

## From Landed Class to Middle Class: Rajput Adaptation in Rajasthan

*Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and  
Lloyd I. Rudolph*

Our story about how the Rajputs in Rajasthan were transformed from a landed class to middle class begins with the demise of India's 'old regime'. However different the origin, process and outcome between the fate of the old regime in France and India, Tocqueville's magisterial *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1998) raised important questions about the transition from monarchy and aristocracy to democracy, questions that have helped us frame our narrative. India's old regime was exemplified by the Rajput princes and nobles of Rajasthan. Their fate stands in marked contrast to that of the old regime in France. In the run up to the revolution, Voltaire raised the cry '*écrasez l'infame*' (eradicate the infamy),<sup>1</sup> an option that the Jacobins took literally when they ended the old regime by using the guillotine to decapitate the king and many aristocrats. In India, the old regime was brought to a close by persuasion, not violence, and became a part of the new democratic order.

When the old regime in India was brought to a close, how did its princes and noblemen adapt to the loss of their kingdoms, titles and estates? In the language of the time, Independence in 1947 brought an end to 'paramountcy', the princes' sovereign relationship of 'subordinate cooperation' with the British crown (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a), and led to 'the integration of the princely states' (Menon 1956) into the Union of India. Most of the 22 princely states that went into the making of the post-Independence Indian

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<sup>1</sup> Voltaire was referring to the teachings of the Catholic Church but, for some, 'infamy' encompassed the monarchy and the aristocracy.

<sup>2</sup> From the Sanskrit *rajaputra*, son of a king. Rajputs have been compared to other feudal-status orders such as the Junkers of Prussia and the Samurai of Japan.

state of Rajasthan were ruled by Rajputs,<sup>2</sup> the Kshatriya or warrior-ruler *varna* (caste status order) of classical Hindu texts (Doniger with Smith 1991).<sup>3</sup>

On 3 June 1947, the last Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, announced that on 15 August paramountcy would 'lapse'; the rulers of India's kingdoms would no longer be recognized as sovereign by the British Crown. Left in a legal and political limbo, they would remain kings in name only. By Independence Day, 564 princes, including those from Rajasthan, had, with a few exceptions, been persuaded, pressured and sometimes threatened by Mountbatten, the Indian Home and States Minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, and the States Secretary to Government, V. P. Menon to sign instruments of accession with the Government of India. India's princes were promised respect, privy purses and privileges. This marked the beginning of an era of royalty without monarchy in Rajasthan.

About half the land in the 22 princely states that became the state of Rajasthan on 30 March 1949 was held by *jagirdars* (feudal landed aristocrats who collected the revenue and provided local government). Land reform began soon after Rajasthan came into existence. It took the form of *jagir* (feudal estate) 'resumption', the theory being that jagirs had been granted by the rulers of the princely states and could be resumed, with compensation, by their successor, the Government of Rajasthan (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984b). Land reform ousted the *jagirdars* from their dominant social, political and economic position in state and society. Like Rajasthan's princes who ceased to rule, Rajasthan's landed aristocracy ceased to be a governing class. Both lost much of their property and sources of income. Unlike France and Russia, the old regime in Rajasthan was not so much destroyed as retired in much diminished circumstances. In time it experienced a second coming by providing the aura of royalty, ancient kingdoms and heroic history that would make Rajasthan a leading tourist destination.

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<sup>3</sup>The four *varnas* are Brahmins (priests and intellectuals who cultivated knowledge of the sacred texts); Kshatriyas (warrior rulers in charge of security and law and order); Vaishyas (merchants responsible for commercial life); and Shudras (cultivators, craftsmen and labourers). Below and outside the *varna* status order based on purity and pollution are the *mlechhas* ('barbarians' or strangers) regarded by those within the *varna* status order as untouchables (Doniger with Smith 1991).

In what follows, we explore how the Rajputs of Rajasthan's old regime adapted to their new circumstances. Our account is about how they made the transition from a royal and aristocratic landed class to a hybrid middle class. Adaptation came in phases: first middle-class politics, then middle-class occupations. When we speak of Rajput adaptation, we have in mind exemplary rather than typical stories. For example, 'big' Rajputs — Rajputs with forts, palaces and mansions that could be made into heritage hotels — were better positioned to make the transition to a middle-class existence than those without such means. But the transition to middle-class occupations was not confined to being a businessman in charge of a heritage hotel. Many Rajputs, like the *chhote bhaiyen* (younger brothers) of old, have learned to acquire qualifications and live by their talents and wits. We have been using the term class, as in middle class, without saying where it came from and what it might mean. Before analyzing how Rajputs made the transition from landed class to middle class, we want to locate class as a term and a mode of analysis.

### **Excursus on the languages of social difference: Locating the term 'middle class' in India**

How should we think about the term 'middle class'? We turn for help to Raymond Williams. His *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1983) broke new ground in helping to understand where the term 'class' came from and what it came to mean. He traces its various versions and manifestations from its origins in late 18th-century England, across the 19th century and into the immediate post-World War II era. Williams's method is to examine the language used in an emergent public sphere. He shows how variants of class as a noun, e. g., middle class, and as an adjective, e. g., class struggle, became the dominant discourse of the public sphere. We contrast Williams's vocabulary of class in England and in Europe more broadly with vocabularies of social difference in other times and places — medieval and renaissance Europe, classical and Mughal India. We do so in order to introduce and make intelligible our story of Rajput adaptation.

It is in this context that Williams says that the word 'class' can be dated, in its most important modern sense, from about 1772

(Williams 1983: xv). Before 1772, class referred to a division or group in schools and colleges. It is at the end of the 18th century that class in its social sense began to be built up. The first usage was 'lower classes', which joined the earlier term, 'lower orders'. The term 'higher classes' made its appearance in the 1790s, and was soon joined by 'middle classes' and 'middling classes'. Roughly from 1815 we got 'working classes'. The 'upper classes' were not heard of until much later, in the 1890s, and the 'lower middle classes' much later still, in the early 20th century.

Williams is quick to point out that 'this spectacular history of the new use of *class*' does not mean that England was without a vocabulary of social difference before 1772. Shakespeare spoke of 'rank, order and degree': 'Take but degree away, untune that string, and hark, what discord follows!'<sup>4</sup> And medieval Christian Europe assumed that there was

a great chain of being . . . Every being in creation was thought to have its place within the chain, which entailed a certain degree of authority and a certain degree of responsibility to the rest of the Chain. As long as each being knew its place and did its destined duty for the rest of the chain, all would be well.<sup>5</sup>

Williams' narrative of class misses an important transitional concept between rank, order and degree, and class, that of the English gentleman. The idea of the gentleman opened the way to achieved status. While birth mattered, one could become or at least be taken to be a gentleman. Character, manners and conduct defined a gentleman. The 18th century in England witnessed the democratization of gentlemanly culture and standing that preceded the shift from a society of hierarchically closed ranks and orders to one of relatively open classes. Daniel Defoe and other 18th-century pamphleteers who wrote on class and manners provided the English with popular literary instruction in the art of becoming and being a gentleman. By celebrating being a gentleman, they

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<sup>4</sup> The Shakespeare quote is from Ulysses's speech before Agamemnon's tent in *Troilus & Cressida* I iii, 85–94; 101–8; 109–10. The speech can be read at [http://absoluteshakespeare.com/plays/troilus\\_and\\_cressida/a3s3.htm](http://absoluteshakespeare.com/plays/troilus_and_cressida/a3s3.htm) (accessed 7 March 2008).

<sup>5</sup> 'The Chain of Being', <http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/Tillyard01.html> (accessed 7 March 2008).

facilitated the expansion of the ideal to those previously excluded from the fold.<sup>6</sup>

If Williams seems to have missed or ignored the term gentleman as a way of indicating social difference in 18th-century England, he is right in arguing that class provided ‘a more indefinite word than *rank*, and this was probably one of the reasons for its introduction’ (Williams 1983: xv) after 1772. In this sense, it better captures ‘the changed social structure, and the changed social feelings, of an England which was passing through the Industrial Revolution, and which was at a crucial phase in the development of political democracy’ (ibid.).

