

18th Century Village Craftsmen: A Socio-Economic Study of Marvar

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the craftsman and village community relations. In the Marvar area craftsmen were classified according to their different ways of employment: first craftsmen who worked for the village community and those who were not skilled but took this profession in their free time, second the entrepreneurs, individual craftsman who worked independently in urban markets. Third, those craftsmen who worked in state workshops to cater to the requirement of aristocrat and royal families. In rural areas, two types of craftsmen were seen firstly, professional secondly, non-professionals, and work relation was based on patron-client relationship. This paper will explore the mode of employment and the difference and similarity between the Fukazawa, Wiser, and mode of employment in Marvar.

In Marvar, the artisanal group also called *pavanjat*. The term pavan before the *jat* is quite significant. It means payment-receiver caste that can be in kind or cash in lieu of service provided by them are *pauni*, *pavania*. Nainsi mentions *pavan* for those who provide the service in rural areas and *qasba*. It seems important to study the relation of artisans with their community vice-versa. Community norms were protected by *nyat* and village *panchayat*. In some case, there was a sub-caste which was the outcome of political changes and societal needs.

Keywords: Artisans, Craftsman, Panchayat, Nyat

Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' documents shows that a single term has been used for rural servants that term had categorized only in Marvar, similarly as that of Maharashtra, where the twelve *balutas* have a similar history (Kulkarni 1969). Apart from the names of professions and castes of the menial artisan and craftsmen, there are four more terms used in records to define them, namely, *khut*, *vaghotar*, *mehtar* and *chhatish pavan jat*.

The terms *khut* and *vaghotar* or *baghotar* appear in a way which shows them to be virtually synonyms of *baluta* in Maharashtra. A revenue-schedule of Marvar shows the share of *khut* and *baghotar* in the peasant production both in cash and kind (1785C.E./1842). The meaning of *khut*

is widely perceived as headman of those who were in the service of the village community and in lower strata of the society. The second term is not used to symbolize any profession or person. The context to create a false impression that suggests as if it is equivalent to or has a similar use as the term *khut*. In fact, it relates to perquisites and should not be taken to designate any service class.

The term *mehtar* occurs often in the Marvar *bahi* (*ibid*). Literally, it means an elder person. It is clearly used as

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a title for a headman of a particular rural profession in a village, and not of the entire class of rural servants. Our sources also mention individual menial castes, sometimes with or without the title *mehtar*.

There is a strong possibility that two different terms for headman (*khut* and *mehtar*) of rural servants were employed simply to demarcate the elders of lowest people like *mehtar* (sweeper), *mochi* (cobbler), *dhedh*, *chamar* and *bhambi* (all leather workers) and other occupational castes like *sunar* (goldsmith), *luhar* (blacksmith), *suthar* (carpenter) and *darji* (tailor), etc. At the moment, no other explanation can be put forward.

The term *pavan jat* occurs often in the *Vigat* as well as in other contemporary documents to designate various groups of artisans. Banarsi Das in his work *Aradhakathanak* mention them as *pauni jat* or *pavan jat* a social status equal to *shudras* (Das, 1981). Both Banarsi and Nainsi sometimes prefix or suffix the word *chhatis* (thirty-six) to the term *pavan* or *pauni* to indicate the traditional number of craftsmen and other artisanal groups (like the twelve *balutas* in Maharashtra) (*Ibid*).

The castes which received payments, obviously for rendering any kind of service, are called *pauni*, *pavania* (Sharma, 1985). Nainsi mentions *pavan* specifically for those who rendered any kind of service to the people of rural areas of village community. So, the term *chhatis pavan*, presumably could have now crystallized for rural servants in Marvar as in the case of *bara balute* in Maharashtra. However, the term *pavan jat* subsumes all the terms like *khut*, *mehtar* and *bagohotar*, etc., under its umbrella. Both the list of Marvar and Maharashtra are broadly similar with a few exceptions. For example, in Marvar, our documents show three different castes of leather workers, namely, *bhambi*, *dhedh* and *mocha*. Besides, the *darji* (tailor), *siqligar* (sharpener) and *pinjar* (cotton carder) are not enlisted in Fukazawa's list of *balutas* (Fukazawa, pp. 20-22).

The primary sources for the present research work are *sanad parwana bahi*, *vigat* (Nainsi and Jalore) and *Pargana Jalore re Gaono ra Farsat ri Bahi* with quantitative methodology.

