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Training and Organisation of Artisans: Rajasthan (17th-18th Century)

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Abstract:

Our study examines how craftsmen were trained and organised in India during the medieval period with special reference to seventeenth-eighteenth century Rajasthan. The present study discusses the hereditary training of artisans. The role of karkhanas (workshops) in training the craftspeople has been revealed in this research. Furthermore, the afore-mentioned study analyses the function of merchants in the organization of artisans. Our study explores the honours bestowed by the state to skilled artisans for their artistic dexterity.

Keywords: Artisans, Karkhanas, Merchants, Rewards.

In Rajasthan, there were various types of urban industries/ crafts and craftsmen like textile workers, leather workers, metal workers, ivory, bangles, ornaments, armaments, etc. It is significant to note that there were no factories in the modern sense rather industries were essentially in the nature of handicrafts. The production was organised in different ways. The basic unit of production was the artisan family. Craftsmen were mostly independent producers and their family and apprentices (who received training under them) acting as helpers. Generally, artisans used tools and implements of their own in the production process. Even they were expected to bring their own tools in state karkhanas also. Hereditary training of artisans and caste played a significant role as it regulated the professional activities, family life, religious and cultural needs of artisans. Under the patriarchal care of his father, the artisan learnt the craft with curiosity.¹ Bernier writes that, “the embroiderer brings his son as an embroiderer, a goldsmith’s son becomes a goldsmith and the physician educates his son for a physician.”² Pelsaert also writes that, “the workers children can follow no occupation other than that of their father, nor can they marry with any other caste.”³ Similarly, Babur and De Laet say that the artisans follow hereditary occupation.⁴ But we also find social mobility during medieval period. Due to the introduction of new crafts and techniques, the caste profession was changed by artisans. Daswant, the well-known miniature painter of Akbar’s Court, was the son of a palaki-bearer and an apprentice of Khawaja Abdus Samad (Muslim painter).⁵

The urban society represented both Hindu and Muslim castes like julahas, kumbhars, mochis, etc. The artisans often used the caste organization to struggle against the exploitation of officials, merchants, etc.⁶ with the emergence of new professions, labour division and technical improvements, new castes developed. We find the emergence of industrial castes due to the development of new cities as centre of professional commodity production and trade.⁷ We have reference to more than sixty castes and sub-castes of artisans like ink makers, book binders, silk weavers, soap makers, thatchers, etc.⁸ Due to the market situation, sometimes the whole caste would change its profession. In the cities, the caste system was more flexible. We have evidence of artisans changing their professions. Chhinpa caste was associated with wool-dyeing. But it is significant to note that they did not confine themselves with wool-dyeing rather engaged themselves in trade, later on, which is an indication of social mobility.⁹ For instance, a bow-maker turned to wood printing, tailors turned to dyeing and indigo-dyeing and chamars switched to cotton carding.¹⁰ They moved from one place to another for better employment. In Rajasthan, we find mobility of craftsmen and hired labour. For instance, kamthana bahis of Bikaner provide us information about artisans who came from far and wide areas.¹¹ For instance, craftsmen who came from Agra, Multan, Delhi, Gujarat, etc. settled down in Rajasthan, which speaks of the migration of artisans.

We find that the production was organised by employing artisans on wage labour for specific jobs by the state. Besides the state, artisans were also hired for a fixed daily wage by any other person (merchants) who needed their services or they were given raw material by merchants to manufacture industrial goods. Their working hours were fixed as four pahar.¹² It seems that they had to work from dawn to dusk.

The production was also organised in karkhanas, but here, it was confined for meeting the specific and fastidious needs of the state/aristocracy. Skilled and more expert artisans were employed in karkhanas. Both local and outsider (who were invited by the state) artisans were working in karkhanas and quality goods were produced by them. They were rewarded from time to time and were given protection by the state. So, we find that artisans came from various parts of the country and settled in Rajasthan.

During the Mughal period, karkhanas (workshops) were maintained to a great extent. Karkhanas played a significant role in the organization and training of artisans. The excellence of art and craft was kept alive by workshops.¹³ The arts and crafts flourished under the karkhanas.¹⁴ Master craftsmen were providing training to artisans in the karkhanas.¹⁵ State appointed different officials for the functioning of workshops like daroga, tahvildar, desh-diwan, khan-i-saman, etc.¹⁶ In each workshop, there was a daroga who used to deal with the artisans in his branch. Raw material and unfinished articles were taken by him from tahvildar for the distribution among artisans. Tahvildar was in charge of cash and material required for the karkhana. He also used to fix the cost price of articles and wages of artisans for the manufacturing of particular articles. The job of fixing the rewards to artisans for decent work and presenting them to the court was also performed by him. Desh-diwan was another official who had the authority of taking initiative in terms of

appointment, dismissal of officers like daroga, tahvildar, treasurer and money-lenders. Transactions of karkhana were dealt by him. For the maintenance of karkhanas, he used to give money to the officials. We have another official i.e., Khan-i-Saman/Mir Saman whose responsibility was to check all official appointments in workshops. He used to enjoy equal status with diwan in terms of appointments, dismissals, and postings of darogas, tahvildars, amins and mushrifs of different workshops.¹⁷ The rules for the work of karkhanas and treasuries were laid down by him. He also used to keep the record of hire and wage labour.¹⁸

