

**THE INSTITUTION OF WATAN AND THE VILLAGE
COMMUNITY IN MEDIEVAL MAHARASHTRA
(17th-18th Century)**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "**THE INSTITUTION OF WATAN AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY IN MEDIEVAL MAHARASHTRA (17-18th CENTURY)**" submitted by **MILY ROY** in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, is a bonafide work to the best of our knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| ASS | Aitihāsik Sankirna Sahitya |
| BISMQ | Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal Quartuly |
| ICHR | Indian Council of Historical Research |
| IESHR | Indian Economic and Social History Review |
| IHR | Indian Historical Review |
| JIH | Journal of Indian History |
| MAS | Modern Asian Studies |
| MHSP | Maratha History Seminar Papers |
| MIS | Marathyanchya Itihasanche Sadhane |
| PIHC | Proceedings of the Indian History Congress |
| PSS | Shiva Kalin Patrasar Sangraha |
| SCS | Siva Charitra Sahitya |
| SKPSS | Shambhaji Kalin Patrasar Sangraha |
| SPD | Selections from the Peshwa Daftar |
| SSRPD | Selections from the Sattara Rajas and Peshwa Dairies |
| TKKP | Tarabai Kalin Kagad Patre |

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

It was from the Marathas and not the Mughals that the defacto rule of India passed on to the British - a fact that perplexed many Britishers too.¹ The British Historian James Grant Duff's reference to the Marathas "as our predecessors in conquest in India, whose power was gradually gaining strength, before it found a head in the far-famed adventurer Shivaji Bhonsle"² explains not only the tremendous significance of their history, but also its attraction for British and Indian historians.

Both, British and Indian historians have highlighted or emphasised the importance of the *watan* institution in medieval Maharashtra, the importance of this institution is clearly indicated by Captain Grant to Elphinstone where he states that the feeling of possessing and protecting a *watan* is singularly strong and is not easily understood or described, for the possession of *watan* may sometimes indicate a mere right to a few blades of grass.³ *Watan* was a hereditary possession of land, privilege or occupation which was recognised by the state and the village community and an important feature of the *watan* system was that land did not constitute the deciding factor in possessing *watan*, it could simply imply a title, office or profession, thus including even the village menial or *mahar* in the *watandar* category.

The right to acquire and possess a hereditary occupation or profession and the monopoly of it was the *watan* right of a *watandar*. Thus almost every section of Maratha society was enveloped by the institution of *watan*; right from the highest authority (the king) down to the village artisan, everyone possessed certain *watan* rights. The *watandars* thus formed the prominent section of society in medieval Maharashtra and the institution of *watandari* occupied a pivotal position in the socio-economic-administrative structure of the Maratha kingdom. *Watan* was not merely a part of the administrative apparatus but it also implied a hierarchy of the privileged and superior class of *watandars* such as the *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Patil*, *Kulkarni*, *Chaugula* and *Shete-Mahajan*, and the other social classes who were also an integral part of Maratha rural society; the *mirasdars* or cultivators and the *balutedars* or artisans who were also *watandars* and they represented the lower and lesser privileged category of *watandars*. *Watan* was therefore, a dominant socio-economic concept which was operating at almost all levels of Maratha rural society; the development of the institution of *watandari* was a feature which was not peculiar to medieval Maharashtra alone, in fact its roots can be traced to the Rashtrakuta period where the officials of the king were not only confirmed in their position but were also given tax-free lands which tended to become hereditary. This hereditary possession of office and land developed into what was called

the *watan* system. Many of the aristocratic Marathas traced their family histories to this period and the system was not effected by the coming of the Muslims in the 13th century A.D. This *watan* system was later inherited by Shivaji and the Peshwas in the 17th and 18th century who recognised the importance of the *watan* institution and the *watandars* in the administrative and socio-economic structure of the Maratha kingdom. The system of granting *watans* or hereditary rights and benefits, as a reward for the performance of state or social duties developed to a great extent under the Marathas. Since the *watan* institution occupied a vital and dominant position in medieval Maharashtra and since it seemed to embrace almost every class or group in rural society, it becomes imperative to study the important features and nature of this institution. Almost every section of Maratha rural society possessed certain *watan* rights therefore, it is important to study the position and role of the *watandars*, whether there existed a stratification or hierarchy amongst the *watandars* and what was the basis of this stratification which led to the categorisation of the *watandars*. A perusal of the rights and privileges of each category of *watandars* and their position in rural society would lead us to analyse the nature of this institution and the nature of relationship that existed between the categories of *watandars* that is, the higher and lower category of *watandars*, both the categories constituting important components of Maratha rural society.

Research in social history is a comparatively new branch in Indian history. Pioneering work has been done by several historians to put political history in its proper perspective. Modern historical research in Maratha history began with Sir Grant Duff whose book "The History of Marathas" was the first scholarly attempt to write a comprehensive and detailed work on Maratha history but it mainly gave a description of military and administrative policy.⁴ In the early 20th century, scholars like M. G. Ranade⁵ and G. S. Sardesai⁶ mainly concentrated their studies on the rise of the Marathas, more in the light of nationalism i.e., the rise of the Hindu nationality to assert its independence. They laid emphasis on the significance of the rise of Shivaji and the Peshwas in establishing Maratha independence and spreading Maratha power throughout India. This was the central feature of their contribution towards Maratha historiography. Ranade strongly criticised the selfish and acquisitive instinct of the *watandars* like *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* who represented separatist tendencies and who used their opportunities to create disturbances and resist the commands of central power.⁷ But Ranade also recognised the importance of institutions specially that of the *watan* in the administrative structure during Shivaji's time and how he entrusted the work of revenue collection to the subhedars or state officials.⁸ According to S. N. Sen, Ranade was the first scholar to

perceive the real importance of the administrative system of Shivaji.⁹ His lead was then taken up by scholars like V. T. Gune, Jadunath Sarkar, S. N. Sen and A. R. Kulkarni who have elaborately dealt with various aspects of Maratha administrative history.

Many scholars of Maratha history have highlighted and emphasised the importance of socio-economic and administrative history of the Marathas. They based their studies on the social, economic and administrative structure of the Maratha kingdom and the various institutions that were at work at almost all levels of society, specially that of *watan*. V. T. Gune,¹⁰ S. N. Sen,¹¹ S. N. Joshi,¹² Sir Jadunath Sarkar,¹³ and K. N. Chitnis¹⁴ have studied the administrative aspects and the working of various institutions like *watan*, village community, judicial and legal institutions like *Gotsabha* and *Panchayat*, revenue management, etc. that formed an important part of the administrative apparatus in pre-British Maharashtra. V. T. Gune in his book 'The Judicial System of the Marathas' gives a vivid description of the continuity of the judicial institutions right from 1300 A. D. till the Peshwa period. The most important part of the book is its appendices through which we get a fair idea of the nature of conflict in Maratha society which mainly pertained to disputes over *watan*. He also highlights the importance of the role of the lower category of *watandars* like the

balutedars who took part in the deliberations of the *Gotsabha* and *Jatisabha* inspite of their low caste status. S. N. Sen in his book, *Administrative System of the Marathas* gives a vivid description of the various aspects of the administrative structure of the Marathas such as revenue and finance, village communities, district and provincial governments, etc. under Shivaji and under the Peshwas. Though he does not overlook the presence of the *mirasdars* and *balutedars* in rural society, he mainly emphasises the functions, role and position of the hereditary officers such on the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* under Shivaji and during the Peshwa regime. S. N. Joshi in his series of articles has dealt with the system of *watan*, functions of the office of *patil*, *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, system of granting *watans* etc., thus laying emphasis mainly on the higher category of *watandars*. He has thrown light on numerous issues which help us in understanding the functioning of many historical institutions such as the *watan* institution.

It is scholars like A. R. Kulkarni and Hiroshi Fukazawa who have highlighted in detail the various social and economic aspects of Maratha rural society in the 17th and 18th century. Earlier, i.e. in 1935, V. K. Bhawe in his book '*Peshwakalin Maharashtra*'¹⁵, dealing with various aspects of social and economic life of 18th century Maharashtra, highlighted the inferior position enjoyed by the *balutedars*

in the village community and the importance of caste and *watan* which often led to conflict and tension in society. A. R. Kulkarni has contributed immensely to the development of Maratha historiography specially in the social and economic history of the Marathas in his book 'Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji'¹⁶ and through a series of articles that were written by him in various journals. He has emphasised the importance of the *watan* institution in medieval Maharashtra and has described the various rights and privileges enjoyed by the higher category of *watandars*. He has also discussed in detail the important features of the village in medieval Maharashtra and the various social and economic groups that were integral members of the village community, thus recognising the importance of the role of the *mirasdars* and *balutedars* who were catering to the needs of the hereditary officers and the village community. Hiroshi Fukazawa in 'The Medieval Deccan'¹⁷ adopted a sociological approach where he discusses in detail the village community and the nature of land rights of the *mirasdars*, he also highlights the position, rights and privileges of the *balutedars* who were supported by the village as a whole. From Fukazawa's work we get a fairly clear picture of the village community of the 18th century Deccan, the main aim of his study was to reconstruct the social structure of the village community, highlighting the various disputes that mainly pertained to *watan* and caste. He also discusses the system of *vethbegari* or

forced labour which was in vogue in 18th century Maharashtra and which seemed to be a serious handicap for the *balutedars* because of their low caste status.

