

History of Rajputs: Rajput Provinces of India – An Empirical Study

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Abstract

'Rajput' is derivative of a Sanskrit word raj-putra which means "son of a king". Rajput were recognized for their bravery, faithfulness and royalty. They were the warriors who fought in the battles and took care of the governing functions. The Rajputs originated from western, eastern, northern India and from some parts of Pakistan. Rajputs enjoyed their eminence during the 6th to 12th centuries. Until 20th century Rajputs ruled in trounce majority in the princely states of Rajasthan and Surashtra. In the 6th century, India was divided into caste systems which consist of The Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and shudras. The Brahmins was known as upper class Hindus who was only responsible for the scared works. The Kshatriyas were the warriors who fought in the battles and took care of the governing functions. The Vaishyas were the agriculturalist, landowners, traders and money-lenders and the shudras known as the lower class Hindus who have to serve the above three caste. The Rajput falls in the category of the Kshatriyas. Throughout their periods of rule in northern India, Rajput built remarkable shrines, castles and forts and were eager supporters of paintings. The Rajput had a widespread population almost of the subcontinent particularly in north, west and central India. Populations were found in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand Himachal Pradesh, Surashtra, Jammu, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

Key words: Rajput, India, culture, Rajput, warriors, provinces

Introduction

Until modern times, the prevailing consensus as to the Rajputs' point of origin was an Aryan descent from India's mythical age. This unsubstantiated belief in a shared heritage with white Europeans later provided ample justification for the British Empire's designs on the subcontinent. Furthermore, no single source gives a complete index of the Rajput families. The English soldier and adventurer Lt Col James Tod's **Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan** is the seminal volume about these soldier-aristocrats and remains the best introduction to the subject. Divided among three dozen clans and even more sub-clans, many notable surnames stand distinguished in the historical record. Consider the Chauhan clan, who once ruled Delhi before the Afghan conqueror Muhammad Guri vanquished them in the 12th Century. It is the Guhilot clan, however, who would conceive of India's greatest fortress: Chittorgarh. Seized from its former masters whose fortunes ebbed with the decline of an ancient empire – of which many are found across India – the Guhilots held Chittorgarh for several centuries and grew wealthy from its country, the kingdom of Mewar. But why did Will Durant, in his *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage*, compare the Rajputs to Samurai? Perhaps it was their preoccupation with honour, a trait manifested in another well-known clan, the Sisodyas, who in the early 14th Century replaced the Guhilots as overlords of Mewar. Like the Samurai, the Rajputs had their own code of conduct. Theirs was detailed in no less than the Mahabharata, Hindu civilisation's epic poem. In it, the Hindu Kshatriya, or warrior caste, were beseeched to always fight fair and observe correctness in their doings. No conquest should be followed by plunder, no victory accompanied by the dishonour of one's foes. Importantly, combat was a rite where cool heads prevailed. "A Man should fight righteously without yielding to wrath or intending to slay," the Mahabharata read.

On the other hand, it was Tod the chronicler of Rajasthan who found parallels between the Rajputs and European knights, a comparison that no doubt resonated with his fellow Englishmen raised on Walter Scott and Cervantes, for whom the echoes of medieval pageantry rang with sweet nostalgia. Meanwhile, another historian, Mountstuart Elphinstone, agreed with Tod's portrayal yet drew a different assessment of the Rajputs. "They had not the high-strained sentiments and artificial refinements of our knights," Elphinstone concluded, while lauding their fighting spirit.

Beneath the vansh division there are smaller subdivisions which are kul or shakh (branch), khamp or khamp (twig) and nak (twig tip). Kul serves as primary identity among Rajputs and each one of them worship and is protected by their family goddess known as kuldevi. The Suryavanshi clans are Bais, Chattar, Gaur, Kachwaha, Minhas, Pakhral, Patial, Pundir, Naru, Rathore and Sisodia. In Chandravanshi we have Bhati, Chandelas, Bhangalia, Chudasama, Jadauns, Jadeja, Jarral, Katoch, Pahore, Som and Tomaras. Lastly in Agnivanshi we have Bhaal, Chauhan, Dodiya, Chavda, Mori, Naga, Paramara and Solanki.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze **Rajputs clans and provinces who** originated from western, eastern, northern India and from some parts of Pakistan. Rajputs enjoyed their eminence during the 6th to 12th centuries. Until 20th century Rajputs ruled in trounce majority in the princely states of Rajasthan and Surashtra.

