

The Rituals of Royal Mourning in Marwar

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Abstract

The mourning in Marwar represents far more than funeral ceremonies; it was a well-balanced and structured institution which reinforced dynastic continuity, political legitimacy and collective memory. This paper studies the ceremonies, rituals, and commemorative practices of the royal family with specific emphasis on the role of kingship, gender, hierarchy and memory process. The paper also analyses the participation of women and the wider society in mourning, highlighting the disparate nature of memorialization in the royal family. The paper argues the mourning in royal family acted as a political and cultural process through which dynastic sovereignty was preserved beyond death. By shifting attention from visual architectural memorial, this study contributes into deeper understanding of the socio-cultural history of Marwar through narratives of rituals, memory and emotions.

Keywords: Marwar, Royal Mourning, Funeral Rituals, Collective Memory, Memorialization, Remembrance.

Highlights of the paper

There are several rituals which are different and unique in their own way. Some of these rituals are :

- When the king died, he was sat in Padmasana(पद्मासन) position and baikunthi(बैकुंठी) was prepared for funeral procession.
- When pind daan is performed the ritual is to be performed by the person who shares the same gotra(सगोत्र) as the dead person.
- During funeral procession on the way to cremation ground fuliya(फुलिया) and rejgari(रेजगारी) coins are tossed in public and people collect them, keep them safe, tie the coin around neck of their kids to keep them safe from evil.
- After cremation, everyone comes back to fort and khari khichdi Dastoor(खारी खिचड़ी दस्तूर) is performed in which khichdi made of rice and moong dal id made and every one eats it.
- Suravani(सुरावणी) is when a member of the royal family dies somewhere else and the news of his death is announced.
- Paniwada(पाणिवाड़ा) happens when suravani is announced and people of the royal family all together goes to take bath at lake that too within three days of announcement of suravani.
- Kesh and Nakh Dastoor(केश और नख दस्तूर) – according to the rituals of the royal family king's hairs and nails were collected by barber from beginning till his death and when his remains are scattered in River Ganga his nails and hairs are also scattered with his remains. Barber is given gold coins weighing the same as his hairs and nails.

- When the king dies his widows do a lot of charity which includes releasing of birds from cages, buffaloes are given to milkman and local dogs are taken in by common people .
- Widowed queens also command the release of prisoners from jail. When Maharaja Gajasingh ji died his widows before performing sati called Radhadas and asked him to release 100 prisoners from jail. One of the prisoner Pancholi Valu Radhadasot declined the release stating that “if I go home, my family will celebrate my return in the time of grief we all face with the death of the king”²². This incidence shows the loyalty of the subjects towards their king.
- After the twelve days mourning period is completed the new king is announced in all parganas which is called ‘anduhai(आणदुहाई)’.
- Crown prince was never allowed to attend the funeral of king; he was not allowed to shave his head and also cremate his father.
- Kings were cremated at Mandore while queens were cremated at Panchkunda(पंचकुण्डा).

Introduction

The history of Marwar has always been remembered through wars, forts, dynastic rivalries, political rivalries, heroic narratives and imperial power. These remains popular topics among historians like GH Ojha, Hukamchand Bhati, James Todd, Melia Belli and others. In the political Culture of Marwar, kingship never terminated with death though the king survived through remembrance, rituals and monumental memory. But the remembrance was not the same for everyone in the royal family. It differed based on their status and hierarchy. In Marwar, the royal death became public process through which sovereignty was transformed ritually rather than being extinguished. Mourning performances, funeral ceremonies, cremation ground, and cenotaphs collectively produced grounds for what can be called as “afterlife of kingship” as it brings a condition in which a political authority persists beyond biological death through collective memory. In a region where scarcity of water, vast arid terrain, and ecological instability is present, stone memorial not only served as funerary marks but asserts as dynastic endurance against both mortal and environmental impermanence. This paper shifts the focus from architecture towards aspects such as rituals, hierarchy of mourning, remembrance and emotional continuity. This paper also raises some questions like how the royal household experience death? What role did the members of royal family played during mourning? Did all the members of the royal family got the same remembrance? Why did some members of the royal family got monumentalised while the others remained largely absent?

