

## LAND REVENUE SYSTEM UNDER THE MARATHAS

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

In Deccan area the entire land was divided into three parts (i) The State land known askhalisa, bhandaravada or muamala, (ii) The land granted to the military, commanders for the maintenance of troops (amara, moqasas) while the land allotted to the officials in lieu of their salaries was known as jagirs and soranjams; and(iii) The revenue-free land grants (manya, inam). Peasant holdings were known as miras and peasant rights as mirasi rights. Land under direct control of the state was placed in the charge of moqasadars, who could be transferred at king's will, but generally held the post for long and even, at times, were succeeded by their sons. The peasant was the owner of land. Instances of communal ownership also existed. Some land (mostly waste) also belonged to the entire village with the Panchayat as its custodian.

### **MALIK AMBAR'S MODE OF ASSESSMENT:**

The land revenue system of the Deccan states owes much to Malik Ambar-the NizamShahi Prime Minister. It was he who for the first time adopted the most scientific methodology to assess and collect the revenue. He, in turn, was influenced by TodarMal's regulations. All the Deccan states (Bijapur, Golkunda and Ahmednagar), including the Marathas, copied his regulations with minor modifications. It was based on the assessment of actual area under cultivation and the cash value of the crop produced. But he actually did not order for the survey of the land and the assessment was done not by actual measurement but by observation. Assessment was done with the help of hereditary village officialsDeshmukhs and Patils.

### **REVENUE SYSTEM UNDER THE MARATHAS:**

Shivajiwas the first to pay foremost attention to the measurement of land. He saw the inaccuracy of rope (which was liable to variations in different seasons). Later Shivaji substituted it by a kathi (a measuring rod). Twenty kathis constituted a bigha and 120 bighas a chavar. But local variations in the bigha size existed. Shivaji thus entrusted the task to Annaji Datto of systematic assessment in 1678. AnnajiDatto also took the help of pargana and village officials for this survey work. He did not rely wholly on those officials. To counteract and check their assessment, he himself did the spot assessment of one hilly, one marshy and one black soil area within a tapa. In many cases he made 25 to 100 per cent enhancements over the assessments of local officials. Besides, the villagers were also consulted regarding the assessment of their holdings. Malik Ambar classified the land broadly into two categories: bagbayat (garden land) and zirayat (cultivated land). The latter was further divided into four categories. In Shivaji's time this member increased to twelve. Waste land was generally excluded from the assessment. But, when the pressure on land increased, more and more cultivable waste land was brought under cultivation. Malik Ambar followed the system of progressive assessment for the assessment of these new reclaimed lands. In the NizamShahi

dominions when such land was reclaimed, no revenue was imposed for the first two years, but from the third year onwards, the state started claiming small share in the produce. Under the Marathas, sometimes these lands were assessed by the number of ploughs (hal) and not by the bigha. Sometimes, even 6-7 bighas were assessed as one bigha for revenue purpose. Revenue assessment also varied on the basis of the fertility of the soil. It was also assessed at various rates on the basis of the nature of the crops sown, e.g., sugarcane, pulses, cotton, etc. Even when the second crop was sown (other than the principal one), it was assessed at a lower rate. According to the, fertility of the soil and the estimated produce, the demand was fixed once for all. Assessment was done on individual peasants separately, but for the realization purpose the entire village was treated as a single unit. AdilShahi rulers of Bijapur also seem to have followed the same methods of assessment as those of Malik Ambar.

### **REVENUE COLLECTION:**

After the state demand was fixed an annual estimate of revenue was made which was called Jamabandi. From this estimated revenue a deduction for revenue free lands (inam) was made. Dues of the state officials were also deducted from the total revenue demand. Revenue was collected twice a year after Rabi (May) and Kharif (October) harvests. There was a long chain of officials to assist the state in the collection of land revenue. Here we will be discussing very briefly powers and functions of these officials.

#### **Village level officials:**

The village headman (muqaddam, patel) was responsible for the collection of revenue. He was assisted by a kulkarni who was a village accountant.

Tapa and pargana level officials: At tapa level Deshmukhs or Desai's was responsible for revenue collection. He was assisted by Karkuns (clerks). He maintained an armed body of retainers for revenue collection. In lieu of his services he was entitled for 5 percent of the revenue collected. Besides, he also controlled revenue-free and hereditary lands. He was assisted in his work by Despande or Deshkulkarni who were the record keeper-cum-accountant. He kept complete records of taxes, area under cultivation, crops sown, etc. for which he was entitled to a fixed percent of share in the revenue. But his share was comparatively lower than those of the Deshmukhs. He was also entitled for revenue-free lands. His post was hereditary. In most cases, this post was held by brahmias. In Golkunda, the havaldar was responsible for the collection of revenue at the pargana level. This office was auctioned and given to the highest bidder. Though sarsmit (incharge of simt/tarf) was to keep watch over his actions, he practically acted at will. His main function was to collect the revenue and pay to the center the stipulated amount at stipulated time. In most cases he was a bania or brahmin. In the Nizamshahi dominion, these revenue officials were largely brahmins. To keep a check on them, they were placed under the supervision of Muslim officers. In the AdilShahi kingdom, the office of amirjumla headed by the wakil was incharge of the revenue administration. At the sarkar level, the subedar was responsible for the collection of land revenue. Jadunath Sarkar has argued that Shivaji totally did away with the intermediaries - zamindan, desmukhs, desais, patels, etc. But Satish Chandra is of the opinion that Shivaji only curtailed the

