



A Page from the Life of the *Chhipas*: Gleaning from 18th Century Rajasthani Records, India

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to construct the life of the chhipas (block printers) under the Jaipur state during the eighteenth century. It is based on the archival records preserved at the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. In the archives the chhipa records survive in the five major heads: The Karkhanajat Records. It comprises of the Jama-Kharch (income and expenditure; V.S.1745-1848/ 1688-1791 CE) and Roznamcha (daily accounts of receipts and expenditure; V.S.1782-1863/ 1725-1806 CE) which highlight on the day-to-day working of the karkhanas of the Jaipur State. Besides these karkhanajat records I have also used Amber Chitthiyats (V.S.1722/CE 1665). Chitthiyats are correspondence between the state officials and the subjects. These letters provide a great deal of evidence regarding the social and economic status of the chhipas. We get the correspondences between the diwan and the chhipas, where the former addresses the complaints of the latter. I have also consulted Jaipur Arzdashst, which are letters wherein chhipas are directly addressing their complaints/ demands to the ruler. I have also used Mawazana Khurd (V.S 1815-1824/CE 1758-1767) papers which is a pargana-wise record of the Jaipur state. It throws interesting light on the chhipas and their profession during the eighteenth century. Archival record is specifically useful in understanding the wage structure of the chhipas.

Keywords: Wage structure, Type of work they done, origin.

Introduction

Details: India, since ancient times is known for its unique arts and crafts. Printed/painted garments are evident even on the Ajanta paintings. One of the most popular forms of hand printing is 'block printing' which has been in use since ancient times. A.K Coomaraswamy mentions its presence in 5th century CE in the North West provinces¹. However, scholars are not in unison over the date of the origin of block printing in India. Irfan Habib opines that calico printing developed in India during the Mughal period². But Moti Chandra argues that calico-printing was practiced in India as early as the twelfth century³.

Ishrat Alam also believes agrees with Moti Chandra that printing was started 'in India sometimes before the twelfth century and spread to Iran from here'⁴.

Calico printing got great impetus under the patronage of the Jaipur rulers. Jaipur rulers set-up a separate karkhana exclusively devoted to printing known as *Chhapakhana*. During the medieval period Sanganer, a small village near Jaipur, assumed great prestige as a chief centre of production of a specific technique of block printing named after the place, Sanganeri⁵.

While profession of weaving was exclusively male; spinning largely confined to female. But it is interesting that printing does not seem to be exclusive either to male or female instead

both, the male and female were involved in the profession. A twelfth century indigenous word's dictionary of Dhanapala, in *Paiyalacchi chimpao* and *chimp* are used for calico-printers, from which the modern *chhipa* and *chhipi* have originated⁶. Moti Chandra mentions the usage of the *chhipa* and *chhipaka* as early as 12th century⁷. Muni Jinavijaya writing in the clearly suggests that calico-printing was practiced even by females as the name of Rajimati, a female calico-printer (*chimpika*) is found in the records⁸. However, we do not get any reference of women printers (*chhipa* or *chhipi*) being employed in the karkhana.

In fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, *chimpaka* was used for a female calico-printer and *chhipa* for a male calico-printer⁹. Though, Irfan Habib argues that earliest reference of the term *chhipa* or calico printing occurs in Jaisi in 16th century, the word *uncho* used for the profession of calico-printer (*chimpakakaruvisesah*)¹⁰.

K.S. Singh narrates that they have migrated Jaisalmer (Rajasthan) from Pindarpore, (Sangli District, Maharashtra), the chief centre of the famous saint Namedev in the Deccan¹¹. Imperial Gazetteer of *Rajputana* indicate they are migrated from Gujarat during the seventh to eleventh centuries¹². A late 19th century Census also report *Chhipa* community's migration from Pindarpore to Marwar¹³. It mentions the presence of both Hindu and the Muslim *chhipas* in the Marwar region. The musliman *chhipas* are converted Rajputs. They are mainly sunnis¹⁴.

