



CREATION OF ROYALTY

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This is the first article in the series of Politics of Culture. It aims at studying the operations of power in various settings in Medieval Rajasthan. Power is very silently deployed in society through culture and it operates in very silent way, fulfilling its purpose. Culture ensures that the people behave in the desired way without their own knowledge and ensures the smooth operation of power politics.

‘Classical Indian texts regularly depicted a kingless age as an anathema. A country without a king was cursed with holocaust from the merely despairing to the insufferable. Such an unfortunate realm was said to be governed by the ‘logic of fish’ (*matsyanyaya*), or the principle whereby big fish devour the small.’¹ Rajput kings of the medieval Rajputana were the heads of administrative and political systems. They claimed divine rights over the hereditary monarchical form of government. The ruler enjoyed legislative, executive and judicial powers and was the chief of the armed forces. In fact the nobility existed to assist him. This was the social reality because it was crafted as such. ‘A study of social relations might cast a fresh light on all the various elements that went to make a civilization as a whole.’² This ‘whole’ includes the ruler, nobility and the ruled. Examining the cultural features surrounding the persona of the monarch, his nobility and court we see that several rituals being formulated around the nodal units of power as essential ingredients for the better wielding and exercise of power. Here ritual takes the role as being ‘concerned with the process... (of) binding people’s feeling into the existing organization’.³

Generally speaking, rituals created the universe as desired. If any person or event is located at affixed place, then it is needed here by the power wielders of the society. But, it is not displayed this way openly. It appears as if it as here by ecclesiastical means or by natural

¹ Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.1.

² Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, University of California Press, London, 1977, p.1.

³ Roland Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, p.7.

progression of nature, and we are just recipients of it and celebrate it by rituals. Rituals make any thing look divine and beyond human intervention. And thus unchangeable. In the name of unchangeable, the authority of the political leaders work. For instance we can see that the formulation of such traditions excluded everybody, but the royal lineage, to succeed to the throne. Everything for or against was designed by the people in power and presented to the world as divine ordering by the mediation of rituals. Thus we can say that 'the structure of the state used to mould and limit the forms of politics of the society over which it exercised authority; the politics of even of those who stood in opposition to it'.⁴

We can say that 'the function of the ritual- the affirmation of social status- might be termed ceremony. The individual in ritual acts tend to dramatize the social pattern or the kinship systems of which they are a part'.⁵

A state is a cultural system which has the characteristics constituted neither by the organization of interactions nor by the organization of the actions of a single actor but rather by the organization of values, norms and symbols which guide the choices made by actors and which limit the types of interaction which may occur among others.⁶ This makes us realize and keep in mind that nobody can be absolute, not even the monarch.

The ideal of Rajput kingship was largely based on ancient works and models of kingship as enunciated in epics and *puranas*. The Rajput princes of Rajasthan inherited the age old ideals from generation to generation. Their preceptors- the *purohitas*, tried to expound these ideals and traditions by citing incidents and stories emphasizing the ideals and tasks of kingship from the past.

These ideals were that the king should be popular, powerful, vigilant, and strong enough to vanquish the enemy. The king was expected to secure material prosperity for the people. He was expected to have conquered pride, lust and weakness- replacing them with righteousness, vigour and wisdom. The prince should seek his own happiness in the happiness of his subjects and his own welfare in theirs. The king should look upon his

⁴ Shashi Joshi. *Struggle For Hegemony in India- Vol. I*, Sage Publication, Delhi, 1992, p.12.

⁵ Fred W. Clothey, *Rhythm and Content- Ritual Studies from South India*, Blackie, Madras, 1983, p.1.