No doubt both the scholars, that is, A. R. Kulkarni and Hiroshi Fukazawa have done pioneering work in the field of social and economic history of the Marathas, highlighting the rights and privileges of the both the categories of *watandars* but what is wanting is the nature of relationship that existed between the two categories of *watandars* and the role of the state in this relationship. Moreover Fukazawa failed to use 22 Vols. of V. K. Rajwade's 'Marathayancya Itihasacin Sadhanen' (Poona, 1898-1919) which contains valuable information relating to the social and economic history of the Deccan. Historians like Andre wink,¹⁸ Satish Chandra¹⁹ have emphasised the importance of the *watan* institution but they mainly concentrated on the role of the landed *watandars* like the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* in the struggle for power thus sowing seeds of dissension and conflict in society, under Shivaji and the Peshwa regime.

By the time the English East India Company established its rule in India, the administrative and political system established in the country by the Mughals had largely broken down.²⁰ The Marathas were politically the most powerful and aggressive entity among the group of states that arose after

the downfall of the Mughal empire. Shivaji had to evolve order out of chaos which was the main characteristic of the Maratha country, it was ravaged by war, conflict and tension which arose mainly due to nature of the *watan* system itself for, every *watan* had two or more claimants and the *watandar* was not moved by pity in order to covet his *watan*. While the Nizamshahi dynasty was overthrown by the Mughals, the Bijapur government was unable to maintain peace and order. It was under such unstable conditions that Shivaji rose to unite the numerous *watandars* such as *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* who exercised petty sovereignty in their territories. Shivaji introduced certain changes in the existing *watan* system which was deeply embedded in Maratha society even during the Muslim rule. He curbed the power of the bigger *watandars* by confiscating some of their *watans*, dismantling their fortifications and did away with their services in the sphere of revenue collection and appointed new officers for the same. Shivaji's policy of doing away with the services of the hereditary officers in the sphere of revenue collection was followed by the Peshwas. The revival of the *Saranjandari* system resulted in the decline of the government's control over the *watandars* who in turn were subjected to the authority of the *saranjandars*. The introduction of the *Ijara* system or revenue farming adopted by Baji Rao II led to the decline of the position of bigger *watandars* when offices along with rights and privileges were farmed out to bankers,

merchants, etc. on a large scale.

The present study of the *watan* institution and the village community mainly arose in the context of the increasing attention paid by the historians to the need for a detailed and critical evaluation of rural society in medieval India. The different categories of *watandars*, the nature of their rights in land and their position and role in society gave rise to complex social and economic relations. An attempt has been made to analyse the nature of relationships that existed between the two categories of *watandars* in the light of the rights, perquisites and privileges held by each category. Since the state was the guardian of all *watan* rights, an analysis of the role of the state in its relationship with the higher and lower category of *watandars* also needs to be investigated. The relationship between the two categories of *watandars* was not one of equality, there was a considerable stratification amongst them which was mainly based on the nature of rights in land, position in the administrative apparatus and possession of rights and privileges. Therefore the rights and privileges held by the *watandars* have to be studied according to the *watan* hierarchy, which establishes two categories of *watandars* : the higher category of *watandars* represented by the village and *pargana* officers such as *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil*, *kulkarni* and *shete-mahajan* who acted as intermediaries

between the state and society; the lower category of *watandars* who were represented by the cultivators or *mirasdars* and artisans or *balutedars*. Though they constituted the lesser privileged section of rural society, ^{they} functioned as important members of the village community according to the services performed by them and also at the time of arbitration of disputes and various social occasions despite their low social and caste status specially that of the artisans.

The first chapter deals with the genesis, basis and importance of the *watan* institution, it's roots can be traced back to the Rashtrakuta period and it survived till the establishment of the British rule in the Deccan. Since this institution was so deeply embedded in the administrative and socio-economic structure of th Maratha Kingdom for such a long period of time, an attempt has been made in this chapter to discuss the basis and objective of the *watan* system which operated at almost all levels of Maratha society. A distinction between *watan*, *inam* and *vritti* has also been made in order to avoid confusion regarding the meaning and connotation of these terms.

The second chapter is an explanatory cum-descriptive study of the structure and working of the *watandari*. The position, rights, perquisites and privileges held by each

category of *watandar* has been studied in detail in light of the *watan* hierarchy. The appropriation of the peasant's surplus by various officials, taxes and customary levies that were imposed by the state and the ruling classes on the artisans and *mirasdars*, etc are also the main concerns of this chapter.

The third chapter is an attempt to analyze the nature of relationship between the higher and lower category of *watandars* and that of the state between each category. While the state on the one hand sought to control the higher category of *watandars* by retaining the right to confer, confiscate, renew and transfer their *watans*, on the other hand the state did not intervene in the sale, purchase, division and transfer^{of} the *watans* of the lower category of *watandars* indicating that the main concern of the state was revenue. The importance of the *mirasdars* and *balutedars* in the village despite their low social and caste status (specially that of the *balutedars*) and how the caste factor at the same time played an important role in the social interaction in rural society, has been dealt with. This chapter is also an attempt to analyse and trace the social and economic relationships that existed amongst the *watandars* in rural society in medieval Maharashtra and the methods and devices adopted by the *mirasdars* and *balutedars* to escape the oppressive activities of the bigger *watandars* and the state.

SOURCE MATERIAL

The evidence on which this study is based is mainly in the form of contemporary Marathi documents edited by V. K. Rajwade, Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal, G. S. Sardesai, R. V. Otturkar, etc., which are preserved in the Peshwa Daftar, Pune (Pune Archives) The Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal has also contributed fruitfully towards the development of Maratha history. It's quarterly journal Traimasik has brought to light more than 80, 000 historical documents, many of them of interest to social and economic historians.

- I. Some of the documents that have been consulted in this study are mainly from the following :
 1. *Marathyancya Itihasaci Sadhane*, ed. V. K. Rajwade Pune, 1918 Vols. 1-22.
 2. *Sivacharitra Sahitya*, Bharat Itihas samshodhak Mandal, Vol. 1 to 13.
 3. *Sivakalin Patra Sarsangraha*, BISM, Vols. 1 to 3.
 4. *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar*, ed. G. S. Sardesai (1930-1934) Bombay Government, Vols. 1-45.
 5. *Selections from the Sattara Rajas and Peshwa Diaries*, ed G. C. Vad, D. B. Parasnis, P. V. Mawjee, Pune, 1905-1913 Vols. 1-13.
 6. *Shambhaji Kalin Patrasar Sangraha*, ed. S. N. Joshi, Pune, 1949.

7. *Peshwekalin Samajik Va Arthik Patra Vyvahar*, ed., R. V. Otturkar, Pune, 1950.
8. *Tarabai Kalin Kagdpatre*, ed. Appasaheb Pawar, Kolhapur, 1969, Vols. 2-3.

II. Reports of British administrators.

British administrators like Monstuart Elphinstone²¹ have also highlighted the importance of the *watan* institution and how the possession of such *watan* rights often led to conflict and tension in society. Monstuart Elphinstone also highlighted the greed and acquisitive nature of the higher category of *watandars* but at the same time he also considers the *mirasdars* and *balutedars* as *watandars* who were important members of the village community. He focused his attention mainly on the village as the best unit for establishing indirect rule and adopting the policy of no innovation in the functioning of the village system, recognising the role of the *patil* and *kulkarni* specially in the field of revenue collection. The Reports of British agents such as R. N. Goodine²², G. W. Forrest²³, W. H. Sykes,²⁴ R. G. Gordon,²⁵ William Chaplin,²⁶ etc. help us to understand the nature of land rights in pre-British Maratha society specially that of the *mirasdars* and how their surplus was appropriated by the state and the hereditary officers of the village and *pargana*, thus helping us to analyse the nature of relationship between the *mirasdars* and the higher category of *watandars*.