Hindu *chhipas* recorded in Mardum Shumari divided into the Namdev Vanshi and Wamdev Vanshi, clearly indicative of their association from Pundarpore¹⁵. The Hindu *chhipas* largely known as Namdev Vanshi are further sub divided into Tak and Gola in Rajasthan. Named after two chief disciples of Namdev Tikam and Gobind. Later, some other castes of Rajputs were also included in them. The Tak *chhipas* presently have the seven sub-divisions – Nathiya, Runwal, Goslis, Sarwa, Untwad, Minda, Loodar, and Naagi, while the Gola *chhipas* have six sub-divisions – Bhati, Chauhan, Parihar, Solanki, Gehlot, Panwar¹⁶. Clearly there seem a marked dividing line between Tak and Gola. All the Gola sub division suggest Rajput affinity.

Russell believes that *Rangaris* (dyer) and *chhipas* (printer) were two brothers out of which professions of dyers and printers originated. He records the myth current among the Rajasthan community 'when Parasurama, that Brahman, way slaying the Kshatriyas, two brothers of the warrior caste took refuge in a temple of Devi. One of them, called Bhaosar, threw himself upon the image, while the other hid behind it. The goddess saved them both and told them to adopt the vocation of dyers. The Rangaris are descended from the brother who was called Bhaosar and the *Chhipas* from the other brother, because he hid behind the image (*chhipa* to hide). The word is really derived from *chhapana*, to print, because the *chhipas* print coloured patterns on cotton cloths with wooden stamps.'

Crooke however states that in Marwar region *chhipas* are basically Parasurame Rathore Rajputs of Rajasthan. Like Russell he also narrates the same legend with different flavor that 'In the same way the Bhavsars or calendars of Bombay have a tradition that when Parasurama was exterminating the Kshtriya race they were Rajputs living at Mathura, and fearing the same fate as their brethren became followers of one Ramdevji, a mendicant and came to Marwar. This Ramdevji being a calendar his followers at first were called *chippas*¹⁷.' Thus Crooke is of the opinion that *chhipas* were basically converted Rajputs, since they pursued printing as their profession they came to be known as *chhipas*.

Presently, the major *chhipa* settlements in Rajasthan are in Jaipur, Ajmer, Bharatpur, Jodhpur and Sawaimadhopur districts¹⁸. During my field survey undertaken in 23 November, 2011, I got the opportunity to interact with one of the *chhipa* family of Bikaner. Maulavi Muhammad Akbar, who is in the cloth printing profession since last 50 years. He recalls that his ancestors came and settled in Bikaner from Sanganer (Jaipur).

Colours for Printing

In the printing process colouring and pattern are the two crucial aspects. Though our information on these is fragmentary. But our documents throw light on the nature of colouring and types of patterns in common usage in the *karkhanas*. The colour used in the *karkhanas* natural colours, invariably extracts from vegetables and flowers. Mohammad Akbar Maulavi's

grandmother, Shabana Bano, an 80-old lady informed me that as late as 40 years ago they were using vanaspati (vegetable) colours for printing the cloth. Each and every colour was prepared different techniques and taken from a different source. She informed that pomegranate peels were boiled with turmeric, soda, *fitkari* to make the yellow colour, Tesu (a local flower of orange colour) was used to prepare *kesari* (orange colour) colour. For red colour *kusum* flowers were used. Here, it is interesting that the use of *kusum* flower for colouring continued as late as the twentieth century same was used in the Jaipur Karkhanas as well in the 17th and 18th centuries. The saffron colour was obtained from *keshu* or *harsingar* flowers. *Keshu* flowers mixed with *harsingar* saffron portions to prepare red colour. Ochre was used for making the ochre dye. Similarly by adding *kesu* flowers in a pink dye the vermilion colour was obtained¹⁹.

Though generally colours or raw material for making colours was purchased from the market, at times it were borrowed from other *karkhana*. In 1688-1689 CE Ram Singh *Tahvildar* of the Jaipur *chhapakhana* received the *saresh* flower (used for making green colour) and *khadhi* (used for black colour) from *rangkhana* for purpose of printing²⁰. In 1726 CE Daulat Ram *Tahvildar* received *kesri* (orange colour) and *pevdhi* (yellow colour) from *rangkhana* for printing²¹.