A difference insufficiently emphasized by both Williams and Defoe is that between those in ‘commerce’ or ‘trade’ and those whose income derived from the land. Nineteenth-century British novels abound in stories in which the difference is both crucial and overcome. Persons in ‘trade’, that is, commercially marked persons, are at one and the same time inferior to landed gentry and aristocrats and, as the distribution of wealth and income tilts against the latter and in favour of those in trade, necessary to their survival. Manufacturers’, retailers’ and beer-brewers’ daughters with fortunes became desirable marriage partners. George Nathaniel Curzon, from a landed gentry family that traced its ancestry back to 12th-century Normans and who became Viceroy of India, married Mary Leitner, an American heiress whose father helped found the Marshall Field department store. The distinction between types of wealth is an element in the differentiation of the ‘middle class’ from the gentry and the aristocracy.<sup>7</sup>

But how did the middle class, which began with a class below (the lower class) and later a class above (the upper class), become a ‘stand-alone class’, a class without a class above or one below, i. e., defined more by culture rather than by structure? Paradoxically, it was Karl Marx, whose theory of capitalism brought class structure and class conflict to its apogee, who opened the way to the

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<sup>6</sup> In the paragraph about the English gentleman, we have borrowed freely from our book (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 113–14). The works of Defoe are replete with instruction on how to become a gentleman and celebrate the idea. Defoe’s death register reads ‘Mr Defoe, Gentleman’.

<sup>7</sup> This relationship is illuminated from the early 19th to the early 20th century in the novels of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope and in H. G. Wells’ *Tono Bungay* (1909).

stand-alone middle-class historic outcome. This leads us to ask: How could this have been?

In 1867 Marx published volume I of *Capital*, but it wasn't until 14 years after his death in 1883, when his colleague and friend, Friedrich Engels, published volume 3 of *Capital* from Marx's notes, that we got a glimpse of what Marx had in mind by the term 'class'. The only place Marx discusses class as such is in the last unfinished chapter of volume 3. The account ends after a few brief paragraphs, beginning as follows, with Marx answering the question 'what constitutes a class?':

The owners merely of labour power, owners of capital and landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground rent, in other words, wage labourers, capitalists, and landowners, constitute the three big classes of modern society based on the capitalist means of production. (Marx 1978: 441)

As André Béteille astutely observes, Marx's scheme is based on a dichotomy, owners and non-owners of the means of production, that leaves out the salaried middle class and the peasantry. The middle class, Béteille argues,

does not form part of Marx's analytic scheme of the three great classes of modern society. Yet its demographic, economic, social and political significance is undeniable. It has grown steadily in size and complexity not only in the industrially advanced countries of West Europe and North America, but also in the post-colonial societies of Asia and Africa, including India. (Béteille 2007: 289)

And it has grown 'without a class above and one below it'.<sup>8</sup>

If the historical career of class, particularly of the middle class, began in late 18th-century England in the context of an emergent 'industrial revolution' and reached its apogee in the hands of Karl Marx at the end of the 19th century (when the industrial revolution was at this peak), when and how did the concept of class come to India? First, what vocabularies of social difference did it challenge? Indian society is notorious for its diversities, not least diverse vocabularies of social difference. The *ur* text is probably the

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<sup>8</sup> Béteille explains the growth of a 'stand alone middle class', i.e., a class without a class above or below it, by arguing that 'we find . . . a steady and continuous increase in the number and proportion of salaried

*Manusmriti* (or Laws of Manu), a first or second CE text. It spoke of four varnas, hierarchically ranked social orders (see footnote 3 of this chapter). Outside and below the varna order were those whom modern India designated untouchables in a caste system based on several thousand endogamous *jatis* (local endogamous subcastes) hierarchically ranked on conceptions of purity and pollution. The class languages that migrated to India with the British Raj's colonial modernity jostled against an evolving caste language of social difference.

The vocabulary of social difference in Mughal India more closely approximated that of the era of the gentleman in England than it did the vocabulary of rank, order and degree in medieval and renaissance Europe or of the varna status orders in India. This was in part because under the Mughal empire's *mansabdari* system, which conferred offices and income from landed estates to support incumbents, rank was not inheritable (Spear 1965). Status was not by inheritance but by performance. The Emperor could at any time transfer office and income to another person. The Mughals created what Norbert Elias (1983) would have called a 'court culture'. Commanders, administrators and courtiers shared an outlook and way of life. Like English gentlemen, they knew themselves and their kind from the manners, language and cultivation they shared. Mughal gentlemanliness persisted in Awadhi/Lucknawi language, manners and lifestyle (Oldenburg 1989).

British rule brought several vocabularies and narratives: liberal, Marxian and what one might call ethnographic. The ethnographic stream introduced the language of tribe and race, and the presumption that social attributes had a biological root. Colonel James Tod, whose *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* constructed the

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employees . . . a change of enormous economic and social significance [because it tended to obliterate the "wage workers"]. At the same time, the distinction between salaried employees in non-manual occupations and wage workers in manual ones continued to be socially and politically significant throughout the first half of the 20th century. In the popular perception it was only the latter that constituted the working class, whereas the former belonged to the middle class' (Béteille 2007: 289). As far as Béteille is concerned, it is the salaried middle class — managerial, professional, technical — that comes to occupy centre stage with no one below or above it structurally. We are left with the very rich and the very poor, persons outside class categorization (Béteille 2007: 289).

19th-century British view of Rajasthan (Crooke 1920), spoke of three great Rajput 'races' — the Solar, the Lunar and the Fire races (Babb 2007:116).

The language of class that accompanied British rule flowed from two sources, the liberal and the Marxian. The liberal language of class can be traced back to Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education the goal of which was to form 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' (Mansingh 2003: 236). Anil Seal's *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968) showed that by the late 19th century, the fruits of Macaulay's policy of educating Indians in English language and civilization were not only civil servants who served the Raj, but also nationalists who challenged it.

Before Gandhi assumed the leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920, nationalists and the English-speaking middle class were synonymous. Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India* spoke of the 'helplessness of the middle classes' before Gandhi's arrival on the scene:

We seemed to be helpless in the grip of some all-powerful monster . . . The middle classes . . . were . . . submerged in this all pervading gloom . . . What could we do? How could we pull India from out of this quagmire of poverty and defeatism which had sucked her in? . . . And then came Gandhi. He was like a . . . a beam of light that pierced the darkness . . . like a whirlwind that upset many things but most of all the working of people's minds. (Nehru 1946: 360)

And so the English-speaking middle class took courage from Gandhi and followed his lead. By his encouragement of the use of Indian languages in the nationalist movement, he snapped the equation of nationalism with English speakers. Gandhi spoke to and for rural India. Like the bulk of the English-speaking middle classes, Nehru too followed Gandhi, but he tried to speak for the modern and Marxist (the two were conflated in the discourse of the time) social categories, not only the 'middle classes' but also what he called 'the peasantry', the 'workers', the 'petty bourgeoisie' (Nehru's italics) and, usually in disappointment, 'the intelligentsia'.

Nehru had acquired these categories during the 19 months he spent in Europe in 1926 and 1927. He spent some time in Brussels attending the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities as well as some in the Soviet Union, just 10 years away from its Bolshevik Revolution. 'The Brussels Congress', Nehru tells us in his *Autobiography*,

‘as well as the subsequent Committee meetings of the League Against Imperialism . . . helped me to understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries’ (Nehru 1961: 125). The vocabulary acquired in these years, of class and class conflict, continued to structure Nehru’s understanding of social and political motivation and that of the Congress socialists. But it did not become the language of the Congress party.

The Congress annual session in Madras in December 1927, which was dominated by Nehru, was probably the high point of Marxian class language in the Congress’s discourse. Mobilization against the Simon Commission (1927–30) and Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha (April 1930) returned the Congress discourse to a middle-class language of centrist nationalism, a language that prevailed up to Independence and beyond. When Pawan K. Varma, a civil servant turned author, published his best-selling *The Great Indian Middle Class*, he found it possible to say that ‘in spite of the politics of Gandhi and the intentions of Nehru, the middle class . . . remained at the helm of the freedom movement’ (Varma 1998: 42).

