated for the money that he spent on the girl. In fact it was a legal practice in

⁶⁰ JSPB 7, V.S.1824/1767, f. 198A.

⁶¹ Sumit Guha, "Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India, 1700-1800", in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *Slavery and South Asian History*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indiana Polis, 2006, p. 165.

⁶² JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 39A, document no. 197.

⁶³ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 39A, document no. 197.

Marwar⁶⁴, which shows that the rules of contract mattered more to the State than freedom of its poor subjects. Being at the hands of her male relatives, in this whole transaction the girl was the worst sufferer. Though the non payment to the brothers for the girl shows their inferior status in front of the *Chaudhary*, the sale and purchase of the girl by her own brothers shows her vulnerability in and outside the house.

Slavery in the *Chaudhary*'s house must have been an indispensable eventuality for the girl in this case. Slavery was very common in 18th century Marwar. Poverty and destitution during normal times, but, mostly during famines and poor political conditions coaxed the parents to sell their children. John Malcolm informs that most of the slaves in central India were from Marwar, driven out from the region due to Maratha excesses and incursions. He even says that majority of the slaves in that part of India were females.⁶⁵ Therefore, it could be inferred that most of the female slaves in central India were from Marwar. They worked as dancing girls, mistresses, domestic servants, etc. Malcolm says that most of the households, both high and low class had women slaves. Studies show that in 18th century Maharashtra, female slaves were obtained through many ways, and were employed in various domestic and outside works.⁶⁶ As slaves, women retained their caste status and it even determined the nature of work assigned to them. Sexual favours to the masters remained a perennially indispensable work for them.

The interface of menial castes women with the 'outer' world brings out two very striking yet interesting facts about their status. Firstly, the apathy shown by the state and society towards the victims of molestation, abduction, rape or slavery further corroborates the arguments of the 'commodification' of menial caste women and the refusal of their selfhood. They remained 'soft'⁶⁷ targets and subjects of the higher

⁶⁴ Nirmal Kumar, "Crime and Gender in Eighteenth Century Rajasthan", *IHR*, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, 2 vols., pp. 199-204.

⁶⁶ Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and State, Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries*, OUP, New Delhi, 1991, Rpr.1998, p. 114-137. For details on female slaves in royal or noble households in medieval Rajasthan, see Shashi Arora, "The Practice of Sale of Girls and their position in Rajasthan, 1700-1800 AD", *Proceedings of Rajasthan History Congress*, Bikaner Session, 1984, pp. 33-45.

⁶⁷ Sumit Guha, "An Indian Penal Regime: Maharashtra in the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present*, 147, 1995, pp. 101-126.

caste men and the state respectively. The leniency of the state towards the men of power and position could be evidenced in the above two cases. In the cases of retrieval of the victims, the state showed more concern for the agreements of the transactions than the freedom of the victims⁶⁸; thus showing its apathy towards the socio-culturally subordinated 'subordinate sex' and further encouraging slavery.

The insensitivity of the society towards the cause of women could be realised from a petition report of C.E.1770 from Merta *kachedi*⁶⁹ -

A Dhobi named Nath came and said that a Dhoban from Kaekeed was wed in a village named Peepadh and was staying in Devgarh. Her husband died in the month of Aaso (around October). On her way to Peepadh, she was abducted by the Mers (a criminal caste). She was released after two months by a Jain from Devgarh. She gave birth to a girl child in April, which died after a month. In the month of June, Nath sent remarriage papers to her natal and in-laws families. He was ready to pay remarriage tax. However, another dhobi named Jodhi complained that the father of the girl child wasn't known. Therefore, Nath had to pay a fine of Rs.16. The Dhoban's uncle also paid Rs.16 because the delivery happened in his house. Other four men present during the delivery were also fined Rs.10. Nath had paid Rs.13.

The state ordered that Nath need not pay the fine if the truth was like that.

Secondly, a considerable hypocrisy was maintained by the upper caste men in the observation of the ideologies of purity and pollution. While the lower caste men were discriminated on the grounds of their 'impure' work and status, aversion towards physical proximities and sexual relations with their women is not visible. The apparitions of untouchability were conjured or contained by the upholders of brahmanical patriarchy. The untouchable women were made 'socially touchable'⁷⁰ by the lust of upper caste men. The upper caste men were mere reapers of the benefits of the brahmanical faith, which, in the cases of sexual offence 'heavily

⁶⁸ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p. 96.

⁶⁹ JSPB 10, V.S.1827/1770, f. 118A.

⁷⁰ Bela malik, "Untouchability and Dalit Women's Oppression", *Gender and Caste: Issues in Contemporary Feminism*, p. 104

weighed in favour of upper caste men and ensured double exploitation of the female both on account of her gender as well as station in life'⁷¹

CONCLUSION

Sandwiched between the patriarchal arrangements in and outside family on one hand, and their 'subordinate' caste status on the other, the menial caste women were vulnerable to all round exploitation. They were mere social, cultural and economic pawns in the hands of people, who used them to their respective advantages. The Brahmanical cultural codes disallowed any socio-economic right, thereby making them the 'downtrodden among the downtrodden'. Bride-price, widow remarriage, right to work, property rights, etc among the menial castes may suggest better status of these women vis-a-vis upper caste women who suffered from unjust brahmanical practices like female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy, *purdah*, sati, etc. However, rather than posing as the indices of a comparatively better status of the menial caste women of a 'liberal' Rajasthan⁷², such practices among the menial *jatis* were mere patriarchal manifestations aimed at benefitting the state and society at large. They hardly catered to the interests and needs of these women. The historically crystallised customs in the brahmanical theory hardly provided respite to this lot. Thus, to conclude, it could be said that patriarchy persisted differently at different levels and locales in the early modern state of Marwar.

⁷¹ Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste: Origin, Functions and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 1998, p. 93.

⁷² Nirmal Kumar, 'Crime and Gender in Eighteenth Century Rajasthan', *IHR*. He attempts at showing the liberal attitude of the state and society towards women in early modern Rajasthan vis-à-vis that in the Gangetic plains. However, he fails to grasp the underlying patriarchal umbrella which recreates itself at every social hierarchal level.

The Endogenous and Exogenous worlds of the Menial *jatis*

This chapter intends to examine the overall standing of the menial *jatis* in the Marwari society along with the variations and exceptions. It starts with the elucidation of the various facets of everyday life like food, shelter, clothing, occupation, property, etc and tries to show their connection or disjunction with the ritual status of the menial *jatis* and the relevant explication as well. It seeks to show the nature and multiple dimensionalities of upper and lower caste struggle. What were the different ways of exploitation of the menial *jatis*? Was caste struggle a homogenous entity where the lower *jatis* were always oppressed? Did caste unequivocally determine the socio-economic position of the high and the low? If no, then why and what were the determinants of an alternate status? These are the questions which will be answered during the course of depiction of the menial *jati* status.

BEING A MENIAL

As a water scarce region, Marwar was always inhospitable to all in general. However, the low ritual status of certain groups complemented the harsh climatic conditions in further depressing their status. The extent of this depressed status can be gleaned through the analysis of the various aspects of their lives.

Food: *Mardum Shumari Raj Marwar* shows that the practice of eating the left over food of the superior *jatis* or even those marginally higher than them was prevalent among the four menial *jatis* under consideration. In fact, the following document of C.E. 1769 shows that they were entitled to take the left over food of feasts as well¹ -

Nai Gumana of village Repakhanch said that there was a feast in the village. After all the people had eaten, Nai Ganga started taking the left over food in the cooking

¹ *Jodhpur Sanad Parwana Bahi 9*, V.S.1826/1769, f. 78B

vessel (*kadhaayaa ri khurchan*). Then his father Kanna asked Ganga since it was his turn to have the left over, why Ganga was taking it. Then, they fought over it and Ganga threw Kanna in the furnace. Around ten days hence, Kanna passed away. The state ordered to call the Nais of the village and tell them to make Ganga give compensation to Gumana according to their *Nyat* or community rules.

This document unravels many interesting facts about the Nais which further aid in understanding the status of the other three *jatis* (Dhobi, Bhambhi, Bhangi) as well. Firstly, the very practice of accepting the left over after feasts elucidates the penurious state of the Nais. Secondly, there was immense competition for the left over food, which normally was worth throwing. Thirdly, the left overs were to be taken by each Nai according to his turn. This systematisation of fixing turn shows the wide prevalence of this practice among the Nais. All this appears perplexing given the fact that the Nais had a better ritual and social status than the other three *jatis*.

Mardum Shumari points out that these four *jatis* did not accept left over food from those *jatis* which they considered lower (*neech*) than themselves. For example, a Nai never accepted it from *Mochi* or *Ghachi jatis* (*ye mochi ghachi vagaira neech kaum ki roti nahi khate*).² The Dhobis did the same with Bhangis and *Chamars*.³ Interestingly, even the Bhangis maintained the same disgust towards the Dhobis, *Sansis*, *Dholis* and *Satiyas*.⁴ A further explication of such apprehensions will be provided a little later.

Feeding on carcasses was yet another practice which was very widespread in the two untouchable *jatis*, i.e., Bhambhi and Bhangi. Still there were some differences in the culinary habits of the two. While the Bhambhis ate almost all dead animals including cow, bull, buffalo, sheep and goat, they did not consume pig⁵ or dog. On

² *Mardum Shumari Raj Marwar*, pp.458

³ Ibid. p. 554. *Mardum Shumari* says that the *Sansis* were lower than the Bhangis in the caste hierarchy. Perhaps they were nomadic groups involved in miscellaneous activities including pilferage of cattle, etc (pp. 585-589); *Dholis* were musicians groups who used to play different kinds of instruments on various occasions and festivities. They were also thought to be polluted *jatis*. (p. 364-369). *Satiyas* were those groups whose daughters worked as sex workers, catering to the needs of the lower *jatis* of Marwari society(pp. 389-391)

⁴ Ibid. p. 585.

⁵ Ibid. p. 527, 533.

the other hand, the Bhangis ate dead cow, buffalo, camel, horse as well as pig and dog.⁶

Clearly, while all these *jatis* were menial, there was a hierarchy among them as well. To start with, food represented this hierarchy. It is to be noted that both left over food and dead animals⁷ were thought to be polluted in the brahmanical society. However the degree of pollution depended upon the status of the *jati* whose left over it was or the type of the dead animal. Since cow was considered holy in the brahmanical society, the *jatis* eating them were looked down upon. This is evident from the way in which *Mardum Shumari* talks about the habit among the Bhambhis of eating beef - *khaane mein itne sarableel hain ki mari hui guy bhi kha jaate hain*. It means that they are omnivorous to such an extent that they even eat dead cow. Similarly, pig was considered a very dirty animal in the brahmanical faith. The *jatis* which ate pork were considered very lowly or *neech*. Therefore, even though the Bhambhis were a *neech jati* in the Marwari society, they were better than the Bhangis as they ate just cow and not pig.

The myths of origin of these *jatis* showed them as the sons of higher *jatis*, having been created from god's body itself. It is said that they were relegated to such a status as a result of eating dead animals or doing 'dirty' works. For example, both Bhambhi⁸ and Bhangi⁹ were seen to have devolved from their initial status after eating dead animals. Similarly, the Nais lost their stature as Rajputs after performing dirty works of cutting hair or dressing wounds. The same happened to the Baid Nais once their wives adopted the midwifery profession.¹⁰ To save themselves from further pollution, the parent *upjati* or sub-caste of Maru Nais stopped dining with the daughter *upjati*, i.e., the Baid Nais. Such myths clearly show that the practice of eating of dead animals was a taboo for the high *jatis*. Similarly, eating with the comparatively 'unclean' *jatis* was dreaded by the higher *jati* or *upjati* for the fear of losing one's own ritual status.

⁶ Ibid. p. 585.

⁷ The term 'dead animals' refers to animals which were eaten after their death due to some other reason; they were not killed especially for eating. Due to poverty, many low *jatis* could not afford fresh animals for eating. Therefore, they consumed the already dead ones.

⁸ Ibid. p. 527.

⁹ Ibid. p. 583.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 457.

Nevertheless, one has to heed the fact that food was not the primary reason that determined one's *jati* status, even though such stories do the same; it merely fixed one's status in the ritual hierarchy. Rather, it was the economic status of the *jati* that made its members consume 'unclean' or 'polluted' food. This clearly comes out of the mythical origin story of the Bhangis, where they ate dead animals due to abject poverty. Therefore, the nature of food eaten was not the cause of one's *jati* status but its effect. However, such practices became historically crystallized to form a part of the identity of a *jati*. Against this background it could be suggested that there could have been better-off *jati* members who stayed away from such practices. In fact, *Mardum Shumari* shows that some members of the Bhangi *jati* did not eat dead animals.¹¹ Perhaps, they were the comparatively richer members who could afford other types of meat. Moreover, as *Mardum Shumari* shows some rich foods like ghee, jaggery, etc were also eaten by these *jatis*. Since cattle were reared by these *jatis*, milk products were available. It was the availability or unavailability of food stuffs which determined the culinary habits of these *jatis*. Their situation is the same as that of Dhobis of Marwar who were accused of never buying clothes, but using those of their customers.¹² In this case the Dhobis did not do so as a tradition but only due to their necessity and availability of clothes. Hence it could be suggested that consumption of 'dirty' food was not a *jati* tradition, but was due to poverty.

Apparel and accessories: As far as these two categories were concerned, it was both affordability as well as the tradition in the caste society at large that determined them. The typical clothes for 'Hindu' menial caste men were *dhoti kurta* and *pagdi* or turban. The Muslim menials by profession wore *pyajama kurta*. Maru Nais used to wear *dhoti* and *pagdi*. *Rachchaani* or instrument box of leather carrying the tools of Nais was a mark of identification for these Nais. Similarly, Naayata Nais who were Muslims wore *lambaa angrakhi* or long coat and *pyajama*.¹³ Their instrument box carried tools and ointments for operating and dressing wounds (*marham nashtar aur katarni vagaire ki peti*). Even Bhangis carried broom and basket in the market place as a mark of their identity.¹⁴ As said earlier, it was believed that the dhobis in Marwar never bought clothes; rather wore those of their customers. There were

¹¹Ibid. p. 585.

¹²Ibid. p. 553.

¹³Ibid. pp. 457-459.

¹⁴Ibid. p. 584.

remarkable differences in the dresses and ornaments worn by the menial *jati* women.¹⁵

Since the expensive wears like ritzy clothes, gold, silver, ivory, etc were insignia of high caste or political status, any menial *jati* member was not free to wear them.¹⁶ Bhangi women, who were accustomed to wearing lacquer ornaments, were not allowed to freely wear those of tusk without the state's permission.¹⁷ In fact clothes and accessories constituted one of the factors which distinguished between low and high *jatis*. Therefore, even the state protected such rights of the latter in order to maintain the social order. However, the few members of the menial *jatis* who were allowed to show off luxuries were the people with power. For example, through the custom of *Paghbandhai* (or wrapping turban), the *Gaon Bhambhi* or head of the Bhambhis of a village was given a special turban and a baton by the state.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, these two constituted the badges of power of the village Bhambhi. Similarly, his wife wore silver anklets and gold necklaces. The following document of C.E.1769 from Daulatpur shows the prevalence of the formal custom of *Pagh bandhai*¹⁹ –

Bhambhi Udai of Daulatpur came and said that in October 1820 (C.E. 1763), he underwent the ritual of *Paghbandhai* for the supervision and collection of the *Vambh* tax. He was supposed to pay Rs.41 for this post (*Gaon Bhambhi*), out of which he had already paid Rs.30. The agrarian tax on his crops was Rs.7. Approximately eight months later Bhambhi Nath underwent the same ritual. Till now, Rs. 11 has not been paid by him. For the appropriation of the remaining amount from him, a man has been hired by the authorities. This man is to be paid Rs. 50.