While in 1731 CE Sewa Ram *darogha* procured *kusum* (red flower) which was used for red colour, from *rangrez* of Muthura Ji²². It suggest that private *rangrez* apart from doing the task of dyeing clothes also prepared colours for personal consumption as well as market. This is also amply clear from our evidence that the state provided the raw materials to the artisans and Artisans simply carried out the instructions. In the *karkhana* mode of production artisans simply turned into wage labourers where they were asked to perform the task desired by the state/nobles.

Patterns and Styles

In the Jaipur *chhapakhana* gold and silver printing was largely used in a design. It is suggestive of the fact that cloth printed there largely catered to elite demands. In 1688-1689 CE in Sewa Ram *darogha* of the Sawai Jaipur/Jaipur received 53 *thans*, 13 *than* for gold and 40 *than* for silver printing²³. We do not get detailed information how to *dabu* printing (most common resist printing) was done in the 18th century. However, as we know that in *dabu* printing, the materials used are largely wax, clay and raisins. Our sources are flooded with information of procurement of wax, clay and raisins suggestive of the fact that *dabu* was one of the most favoured form of the printing styles used in the *karkhanas*. In 1742 CE in the *chhapakhana* submit 12 *momni* (wax) *than* probably for *dabu* printing²⁴. Vandana Bhandari argues *khari* printing is the modern method of screen printing but I have got instance for *khari* printing in the Jaipur *chhapakhana*. In 1742 CE Harballabh *darogha* of the

Chhapakhana of Jaisinghpura Jihanabad submitted the three *thans* for *khari* print²⁵.

As for printing designs largely the most favorites design used in Jaipur *chhapakhana* was *butas* (small flower). 1688-1689 CE Lakhmi Das *darogha* of Jaipur *chhapakhana* deposited 361 *thans* for *jal butas veli* (creeper spread throughout flowers) after finishing²⁶ and at another instance Lakshmi Das submitted four *thans* for chintz, Sultanpuri printing style, and thirty-one *thans* pamadhi (yellow) pasmi for printing of *butas*²⁷. *Kasthuri* printing was also done in the Jaipur. In 1725 CE Fakhirdas was asked *kasthuri* printing at *chhapakhana*²⁸.

Chhipas, Chhapakhana and the Wages: Abul Fazl in the *Ain-I Akbari* provides a detail list of wages paid to the artisans in the *karkhana* of Imarat²⁹. However, actual wages paid in other *karkhanas* hardly survive. In this regard Jaipur *karkhanas* which were set up on the same pattern of the royal *karkhanas* of the Mughal survive to date. The *karkhanajat* records provide exclusive details on the nature of wages paid by the state/nobles to the artisans employed by them in the *karkhanas*.

Shireen Moosvi argues 'The majority of servants, especially those tending animals (and birds), or otherwise employed in the animal stables, drew monthly salaries, but for most of the skilled jobs the wages quoted are piece wages. Daily wages were sanctioned only in the building establishment and for some unskilled, low paid worker such grass-cutters and boy helpers in the stables³⁰. But this does not appear to be the fact. As mentioned above *chhipas* receive both monthly wages as well as assignment based payments. At times they were even employed and paid in daily basis.

R. K. Saxena mentions three types of wage worker working in the *karkhanas* *Mahinadars*, (monthly wages), *Alutedars* (artisans who were allotted jagir in lieu of wages) and *Rozinadars* (daily warker). Their wages disparity from *karkhana* to *karkhana* depending upon their duty. Each *karkhanas* wage pattern was different some *karkhanas* was paid cash and while in other a mixed pattern was adopted and half part in wages in cash and half one kind. R.K. Saxena³¹ argues wages like a month scales³². However, I could not get any instance of wage payment on month scale pattern in Jaipur *chhapakhana*. Neither, we get the probably income tax it is uniformly deduction 1/6 in total salary. Probably each *karkhana* deduction is different for example: Barchidars, Choubdar Deodi Khasa and Beldars were subjected to a deduction of one *anna Batta Bidotra* one *anna* additional³³.