This paper also attempts to humanize the understanding of grief, widowhood, succession anxiety, and emotional loss. This paper blends architectural, ritual, memorial and emotional aspects of death into understanding a whole aspect of death.

Death and Ritual

Death in the royal family of Marwar specially the King mark significant moment of uncertainty for the dynasty and influence the political structure of the kingdom. Rajput sovereignty depended on genealogical continuity and recognition of legitimacy in public eyes. That is why, funerals in royal family designed to prevent political unrest through carefully regulated political performances. The vacuum created by death of a king which often creates political instability is filled with ritualistic customs and traditions. There were several protocols which were to be followed in the wake of the death of a member of royal family. When we talk about the death of the king following are the instances and rituals related to them :

Maharaja Mansingh ji before his death stayed at Mandore for about 20-25 days¹ which was unusual for the king to do so and there is no such rule for anyone to stay there and this indicates the free will of a person specially in their final days. When the final time approached Alms deed(धर्म पुण्य) was done by the dying person as it is said that doing so smoothen the path in the afterlife. Maharaja Bhimsingh ji gave 500 Mann Dhaan, 500 rupees and 500 cows in alms deed.² Alms deed was resolute before death and promise was fulfilled after the death of the member of royal family. Alms deeds are also considered to provide absolution to the soul and lessen the pain during their journey to heaven.

In the wake of the death of the royal family member the whole atmosphere of the palace changes as the family members as well as all the servants are put to work and assigned different duties. Messengers were sent to all parts of the palace and to different states as well, ministers were called as some important people were also asked to report at fort and pay their respect. As soon as the news reached palace and people funeral preparations were started. The dead was laid on land pre prepared with purifying with Gangajal, cow's urine and dung with warm cloth on floor to keep away insects³. Royal historiographer was called to record all proceedings of death and rituals related to it⁴.

There was no sequence in the process and all the things were organised as all the gates(किले की पोल) of the fort were closed, auspicious drums(नोबत) were stopped playing, and firing of cannon which took place three times a day were also ceased⁵. Preparation for baikunthi(बैकुंठी) takes place where king's body was bathed, dressing the king in new clothes and jewellery and put him in the box decorated with gold and silver then the funeral procession was started and in the procession royal family members, people playing drums(नगाड़ा), nobat(नोबत), turahi(तुरही), surnaami(सूरनामी), patariyan(पतारियाँ), bhakatniya(भक्तनियाँ), royal insignia, horse, elephant, land lords(जागीरदार), diplomats(मुत्सद्दी), khavansa(खवांसा), Paswan(पसवान), chadi bardar(छड़ी बरदार), and dyodidaar(ड्योड़ीदार), etc. joined the funeral procession(लोकाचार)⁶. Funeral procession following the assigned route used to reach Mandore as this was the cremation ground for members of royal family until Maharaja Jaswantsingh ji II, according to whose last wish was to be cremated at Jaswant Thada and since then cremation of royal family members started taking place there. Before reaching the cremation ground, bichlawasa(बिछलवासा) took place at a three ways intersection where legs of dead person are kept towards cremation ground and pinddaan(पिंडदान) was done before cremation⁷. Funeral procession reaches cremation ground and cremation takes place. After cremation princes and nobles takes bath at the devkund(देवकुंड) and everyone takes bath in the other lake then goes back to fort. Twelve days mourning meetings called satharwada(साथरवाड़ा) or tapad(तपाड़) were organised at town square where a prince, Maharaj sardar or a mustaddi were always present to attend to people who comes there to express their condolences. When Maharaja Ummaidsingh ji died his satharwada was organised at gidrikot in the initial days Maharaja Ratansingh ji sat for the meetings then other people sat in his place, Kedar Roop Rai was responsible to organise the meeting and pleasantries given in the meetings⁸.

In between these twelve days some rituals were performed where on third day yet another procession goes to bring the remains of the dead person and collected in a pot which is kept at where place people comes to pay respect and during these days funeral liturgy of Hindu scripture called Garuda Purana also takes place then on the tenth day the squandering of assets takes place. On the 12th day of the death Mosar(मोसर) ritual takes place in which funeral feast is organised and servants, personal attendants, and davadiyan(दावड़िया) were asked to have meal. These are the rituals which takes place when a member of

the royal family dies. The rituals in the funeral of the king are quite different yet similar in so many ways as they hold the state of the time as sacred times where transition of power is at line and the ritual shows strength for the time being.