⁶ Talcott Parsons and Edwards A. Shils, *Towards a General Theory of Action: Theoretical Foundations for the Social Sciences*, New Jersey, Translation Publishers, 2001, p.55.

people as his children.⁷

This indeed justifies the most eloquently articulated argument of Clifford Geertz that 'pomp was not in service of power, but power was in the service of pomp'.⁸ We have observed that during the process of state formation their texts were being written for the benefit of a certain group of people and later these texts dominated the norms and people had to conform to them. Truth, courtesy, beauty, knowledge, perseverance, large heartedness, generosity, high spirits, richness, leadership, mercy, thoughtfulness, wisdom, valour, courage, strength, good-luck, cleverness, benevolence and meditation, etc were projected as the important qualities, which were to conform to the ancient ideals.⁹ By the means of culture, a system was set up to retain power in the same lineage without any use of force or resources. An order was organized that the most suitable candidate gets support and rest are systematically sidelined and made to serve the chosen one.

In the Rajput states of Rajasthan, crown usually passed on to the eldest son who on coming of age was installed as heir-apparent. 'As for all relations among men, many factors determined power. Yet rationalization was also constantly working away at it... (primogeniture) involved a certain type of rationality. It did not involve instrumental violence.'¹⁰

As far as the general nature of successions in Rajasthan was concerned, the some generalizations emerge. normally the crown was passed on to the eldest son or the eldest surviving son. If the eldest prince who had been declared as heir-apparent died, the crown was passed on to his eldest son (real or even adopted).¹¹ Sometimes a younger son, a younger brother or a nephew could also succeed when he was the eldest among the survivors

⁷ *Daroga Dastari Bahi*, Maharaja Maan Singh Pustak Prakash, Jodhpur, 1996. p. 34.

⁸ David Cannadine and Simon Price, ed. *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992., p. 3.

⁹ *Daroga Dastari Bahi*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Jeremy R. Carrette (ed.), *Religion and Culture* by Michel Foucault, Manchester University Press, , Manchester, p. 152.

¹¹ *Sava Bahi*, V.S. 1762, Sawan, Sud, 11, Rajasthan State Archives, p. 2,

or when the interests of the state so demanded or the incumbent had the support of the principal nobles.¹² When the ruler died without leaving a heir, the crown was passed on in order of preference to his younger brother, to his uncle or to nearest relation in the male line.¹³ The childless ruler had the right to adopt his heir from his nearest blood relations in the male line.¹⁴ The ambitious eldest son, the younger son or even the natural son often killed or poisoned the ruling prince and usurped the throne.¹⁵ Such usurpers had generally been omitted in the *Vanshavalis* (genealogical tables). They were not openly opposed either by the nobles or the public till they proved to be harmful to their interests. Common people generally remained unconcerned. However, usurpers and parricides were hated by the Rajput chroniclers, viz., the *Charans* and the general public.¹⁶ No daughter or son-in-law could occupy the throne of her father or his father-in-law even if there was no direct heir in the male line. It was forbidden because of the change of the clan or dynasty.¹⁷

The succession alone was not deemed enough to invest the prince with the right to rule his subjects. Just right to rule is not enough to grant authority. Authority is really transferred by ceremonial enactments. Some ceremonies of investiture for regnal powers had been in vogue from time immemorial. The coronation or *rajyabhishek* ceremony gave a constitutional right to the monarch who resumed the reigns of government on his succession to the throne. Reality (of kingship) according to the Vedic savants, was not given, but made.¹⁸ These traditional items were not just show-pieces but were means of make believe conversion of ordinary humans into divine beings.

During the Vedic times the coronation ceremony was elaborate, ritualistic and ostentatious. The sacred hymns, mantras and rites for king's installation were duly prescribed. In the epics there were instances of *rajyabhishek* of Lord Rama and of Yudhisthira according to the prescribed rituals. The political scientist of the seventeenth

¹² Ibid, p. 2

¹³ Ibid, p. 3

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 6

¹⁶ Shyam Singh Ratnawat; *Rajput Nobility*, Panchsheel Prakashan, Jaipur, 1991, p. 185.

¹⁷ *Sava Bahi*, V.S. 1762, Sawan , Sud, 11, p. 7.