The first to notice a new middle class was Suman Dubey who credited Rajiv Gandhi with the ebullient growth of the 1980s and beyond: ‘the 1990s will be a decade of radical and rapid transformation: the decade of the middle class, marching confidently into the twenty-first century’ (Dubey 1992: 164). In the aftermath of economic liberalization in 1991, the language of class in India has added ‘new’ and ‘old’ to the category of middle class. Pawan Varma depicts the old middle class, what might be seen as the Nehru-generation middle class, as regarding it in bad taste to flaunt one’s assets (Varma 1998: 40). Gandhi encouraged simple living in the name of *swaraj* — self mastery that prevented the individual from being a slave of desire, not least the desire to consume. Nehru encouraged simple living too, but for different reasons. The socialist society he tried to create aimed at distributive justice; becoming rich was thought to take place at the expense of the poor, just as the profit motive was thought of as anti-social.<sup>9</sup> What mattered for Gandhi was service. What mattered for Nehru was redistribution.

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<sup>9</sup> It is said that a proposal to ban the profit motive failed in the Constituent Assembly. At that time the dominant ideology about capitalism in the Nehruvian Congress was that ‘the profit motive and private gain are inherently antisocial’ (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 2, 27).

Post-1991 economic liberalization and post-globalization India has produced the language of 'India's New Middle Class', the title of Leela Fernandes's book (Fernandes 2006). According to a still-cited 2002 National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) study, the new middle class includes the 'Very Rich' (six million); the 'Consuming Class' (150 million); the 'Climbers' (275 million) and the 'Aspirants' (275 million). If we count the top two categories, we are talking about 15 per cent of the population at the time it was about one billion (Rao 2004). As investors are fond of saying, 156 million (now approaching 200 million) approximates something like the European Union (EU) market. At the other end, the poor are variously estimated at 25 to 30 per cent (or 250 to 300 million) of a one billion population. According to Fernandes:

The growing visibility of this new Indian middle class embodied the emergence of a wider national political culture, one that has shifted from older ideologies of a state managed economy to a middle-class-based culture of consumption . . . Mainstream political discourses increasingly portray urban middle-class consumers as the representative citizens of liberalizing India. (Fernandes 2006: xv)

When consumption displaces service and achievement as the key marker of middle-class culture, money becomes the measure of who and what you are. This view is evident in the conversation that follows:

- Elegant Rajput lady: And what are you writing about?
- Professor: About Rajputs, about how they have changed from a landed class to middle class.
- Lady: Oh yes! My husband says we're middle-class now. It's all about money!
- Husband: True. We're all judged now by money.
- Lady: Are we really? My father was a maharaja. That is still very much part of me.
- Husband: Well, the fact that my *thikana* [estate] was important in Jaipur history does make a difference. And think about it. If someone wants to praise a businessman, an Ambani, a Tata, a Birla, what do they call him? A maharaja.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Conversation at a dinner party in Jaipur, 9 February 2007.

## Rajputs and the language of class

How does the language of class fit the discourses on social difference used in India? The vocabulary and narrative of the 'Rajputs' appear, in the first instance, to be more about status than about class. The term was used in the context of a naming pattern that identified Rajputs as Kshatriyas within the classical varna order. Dirk Kolff (1990) challenged this view by pointing out that 'Rajput' had a different meaning in 16th- and 17th-century north Indian regions such as Bundelkhand. Kolff argues that Rajput in this context designated 'fighting men' recruited from a village-based 'military labour market' that was tied to the agricultural seasons. The 'Rajput Great Tradition' arose, he argues, in post-Mughal Rajasthan when the term became endowed with ancient royal genealogies and got inflected by a Mughal-like hierarchical court culture. The bardic image which Tod (1920) adopted in his influential *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (first published in 1829 and 1830) treated Rajputs as Kshatriyas and helped to establish the 'Rajput Great Tradition'.

Today's Rajputs are aware of the transformation that the Mughal relationship wrought. In a recent semi-official history of Jodhpur, Dhananjaya Singh writes:

There never was and will never be another age quite like the Mughal. Everything about it was . . . larger than life . . . From the majesty of the Emperor to the pomp of the Imperial Court, from the splendour of its architecture to sublimity of its art and music . . . From the stability and prosperity it engendered to the anarchy it left behind: in the history of the world the Mughal Empire is rivalled only by the Roman . . . The Rathores [of Jodhpur] were sucked into this whirlpool of Timurid greatness. They would surface two centuries later a different people, mighty warriors still, but effete and decadent. (Dhananjaya Singh 1994: 73)

Post the Mutiny and the Rebellion, British observers constructed a romantic image of the feudal Rajput. After 1858, as Queen Victoria's 'loyal feudatories', they became a pillar of the Raj. Under Tod's influence they made much of the fact that the antiquity of Rajput royal lineages surpassed that of European royalty. And they spoke of warrior aristocrats who cherished valour and honour and avoided utilitarian and intellectual pursuits. To die in battle fighting gallantly for a noble cause was the highest form of glory for them. 'The Rajput disdains the plough', says a proverb. 'A Rajput who

reads will never ride a horse', says another (Lawrence 1928). But the Rajput romance played not only for the colonial power: drawing on Tod's *Annals and Antiquities* (1920), early nationalists in Bengal put Rajputs at the centre of their narrative in plays, songs, poems, and histories that celebrated Mewar's Rana Pratap as a freedom fighter who resisted imperial rule.

The ideology of the pre-Independence Rajputs denied class differences. Rich and poor Rajputs, it was said, shared the same identity and status. Myth and history united Rajputs as a community of warrior-rulers: the brotherhood of their corporate lineage overrode the differences in the material conditions. Legends spoke of princes carrying off village maidens to be their brides. The least member of a Rajput clan, whether Kachchawa, Rathore or Sisodia, was also a brother.

In the 1930s, the Congress-affiliated States Peoples Freedom Movement introduced the language of class along with that of nation into the princely states of Rajasthan (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984b). Jagirdars were said to be a feudal class, with 'feudal' now being construed negatively in the light of liberal and Marxist ideology rather than positively, as Tod would have it. In the 1950s, after Independence and after princely state integration, and with the dismantling of the old regime and the introduction of land reform, Rajputs became sharply divided by material interests. The earlier ideology of Rajput equality and solidarity died; class differences that challenged status and clan equality led to cleavages and conflict.

## The class politics of land reform

The language of class introduced by the States Peoples Freedom Movement in the 1930s and 1940s structured the process of abolition of jagirs in the 1950s. Within two years, between 1947 and 1949, India's old regime — its kings and landed aristocrats — was swept away in a largely peaceful republican and democratic revolution. India's princes, who had ruled a quarter of India's people and two-fifths of its territory, surrendered their political power.<sup>11</sup> The abolition of jagirs in Rajasthan disestablished feudal land relations,

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<sup>11</sup> Rajasthan's rulers were allowed to keep their titles and considerable 'personal' property, and were granted generous privy purses. The purses were abolished in 1971 by Indira Gandhi's Congress government.

leaving thousands of landholders and their dependents in radically reduced economic circumstances. The result of princely state integration and the abolition of jagirs was a revolution by persuasion, if not consent (Menon 1956). Rajasthan's 22 princely states, 20 of which were ruled by Rajputs, were first 'integrated' into India, then merged to form a state in the Indian union.<sup>12</sup> Rajput jagirdars, who controlled over 60 per cent of the state's productive land, were dispossessed.<sup>13</sup>

In 1950–51, the Congress government of Rajasthan, like Congress governments in the other Indian states, prepared legislation designed to eliminate the 'intermediaries' between the tiller of the soil and his government. In Rajasthan this meant legislation which would 'resume' jagir land. Together with the end of princely rule, the resumption of jagirs completed the dismantling of Rajasthan's 'old regime', i. e., the political and economic institutions of monarchy and feudalism. The government compensated the jagirdars with government bonds of a certain value. The criteria used to determine the 'amount' of the compensation became an issue for the courts for almost a decade (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 107–10).

