



VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN THE DECCAN REGION

Dr. Raju Gholap

Assistant Professor & Head,

*Dept. of History, Dada patil Rajale Arts & Science College, Adinathnagar, Tal. Pathardi,
Dist. Ahmednagar(MH.)*

Corresponding Author - Dr. Raju Gholap

Email - rajugholap@dprcollege.edu.in

DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.7705238

One of the aspects of the village economy and society in the medieval period was, it was at once a social and economic unit. A. S. Altekar in his book – A History of Village Communities in Western India, tried to prove the point that the village headman was a hereditary officer in the village administration since ancient times in India.¹

In medieval times, the administration of the villages of the Maratha country was entrusted to a group of officials called the Watandars. The Deshmukh was the chief of a Pargana comprising a number of villages. The day-to-day administration of the village was headed by the village chief, the Patil, but the ultimate responsibility for the administration of the village rested with Deshmukh. “Watan was a rent free and grant made to a person in lieu of his services to the village community. The

office created by the watan is a hereditary one and it continues in that family so long as he serves the village community loyally. In common parlance, therefore, this grant is called “Chakari Watan” i.e. service tenure.”² This shows how Marathas had an excellent set of regulations for their own administration. But according to S. N. Sen, “... the Maratha chronicles pay very little attention to the administrative system of their times and the economic condition of their country.”³

As the Deshmukh's jurisdiction extended over the whole pargana, he had to supervise the work of all the Patils under his jurisdiction. The Deshmukh also enjoyed the patilki watan of some villages in Pargana. In the absence of a permanent Patil in a village under his jurisdiction, the Deshmukh would act as the Patil of that village until a permanent arrangement was made. “In addition to this, the Deshmukh

served as a depository of old records and the past and present history of all watans, grants, and inams.”⁴

“The Watandars enjoyed a privileged position in the village administration. The Deshmukh, being the Chief of the pargana, was too powerful and was practically an independent master of his pargana. This was mainly because of the unstable political situation in Maharashtra in the beginning of the 17th century.”⁵ According to Ramchandrapant Amatya, ‘They (Watandars) are Deshnayak and Dayads, the real power sharers of the kingdom.’⁶

“The privileges of the Deshmukh from each village have been referred to as gavaganahak and it included a variety of items which were collected both in cash and kind from the cultivators, artisans, shopkeepers, etc.”⁷ The real leaders of the socio-political life of the Maratha country in the 17th and 18th centuries were the Watanadars. The government had to seek their support for its civil and military functions. Hence the organizational structure of the social organization remained unchanged. Thus, the Watandars exploited the situation to their advantage and enjoyed their privileges endlessly for a very long time.

“During the period of Rashtrakutas, there was an officer called gramkuta in Maharashtra, who had under his charge a

cluster of villages. The village officer was known as ‘gramakuta.’ Thus the Desagramakuta was a country headman, who like the village headman (gramuta) was a non-official and hereditary officer of a region.”⁸ “The administrative units in the Deccan prior to the rise of the Yadavs were Rashtra, Vishaya, Mandal, Bhukti, Pur or Gram.”⁹ “Deshmukh, is again a Sanskrit word, and may be interpreted as leader of the Desh or a mouth-piece of the Desh. However, these interpretations do not deprive him of his position in the village community. It appears that in the course of time, old concepts gave rise to new just as we find the old Bhukti being replaced by the Kampanas and Mandal by the Desh, similarly the Deshgramakuta must have been replaced by the word Deshmukh.”¹⁰

“The rise of the Deshmukh and Deshpande was therefore, certainly not coeval with the Muslim rule in the Deccan, as these offices under different name, but performing similar duties, were prevailing in the Deccan. Thus, the case of the Deshmukh and the Deshpande has not been convincingly argued by Grant Duff.”¹¹ “... it is clear that even under the early Mahomedan rule, the watan or the village headman was regarded as one of great antiquity. The Mahomedan rulers did not introduce this watan system but they

simply continued the old custom under the Hindu kings.”¹²

“During the regime of the Adilshahi and the Nizamshahi dynasties the Maharashtra country was, for revenue and administrative purposes, divided into Parganas, Sarkars and Subhas. Shivaji, however, true to his nationalising principles, divided his dominions into Mauja, Tarf and Subha. In his days the officer in charge of a Tarf was called a Havaladar, and the officer in charge of a Subha was styled as a Subhedar or Mukhya Deshadhikari. During the Peshwa period, however, we find all these terms Tarf, Pargana, Sarkar and Subha, in indiscriminate use. But the Subha was also called a Prant and Tarf and Parganas also came to be styled as Mahals. Over the small divisions were placed the Kamavisdars, and the Mamlatdars held the charge of the bigger divisions. The Mamlatdars held their office directly under the central government except in the three provinces of Khandesh, Gujrat and the Karnatak, where they were placed under officers known as Sarsubhedars.”¹³

