



IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary
Research, Review and Studies**

Volume 1 - Issue 2

2024

© 2024 International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review and Studies

**BEYOND THE CITADEL: STATE DYNAMICS IN THE
PERPETUATION OF CASTE AND GENDER HIERARCHIES IN
PESHWA GOVERNANCE AND RAJPUTANA REALMS**

-BY JAHANVI JHA

The subordinate position of women has been documented throughout the different stages of history, where the degree and nature of the subordination was determined by socio-economic and cultural milieu in which women were positioned. In the pre-colonial era, the state played a significant role in regulating the social interactions and domestic lives of different castes, aligning them with customary laws. This intervention gives insight into the ideological and moral norms endorsed by the state, and the recorded accounts reveal how justice was administered across diverse caste groups. The state's responsibility in perpetuating the caste system was crucial for asserting political authority over the subjects.

Within the framework of the Peshwa administration, a discernible aspect was the imposition of restrictions on marriages within the Brahmin community. These constraints were formalised through the issuance of instructions referred to as "*resangi yadi*," which served as a mechanism to enforce the application of Shastra Laws. This particular set of regulations underscored the intricate control the administration sought to exert over the marital alliances within the Brahmin segment. In contrast, marriages among Non-Brahmins followed a distinct protocol. The initiation of such unions necessitated obtaining explicit permission from Mukadam Patil. Furthermore, as a prerequisite for obtaining this permission, Non-Brahmins were obligated to pay a marriage tax. This nuanced approach to regulating marriages within different segments of society sheds light on the administrative intricacies and the varying processes employed for distinct social groups during the Peshwa era. Additionally, the government utilized its authority to reunite couples who had been separated. The governance under the Peshwa rule has frequently been characterized as 'Brahman Rajya' due to its adherence to *shastric* laws, granting privileges to Brahmins while suppressing lower castes. Simultaneously, stringent measures were enforced on women, prohibiting them from remarriage and endorsing the practice of child marriage. This was further exacerbated by the ritualistic act of *kanyadana* and the prevailing dowry system. Despite state attempts to

discourage lower castes from emulating these customs rooted in *shastric* laws, non-Brahmins or *Shudratishudra* communities adopted some practices through the process of Brahmanisation, exacerbating the plight of low-caste women.

Similar constraints on women in Punjab and Haryana perpetuated the idea of widow remarriage to suit political and economic factors for landowning classes. Society celebrated married women's sexuality but viewed widows with suspicion, leading to control mechanisms like *karewa* or widow remarriage in the levirate form. Karewa marriages symbolized the deep-seated ideology of dependency and control over women. The historical records in the Farohi accounts of Mughal sarkars present evidence of the state officially acknowledging the customs of widow remarriage, known as '*nata, gharva, gharijana, or gharecha.*' These practices were prevalent among the middle and lower castes. It is noteworthy that adherence to specific caste rules, as specified by *jati-panchyatas*, was required in these matters. In cases where these norms were violated, the state would intervene. Furthermore, if there was a breach of the norm of endogamous marriage, the individual involved would face excommunication by the state. Widespread acceptance of widow remarriage among lower castes like artisans in Marwar could be linked to gendered production processes and the absence of a strict private-public dichotomy in elite upper-caste households. In upper castes, widow remarriage was considered polluting, equating the death of a husband to the death of a woman's personhood. Conversely, lower-caste widows were compelled to enter levirate form matrimonial alliances, compromising their sovereignty in both scenarios.

In medieval Rajasthan, the practice of sati, or self-immolation, gained acceptance in the Rajput state. This practice, rooted in the doctrines of *Pativarta* and *mahasati*, was perpetuated by the court of the Rajput state. Sati was prevalent among both high and low-caste women. Varsha Joshi, in her article 'Deifying the dead, The satis of Rajasthan,' highlighted the categorization of sati based on political and socio-economic dimensions within the Rajput *zenana*. This included *Sati, Jamar* (self-immolation as a protest against tyranny), and *Beli* (composed of maidservants, concubines, and women of different castes who burned themselves to fulfil societal demands as they were not considered *pativarta*). The norms related to widow remarriage and sati meant that when a woman ceased to be a wife, she was deprived of her personhood.

In the pre-colonial era, the state was dedicated to regulating instances of sexual misconduct, a commitment evident in the historical accounts of the Mughal Sarkar found in the Farohi

records. These records detail incidents of "*chamchori*" or sexual misconduct, acts that often transcended the boundaries of caste, class, and gender relations. The state, in such cases, frequently intervened in community affairs to uphold the honour of individuals. Specifically, when it came to women, actions were taken against those engaging in "improper behaviour" or "*be-adbi*." The state's perspective on adultery placed the onus solely on women. During the Peshwa government's reign, fines were imposed on women of high caste and status for their involvement in adultery. Conversely, low-caste women faced a different form of punishment—they served as *batik* or slaves under individuals assigned by the state. This underscores a stark disparity in the treatment of women based on caste and social status. This cultural oppression, particularly evident in the lives of women from lower castes, assumes an even more dehumanizing and destructive form than economic exploitation. The state's practices not only perpetuated gender inequalities but also entrenched cultural norms that subjected women to varying degrees of subjugation and exploitation based on their social standing.

Patriarchal regulations manifested differently among lower castes, with significant distinctions between customary practices and Brahmanical regulations. Brahmanical law books provided legal prescriptions more relevant to high castes, while lower castes received guidelines. As castes proliferated into sub-castes, society became increasingly governed by customary norms specific to each community. In general, ruling castes exercised social dominance, particularly patriarchal power over women, often exploiting practices with state support. In conclusion, the doctrine of endogamous marriage, a fundamental aspect of the caste system and the varnasanskara theory, serves as a mechanism to prevent leakage within the system. This involves the control of women's sexuality and social mobility. The fear of losing authority over women, coupled with misogynistic concerns, has led to the imposition of strict supervision on women. This ideology not only renders women socio-economically and politically subservient but also socially constrained within a patriarchal framework. Consequently, the ideological dimension of the caste system, prohibiting intermixing among people of different castes and restricting social interactions and ritualistic marriages to specific caste members, intricately intertwines caste and gender dynamics.