¹⁸ Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p.50.

century Rajasthan again prescribed the essentials of the ceremonial for the installation of Hindu king.¹⁹ This *rajyabhishek* ceremony continued to be practised without much change during medieval times and right up to the eighteenth century. The Mughals introduced the practice of applying *tika* with their own hand on the forehead of a vassal Hindu king in the Mughal court. To Aurangzeb it appeared to be a Hindu custom, so in his time the Mughal prime minister appointed the Rajput Raja with *tika* on behalf of the emperor. From 1679 A.D. onwards, this ceremony was altogether abolished and performing a *taslim* (salutation) by the new raja was considered enough for his investiture. Thus a Hindu prince who recognized Mughal supremacy was consecrated twice, once at home and the second time in the Mughal court or vice versa.²⁰

The ceremony was generally performed in the Mughal court for the Rajput vassals. The Mughal emperor or his prime minister put the *tika* of accession on the forehead of the concerned raja and bestowed royal gifts of robes *khilat* on him. This *tika* could be had immediately if the ruler was present in the Mughal court at the time of death of previous ruler. This could be had as first, or second of the last ceremony. There was no fixed procedure for it. It mostly depended on the convenience of the emperor and the presence of the concerned prince at the Mughal court. The Maharanas of Mewar received their *tika* from the Mughal emperors through special envoys in their own court. They never attended the imperial court at Agra or Delhi.²¹

A quick glance over the coronation rituals of Mewar would show ‘that not only was it easy to build up social structures, if one concentrated only on ritual communication.’²²

On the death of the Maharana all the government offices were closed and sealed and all the gates of palaces were locked. The heir apparent or the successor was then installed on the *gaddi* by the chief noble of Mewar, Rawat of Salumber, the descendant of Chunda who was

¹⁹ Shyam Singh Ratnawat, op. cit., p.188.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

²¹ Kaviraja Shyamaldas, *Vir Vinod*, Shahtawat Publishing House, Udaipur, 1974, Vol. II, p. 401.

²² Maurice Bloch, *Ritual, History and Power*, Berg Publishers London, 1989, p. 13.

the hereditary premier. He girded the sword round the waist of the Rana and touching the ground thrice hailed him as the Rana of Mewar. Keys were then surrendered to the new Maharana who commanded the gates of the palaces to be thrown open and corpse of the late Maharana let off from the main gate of the palace which was never closed except on the death of a Maharana.²³

The funeral rites of the late Maharana were performed at the house of the royal priest (*purohit*) and not in the palaces. Heralds simultaneously announced the death of the Maharana and the installation of the new Maharana. The newly installed Maharana did not attend the funeral rites of the late Maharana even if he was his father. The nobles and courtiers on returning from the funeral rites at the cremation ground paid their respects to the new Maharana in the *darbar*. He received them with the traditional honours and respects. The keys of offices were returned for commencing regular work. After the death of Rana Udaisingh, Jagmal was installed as Rana but after the cremation the nobles of Mewar decided in favour of Pratap and installed him as the Maharana of Mewar. The throne of Mewar was never left vacant.²⁴

The Maharana, a few days after his accession, went out for '*hari pujan*' or '*haria dekhva*' (worship of green vegetables or vegetation). It was done as the last rite of the state of mourning. This required the new Rana to appear in the public and be acclaimed by his subjects. The Rana went in procession to a few agricultural farms (*badis*) where the priests conducted the prayers and offered oblations. Here the Rana was presented with baskets containing vegetables and green cereals. After the worship of the cereals the Rana went back to his palace. This ceremony was generally held before the *rajyabhishek* ceremony as in the case of Rana Ari Singh and Rana Hammir Singh II.²⁵

The religious rituals of coronation are those aspects of structuring the world, which create something (desired results) out of nothing. They are themselves premised on the notion of rites which are transformative in nature. How much of it is true mystical and based on blind faith. Based on these rites a transformation (beyond the wisdom of ordinary masses) of secular world is attained. All the minute details are base on ancient wisdom, which is sacred and subtle enough to be understood by all. Since it is understood and supported by the Brahmins (or people of knowledge) it is deemed to be right and meaningful.