The fact that Rajput society included few big landholders and many more small ones complicated the process of compensation. Unlike the big jagirdars, who usually held some land in *khudkasht* (under personal cultivation) in addition to the lands cultivated by tenants, Rajputs with small holdings usually owned no *khudkasht*, only land cultivated by tenants. Many derived their main incomes from service in Rajput courts and jagirs. For them land reform in the form of jagir resumption meant that their land was transferred to the tenants to whom they had leased it. Many of those tenants were Jats (a north Indian caste reputed as good cultivators), who became very influential in the early politics of Rajasthan, often in competition with Rajputs. Rajputs with small landholdings were

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<sup>12</sup> Before the first national election in 1952, Rajasthan was governed by a 'popular' ministry appointed in effect by the Home and States Minister Sardar Patel, and was more responsible to him than to the recently formed Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee.

<sup>13</sup> Sixty-six per cent of Rajasthan's land was in jagir and 34 per cent in *khalsa* or crown lands. Forty-eight per cent of the villages lay in *khalsa* and 52 per cent in jagir (Dool Singh 1964: 44).

left without khudkasht, without the prospect of even nominal compensation and without employment in the princely state service sector. To the small Rajput, land reform appeared to be a zero-sum game. Pleading economic survival, many of them ousted their tenants illegally, and sometimes forcefully.

The human drama of the abolition of jagirs was dramatically captured by a visiting British scholar who found himself in a position to observe its effects in a large thikana:

Deoli was dominated socially, no less than physically, by the fortress that towers over it. Until 1948 it had contained a court of law, police station and a jail, revenue offices — all the business of a thikana encompassing sixty smaller villages. The ruler was always attended by a number of his subordinate Rajput jagirdars . . . and by a retinue of two hundred servants . . . The courtyards and stairs were alive with people in those days, officials and tenants, litigants, petitioners waiting for an audience with the ruler . . . This way of life continued unchanged until 1948, and then without warning, the mainstay of village life was removed. The Congress Government pressed home its democratic reforms, abruptly relieving the ruler of his former administrative powers . . . In order to emphasize the change, the new magistrates' court, revenue office and civil administration were centred in different towns and villages, each more than twelve miles away. In 1951 the palace was an empty shell. The elephants and most of the horses were gone; nine-tenths of the retainers had been turned away, and the stairs and courtyards were deserted. (Carstairs 1957: 22–25)

The Rajputs, however, did not surrender without a fight. They challenged the legislation on the question of compensation in courts. The judiciary, more interested in property rights than the legislatures, for a time stayed implementation in the name of 'meaningful compensation'. Rajputs with big thikanas went to court in an effort to gain higher compensation. They formed an association, the Kshatriya Mahasabha, to coordinate their legal and political resistance and to negotiate better terms (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a).

The leadership of the Congress government that initiated and implemented the abolition of the jagirdari system was drawn from activists of variously named Congress surrogates that operated in the princely states in the 1930s and 1940s — the Praja Mandals, the States Peoples Conference, the States Peoples Freedom Movement. They had pressed for a constitutional and representative

government and for civil and political rights. Praja Mandalists were drawn from a narrow stratum of educated middle-class professionals. Though Rajput rulers sometimes repressed and sometimes suppressed their activity, for the most part, they tolerated it (Rubin 1983).

After an uncertain and precarious start, the Congress party in Rajasthan found a leader in Chief Minister Mohan Lal Sukhadia, a consummate politician and administrator. Sukhadia, who hailed from Mewar (Udaipur), managed to serve for 17 years as Chief Minister, a record yet to be broken. He was supported by another Mewari (term for one hailing from the Mewar region), Rajasthan's longest-serving Chief Secretary, Balwant Singh Mehta. For over a decade they negotiated the terms and conditions of land reform, working for an effective and peaceful settlement in the form of compensated jagir resumption. In January 1954, soon after the conclusion of a settlement with the big jagirdars, 18 of them crossed the aisle to join the Congress legislature party, an act that greatly strengthened Sukhadia's and the Congress's hold on power. The Vice President of the Kshatriya Mahasabha and its chief negotiator, Rawal Sahib Madan Singh Nawalgarh, expressed the sentiments of the Rajput establishment when he said:

In the present circumstances the most sensible course open to the landholders . . . was to strengthen the hands of the Nehru government by actively supporting Congress, which is the only political organization capable of ensuring unity and solidarity of the nation. The representatives of the landholders who met recently at Jaipur . . . were convinced that sectarian and communal considerations should be eschewed.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, in a state assembly of 200 seats, 25 MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) joined the Congress, as did one MP (Member of Parliament) and 'hundreds' of rank and file Rajputs. The big jagirdars had led the way towards class transformation by adopting the middle-class outlook and the vocabulary of the Nehruvian Congress (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a: 38–78).

The small Rajputs and the chhote bhayien were another matter. They lost their service jobs in thikanas as well as princely government service, and many lost control of some or all of their small

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<sup>14</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 4 February 1954.

landholdings.<sup>15</sup> Initially, the small Rajputs' jagirs of ₹ 5,000 and below were exempted from resumption, but, under pressure mainly from Jat tenant cultivators, the Congress leadership in New Delhi succumbed and the exemption was withdrawn. Subsequently, tenant cultivators, many of whom were Jats, took possession of the land they cultivated. The small Rajputs came to believe that they had been betrayed not only by the Congress government in Delhi but also by their fellow Rajputs. Joined by chhote bhaiyen, they broke with the Kshatriya Mahasabha to form the Bhuswami Sangh.

The name of the organization was indicative of the social protest and religious revivalism of its ideological orientation. *Bhumiya* refers to those attached to the soil, but it also has a more specific reference to the *bhom*, a feudal tenure whose leading characteristic was its inalienability. Granted for service to the state, *bhom* tenures did not ordinarily carry an obligation to provide future service to the state. *Swami* evokes a sense of the master — a master, in the first instance, of the self but, in this context, also one of the soil. The Bhuswami Sangh's goal was to save the small Rajputs from economic and social ruin; it tried for three years, with little success, to use agitations, sometimes violent ones, to negotiate better terms. In the mid-1950s, Rajasthan experienced a mini class and civil war as the Bhuswami Sangh, under the leadership of Madan Singh Danta, turned violent, causing the deaths of many Bhuswamis and policemen (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984b).

When the big Rajputs settled with the Congress and the smaller ones lost their status as landlords and their jobs in court service, the notion of the Rajputs as rulers and as the dominant stratum in a status order disappeared from view. In all this, the Rajputs had not only experienced class cleavage and conflict but also faced the prospect of fashioning a new identity in a republican and democratic state and, as soon became apparent, in a market economy.

### **Fashioning a hybrid identity: A Rajput middle class**

Looking back from the perspective of 2008, it can be said that the Rajputs of Rajasthan have been fashioning new identities for

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<sup>15</sup> For how the land-reform legislation was implemented in the countryside, see the two fine studies by Thomas Rosin (1978, 1981).

almost 60 years, ever since they lost their lands, titles and governing authority. For analytic purposes, we want to discuss their changing identity in the context of three generations — the ‘original’ landholders (both large and small) when land reform began, their sons and then their grandsons. The three generations were confronted with different possibilities as the economy, politics and society around them changed. What they could choose and become depended not only on the changing context but also on their social origins as large jagirdars, chhote bhaiyen and small Rajputs.

