



Role and Functions of Kayasths in the State of Jaipur in Eighteenth Century

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Abstract:

Majority of the members of the Kayasth community had the distinction of having direct access to the ruler. This new development may be explained in terms of their mounting economic clout which indeed made it difficult for the ruler to keep them out of his patronage. Various festivals like Holi and celebrations like birth, marriage, etc. were marked by the presence of the ruler himself. State patronage became a key source of their employment and social eminence. Kayasths who were mainly a scribal caste were present at every level of administration. Their familiarity with revenue management and various aspects of the administration enabled them to acquire greater economic and political authority during the eighteenth century.

Keywords: *Managerial Function, Social Status, Financial Responsibilities, Economic Eminence*

Kayasths constituted an important social group by virtue of being employed by the state in large numbers as writers and record keepers for maintenance of records of land revenue assessment and collection, which formed the backbone of the administrative machinery of the state. Traditionally a writing caste, their historical prominence can be traced back before the establishment of Turkish rule in India. Their functions were no longer restricted to being just the accountants or keepers of revenue records. They were now delegated upon some of the financial responsibilities of the Diwan, handled his correspondence, maintained financial records of a varied nature, and arranged for repayment when revenues were remitted.¹ Therefore, these officials experienced considerable enhancement in their position during this period.

Another important feature of this period is the active participation of the members of this community in the army of the Jaipur state. Not only members of eminent families but also individuals from humble backgrounds acquired high military positions. Military service was the surest way to acquire social recognition, earn titles, privileges, and economic rewards such as booty, inam jagirs and jagirs granted for the maintenance of troops. All those who served in a military capacity rose rapidly to the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy as military pursuits had acquired utmost significance for the Jaipur state during this period.

The significance of military service to the state of Jaipur can also be assessed from instances when the son of a posthumous military official was rewarded for the latter's meritorious military service to the state. For instance, Khushpal Chand Kayasth managed to secure for himself the position of musharraf of the Department of Artillery (Musharraf-i-Topkhana) in 1728 on account of his father Jadurai who

played an exemplary role in the battle of Ramgarh.² Another person called Puranmal was also made the Daroga-i-kachahari (Daroga of the court) for the same reason in 1769.³

The traditionally powerful classes of Rajputs and Brahmans seem no longer to be in predominant position in the Jaipur court. Members of emerging groups like Kayasths and Khatriis can be seen becoming an integral part of the nobility. This development must have definitely had some destabilizing effect on existing political equilibrium in the Jaipur state. Karen Leonard in her work suggests that the financial fortunes of the state were largely dependent on its military strength; therefore, it extended special favours to all those who joined it. Such positions could be lost or diminished because of changing political boundaries or treaties or because of internal conflicts.⁴ Thus, the members of Kayasth community thrived under the Mughal Empire and survived its collapse.

Besides this, the members of the Kayasth community often served some of the eminent functionaries who helped them grow and prosper both economically and socially. For instance, Ganga Bisan Dalpat Rai served Nawab Naji-ud-daullah in 1760 and Dal Singh served Daroga Himmat Ram as an advocate in 1761, which gave them high social standing.⁵ Many of the Kayasths also acquired eminence during their long periods of service. For instance, Dulharai who had joined the service of the Jaipur state in 1763 as head of two significant military departments steadily rose to the top and served for nearly two decades.⁶ Similarly, Vijaya Narayan: a Kayasth by caste and son of Dharam Narayan also had the distinction of having served the state approximately for 40 years, during which period he acquired immense degree of political clout.⁷ Another Kayasth called Hemraj is yet another individual who prospered on account of his proximity with the state of Jaipur for a period of thirty years.⁸ All of them received not only financial favours but also social felicitations and honours from time to time. Also, the close correspondence and contact that they came to enjoy with the ruler opened up for them high prospects to negotiate the cause of others with the ruler, which resulted in a significant way to provide promotion to other members of their community.