Women of Royal Family in Mourning

Mourning in Marwar was profoundly gendered and part played by women in it received lesser attention in the study of regional history. Although women of Janana Dyodi(जनाना ड्योदी) actively involved themselves in the rituals of remembrance but the women of royal family followed strict mourning practices including fasting, ritual seclusion, changing into funeral attire and participating in lamentation traditions. For queen mothers, mourning could also act as a form of political responsibility. During periods of dynastic transition, royal widows at the time acted as the guardians of succession and protectors of lineage continuity. At the same time, the women in memory remained unequal. Kings were remembered through monumental cenotaphs and inscriptions, whereas many royal women survived only through fragmented archival references or oral memory.

On the occasion of death of the king, in the royal family the transformation in janana dyodi was drastic. Women start the ritualistic process of mourning as all the auspicious festivities were ceased, music stopped playing, women change into funeral attire, and women cry and wail which is called muh dhakna(मुंह ढकना) or palla lena(पल्ला लेना). Widowed queen embraces widowhood and personal attendant who came with the queen in her marriage also embrace widowhood along with the queen, remove their bangles and wear kanchli(कांचली) which are mourning cloths⁹. After the funeral procession proceeds follows the Sati Procession. This study does not provoke or support the idea of sati but here it demands the emotional understanding of this practice as in that period sati was not just a ritual but more of an expression of one's devotion, love, loyalty and commitment for the other person. Sati was also called sahamaran(सहमरण), sahgaman(सहगमन) and analarohan(अनलारोहण). Similar word to these is Anumaran(अनुमरण) in which widowed women commit sati with her husband's turban or some other keeps sake¹⁰. In Marwar, queen was not the only one who commit sati but Paswan, Pardayat, Gayan, Khawasa, and in some cases male attendants also committed sati. When women go for sati she wears auspicious colour dress, jewellery, put kajal in eyes, eliminate pardah and ghoonghat(घूँघट), her hairs are open and she holds a coconut in her hand. Before leaving for the sati procession, she leaves her handprints at gates of the fort. In sati procession purohit(पुरोहित), vediya(वेदिया), Joshi(जोशी), nagade(नगाड़े), sigil, tawayafein(तवायफें) takes part. Badarans(बडारण) were on horse with their hairs open and ride in front of the chariot or palanquin of the queen¹¹.

On the occasion of the death of Maharaja Mansingh ji died his queen Chota Devdi ji, Pardayat Ridrai ji, Pardayat Sukhwel ji from bada akhada, Pardayat Phulwel ji and Anduwel ji, and Pardayat Kesarkanwari ji commit sati. Queen was in big palanquin while the pardayats were in small palanquin. Badaran Radha was leading on her horse. Sati procession reached Mandore gate and waited outside, the procession was then welcomed and queen come out and visited king, circled 4 times around him, paid her respect and before leaving adjusted king's sirpench(सिरपेंच) and again went into her palanquin. At the time of cremation, the queen and pardayat stood around funeral pyre, removed their jewellery and gave them for charity. They sang auspicious song and then pyre was lit on fire¹².

When Maharaja Abhaisingh ji died his six queens, two khaswan, eleven pardayat, seven gayaniyan and pardayat commit sati¹³.

On death of Maharaja Gajsingh ji his Gayan Nainchain couldn't commit sati on 6 May 1638 because she was on her periods so she committed Chitarohan(चितारोहण) on 10 May 1638¹⁴.

Rav Satal died in 1491, he has seven queens of whom six committed sati on his funeral but his queen Bhatiyani's son was far too young so she went for sati after one year of king's death¹⁵.

After the death of Maharaja Mansingh ji death there is no mention of sati ritual and the reason behind is considered that when Jhalamand Thakur Gambhir Singhji died his two Thakuranis Karnot ji and solankini ji on their sati pyre cursed that from today onwards there will be no sati on the stone of jodhpur will take place and the reason behind it was that they were on informed of the death of their husband¹⁶.