The chhote bhaiyen were in some ways best prepared for the new era. When land reform began, these ‘younger brothers’ were doubly armed: with modest expectations and the capacity to live by their wits and talents. In most large-jagir households, the eldest son inherited the title and the estate.<sup>16</sup> Younger sons were provided for by settling some land and property on them, but which was usually not enough for them to live comfortably or independently. Some younger sons lived on the sufferance of their eldest brother, the *thakur*, and became a part of his staff or retinue. But often they would go into the service of a princely state or a large thikana. For example, Colonel Kesri Singh, a younger brother of Amar Singh, the diarist and thakur of Kanota in Jaipur state, graduated from Mayo College, attended the Agriculture College at Poona, where he graduated with distinction, and went on to serve in the princely states of Kashmir and Gwalior before becoming Deputy Inspector of Police in Jaipur state, the head of its *Shikarkhana* (hunting department) and the author of several important books on hunting.<sup>17</sup>

The army of a princely state or, in the 1930s after Indians could hold King’s commissions, the Indian Army also became suitable choices for these younger Rajput brothers. For example, General Nathu Singh of Gumanpura (a Banswara thikana), a Sandhurst graduate, was the second-ranking Indian general behind K. M. Cariappa, the first Chief of Staff of the post-Independence Indian Army. In the post-Independence second generation, we also have Jaswant Singh, successively India’s Defence Minister, External Affairs Minister and Finance Minister in the 1998–2004 NDA (National Democratic Alliance) governments of Atal Behari Vajpayee,

<sup>16</sup> Rajput inheritance usually followed the rule of primogeniture.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Kesri Singh (1959, 1964, 1970).

the grandson of Zorawar Singh, the Rawal of Jasol (Barmer district, Jodhpur), and son of a younger son of that house. His father's military career was spent in the Jodhpur Lancers, including service abroad in World War II. After graduating from Mayo College, Jaswant Singh too chose a military career, serving as an officer in the Indian Army for nine years (1957–66) before joining politics (Jaswant Singh 2006: 3–51).

The small Rajputs were the least prepared. Many of them were the victims of inheritance rules which, in some contexts, allowed the division of the land among brothers, rules that led to progressive fragmentation of agricultural lands.<sup>18</sup> When the negotiations were over, a few regained their lands and became small farmers, often living up to the stereotype that Rajputs could not farm (Rosin 1987). Some sought careers in public service, the most notable example being that of Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, three times Chief Minister of Rajasthan (1977–80; 1990–92; 1993–98), Vice President of India (2002–07) and an unsuccessful Presidential candidate (2007).<sup>19</sup>

More often, ideas of honour, nurtured in villages in the interior, made it difficult for the small Rajputs to take up menial jobs in urban commercial settings. For example, they often rejected service work in the emergent Rajput-dominated heritage hotel industry. Being a waiter, for instance, involved having to clear the *jhootha* (the polluting leftovers) of the guests. This practice was thought to be demeaning. In the early days of the heritage hotels, before the rise of professional hotel management schools, Rajput proprietors turned to Nepalis, for whom hotel jobs were a step up from village poverty, and who were not bound by Hindu conventions of pollution.

The distinctions between jagirdars (or big Rajputs), *chhote bhaiyen* and *bhumiyas* (small Rajputs) make it clear that Rajputs

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<sup>18</sup> These rules prevailed in only a few places in Rajasthan, such as the Udaipurwati region of Shekawati.

<sup>19</sup> After graduating from high school, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat first worked as a farmer, and was subsequently able to join the police as a sub-inspector. At the age of 29 he was elected on a Jan Sangh ticket as an MLA in the Rajasthan legislative assembly. Beginning in 1952, he served there for 22 years. He was one of the several MLAs we interviewed in 1956 during our first year of research in India.

entered the process of adaptation after land reform from different social locations. In the first and second generations after land reform, Rajput adaptation often took the form of moving from a landed class base into the old middle class of educated professionals in service-related careers.

Our research on why and how Rajputs entered the new middle classes focused mainly on the big Rajputs and the *chhote bhaiyen*. What possibilities did they face, 10 years out of 'feudal' Rajasthan, 30 years out, 60 years out? The clearest case for Rajputs becoming a part of the new middle classes can be made for those 60 years out and in the third generation, those who were 25 to 35 years old in 2008. This result has been determined, to a considerable extent, by the changing nature of the Indian economy and its labour market.<sup>20</sup>

The first generation affected by land reform spent the 1950s and 1960s dealing with its massive disruption of their lives: loss of status, income, wealth, and responsibilities. Their compensation was in the form of government bonds whose interest income was meagre and whose sale value was radically discounted. Either way, they found themselves in greatly reduced circumstances and with very few properties or responsibilities. Few were prepared by temperament or training to cope with a market economy, much less an unstable and rapidly changing one. Stories abound about how jagirdars were taken advantage of or squandered their money. Many retained as personal property valuable urban holdings — palaces, *havelis* (mansions), *baghs* (garden-palaces), and forts — but, in a catch-22 situation, had to dispose of them under fire sale conditions to comply with urban land ceilings (Bhargava 1983).

For the next generation, there were two tracks: eldest sons could try to make a go of being gentlemen farmers on what was left of the estate or they could try to find an off-estate career suitable for a Rajput. Not many of the second generation could expect, in the 1970s and 1980s, to be maintained by, or make a go of, their fathers' estates. Estates were now commercial, not 'feudal'. They were

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<sup>20</sup> Our generalizations about change over three generations are based in part on observation and social interaction, beginning in 1956, with a number of Rajput lineages, particularly those from Kanota, Bissau, Bedla, Jobner, Chomu, Acherol, Alsisar, Mandawa, Nawalgarh, Naila, Santa, and Khandela.

staffed by ‘employees’ rather than by ‘servants’. To the extent that they produced for the market, they had to deal with ‘the bottom line’. They required hands-on management of a style that the pre-Independence Rajput thakurs could hardly recognize: knowledge about scientific agriculture, including high-yielding varieties and what helped them grow; attention to input costs and remunerative prices; and transportation to the market. In our panel of Rajput lineages, there were three such gentleman farmers. They had trouble (but succeeded in) finding brides willing to give up city living for life on the farm. One of them had a supplementary career as a college teacher.

For those who chose to leave the thikana, there were some obvious choices. As we have seen, military service was one. It was compatible with the Rajput self-conception as warriors. In the early decades after Independence, a career in the military services retained some of the prestige bequeathed by empire and class. Also favoured was employment in the tea gardens, where life on horseback (later the jeep) and at the club captured the manly and leisure-class style favoured by Rajputs. Darjeeling in the northeast, where the pay and social life were better, was favoured over the Nilgiris in the south. A few went into business — an automobile, petrol pump or LPG cylinder dealership; an electric power company; or banking. Rajputs tended to choose occupational niches that were clearly distinguishable from those occupied by the traditional trading castes. They did not go into the retail business where they would have to serve and cater to customers. (However, as we shall see, being a host at a palace was an entirely different matter.) It should be noted that these were careers not dependent on testing. While one could find a Rajput or two in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or the Indian Police Service (IPS), on the whole, they did not take to the non-military meritocratic public services. ‘We don’t enter careers that require exams’, one of our second-generation informants noted wryly.

Another option surfaced without signalling the great importance it would have in the future — the travel industry. Rajasthan was beginning to attract tourists. Young men without estates, or urban property to fall back on, started joining travel bureaus or opening one. At the same time government academies for hotel management began to come up. Initially they prepared their students for jobs in public-sector hotels. In Rajasthan, the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) took over princely state guest

houses and began to build and operate them as two-, three- and four-star RTDC hotels. Some Rajputs entered government service as managers in RTDC-operated facilities throughout the state. More important, some of the ex-princes and *jadirdars* began to notice that their large unused and deteriorating *havelis*, palaces and forts might make good sites for hotels.

By the time the third generation came along, those who were in their late twenties or thirties in 2008, the career preferences of the Rajputs had changed once more. The labour market had changed and with it the perceptions and attitudes of third-generation Rajputs. We were told that the army had become less attractive because it had, over time, become more democratic. Officers, more often than not, now came from *mofussil* towns rather than cosmopolitan cities, were from lower rather than higher castes, and hailing from families where the fathers had been Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) rather than commissioned officers. Salaries were less attractive as the pay of all public services, military and civilian, increasingly lagged behind what could be earned in increasingly prosperous private firms. The tea gardens lost their charm as relative compensation declined and ethnic and separatist violence in the northeast became more common.

But these losses were balanced by certain kinds of business-related careers. We observed that many second-generation Rajputs entered careers in banks and, to a lesser extent, in management in firms. They preferred, it seems, to be in service rather than to be on their own in business as proprietors or entrepreneurs.