Another sphere in which the Kayasths began to venture was the field of high administrative positions. Politically and economically, they had become influential enough to occupy the position of Diwan of the Jaipur state. The office of Diwan, which was just next to the king symbolised high degree of authority over several administrative areas like the land revenue collection, the military, the household establishments, and the supervision of justice and commerce. For instance, Kishor Das, whose family lineage is not illustrated clearly in Dastur Komvar was made the Diwan of Jaipur in 1721.⁹ Again, a Kayasth named Dalel Sigh; the son of Syonath was conferred the honour of being the Diwan of the state in 1755.¹⁰ Notable enough is the case of Vijayanarayan, who was the son of Diwan Dharamnarayan who had a strong family lineage. The dramatic rise of Vijayanarayan to the office of Diwan in 1744 was due to his close relationship with the royalty. Usually, other officials could rise to the top very slowly. Possibly, Vijaya Narayan had some unique functional utility for the king who gave him such an opportunity. There are some more notable examples of such spectacular promotion in the political set up of the Jaipur state. Such persons used their political influence to enhance their fiscal power and vice-versa. On important occasions like the marriage of his siblings or any other festivities, the ruler usually joined him and gave him special gifts.¹¹

² Dastur Komvar, Kayastha, p-540

³ Dastur Komvar, Kayastha, p-679

⁴ K. Leonard, Social History of an Indian Caste: The kayasths of Hyderabad, p.31

⁵ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p. 551.

⁶ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.624-25.

⁷ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.674-680.

⁸ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.847-853.

⁹ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.537

¹⁰ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.621

¹¹ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.674-680

Besides the office of the diwan, members of the Kayasth community are also found basking in glory in other important official positions. They can be seen venturing into professions of a bakshi, faujdar, naib-subedar etc. which earlier had been the preserve of only Rajputs, Brahmins and princes of royal blood. These new possibilities of growth and success came to them in a variety of ways. Quite often when they performed their services too well they were not only conferred social felicitations but were also given significant positions, which could be both civil and military in nature. For instance, Takhatmal, a naib was promoted to the office of daroga-i-khazana in 1717 in acknowledgement of his hardwork and dedication.¹² Similarly, Kanhyaram was graciously rewarded with a siropav in 1733 for dedication and efficiency in performing his official duty, which undoubtedly helped him to improve his social standing.¹³ Further, the members of the Kayasth community were also conferred high offices in response to significant contributions made by their kinsmen in official capacities especially the father of the concerned person. For instance, in response to Jadurai's significant contribution in the battle of Ramgarh his son Khuspal Chand was bestowed the honour of becoming the head of the department of arms and ammunition in 1728.¹⁴

Apart from the above, the Kayasthas were associated with wide variety of functions ranging from tasks associated with the departments of construction of monument, gumasthas, faujdar, amil, bakshi and so on. For instance, Vallabhanad was bestowed the honour of becoming an amil of a vital pargana called Lalsot in 1784. This opportunity indeed marked the beginning of an illustrious career, opening up the doors of fame to him.¹⁵ Similarly, Simbhunath acquired the distinction of embarking upon an illustrious career when he was inducted in the Jaipur state as Daroga-i-Topkhana in 1750. Two years later, he joined the elite club when he was bestowed a siropay for his exemplary military service in the battle of Toda Bhim.¹⁶ Some of the members of this community even carved out independent space within the Jaipur kingdom. In this context most important illustration is the case of raja Vilasrai of Sawaijaipur whose political eminence is evident from his personal visits at the palace of the ruler of Jaipur.¹⁷