Craftsmen and Village Community

In Marvar the differentiated local conditions such as those of settlement density, distribution of power, land/labour ratio and the availability of labour, commercialization level of the village in question and its access to markets, etc., constituted a multi-centric set of dynamics that saw a variety of exchange forms co-exist simultaneously. Cash-based transactions operated alongside exchanges in kind, based on the forging of patron-client relationships in some villages among certain castes. Known in Marvar as *birt* relationships, these contracts were based on dyadic relations with specific patron households, conceptually distinct from demiurgic *baluta* relationships of village servants with the entire village community, common in villages of the Deccan region (Kotani, 2002). Known in Marvar as *birt* relationships, the latter appear to be the local variant of the much-debated *jajmani* that were supposed to establish harmonious collective interdependence among different constituents of a village caste hierarchy on the basis of customary rights and privileges (Wiser, 1958). In its pure form, the model suggested that upper-caste landed patrons established affectivities with craftsmen 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 this region as *birtkaris*, entered these social arrangements to find protection against dearth and deprivation in difficult times, exclusive bonds with their *birt* households a guarantee of their support, and also meant to act as exclusive catchment areas for distribution of their produce. Depending on the size of the family, fundamental consumption needs were more or less irreducible. Meeting these subsistence needs in a reliable and stable way was indeed their central concern, and as insurance against economic distress, these craftsmen families saw insurance against starvation by having a fixed cluster of patrons. In doing so, they attempted risk-aversion through control over an exclusive market years when consumer demand for them goods failed to provide them adequate income.

Unlike the historical uniformity attributed to patron-client systems of relations in Wisser's traditional archaic model of *jajmani*, sources from Rajasthan, reveal a range of bonds set in specific historical circumstances. For one, the form of exchange between the 'patrons' and the 'clients' is far from being uniform or clear, with no evidence discernable in the records that indicates a customary portion of the harvest being bartered for craft commodities. It is neither evident whether the payments were made in cash or kind, nor is it indicated if the quantum of payments was along 'customary' lines or had some relation to the amount of labour expended or quantity of goods provided by the *birtkari*. Lending credence to C.J. Fuller's critique of the archetypal grain heap as the enduring symbol of a moneyless economy, petitions from Jodhpur suggest a cohabitation of the twin forms of exchange, food grains and cash prestations co-existing simultaneously even within the same village (Fuller, 1989). Also unclear is the conventional perception that clients forged such bonds with landed families alone. Numerous artisans engaged in agriculture and did not practice their traditionally prescribed trade alone. This 'non-correspondence of ordained role ascription', as Simon Commander notes, was bound to generate practices that appear ambiguous and anomalous when compared with the classic construction of *jajmani* (Commander, 1983). Cultural norms prescribed the patrons to adopt a paternalist attitude towards their *birtkari* (Kothari, 1995); hence, the compensations the *birtkari* received were not given as payment for the goods or labour they supplied, but as results of the responsibility that rested on every patron for their welfare (Manyon, p.163). Their exchanges did not always involve a market transaction of quid pro quo. The *birtkari* had the explicit hereditary right to serve their *birt*, which ensured their survival in an economy of scarcity and closely bound their fate with the power and well-being of their patrons. Several documents record that the Padam Kumhar Paima of Merta offered clay lamps to Shri Huzur every Diwali and clay toys for the palace every Holi. The amounts of clayware that he gifted varied, but invariably the money presented to him by the ruler remained constant at ten rupees. Similarly, *Mochi* Mahmud brought leather goods and received fixed cash amounts irrespective of the nature and quantum of

goods brought by him. These exchanges may perhaps be the vestiges of patron-client relationships between the ruler's household and craftsmen mentioned in the records (SPB no. 1, 1764 C.E./1821 V.S., p. 62B). What is noteworthy, in any event, is that remuneration came in the shape of money and not food grains as Wisser's model would have us expect *birtkari* were also entitled to urge on festivals and ceremonies, and these got not as dues for work done, but under the garb of a paternalistic generosity and a customary obligation traditionally observed on such occasions (SPB no. 16, 1776 C.E./1833 V.S., f. 67B).

Craftsmen, Merchant and State

Craftsmen usually took the loan to meet heavy expenditures they incurred over life cycle ritual, birth, death, marriage, invariably compelled to spend far beyond their limits. The stranglehold of those customary obligations was so strong that despite being ill-equipped to afford such immoderate expenses, the poor saw loans because the only way out. Evidence from Marvar suggests that once caught within the quicksand of indebtedness, getting out of it had been highly improbable due to coercion from the dominant, especially in areas where labour was not easily available. Khati Champekhete of village Bhagsar in Jalor had borrowed a pot of grains twenty-two years ago from Laghar Singhvi (a *bania*). Despite working to repay it for over two decades, the latter's demands did not end (SPB no. 8, 1768 C.E./1825 V.S., f. 120A). Such coercions became necessary to prevent craftsmen from migrating away. Since economic methods of trying to retain labour through wage incentives expensive, the employment, the utilization of extra-economic means of retention were expected to keep at bay the intense competition for skilled labour. For instance, the pattayat of village Bua in pargana Nagaur, Rajavi Daulat Singh, forcibly took away all of Kumhar Ladu's valuables from his house, on his refusal to become a *vasi*, the Rajavi demanded that the kumhar either become his *vasi* or pay twelve hundred rupees to get his belongings back (SPB no. 13, 1773 C.E./1830 V.S., f. 36 B). Apart from craftsmen having to become *halis* and *vasis* and living their lives as bonded labourers, agrestic slavery with the master

as the private proprietor of his *gola* whom he could sell, mortgage or rent out, and whose productive and reproductive capacities he was entitled to exploit, is also recorded.