As already mentioned, artisans were largely organised and trained by expert and master craftsmen. The workshop's success depended upon the experience and skill of master craftsman as referred by Ain.¹⁹ For the training of artisans, master (ustad)²⁰ was appointed in karkhanas.²¹ The master craftsman was well skilled and perfectionist in his field/craft.²² Master craftsman used to arrange materials and tools to artisans.²³ We find reference of master craftsmen managing their own workshops under Mughals and employed skilled craft- persons and apprentices who worked from dawn to dusk.²⁴ He was an administrator, manager and supervisor of his establishment. Gujarati merchants had their own workshops where craftsmen like dyers, weavers, embroiderers, and silk twistors were employed.²⁵

Raw material was not bought by artisans from market rather it was provided to them by state in karkhanas. No doubt we have evidence of master craftsmen purchasing raw material from market but money was given to them by state. The master craftsmen supervised the work of artisans, guided them in a better way and their wages were high as compared to artisans.²⁶ We find that artisans like smiths, carpenters, jewellers, weavers, etc. employed hired labour.²⁷ In our sources, the term for hired labour is majur and they were paid in the form of taka.²⁸

Merchants were also attached to the workshops. They played a significant role in facilitating the workshops in a proper manner. Raw material was provided by them regularly and on monthly basis. They brought raw material in stocks (in the form of jinsi/kind, tola/weight, jodi/pairs, and kata) and were paid in kind and cash for the said. For instance, seventy-five mohar and Rs. 25 were paid to Bhikharidas in V.S.1792.²⁹ We find reference of different terms for commercial groups like vyopari or byopari, bichayati and mahajan in our sources.³⁰ They operated at every level and played a crucial part in the functioning of the karkhanas.³¹

The buying of finished items from craftsmen was the earliest form of bond between the merchant capital and crafts. Later, traders brought semi-processed items and sold it to artisans. Putting out system of raw material was another connection. The merchants interfered directly into manufacturing process as mentioned by K.N. Chaudhuri.³² Similarly, in the context of South India, the standards of cloth received from the julaha (weaver), main technological operations, size of fabrics and the number of warp threads were decided by traders.³³

Thus, artisans achieved excellence in their craft as we see that besides hereditary training, artisans were also trained and guided in karkhanas by master craftsmen. The raw material was provided to them regularly by merchants on time and at the time of work, it was distributed to them by an official.

Honours/Rewards: Skilled craft-persons who were known for their work were rewarded by the state³⁴ in the form of cash, cloths and siropaos.³⁵ We have a reference of number of craftsmen, who were rewarded for their artistic dexterity, see table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Name, Profession and Rewards of Artisans³⁶

Name	Profession	Rewards
Lala ³⁷	Shorgar	Pag (turban)
Pema	Khati	Rs. 20 in cash and cloth worth Rs. 6
Gopal	Mason	Rs.400
Bhu Dhar ³⁸	Sangtarash	Cloth worth Rs.13
Fateh Muhammad ³⁹	Luhar	Siropao worth Rs.6.2 Annas
Sahajram	Minakar	Siropao worth Rs. 22.4 annas
Deepa	Chhinpa	Thirma Butadar (cloth) than 1 worth Rs. 6 and annas 8
Mansaram	Patwas/Tarkash	White cheera cloth
Muhammad Sadiq	Chhinpa	Siropao worth Rs. 31
Thamman Das	Karigar	Siropao than 3 worth Rs. 22 and annas 4
Khema Chetan	Khati	Thirma Butadar worth Rs. 7 and annas 8
Uda	Sunar	Golden bracelet (pair) worth Rs. 50
Gangaram	Silawat	Thirma Butadar worth Rs. 6
Nizami	Embroiderer	Angrakha ⁴⁰ worth Rs. 5

Thus, it makes us clear that the skilled craft-persons were honoured and promoted by the state from time to time for their decent work. Siropaos which were tailored by darjis were also presented to the nobles.