²³ Kaviraja Shyamaldas, Op. Cit., Vol. I, p. 670.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 670.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 671

A look at the details of the coronation rituals gives us the picture of the exhaustive exploitation of Hindu beliefs. The coronation ceremony programme began with invocation for peace viz Aindri Shanti etc. much in advance. A day prior to the coronation after Yogyantar Sanskar, prince's body was purified with the soil dug from various places. This was mixed with water and the paste was applied to the various organs of body of the would be ruler.

The head was purified with the soil obtained from the top of a hill, ears with soil from ant-hill, right hand with soil dug with the tusk of an elephant and left hand with that dug by the horn of an ox, back with mud from a tank and belly with from the confluence of rivers, both sides with the soil gathered from the banks of a river, his waist with the soil collected from the door of a prostitute, thighs, knees and buttocks with the dust of an elephant shed, of a cow shed and of a stable, respectively and feet with the dust raised by the wheels of a chariot.

The body of the prince was then washed with water mixed with five holy secretions of the cow. After this he bathed with water brought from tanks. The prince fasted and spend the night in total abstinence. He slept on the bed of grass on or ground.

Next day after taking his bath the prince dressed up in white clothes, tied holy grass on the arm, changed the sacred thread (yajnopavita), said his prayers and invoked for forgiveness of ten types of physical, oral and mental sins. Then he invoked Pushkar and other holy places, performed Chandrayan-vrat, Matrika-pujan and Shradh oblations. His queens clad in ornaments (solah shringar), entered the mandap (canopy) from the east and consecrated the prince while standing on his left side.

Under the canopy the vedi (seat) was established in the north-east corner for the purpose of coronation (in other ceremonies it was established in the south-western direction). The Kashmiri carpet was spread and over it was placed a golden or ivory throne having the symbols of eight lions on four pedestals. Tiger skin was spread on the cushion. The prince then adopted the insignia of royalty i.e. the throne (takhat), umbrella (chhatra), fly whisk (chanwar) and the crown (mukut). While ascending the throne the king was sprinkled with ghee (butter oil) trickling from a perforated golden pot by the Brahman who stood in the eastern direction, milk through the silver pot by the Kshatriya standing in the west and holy water through earthen pot of rudramatiya (shudra) standing to the north.

It is also suggested that the four pots were filled with five ratnas (jewels), five types of soil, five types of grass, and five holy secretions of cow. They were then to be covered with copper plates and tied with cloth and placed in east, west, south and north of the mandap.

Having worshipped Lord Ganesha, the sacrificial pillar (yup stambha) was set up by offering milk and curd. Oblations were made to the nine planets (navagraha) and main havan (fire oblations) was performed. In coronation five principle Gods Vishnu, Rudra, Indra, Agni and Surya were mainly performed.

Eight reciters (japak) of the vedas were up in the Mandap, two each in the east for reciting the Rigveda, in south for the Yajurveda, in west for the Samaveda, and in the north for the Atharvaveda. This recitation went on for the whole night.

Next morning the prince was clad in new clothes, worshiped nine planets, offered sacrifice to Narayan and Laxmi, Shiva and Parvati, Brahma and Brahmani, Indra and Indrani (god and goddesses), Surya and Chandra (Sun and Moon) and Ganga and Yamuna (sacred rivers). He then tastes Madhupark (curd mixed with honey) while seated on the Bhadrapith (small seat) in the south of the mandap. He performed aachaman first on the bull's skin (for desiring prestige) and then on the elephant's skin (for desiring wealth- Laxmi). After performing the havan the Maharaja took his ceremonial bath. He sat on the bhadrapith and was sprinkled by honey through a porous pot having a hundred holes, then with milk, curd and water respectively. He was smeared with seven auspicious dusts as earlier and five holy secretions of cow and then bathed with scented waters. He, then, put golden bracelets on the legs with symbols of Swan, worn sacred thread and new clothes and turban and put a garland of champa flowers round the neck and performed salutations from the bhadrapith to the west to Vishnu (kurma or tortoise), to the south to the Shesh (celebrated serpent who serves as the couch of lord Vishnu) and to the other side to mother earth and to all. He then saluted the Sinhasana (throne), got on to the foot stool and spread mustard seeds around it, chanting sacred verses and paid respects to all Gods. The Raja was shown the vessel containing the medicinal herbs. He then looked his own reflection in the bronze pot full of ghee and put a gold coin in it and gave it to the brahmana.'