The State ordered for the veracity of his statement to be checked. (he is to pay Rs.11 and the hired man to be given Rs. 50) He was not supposed to pay the money if he was found correct.

In actuality, these differences were not just a part of their distinct identity, but were also elements of differentiation between one *jati* or *upjati* and the other. Since this

¹⁵ For more details on the clothes and accessories of menial women, see chapter (Between the Devil and the Deep Sea).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 584.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.527

¹⁹ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f.178 B.

distinction was necessary for the protection of the caste society, they were guarded by both society and the state.

Morphology and Residential pattern: Evidences show that in comparison with the Nais, the Bhambhi or Meghwal *jatis* lived in separate colonies (*baas*). The following petition report of C.E. 1765 from Bilada shows this²⁰ -

A Meghwal from Uchiyarda village said that in the village there were four hamlets of Meghwals, which were divided into sixteen divisions. All the houses had some space (or *chauntari*) in front of their gates. No *Patta* was made or money was charged for this *chauntari*. However, only he had been given a *patta* of Rs.31. though he hadn't paid the amount till recent times, he was made to pay Rs.5 in the Darbar. The State asked to enquire this case where the other Meghwals weren't given *pattas* for the *Chauntaris*, except for the complainant. It also asked for the details of the case.

[C.E. 1769, Nagore Chauntara, evidence of Nai living among the higher *jatis*]²¹ :

A Khandelwaal (Baniya *jati*/ a trader community) Dev of Nagore came here and said that on the other side of his house wall was an *ora* (a store or warehouse) of Nai Lachiya. Above this room he made a *maliya* (room on the terrace). The *kadiya* or wooden beams for creating this *maliya* penetrated my wall. The Nai took a personal loan of Rs.40 from Khandelwal Maujya and Balu. But both of them died. Their wives are selling the house for Rs.225 to Bhagchand Chhitar. I made him resolve to give Rs.250 to these women and take Rs.40 for me. Therefore, Rs.265 is to be taken. Rs. 40 will be given for registry. The state ordered to have *char thava admi* (or four important men) who could make them understand the legitimate course of action.

[C.E.1767, Pargana Phalodhi, indicates the same as the above document]²² :

²⁰ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f.89 B, document no. 422.

²¹ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 58 B. This document is unclear in various ways. However, one of the facts that comes out clearly is that the Nais lived with the higher *jatis* in the same locality.

²² JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 109 A.

Brahmin Bhagwandas of village Savrij came here and said that in 1810 (C.E.1753) *Jagirdar* Karannot Surat Singh fought with me. Then I had to leave the village and go to village Dahiya Kohar. I had a field in Savrij which I used to till from the other village. In 1821, Surat Singh grabbed this land too. Now Savrij has been given to another I named Surat Singh. However, still Surat Singh isn't leaving my land. His Nai stays in my house now. *Sri Huzoor* ordered that after a proper enquiry *wajabi* (or appropriate as per normative conduct) should be done.

The second document shows that the side walls of the houses in the cities of Marwar had no space between them and were quite close to each other. The Nais lived in such close proximities with the higher *jatis*. Even the third document indicates that the Nais lived very much inside the villages. On the contrary, the Meghwals lived in their own *jati* colonies or hamlets. Presently, it's difficult to give the exact location of the settlements of the untouchable *jatis* – in or outside the village or on the periphery. However, we already know from Alberuni's (an eleventh century historian) details on Indian villages that there were certain groups which stayed outside the village or city boundary walls. These were the *achut* or untouchable *jatis* who were made to live away from the main settlement. While referring to the *Chamars* or leather workers, even Sir John Malcolm informs that in Central India and elsewhere these *jatis* were supposed to be so unclean that they weren't allowed to reside within the boundaries of the villages.²³ Similarly, Bishop Heber describes the filthy and penurious conditions in which the leather workers lived in 18th century Jaipur – 'there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth'.²⁴

By calling the residential patterns as the indicators of caste discrimination, Masanori Sato shows that the *Chamars*, almost an equally *neech jati* like the Bhambhis, lived on the peripheries of the villages or even farther away in the 17th-19th centuries South-Eastern Rajasthan.²⁵ Furthermore, researches show that in contemporary Maharashtra the *Mahars*, (one of the *ati-Sudra* or untouchable *jatis*) who were very

²³ Sir John Malcolm, A Memoir of Central India including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces, 2 vols., Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 2001 (1st Indian rpr.).

²⁴ M.A. Laird (ed.), Bishop Heber in Northern India: Selections from Heber's Journal, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1971, pp.259-260.

²⁵ Masanori Sato, 'The Chamars of South Eastern Rajasthan A.D.1650-1800, in H. Kotani ed. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997, p.32.

much similar to the Balais/Meghwals of Marwar, lived on the periphery of the villages.²⁶ In fact, both the society and state maintained a reasonable distance between the real village and the *Maharvada* or *Mahar* hamlet. The location of these *Maharvadas* could be easily changed according to the requirements of the villagers. The state paid them a small compensation and resettled their hamlets.²⁷ In the light of the untouchable status of the *jatis* like Balai and Bhangi as well as the various restrictions imposed on them²⁸, it could be suggested that they were made to live outside the precincts of the settlements. Once again, this was done to maintain a considerable distance between the comparatively 'cleaner' *jatis* on the one hand and the 'unclean' ones on the other.

Occupation: It is important to study the occupational structure of the *neech jatis*. Not only is it a scale to gauge the socio-economic position of these *jatis* in the Marwari society, but also a balance for the comparison of the ritual status of different *jatis* in medieval Marwar. *Mardum Shumari* shows that the nature of work done was one of the important determinants of pure or impure status of the *jatis*. The respective discriminations between the *upjatis* of a *jati* were also based on the status of work performed. In reality, the *upjatis* had a specific consciousness regarding the type of work undertaken. Any work which could have defiled their ritual status was averted. For example, as aforesaid, a Maru Nai avoided the surgical works of the Baid Nais for the fear of losing his comparative purity.

In order to understand the socio-economic status of the four menial *jatis*, it is imperative that we scan their varying modes of existence one by one. As far as the Nais were concerned, hair dressing was their traditional occupation. Apart from that, there were various other types of works done by the different *upjatis*.²⁹ The Maru Nais were involved in works like hair dressing, lighting candle, massaging, washing dirty dishes, working in their *jajmans* or patron's houses during marriages, inviting people for marriages and deaths to the *jajman's* house, etc. The Jangada Nais were

²⁶ For details on the Mahars, see H. Kotani, 'Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan', in H. Kotani ed. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997, New Delhi and Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16th-18th centuries*, New Delhi, OUP, 1991, rpr. 1998.

²⁷ H.Kotani, 'Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan', in H. Kotani ed. *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar Publishers, 1997, pp. 58-59.

²⁸ Other restrictions will be dealt with in the next section on purity and pollution.

²⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 454-459.

almost similar to the Maru Nais. Baid Nais used to operate wounds, clean and dress them. Midwifery was the occupation of the females. The Nayata Nais had the same occupation as the Baid Nais. Since they were hair dressers of the Muslims, they even performed circumcision of the Muslim boys. The Musalman Nais used to work as hair dressers of the elites as well as the Muslim *jajmans* in Marwar. The Babar Nais were involved in hair cutting of camels, inviting guests during occasions in *jajman's* house. Their women worked as maids.

Apart from such traditional works, the Nais were involved in various other kinds of work. This will be gleaned from the following documents.–

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Phalodhi, shows a Nai as a revenue farmer]³⁰ :

Darji Dharma of Pargana Phalodhi said that he had a *pasavato khet* (or ancestral land) which he gave to a Nai on *muqata* tenure (for revenue farming). Till recent times the Nai had been paying the money for cultivating the land. But now he had stopped. The State ordered to enquire the case, do what is legitimate or *wajib* and make them understand.

[C.E.1768, Nagore Kachedi, evidence of a Nai working in temple]³¹ :

Nai Khushyalo came here and said that since a long time he had been working in the temple of Thakurji Shri Murlidharji. During festivals, he used to light candles and work there like that. Now Mahesri Mahajan had employed a new Nai in his place. The State ordered to explain how this happened, as also to investigate the case.

[C.E. 1770, Parbatsar, indicates the miscellaneous works done by Nais under the system of *begar*]³² :

Nai Kojje and others came here and said that in these years they were made to do new types of work – cutting camel's hair, cleaning and plastering of floor on Diwali, fanning the deity in *Ganwar* festival, bringing *datun* or wooden sticks used as tooth

³⁰ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 109 B.

³¹ JSPB 6, V.S.1825/1768, f. 21 A.

³² JSPB 10, V.S.1827/1770, f. 263A.

brush for officials. The State ordered that if the services had been introduced only that year, then the Nais should be excused from them.

[C.E. 1767, Nagore Kachedi, document in the form of State order showing Nais employed as night guards]³³ :

In the months of November and December, *Hakam, Karkun, Kotwal*, etc had appointed Nai as guards for night patrolling (of cities). Now bid them farewell (*tina nu to rukhsad kar dejo*) and send them to work as guards on daily wages basis.

All the above documents show that the Nais were involved in various non-traditional works like agriculture, night guard service, religious services and various other kinds of miscellaneous jobs under the *begar* or unpaid labour system(as shown in the third document).

In the case of the Dhobis, *Mardum Shumari* demonstrates that apart from their traditional work of washing clothes, they were involved in *pinjare* or cotton ginning, *rangrez* or dyeing, *silawat* or stone masonry and *nalbandi* or work of farriers.³⁴ The state order of C.E.1764 from Jodhpur Kachedi displays the religious or temple services of the Dhobis³⁵ -

A Washer man Khushala is to be employed in the temple of Thakurji Shri Anad Dhanji for Rs.2 per month. Therefore, give him two rupees in the first month and later according to his performance.

Similarly, even the Balais or Bhambhis were involved in tasks ranging from traditional ones of dragging the carcasses out of the villages and towns to colouring of leather, tanning³⁶, making shoes, weaving clothes,etc.³⁷ The other kinds of works for them were in agriculture as owners of land or as *halis* or labourers, government service, etc. The following two documents prove this point.

³³ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 30A.

³⁴ *Mardum Shumari*, p.554.

³⁵ JSPB 1, V.S.1821/1764, f. 9B.

³⁶ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 527.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

[C.E.1769, Pargana Siwana, evidence of a Meghwal as a *hali* or labourer]³⁸ :

In village Asadha, Mheche Dev (an upper caste man) had kept a Meghwal Champala as a bonded ploughman for twelve years. Now the *Vambh* tax was to be paid to the state. The high caste man gave his bull to Champa for Rs.9 (till the contract lasted). The contract or the term was over between the two, but the Mheche has delayed the payment of the bull. The state has ordered to call both the parties and make them understand what is right or *wajib*.

[C.E.1769, Sojhat Kachedi, evidence of a Bhambhi as a government servant]³⁹ :

Brahmin Gordhan deep of Bhitora village came here and said that he had never paid *Dhibro* tax to the *chowkis* (posts) of government servants, Bhambhi and Sansir. However, now the *Jagirdar* of his village was asking him for it. The state ordered that if the tax hadn't been imposed before, then problems should not be created by freshly imposing it.

Lastly, the Bhangis who were traditional scavengers, produced and sold *chhajle* (or open wooden tray for collecting and picking up trash) as well and even dragged the carcasses of horses, asses and dogs out of the villages and cities.⁴⁰

In the occupational arena of all the four *jatis*, agriculture was a commonality. This was atypical of the scriptural codes, which restricted *jatis* from taking up profession unrelated to their *jati* identity. Nevertheless, agriculture was altogether a different occupation which was adopted by almost all the *jatis* in general. B N S Yadav has efficiently laid out the way in which such religious norms were not adhered to even in the ancient society. He has shown that in reality, it was the economic status of a

³⁸ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 146B.

³⁹ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 123A.

⁴⁰ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 584-585.

person that determined the occupation adopted. Therefore, even the poor among the higher *jatis* took to agriculture.⁴¹

Agriculture was a seasonal occupation that gave ample opportunities for engaging in other professions, thereby helping in further increments in income. Apart from that, possession of land was a prestige factor in the Marwari society. Nandita Prasad Sahai proposes that land constituted 'the plinth on which power and position rested'; since the possession of land and agricultural implements gave economic security and prestige, the professional artisanal *jatis* of Marwar undertook agriculture side-by-side with their artisanal occupations.⁴² Ownership of agricultural implements did increase possibilities of enhancing one's economic and social status. Satish Chandra contends that in 18th century North India, *Pahi kashts* (or 'tenants-at-will' who came from other village to till land), were welcomed if they owned their own agricultural accessories. They were even given concessions by village headman to bring new lands under cultivation.⁴³ A menial labourer without agricultural implements was to pay for using the master's tools. The aforesaid case of Meghwal Champala in which he paid for using the bull of a man is an example. Incidentally, it was the same man whose field he tilled for twelve years as a *hali*. The non possession of land or resources further increased the vulnerability of a menial vis-à-vis the dominant *jatis*. This could be said because non possession of resources by an agricultural labourer meant complete dependence on the landlord; on the other hand, the mere possession of resources gave choices of work to the labourer. As said earlier, labourers with tools were received gladly by villagers.

Evidences show that the menials were involved in cultivation as owners of *bapoti* or ancestral land and bought lands, tenants of landlords or state, *muqata* holders or revenue farmers or labourers of various kinds (*hali* or *vasidar*). The following documents show the varying status of the menials in agriculture.

⁴¹ B N S Yadav has efficiently shown the transition of the *varna* specific ancient Indian society where physical labour was looked down upon by the higher *varnas* or assigned only to the lower *varnas* to one, where the depressed economic state of higher *varnas* made them dependent on agriculture. Therefore, even in the early medieval period, agriculture was an occupation adopted by almost all the *jatis*. See B.N.S Yadava, "Problems of the Interaction between Socio-Economic Classes in the Early Medieval Complex", *IHR*, Vol.3. No. 1, July 1976.

⁴² Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p. 126.

⁴³ Satish Chandra, "Some Aspects of Indian Village Society in Northern India during the 18th century", *IHR*, 1975.