The contemporary Marathi documents mainly deal with subjects such as *watan* system, taxes, trade, bankers, land revenue, *watandars*, wages and allowances, types of land, marriage cess, temples, *zamindars*, festivals, privileges enjoyed by different sections of society, civil and criminal cases, loans, religious endowments, disputes, pilgrimages, methods of collection of taxes, famines, position of *Brahmans*, caste and a wide variety of subjects relating to social and economic conditions.

Although the Marathi documents are a primary source of information and are invaluable in the detail and variety of their information, they do not throw much light on the condition of the peasants and artisans, that is the lesser privileged section of rural society in order to analyse their position in rural society, despite the importance of their services in the community. Moreover, a background information on the reasons for a dispute relating to *watan* are not explicit in order to analyse it in terms of the power structure within the village Secondly, these documents do not provide much information on the social background of the different categories of *watandars* which would have helped us to understand better, the nature of relationship that existed in rural society. Thirdly, these documents do not provide enough informative material on the socio-religious disabilities faced by the lower category of *watandars* as

result of their low caste status specially that of the artisans. Though the above documents refer to the confiscation, renewal, grants and transfer of *watan* they do not clearly state the reasons of such acts, in order to gain a better understanding of the working of the *watan* institution. Though these documents mention the participation of various sections, of the village community in the arbitration of disputes, they do not clearly mention the exact role played by each section in the decision making process.

Despite these limitations, however the importance of these documents as a primary source material cannot be underestimated. the variety of information on almost every aspect of rural administration, the nature of rights and the socio- economic relationship between the various strata of rural society, differences in privileges and rights and social status, is essential in order to study medieval Indian society. The reports of British administrators have also provided valuable information in order to gain a better knowledge of rural society specially the nature of land rights, mode of taxation, etc. in pre-British Maratha society.

References and Notes to Introduction

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2. G. Duff, *History of the Marathas*, London, 1826, Vol. I (4th ed.) New Delhi, 1979, p. 19.
3. Extract of a letter from Captain Grant, Political Agent at Sattara to the Honourable M. Elphinstone, dated 17th Aug. 1819, p. 125 in *Territories Conquered from the Conquered from the Peshwa, A Report by Monstuart Elphinstone (1821)*, Delhi, 1973.
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Chapter I

***WATAN : IT'S GENESIS, MEANING,
IMPORTANCE, BASIS AND
OBJECTIVE***

WATAN : IT'S GENESIS

Watan was a grant of land made by the state to a person who held a certain office and the grant continued in his family so long as the services were rendered efficiently, in theory, but in practise as long as he was loyal. The grant could be a rent-free land or a title to an office or profession in return for which the holder known as the *watandar* undertook to perform certain services for the state and the village. The genesis of this institution, and when exactly this term came to be used is yet to be established. The term *Desaka* was probably used to denote these officials under the Hindus rajas. According to V.T.Gune "*watandars* or officers and servants of the *parganas* and village centers were jointly known as the *deshak* under the Hindu rajas, the term *deshak* signifying the chief officers like *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Mukaddam*, *Kulkarni* and sometimes even petty *watandars* like the *balutedars* (village artisans)¹. For P.V. Ranade, the Turko - Afghan conquerors of the Deccan and their Bahmani successors recognised the pre-eminence of the *desakas* in the rural area and these became the *watandars* of later times.² According to A.R. Kulkarni the term '*Desak*' was used in a comprehensive sense, signifying the hereditary officials like *Desai* or *Deshmukh*, *Deshkulkarni* or *Deshpande*, *Patil*, *Kulkarni* and *Shete-Mahajan*, but sometimes the term was used in a limited sense denoting only the higher

hereditary officers like *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Patil* or *Kulkarni* and the *Desaks* who paid no revenue but had to serve in lieu of this concession were called *watandars*.³ Hiroshi Fukazawa is of the view that of such terms as *Desai* (or *deshmukh*), *deshkulkarni* (or *deshpande*), *Patil* (or *mukaddam*), *shete-mahajan* and so on, only *mukaddam* is of Arabic origin, the others are all indigenous Hindu expressions, suggesting that at least the proto-type of these hereditary officers had existed before the Muslim invasion. Such terms like *patil*, *kulkarni*, *shete* and *mahajan* have been found on some copper plates of the 12th and 13th centuries discovered in south-western Maharashtra.⁴ Though the earliest documentary evidence of the term *watan* goes back to 1395 i.e., five decades after the establishment of the Bahmani sultanate,⁵ for Prof. A.S. Altekar the prototype of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* are also found in the Rashtrakuta period of the 8th - 11th centuries although different terms were used.⁶

Thus the genesis of the *watan* institution can be traced back to the Rashtrakuta period; in fact the office of the *deshmukh* had its roots in the office of the '*desagramakuta*' (village headman) during the period of the Rashtrakutas.⁷ But how and when this institution evolved is lost in obscurity; just as nothing can be said about how the *zamindari* system evolved, so also nothing can be said about how the *watandari* system evolved. It was the muslims who introduced the term

'*zamindar*' or '*watandar*' which designates the autochthonous gentry since both the terms are Arabic-Persian compounds⁸ and it was the agrarian function of colonisation and settlement that led to their rise and prominence in history. Many of the aristocratic Marathas of later times traced their family histories to the Chalukya and Rashtrakuta period when land was alienated to officials who were entrusted with duties of revenue collection who in course of time became hereditary officers. Lands were also given tax-free to temples and to Brahmans; thus the Brahmans acquired political power and together with the indigenous non-Brahman officials constituted the rural aristocracy. The system remained unaffected by the advent of the Muslim conquest in the 13th c. Under the Adilshahi Sultanate (15th-17th centuries) the administration was divided amongst the Sultan's officers and the "hereditary officers" which included the *desai* (*deshmukh*), the chief of a *pargana*; the *deshkulkarni* (*deshpande*), the accountant of a *pargana*; the *patil* (*mokaddam*), the head of a village; the *kulkarni*, the accountant of a village; the *shete*, the head of a market place; and the *naikwadi*, the guards of a fortress. Thus, the "hereditary officers" were the traditional *watandars* who held important military and administrative posts at the district level. The duties and methods of remuneration of the hereditary officers during the Muslim period were clearly conceived as *miras* or *watan*; and the remuneration alone was

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usually called *inam*. These three terms are all of Arabic origin indicating that the Muslim rulers of the Deccan, on finding the prototypes of the hereditary officers, adopted them and defined their functions and fixed the means of their remuneration in terms of Muslim concepts so that they could be utilized as indigenous local agents of the Muslim ruling power.⁹ During the Adilshahi period, the office and remuneration of each hereditary officer was confirmed and assured by royal favour directly, while at the same time the Sultan could confiscate their office and remuneration if they were found guilty of disobedience and rebellion. Various terms such as '*halal-khwari*' (proper discharge of obligation of service) '*namark halali*' (faithfulness to the salt or loyalty) indicate that one of the main obligations of the hereditary officers of the Sultan was that of loyalty. In short, these hereditary officers were basically the servants of the Sultan and were under his strict control. While the *watandars* were normally under the control of the Adilshahi Sultan, they were in fact mainly the Maratha Hindu aristocracy, had the continuing possibility of transferring themselves into relatively autonomous rulers.¹⁰ Some of the prominent families who owed their title and rights to royal favour and who performed important service under the Muslims were the Shirke, Sardesai and Bhonsle who had acquired their *watans* under the Muslim rule.

By the 17th century, the *watandars* became the most prominent elements in Maharashtra both socially and politically. According to the *Ajnapatra* 'the *watandars* were small self-sufficient chiefs who in reality were the co-sharers of the Kingdom. They are not strong but succeed in keeping up their power by allying themselves with the 'lord of the land' the '*sarvabhaum*'. Ramchandrapant Amatya, the author of *Ajnapatra* states that "ownership and control of land is considered to be the principal deciding factor." He claims that there were ninety six noble families in Maharashtra consisting of *deshmukh*, *deshkulkarni*, etc. who were autonomous chiefs and partners in the kingdom as it were.¹² Thus by the 17th century, the higher category of *watandars* were no longer considered as servants of the king nor were they bound to him by ties of loyalty. "When a foreign invasion comes they make peace with the invaders with a desire for gaining or protecting a *watan*, meet presently the enemy, allow the enemy to enter the kingdom by divulging secrets on both sides and then becoming harmful to the kingdom." The *Ajnapatra* further explains that the *watandars* are never satisfied with the *watan* they possess and don't have the intention 'to remain' loyal to the lord of all land, the *raja*. No longer are they seen as mere office-holders at the mercy of the King, but they become his partners, his co-sharers, his '*dayada*'.¹³ Shivaji in his struggle against the bigger *watandars* like the Mores of Javli and Ghorpades of