unlimited powers of these hereditary officials. He appointed his own officials to visit and supervise the collection of revenue. They were asked to refrain from extracting more than their due share failing which severe punishments were given. Under the Peshwas, the sarsubadar exercised wide powers in revenue matters. He fixed the remuneration of the kamavisdarsetc; he had the right to increase or decrease the rasad (advance payment of the kemavisdan), granted remissions and even had the right to appoint or dismiss phadnis. The mamlatdars and Kamavisdars played important role in revenue collection under the Peshwas. He was the Peshwa's representative in the parganas (same powers were enjoyed by the havaldars in Golkunda). Their duty was to collect revenue from the pargans and its villages and pay it to the center. Generally, certain numbers of parganas were farmed out to them. The state received a fixed sum of money called rasad (advance payment) from them. The deshmukh and muqaddam/patel of the village and simts were asked to make over the revenue collection to them. In certain cases, the sarsubedar could appoint the mamlatdar with the approval of the Centre. In such cases, the mamlatdar was required to pay the revenue to the sarsubedar and not to the Centre directly. They were asked to refrain from taking more than the fixed share. Interestingly, sometimes they were assigned the kamavis of particular territories lying outside the state. They were asked to conquer the territory themselves. In such cases they were asked to maintain troops. These troops were paid out of the revenue of that territory and not by the Centre. They were paid lucrative salaries. Along with their salaries they were also paid maintenance allowance for a palanquin, a torchbearer, a batman and aaftagira. To check their powers, the state directly appointed a mazumdar (to check the daily accounts) and phadnis who wrote the daily book. They were directly responsible to the state. The amin was appointed to punish the corrupt ones. A separate official – Daftardar - prepared the annual estimates of receipts and expenditure of the mahals. The Kamavisdarsaccounts were regularly audited by the officers specially appointed by the Centre.

#### **STATE AND THE PEASANT:**

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj attempted to take special measures to protect the peasants from the oppressive revenue officials. He tried to curtail the power of the Deshmukhs, Deshpandes, Patels, etc. He also abolished all the cesses to the advantage of the peasants. He appointed even his own state officials who used to visit personally and supervise the collection. Officials were asked to refrain from claiming more than the due share. Sometimes, to encourage the cultivators (who left their holdings) to return and settle down, the revenue officials were asked not to claim their previous arrears. To reclaim the arrears, the cultivator's tools and implements were not to be confiscated. Revenue was to be collected in proper season and not at the time of sowing or ploughing or while the crops were still standing. In times of famine, drought and damage of crops, special concessions were given to the peasants. Taqavis in the form of cash, seeds and ploughs were distributed among peasants in times of need to be repaid on easy installments. But Shivaji's Maharaj's system soon fell into abuse. The increasing powers of the Kamavisdars, who almost acted as revenue farmers by advancing rasad to the Peshwas, destroyed all the advantages of Chhatrapati Shivaji's measures. With his new revenue experiment, Malik Ambar succeeded in

protecting the interests of the peasants, promoting agriculture and eliminating the intermediaries as far as possible. But his system carried certain flaws as well. His assessment was not based on actual survey of land (this flaw was later corrected by Chhatrapati Shivaji). The practice of estimation by observation was extremely defective because it was neither based on actual yields nor on correct assessment. The Bijapur and Golkunda rulers believed in farming out the entire revenue which must have provided added powers to the revenue officials. All these revenue officials were generally oppressive and their tendency was to extract as much as they could. The state and its appointed officials were satisfied so long as they were getting regular supply of their due share, without bothering for the welfare of the peasants.

#### CONCLUSION:

Almost all the Deccan states based their revenue system on Malik Ambar's model with slight regional variations. Malik Ambar based his assessment on the basis of actual cultivated area. But, it was more an estimate by observation than actual measurement. It was Annaji Datto, the Maratha finance minister who shifted to actual measurement, thus resolving the faults of Malik Ambar's assessment. The assessment in the Deccan states was a progressive one, i.e., it was assessed keeping in view the category of soil, nature of crops sown, etc. The revenue demand ranged between 1/3 to 1/2 of the produce. Shivaji, however, abolished all the illegal cesses and increased the revenue demand to 40 percent. The state maintained vast machinery of revenue officials for the assessment and collection of revenue. Most of them were paid in the form of either revenue-free land grants or received fixed share in the total amount of the revenue collected. It is generally presumed that Shivaji had totally done away with the intermediaries-Zamindars, Deshmukhs, etc. But, in fact, what Shivaji did was that he curtailed the perquisites and power of these classes to the advantage of the state and the peasants. But under the Peshwas, this class again enjoyed special perquisites and even got official sanction for certain privileges which were due to kings only.

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