There was a little movement among Rajput women in the second generation. The Rajput seclusion of women had been very stringent, particularly in rural areas. The enabling conditions for a woman to take up work outside the household included an urban environment and a sympathetic and supportive husband willing to override an unsympathetic mother-in-law if need be. In Jaipur, two entrepreneurial women, wives of younger brothers, opened primary and secondary schools, which were in great demand in the under-served Jaipur market of the 1960s. The career of the late *Kunwari Sahiba* of *Mandawa* suggests the exceptional conditions that made it possible for her to become one of the earliest entrepreneurs to connect traditional Rajasthani block-printing on fabric (a craft on the verge of extinction) to the modern middle-class market. Daughter of a progressive *Ajmer thikana*

called Masuda, she began to search out traditional wooden blocks used in the printing of cloth, and began to print, design and market garments from her Jaipur haveli. Her liberation from the seclusion of the *zenana* (women's quarters) and movement into the public world of manufacturing and marketing was aided and abetted by her husband, the late Thakur Devi Singh Mandawa.<sup>21</sup>

### **The transformation of Mayo College and Rajput identity**

The history of Mayo College provides another entry point into the transformation of Rajput society from landed class to middle class. Named after Viceroy Lord Mayo, who founded it in 1870, Mayo was one of several educational institutions known as 'chiefs' colleges' that the British Raj had established to educate the sons of princes and nobles.<sup>22</sup> The schools were created in the aftermath of the momentous Mutiny and Rebellion of 1857, when Crown rule replaced the East India Company's rule. The Crown and its representative in India, the Viceroy, were in search of support and legitimacy. In Queen Victoria's phrase, India's princes were asked to become 'loyal feudatories' of the Crown (Rudolph and Rudolph 1984a). Schools for princes and nobles were seen as a way for assimilating them to an imperial governing class. The schools were created in the shadow of England's great public schools such as Eton, Harrow and Winchester (Sherring 1897). Tory imperialist viceroys such as Lords Curzon and Lytton counted on the 'natural aristocracy' to cement British rule in India. As they saw it, India's princes and nobles were the 'real Indians', respected, honoured and obeyed, while the emergent English-educated middle classes, who claimed they spoke for the Indian nation, were deracinated and seen as inauthentic (see Kipling 1937).

Soon after Mayo's founding, the then Viceroy, Lord Lytton, expressed at the school's prize-giving in 1879 contemporary expectations about what it could accomplish:

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<sup>21</sup> The credit for nurturing the hand-block garment industry goes to a number of people. Among the pioneers were Jaipur-based Faith and John Singh who, in the early 1970s, launched the Anokhi line of hand block-printed garments, a line that has become highly successful worldwide.

<sup>22</sup> The others were at Rajkot, Indore and Murree, the last now in Pakistan.

There are I think many points of resemblance between the great Rajput clans and the English houses founded by our northern ancestors. Both of them owe to the same characteristics the positions they have made, and still maintain for themselves in the political hierarchy of an ancient race. Those characteristics are energy, fearlessness, the love of healthful exercise, an instinctive aptitude for active life, an instinctive scorn for all unmanly ease. No race, no class can long maintain its social and moral ascendancy if it degenerates in physical vigour. And it is perhaps a special merit of our English system of education that it aims at training, developing and strengthening not only the mind but also the body. The idea was well expressed long ago by Colonel Walter in an excellent and most suggestive report which may have influenced Lord Mayo when he founded the present college. In that very sensible report Colonel Walter pointed out that what was then most needed for the education of India's young rulers and nobles was an Indian Eton. Ajmer is India's Eton and you are India's Eton boys.<sup>23</sup>

Until World War II, the arrangements at Mayo reflected the hierarchy and deference of Rajasthan's princely society. The major states (Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner) built 'houses' for maharajas' sons, the heirs apparent, and the state's noblemen. The royals and thakurs arrived with retinues, a bevy of servants, cooks, *syces* (grooms), etc. Given its limited clientele, there were few students in the early years: 98 in 1931, 170 in 1939. The end of the old regime at Mayo and the beginning of its transition to a middle-class school took place during the 'McCanlis years', 1943–48. Those years coincided with the end of World War II, Independence and decolonization, the integration of the princely states, the abolition of the jagirdari system, and the formation of the state of Rajasthan. M. A. McCanlis did for the school approximately what the Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan were doing for princely and feudal Rajasthan — ending the old regime by peaceful means. The retinues of servants were done away with. Personal cooks and private dining were replaced by a public mess in which all students, regardless of caste or religion, dined. McCanlis replaced the syllabus supplied by the Viceroy with Senior Cambridge exams, which meant that they were graded at Cambridge University. (The school eventually moved to the Central Board of Secondary Education or CBSE standard for Indian secondary education.) To ease the impact, the

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<sup>23</sup> See the Mayo website, [www.mayocollege.com/aboutEtonIndia.asp](http://www.mayocollege.com/aboutEtonIndia.asp) (accessed 6 March 2008). The following citations are also from this website.

changes occurred over several years. The residential houses were converted to the new system, the teaching and administrative staff was Indianized, and admission procedures were rationalized even as applications plummeted. In 1947, Mayo had its first Indian Principal, T. N. Vyas, and became a member of the Indian Public Schools Society.

With the end of princely states and the departure of the British from India, the school's *raison d'être* seemed to have disappeared. The very definition of the school as a simulacrum of princely state society evaporated. 'The exit of the British shook the very foundations of the school and created much uncertainty among its fraternity and community'.<sup>24</sup> Into the breach stepped the soon-to-become legendary figure of J. T. M. (Jack) Gibson. In the 15 years between 1954 and 1969, he was able to transform Mayo into a premier Indian public school with a reputation for quality education, sports and discipline. Gibson's background as a Doon School teacher helped him re-shape Mayo College into a rival public school. Gibson's charisma arose from his multifaceted character — he was a naturalist, trekker and mountaineer, as well a teacher and administrator — and from his entrepreneurial talents — he travelled throughout India, to Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, to bring the message of Mayo to India's middle classes (Gibson 1976).<sup>25</sup> He told the parents of potential students 'to send their sons to Mayo which . . . had shed its princely aura and was now a well-endowed public school open to all'.<sup>26</sup> Finally, in the face of considerable opposition from the princely members on the Governing Board, Gibson reconciled the old and the new regimes by arranging for the Congress party to hold its annual All India Congress Committee (AICC) session within the precincts of Mayo in 1954,<sup>27</sup> a reconciliation that was continued at the Mayo

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<sup>24</sup> This has been taken from the Mayo College website, [Mayocollege.com](http://Mayocollege.com), the section on 'The Gibson Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Gibson's *As I Saw It* (1976) is 'made up of extracts from letters' written between 23 January 1937, when he joined the Doon School as a teacher, and 11 January 1968, the last year of his principalship.

<sup>26</sup> [Mayocollege.com](http://Mayocollege.com), the section on 'The Gibson Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

<sup>27</sup> The AICC session was held 'against the wishes of the . . . reluctant Governing Body, whose princely members had an innate suspicion of Congress politicians'. [Mayocollege.com](http://Mayocollege.com), the section entitled 'The Gibson Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

centenary in 1976 when Congress Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was invited to be the chief guest, and on which occasion she praised the school's ability to adapt to changing times.<sup>28</sup>

In 1996 Mayo broke even further from its princely past as a Chief's school when it appointed Pramod Sharma as Principal. Sharma was an alumnus of an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) with 19 years of experience as a top-level executive in Information Technology (IT) firms that provided global services. He had begun his career as a teacher at the Doon School. A new global and middle-class Mayo was apparent in an interview Sharma gave to a newspaper. 'The world over', Sharma said,

parents are getting more competitive for their children . . . The middle class has realized that upward mobility is possible through good education. Twenty years ago, today's range of career paths was not available — the choice was either engineering, medicine, or the civil service. Also the choice would have been limited to India, whereas now the opportunities are phenomenal. Graduates are more prepared to play a role in a liberalised global market.<sup>29</sup>

Items in the 'News and Views' in the Old Boys Annual Reports for 2004 and 2005 confirm the image of Mayo College graduates in middle-class business and professional careers in India and abroad. Positions reported by alumni include: Managing Director, Tata Motors; Managing Director, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development; Justices of the High Court in Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana; LTX Corporation, California; Additional Director, Central Bureau of Investigation; Director General, Narcotics Control Bureau; Dubai Modern High School; Perot Systems (a computer firm); Commander-in-Chief, Andaman and Nicobar Islands; two Members of Parliament (elected in 2004); Minister for External Affairs, Government of India.