Bhor was supported by the smaller and middle *watandars* like the *deshmukhs* of the Maval area who were oppressed by the Mores and Ghorpades; they represented the back bone of Shivaji's movement and who later rose to prominence under Shivaji. In the 18th century inclusion of Brahmins in the administrative and social institutions formed a prominent feature under the Peshwa regime. The Peshwas who were Chitpavan Brahmins gave preference to Brahmins in almost every sphere whether in the administrative, social or judicial system. The Peshwa government became a powerful agency regulating the judicial system in Maharashtra in the 18th century.¹⁴ Anandi Bai, wife of Raghunath Rao a prominent member of the ruling family from a Chitpavan Brahmin sub-caste described the rule of the Peshwa as the 'Brahmani Doulat' meaning the rule, by, for and of the Brahmins.¹⁵ Thus under the rule of the Peshwas, the Brahmins in Maharashtra enjoyed considerable privileges in religious, economic, judicial and social matters. Thus from the official point of view, the *watandars* were considered as the servants of the state rendering administrative duties and the hereditary rights in lands which they had held were duly recognised by ruler. Unstable political conditions in the 17th century gradually paved the way for the bigger *watandars* like the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* to establish themselves as autonomous chiefs and petty rulers. During this period, the Mughals and the Marathas were engaged in a struggle over the

control of Deccan, thus giving the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* ample opportunity to strengthen themselves by augmenting their resources and by vascillating their support towards both powers. Thus the balance of power and authority tilted more in favour of the bigger *watandars*. During the 17th century both the Marathas and *Brahmans* who held the offices of the *deshmukh* and *patil* (Maratha caste) and *deshpande* and *kulkarni* (Brahman caste) held their position and authority and enjoyment of rights and privileges according to the functions and services performed by them. But during the 18th century the Brahman office holders under the Peshwa government were given pre-eminence when they were granted more rights and perquisites mainly in the form of revenue-free land. The policy of the Peshwas led to the emergence of a Brahman aristocracy who not only secured extensive land rights through *watan* but also become leading bankers. The Joshis of Baramati, the Rastes of Wai were prominent Brahman families who had held shares in the *watans* of Joshi, *Deshkulkarni*, *Patil*, etc.¹⁶

The *mirasdars* or cultivators and the *balutedars* or artisans were also considered as *watandars*; their monopoly over a particular profession along with certain rights and privileges was itself their *watan*. But in the 18th century notions of pollution and ritual purity mainly affected the social status of the *balutedars* when caste and ritual taboos

in almost all aspects like marriage, festivals, pilgrimage, justice etc. crept in. For example a Brahman could not be inflicted a death penalty in case of murder while members of other castes could be awarded a death sentence for a similar crime.¹⁷ Untouchables like the *Mahars* and *Mangs* who were considered as *Sudras* or *Atisudras* were effected the most. For example the *mahars* and *mangs* were not allowed to enter the gates of Poona between 3 p.m to 9 a.m nor did they possess the right to the services of the village priest and barber.¹⁸

Therefore from the above discussion it is quite evident that the institution of *watan*, was a prominent feature in the Deccan right from the *Rashtrakutas* to the Muslim rule down to the Maratha to the British rule. The very fact that it existed for centuries indicates that it was deeply embedded in the socio-economic-administrative structure. By the 18th century almost every profession or right seemed to be embraced by the institution of *watan*.

Watan : It's Meaning, Importance, Basis and Objective.

The term *watan* having an Arabic origin meant country, place of residence or home; and its tenure being hereditarily perpetuated in the family of the *watandar* so long as he fulfilled the duties assigned to his office. Therefore it would be apt to define *watan* as a hereditary possession of

land, privilege or title recognised by the state on the one hand and by the local community on the other for enabling the holder to perform the functions associated with it. The *watan* tenure was held by the village officials like the *Patil* or *Muqaddam* (village headman), the *kulkarni* (village accountant), the *Chaugula* (assistant of the *Patil*), the *Shete-Mahajan* (village market officers) and the *mahar* (village helper) in the Maratha country of the Deccan.¹⁹ The *pargana watandars* like the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* supervised the work of the *patils* and the *kulkarnis* of the villages under their jurisdiction.²⁰ As a group the landed *watandars* i.e. the *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Patil*, *Kulkarni*, etc. who were invested with agrarian and revenue functions formed the superior and privileged section of rural society while the cultivators called *mirasdar*s, the village artisans called *balutedars* who were also holders of *watan* constituted the lesser privileged section of village society. The superior category of *watandars* performed service both towards the state and the village community for which they were entitled to various privileges and dues called '*haklajimas*'. The lower or lesser privileged category of *watandars* specially the *balutedars* performed services mainly towards the community; they enjoyed a monopoly over the profession that they held catering to the needs of rural society. For eg. the *lohar* or the blacksmith provided the necessary implements required for cultivation to the *mirasdar*. Thus there was a considerable stratification

amongst the *watandars* as a group, the details of which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

The fact that the institution of *watan* enveloped or embraced almost every section of Maratha society right from the king to the *pargana* official like the *deshmukh* to the village menial like the *mahar*, clearly indicates its importance in the socio-administrative structure of the Maratha kingdom and Maratha rural society. The question that arises is that why was this institution accorded such a great degree of importance and what was the basis of this institution which not only became the cause of conflicts and tensions in society but was also an effective instrument to secure an efficient administration both at the district level and at the village level.

According to Ramchandra Pant Amatya, the author of the *Ajnapatra*, inspite of their faults it would be a great injustice that the *watandars* (higher category) should be hated and that their *watans* should be discontinued. They should not be treated cruelly which would prove a cause of calamity. They have to be kept positively between conciliation and punishment.²¹ The author thus acknowledges the importance of the *watandars* specially that of the superior privileged ones mainly for administrative purposes, and moreover they possessed a better knowledge of the

condition of the rural society under their jurisdiction. *Watan* not only generated a feeling of security, it was also a means of acquiring prestige and distinction in society. For the higher category of *watandars* like the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* it was not only a means of acquiring social distinction but also a channel for securing a political career. For the lower category of *watandars* it was a source of livelihood and a means of acquiring occupational security.

The motive behind the *watan* system was to secure an effective administration of the state. The bigger *watandars* were incorporated into the administrative apparatus. Besides acting as inter mediaries between the state and society, the *watandars* were also entrusted with the responsibility of settlement of villages, expansion of cultivation, maintenance of law and order, settlement of disputes etc. The *deshmukh* who was the head of the '*Gotsabha*' or village council played an important role in settling disputes relating to *watan*, inter and intra class disputes, intra and inter-caste disputes, inter villages disputes etc. Whenever a complainant referred a dispute directly to the government, it was finally referred to the *deshmukh* of the said *pargana* where the dispute had originated. Thus the *deshmukh* functioned both as head of the local community and as the hereditary district officer. Though the state played a crucial role in the expansion of

agriculture, settlement of cultivators on newly cleared land, etc.²² through its officials like *Kamavisdars*, *Karkuns* etc; the state did not assume the sole responsibility in performing these functions, the higher category of *watandars* were also responsible in sharing the state's responsibilities, thus indicating a strong presence of the local element in rural society. A study of the duties and functions of this superior category of *watandars* would show that certain functions and responsibility of the state was shared by the *watandars*. (the duties and functions of the various categories of *watandars* will be dealt with in the next chapter) Thus the power of the state was decentralised through the system of *watan* in order to manage and decide issues on the spot.²³ Earlier, the Bahmani Sultans who endeavoured to create an efficient centralised administration, retained the office of the *desai* (*deshmukh*) and *deskulkarni* (*deshpande*) because their role in collection of revenue, administration of justice, maintenance of law and order, expansion of land under cultivation, etc. was considered as indispensable by the Bahmani rulers. But at the same time they were also under the strict control of the Sultan, in fact the *desai* and the *deshkulkarni* were under the obligation to obey the commands of the *Havaldar*, the state officer. The Bahmani Sultans also realised the importance of the hereditary officers like that of the *desai*, *deshkulkarni*, *patil*, etc. due to their traditional links with the rural

society. These hereditary offices were generally monopolised by dominant castes such as *Brahmans*, Marathas and Prabhus. A very few of the hereditary officers were muslims and even they were most probably native converts.²⁴ It was perhaps this policy of hereditary monopoly of offices by dominant Hindus castes and their role in settlement of villages and expansion of cultivation which created a close link between the bigger *watandars* and the village community, it also led them to enjoy considerable influence over the villagers, right from the Bahmani rule. In course of time, due to unstable political conditions, these *watandars* gradually increased their authority by strengthening their position and retaining their rural base, which gave them ample opportunity to transform themselves into petty, autonomous rulers, while at the same time functioning as the head of the local community.