Rajput Kingdom

Earliest and much debated opinion concerning the origin of the Rajputs is that all Rajput families were the descendants of the Gurjaras and the Gujjaras were of foreign origin. Therefore, all Rajput families were of foreign origin and only, later on, were placed among Indian Kshatriyas and were called the Rajputs. The adherents of this view argue that we find references to the Gujjaras only after the 6th century when foreigners had penetrated in India. So, they were not of Indian origin but foreigners. Cunningham described them as the descendants of the Kushanas. A.M.T. Jackson described that one race called Khajara lived in Arminia in the 4th century. When the Hunas attacked India, Khajaras also entered India and both of them settled themselves here by the beginning of the 6th century. These Khajaras were called Gurjaras by the Indians. Kalhana has narrated the events of the reign of Gurjara king, Alkhana who ruled in Punjab in the 9th century. A part of Rajputana was called Gurjara-Pradesh in the 9th century while, in the 10th century, Gujarat was referred to as Gurjara. Therefore, some scholars have described that the Gurjaras entered India through Afghanistan, settled themselves in different parts of India and were the ancestors of the Rajputs. A stone-inscription at Rajora of 959 A.D. describes Mathandeo, a feudal Chief of Vijaypala as Gurjara-Pratihara. It led to the conclusion that the Pratiharas were also a branch of the Gurjaras. The Chalukyas gave the name of Gujarat to that particular territory. It meant that the Chalukyas were also the Gurjaras. Prithviraja Raso also described that the Pratiharas, the Chalukyas, the Parmaras and the Chauhanas originated out of a sacrificial fire-pit which supported the theory of foreign origin of the Rajputs. Therefore, several scholars described that all thirty-two Kulas of the Rajputs originated from the Gurjaras who were foreigners and, thus, all Rajputs were foreigners and were provided the status of the Kshatriyas only afterwards.

However, this view has not been accepted by the majority of modern historians. It is not certain that the Khajaras were called the Gurjaras. Except the Parmaras, rest of the three Rajput Kulas refused to accept their origin out of sacrificial fire-pit. There is no proof that these four Rajput clans had blood relations. On the contrary, it has been regarded more reliable that the Parmaras and the Chaulukvas had no relation, whatsoever, within the Gurjaras. No early Muslim record has mentioned that the Gurjaras were a clan. Rather a particular territory has been referred to as Gurjara. In India, several families were named on the name of the territory which they inhabited. Therefore, it is more logical to accept that the Pratihara was that clan which occupied Gurjara-Pradesh.

Of course, foreigners were accepted within the Hindu society and accorded the status of lower Kshatriyas but the facts do not permit us to accept the view that political power of India had passed into the hands of these new converts to Hinduism. After the death of Harsha, most of the ruling dynasties belonged to ancient Kshatriya families.

The Puranas and even the Harsha- charita of Banabhatta use the words Rajputra for the sons of Kshatriya-kings. Afterwards, the distortion of the word Rajputra became Rajput. Therefore, the Rajputs were the descendants of the Hindu Kshatriya families. However, all those Kshatriya princes, who established their independent kingdoms after the death of Harsha, called themselves Rajputs. The Rajput kingdom proved to be a very big difficulty to the whole Muslim conquest of Hindu India, during the period of Islamic invasions from 11th to 16th centuries. During the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605 CE), Mughal authority was accepted by Rajput & were allowed into the emperor's court. They were given status in his administration & forces & also formed martial & martial associations with the Emperor.

Prithviraj Chauhan is the most prominent ruler of Rajputana dynasty. After the death of his father he ascended the seat at a small age of thirteen. He was known for his skilled archery that he could aim based only on sound and did not even look at his target. In between he raised his territory and organized most of the Rajasthan and Haryana unifying Rajput against Muslim attacks. A Muslim defector called Shahabuddin Muhammad Ghori became threat to Prithviraj & his territories as he was capturing nearby empires. Prithvi Raj was defeated & captured at the second battle of Tarain. He was tortured & his eyes were blinded by red hot iron rods. Afterward, in an archery rivalry he exhibited his talent by striking targets. Ghori said to be has acclaimed for his accomplishment on hearing his voice, Prithvi Raj aimed an arrow in his direction killing him over.