Equally revealing were the plans of the 37 students who graduated in the 'Batch of 2006–07'. Three were headed for St Stephen's College, University of Delhi; eight were entering other Indian colleges (four in Delhi, two in Christ Church College, Bangalore,

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<sup>28</sup> Mayocollege.com, the sections entitled 'The Gibson Years' and 'The Das Ganju Gupta Years' (accessed 8 April 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Bo Johnson, 'Organisational Turnaround', *Financial Times*, 9 June 2005, p. 11.

and two at St Xavier's College, Kolkata); four were joining colleges overseas — one to Cornell in the USA, two to colleges in the UK, and one to a college in Singapore; two were taking up medicine in MBBS programmes; four were doing business management Bachelor's degrees; six were joining engineering or computer science degree programmes, including two in IITs at Mumbai and Kharagpur. One planned to study architecture. The largest group, eight in all, planned to enrol in three-year hotel management programmes.

These careers and degree programmes indicate that Mayo's mission has morphed from educating royals to become achieving aristocrats and loyal allies of the crown to one of educating the sons of the middle classes to become successful professionals and businessmen. We estimate that Rajput boys (perhaps 30 per cent of the 2006–07 graduating batch) learn to be middle-class, and middle-class boys acquire a Rajput inflection<sup>30</sup> from the school's origin as a chief's college for educating Rajput rulers and nobles. Like the story of Rajasthan's heritage hotels that follows, the account of Mayo College blends strands of royal provenance with middle-class culture to make a hybrid class identity.

## Heritage hotels and hybrid identities

Like education at Mayo College, the tourist and hospitality industry, particularly the Rajput-operated heritage hotel segment, has been a principal site of Rajput adaptation. An early consequence of the end of the old regime in Rajasthan was that the maharajas' and noblemen's palaces, forts and havelis lay vacant and unattended. Urban land ceiling laws compounded the problem. Minimal rents could sometimes be collected for space in moffusil towns from the Government of Rajasthan for minor offices and primary schools or from cash-strapped NGOs. *Chaprasis* (peons), clerks and teachers competed with bats and pigeons for the high-ceilinged space. More often, the forts and havelis were left to the depredations of *chowkidars* (watchmen) whose families camped in their premises. In cities such as Jaipur, the royal family and big thakurs were forced

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<sup>30</sup> We estimate that nine of the 12 members of the Mayo Executive Committee of the General Council are Rajputs, [www.mayocollege.com](http://www.mayocollege.com) (accessed 8 April 2008).

by urban land ceiling regulations and laws to sell their ‘excess’ land for house plots<sup>31</sup> or relinquish it to state or city development agencies such as the Jaipur Development Authority.

But there were escape hatches. One was agricultural uses such as orchards and nurseries. Another was commercial uses such as hotels. The Jaipur royal family was among the first to catch on. The family owned two great properties outside Jaipur’s city walls: One was the Jai Mahal, which had been the residence of the kingdom’s prime ministers, most notably of the penultimate prime minister, Sir Mirza Ismail. The other great property was the royal family’s ‘country’ or ‘garden’ palace, the Ram Bagh. In 1955 the then Maharaja, Man Singh, turned the graceful Indo-Saracenic Jai Mahal into a hotel by leasing it to one of India’s leading hotel chains, the Taj group. In 1958 he did the same for the even more graceful Indo-Saracenic Ram Bagh. Both properties have been repeatedly refurbished over the years. Today, their distinctive architecture and princely state ambience keep them in the forefront of Jaipur’s more recently constructed five-star hotels.

The Maharana of Udaipur, Bhagwat Singh, was another early entrant into the hotel business. He converted the Jag Niwas, the summer palace of the maharanas of Udaipur, into the Lake Palace Hotel. Located in the centre of Lake Pichola with the Aravali hills framing the lake, it must be approached by launch. It is perhaps the best known and the most memorable of Rajasthan’s princely state hotels.<sup>32</sup> Palace and haveli hotels soon caught on, with Bikaner House at Mount Abu, Bissau and Khetri House in Jaipur being early entrants.

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<sup>31</sup> Urban land ceiling laws made it illegal to hold extensive urban properties. The law affected both the size of the plots on which buildings stood and the land surrounding them, typically occupied by baghs, ‘gardens’ large enough to serve as hunting preserves. The land ceiling law forced owners, often Rajput jagirdars of major thikanas, to rent out or sell their garden properties or lease them for commercial purposes to nurseries, bus depots, transport companies, and parking facilities. Unniara Bagh, Kanota Bagh and others were divided into small house plots and sold to home builders. For an account of the ceilings legislation, see Kabra (1975) and Urban Land (Ceilings and Regulation) Act, 1976. This Act was passed simultaneously in many states, including Rajasthan.

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed account of the royals leading the way into the hotel business, see Taft (2003: 128). The Lake Palace Hotel has entered

The British were said to have acquired an empire in India in a fit of absence of mind. Something similar can be said for the way in which great thikana *garhs* (fort palaces) morphed into what came to be heralded as heritage hotels. Many narratives float around Jaipur which claim to explain how it happened. One credits Rajvir Singh, a scion of the Dundlodh Shekhawati thikana, with initiating the process. In 1973, he took a group of American tourists on a tour by Ambassador car to key sites in Rajasthan. He arranged to put them up in rulers' palaces and guest houses. In 1977, he introduced a group of 90 French tourists to 'adventure tourism' by taking them on a camel safari in Shekhawati that travelled from the Dundlodh garh to the Mandawa garh, on to Fatehpur (a Shekhawati town with splendid painted havelis belonging to absentee Marwari businessmen), and then back to Jaipur. In 1978, Rajvir Singh introduced Dominique Lapierre, author of *Freedom at Midnight*, to Kunwar (he was not yet the Thakur) Devi Singh of Mandawa, who arranged for the first group of French tourists to stay at the Mandawa Fort (later renamed Castle Mandawa). In 1980, Castle Mandawa opened with six rooms.<sup>33</sup>

According to Frances Taft, at the end of the 1980s a major shift occurred when what she calls 'historic properties' came to be known

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history in a variety of ways, from being the site of the 1964 Pugwash conference that first called for a ban on anti-missile missiles, to the filming of the James Bond film *Octopussy*, and to visits by famous persons such as Jacqueline Kennedy. When Bhagwat Singh died in 1984, he created a trust that disinherited his eldest son, Mahendra, for challenging him in court, gave his second son, Arvind, the largest share in the trust and his daughter, Yogeshwari Kumari, a lesser share. Since then, Arvind Singh Mewar has successfully developed Mewar hotel properties and made Udaipur a destination city even while being engaged in legal battles with his two siblings (see Rohit Parihar, 'Mewar Muddle', *India Today*, 24 January 2000).

<sup>33</sup> This paragraph draws on Taft (2003: 128–29). Since we are among those she interviewed in the process of writing this article and since we know many of her other sources and have listened to their accounts, Taft's accounts more or less tally with ours. Here we elaborate upon one of her stories, the one about Mandawa. According to the late Kunwari Sahiba of Mandawa, one of the reasons the family got into the hotel business was her concern about finding suitable employment for her younger son, Pradhuman, whose three older brothers had established careers in the army, banking, etc.

as heritage hotels. ‘The origins of this transition’, she says, ‘are not entirely clear’ (Taft 2003: 130). ‘Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph’, she writes,

recollect that when they returned to Rajasthan in 1983, they travelled via Florence, where they stayed in a villa converted into a hotel, and brought with them a brochure illustrating how the villa and similar properties (Italian villas, German *Schlosser*, French *chateaux*, English manor and country houses, etc.) were being marketed in a way that emphasized their historic architecture, décor and associations. (Ibid.)