It was these *watandars* (higher category) who had now assumed the status of petty autonomous local rulers, that Shivaji had to contend with in his attempt to consolidate the Maratha empire. Shivaji tried to make the *watandars* subversive by curbing the powers of the bigger *watandars* in order to bring them under control. At the same time he also created new *watans* on various occasions,²⁵ continued the old *watans* which were earlier granted by the Muslim kings²⁶ and confiscated the *watans* of many *watandars*.²⁷ The *Ajnapatra*

states that these *watandars* should be kept positively between conciliation and punishment, their existing *watans* should be continued but their power over the people should be done away with.²⁸ Shivaji was well aware of the ambitious nature of the *watandars* and their willingness to ally with a foreign power if necessary but at the same time he also realised their importance in the administrative structure and their role as an important link between the state and rural society. "Though medieval rulers like Shivaji tried to reduce the power of local magnates like *zamindars*, yet many large *inamdars* such as *deshpandes*, *deshmukhs* and the like had to be maintained and created throughout the medieval period, for such was not only the custom of the time but the political and social necessities compelled them to admit and rely on the landed interests."²⁹ According to Prof. Satish Chandra, Shivaji tried to lay the foundations of a centralised state by restricting the abuse of powers by the *watandars* but he never attempted any fundamental changes in the basic structure of Maratha society, his centralised structure of government lacked any deep foundations. Most of the officials who served under Shivaji and rose to prominence were petty *watandars*.³⁰

The British after their conquest of the Maratha territory, in their effort to restructure the existing system to secure maximum taxes dislodged the offices of the *deshmukh*

and the *deshpande* but at the village level they had to continue the office of the *patil* and the *kulkarni*, realising that they were an integral part of the village.³¹ Even the Peshwas had to bear the fact that a Maratha would go to any extent to save his *watan*, he would not easily part with the rights and privileges enjoyed by his ancestors.³² The Peshwas continued the practise of Shivaji, though the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* were relieved of their authority and original duties, they were allowed to enjoy their customary dues. Their *watan* still was not a sinecure i.e. which yielded only profit or honour without performance of duty. They were still made to act as a check on the non-hereditary officers like the *mamlatdars* and were also required to maintain records of the past and present history of all *watans*, grants and *inams* (gifts).³³

At the village level the importance of the *watan* is corroborated by the number of disputes over *watan* and the rights attached to it. A record of the year 1765 reveals, the detailed process and result of a dispute over the sonarkiche *watan* (goldsmithery *watan*) between Lakshman, a goldsmith of village Lonibudruk and village Hasanapur, and Sadasiv a goldsmith of Loni khurd in Sangamner near Poona. The dispute was referred to the local governor who summoned the disputants, the village officers (*Patil*, *kulkarni*, etc.) and the village artisans (*balutedars*) of the concerned villages.

The decision finally went in favour of Lakshman of Lonibudruk.³⁴ When another dispute took place between a carpenter and a blacksmith over the *loharkiche watan* (blacksmith *watan*), all the villagers, landholders and *balutedars* were made to give their evidence and decide the dispute.³⁵ In a record of the year 1763 which pertains to a dispute between a group of carpenters and blacksmiths over the *watan* of blacksmithery in village Koradh in the Junnar province,³⁶ the terms and phrases that occur in the record indicate the importance of *watan* and the duties and rights that were attached to it. The following terms and phrases were recorded : 'watanancha wada' (*watandar's* house), *gairvatani* (*watanless*), 'maouje majkurchen loharkiche watan' (*watan* of the blacksmithery of the above village), 'mauje majkurchen sonarkichen watan' (*watans* of carpentry and blacksmithery), 'gaavanche watan' (*watan* of the village) etc.³⁷ There are also numerous instances of disputes regarding *patil* and *kulkarni watan*, disputes between *patils* and *mahars* etc. over the question of rights and privileges.³⁸ There was another dispute over the right of *patilki watan* between Lingoji Yadav and Lingoji Bogur *Patil*. The decision of the village court was that twenty seven rights were assigned to one and twenty four to the other party.³⁹ In another instance Shambhaji II had renewed the *Khoti watan* of village Fur to Vishwanathbhat Agnihotri. One Dhondo Gopal Khanderkar was also claiming the above *watan* but the

mirasdars and *balutedars* of the said village upheld the claim of Agnihotri⁴⁰. From the above disputes relating to *watan* one can come to the conclusion that *watan* not only denoted a social status but also signified the professional status of the *watandar* which determined his economic condition in lieu of his *watan*. Another important fact is that the villagers including the officials like *patil*, *kulkarni*, etc and the artisans and cultivators who were also *watandars* played a decisive role in solving their mutual disputes regarding *watan*.

If the institution of *watan* formed such an integral part of Maratha society, then what was the basis on which this institution was operating at almost all levels of society? According to V.T. Gune the term *watan* which was gathered from the *watan* papers and which signified office such as those of the *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Mukaddam*, *kulkarni* and *Joshi*, was chiefly an official tenure. *Watandars* such as *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Kulkarni*, *Shete-Mahajan* (hereditary officers of a *qasba* or *mart*) held lands known as *watani inams* (emoluments for the services to be performed) while the *balutedars* received their payment in kind for the services they performed towards the community.⁴¹ They were expected to serve the village whenever required in their respective capacities fixed by their castes. They were paid their remunerations at two harvests of the year usually in kind,

but occasionally in cash, such remunerations being called *balute*.⁴² Some of them were also entitled to *inam* lands which they had to cultivate themselves. For S.N.Sen, service formed the basis of the *watan* tenure for he includes even the *mahar* (village menial) a man of low caste as a serviceable official, in the category of *watandar* who helped the *patil* in revenue collection and held the office of the village watchman.⁴³ He cites the example of *pargana* Parnes in 1776 where one Devnak, son of Bhikak Shinda of *mauja* Isaluk and Bennak son of Subhakkar of *qasba* Nagar complained that the *kunbis* and *mangs* were depriving the *mahars* of their customary services, thus indicating that even the right to perform a particular service formed an important pre-requisite of *watan* other than the prestige and distinction that went along with it. The nature of service rendered by the different category of *watandars* and the emoluments that were attached to each category differed from each other as mentioned earlier, the higher category of *watandars* were invested with administrative duties, they had a responsibility towards the state and the village community for which they were given land as *inam* along with rights and privileges. The lower category of *watandars* such as the *balutedars* had to serve the villagers for which they were entitled to a share in the harvest and other perquisites on special occasions. Thus land was not the invariable concomitant of the *watan* tenure for this category; this was quite evident from the disputes that

arose over *watan* rights. A dispute between the *mahars* and *mangs* of Indapur over the *huqs* of each community was referred to the Brahma Sabha of Paithan. It was finally decided that the *mangs* should lift all that they could find on the roads including dead animals.⁴⁴ The higher category of *watandars* for whom land formed an important pre-requisite of social status had a greater responsibility since they had to perform service towards the state and the community. Some of their important functions were : it was their responsibility to see that land did not lay fallow, to settle the land revenue of lands newly brought under cultivation, protection of villagers, settlement of villages that were ravaged by war and famine etc. For example Shivaji had asked the *deshmukh* of Rohidkore that he should take all the people from his village to a place between the Ghats for protection from the enemy.⁴⁵ Grant of *inam* (rent-free land) along with the various *huqs* (privileges) and *lajimas* (dues) led the *watandars* like the *deshmukh*, *patil*, *kulkarni*, etc. to acquire *watans* but at the same time performance of duty and fulfillment of responsibility was a criteria which they could not ignore for ultimately it was the state which possessed the right to confiscate or confer a *watan*. The ruler could terminate a title or office for failure to perform the duties and functions with which the grant was associated.⁴⁶ The *watans* of *deshmukh* and *deshkulkarni* of Multhekore *taraf* were appropriated for failure of performing their duty.⁴⁷ There

are a number of instances which indicate the confiscation of *watans* of the *watandars* by imperial authority.⁴⁸

The combined responsibility of the cultivators and *pargana*, and village officials to bring more land under cultivation, expansion of means of irrigation, digging up of canals etc. was perhaps one of the reasons which created a closer link between them. During Shivaji's period canal irrigation was encouraged by giving the *patils inams* of villages to undertake the irrigation works. The Peshwa Government also encouraged irrigation works by giving *inam* lands.⁴⁹ Moreover, the *patil*, who acted as a link between the state and the village also acted as a check to over-assessment of revenue by the *kamavisdar* (official of the government deputed to assess and collect revenue) at the time of assessment and many a time they sought the support of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* to check the whims of the *kamavisdar*, while during the Peshwa period the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* acted as effective checks on the state officials or non-hereditary officers inspite of loosing their authority and power. S.N.Sen has stated that during the Peshwa period the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* became the sincere friends of the *rayat* and never failed to bring to the notice of the Peshwa their grievance.⁵⁰ Though the authority of these *watandars* was considerably reduced by Shivaji which was later followed by the Peshwas, they were integral components of the village

community with long-term interests in its improvement. In the earlier period the bigger *watandars* were the powerful elements in village society who tyrannised the smaller *watandars* and the peasants. In the 18th century, their power and authority was considerably reduced by the state, they therefore supported the peasants and their claims and grievances against the intrusion of the state officials. They thus acted as beneficiaries of the cultivators when the need arose but at the same time they also mustered the peasant's support to counter the claims of the state officials.⁵¹