Reciting mantra he was shaded with the chattra and wore the Mukut. The guru (priest) named him so and so varma. The Raja then worshipped the weapons, sword, dagger, bow and arrow, etc.. After it he worshipped the insignias of royalty- chanwar (fly whisk) ,

chhatra (umbrella), conch shell (shankha), golden mace, the flag, buntings, drum, horse and elephants, etc. He performed some sacrifice to god and goddesses.²⁶

After the performance of these religious rituals prisoners were set free.²⁷ This can be understood as 'good faith economy'²⁸, which actually costs nothing and brings in immense faith of subjects. The Raja then offered clothes, cattle and money to the Charans and Brahmins. This can be understood as the show of royal generosity and encouragement to propagate their fame. On this occasion, the Raja appointed his ministers and officers and received nazars from them.²⁹

He was then taken on an elephant in a procession with his nobles and ministers and the royal retinue and passed through the main streets of the capital and paid obeisance to the deities of the temples en route.³⁰

After the procession an open durbar was held where the nobles were presented to the new ruler. Muttasadis- officials, principle citizens and merchants etc. in due precedence paid there homage. All of them paid nazar and nichrawal according to their rank and status. After receiving the nazars the new Maharaja bestowed favors on them in the shape of siropavs, horses, elephants, etc. according to their traditions in vogue and privileges of the incumbents. The envoys from the rajas, nawabs and friendly states presented tika (coronation felicitation) by way of recognition in the shape diamonds, pearls, gold coins, elephants and robes etc.³¹

The appointment of royal office holders is the first step to assert the administrative authority of the newly anointed king. Further, taking a procession in the midst of people is the open declaration of his being the king. Finally, allowing the ruling elite to offer nazar and nichrawal, is the process by which a bond is initiated between the ruler and his sub-ordinates. Earlier nazar and nichrawal were offered to the father of the present monarch, now, performing the same act, a new relation is developed with the the new ruler. Also, it initiates the obedience and submission of the state power holders.

Besides, the religious ceremonies of consecrations, there evolved some local traditions for the coronation of the new ruler in nearly all states of Rajasthan due to some

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 675-78.

²⁷ M.S. Narvane. *Rajput of Rajasthan: A Glimpse of Medieval Rajasthan*, Agra, Laxminarayan Publishers, 1972, pp 23

²⁸ Richard Burghart. 'Gift to the Gods; power, property and ceremonials in Nepal' in David Cannadine and Simon Price ed. *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp 159.

²⁹ Kaviraja Shyamaldas, Op. Cit., pp. 199.

³⁰ Ibid, pp 199.

³¹ Ibid, pp 200.

incidents of historical significance. These traditions have always been kept up and ceremoniously adhered to.