[C.E. 1767, Jodhpur Kachedi, evidence of a Balai as a buyer of land]⁴⁴ :

Jat Pema of Bhavi came here and said that when he went to Malwa, the *Chaudhary* Karsa, the Patwari and eight other people of Base village together sold off his land to Balai Jeevan in exchange of an advance payment. The state ordered that if the reality is like that then give back the land to Pema and do something about the advance payment as well(*sukra rupiya liya batawe chhai jin ri theek kar dejo*).

[C.E. 1769, Bilada, a state order regarding the Meghwals/Bhambhis working on crown lands]⁴⁵ :

The state servants are to take Rs.7.50 as agrarian tax on Rabi crops from the Meghwals working on crown lands.

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Phalodhi, evidence of a Nai as a revenue farmer]⁴⁶ :

The earlier mentioned case of Darji Dharma who gave his field to a Nai on *muqata* tenure. After sometime the Nai stopped giving the requisite amount to the Darji.

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Merta, shows a Balai as a cultivator for a higher *jati* of Rajputs]⁴⁷ :

A Rajput named Lagdhiram Singhot of clan Mertiya Madho Dasot complained that he has his share of field in Parubadi village. Even Rajput Jalam Singh Salam Singh has a field there. However, his share of the field is cultivated by Salam Singh's Balai Bhogina. Since two years he hasn't paid the returns to him. Then, my son said that if the Balai won't give the returns, then they will cut the required amount from the cost of *kadab* or the left over crops in the field. But Salam Singh made the Balai burn this

⁴⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 8A.

⁴⁵ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 163A.

⁴⁶ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 109B.

⁴⁷ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 54A.

kadab also. Then, my son beat up the Balai (*balai ra mathe mein divi*). Around two days after this, my son went to Itavada village. Jalam Singh Salam Singh sent his son to fight. Suddenly, around midnight they started beating up my son with stick. Even my son got hold of it and beat them up. But, they battered my son so much that for days he couldn't speak or move. This isn't the only offence done, but there are many other crimes as well.⁴⁸ The state asked to enquire the case and give the reply.

All these documents propose that the agricultural pursuit of the menials was marked by extreme heterogeneity. While one was an owner of land, the other was a mere labourer without implements. This shows that there were varying economic status of the menials. Since this contention awaits yet more information on the material world of the menials, it will be further explored a little later.

Other than cultivation, there were various other jobs which were appendages of the main occupation of a *jati*. For the Bhambhis, works like hiding and colouring leather were extensions of the traditional work of removing carcasses of dead animals from the settlement areas. Similarly, even operating and dressing of wounds almost complemented the typical occupation of hair dressing for the Nais. All these works aided in maximisation of one's profits without affecting the caste hierarchy.

It is to be noted that while Nais and dhobis were employed in temple service, Balais and Bhangis were completely out of the picture. This further corroborates the earlier argument of Nai and Dhobi being above the latter two in the *jati* hierarchy. At the same time, it even shows that though the menials were allowed to practice different types of occupation, those related to the religious orthodoxies of the high *jatis* were not open to them. It is known that untouchable *jatis* were disallowed from entering temples in contemporary Maharashtra as well.⁴⁹ Any potential threat to the purity of *devi-devatas* as well as the upper castes from the 'polluted' *jatis* was averted. Cooked food, which was related to one's ritual purity, was thought to be vulnerable to such pollutions. Therefore, so far, all the four menial *jatis* were never seen cooking for or serving the higher *jati* members.

⁴⁸ This is a very lengthy document enumerating the evil deeds of Jalam Singh Salam Singh. Since these aren't relevant to the topic, they haven't been mentioned.

⁴⁹ Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16th-18th centuries*, p. 106.

It could be suggested that the menials of Marwar were involved in various traditional and non-traditional tasks for various reasons. Firstly, due to the difficult and harsh geographical conditions and adverse land-man ratio of Marwar, subsistence on the basis of a single traditional occupation was difficult. Even G.N. Sharma shows that almost all *jatis*, high or low, practised different non-traditional occupations. He contends that in medieval Marwar, 'occupations were not wholly exclusive' of one's *jati* status, but, were 'independent' and 'flexible'.⁵⁰ In fact, multiple modes of livelihood were a necessity for survival. Therefore, the menials took to different other works, some different and some extensions of their traditional works.

Secondly, both the society and state aimed at the maximum utilization of the available human capital. Restricting one to one type of work was not beneficial for both the entities. In general, service castes proved to be profitable because one could extract as much labour as possible. *Mardum Shumari* shows the inevitability and usefulness of the Bhambhi *jati* to the Marwari society. It says that even though they were *neech*, they were very important to the common man. This was because this *jati* was very *kaamkaaju* or laborious and it rendered many types of free labour to the villagers under the institution of *begar* or bonded labour.⁵¹ Having evolved from the ancient institution of *vishti* or forced labour⁵², this system of *begar* ensured various types of work to the patrons or *jajmans* as well as the state. The earlier stated petition report on Nai Kojje and others, where they were asked to render fresh type of services⁵³ shows that exploitative tendencies in the society were unreasonably high. Since the demand for labour was very high in sparsely populated Marwar, every attempt was made to appropriate the maximum possible labour out of a unit. Many-a-times even false claims were made on the labour of the menials for the utilization of their potential. The following documents prove this point. -

⁵⁰ G.N. Sharma, *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan(1500-1800A.D.)*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal Educational Publishers, Agra, 1968, pp. 78.

⁵¹ *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 534.

⁵² For a better understanding of the transition of the institution of *vishti* from the ancient period to the late medieval system of *begar*, see G.K. Rai, "Forced Labour in Ancient and Early Medieval India", *IHR*, Vol.3, No.1, July 1976.

⁵³ For the details of the document, see p. 32.

[C.E. 1767, Mukam Merta]⁵⁴ :

Rajputs Devrajot Bhiyo Jaitaro and Sawai Deepa of village Karaejada claim that Balai Gordhan of qasba Kuchora is under their *begar* services (*Bassipana*). The state says that the Balai has been a *raiya*t or cultivator of a lower caste⁵⁵ of the state since forty years and has lived in Kuchora ever since then. Therefore, don't make such claims of *begar* on him. It is his will to earn and eat freely.

[C.E. 1768, Merta Kachedi]⁵⁶ :

Bhambhi Jeev of village Kudli said that in V.S.1823 (C.E. 1766), Mahavat Singh had kept him as a servant and he was content to stay like that. Now the Hada says that he is my *vasira* (or permanent master of a labourer). The state authorities ordered to bring the document of occupancy. It ordered that work has to be rendered according to the deals of the document.

[C.E.1769, Nagore Kachedi, a case where a high caste landlord claimed to be *vasira* of a low caste woman]⁵⁷ :

The step mother of the Meghwal of Doha village complained that the Bhomiya Chandawat Dhano used to say that he was her *vasira*, while Meghwaal ram said that he isn't. The state ordered that the known people of the village should be asked and if they say no then set her free.

Many-a-times the menials were found trapped between the contesting claims of two parties of equal vigour. The higher *jatis* fought for their ownership rights over the menials. Undoubtedly, the labour potential of the menials was the bone of contention in such conflicts. The following document of C.E. 1765 from Merta Kachedi stands as evidence to this proposition.⁵⁸ Charans Lakha and Hethu have a conflict regarding

⁵⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 180A.

⁵⁵ Dilbagh Singh, "Caste and the Structure of the Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan during the Eighteenth Century", *JHR*, Vol.2, No.2, 1976.

⁵⁶ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 74A.

⁵⁷ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 20A.

⁵⁸ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 45B, document no. 240.

a well, a house and a Bhambhi in village Bachchwas. The State asked the authorities to make the parties understand what was *wajib* or the right thing.

On the part of the state, it rather encouraged menials to do various types of work. The sole motive behind this encouragement was to enhancing its revenue potentials. It was evidenced that in the medieval Marwar state, imposition of taxes wasn't done indiscriminately on the basis of one's *jati* status; rather it depended on the type of work performed. For example, a Balai who did agriculture wasn't asked for the *Vambh Bab* (a tax paid by those Bhambhis/Balais who removed carcasses from villages and performed other related tasks), but for agrarian tax. This is known from the following documents—

[C.E. 1767, Pargana Daulatpur]⁵⁹-

Khadiya Jeevaram informed that Balai of village Saduvaas has been asked for *Vaambh Baab*. That Balai was called from Barla village and made to reside in Saduvaas by me. He doesn't do the work (traditional occupation) of Balais. The state ordered not to pester the Balai for the tax.

[C.E. 1769, Bilada, a state order to take agrarian tax from Meghwal cultivators]⁶⁰-

The state servants are to take Rs. 7.50 as agrarian tax on Rabi crops from the Meghwals working on crown lands.

Therefore, the state could be seen as a co-partner of the menials in the process of earning as much was possible from different occupations. In fact, in agricultural initiatives, it gave all support to the lower *jatis*. Various concessions were given for bringing virgin lands under cultivation.

Another reason behind adopting or being open to non- traditional professions was the turbulence in the political economy of Marwar in the latter half of the 18th century due to increased Maratha incursions. The frequent migration of people to

⁵⁹ JSPB 7, V.S.1824/1767, f. 147B.

⁶⁰ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 163A.

Malwa⁶¹ was an outcome of this political development. It could be suggested that the menials were compatible with non-traditional occupations in Malwa because the sole motive of their migration was to earn as much as possible. It is quite possible that their status as migrants was better than that in Marwar. Perhaps their *jati* affiliations posed lesser problems. The willingness to migrate to some other region for earning proposes many things. Firstly, the political turmoil in Marwar had a considerable bearing on the economy as well. Secondly, even in such conditions, the menials were willing to brave the odd ends by working in some other place. Thirdly, the low competitiveness of Marwar vis-a-vis Malwa in terms of labour payments convinced the menials to migrate to the latter to earn more. The out migrations are known from these documents –

[C.E. 1768, Nagore Kachedi, evidence of Marwari people earning in Malwa]:

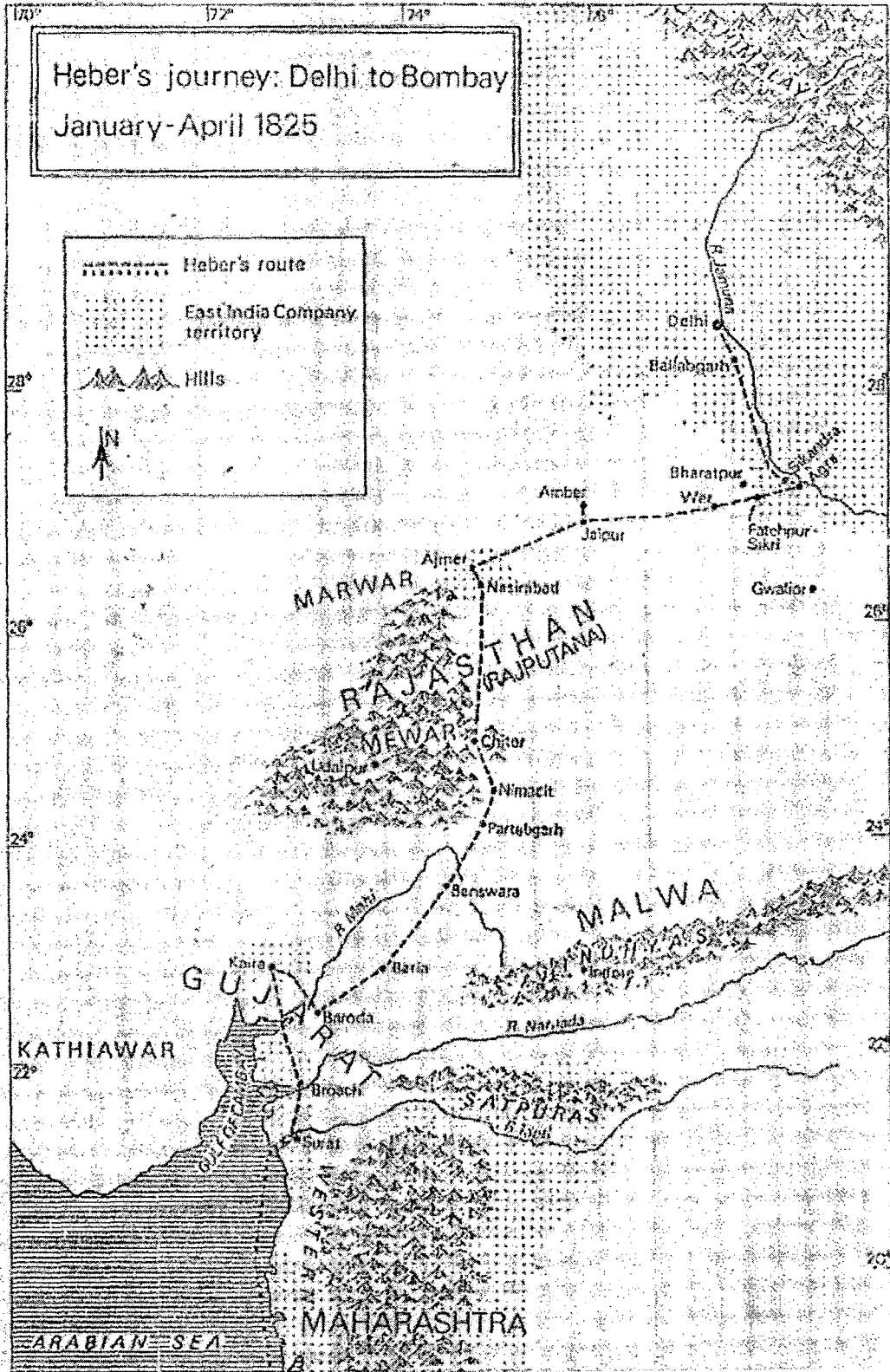
Jat Veed of Phidod came here and said that he went to Malwa and earned Rs.5. by working as *hali* or paid labourer. Even Nai Dana was there. He asked for Rs.40 which the Jat gave. Later, when the Jat asked him for the sum, the Nai declined to pay back. The state ordered to do what was *wajib* or right. If the Nai had borrowed the money, make him pay.

[C.E.1767, Merta, evidence of a Nayan's movement towards Malwa]⁶²:

The wife of Nai Dhana of Bholasar village was abducted by Sankhala Dhana of village Palriwari when she was going to Malwa. The state asked him to return the lady, else to come and give an answer to it.

⁶¹ See fig. 4 on the next page.

⁶² JSPB 7, V.S.1824/1767, f. 198A.



(Courtesy: M.A. Laird)*

Fig.4: Location of Malwa

* M.A. Laird (ed.), *Bishop Heber in Northern India: Selections from Heber's Journal*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, New York.

[C.E.1765, Merta Kachedi, a similar case of movement of a Nai towards Malwa]⁶³:

Nai Raja from Kaekeeda village complained that in 1822/1765 when Musraf Maoodas was the *hawaldar* in a village in south, the Village *Chaudhary* bought his niece (Raja's niece). She was sold for one rupee by Raja's nephews. However, the payment was never made. After I came back from Malwa, hawaldar Ratanbhan asked the *Chaudhary* to take five rupees and release the girl as she was to be married; but to no avail. The state ordered that after compensating for the money that *Chaudhary* spent on the upkeep of the girl, she should be returned to Raja.