When women in royal family died, they were also not memorialized equally as well. Some queens got their cenotaphs made, some women who performed sati got Sati Stone, while a large number of women got scattered remembrance through oral traditions only.

Remembrance for women in Marwar was different for everyone as we see when Grandmother Chouhanji Sahiba died two days holiday was announced, nobat was ceased for mourning, the state flag was flown at half mast, and one day government holiday was also announced. A three days holiday on Indar Kanwar Bajjilal's death. Paternal aunt Shri Simrath Kanwar Sahiba died on 18 February 1949, for her mourning construction work was stopped, government holiday announced for one day and two-time nobat was ceased¹⁷.

On the occasion of the death of Maharaja Takhat Singhji's and his Pardayat's daughter Singar Kanwar Baiji, queen Devdi ji organised twelve days mourning rituals which shows that remembrance was beyond status and hierarchy¹⁸.

Memorialization through structures

According to Hindu accreditation in the memory of the dead, Marwar also followed the tradition of making memorial canopy or platform. In Marwar, memorialization through structures formed an integral part of royal commemorative traditions. Cenotaphs (*chhatris*), funerary monuments, temples, and commemorative inscriptions preserved the memory of deceased rulers and members of the royal family. These structures served not only as architectural symbols of remembrance but also as enduring expressions of dynastic legitimacy, political authority, and cultural continuity across generations.

Cenotaphs (*chhatris*) are the most significant memorial structures in Marwar, commemorating deceased rulers and some members of the royal family. Built primarily at royal cremation sites, they combine Rajput architectural traditions with symbolic representations of honour and remembrance. Beyond their funerary purpose, these monuments reflect the political prestige, artistic patronage, and dynastic continuity of the Rathore rulers. The Chhatris of Rao Jodha and Ridmal are said to be built at Panchkunda near Mandore, along with the Chhatris of the queens. Most of the later temples are built in Mandore. These mainly include the 'Thadas' of Maharaja Ajit Singhji, Sawai Raja Sur Singhji, Rao Maldev, Maharaja Man Singhji and Maharaja Takhat Singhji. After Maharaja Takhat Singhji, the Chhatris of the Jodhpur dynasty was built on Jaswant Thada near Devkund.

Two instances were there when cenotaphs were made in honour of women when queen mother Hadiji went to Jamnagar to see his son Maharaja Sumersingh ji, she died there and a cenotaph was built in her honour in Jamnagar¹⁹. Another case where Thakurani Bhatiyani Sugankanwar, wife of Brigadier Jabbarsingh ji of village Beda performed sati, a cenotaph was built in her honour in Ratanada²⁰.

Sati stones were also made to commemorate the women who performed sati. Some stones have inscriptions as well which gives us information about the women and their contribution in social life.

Social implication of the Royal Mourning

On the occasion of the death the member of royal family specially the king the people of his state also participated in the mourning. After the announcement of death, the people also went to lake to take bath, changed into mourning attire and men wear turban of the colour of mourning. The market was closed along with businesses for twelve days, men went for tapad at Gidrikot while women went for tapad at fort. Even in today's time people respect the royal family and follows the traditions they lay in front of them. Different sections of the society also organised memorial services in honour of the king as on 28 January 1952, in leadership of Shri Govardhan Lal ji a condolence meeting was organised at Chandi Hall of Khejdala palace in which a large number of traders came and paid their respect²¹.

Conclusion

The rituals during mourning in the royal family of Marwar dhows that death was not just a personal or religious matter but it was an important cultural and political institution which made sure dynasties continued and royal authority reaffirmed. Funeral ceremonies, charitable acts, memorial structures and all the mourning practices all together transformed the death of the ruler and other royal family member into a public expression of legitimacy and collective memory. This study also shows that even in remembrance the royal family commemorated the dead person according to the hierarchy where the king got an elaborated memorial with structures and rituals while royal women, Pardayats and other women got partial remembrance. By analysing mourning with the perspective of rituals, memory, gender, and architecture, this study broadens the understanding of Marwar's political culture and highlights how the legacy of the departed person continued to shape the historical identity of Marwar long after death.

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