Another factor which created a close link between the *watandars* and the village community was the hereditary aspect of the *watan* tenure which also formed an important basis of this institution. The landed *watandars*, the *mirasdars* and the *balutedars* enjoyed a monopoly over their profession and this monopoly continued among the descendants of all *watan* holders. This right to monopoly over a profession or trade was recognised by the state on the one hand and society on the other hand. A *watan* holder whether a *pargana* or village official or a village menial did not give up his hereditary office or title easily, thus generating numerous disputes over the ownership of such *watans*. Most of the disputes that arose were decided by the village council or *Gotsabha* along with the *Diwan* or the state official were related to *watan* and *watan* claims. Krishnaji Villal refers to royal orders

reprimanding the officers responsible for bringing an outsider to work as a priest in the mosque after the death of the incumbent. Since he was a rightful claimant legally competent to hold the post by way of influence, he should be appointed as priest.⁵² According to V.T. Gune, out of the 101 disputes tried before the *Diwan* and *Gotsabha*, 80 of them were concerned with *watan* while 60 were concerned with landed *watandars*.⁵³ A *watandar* would go to any possible extent to protect his *watan* for he was not willing to forfeit the rights and privileges associated with his *watan*, which were enjoyed by his ancestors and handed down through generations. A lengthy record of the year 1765 (mentioned earlier) reveals in detail a dispute over the *sonarkiche watan* (goldsmithery *watan*) between *sadasiv*, goldsmith of village *Lonikhurd* in *Sangamner* and *Lakshman*, goldsmith of village *Lonibudruk*. *Lakshman* claimed that during the time of his ancestors, the village *Loni* was divided into the above villages and his ancestors had held the *sonarkiche watan* of these villages. But they ancestors migrated to another village leaving the goldsmithery to be looked after by a relative. Later *Sadasiv's* ancestors came to *Lonikhurd* and started a goldsmithery there. The relatives of *Lakshman's* ancestors informed his grandfather who in turn sent his sons (*Lakshman's* father and uncle) to their ancestral villages. They settled down and started the goldsmithery in *Lonibudruk* and *Hasanapur* and asked *Sadasiv's* father and grandfather to

restore the *sonarkiche watan* to them in Lonikhurd to which the latter refused. The matter was referred to the local governor, and the village officers and *balutedars* were asked to act as witnesses. Finally the decision went in favour of Lakshman i.e. the *sonarkiche watan* of Lonikhurd originally belonged to Lakshman and his father and that Sadasiv and his ancestors were strangers inspite of having worked in Lonikhurd for three generations as goldsmiths.⁵⁴ Thus long periods of absence from the village did not effect or alter the claims of a *watandar* to his *watan* rights, the original *watan* holder and his decendants could come back after decades and still lay claim to their *watan* and replace the person or family who had taken his place. In another instance one Nagya Hanbar claimed the *patilki watan* of *kasba* Khanapur which belonged to Yasaji More-Patil during the Adilshahi period, Hanbar was given some land in that place and on the strength of that grant, Hanbar was claiming the *watan*. The *Panchayat* decided the case against him.⁵⁵ Thus the hereditary aspect of *watan* and the ancestral claims to it generated a process of succession and legitimation which was recognised by the state and society, except in few instances where a *watan* could be transferred to another grantee if the descendant of the original claimant did not claim the *watan* Shambhaji II granted the *Chaugulki watan* of the village Pishavi to Shivaji Jadhav Patil, on condition that if an heir of the earlier *watandar* claimed it in future, the same should be transferred

to him, if all the expenses incurred by Jadhav were paid to him with interest.⁵⁶ The hereditary nature of the *watan* tenure accorded to this institution a kind of permanence which in turn generated a feeling of security. Even royal officials, commanders, both Marathas and Brahmans, members of the royal family etc. were eager to possess or retain their *watans* inspite of their position in the administrative hierarchy. Thus the Rajas of Sattara clung to their *watandari* rights in Indapur and elsewhere, which they held even before their rise to power.⁵⁷ The Maratha sardars like the Holkars, Sindhias and Gaikwars held *Patilki* rights in the Deccan.⁵⁸ The Peshwas themselves held *deshmukhi*, *patilki*, and *kulkarni*, rights, and *inams* and shares of half or one-third of *watans*, mainly in the southern Konkan, their homeland.⁵⁹ This preference to the original village *watan* and the desire to retain *watan* rights inspite of holding office in the state apparatus was probably due to the fact that the Marathas viewed political power as temporary while *watan* was looked upon as permanent.⁶⁰

Thus *watandars* were more keen on retaining and protecting their rights connected with *watan* since changes in political power rarely affected them as long as their position and privileges remained unchallenged. For the *balutedars* it was their hereditary monopoly of a particular

trade or profession which they sought to protect since possession of *watan* was not only a source of a livelihood but also an indicator of their social and economic status. The villagers could not remove a *balutedar* nor could they withhold his *balute* or share of produce thus assuring a kind of economic security to them. It is important to distinguish between permanent *balutedars* or '*mirasdar balutedars*' and temporary or '*upari balutedars*'. The former class had the right to work and receive remunerations in the village and this right was recognised as their *miras* or *watan*. This class of *watandar balutedars* were entitled to hold plots of rent-free land granted as *inam* by the village community, such *inam* land also being included in the *watan* which they cultivated themselves. The *upari balutedars* held no permanent rights and were migratory, he could become a *watandar* only when he bought a *watan* or a portion of it from the former incumbent or when he had worked there as an *upari* for a long period of time.⁶¹

Thus by assuring continuance of occupations to the individuals practising them on a hereditary basis, the *watan* system not only guaranteed an economic career and economic stability to its adherents, it also assured an uninterrupted supply of goods and services to the village community.

Watan, Inam and Vritti

There is a need to distinguish between *watan*, *inam* and *vritti* land grants because sometimes they tend to be used as synonyms. The Ajnapatra makes a clear differentiation between *watan*, *inam* and *vritti* land grants; *vritti* denoting hereditary rights, office or profession which could not be confiscated while *inam* is referred to as hereditary lands to servants or *vritti*-holders for the purpose of achieving a task.⁶² For Andre Wink revenue-free villages and lands which were basically no more than a formally sanctioned payment exempt from royal taxation were called *inam* and that there were two such categories; 1) those who held ex-officio, as an appurtenance of *watan* and 2) free gifts on account of religious and personal services. While both were called *inam* the difference was that the former category of grant involved reciprocity between the donor and donee in the form of on-going service while the latter did not. It was given in payment of service to the village and district *watandars* and to *balutedars* as well as to a variety of professionals.⁶³ Both *watan* and *inam* are Arabic words, *watan* was essentially a service tenure (*chakari watan*) it was a grant of land that was accorded to a person in office and which perpetuated in his family as long as service was rendered. The *watandar* was entitled to rights and perquisites called *huq-lajimas* and most of all he enjoyed rent-free land in lieu of his

services. *Inam* was not a service tenure, but land which was granted as reward for services rendered in the past, and like *watan* it was held in perpetuation without any condition of service. Thus according to A.R.Kulkarni '*inamati*' was the land revenue which was allowed to be appropriated by various *inamdars*, etc, in lieu of direct recompense by the the king.⁶⁴ The document which created an *inam* was called the *inampatra* or *karor*, it was an agreement which mentioned whether the *inam* was a rent free grant held in perpetuity or whether it was *inam tijai* which meant that the *inamdar* or holder of *inam* was to pay one third of the normal rent fixed for his land to the state.⁶⁵ The different kinds of *inam* were: a) *Diwan-Nisbat Inam* or *Sanadi Inames* - it was a grant issued to the grantee indicating the purpose of the *sanad*, an official grant. It could either be exempted from all government exactions or it may be granted with a reservation of a half, a third, or a fourth of the claim known as *inamnimai*, *inam-itjai* and *inam-chauthai*.⁶⁶ b) *Gao-Nisbat Inam* or *Tikanati Begari* or *Dehangi Inam*, - these were rent free lands which were granted by the village community out of its own lands to an artisan or a cultivator if it required their services, the loss of revenue accruing to the government was made by the village community itself. These lands could be mortgaged but not sold. c) *Devasthan Inam-inam* which was assigned for the maintenance of a temple or mosque or a religious place of worship. d) *Agrahar Inam-inam*

given in the form of villages or the entire land of village to *Brahmans*. There are numerous instances of Shivaji granting *Agrahar inams* to *Brahmans*.⁶⁷