Thus, it could be suggested that owing to the socio-economic and political expediency of the times, the menials were allowed to engage in a wide range of occupations. It benefitted them as well as the upper caste/class and the state. However, the expanse of this freedom ended where it seemed to encroach upon the boundaries of ritual purity of the higher *jatis*. No such profession was undertaken by them or allowed to them which could have breached the purity and sanctity of the higher *jati* status. Therefore, occupational arena of the menials was placed on a balance between the orthodox brahmanical scriptural norms and the societal needs for their labour.

Ritual status and the issues of purity/pollution: Evidences show that the menials were looked down upon as *napak* or 'dirty' *jatis* by the higher ones. It could be gleaned from *Mardum Shumari* that this differentiation was maintained due to the 'dirty' professions practiced by the four *jatis*. Interestingly, the degree of the discrimination was inversely proportional to the rank of the *jati* in the caste hierarchy. This is to say that, the lower a *jati*, the higher was the level of discrimination faced by it. Similarly, a lesser degree of differentiation was experienced by the *jati* higher than this *jati*.

The aforementioned empirical surmises of the Nai and Dhobi standing above the Balai and Bhangi in the *jati* hierarchy finds its definite proof in this sub-section.

⁶³ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 39A, document no. 197.

Mardum Shumari shows that the Nai and Dhobi were termed as *napak jatis* due to their involvement in dirty works where they were in constant touch with bodily filth of others. This could be judged through a quote from *Mardum Shumari*⁶⁴ –

. . . *Nai ka haath jis se hazamat aur zakhmo ka khoon laga karta hai hamesha napak rehta hai. Nai ke siwaye aur bhi aisa hi peshwa karnewali jatein achhep samjhi jati hain.; jaise baid jo har kism ke rog ko hath lagata hai, aur dai jo lugaiyon ko janati hai, aur kasai jo jeev hinsa karta hai.*

It means that since Nai's hands touch blood of cuts and wounds during shaving, they always remain polluted. Apart from the Nais, other *jatis* practising this kind of profession are thought to be polluting; for example, the Baid or doctors who deal with every kind of ailment, midwives who help in delivery of wives and butcher who kills animals. A well known saying in Marwar can be quoted to complement this point further,–

*Nai dai baid kasai, inka sutak kabhi na jaae*⁶⁵ – it means that the pollution created by Nai, midwife, doctor and butcher can never be done away with.

Likewise, even Dhobis were thought to be *napak* because they touched different types of dirty clothes. In fact, the *kund* or pond where they washed the clothes was thought to be a pond of hell. It was dreaded by the society due to its extremely defiling character. The Dhobi's *kund* was referred to in a derogatory sense – *jo vachan chooke to dhobi ke kund mein padhe*⁶⁶, meaning those who fail to keep promises should fall in Dhobi's pond.

Even the touch of Nais and Dhobis was considered polluting, so much so that purification rites were performed to relieve oneself of it. For example, people always bathed after a hair cut. Also, the more religious ones never accepted water touched by the Nais. On the other hand, the clothes washed by Dhobis were purified by sprinkling water touched by gold. A Marwari saying brings forth this belief system prevalent in the Marwari society –

⁶⁴ *Mardum Shumari*, pp.459.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.459. There is no appropriate English word for the Marwari term '*sutak*'. It roughly means the ritual pollution created by a *neech jati*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.553.

*Aar, dhaar aur suskaar*⁶⁷ – It refers to the three *jatis* of Teli (or oil presser), Nai and Dhobi. *Aar* means the oil pressing rudimentary machine driven by bull. *Dhaar* refers to the sharpness of Nai's tools and *suskaar* is the sighs of a dhobi on work. Basically, all the three words refer to the three *neech* *jatis* who did 'dirty' works. Therefore, this idiom was used in a derogatory sense.

Nevertheless, both these *jatis* worked in temples. This could be gleaned from the earlier mentioned documents. Nais used to light candles in temples or fanned deities during religious processions called *Ganwar*. Similarly, even the Dhobis were employed for washing the clothes of the deities.

In retrospect to these two *jatis*, the Balais and the Bhangis had a more degraded status. On the pretext of their 'dirty' profession, they were called *achhut* or untouchables. Untouchability was visible in their everyday life, etc. They lived in separate hamlets, perhaps outside the village, drank water from separate wells. The following petition reports show that the Balais had separate drinking water pool and they weren't allowed to have water from the village wells.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi]⁶⁸ :

A Balai from village Mahewada complained that he had always been drinking water from his *judi kundi* (or a separate water container near well). But now the villagers stop him from having it. The State ordered that if he had been drinking water from a *judi kundi*, then the villagers shouldn't be allowed to say anything.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi, a State Order for the authorities as a response to the previous document]⁶⁹ :

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.459, 553.

⁶⁸JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 260. Also see Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan An Oral History: Conversations With Komal Kothari*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2003, p. 106. The drinking water arrangement in the Rajasthani villages was one where water was drawn out of wells manually or with the help of animals, and was poured into a nearby ditch or water container called *kheli*. The above document reveals that there were different *khelis* for the high and the low *jatis*. While the higher ones had big *khelis*, their lower counterparts had smaller ones. Perhaps the size of the *khelis* depended upon the population.

In Mahewada village, the Dhedhs (or Balais) have a different drinking water container (or *alayadi kheli*). Let them have water from here. There is a *kotho kheli* or bigger drinking water container for the villagers. Don't let the Dhedhs have water from here.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi, a State Order related to the earlier two cases]⁷⁰ :

In village Mahewada, Brahmin, Baniya, Jat, etc fill up water from the upper *kundi*. For the Balais, there is a separate lower *kundi*. Musalmans bury their corpses near the earthen boundary near the *kundi*. The state ordered the authorities not to let them bury near the pool but somewhere far from it. Similarly, the Hindus were ordered to cremate their corpses away from this pool. The papers of this order were to be copied and sent to the villagers. It also asked to give it in a written form to the Hindus that they should not burn their corpses near this pond.

These documents show that both the society and state cooperated with each other in containing the pollution created by the Balais in order to preserve the purity of higher *jatis*. Nevertheless, the degree of pollution in the case of the Bhangis was probably more than this. *Mardum Shumari* says that while moving into the market places they were to announce the term '*pois*'.⁷¹ Such announcements were made to make the higher *jatis* wary of the presence of these 'polluting' people. Undoubtedly, the sight of these people was thought to be a source of pollution for the higher *jatis*.

Thus, it's evident that all the four *jatis* were thought to be sources of pollution, but of varying degrees. But, why was there a variance in this degree? What were the main factors transmitting this pollution? Was the nature of occupation the lone criteria in the determination of one's ritual status? These are some of the queries which will help in understanding the questions of purity and pollution in their entirety.

⁶⁹JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 261.

⁷⁰JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 49A, document no. 262.

⁷¹*Mardum Shumari*, p.584.

Louis Dumont saw organic wastes in the human world as the source of all pollution.⁷² All the *jatis* involved in occupations of eliminating these wastes were thought to be 'polluted'. The dirtier the waste, the lower was the ritual status of the *jati*. For example, the Nais who used to cut others hair or operate and dress their wounds were considered a 'dirty' *jati*. However, the Bhangis who removed human waste were even 'dirtier' than the Nais. Even though this inference is true the assertion isn't. This is because organic waste alone can't be viewed as the sole criteria of pollution in the brahmanical world.

Many scholars have seen death as a 'more potent' source of pollution than bodily emissions.⁷³ In fact Declan Quigley has shown the way in which the pollution emanating from death created divisions even among the highest *jati* of the Brahmins.⁷⁴ He efficiently lays out the hierarchy within this *jati* which was based on the degrees of involvement in the world. A Brahmin who renounced the world was thought to be the purest and free from all worldly pollutions. Therefore, he led this hierarchy. On the contrary, a Brahmin officiating at funeral rites is considered the most polluted among all the Brahmins. Ritual differentiation based on the levels of purity occurred between the different types of Brahmins.

Based on this hierarchy even among the highest *jati*, it could be suggested that the purity/pollution quotients among the untouchables were based on the notion of death as well, and not alone the contact with organic wastes. In fact there were many other factors which determined the degree of pollution attached to a *jati*. Where these two combined, the degree was the greatest. These could be harvested from the mythical stories of origin of these *jatis* as well. The Bhambhis were relegated to this status on eating dead goat in times of emergency.⁷⁵ Similarly, even the Bhangis did the same; but, they also went to *Matangi Devi*'s temple without attending to the daily business (*bin shauch kiye maatangi devi ke mandir mein chale gaye*).⁷⁶ The enraged goddess cursed them that they will always remain devoid of the daily routines of attending to nature's call, bathing, etc (or *kriyabhang*) and will work as scavengers. Therefore, both the types of pollution combined to give a yet lower status to the Bhangis vis-a-

⁷² Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 30.

⁷³ M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, OUP, New York, 2002, pp. 183-186.

⁷⁴ See ch. 4, The Pure Brahmin and the Impure Priest, in Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, pp. 54-86.

⁷⁵ *Mardum Shumari*, p.527.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.583.

vis the Bhambhis. Here, another factor worth noting is the type of animal touched or eaten by the *jatis*. While the Bhambhis removed only hooved and edible animals of high status like cow, goat, bull, sheep, etc, the Bhangis removed all sorts of animals, both edible and non-edible e.g. dog, cat, pig, etc. In this case death conflated with the status of animal touched in the further deterioration of the ritual status of the Bhangis.⁷⁷ Therefore, it isn't wrong to say that the actual criteria of pollution were many. All coalesced in different proportions to form a complex web of levels of purity and pollution. In this context, Declan Quigley⁷⁸ holds –

..... ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status. The actual criteria of purity are, however, various – for example tolerance of widow remarriage, or diet (which can always be manipulated to set one's own group apart) – and this quickly generates a complicated system of ranked groups. Using whichever criteria are to its own advantage, each group can find others who are inferior. The process of differentiation is potentially capable of infinite extension and refraction.

The explication of the degradation of various *jatis* and *upjatis* are again based on these multiple criteria. For example, the Nais who thought themselves to have emerged from the Rajputs, underwent debasement in status due to the practise of *niyoga* or levirate.⁷⁹ This practice was looked down upon in the higher *jatis*. Moreover, the very institution of widow remarriage was considered highly despicable in the quarters of the 'superior' *jatis*. As Quigley pointed out, widow remarriage was another criterion of pollution. All the *jatis* practising it were considered polluted and it became one of the distinguishing features between the high and the low *jatis*. Marital alliance with lower *jatis* was yet another standard of measuring one's impurity.

Similarly, even food was a source of pollution. Eating 'dirty' and unhooved animals was again looked down upon and it also became a criterion of calling oneself high vis-a-vis the other. Further, eating the food touched by a menial *jati* member was thought to have befouled the ritual status of higher *jatis*. In the brahmanical tradition, eating or drinking were considered 'magico-religious activities of

⁷⁷ M.N.Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, p. 184.

⁷⁸ Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 455.

mysterious significance⁸⁰. *Kacca* or food cooked in water was very vulnerable to pollution.⁸¹ In fact water itself was the main reason behind this vulnerability. The aforesaid separation of the drinking water pools of the higher and lower *jatis* can be understood in this light. At first the Brahmins, and then the other *jatis* as well adopted the practice of not accepting *kacca* food from any lower *jati* than them. However, such apprehensions weren't maintained in the case of uncooked food. This could be assessed from the following document of C.E. 1824 from Pargana Siwana, where the grains of a higher *jati* were kept in the house of a Balai.⁸²

Bhayal Beeja (a Jat by *jati*) lived in village Googhrote. In 1815, Baniya Gele of Siwana kept a pot of *dhan* (or uncooked grain) in Balai Purkha's house. This pot was grabbed by the Jat without the Baniya's permission. At that time, the price of the grains was Rs. 4-5 a ser (a unit of measurement). Now, after so many years, the Jat was giving the grains to hi and he didn't know at what price he should take it. The state ordered that the grains should be taken at the present price.

If one looks carefully at the reasons given for the relegation of a *jati* or *upjati*'s ritual status, all these aforesaid factors are found actively at play. The Maru Bhambhis (the highest *upjati* among the Bhambhis) believed that they were degraded from the Rajput status due to the following reasons:-

1. became Bhambhis for the fear of losing their religion during Muslim invasions (a political reason)
2. By throwing away dead cow or calf on the order of their brother or sister-in-law (death pollution)
3. After falling in love with Meghwal women (marital pollution)
4. On eating or drinking water from Meghwal's house in times of great need (food pollution).

Thus, it is evident that there were many criteria on which the notion of pollution was based, like organic wastes, death, widow remarriage, food, marriage with lower

⁸⁰ Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publishers, 1998, p. 83.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸² JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 150B.

jatis, etc. However, these were just a few to name. As Quigley says these were innumerable in number and one *jati* took recourse to one or more reasons to call the other *jati* lower than itself. For example, one knows that the Dhobi was higher than the Bhangi, but the former was untouchable for the latter. In fact the Bhangis maintained untouchability towards the *Sansi*, *Dholi* and *Santiya jatis* as well.⁸³ However, the varying 'levels of respectability'⁸⁴ maintained by the Bhangis towards these *jatis* could be gleaned from the fact that even though the Bhangis considered the *Sansis* as lower than themselves, they provided *chilam* (or traditional cigar) to them. On the other hand, even if the shadow of a *Dholi* touched a Bhangi's chapatti, he used to throw it away. A possible explanation could be that while the *Sansis* relied on nomadic and criminal activities, the *Dholis* practised singing and dancing professions. The profession of the latter could have been detestable to the Bhangis. Perhaps this is an example of occupational chauvinism, wherein the Bhangis saw their profession as more 'moral' than that of the *Dholis*. Therefore, for the Bhangis, the *Sansis* constituted a relatively upper *jati* than the *Dholis*.

Similarly, the Dhobis accepted left over food from all *jatis* except the Bhangis and *Chamars* (or leather workers). The internal divisions in the *jatis* themselves could also be explained in the same light. Such hierarchies in the lower *jatis* based of different criteria of purity and pollution were omnipresent and an interesting fact of the caste society of Marwar.

It has been demonstrated that both the Nais and the Dhobis had better ritual status vis-a-vis the untouchable *jatis*. As shown earlier, they worked in temples as well. In fact, the Nais had a very important role to play in the marriages in Marwar, so much so that, they were equated with the Brahmins in this regard. Further, if one was going for some important work, then meeting either the Nai or Dhobi on the way was thought to be auspicious or *sukan*. This could be gleaned from the following Marwari sayings:

Nai sama avato darpan liya hath,

⁸³ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 585.

⁸⁴ Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan An Oral History: Conversations With Komal Kothari*, p. 31.

*shakun vicharo pathiya sammat ave sath.*⁸⁵

It means that if a Nai is coming in front of you with a mirror in hand, o pedestrian think of good omen because happiness is coming towards you.

Similarly, if a Dhobi with washed clothes is seen by someone who is going for a job, it is supposed to be a good omen for him. This comes out from the following document.