Another famous ruler was Maharana Pratap. He was King of Mewar and was regarded as a fearless warrior & ingenious strategist, who successfully fought the Mughals & safeguard his people until his death. Slowly the power of Rajput declined as there was no match for the supremacy of Mughals.

Ossified tactics

What's astonishing is that centuries of being out-thought and out-manoeuvred had no impact on the Rajput approach to war. Rana Pratap used precisely the same full frontal attack at Haldighati in 1576 that had failed so often before. Haldighati was a minor clash by the standards of Tarain and Khanua. Pratap was at the head of perhaps 3,000 men and faced about 5,000 Mughal troops. The encounter was far from the Hindu Rajput versus Muslim confrontation it is often made out to be. Rana Pratap had on his side a force of Bhil archers, as well as the assistance of Hakim Shah of the Sur clan, which had ruled North India before Akbar's rise to power. Man Singh, a Rajput who had accepted Akbar's suzerainty and adopted the Turko-Mongol battle plan led the Mughal troops. Though Pratap's continued rebellion

following his defeat at Haldighati was admirable in many ways, he was never anything more than an annoyance to the Mughal army. That he is now placed, in the minds of many Indians, on par with Akbar or on a higher plane says much about the twisted communal politics of the subcontinent.

There's one other factor that contributed substantially to Rajput defeats: the opium habit. Taking opium was established practice among Rajputs in any case, but they considerably upped the quantity they consumed when going into battle. They ended up stoned out of their minds and in no fit state to process any instruction beyond, "kill or be killed". Opium contributed considerably to the fearlessness of Rajputs in the arena, but also rendered them incapable of coordinating complex manoeuvres. There's an apt warning for school kids: don't do drugs, or you'll squander an empire.

From one empire to another

When the British arrived in India, the Rajput states become colonies which in turn ended the reign of Rajputs forever. After India's independence (1947), most of the Rajput states in Rajputana were merged to form the state of Rajasthan within the Indian union. When the British arrived in India, the Rajput states become colonies which in turn ended the reign of Rajput forever. Of course, certain foreigners also established their independent kingdoms in the North-West and the Western part of India and when they were accepted within the Hindu society they, being rulers, also called themselves Rajputs and were accepted as such. Therefore, there is no doubt that while most of the Rajput families are of Indian origin, a few of them have their origin from among the foreigners. Dr R.C. Majumdar does not accept the theory of the origin of the Rajputs out of sacrificial fire-pit as an historical fact.

He maintains that mostly the Rajputs are the descendants of Hindu Kshatriya or Brahamana families. He writes that Bappa Rawal, the real founder ruler of the Guhilot Rajput family of Mewar was a Brahamana, Harisena, the founder of Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, was a Brahamana whose one wife was Kshatriya and the other one a Brahamana, the Chandella-Rajputs are the descendants of the sage Chandratreya who was born of the moon; the Parmara-Rajputs claim their origin from the Kshatriya Rashtrakuta-family; and the Chalukyas of Badami were Kshatriyas.

Conclusion

Providence could not have endowed a more difficult setting for India's greatest romance. Along the periphery of the Thar Desert, beyond the undulating dunes and thorny brush, are the Rajput nations. From Gujarat in the west until Delhi and the foothills of Kashmir, there existed since time immemorial glittering kingdoms ruled by fighting men. Yet it was in the Indian subcontinent's arid north, the realm of the harrier and desert fox, where Rajputana came to be. It was a land where rugged noblemen hunted game, built magnificent strongholds, and repelled the tides of conquest. After the fall of the empire of Harsha, India passed through a disturbed and unstable state of affairs. At that very time it was further endangered by the attacks of the Arabs and the Turks. Therefore, as had happened many times in ancient India the Brahamanas took up arms for the defence of their culture and religion and were called Kshatriya-Rajputs and ultimately Rajputs.

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