In the state run *karkhanas* of the Jaipur rulers artisans seems to have paid in the form of cash wages. However, the wage structure of different artisans varied. They were subject to different modes of payment. Some artisans were paid monthly (*mahipane*); while others were recruited on daily (*Azuradar*) basis; while some were paid as per the completion of their assignments.

In the *karkhana chhapakhana* wages were paid monthly. Here, Shireen Moosvi's argument that 'for most of the skilled jobs the wages quoted are piece wages.' Printing was a skilled job. In our records many times *chhipa* were employed on monthly wages. However artisans many times did not receive their payment regularly. In Jaipur 1758 CE Ramu *chhipa*, was engaged for printing exclusive dresses (*khas poshak*) in the *chhapakhana* at monthly wages of Rs. 10. But he was not paid every month. Instead, he got the salary after four months³⁴. Similarly, in the same year (1758 CE) when Higadas *chhipa* was also appointed to print *khas posahak* (special dress) was paid monthly (*mahipane*) Rs. 7.5. He was also not paid every month instead got his payment after four months³⁵. In 1759 CE Higadas *chhipa* got after two months got his salary for the same assignment³⁶. Here, it is also important to note that for the same assignment both Ramu and Higadas were paid different.

Deductions

Moreland found 'though there are general assertion that all classes of the people paid taxes according to their means. While, therefore, there is no positive evidence to prove that artisans were heavily taxed in the latter years of Akbar's region.' However, probably due to lack of documentation Moreland does not mention the actual deductions³⁷. Fortunately records do speak about the actual mamazana khurd rate of deduction. It specifically mentions that out of the wages of the *chhipas* (*hissa chhata kata*) was deducted.

R.K. Saxena also mentions in the context of general argues artisans employed in the *Karkhanas* on the monthly basis that monthly wages were *Bata Bidotra*³⁸. "The modus operandi for making payment was also identical in all the states. Instead of paying monthly wages, a two-month schedule was drawn and that too subjected to *Adhik Mas* and month schedules, of deductions on many counts"³⁹. However, we does not find any deductions in the wages of daily wagers and assignment workers.

In 1758 CE Ramu *chhipa*, was engaged in the *chhapakhana* of Jaipur at the monthly wage of Rs. 10. He was paid after two months but instead of Rs. 20 for two months of his work, he was given a sum of Rs. 16.10 only. This is indicative of some sort of taxation deduction from the monthly salaries paid to the *chhipas*⁴⁰. In 1759 CE Ramu *chhipa*, again where wages are due for four months he received after duration only Rs. 33.50, instead of Rs. 40⁴¹. While Higadas *chhipa* when appointed for printing *khas posahak* (special dress) was paid monthly only Rs. 7.5 (*mahipane*) Going by the calculation, he should get Rs. 15 for two months of his work. But he was given Rs. 12.50 for two months⁴². While the other Mahmud had printed *khas posak* (unique) dress in the *chhapakhana* in Jaipur. He was appointed Rs. 7.5 *mahipane* (per months) so whom he had to pay fifteen rupees of the last two months but he was paid Rs.12.5 and Rs. 2.5 were deducted from his money⁴³.

It was a general practice to keep their dues pending against two counts. One, the *chhipa* would not think of leaving the job before finishing the task, secondly, it might also involved procedural delays.

A daily wager received in cash according to the work performed. In 1725 CE Fakhirdas performed the task of printing *kasthuri* (type of printing) for cotton *masnad* (long pillow) for the *farashkhana* of Jaipur. He got 8 *aanas* for a single day's of work, without any deduction⁴⁴. In 1731 CE Nandlal, who printed two *alam* of 'thans' (a bundle of cloth) and he got Rs. 2.5 for his work. There was no deduction made in his pay⁴⁵.