Dhobi dhoya kapda, saamo aayaa milant,

*Shakun vicharo panthiya, pag pag theekh karant.*⁸⁶

This saying means that if you see a Dhobi in front of you with his washed clothes, O pedestrian, think of good omen because this will brighten up your future.

Since no material was found on the untouchable *jatis* so far, one can not argue on their relevance or irrelevance on the religious arena, they have not been mentioned. However, Hiroyuki Kotani elucidates the case of the *Mahar* and *Mang jatis* in the Medieval Deccan, who had great significance in the boundary disputes of the village or the ceremony of *devi santi*. In the former, the *Mahars* played a very important role. They underwent a custom equivalent to the *ghijpani*⁸⁷ system in Marwar, where the *Mahar* of a particular village was to put his hand in a vessel full of boiled oil and *ghi* and take out a piece of iron or *Rava* from it. This was called the *Rava Divya* custom which was performed to hear the divine will. It was believed that if the *Mahar*'s hand wasn't burnt, his village's demarcation of boundary was correct. If it was burnt, then the village was at fault.⁸⁸ The religious ceremony of *Santi* was performed in times of natural calamities or epidemics. In this ritual, both the *Mahars* and *Mangs* (another *jati* involved in leather works) were involved. They were to walk along the village boundaries along with a bull, which was to be sacrificed by

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 462.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 553.

⁸⁷ This was performed in cases of adultery. If the hands of the person under suspect were burnt, he or she was at fault and if not then he/she wasn't.

⁸⁸Hiroyuki Kotani, "Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan" in H.Kotani (ed.) *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, pp. 64-67.

them in stages. The head of the bull was to be offered in the *devi*'s temple and later was thrown outside the village boundary by them.⁸⁹

On the pretext of these two customs, Kotani contends that the existence of the untouchable *jatis* in medieval Maharashtra was marked by ambivalence, wherein 'discrimination in everyday life and spiritual significance in the animistic world counterbalanced each other in their very existence'⁹⁰. If we place the case of the Marwari Nais and dhobis here, can one draw a similar inference?

It is to be noted that in the case of the untouchable *jatis* of Maharashtra, the 'spiritual superiority' that Kotani talks about is actually a further indication of their depressed status. One should heed the fact that the *Rava Divya* custom was nothing less than exploitation in the name of religion or spirituality. No high caste would have undergone such an atrocious ritual. Similarly, the ceremony of *Santi* involved the notions of purity and pollution. The ritual involved beheading of bull, which could have invoked death or other kinds of pollution for the higher castes. Therefore, not even the lower *jatis* but the untouchables were chosen.

So can one speak of the religious or spiritual significance of the two *jatis* in the Marwari society? *Mardum Shumari* shows that even though the Nais were paired with the Brahmins in marriages, this didn't mean that the former were equivalent to the latter. This is because while the Brahmins were thought to be *sarvottam* or supreme due to their works, the Nais were considered *agham* or low due to their 'dirty' works of hair-dressing, surgery and midwifery. This could be sensed from the following idiom –

*Kathe raja ri rewari, kathe nai ro thecha kuto*⁹¹ – It compares the status of a king to that of a masseur Nai.

Generally, the Nais did various kinds of work in marriages, e.g. looked for matches for girls, distributed invitations of marriage to people, helped in washing their hands, collected and disposed off the leaf plates after the marriage meals, etc. Therefore, in this case it could be said that it was the importance of the Nai's labour in the marriages, and not any kind of religious significance, that he was paired with a

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 67-69.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 459.

Brahmin. The same kind of objective was involved in employing the two *jatis* for works in the temples as well. But, it has to be kept in mind that the sole right of touching the deity was with the priest. A considerable distance was maintained between the deity and the lower *jatis*. However, the works which were the traditional works of these *jatis* were given to them only. A dhobi would wash the clothes of deities, but with special care and perhaps not in the same *kund* where people's clothes were washed. However, this contention need not be taken at face value as it needs further support from other evidences.

Further, the explication of relating good omen with the Nai and dhobi *jatis* is difficult to explain at this juncture. However, it has to be kept in mind that both the *jatis* were considered auspicious only when they were found with some symbol of their profession. While the Nai carried his mirror, the dhobi was to be with his washed clothes. Secondly, even though these *jatis* were considered 'dirty', the symbols in some way signified purity and not pollution. A Nai carrying his mirror was considered auspicious and not one carrying his tools of hair dressing or surgery. Similarly, a dhobi with washed clothes was a good omen for a job seeker and not one with dirty ones. In some sense, it could be perceived as a celebration of purity. These extractions from the idioms need further corroboration through in-depth analysis of the Marwari society.

Therefore, it could be suggested that the caste society was internally divided into innumerable units and sub units by the divisor of the factors of purity and pollution. These constituents of the society were at constant conflicts and negotiations with each other in order to valorise their own status and degrade the others on any of the criteria of pollution

OPPRESSION AND THE MENIAL JATIS

Evidences readily show that the menials reeled under high caste oppression and suppression. Their subjugation by these elements was an active function of their penurious state and low ritual status. There were various fronts on which they were exploited. However, its discussion has to be preceded by an elucidation of the types

of property owned by the menials. This is because most of the conflicts arose on the issues of property.

As had been shown earlier, land constituted a very important form of property in Marwar. Studies on Rajasthan reveal that even the lower *jatis* had some share in this arena.⁹² They had different status in this field. Some were land holders, tenants, revenue farmers, while most of them were agricultural labourers. The evidences so far show that there were few land owners.

The other forms of property were agricultural tools and cattle. Bull constituted the most important cattle wealth of the menials. These were utilised in agriculture by the menials as land owners or agricultural labourers. The possession of bull and other agricultural implements increased the chances of getting employment in the village. This was due to the fact that *halis* or agricultural labourers with their own implements were welcomed by the employers. Camel was another animal possessed mostly by the Nais. Perhaps these were rented out to the trading communities. Land and cattle constituted the most important arena on which most of the high and low *jati* disputes were based. House was yet another type of property of the menials, which mostly involved intra family disputes.⁹³

Women of the family served as human capital in the menial *jatis*. Not only did they take care of the household, but also contributed towards the household economy. For the same reason, on various fronts their existence was negotiated by the natal as well as the in-laws families. Contrary to the higher *jatis*, the abduction of menial women was an economic issue, and not alone of honour.⁹⁴

As far as the intangible forms of property were concerned, *virat* and labour were the most important. Sources show that *virat* system, a derivation of *jajmani* system was prevalent in medieval Marwar. It was a social system based on the caste system, with an effective economic angle to it. To make things clearer, there is a need to

⁹² Dilbagh Singh, "Caste and the Structure of Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan during the Eighteenth Century, *IHR*, Vol.2 No.2,1976, p.299-311. He shows that the *Raiyatis* or the cultivators of lower *jatis* comprised of both *maliks* or land owners as well as landless cultivators.

⁹³ Nai Gordhan appealed that his paternal aunty, who did not have any child stayed with his father's family after her husband's death. She left behind her share of house which wasn't being given to him by the *Nyat* members. Gordhan claimed to be the heir of this house, JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 17B.

⁹⁴ For more details see chapter 3 (Between the Devil and the Deep Sea).

quote Nandita Prasad Sahai who has intricately looked into the working of this system in early modern Marwar.⁹⁵

.... upper caste landed patrons established affective ties with artisanal and service castes to control their labour and in turn took upon themselves the obligation to meet the minimal subsistence requirements of clients through a customary apportioning of a part of their harvest as compensation. The latter known in the region as *biratkaris* entered these social arrangements to find protection against dearth and deprivation in difficult times, exclusive bonds with their *birat* households a guarantee of their support, and also meant to act as exclusive catchment areas for distribution of their produce.

Therefore, *virat* or patron families were nothing less a form of property to the menials which gave them employment in normal times and some respite during calamities. Many intra-*jati* conflicts arose on the question of ownership of *virat*. Nai Jagmal of Rahin complained against Nai Jorawari of Nikhela that he had been trying to get into his perpetual *virat* in Rahin.⁹⁶ Similarly, even Nai Lala and Nayan Chaina had a dispute regarding the *virat* of a family (*ghara ri virat babat mahomahi asarcho tho*). The state entrusted the case with the *nyat* of the Nais.⁹⁷

Labour, which rested in the person of the menial *jati* members, was one of the most sought after things in the agricultural society of Marwar. This was precisely due to its multifarious uses both in the agricultural and non-agricultural domains. The *Riyayatis* or high caste landlords tried to retain the labourers under any condition. Most of the times, it happened in the form of oppression of the local elements. Many issues arose between the landlords and the labourers during different phases of this relationship. The different dimensions will be revealed a little later.

Source of oppression : According to M.N. Srinivas the various elements of dominance in the rural society are numerical strength, economic and political power, ritual status and western education and occupations.⁹⁸ In the case of medieval Marwar, all the five factors except western education held great significance. They were intertwined with each other in different proportions to provide relative dominance to various *jatis* vis-a-vis the others. The calibration of the four menial

⁹⁵ Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, pp. 129- 136.

⁹⁶ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 56B.

⁹⁷ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 108B.

⁹⁸ M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, pp. 91-92.

jatis under study on the scale of these indices would help in estimating the extent and degree of oppression faced by them at the hands of the dominant castes.

TABLE: 1 POPULATION OF SOME MENIAL JATIS IN 1891

Jati	Population
Nai	34418
Dhobi	5124
Balai	Not Available
Bhangi	12272

TABLE: 2 POPULATION OF SOME DOMINANT JATIS IN 1891

Jati	Population
Brahmin	211396
Rajput	244563
Mahajan	232351
Jat	315443

As far as the numerical strength is concerned, the Nais had upper hand over the other three. Their total strength in Marwar in 1891 was 34418. On the other hand, the Dhobis and the Bhangis were 5124 and 12272 respectively. The figure for Bhambhis isn't available in *Mardum Shumari*. However, provided the number of documents available on them vis-a-vis the latter two *jatis*, it could be suggested that they were more numerous than the two, but less than the Nais. The maximum number of documents pertains to the Nais. Though there were other factors like proximity of the Nais with the high *jatis*, etc behind this development, the population factor can't be denied. On the other hand, the Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans and Jats, the so-

called dominant *jatis* of Marwar were 211396, 244563, 232351 and 315443 respectively in number.

In the sphere of economic power, all the four *jatis* were highly divided on the basis of occupation. Whosoever was in a better profession and possessed considerable resources was better off than the rest. However, taking a generalized review, it could be said that the Nais and Dhobis were better off than the untouchables. On the contrary, the Mahajans or the Baniyas were one of the most affluent *jatis* in Marwar. As a populous cultivating class, even the Jats were affluent. Both the Rajputs and the Brahmins were better than the menials in this respect.

Political power was not the terrain of the menials. However, there were certain elements in each *jati* who held government posts, or were *mehatar* or head of their *jati* and acted as intermediary between the state and the *jati*. They had more political power than the other units in the same *jati*. Undoubtedly, the Rajputs were the main centres of political power. They were found as *jagirdars*, *zamindars*, *ijaradars*, etc. Nevertheless, political power was also bought by richer sections of the society like the Mahajans⁹⁹ or Jats.

The hierarchy of the four *jatis* on the basis of their ritual status has already been depicted. Useless to say, but, the Brahmins and the Rajputs were high above the others. Both Mahajans and the Jats¹⁰⁰ emerged from *Vaisya* or *Sudra jatis*, but succeeded in negotiating their status with the state and society on the pretext of their affluence.¹⁰¹

Lastly, the occupation of a *jati* was greatly responsible in rating it as high or low in the society. According to the earlier demonstration, the menials were looked down upon due to the 'dirty' nature of their work. As shown earlier, on the pretext of their economic power, the Mahajans earned better status in the society. Their involvement

⁹⁹ Dilbagh Singh, 'The Role of the Mahajans in the Rural Economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century', in *Social Scientist*, Vol.2, No.10 (May, 1974), p.26. Dilbagh Singh has shown that the Mahajans of Eastern Rajasthan used to buy hereditary official posts in villages, e.g. *patel*, *patwari*, *chaudhary*, etc by paying *nazrana* to the state.

¹⁰⁰ *Mardum Shumari* says that they were *jatis* engaged in cultivation and who weren't considered that high (*kuchh badhe darze ke nahi samjhe jate*), p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India: Caste, Society and Politics in India from Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age, IV.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Bayly argues that caste had always been a fluid entity in India, which could be negotiated and improved in times of political exigencies and otherwise.

in trade and commerce made them such important factors in the villages and towns that the economy was completely unthinkable without them.

It is to be noted that on all the above domains, the menials stood as inferiors. This made them vulnerable to the exploitative tendencies of those in dominance and power. In the village economy, most of the official posts vested with the high or rich *jatis*. Therefore, the major power holders were the *amils*, *patwaris*, *mahajans*, *ijaradars*, *jagirdars*, *zamindars*, etc. Studies on Rajasthan history reveal that giving gifts and rendering services to the dominant *jatis* was a customary practice among the lower *jatis*. Giving milk, curd, cots, beddings, gifts on special occasions and festivities to the dominant ones was necessary to have a better relationship with them. *Mardum Shumari* shows that the Bhambhis gifted cotton cloth or leather belt to the *jagirdar* or *hawaldar* on diwali and holi (*.....holi diwali ko jab jagirdar ya gaon ke hawaldar se ramram karne ko jate hain to aksar soot ki ati ya chamde ka kassa jaisa dhanda ho le jakar bhent dharte hain khali haath jana theek nahi samajhta*).¹⁰² Similarly, they even rendered *begar* services in agricultural as well as non-agricultural fields. In return for these, the higher men gave some money or grains to them.

There was a limit to all this giving and taking. When the demands of the power holders exceeded these limits, it was called 'illegal' exactions or extortions.¹⁰³ It was the misuse of this power and position that oppressed the menials of Marwar up to a great extent. The multifarious extortions were both monetary and non-monetary in nature. The monetary exactions ranged from a simple illegal exaction from the menial to a denial of his wage. The various types of exactions could be assessed from the following documents –

[C.E. 1770, Merta Kachedi, evidence of illegal monetary exactions along with various other exactions] -

Balai Jagiyo of village Paldi came and said that in 1811(C.E. 1754), he had tilled Siri Mali Harkaran's field. It had 60 *mann* of crops. Since there was Maratha threat

¹⁰² *Mardum Shumari*, p. 534.

¹⁰³ Harbans Mukhia, "Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans and Menials in Eighteenth Century Eastern Rajasthan", *IESHR*, Vol.XIV, No.2 (April-June), 1997, p. 231.

in that region, Harkaran asked Sita to save his harvest. However, Sita said that he would help the Mali only if he gave his land to him. So after harvest, Sita took away everything. Later, when a Jat died, he took away his corn as well. Sita asked the Balai also to regularly provide three and half *ser* of crops and one-fourth of the price of the bull used. While the Balai gave the former, he could not give the latter. Therefore, Sita forcibly took away the fresh harvests, a bull and sixteen rupees of the Balai. Further, when the Balai went to Malwa, Sita lifted all his cattle: 1-buffalo, 3-cows, 1- female buffalo, and 1-bull. The state ordered to ask the *panchas* of the neighbouring villages to fix the problem.