Thus various categories of *watandars* like the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil*, *kulkarni*, *chaugula*, *balutedars* like the *mahar*, *joshi* or village priest, temples etc, were all entitled to hold *inam* lands, which were not only enjoyed hereditarily but could also be sold or disposed off by the holder along with the office. According to Fukazawa though *inam* lands attached to a hereditary office could be sold or transferred along with the office of the *inamdar*, it is not clear if the *inam* lands as such could be separated from the office to which they were attached and sold or transferred separately.⁶⁸ The following example shows the divisible, saleable and transferable character of the *watan* and *inam* grants. The *kulkarni* and *jotishi watan* of a village in Junnar was held by a *Brahman* who died in 1740. He did not leave behind any heir to take over the *jotishi* and *kulkarni watans*. So his widow divided the two offices and offered half of the share of the *kulkarni* and also the *jotishi watans* to his son-in-law and sold the other half to a *Brahman* for Rs.2, 000. The *watan patra* or the official document which confirmed the hereditary offices shows that there were thirteen items of privileges attached to the *kulkarniship* and three items of rights (*huq*) attached to the *jotishi* and one of the

rights of the jotishi was *inam* lands of 25 *bighas* (about 8 hectares).⁶⁹

The saleability and durability of the *watan* and *inam* grants often led to , conflict and tension in society. Almost every *watan* had two or more claimants and the *watandar* was not moved by pity in order to covet his *watan*.⁷⁰ The family papers of the old *deshmukhs* like the Jagdales of Masur and the Jedhes or Rohidkhore throw light on instances of feuds and bloodshed. The Marathyanche Itihasanche Sadhanen, Shiva Charita Sahitya, Tarabai Kalin Kagadpatre, Bharat Itihas Samshodak Mandal Quarterly, throw considerable amount of light on the intricate development of disputes over hereditary gentry rights in lands.⁷¹ According to Goodine "in most villages the patilship has been divided among a great number of sharers and the increasing families of these sharers have caused it to be still further divided and as each individual lays claim his share in the produce of *watan* they collectively present little more than the appearance of a beggarly mob of clamourants who by their internal feud greatly retard the object of their office".⁷² According to Monstuart Elphinstone the *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Patil* and *Kulkarni* can sell their own land and fees (or wuttun as both are called); but they cannot sell their offices and it is even doubtful if they can sell their fees though they may pawn them, their land they can definately sell.⁷³ Captain

Briggs, the political agent at Khandesh states that the whole of the village officers such as the patil, *kulkarni*, barber, washerman, watchman, carpenter, astrologer, potter, etc. had each his field assigned to him; his office and his land are both hereditary and personal and that both are saleable or transferable by gift, these lands are free of taxes as a remuneration for the performance of their offices.⁷⁴ Unstable financial circumstances, debt, famine, absence of heir, etc. caused many *watandars* to sell their *watans* or part of it. Nagoji Sidoji Patil an old man in debt and having no male issue sold the remaining half of the *patilki watan* of village Mudsinji to Dwarkaji Yadav. The king issued orders confirming the sale.⁷⁵ A *kulkarni* exchanged his privileges that were attached to his office for a minimal price since the price of grain had increased exorbitantly.⁷⁶ Naroji, Narsoji, Jaloji and Yesahji Pawar urged their kinsmen to buy their share of *patilki* as they had no money to pay government dues; since their kinsmen refused to buy it, it was sold to Dwarkaji Yadav.⁷⁷ At the lower level the *balutedar* whose *watan* was hereditary, was entitled to transfer and sell of his *watan* but it is to be kept in mind that the division of *watan* did not imply that it increased its number (*watan*) or that the total amount of emoluments became doubled.⁷⁸ Division of *watan* meant that the emoluments came to be divided amongst, the holders of a particular *watan*, the sphere of service or the sphere of activity was divided i.e.

A particular aspect of part of the occupation was carried on by one claimant while the other claimant performed another part of it, the entire process of manufacturing or producing goods was carried on by both the *watandar-balutedars* who were claimants of a common *watan* or occupation. For example if a *sonarkiche watan* (goldsmithery) was divided into two amongst two families, the emoluments were divided into two equal shares between the two families, on the basis of seniority i.e. the senior family was to receive all the remunerations in cash and give half of it to the junior family.

Thus the institution of *watan* occupied a very important place in the Maratha social and administrative system, its importance being given due recognition right from the Rashtrakuta rule down to the British rule over the Deccan, notwithstanding the conflict and tension it generated in society, it was not only a symbol of social status but also a source of livelihood. The supreme authority of this ancient unnerving institution surprised the British administrators to no end. "A new ephemeral ruler could have no inducement to displace village officials when he had everything to gain from their co-operation. The wealth or service of the state might pass away but a *watan*, a source of respect always remained.⁷⁸

The acquisition of *watan* and its preservation was an

all absorbing occupation of the *watandars*.⁸⁰ Captain James Duff in a letter to Elphinstone printed in the above book states an incident of how two women fought over a stone claiming that it was a part of her *watan*.⁸¹ Every attempt was made to retain or preserve the *watan* within the kinsmen or *bhauband* (brotherhood). It was only in times of extreme financial problems or absence of male heir that induced the *watandar* to sell his entire *watan* or a portion of it.

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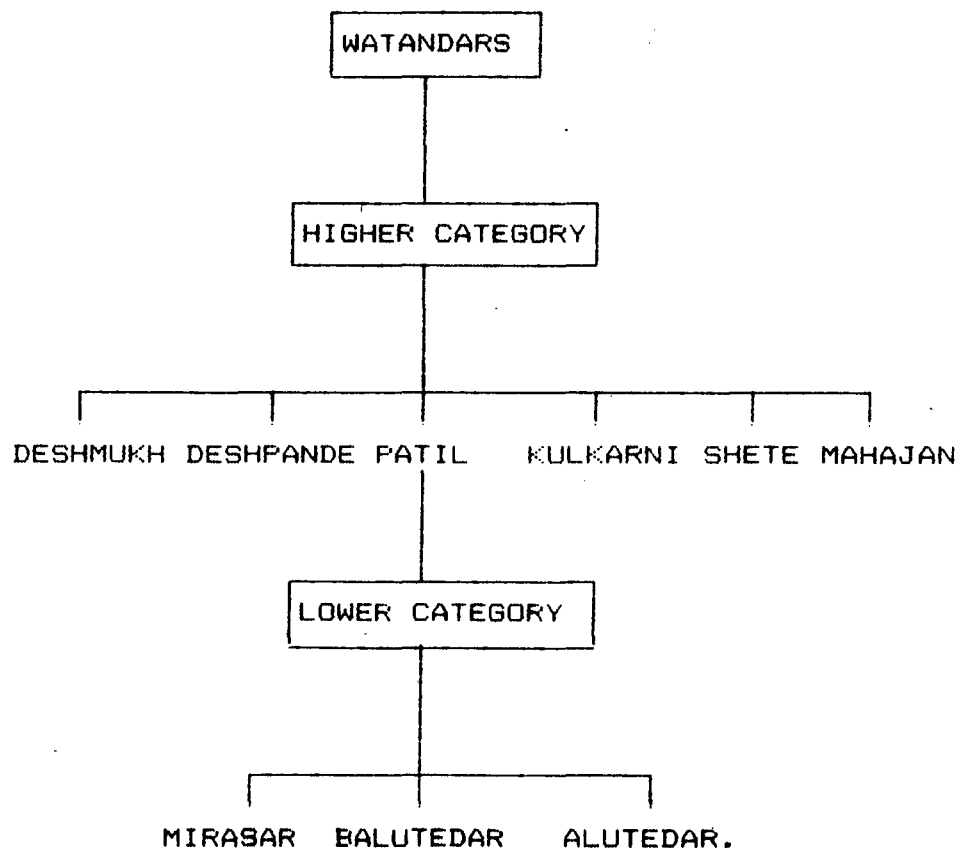
Chapter II

THE STRUCTURE AND WORKING OF THE WATANDARI SYSTEM

The institution of *watan* led to the emergence of a class of *watandars* who were integral components of rural society in medieval Maharashtra. The *watandars* as a group can be broadly divided into two categories: The higher category of *watandars* consisting of the *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Patil*, *Chaugula* and *Shete-Mahajan*. They constituted the revenue collecting machinery, thus forming an important link between the state and the revenue paying villages. They were a group of hereditary officers who enjoyed a superior and privileged position in rural society, performing agrarian, revenue and administrative functions, for the state on the one hand and for the village community on the other. The other group of *watandars* consisted of the cultivators or *mirasdars* and artisans or *balutedars* and *alutedars* whose performance of functions like cultivation, production of goods, etc. accorded to them an important position in rural society. They were the lower category of *watandars* who were performing services mainly towards the village community. There was a considerable stratification or hierarchy and distinction between the higher category of *watandars* and the lower category of *watandars*. This stratification between the two classes of *watandars* was mainly based on position in the administrative apparatus, nature of rights in land and hereditary monopoly of occupation. In spite of this hierarchy both the categories of *watandars* were important and integral members of rural society, their social and economic rights

were distributed between them through the performance of service, participation in the decision making process and in social and religious occasions thus being integrated with each other through social, economic and judicial institutions to a certain extent.