“A century earlier the revenue collection of Northern India had been brought into a system by Todar Mal, the diwan of Akbar. But the Deccan had no system at all. Here the marking out of plots, the measurement of land by chain survey, the assessment The old irregular

revenue of revenue at so much per bigha, administration of the sharing of the actual the Deccan, produce between the State landlord and the cultivator, were unknown. The peasant in the Deccan cultivated as much land as he could with a plough and a pair of oxen, grew whatever crop he liked, and paid to the State a small amount per plough,-the rate of revenue varying in different places and being fixed arbitrarily, without bearing definite proportion to the actual yield of the field, because it was not the practice there to inspect fields and estimate the quantity and value of crops.”¹⁴

“This utter absence of system and principle in revenue matters laid the peasantry open to the caprice and extortion of the petty collectors. The long wars of Mughal aggression and a succession of rainless years, completed their ruin. The oppressed ryots fled from their homes, deserted fields lapsed into the jungle; many once flourishing villages became manless wildernesses. Shah Jahan had reduced the revenue of Khandesh to one-half in 1631, but even this amount was never fully realised before Murshid Quli's time.”¹⁵ “Thus it is clear that during the Mahomedan period in Western India, the existence of the headman was regarded as necessary for revenue collection.”¹⁶ “The responsibility of the headman for the village revenue collection was well established under the Marathas and

Peshwas.”¹⁷ “His [headman] usefulness to the Government is attested to by the fact that both Moslem and British rulers have found him indispensable in the village administration; his usefulness to the people has been proved by the confidence that has been always reposed in him by villagers.”¹⁸

Every village, in its original constitution, is said to have had twelve craftsmen and professions, who, in their several lines, had to perform all that the cultivators required to be done for themselves individually, and the village collectively. The twelve village servants or bara balutas were, the carpenter, the blacksmith, the carrier or Mahar, the tanner or Chambhar, the potter, the barber, the washerman, the rope maker or Mang, the astrologer or Joshi, the temple-attendant or Gurav, the mosque-attendant or Mujavar and butcher that is Mulla, and the gatekeeper or Yeskar. These were hereditary-servants who had claims on the husbandmen. To these may be added the Chaugula who used to be the assistant of Patil. He was found in most villages; sometimes he had a trifling land-grant, but commonly a fee in grain from the cultivators. Another was the Nargun or head of the shepherds a position held by the Holkar family, and the Havaladar or grain-watchman who was an officer of Government rather than of the village.

Their names explain the chief duties of the village servants or bara balutas.¹⁹

Thus, village administration in the medieval Deccan was clearly in the hands of watandars. There was a clear hierarchy and stratification amongst the watandars. The higher category of watandars was privileged ones and received its wealth from control over the rural economy appropriating the surplus produced while at the same time holding land as inam, receiving a share of the state revenue and customary perquisites from the village community.

References:

- 1 A. S. Altekar, History of the Village Communities in Western India (Bombay: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1927), 1-4.
- 2 A. R. Kulkarni, “The Deshmukhi Watan with Special Reference to Indapur”, Proceedings of Indian History Congress 36, (1975), 289, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44138854>.
- 3 Surendranath Sen, Administrative System of the Marathas (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1925), 1.
- 4 Ibid, 147-48.
- 5 A. R. Kulkarni, 289.
- 6 Ramchandrapant Amatya, Swarajyaniti Adnyapatra, ed. R. C. Dhere (Pune: Padmagandha Prakashan, 2005), 91.
- 7 A. R. Kulkarni, 295.

- 8 A. R. Kulkarni, “The Origin of
Deshmukh and Deshpande”,
Proceedings of Indian History
Congress 31, (1969), 268,
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/4413
8379](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44138379).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., 269.
- 11 Ibid., 271.
- 12 Altekar, 7-8.
- 13 Sen, 152.
- 14 Jadunath Sarkar, History of
Aurangzib, Vol. 1, Reign of Shah
Jahan (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar &
Sons, 1912), 190-91.
- 15 Ibid., 191.
- 16 Altekar, 6.
- 17 Ibid., 7.
- 18 Ibid., 10.
- 19 Raju Gholap, “Subha
Ahmednagar Under ThePeshvas:
An Economic Study(1759-
1818)” (PhD diss., Savitribai
PhulePune University, Pune,
2022), 76-77.