[C.E. 1770, Parbatsar, evidence of monetary exaction on false grounds]¹⁰⁴-

Nai Badre of village Rohri complained that Jagirdar Haknak asked him to pay Rs. 100, which he revealed to the Parbatsar court. After its writings, he paid the money but still the *jagirdar* used to fight with him. The state ordered not to let the *jagirdar* do so.

[C.E. 1765, Merta Kachedi, evidence of mahajan's denial to give wages to the menials]¹⁰⁵-

Mahajan Chutro of village Kaekeedda says that till now on any marriage occasion in a Mahajan's house Rs.27 (under a custom of giving money to other *jati* members) were distributed likewise :- Rs.2.25 – *Bhomiya*; Rs.2 – *Chaudhary*; Rs.6 – *Thanayat* Brahmin; Re.1 – *Charan, Bhojak, Sami Sanyasi, Teli, Kumbhar, Bhambhi, Fakir, Balai* ; Rs.3 – *Bajdar*.

It's been seven years that Mahajan Bijo Gordhan distributes Rs.10 like this: - Rs.2 – *Bhomiya, Chaudhary*; Rs.6 – *Thanayat* Brahmin. The remaining Rs.17 is eaten away by him. Therefore, Mahajan Chutro asked him to give away to the people who were supposed to get it. On this, Bijo Gordhan threw Chutro on the ground and kicked

¹⁰⁴ JSPB 10, V.S.1827/1770, f. 251A. Another such case was of a fight between a Mahajan and a Balai the Balai was fined Rs.25 after his falsity was proven. However, the fact that the state set him free without any payment of fine suggests that perhaps the Balai was falsely accused by the Mahajan, JSPB 2, V.S.1822/1765, f. 70B, document no. 481.

¹⁰⁵ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 50A, document no. 270.

him many times. The state ordered to do the enquiry and do the legitimate thing. It also said that Chutro and Bija Gordhan had some transactional dispute, and that this dispute should be sorted out.

The earlier case of a Meghwal from village Uchiyada who was asked to have a *patta* for the *chauntari* outside his house, is also a case in point. He was the only one to have been issued such a *patta* in his Meghwal colony. This shows that it must have been somebody's hidden intention to exact money from him or to avenge him.¹⁰⁶

The non-monetary exaction or exploitation was also miscellaneous in character. Land, labour, cattle, women of family, etc were misused or taken away. The earlier case of the oppressive Mahajan Sitapokar shows that the powerful left no stone unturned to increase their resources. It was easier to enhance one's economic status at the cost of the menials than any other section. This was because comparatively they were economically weak and readily available for *begar*.

As shown earlier, the labour of the menials was a potential resource which was very important for the *riyayati* class. The menials were employed in agriculture, domestic and non-domestic activities. According to Harbans Mukhia, customs subjected the economically and socially deprived group of menials to the largest burden of *begar*.¹⁰⁷ The complaint of the Nai Kojje and others against the officials for extracting more than customary *begar* is a case in point.¹⁰⁸ Anything extending the limit was unacceptable to the menials. However, provided that not many cases of the manipulation of the limits of *begar* are there, it could be suggested that many of the cases remained internally settled in the village or completely unreported. Further, the demand for labour even led to fights between the powerful themselves.¹⁰⁹

Other than labour, cattle were the most sought after factor of production for the powerful. The numerous instances of cattle lifting prove this point. It was used in agriculture or simply sold off for monetary gains. The earlier case of Mahajan Sitapokar gives insights into the ways in which the higher classes lifted the cattle of

¹⁰⁶ See p. 29 for the details of this document.

¹⁰⁷ Harbans Mukhia, "Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans and Menials in Eighteenth Century Eastern Rajasthan", p. 232.

¹⁰⁸ For the details of the document, see pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁹ See the documents on pp. 39-40.

the menials whenever they got the chance. The same happened with the Bhambhi of village Nuhan. Two of his buffaloes were taken away by a Jat named dev from village Chokhli.¹¹⁰ This case shows that powerful men from other villages also stole the cattle wealth of the menials.

The assessment of cattle crime in pre-modern Punjab by David Gilmartin shows that such cases were not simple robberies, but rather meticulously planned activities which involved people from influential classes of society who were related to the cattle markets in commercial centres like Delhi, Multan, Peshawar, etc. He efficiently portrays the dilemma of the British government between doing justice with the poor aggrieved parties on the one hand and the local leaders who were involved in the crime but at the same time were the props of the British government in the rural areas as well. He even displays the multiple contradictory roles played by these leaders as 'a hinge between structures of local community leadership and authority, and the operation of professional networks of cattle disposal and marketing'¹¹¹. Such cattle theft operations were as far-flung as Uttar Pradesh. The cases of stolen cattle were first enquired by trackers who checked the *baras* or cattle sheds of the brokers in the crime who were given the cattle by the thieves. If nothing came out of it, an ad hoc panchayat constituting of a few friendly authoritative men, friends and the chief suspect of the crime was called. Strong evidences and foolproof support of powerful men were very much required to get justice. Even after promising the panchayat to return the cattle, they rarely did that. With the addition of more powerful elements from the neighbouring villages as well, this struggle went on between the two parties till one bowed down. Many-a-times, some weaker elements were also falsely accused. This is how many of the cases remained unreported.

Norbert Peabody gives a glimpse of the cattle lifting activities of the local chieftains in eighteenth century Rajasthan. He calls it a consequence of the increased affinities between the crown and capital or the king and the merchants, which in turn

¹¹⁰ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 105B. Another case of cattle theft was of Nai of Jatasar whose camel was stolen by a thief from another village called Kasubi Gudiya Alipur, JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 21A, document no. 111.

¹¹¹ David Gilmartin, 'Cattle, Crime and Colonialism: Property as Negotiation in North India', *IESHR*, Vol. XL, No.1, Jan-March, 2003, p. 40.

marginalized the landed aristocracy.¹¹² Therefore, Gilmartin's assessment gives reasons to believe that perhaps such networks were rampant in Marwar as well. However, in this region it wasn't just cattle but also other types of beasts which were stolen. Firstly, the frequency of beast pilferage in Marwar was very high. In reality, most of the tangible property related complaints from the menials were of animal thefts.

Secondly, the case of Nai Sadupa gives many insights which cohere with Gilmartin's contentions. Nai Sadupa of Jetasar village complained that *jagirdar* Bharatsingh Lakhdeher of Kasubi village took away his female camel. Later, Sadupa recognized his camel in Kasubi and reported it to the police station of Ladnoo. The *jagirdar* was called and asked as to how he got the camel. Afterwards, he sent for a man to get the camel, but the man never returned with the camel. Therefore, the policeman asked him to give a bull in place of the camel. However, Sadupo never got back his camel. The state simply asked to give back the camel to Sadupa whosoever had it.¹¹³ Firstly, it has to be heeded that the case was reported to some third village so that the *jagirdar* was out of his sphere of influence. Perhaps the Nai had some powerful friends in that region to side with him. Secondly, it shows the vulnerability of the menials in front of the political and administrative power holders. Both the power holders must have allied for mutual benefits. Thirdly, the hesitation of the *jagirdar* and the exchange proposal of the police prove that probably the camel was already sold. Thirdly, as Gilmartin says, the accused rarely gave back the beast.

Thirdly, the case of Jat Nimba who found a dead village goat in the *bara* of Bhambhi Kisna is important. He was beaten up by the Bhambhi and a *kanvariya* or government servant. After getting some bribe (wheat, jiggery, *ghi* and money) from the *Chaudhary*, the *hawaldar* or policeman, he gave wrong evidence against the Jat. Then the Jat was also beaten up by Lodha Sultanmal. The state admonished its officials for framing a false case against Jat Nimba.¹¹⁴ Gilmartin's contention of locating the lost animal in the *bara* of potential offenders is visible here. To some

¹¹² Norbert Peabody, "Cents, Sense and Census: Human Inventories in Late Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 4(October 2001), p. 839.

¹¹³ JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 21B, document no.117.

¹¹⁴ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 31A.

extent this case does point at a joint collaboration between various elements in the thefts of beasts.

Leaving aside the cattle thefts network, it could be suggested that many-a-times the menials were found accused of cattle robbery¹¹⁵ or other robberies and were made to pay fine in terms of animals. For example, Bhangi Dungariya of Jalpur village was accused of theft by Rajput Bahadur Singh Surtaj Singh. He was to pay Rs.6 and a bull to the Rajput. The Bhangi said that he hadn't stolen it and that the state could investigate the case. He demanded his bull back if he wasn't found guilty. The state asked for proper enquiry of the case and if the Bhangi wasn't at fault, then his money and bull were to be returned back.¹¹⁶ Comparing the penultimate case with the last one, it could be suggested that the menials were both victims and accused in such cases of cattle thefts. However, both the types of cases show the omnipresence of powerful men who employed or harassed the menials for their gains.

There were yet other types of cruelties done on the menials due to their weak economic and ritual positions. The occupation of the menials under the high class/caste made them vulnerable to their atrocities. Their status solely depended upon their relation with their masters. Dhobi Khushala was employed in the temple of Thakurji Shri Anad Dhanji. The state ordered that he was to be given Rs.2 in the first month, and thereafter according to the wishes of the priest of the temple.¹¹⁷ They could be easily fired according to the wishes of the masters. This is known from the case of the Nais of Merta who worked in the *virat* of the Oswal of Merta. They were replaced by some new Nais from outside the *Nyat*. The state also sided with the Oswal and said that mutual willingness of both the Oswal or Mahajan and the Nais was required for working in the *virat*; it wasn't possible without this readiness. The state also sought the suppression of the *gair wajabi* or illegitimate voices.¹¹⁸ This case also shows that the employers could do so even without the permission of the employees.¹¹⁹ The delay or refusal to give wages in cash or kind

¹¹⁵ The state ordered to release Nai Mauro who was arrested for stealing a bull, JSPB 2, V.S.1822/1765, f. 54B.

¹¹⁶ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 64B.

¹¹⁷ JSPB 1, V.S.1821/1764, f. 9B.

¹¹⁸ JSPB 8, V.S.1825/1768, f. 78A.

¹¹⁹ Even Nai Khushyala was ousted from his service in temple by Mahesri Mahajan. See p. 32 for further details.

could be gleaned from the complaints of Mahajan Chutro¹²⁰ and Dhedh of village Dasya¹²¹ respectively. The powerful men even beat up¹²² or ousted the weak from the village¹²³ according to their wishes. Discrimination and oppression on the basis of low ritual status was yet another form of oppression. However, one has to keep in mind that the practices of purity/pollution and untouchability were maintained by the high caste/class according to their own convenience. It seems molesting, abducting or outraging the modesty of menial caste women never polluted them. Similarly, the same leather which made the Bhambhis an untouchable *jati* was accepted by the powerful as gifts on festivities.¹²⁴ Wherever benefit through the breach of the religious laws was seen, they readily breached; otherwise, on general occasions, these laws were conjured up to tighten their control on the *neech* or lowly.

One got temporary relief from such exploitation in cases of clash of interests of two powerful parties. Cases of exploitation were brought to the fore by such conflicts. For example, the complaint of Mahajan Chutro against Mahajan Bijo Gordhan did intimate the state on the fact that since a long time Gordhan had been eating away the wages that the menials used to get on the occasion of marriage.¹²⁵ Similarly, the atrocities of Jalam Singh Salam Singh were elucidated by Laghdhi ram Singhot.¹²⁶ On the contrary, this case also shows the vulnerability of the menials in the clashes between two strong men. Balai Bhogina was beaten up by the former just because he adhered to the instructions of his master, which went against the former's interests. Therefore, even in such high class/caste conflicts, the menials remained susceptible to exploitation. Nevertheless good relationship with the high and rich was very important. Therefore, it was valued and maintained through customary practices of gift giving.

¹²⁰ See pp. 59-60 for the further details of the case.

¹²¹ Dhedh of Dasya complained that the *jagirdar* made him work but didn't give him the stipulated amount of bajra as a compensation for his service. The state ordered to call a man of the *jagirdar*'s and ask him to pay the Dhedh for the services, JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 114A.

¹²² Without any fault the Meghwal of village Vambhseen was beaten up by the *jagirdar* of Umarlaai, JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 150B.

¹²³ Over an issue of a field, Nai Lakha was ousted by the *Chaudhary* and others of the village. The state simply asked to do the legitimate thing after listening to the *Chaudhary*, JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 46A.

¹²⁴ It was a tradition among the Bhambhis to gift *chamde ka kassa* or leather belts to the powerful men in the village on festivals, *Mardum Shumari*, pp. 534.

¹²⁵ See p. 59-60.

¹²⁶ See pp. 36-37.

Therefore, it is quite evident that the powerful often misused their power against the menials for their personal gains. The analysis of different cases suggests that not only the elites of one's own village, but even those of the neighbouring villages were readily engaged in this exploitation of the weak. Most of the times the property of the menials was seen either as personal terrains or sought after areas by the affluent classes. On the pretext of the socially and economically depressed status of the menials, their property could be easily appropriated. The only way to survive in this situation was by befriending stronger elements who could decimate the extent of this oppression. Even the clash between two strong parties brought some solace to the menials. However, even these safety valves weren't without dangers to the weak. The bottom line remains that the menials were always vulnerable to all round exploitation by the strong. The only difference was that some were saved but some were badly trapped in the cobweb of exploitation.

Resistance by the weak: It is seen that dominance and resistance are two sides of the same coin. Both coexist to complement each other and this combination contrasts the monolithic social order of one sided dominance or resistance. Resistance could be defined as 'those behaviours and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations, that threaten to unravel the strategies of domination; consciousness need not be essential to its constitution'¹²⁷. It is seen that the menials resisted in a number of ways, both consciously and sub consciously.

The basis of any resistance by the menials was a realisation of their depressed status in every sense. The doctrine of karma or deeds in the previous birth weren't always used to reconcile to one's low status. In fact, many-a-times they questioned the 'historicity' of the caste order and its preceptors which always degraded them. This happened in the form of 'cultural resistance'. The 'everydayness of resistance' could be gleaned from the mythical stories of the menials. These stories always portrayed them originally as high *jatis* who devolved into menials due to circumstances. In the context of the Bhuinyas (an untouchable *jati*) of Bihar, Gyan Prakash says that such stories sought to depict the status of the untouchables as 'historical' and 'not

¹²⁷ Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash(ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, OUP, Delhi, 1999, p. 3.

natural'.¹²⁸ Further, the myths of their creation from the body of god contested the practices of untouchability. Interestingly, this practice was also manipulated to mock those who practiced it. The Bhangis, who were considered the most depressed of the four *jatis* eulogized their identity through a belief of the attainment of *nirvana* only by the touch of the dirt of their broom. On the pretext of their highly 'impure' ritual status, the Marwari people refrained from inviting them for food. This practice was given a full turn of three sixty degrees to upgrade the Bhangis and degrade those who practiced it. The Bhangis held that they never ate at anybody's home unless until the host gave them golden broom and basket.¹²⁹ The ritual chauvinism of the high *jatis* was mocked and subtly portrayed as their inability to give expensive gifts. The denial of the Bhangis to announce their arrival in crowded places¹³⁰ at a later period also shows their everyday resistance to the caste ideology.

