



## **Full Length Research Article**

### **DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE IN MEDIEVAL RAJASTHAN: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO CONDITIONS DURING 1201-1707 A.D**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The social structure of Rajasthan in early medieval period was a bit different from other areas of India. The society was clearly demarcated in various stratas of castes followed by ethical bondages of Rajasthan. Further, such structure led to emergence of an economic structure which was refined as well as society-oriented. This period actually marked the transition from medieval to colonial era.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Advent of Islam proved to be a landmark in the history of Rajasthan. The political conditions altered various thoughts related to customs and traditions. The Rajputs fought against the Turks and Mughals valiantly but in the war field they lacked unity and followed traditional warfare system. This was perhaps the most important reason of their failure even though they were more in number. Looking to the other side; on the one hand, various demerits encroached the social life of people of Rajasthan while on the other hand views generated from the saints of Bhakti Movement were helpful in unscrambling the hidden ideology of religion

##### **Social Structure**

##### **Caste System**

Various historical sources throw light on the contemporary social structure. The Varna system which was the part of a standard society continued but with various social amendments. During this period, various castes or "jatis" emerged based on the occupation. These were further divided into sub-castes depending on their local customs and traditions. The ideal Varna system was thus cut off by these sub-castes and people were known by their occupation rather than their Varna-by-birth.

A flexibility in occupational system is also evident in the society i.e. agriculture could be followed by a Brahmin and Trade (which was exclusive to Vaishyas) could be followed by varnas other than Vaishyas. The Brahmins were sub-divided into various sections viz. Gaur, Sanadhya, Saraswat, Shrimali, Pushkarna etc. Although their professional duties remained the same. They performed Yajnas and other worshipping ceremonies apart from interpreting the divine law in some cases. In later period, Brahmins were involved in some professions like cooking for the royal kitchen and they were called the 'Bhojak'. These types of Brahmins, including those who begged and involved in cremation activities were considered inferior in society, although their role was of much importance. Rajput society also faced almost similar conditions by having a sub-division. As many as 36 clans of Rajputs are mentioned in various contemporary literary sources; important being the Chauhans, Rathores, Paramars, Pratihars, Chandelas etc. They were associated with defence services and most of them served for the royal army. Sub-divided Vaishya society consisted of Agrawals, Oswals, Paliwals, Porwals etc. These people were basically involved in trade and commerce, but they also pursued other professions. People like Bhamashah and Tarachand find a reputed place as warriors and administrators. Some of them also acted as Diwans and were involved in assignments ranging from tax-calculation to tax-collection. Besides the above, we also find other castes like Kayastha, Charan, Jat etc. The Kayasthas were responsible for maintaining official records and orders while the Charans had a bent of mind towards literary works. They composed Khyat, Vat, Raso and also maintained

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Vanshavalis. Jat, being the agriculture-based community involved itself in farming and cultivating. Artisans involving castes like 'thathera', 'sunar' and 'patwa' were indeed a vital part of the society. Untouchability as well as Slavery was also prevalent. Apart from this, Muslim society has its own hierarchy and classification, consisting of Qazis, Sayyids, Pathans and the Kayam-Khanis who were ranked a bit lower.

### Marriage

The concept of joint family was the fundamental aspect of society. The cultural traditions and 'sanskaras' were transmitted from one generation to other under the aegis of an organised joint family system. Though the basic thought of marriage in same caste was unanimously accepted yet the inter-caste marriage was also prevalent. The royal harem had female members from various castes. As a part of diplomatic moves and maintaining of political relationships, marriage between Mughal prince and Rajput princess was also not uncommon. Dowry system was spreading its tentacles and so girl-child-birth was seen as a matter of burden. Polygamy was indeed limited to the royal families and often resulted in inheritance clashes. The most dismal condition was of widows especially those who lost their husband at a very early age. They were denied even basic amenities in some cases and were kept away from all auspicious occasions. The society was thus not only male-dominated but also customs-dominated in all matters related to marriage.