The rajyabhishek ceremonies of Maharanas of Mewar included a fairly old tradition of applying tika by the Bhil noble of Oghna while the Bhil chief of Undri held the platter of scorched rice and kumkum (red paste). The chief of Oghna used to cut his thumb and apply the tika with his blood on the forehead of the Rana. He then took the Rana by arm and seated him on his ancestral throne. The Bhil chiefs earned this privilege in lieu of their alliance with and promise of loyalty to Bappa Rawal- the founder of the house of Mewar.³²

In Dungarpur also there was a similar tradition. The Balwaia Bhil sept enjoyed the right of applying the tika on the forehead of the new ruler of Dungarpur state. The rulers of Dungarpur were Sisodiyas and belonged to the same house as the Ranas of Mewar, so they might have kept up this tradition of their parent branch.³³ Besides religious rituals of the coronation, the right of applying the tilak on the forehead of the prince of Marwar went to the Thakur of Bagri- one of the prominent nobles of Jodhpur. It was a hereditary privilege of the house of Bagri since the accession of Rao Jodha.³⁴

In Bikaner also the tradition of applying the tika has come down from the times of Rao Bika (1742-1804), the founder of Bikaner House. The right of applying tilak at the time of rajyabhishek of the successor of the throne of Rao Bika was that of a Godara Jat of Sekhasar who got it by a contract of submission settled with Rao Bika on behalf on behalf of Godara Jat community.³⁵

The Meenas of Khalikho who had been the lords of the soil before the coming of the Kachhwahas, as a compromise, were entrusted with the protection of the treasures placed in Jai Mandir and the guarding of the seraglio and the person of the prince. The Meenas discharged their trust of guarding treasures and palaces most faithfully and have left no blot on their faithfulness and loyalty.³⁶

The evolution of such traditions show that either they were accidental or were adopted to emphasize the contract entered at some earlier stage of establishment of the state. Such traditions and customs did not have any religious value but they were constitutional in nature. They were politically motivated and reminded the rulers of the high service rendered

32 Ibid. pp 378.

33 Ibid. pp 380.

34 Ibid. pp 491.

35 Dayaldas. *Dayaldas ri Khyat*, Rajasthani Shodh Sansthan, Jodhpur, 2005, vol. II, pp 108.

36 *Tod. op. Cit.*, Vol II, pp 141.

by the ancestors of the particular chiefs for the house of the sovereign. A bond of friendship and reciprocal loyalty is exhibited in these age old traditions.

These and other such traditions effectively involved those forces in the process of state forces which would otherwise prove disruptive. These are good examples of studying the ways power was reserved for some people and the ways outsiders were prevented to encroach upon it. All such activities of state should be examined thoroughly to understand history deeper and wider.

All these rituals are based on a preconceived notion that the person of king was chosen by the gods and that divinity was bestowed upon him by these ceremonies. The power of ceremonial brings the political into an ecclesiastical domain and renders it unquestionable and makes it acceptable as continuance of divine order. In doing so, the specialists made 'use of a very intricate Hindu conception'.³⁷ This speaks volume about 'the ways in which notions of cosmic order and transcendental hierarchy were deployed and transmitted by the ruling elites as a means of ordering their own terrestrial realms and of sustaining their own earthly dominance...the rituals of rulers were not mere incidental ephemera, but were central to the structure and working of any society.'³⁸

In the view of Fred W. Clothey 'rituals is transformative also in the sense that it can be integrative, even if only for the moment in which the ritual itself occurs'. Not only were the offering identities which participants brought into the ritual affirmed. Not infrequently they were also reconciled, transcended, or given perspective by the

In the view of Clothey, individuals in ritual acts tend to dramatize the social patterns or kinship systems of which they are part.³⁹ About the gifts, Nicholas B. Dirke opines that 'the gift was thus a natural principle element of statecraft. The chief means for the formation and articulation of a political community was the kings' gifts...which symbolically and morally linked individuals with the sovereignty of kings'.⁴⁰ Along with these gifts and other rituals,

³⁷ Peter Van Der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p. 49.

³⁸ David Cannadine and Simon Price, op.cit. p. 3.

³⁹ W.Fred Clothey, *Rhythm and Intent*, Blackie, Madras,1983, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Nicholas B.Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnography of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge

the image of a monarch from an ordinary through the culture in a very silent way, with every body's involvement and approval. The identity of the a ruler is not divine or biological but crafted through, ecclescialtical and secular means.

University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 130.