The Rudolphs showed the brochure to Mohan Singh of Kanota and Devi Singh of Mandawa ‘who were actively . . . running family properties as hotels’ (ibid.).<sup>34</sup> Mohan Singh and Devi Singh saw that the heritage approach being used in Europe to market historical hotel properties to tourists ‘offered marketing possibilities for their own hotels’ (ibid.). Taft explains in some detail how the India Heritage Hotel Association (IHHA) was formed and became operational in September 1990 (ibid.: 131–32).<sup>35</sup> In 2007, the Association had 38 member hotels in Rajasthan, almost all of which had Rajput proprietors.<sup>36</sup>

Heritage hotels, however, will not exist, much less flourish, without the tourist industry,<sup>37</sup> which is, and is likely to remain, fast-growing. By 2012, it is estimated that the tourism sector of

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<sup>34</sup> Early on, Mohan Singh, Devi Singh and others were advised by a fellow Rajput who had become a professional in the hospitality industry. This was Vikram Singh Chomu, a manager of hotels for the Taj group, including the Taj Mahal in Bombay and the Rambagh in Jaipur. He knew the nuts and bolts as well as the big picture. As he put it, Rajputs wishing to run hotels had to be instructed about what was required for a bathroom that met Western tourists’ standards. Interview with Vikram Singh Chomu, 1 February 2007.

<sup>35</sup> The Department of Tourism, Government of India and of Government of Rajasthan played important roles. Becoming operational entailed a classification system, required standards and inspection procedures. In 2001 the IHHA set up a website ([www.indianheritagehotels.com](http://www.indianheritagehotels.com)) and most of the individual hotels have websites of their own.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.heritagehotelsofrajasthan.com> (accessed 7 July 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Barbara N. Ramusack gives two versions of how the tourism industry has developed in Rajasthan (Ramusack 1994, 1995). For a more recent account of the tourist industry in Rajasthan, see Henderson and Weisgrau (2007).

the global economy will generate 3.8 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and create 90.8 million jobs (PATA 2003: 150). It is India's third-largest source of foreign exchange (Sinclair 1998) and, in 2006, accounted for 5.9 per cent of India's GDP.<sup>38</sup> Tourism accounts for about 15 per cent of Rajasthan's economy, ranking third after industry (32.5 per cent) and agriculture (22.5 per cent).<sup>39</sup>

Heritage hotels are located in Rajasthan's tourism and hospitality industry. The Rajputs who operate heritage hotels face a financial bottom line, a need to operate in the black rather than in the red. But these proprietors also have other motives, besides making money. Our colleague, the late Mohan Singh, Thakur of Kanota, was not alone in seeing the conversion of Narain Niwas, the haveli built in 1935 by his uncle, the diarist Amar Singh (S. Rudolph, L. Rudolph with Kanota 2001), into a hotel as a way of preserving his patrimony and his Rajput identity. Like many of those who joined him and Devi Singh Mandawa in the IHHA, he was as motivated by the desire to save a way of life as by making money.<sup>40</sup> Operating a hotel allowed these Rajputs to continue their role as patrons, especially as patrons of the traditional arts, employing carpenters and masons who recapitulated traditional pilasters and cornices; artists who refurbished and repainted plastered walls with delicate designs; woodcarvers who reproduced the long-legged lounge chair of the British topi-wallah. The Langa and Manganiyar,

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.euromonitor.com/travel\\_tourism\\_in\\_India](http://www.euromonitor.com/travel_tourism_in_India) (accessed 6 March 2007). The UN World Tourism Organization notes a 'remarkable growth' of 10 per cent, more than double the world growth, in tourist arrivals in South Asian countries. More than half of those arrivals were accounted for by India. 'In a remarkable transition', the UN *Survey* observes, 'the tourism industry has displayed buoyant growth rates in each of three years'. The *Survey* goes on to quote India's NCAER as estimating tourism's contribution towards India's GDP (both direct and indirect) as 5.9 per cent. The travel and tourism market in 2005 was valued by Euromonitor at USD 42 billion. The GoI's *Economic Survey, 2007* estimates that tourism earnings crossed USD 6.6 billion in 2006. See [http://www.domainb.com/economy/ecosurvey2007/20070227\\_overview.html](http://www.domainb.com/economy/ecosurvey2007/20070227_overview.html) (accessed 8 March 2008).

<sup>39</sup> See 'Economy of Rajasthan' at <http://www.mapofindia.com/maps/rajasthan/economy> (accessed 8 March 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Heritage hotels were also a way of legalizing above-ceiling property; off-loading the costs of food and drink and transportation for an extensive joint family; and providing employment to family members.

singers from distant Barmer district, found new audiences in the hotels, as did folk and tribal dancers (Pandey 1999).

Operating a heritage hotel provided a way to enact an identity and a culture by recapitulating a style of life. The former lord who once offered gracious hospitality to fellow aristocrats and Raj officials now offered it to visitors from France, Britain, America, Italy, and Germany. Entertaining guests from Dallas, Cologne or Paris by taking them on an overnight camel safari, complete with the traditional offering of opium, is not quite the same as taking the Prince of Wales or a visiting fellow nobleman on a tiger shoot, but it preserves the role of host and the spirit of adventure while adding a certain exoticism.

Here is the language that the heritage hotel website uses to bridge the gap between then and now, between princely Rajasthan and tourist Rajasthan:

For decades, the Rajput fortress, the defensive Castle, the composite Haveli — was the abode of the nobility where hospitality was a way of life . . . The chivalry and gallantry of the warrior clans was reflected in the architecture of the feudal homes. Post-Independence democratic India witnessed the merger of the Princely States [and] . . . abolition of ‘jagirs’ . . . The noble families lost their traditional means of livelihood . . . Now ancestral homes . . . find sustenance in this new lease of life — as Heritage Hotels. Each of these Heritage Hotels or ancestral homes is different, unique, reflecting its own, exceptional history, tradition and period. Living in a heritage hotel makes one feel like a king!<sup>41</sup>

What does this narrative tell us about the transformation of the Rajputs from being a landed class to middle class? Preserving their Rajput identity and way of life helps them to succeed in the hospitality business. But preservation is not good enough to ensure success in business. Becoming and remaining successful as proprietors of heritage hotels entails for the Rajputs the challenge of replicating and modernizing their material and cultural inheritance even as they maintain and cultivate it. Can they maintain the authenticity (Barnes 1998; Rudolph and Rudolph 2003)<sup>42</sup> of their Rajput way of life and of their properties? Can they

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.HeritageHotelsofRajasthan.com> (accessed 8 March 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Julian Barnes’s novel *England, England* (1998) explores the elusive nature of authenticity by imagining replicating ‘England’ on the Isle of

remain convincingly 'royal' if they replicate and modernize these properties? As the tourist and hospitality business expands in scope and rationalizes, can the criteria and standards that define Rajput heritage hotels avoid the slippery slope that leads from replication through modernization to theme park architecture and culture? How should we judge, for example, the replicated Indo-Saracenic castle architecture, amenities and liveried staff of the Taj group's recently built top-of-the-line hotel in Jaipur, the Raj Vilas, at which former American President Bill Clinton stayed for two days in March 2000?

A way out is visible in the way Rajputs in the heritage hotel business forge hybrid identities that blend 'landed class' with 'middle class'. A credible Rajput hybridity has to be a work in progress, one that goes beyond the preservation and conservation of Rajput heritage to an authenticity that adapts that heritage to changing times. A credible heritage-hotel Rajput identity combines being a believable lord of the manor with being a successful businessman. Rajputs succeed as middle-class hotel proprietors to the extent that they are able to preserve the culture and identity of aristocrats.

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Wight as a tourist attraction. Like Baudrillard, he problematizes authenticity by showing that modern technology makes it possible to replicate everything, from art to human life. When simulacra, representations of the original, can displace the original, the authentic becomes difficult to grasp.