Moreover, the Kayasths were considered suitable for executing multi-functions by the king. For example, Dulharai was not only made the daroga of the stables but also made the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the state in 1763.¹⁸ Vallabhanand was made both the Daroga-i-Tosakhana (Department of Ornament) and an amil of pargana Lalsot in 1784. These instances show the increasing dependence of the state on these individuals. This new development may be explained in terms of their mounting economic clout which indeed made it difficult for the ruler to keep them out of his patronage. Majority of the members of the Kayasth community had the distinction of having direct access to the ruler. Dastur Komvar projects many individuals possessing such distinction. For instance, Dharam Narayan Das, the Bakshi of Ajmer enjoyed a very special position vis-à-vis others since he had direct access to the ruler; a privilege enjoyed by few. Various festivals like Holi and celebrations like birth, marriage, etc. were marked by the presence of the ruler himself.¹⁹ Similarly, Khemchand, a qanungo of a place called Antela Bhabhra was bestowed the honour of a 'siropav' when he visited the ruler of Jaipur 1726.²⁰ Sadaram, qanungo of pargana Alwar, also a Kayasth enjoyed a similar privilege.²¹ Further, a meeting of a qanungo of Ajmer with the Amber ruler is elaborately described in Dastur Komvar. Since the purpose of the meeting is not specified, it could have been a private and personal

¹² Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.619

¹³ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.536

¹⁴ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.540

¹⁵ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.680

¹⁶ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.824

¹⁷ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.682

¹⁸ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.624

¹⁹ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.634-639

²⁰ Dastur Komvar, Qanungo, p.893

²¹ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.805

meeting.²² These individuals served as gateway to all those aspiring for high positions in the Jaipur state's bureaucracy.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, many of the Kayasths had also started serving as vakils in region outside Jaipur. In this capacity, they had the fortune of serving many distinguished personalities and subsequently gained considerable prominence. For instance, Rai Udai Chand gained eminence by serving as an eminent faujdar of Sambhar in 1737 and was therefore, bestowed siropav in 1739 by the king. Later on, by virtue of his political economic affluence, he acquired ijara of collecting custom duty in 1742.²³

Another notable feature of the eighteenth century was the cooperative character of the ijara system. Many individuals belonging to different classes and castes came forward to bid for ijara jointly. This symbolised not only coming together of individuals but also the pooling of financial resources by those who could not do so individually. Sharing of profits by individuals on the returns from investment in ijara confirms that by the second half of the eighteenth century ijara had become a profitable venture.²⁴ For instance, in 1721 Kisordas and Gulabrai, both state officials were jointly rewarded with a siropav for helping the state to earn enormous profits on a land held by them on ijara. Although, joint ijaradari does not seem to be a rampant practice among Kayasths but its very emergence is indeed significant since, it allowed individuals with limited financial resources to acquire revenue collecting rights on ijara and streamline the system of land revenue collection for the state.

Many of the Kayasths in their capacity as qanungo could well afford to obtain ijara for themselves too. The qanungos had started taking ijara actively for themselves for years together, unlike earlier when it was held for brief periods only. It also emerges from Dastur Komvar that many qanungos who were kayasth, were prosperous enough to take up the territory on ijara of which they were themselves qanungos. This practice is evident from the fact that the ijara of suba Ajmer was further renewed to its qanungo beyond the normal tenure, on his request.²⁵ Conclusion that can be drawn from this is that influence and prosperity were decisive factors for securing ijara in the villages. Also, by the mid eighteenth century ijaradari system had become an established channel for ensuring smooth flow of cash.

The Dastur Komvar cites many instances of the state honouring them for reasons not clearly indicated. On certain occasions it fails to inform us about the actual change in the nature of service which the qanungo had come to assume over the years. This suggests that these officials had begun to perform a wide range of functions, which they were not entitled officially. Since the state had come to depend on them far too much because of their skill and traditional revenue-related knowledge, it began to honour them sufficiently. Demarcation between the role and functions of state functionaries was apparently getting blurred and this benefitted the kayasths in a big way.

Thus, the conventional role of the kayasths as record keepers or scribes underwent tremendous transformation during the period of our study. It may be stated that the kayasths who were until now chiefly associated with revenue administration achieved prominence in other fields of administration as well. State patronage became a key source of their employment and social eminence. Kayasths who were mainly a scribal caste were present at every level of administration. Their familiarity with revenue management and various aspects of the administration enabled them acquire greater economic and political authority during the eighteenth century.

²² Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.886

²³ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.516-517

²⁴ Dilbagh Singh, The State, Landlords and Peasants, p.136

²⁵ Dastur Komvar, Kayasth, p.892

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