The very act of petitioning against the rural dignitaries or office holders was a form of protest which was sanctioned by the state itself. To pressurise the judicial authorities for speedy justice, many times they went collectively in a group (*samsat* or *vagaire*) for lodging complaints. Even though the menials couldn't have got justice without a powerful saviour, at least they could exercise their right to legal protest. In times of severe exploitation, the menials took recourse to 'avoidance resistance'¹³¹. They migrated to neighbouring places to evade the exploitation.

In very rare cases, they took recourse to open protest or violence. The present evidences show that the use of violence by the menials was only at the behest of the men of power. These men had their own reasons for physically avenging other high units of power. In the rarest of the rare cases the menials took to arms against the high caste/class for their own purpose. Such cases were rare due to the realisation of the harmful consequences which could've even threatened their own existence.

¹²⁸ Gyan Prakash, "Becoming a Bhuinya in Eastern India", in Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, p. 159.

¹²⁹ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 584-585.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 584.

¹³¹ Avoidance resistance is one where the 'dissatisfied groups seek to attenuate their hardships and express their discontent through flight, sectarian withdrawal, or other activities that minimize challenges to or clashes with those whom they view as their oppressors', Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash(ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, p. 9.

Furthermore both the society and state¹³² were incompatible to such excesses on the part of the *neech*.

Hence it could be suggested that even though the menials understood their depressed status and showed their everyday resistance against oppression in many ways, they could do little to ameliorate their conditions. Though violence was the last recourse on their list, it helped little in bringing about any change in their status and condition. Seeking help from powerful group seemed to be the best option for them to get justice.

The oppressed as the oppressors: Till now, the overall picture that has emerged of the menial *jatis* is that of a poverty stricken group that was always oppressed by the upper *jatis*. However, the picture is incomplete without the demarcation of the grey areas between the complete black and white shades. This is to say that on the one hand, not all menials were poor and depressed, and on the other, not all the high *jatis* were rich and oppressors. When Jat Perna went to Malwa, the *Chaudhary*, Karsa and the *Patwari* sold off his field to a Balai Jeeven.¹³³ It is to be noted that if a Balai was buying the land of a high status jati like Jat, he must be rich. This contention is corroborated by the fact that the land was sold to him by some influential men.

Further, many documents show that many menials had good cattle wealth. This is known from the earlier discussed case of Balai Jagiya whose grains, cattle and money were taken away by Mahajan Sitapokar, when the Balai had gone to Malwa.¹³⁴ As has been said earlier, the *gaon* Bhambhi's wife had the permission to wear gold and silver ornaments. Even this displays the affluence of these men of power in the lower orders. The influence and affluence of the village balais (or bhambhis) of central india were so conspicuous that they were noted by John Malcolm (an English official). While talking about the powerful status and importance of the Dhedhs or Balais of central india he says¹³⁵ –

The Bullae (or Balais) or Dher (or dhedh) of the village, though of low caste, is in Central India considered as one of the most important village officers. He is paid by a free grant of land, and some

¹³² In the case of Jat Nimba where he was beaten up by a Balai, the state replied in a very harsh to give reply for such misdemeanor,

¹³³ JSPB 6, V.S.1824/1767, f. 8A.

¹³⁴ See pp. 58-59 for the details of the document.

¹³⁵ Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, 2 vols., p. 18.

small fees on the produce of the village, from the cultivators of which, when the lands are not rented, he collects the revenue, and gives it to the Potail (Patil/Patel or the village headmen). The Bullaee ought not only to be acquainted with the name and quality of every inhabitant, but with his occupations and exact possessions. In short, he is, ex-officio, the Potail's spy and he reports all improper transactions that take place in the community. The Bullaee is expected to be informed minutely of every house, tank, well, tree and field, appertaining to his village. He notes every landmark and boundary, which he is expected to know either from tradition or observation. His evidence in all disputes about land is the most essential: he is the appointed guide of travellers through his limits, and must also carry all burdens that the Potail directs; but, this is, if frequent, generally performed by persons of his family or tribe, who are settled in the village, and work also as labourers in cultivation.

Perhaps almost the same status was enjoyed by the Balais of Marwar as well. This proposition could be buttressed by citing the numerical strength of the Balais in this region. As has been shown earlier, they were more numerous than the Dhobis or Bhangis. The more number of documents pertaining to the Balais vis-a-vis the two jatis ascertains this contention. Further, There were many other menials who worked as government servants. Like the high caste/class oppressors, making money by oppressing weaker elements was easy for them as well.

There are evidences of the menials harassing higher and lower *jati* elements. Brahmin Gordhan Deep of village Bhitara complained that he had never paid *dhibro* tax in the *chowkis* or posts of Bhambhi and Sansir. But now the *jagirdar* was asking for it.¹³⁶ This shows some kind of collaboration between the high and the low *jatis* power holders to oppress a poor high *jati* member. Similarly, Jat Nimba was also beaten up by Bhambhi Kisna with the support of other men of power.¹³⁷ Another case shows that due to high contacts, a Nai was living in a Brahmin's house.¹³⁸ Although the menials oppressed the high *jati* members in these cases, they didn't do that independently. In fact, they simply gave shape to the plans of the high caste/class oppressors. On the contrary, there were instances showing the ways in which the menials persecuted those below them. A Nai got Darji Dharma's land on *muqata* tenure (revenue farming). After a few years he stopped paying the rents, and later even refused to give back the land. Moreover, he had passed on the land of the

¹³⁶ JSPB 9, V.S.1826/1769, f. 123A.

¹³⁷ See p. 62.

¹³⁸ See p 30.

Darji to his cousin.¹³⁹ Another case is of Jat Vid who lent some money to Nai Dana in Malwa. Later the Nai refused to pay back the sum. In comparison to the earlier cases where the menials indirectly exploited high *jati* men due to their high contacts, these are cases of harassment of the poor members of both of high and low *jatis*.

Mardum Shumari shows that there were *jatis* and groups which were even lower than our four *jatis* in social or economic standing. These groups were treated in the same way as the higher *jatis* treated the four lower *jatis*. Therefore, in many ways the oppressed acted like oppressors. The following case of C.E.1764 from Sojhat Kachedi¹⁴⁰ shows that the menials could easily deny services to *jatis* lower than them –

The Khalpiya (a Muslim butcher *jati*) of Sojhat came here and complained that a Nai who had always been doing his *hajamat* or shaving, refused to do it now. The state ordered the Nai that if he had always been doing it, he should not discontinue now.

All the above examples depict the heterogeneity of the Marwari society in terms of the social and economic status of its members. A high caste didn't necessarily mean high economic and social placement, and likewise, a low caste wasn't always coterminous with sufferings and exploitation. The rich and the powerful were almost always exploitative towards all, irrespective of their *jati* status. The only difference lied in the degrees of oppression faced by the high or low *jati* units. While a poor high *jati* member was exploited on the pretext of his low economic status or comparatively lower social position, a low social unit faced double repression based on his economic and ritual positions. However, even among the oppressed, there were certain rich and influential elements that oppressed those lower than them. Therefore, a hierarchy of oppression could be visualised where the high oppressed the low. And, the menials were no exception to this hierarchy.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

It is evident from *Mardum shumari* shows that though the Mahajans were not a ritually high group, their affluence gave them a politically and economically strong

¹³⁹ See p 32. Also see chapter 4 for the further analysis of this case.

¹⁴⁰ JSPB 1, V.S. 1821/1764, f. 78A.

position in the Marwari society. Such a position underestimated their low ritual status and placed them almost equal to the Brahmins or the Rajputs in social status. This is an example of collective social mobility of the Mahajans which took place as a result of the negotiations between the economic and ritual status. Was there any possibility of any kind of social mobility in the case of the menial *jatis*?

Before answering this question, one has to keep in mind that the menials belonged to the *sudra* order. Considerable distances were maintained from them for the fear of ritual pollution. Nevertheless, examples from medieval South India show that groups with such status did succeed in negotiating with the state for a better status. The works of Vijaya Ramaswamy¹⁴¹ on the artisanal castes of south India give a positive signal to this transformation. She efficiently outlines the ways in which the artisanal *jatis* enhanced their economic status in the booming markets of medieval south India. It has been shown that the escalation in economic ladder equipped the artisanal groups to negotiate with the higher *jatis* and the state for a better ritual or theoretical status in the *varna* system. In fact, the various disunited components, i.e., the *Idangai* or left-hand and the *Valangai* or right-hand in the artisanal groups stood as a united body in times of need. Considering their importance in the economy, even the state couldn't refuse this demand of ritual upgradation.

Similarly, even Cynthia Talbot¹⁴² has shown that on the basis of one's military skills, a low *jati* unit could upgrade his status in the Kakatiya Andhra state. While Ramaswamy talks of group mobility, Talbot indicates mobility on the basis of individual skills. Talbot says that due to the military adventurism of the Kakatiya state, it honoured anybody with military skills. Here lied the opportunity for the lower *jatis* to enhance their state.

In retrospect to both these cases from south India, medieval Maharashtra gives a completely different picture. Hiroyuki Kotani¹⁴³ illustrates the 'spiritual superiority' of the *Ati Sudra jatis* of medieval Maharashtra in boundary disputes of villages or during natural calamities. He even shows the differential occupational structure of

¹⁴¹ Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in South India*, New Delhi, 1985 and "Crafts and Artisans in South Indian History, *Indian History Congress*, 64th session, Mysore (December 28-30, 2003).

¹⁴² Cynthia Talbot, *Pre-colonial India in Practice*, OUP, New Delhi, 2001.

¹⁴³ Hiroyuki Kotani, "Ati Sudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan" in H. Kotani (ed.) *Caste System, Untouchability and the depressed*.

the *Mahar jati* to indicate heterogeneity of status of the people in the same *jati*. Like Talbot, even Kotani demarcates the raised status of the *Mahars* as mountain soldier or police. The considerable unity in the lower artisanal *jati* against a common enemy as depicted by Ramaswamy was also found in the *Mahar jati* members of varying status. Despite all this, the untouchable *jatis* failed to experience group mobility. In fact, here the state ensured the strict demarcation between the ritual status of the high and the low. It was more serious in cases of breach of the Brahmin honour or moves towards brahmanization. Even Hiroshi Fukazawa¹⁴⁴ shows that though the *Mahars* demanded a better treatment at the hands of the society and state, they were never given one. On the contrary, the government tried restoring the social order by being unreasonable to the untouchables most of the times.

Perhaps the same line was toed by the Marwar state as well. Till now no evidences of social uplift of the lower *jatis* have been found. In fact, *Mardum Shumari* presents a depressed picture of these *jatis*. At one place, it even indicates the frustration of the census reporters towards any breach of the general norm in the lower orders. At a later period, the Bhangis were rebuked for not announcing their arrival in the market places – *magar jo raj mein naukar hain ve apni aukat bhool gaye hai*¹⁴⁵. It says that the servants of the state have forgotten their status that they don't announce before arriving. As shown earlier, all these *jatis* were discriminated on the basis of their ritual status. Further, even the works on the artisanal *jatis* do not show the same trend of south India whereby the relative economic strength of the artisans made them pressurise the state for better status. Though a comparative study of the western and south Indian regions will be an interesting endeavour in this regard, it is difficult to explicate this difference at this point.

But, why the menials could not experience such mobility? M.N. Srinivas opines that there exists a 'hiatus' between the ritual status of a *jati* and its politico-economic standing. Most of the times, the achievement of one is followed by the other two.¹⁴⁶ An evaluation of the menials on all these three grounds shows their depressed status which was difficult to uplift. As indicated earlier, the occupations practised by them were mere extensions of their traditional works, which gave them very less

¹⁴⁴Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, 16th-18th centuries*, Ch.4 (The State and the Caste System).

¹⁴⁵ *Mardum Shumari*, p. 584.

¹⁴⁶ M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays*, p. 203.

opportunities to enhance their economic position. The presence of certain affluent elements in every *jati* couldn't have stimulated the process of collective social mobility; rather these were instances of individual mobility. The example of the Mahajans shows that only reasonably good economic position could win higher status for lower groups. The indispensability of such groups was to be felt by the society and state.¹⁴⁷ This was never the case with the menials in terms of their economic resources. In fact they were indispensable, but in the service sector. Even in the political arena, rather than being the main actors, they assumed the side roles as head of the *jati* or low government servants. Thus, a 'corporate' mobility of these groups was not just difficult, but near to impossible.

CONCLUSION

The colonial construction of the myth of static nature of caste order gave rise to various misconceptions about the Indian society. The homogenisation of the religious, socio-economic or occupational political stature of the different units of a *jati* was just one of those. The myth failed to oversee the varying contours in the internal walls of a *jati*. This study of the status of the menials of Marwar tried to unravel the internal mechanism of these highly heterogeneous *jatis*. The multiple levels of status in a single *jati* were shown to prove that every *jati* was like a micro organism in the body of caste society with the same differential in status. The treatment of the lower *upjatis* by the higher ones was almost a replica of that of the lower *jatis* by the higher counterparts. The inter-relationship between lower *jatis* also resembled this picture. However, the difference in economic status again cut across the ritual differences to upgrade the low.

Furthermore, oppression was an omnipresent phenomenon in medieval Marwar. The only recognizable difference was between the degrees of oppression faced by one. Also, the caste society wasn't unidirectional in terms of the oppression or subordination faced by the lower *jatis* at the hands of the higher. In fact it was a three dimensional unit in which the different blocks were at constant conflict to

¹⁴⁷ Dilbagh Singh, 'The Role of the Mahajans in the Rural Economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century', *Social Scientist*. He has shown that the Mahajans played a very important role in the rural economy. Not alone to the peasants, but they also advanced loans to the *jagirdars* and the state.

show their comparative strength over the other. Ritual status was not the only criteria of being placed over the others. Even economic and political clout gave considerable lift to one's status. Though one can generalize that the sum total of the status of all Rajputs or Brahmins (or any other high *jati*) was better than the Balai or Bhangi, he/she can't underestimate the fact that many-a-times high contacts or economic uplift did make them stronger than many high *jati* members. Therefore, there is nothing wrong in contending that in 18th century Marwar, caste was not always coterminous with class. Despite all these nuances in the inter relationship of the various *jatis* of Marwar, it could be said that the menials could've never experienced a collective social mobility due to an overall low ritual status as well as a lack of opportunity to avail a unified high economic status of a *jati*. This was one of the reasons of their adoption of sanskritised ways of life later.

Conclusion

This study aimed at showing the extent to which the depressed *jati* status of menial groups affected their overall standing in Marwari society as well as vis-a-vis the state. Also, the multiple dimensions of the menials as victims as well as victimisers, passive helpless beings, as also pro-active negotiators are examined to gain a comprehensive picture of their existence as homogenous or heterogeneous units of Marwari society.