The state in early modern India was close in Pattern to the 'contest state' model, unable to prevent subject groups from evolving defence mechanisms to protect their interests (Adas, 1981). Central form of political organization was rule by a king that claimed a monopoly of power and authority during a given society but whose effective control was actually severely restricted by rival power centres among the elite, by weaknesses in administrative organization, by poor communications and, course, by a low population density ratio that placed a premium on manpower retention and regulation. The early efforts of the Rathore State at enumeration of caste data, such as in Nainsi's *Vigat* suggests, as noted earlier, an agenda of 'knowing the country', and thereby disciplining it. Peabody and Arjun Appadurai have argued that such computations of human inventories were 'tied, in these pre-colonial regimes, to taxation, to accounting, and to land revenue'.

Records from the Jodhpur state reveal that, in fact, the elites themselves were not monolithic body but a hierarchy of disparate interests, competing and clashing for resources. Petitioners appear to have been cognizant of the fact that the government was a multilayered formation in which one layer could be encouraged to operate against another, using perceived fissures within ruling classes to win justice.

Often petitions were made collectively, harnessing caste and community networks, a particular craftsmen community from a certain pargana negotiating as a group to put pressure on the administrative authorities. Documents record that they reported their grievance jointly as a single body (*samsat*) when seeking redressal, arguing for custom and convention to be adhered to. Joint petitions against enhanced taxation indicate that the capacity for organization in pursuit of demands for tax concessions arose naturally from the day-to-day experience of life. Artisan-cultivators, as well as full-time craftsmen, developed solidarities by living and working together, contacts during communal feasts

and other life cycle rituals considerably countering the isolation that some individual artisanal households may have suffered if they were the solitary representative of their caste in village. Shared experiences of oppression and injustice cemented and promoted caste collectively and encouraged joint action (Haynes and Prakash). The khatis of Sojhat, for example, claimed that they had enjoyed exemption from paying *kabada* tax. When asked to pay an equivalent, they requested the authorities to desist from flouting traditions. Their joint petition found a favourable response, and therefore the authorities ordered that the convention during this matter should still be honoured (SPB no. 6, 1767 C.E./1824 V.S., f. 88 B).

Craftsmen were conscious of their indispensability as providers of labour, but equally mindful of the superior status and resources of the dominant castes. Realizing that direct attacks and defiance could invite the coercive might of the 'powerful', they preferred not to provoke the powerful, and opted for more non-confrontationist forms of resistance. In any event, such situations arose in the rarest of rare cases. More often, craftsmen petitions received a response and succeeded in partially undoing the justice.

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CONCLUSION

Strategies employed by village craftsmen were different and contrasting with those of craftsmen groups resided in urban areas. It seems clear that the compatibility of

subaltern autonomy with elite domination or hegemony and the dialectical nature of their relationship. Without their autonomy the subalterns would haven't any identity of their own, no domain where they could have resist at the same time as they were dominated. Well the settlements of village craftsmen were dispersed, and their access to the dispute resolution mechanism of the state was proportionately harder. Even they worked to strengthen their bargaining position by establishing trade monopolies and disallowing caste-fellows to function as substitute labour.²²