### Religion

Rajasthan has been a religious hub for almost all the religions since the early medieval period. Still, majority of population was Hindu. On the whole, the religious frame-work was too complex and orthodox, because somewhere it still had the spores of the much stressed ideology of religious philosophers like Sankara, Ramanuja and Ramanand. While the Islam was trying to expand itself, the Rajputs on the other hand made every effort to maintain the glory of culture and regard for the Hindu religion. During the later medieval period, an era began to simplify the Hinduism and to meticulously tie the threads of religion which remain opened for centuries. This led to the beginning of Bhakti movement which tried to rejuvenate the Hindu religion and gave altogether a new direction to the socio-culture condition of Rajasthan. The transition period gave rise to various new thinking. Such thinkers were called 'Saints' who unfolded the complex religion and presented it in front of common people in an easy and graspable way. The traditional theory of worshipping idols and restriction to the holy place for the lower class was challenged by these saints. This process also restrained many lower class peoples from going outside the culture of Hinduism. The era marked advent of philosophies and religious composition of saints like Meera, Dadu Dayal, Dhanna, Pipa, Sahjobai etc. Medieval Bhakti movement, we can say, was thus an attempt to remove such practices like polytheism and idolatry, in order to save Hinduism from being engulfed by Islam. The social views of saints of Bhakti movement who emphasized one Omniscient Brahma may thus be looked upon as an attempt to bridge the wide gulf that separated Hindus and Muslims inhabiting the same country.

### Economic Conditions

The Economy of Rajasthan, as in almost all other part of India has been agrarian. Agriculture was the occupation of majority

of people. But, lack of proper irrigation facilities and frequent famines not only persuaded people to migrate to other places but also posed a threat to economy.

### Trade & Commerce

Trade was well-developed and flourishing in various parts of Rajasthan. The concept of 'Haat' was popular which consisted of organising a temporary market at fixed intervals of time. Religious fairs also provided a platform for businessmen to sell and buy articles ranging from small household items to cattles. Trade was promoted by the royal authorities who also kept a strict vigil on trade-practises. Stringent punishments were given to those involved in corrupt activities in trade. Interstate trade was also promoted and the concept of octroi tax (Daan) was prevalent. Jaisalmer, Ajmer, Pali, Barmer etc. were important places of interstate trade where trading of cloth, salt, tobacco and grains was at its peak. Sales tax, also known as 'Maap' was collected on trade of various articles. Similarly 'Khunta Firai' and 'Rupota' were the taxes imposed in trade of cattles. An important tax named 'Jagat' was collected mainly in Bikaner which was a collective tax of octroi, customs and sales tax. Well organised currency system facilitated the commerce and in most of the areas, the businessmen community was earning huge profits.

### Agriculture

The major portion of revenue was generated through tax levied on agriculture since it was the profession of majority of population. Irrigation methods, though traditional were applied for the cultivation. 'Peenwal' was the land which was having proper irrigation facilities. Two crops were cultivated in a year. The 'Syalu' or the kharif consisted of Bajra, Rice and Gwar while the 'Unalu' or the Rabi cultivation comprised Wheat, Gram, Mustard etc. Crop rotation was not common as due to lack of irrigation and proper soil, people cultivated fixed crops only.

### Land Revenue

As in other parts of India, a proper land-revenue system was prevalent in Rajasthan during the medieval period. The 'lagan' which was the most important among all the taxes ranged from 1/3 to 1/4. Frequent famines, although were the biggest problem in generation of land revenue.

**Table 1. Taxes in Rajasthan in Medieval Period**

Tax	Description
Haasil	Combination of Agriculture Tax and other miscellaneous taxes
Dhuan Bhanchnh	House tax
Zamin Chauth	Tax on selling of land
Paan Charai	Grazing tax
Khadsisar	Tax on drinking water (in Marwar)
Hubub	Tax to compensate increased expenditure of state

The taxation system was such that no farmer could be deprived of his basic amenities in the name of tax collection. Tax on cultivation was calculated by various methods; considering cultivation of previous year, value of current crop and also by arbitrary decisions of the royal representatives. Strict punishments (including taking-over of land) were defined for tax-evaders.

**Inference**

The study shows the organized structure of society as well as of economics. The trade and commerce saw landmark change with adoption of trade-friendly norms and the revenue collection underwent changes so as to incorporate new taxation policies. Thus it can be inferred that the medieval period proves to be a link between the glorious ancient and the British-dominated modern history.

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