Differential wages

Moreland argues in Akbar's time artisans wages were different because wages sanctioned basis on artisans classes, skilled worker get the higher salary and ordinary workers get the low salary⁴⁶. However, *chhapakhana* records speak about differential wages for the same task assigned to two printers. The wages seems to be differential and no standard format seems to have followed. It appears that wages depended upon the merit of the individual artisan. When Ramu *chhipa*, was assigned the task of printing *khas posahak* (special dress) he was paid Rs. 10 per *mahipane* (monthly)⁴⁷. While Higadas *chhipa* when appointed for printing *khas posahak* (special dress) was paid monthly only Rs. 7.5 (*mahipane*)⁴⁸. This indicates a huge disparity in pay between two workers performing the same task. This wage disparity possibly indicates the presence of hierarchy in the profession. Though sources are silent on hierarchy within the profession as such. But probably skilled worker got while higher wages as comparatively less unskilled worker got the lower salary. Fakhirdas got 8 *aanas* for a single day of work⁴⁹. While Nandlal received Rs. 2.5 for his assignments⁵⁰ and Fakhirdas was paid Rs. 1 for his printing assignments⁵¹. 1726 CE printer Muhammad Ashraf etc, were paid the (*azura*) wage Rs. 18 and 10 *anas* for *masnad* (a kind of round pillow) printing assignment⁵².

State and the Chhipas

To a limited extent archival records throw light on the relationship of the *chhipas* with the state. It seems that in case of conflicts the *chhipas* could directly approach the ruler. In 1705 CE the *chhipas* of Sambhar (Jaipur) directly complained to the ruler about the recently occupied quarters of the newly settled *chhipas* in the village. They complained that in the village the newly established *chhipas* use cow and oxen skins to colour the clothes. This polluted the river water polluted. They requested the Raja to direct these newly settled *chhipa* families not to pollute the river water and stop washing clothes there⁵³. The complaint suggests the environmental awareness of the 'humble' *chhipa* community who appear raising their voice against pollution and ensured that it should be heard loudly in the royal court.

State officials also had sympathetic attitude towards the *chhipas*. In 1665, Kalian Das, (Kalyan Das) *diwan*, informed the Amber ruler about the *chhipas* of the Harda Village (*harda vasi*) who were strictly prohibited not to wash their clothes in the Mandawar river, they still continued inspite of the ban. Upon this Anandram, the *tahvildar* beat up the *chhipas* and snatched their clothes. It seems that the aggrieved *Chhipas* approached the *diwan*, thereafter the *diwan* requested to the ruler that their clothes should be returned and the *chhipas* should be permitted to wash the clothes in the river⁵⁴. Here, *diwan*, the highest official in the hierarchy seems to have sympathy with the *chhipa* community and attempted to undo the acts of his subordinate officer. Here once again state's ban over washing in the river suggests state's environment concerns.

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14. *Jamakharch chhapakhana*, Basta No.1. V.S. 1745-46/ CE 1688-1689 f.22a.
15. *Rozanama chhapakhana*, Basta No.1. Miti Chait Vadi 1, Saturday. V.S. 1783/ CE 1726, f.1/1.
16. *Jamakharch chhapakhana*, Basta No.1. Bhadwa Sudi 3, Sunday. V.S. 1788/CE 1731, f.95a.
17. Abu-l Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari* (1949). Vol. II, ed. H. Blochmann, Bibliotheca Indica. Calcutta: tr. Jarrett, revised by J. Sarkar, 170.
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19. Month scales system a mode of payment stated by Shahjahan to balance the *jama-hasil* gap. Athar Ali mentions (see Athar Ali page 47), that though month seek was applicable in case of *tankhwah nagdi* as well but it was never fixed above 'eight monthly' or below 'four monthly'. However, R.K. Saxena mentions tankhwah paid to the artisan, in the karkhans 'two-month' as well as 'ten months'. (R.K Saxena, p.137).
20. *Mawazana khurd, pargana Jaipur*, Basta No.108,. Sawan. Vadi 12. f 1/1.
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