Conclusion: Our study concludes that the craftsmen were classified into castes based on their profession. Hereditary occupations were followed by the people of a particular caste. Following his father's death, the craftsman took up his father's occupation, in which he had received training. This helped craftsmen gain efficiency quickly in their occupations. There was also mobility in the occupations of artisans. We find the division of artisan castes into sub-castes due to a variety of factors such as labour division, craft diversification, technological innovation, and so on.

The state extended patronage to professional groups (both local and outsider like Multan, Gujarat, Malwa, Sindh, Delhi, and Agra). Due to the efforts of the state a large

number of skilled artisans from different parts of the country came and settled down in Rajasthan. This resulted in a splendid build-up of handicraft manufacturers in Rajasthan. Professional groups (local as well as outsider) were employed in karkhanas and were given favours from time to time. We see a number of officers were appointed for the karkhana's smooth functioning. In the workshops, it was the responsibility of Desh-Dewan to recruit the artisans. There were other officials associated with karkhanas like tahvildar, daroga, etc. Production of handicrafts was checked by daroga who was assisted by other clerks and accountants. Master craftsmen also recruited the artisans in the workshops. Artisans were largely organized and trained by the master craftspeople. We also found that artisans were given money to purchase raw materials for the karkhanas. Here articles were particularly prepared for the aristocracy and elite class with dexterity. Artisans were also engaged by merchants either on a daily basis or by providing them with raw materials for the production of various articles. Well-known and more skilled craftsmen were rewarded by the state in the form of cash and siroapas (robes of honour). They were encouraged from time to time to achieve the excellence in workmanship. In some cases, pleased and impressed with the decent work of craftsmen, the rulers also granted them jagirs.

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- ¹¹ Kamthana Bahi, V.S. 1808/A.D. 1751, no. 2, pp. 4-6; Lekha Bahi, Bikaner, V.S. 1727/A.D. 1670, p. 311; Jama Kharch Bahi, Bikaner, 1757 A.D., p. 240.
- ¹² One pahar consisted of three hours.
- ¹³ Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire, 1656-68*, pp. 254-259; N.S. Gupta, *Industrial Structure of India During Medieval Period*, p. 116-19.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed. Nawal Kishore, Lucknow, 1882, vol. I, pp. 65-66; J.N. Sarkar, *The Mughal Administration*, Calcutta, 1924, pp. 168-169.
- ¹⁶ J.N. Sarkar, *The Mughal Administration*, pp. 41-46.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 42-44.
- ¹⁹ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, ed. Syed Ahmad Khan, p. 13.
- ²⁰ Ustad was an honorific title.
- ²¹ James Skinner, *Tashrih-ul-Aqwam, (A.D. 1825)*. Persian Rotograph No. 206, preserved at CAS, Department of History, A.M.U., Aligarh, p. 259; K.N. Chaudhuri, 'The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *IESHR*, vol. XI, 1974, pp. 76-78.
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- ²⁵ Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, ed. Syed Nawab Ali, vol. II, Baroda, 1927, p. 139.
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- ²⁸ Ibid.

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- ²⁹ S.P. Gupta, *Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan (1650-1750)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1986, p. 212.
- ³⁰ Sanad Parwana Bahis of Jodhpur.
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- ³³ Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 315.
- ³⁴ Tripta Verma, *Karkhanas under the Mughals*, pp. 42-43.
- ³⁵ Siropao was a special honour showed by the ruler by presenting robe of honour.
- ³⁶ Kotwali-Chabutara-Jamabandi-Bahi, Jodhpur, no. 754, Pargana Jalor, V.S. 1834/A.D. 1777. See also B.L. Gupta, *Trade and Commerce in Rajasthan: Economy of Marwar in the Seventeenth Century*, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 1999, p. 27; Athar Husain, "Craft and Trade in Eighteenth Century Rajasthan", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, C.A.S., Department of History, A.M.U., Aligarh, 2008; Sumbul Halim Khan, *Art and Craft Workshops Under the Mughals: A Study of Jaipur Karkhanas*, Primus Books, Delhi, 2015; Farhat Kamal, "Artisans and Craftsmen in 18th century Jaipur", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, C.A.S., Department of History, A.M.U., Aligarh, pp. 30-54.
- ³⁷ Lala was a famous shorgar (gunpowder maker) of qasba Jalor who was given a turban by the Jodhpur Darbar as a mark of honour.
- ³⁸ Bhu Dhar was a noted stone-cutter who constructed a cenotaph of the late Maharaja Jai Singh in 1755.
- ³⁹ He was expert in making cannons.
- ⁴⁰ Angrakha remained the preferred dress of the Marwar rulers throughout the eighteenth century. A thin cotton garment with long fitted sleeves, the Angrakha gave the wearer an arresting aristocratic profile. It was accompanied by a fitted pajama, a regal pag, patka and the rare jewels. Physical Survey of Mehrangarh Fort.