In general, menials were supposed to eat, wear, live, work, etc in accordance with the set pattern or principles of caste society. All such indices like food, clothes, residential pattern, occupation, etc were indicative of the hierarchy of ritual status among the four menial *jatis*. This hierarchy was marked by the ideologies of purity and pollution, wherein occupation was not the only factor behind one's 'pure' or 'impure' status. In reality, there were innumerable other criteria like the nature of food consumed, customs related to marriage, death, etc that determined the relative purity or impurity of a particular *jati* vis-a-vis the others. The same factors were responsible for one's devolution from the original ritual status.

Interestingly, at a micro level, every menial *jati* acted as a *jati* society in itself, where the various *upjatis* were hierarchised on almost the same aforesaid criteria. Breach of any *upjati* norm or proximities with the lower *upjatis* were potent enough reasons to relegate one to a lower ritual status in the menial *jati* hierarchy. Thus, in their own ways, the higher *upjatis* in every *neech jati* were unjust to the ritually lower *upjatis*. In this sense, an oppressed was always an oppressor, practising almost the same inequalities faced by him/her at the hands of the higher *jatis*. However, one does not know up to what extent these theoretical value systems were followed in the real sense. Contestations and negotiations for the valorisation of one's *jati* or *upjati* status were after all a basic feature of the Marwari society.

Furthermore, in the economic arena, the menials were mostly inferior to their high *jati*/class counterparts. Even though the society valued their labour and allowed them to practise a variety of professions, their economic status was lower in comparison to the higher groups. This is because the non traditional professions allowed to the menials were almost in

conjunction with their ritual status. Therefore, most of the times they were associated with low profile menial jobs, which promised minimal or negligible rise in economic status. Similarly, such menial jobs gave little or no political power to the menial *jati* members, thereby adding to their overall marginality in almost every aspect. The weak numerical strength, economic and political power, ritual status and occupations subjected the menial *jatis* to outright and all-round repression at the hands of the dominant ones. The subordinate's property which mostly constituted of cattle, house, land, women, *virat*, labour, etc was forcefully and illegally grabbed by the high *jati*/class constituents. The over exploitation of their labour in the name of the customary tradition of *begar* or bonded labour was one of the most exploitative practices among the high groups of Marwar. The already depressed status of the menials left little scope for the retrieval of property or freedom from *begar*. The only hope of justice came from the support of a rich and powerful agent, at loggerheads with the victimizer. Most of the times, they used to be the patron masters of the menials, who were bound by the need of the menial's labour as well as tradition to protect them from natural or manmade calamities.

However, the menial *jati* women were the worst affected victims of oppression and suppression, not only at the hands of the high *jatis*, but, the caste society at large. The rampant patriarchal arrangements in and outside family on the one hand, and their depressed *jati* status on the other, coalesced together to compound the degree of subjugation and oppression faced by them. The burden of tradition and customary practices born by them was aimed at the maintenance of *jati* hierarchy and healthy production relations. Their *jati* and even *upjati* traditions affected or determined all the aspects of their life, ranging from food, clothes, occupation to their overall status in society. In fact, all these aspects of a menial woman's life marked out the socio-economic distinctions between the *jatis* and *upjatis*.

Due to their significant role in production and procreation, women were considered very important economic agents by the caste society. It was their utility in the menial household and community that they were allowed to work or remarry. However, in both the arena of work and remarriage, it was not the choice or right of women that was exercised by them, but a social obligation that was thrust upon them. In simpler words, it could be said that their family and customary laws determined their destiny. The tasks done by them were mere extensions of the work done by the men of the household. This was done to limit their appropriation of the produce and income of their labour, as also, to keep them under constant patriarchal vigil. Similarly, remarriage was an economic transaction between the natal and in

laws families, with little or no say of the woman. The sole motivation was the maximum utilisation of woman's labour and fertility, which would've gone waste as a widow, than the concerns of her welfare. Even the state and caste society were indirect parties in this economic transaction. Widow remarriage among the menials gave the higher *jatis* the ideological reasons to prove their superiority in front of the *neech jatis*. Also, it provided more human capital to be gainfully employed in the production process for the maximisation of returns. Even the state received remarriage tax and more working hands to inflate its revenues in the adverse climatic zone of Marwar.

Further, their interface with the world outside their household and community was imbued with insecurities. Their depressed *jati* status made them soft targets to the high *jati/class* men. The socio-economic and political weaknesses of their men and leniency of the state towards the powerful subjugated them to such excesses, with little or no hope of justice. The debilitating economic and political conditions or natural calamities often forced them into slavery, thereby curtailing almost every freedom. Thus it could be said that the menial *jati* women were all-round victims of patriarchy and subordinate *jati* status.

Nevertheless, all the social conspiracies came with certain liberties and privileges for the menial women. They had certain proprietary rights in the in-laws family, which were secure even after widowhood. Secondly, they had some say in the family affairs as well. As patriarchal elders they were heard in the household. Thirdly, even the state gave them the right to redress their grievances against the conflicting parties of high or low statures. All such positivities in the menial society equipped them with opportunities to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions to some extent.

Unlike the Orientalist construction of the Indian states as despotic, the state of Marwar showed remarkable ambivalence in its interface with the menial *jatis*. The potential Maratha threat to the Marwar state in 18th century coaxed it to give greater concessions to the masses to stay back in Marwar and contribute to maintaining the interdependent, pyramidal social set-up and local economy. Therefore, it traced a middle path rather than one of outright oppression towards the menials. It tried balancing out its roles as an upholder of social order and the guardian of the masses. While conforming to brahmanical traditions and practices, it left out those clauses which were at loggerheads with its own interests. Here lay the terrain of paternalism. This is to say that, the paternalistic acts of the state towards the menials, which

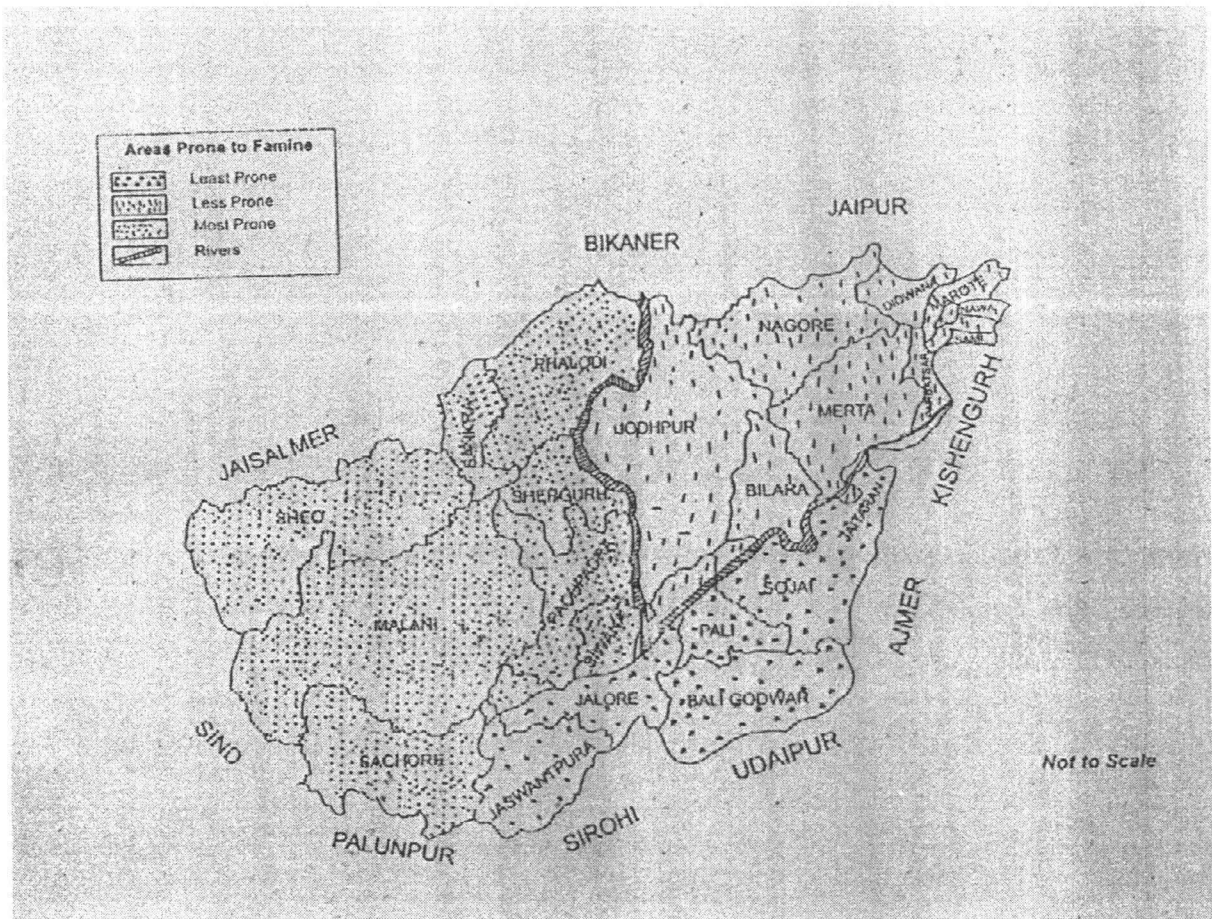
were mostly against brahmanical traditions, were unravelled for a healthy socio-economic and political atmosphere.

Against this backdrop, it is easy to grasp and digest the ambivalent or the carrot-and-stick attitude of the state towards the menials. It allowed the menials to practice many professions to maximise its own revenues. However, acting as a fulcrum between the well being of the high and the low *jati*/class of Marwar, it allowed only those professions that were almost synonymous with their *jati* status and wouldn't have affected the social order. Many-a-times, not only did it employ both high and low *jati* units for the same job, but, also gave the same wages. Some menial agents were employed in government services as well. Even as a strict employer, it gave regular gifts on special occasions in the menial households to represent and rejoice its warm proximities with them. Rigorous tax collections were interspersed with tax remissions. Further, while respecting the judicial authority of the traditional adjudicatory bodies, it provided official institutions to redress the grievances of the low, even against the high.

The mixed response and attitude of the state towards the menials gave rise to a group of affluent and influential menials, who enjoyed greater power and respect than their other *jati* brethren. High contacts or noted propinquities with authoritative high *jati*/class elements also resulted in such privileged set of menials. Holding more resources than many of the high *jati* members, these so-called oppressed groups acted as oppressors in their own capacities. Their relatively high political and economic stature or high reach made them invincible in front of the weak masses of both high and low *jatis*. This shows that in 18th century Marwar, low *jati* was not always coterminous with low class, and also that, the menial group wasn't a monolith characterised by homogeneity in the status of all its agents. However, such individual heights were still distant from achieving social mobility for the menial *jati* as a group. This was mainly due to the considerably low ritual status as well as low economic standing of most of the *jati* units. As a bottom line, it could be suggested that in 18th century Marwar, the *jati* status did affect the overall standing of the menial *jatis* as a group, but, exceptions were always there.

APPENDIX I

Drought-prone regions of Marwar

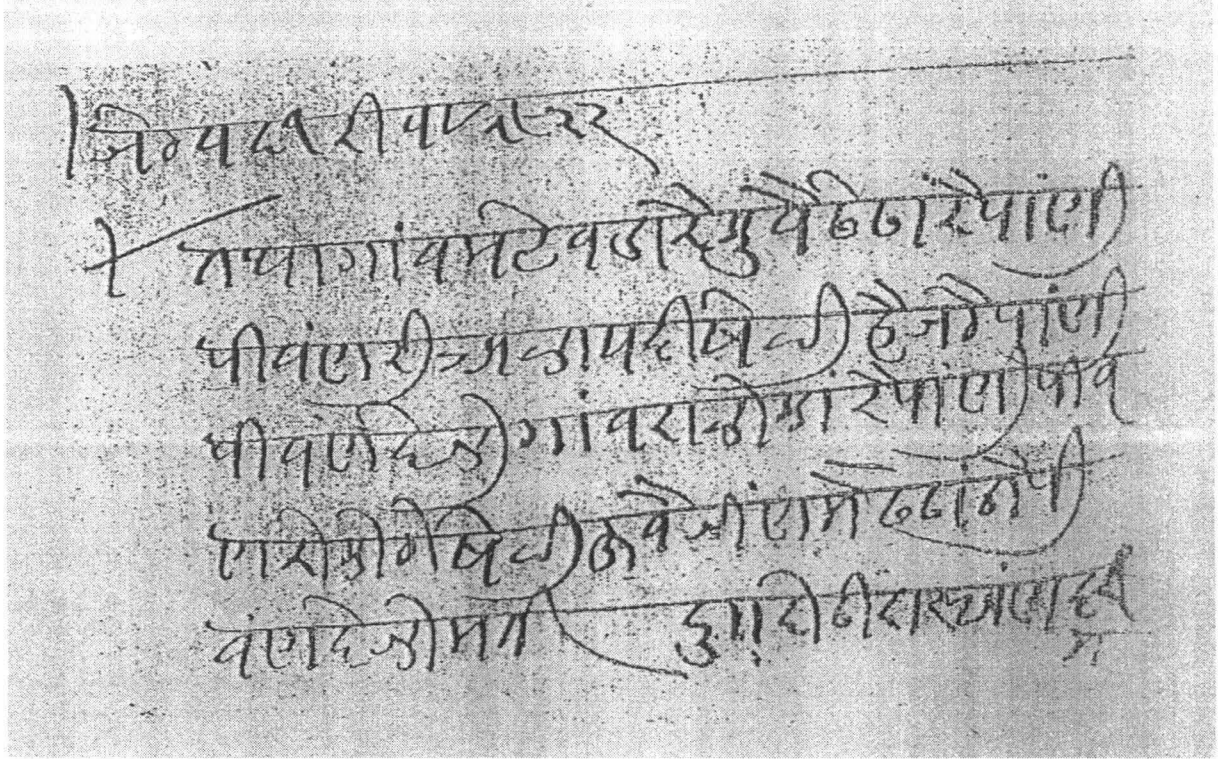


(Courtesy : Nandita Prasad Sahai)*

* Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest*, p. 67.

APPENDIX II

Transcription of an Original Marwari document from JSPB



(JSPB 3, V.S.1822/1765, f. 48B, document no. 261)

Transcribed form of the document :

Jeth vad 1 rev 1822

tatha gaon mahevada re kuwe dhedha re pani pivan ri alayadi kheli hai jathe pani
pivan deho gaon ra loka re pani pivan ro kotho kheli huwe jin me dhedha ne pivan
deho mati duhayati dodhidar Anad Ram

Translation of the document:

June, Sunday, V.S.1822 OR C.E. 1765.

In Mahewada village, the Dhedhs (or Balais) have a different drinking water container (or *alayadi kheli*). Let them have water from here. There is a *kotho kheli* or

bigger drinking water container for the villagers. Don't let the Dhedhs have water from here.

APPENDIX III

Map of 18TH century Rajasthan



(Courtesy: G.N. Sharma)*

* Sharma, G.N., *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan (1500-1800A.D.)*, p. 2.

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