REFERENCES

1. Kulkarni, A.R. 1969. *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, Bombay, pp. 46-47; Hiroshi Fukazawa, "Rural Servants in the 18th century Maharashtra Village-Demiurgic or *Jajmani* System", *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, Vol. 12, no. 2, February 1972, Japan, pp. 14-40.
2. These terms are mentioned in the revenue records of Marvar's village of the 17th century that is copied in 1785 C.E./1842 V.S., *Pargana Jalore re Gaono ra Farsat ri Bahi*, Basta number 11, Bahi number 92, Jalore collection, Rajasthan State Archives Bikaner
3. *Ibid.*
4. Banarsi Das, *Ardhakathanak*, ed. Mukund Lath, Jaipur, 1981, pp. 225-26.
5. *Ibid; Vigat*, II, pp. 234-246 and 237; *Jalor Vigat* (small bahi), f. 38 A.
6. R.C. Sharma equates the term *pawan* with *pawana*, to receive, in his "Literature and Society in Northern India during the Medieval Period: A study of the Caste System with particular Reference to the occupational Castes", *India Past and Present*, vol. II, no. 2, 1985, pp. 200-2.
7. The artisans enumerated in Marvar records could conceivably include the following: *kumbhar* (potter), *bhambi* (leather worker), *nai* (barber), *luhar* (blacksmith), *suthar* (carpenter), *dhobi* (washerman), *sargara* (ropemaker), *darji* (tailor), *mehtar* (sweeper), *sunar* (goldsmith), *siqligar* (sharpner), *mochi* (cobbler), *dhedh* (leather worker), *mawal* (bear of burden) and *pinjara* (cotton carder). A list of *bara-balute* in Maharashtra included: carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leather-maker, rope-maker, barber, washerman, astrologer, Hindu shrine-keeper, mahar, goldsmith, bard, masjid-keeper and bearer of burden (H. Fukazawa, "Rural Servants, & c", op.cit., pp. 20-22).
8. Kotani, "Dyadic Relationships at work within the Vatan System with Special Reference to the *Jajmani* System", in Kothani ed. *Western India in Historical Transition: Seventeenth to Early Twentieth Century*, Delhi, 2002, pp. 52-61, for an elaboration of the distinction between the two. H. Fukazawa's discussion on the subject is of course enlightening; "Rural Servants in the Maharashtrian Village: Demiurgic or *Jajmani* System?" in Fukazawa ed. *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Oxford, 1991, pp. 199-244.
9. The classic model of the *jajmani* system, as constructed by William Henricks Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System: A Socio-Economic System Interrelating Members of a Hindu Village Community in Services*, Lucknow, 1958, first published in 1936, has already been exposed as idealistic rather than one that reflected ground realities. It makes several assumptions that the evidence, at least from Marvar, does not corroborate. He wrote that *Jajmani* ties created a community where all castes existed to serve each other, thus making for a self-sufficient village order. Wiser writes that *Jajmani* ties created an integrated organic society in contrast to the atomistic society of the west.
10. There were three kind of remuneration to craftsman in Marvar. Firstly, payment in kind or cash called *sukhri* in Marvar. Secondly, miscellaneous supplementary collections, in addition to payment (first type), for which numerous terms are used in the documents such as *petiya*, *tahiwari*, *lawajimo* and *vaghotar*. Thirdly, assign land to craftsman on concessional rates or revenue-free called *pasita*. In eighteenth century tribal castes were recruited in state army for border security, for instance Bhil was recruited as watchman and get the remuneration in kind under the *lata* system.
11. C.J. Fuller, "Misconceiving the Grain Heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian *Jajmani* System", in J. Parry and M. Bloch ed. *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 33-63.
12. Simon Commander, "The *Jajmani* System in North India: An Examination of its Logic and Status over Two Centuries", in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. XVII, 1983, pp. 283-311.
13. The *birat* system of Marvar has been studied by Padmashri Komal Kothari in his article "Patronage and Performance", in N.K. Singh and Rajendra Joshi ed. *Folk, Faith, and Feudalism*, Jaipur, 1995, pp. 55-66. Though his focus is on patronage in the field of performing arts, he traces the relations of mutuality and obligations of the patron and the performer towards each other.
14. Late feudal Western society too recognized the prototype of such structures of obligation. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon, Vol. 1, pp. 163, where he shows that the feudal bond implied a comprehensive duty on the part of the lord to see that his men were protected and taken care of.
15. SPB no. 1, 1764 C.E./1821 V.S., p. 62B; SPB no. 2, 1765 C.E./1822 V.S., f. 54A; SPB no. 13, 1773 C.E./1830 V.S., f. 153A, etc.; and SPB no. 1, 1764 C.E./1821 V.S, f. 37A, SPB no. 2, 1765 C.E./1822 V.S., f. 202A; SPB no. 19, 1769 C.E./1826 V.S., f. 58A, SPB no. 10, 1770 C.E./1827 V.S., f. 69A; SPB no. 15, 1775 C.E./1832 V.S., f. 363B respectively. (Bikaner State Archives, Rajasthan)

16. SPB no. 16, 1776 C.E./1833 V.S., f. 67B.
17. SPB no. 8, 1768 C.E./1825 V.S., f. 120A.
18. SPB no. 13, 1773 C.E./1830 V.S., f. 36 B.
19. Michael Adas constructed the 'contest model' to describe pre-industrial political formations; "From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Pre-colonial and Colonial Southeast Asia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1981.
20. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash to emphasize that shared experiences of the subalterns in particular relationships generated autonomy and resistance in that specific context; "Introduction" to their jointly edited vol. *Contesting Power*.
21. SPB no. 6, 1767 C.E./1824 V.S., f. 88 B.