This chapter is an attempt to study in detail the important features, functions and position of the different categories of *watandars* and the rights and privileges enjoyed by each group within each category.



HIGHER CATEGORY OF WATANDARS

1. DESHMUKH

The ultimate responsibility of village administration was vested with the *deshmukh* who was the head of a *pargana* consisting of a number of villages. The *deshgramakuta* was the counterpart of the *deshmukh* during the Rashtrakuta period and in course of time the term *deshgramakuta* was replaced by the term '*deshmukh*'; the functions of both the offices remained the same, though there was a change in the terminology.

In the 17th century, unstable political conditions facilitated the *deshmukh* to acquire greater power and virtually become an independent ruler of his *pargana*. During this period the Mughals and Marathas were involved in a conflict over the control of the Deccan and in this struggle for power the *watandars* like the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* found ample opportunity to augment their resources. They displayed a tendency to vacillate their support between rival political powers in order to suit their own interests. While powerful *deshmukhs* like the Morays of Javli and the Ghorpades of Bhor sought the support of the Bijapur government, many others were courted by the Mughals with offers of high *mansabs* and at the same time strengthening their hereditary claim over their *deshmukhi*. Political changes hardly affected the position of the *deshmukh* and other hereditary officers as long as their

watan remained undisturbed to the extent that they did not seem to mind even if their *pargana* was distributed between different powers at the same time. For example, a part of the Poona *pargana* was held by the Mughals while the other part was held by the Adilshahis. But the position of the *deshmukh* remained unaffected, his importance thus being recognized by both the powers specially in the sphere of revenue collection.

The *deshmukh* who was originally appointed by the government, was the state's link with rural society. It was his responsibility to see that the revenue was paid in time to the state officials.¹ Sometimes the *deshmukh* undertook the responsibility of raising the required amount of money in case the villagers were unable to pay the revenue in full. In 1783, in village Sangamner, the *deshmukh* and *Deshpande* with the consent of the entire village community borrowed Rs. 10501 from two *sarrafs* (*seths*) to be paid to the government since the *rayats* were unable to meet the total revenue demand. This amount was to be later paid by the *rayats* with interest.² Sometimes the *deshmukh* along with the *patil*, as representatives of the village community requested the state to consider a particular village for remission from revenue due to the inability of the village to meet the revenue demand.³ Thus the role of the *deshmukh* as an intermediary between the state and the local community was clearly seen at

the time of these settlements. By ensuring the payment of revenue to the state and by representing the grievances of the cultivator to the government, the *deshmukh* was therefore protecting the interests of both the state and the *rayats*.

The *deshmukh* who supervised the work of all the *patil* in his *pargana*, sometimes discharged the duties of the *patil* of a village until the appointment of a new *patil* was made.⁴ In some cases the *deshmukh* was also entitled to hold the *patilki watan* of some villages of his *pargana*. For instance, the *deshmukh* of Indapur was holding the *patilki watan* of two villages in his *pargana*.⁵ A *deshmukh* was also

entitled to enjoy an unprecedented combination of several functions. According to Major Sykes a *deshmukh* in Ahmednagar was enjoying both *patilki* and *kulkarni* rights in addition to his *deshmukhi* rights.⁶ The *deshmukh* who generally belonged to the Maratha caste was entitled to sell his *watan* to people belonging to other castes. The *deshmukhi watan* of Miraj was held by both *Brahmans* and Jains.⁷ Thus the sale of the *deshmukhi watan* opened it's office to other castes as well; and *deshmukhs* of *Brahman* origin and other castes including muslims were also to be found.⁸

The rights and perquisites enjoyed by the *deshmukh* were varied and extensive; one of the chief rights or *huqs* was his share in the revenue that was collected from the *pargana*

under his jurisdiction . According to Elphinstone " the profits of the *deshmukh* are very great; generally I am told about 5%. Not only on the revenue but on the land; 5 acres in each hundred, for example will belong to the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* and a twentieth of the collection; besides he has various other claims in kind, as a portion of ghee, etc.⁹ But according to V.K. Rajwade, a document states that the *deshmukh* got only 2% and not 5% of the revenue. A document of 1795 dealing with the accounts of a *deshmukh* of Indapur shows that the *deshmukh* had three broad divisions of income :

- a) two and a half *isafat gava* (village held permanently as *inam*).
- b) income from the *deshmukhi huqs* and perquisites from the *pargana*.
- c) income from the *patilki watan*.

The total income amounted to Rs. 7380, the income representing his *huqs* due to his position as the chief *watandar* of the *pargana* Indapur.¹¹

In addition to a share in the revenue, the *deshmukh* was entitled to collect payments in kind from the cultivators, goods from the artisans and merchants, and services from the community. It seems that the *deshmukh* was entitled to a share in each and every article that was being produced, perhaps no source of income remained untapped. The articles of consumption that he collected were, a pair of shoes from the cobbler, oil from the oilpresser at the rate of 5 *sers* per crusher, a blanket from the *dhangar* (blanket weaver)¹², a

chicken¹³, etc. It must be remembered that such collections from almost every section of the village were not accompanied by any payment on the part of the *deshmukh*, they were a part of his *huq* and *manpan*. The *deshmukh* also collected yearly dues from the village artisans like the barber, washerman, carpenter, tailor etc. He was also entitled to receive the free services of a *mahar* for to one to two months in a year. Some of the other perquisites that were enjoyed by the *deshmukh* were: a) *Gavdana* - a variety of items levied both in cash and kind from the cultivators, artisans and shop-keepers from every village. b) *Kabulipatti* - a tax on agreements transacted by the residents of the *pargana*. c) *Bhet* - present, at the rate of one rupee per village. d) *Jakat* - octroi duty, he was entitled to a surcharge of 2% of the octroi charged by the state. e) surcharge on the sale and purchase of cattle per head. f) tax on marriage and divorce.¹⁴ g) articles from shopkeepers, vendors and merchants of the weekly *bazars*.¹⁵ Thus the *deshmukh* seemed to have been entitled to a number of privileges and rights which was based on both legal and customary sanctions i.e. sanctioned by the state and tradition; besides they also had an important role to play in the deliberations of the *Gotsabha* or *Panchayat* in deciding disputes relating to *watan*, caste, rights of precedence, etc.. All these rights and privileges in addition to the possession of administrative power, accorded to *deshmukh*, a superior position in rural society.

DESHPANDE

The *Deshpande* who was usually a *Brahman* by caste occupied a position that was inferior to that of the *deshmukh*. He supervised the work of all the *kulkarnis* in his region. He is sometimes referred to as *deshkulkarni* signifying his authority over a number of villages and *deshlekhak* indicating his principal duty as writing and maintaining the records and accounts of the village under his jurisdiction.¹⁶ Just like the *deshmukh* the *deshpande* could also combine in himself various functions, he could possess both *jotishi* and *kulkarni* rights in a village under his jurisdiction.¹⁷ S.N. Sen cites the example of Baji Yeshwant and Gangadhar Yeshwant, the *deshpandes* of *sarkar* Junnar who held both *kulkarni* and *jotishi* rights.¹⁸ Sometimes the *deshpande* also acted as the *kulkarni* of a village in the absence of a headitary *kulkarani*.¹⁹

The *deshpande* was entitled to a number of rights and privileges in the form of kind and cash. In fact there was hardly any distinction between the nature of rights and privileges enjoyed by the *deshmukh* and *deshpande*, the only difference being in the number rather than the nature of privileges. The share of the *deshpande* was half of that of the *deshmukh*. For instance if the former was entitled to the

services of the *mahar* for one month, then the latter was entitled to the *mahar's* services for 15 days. The following are some of the *huqs* and privileges that were enjoyed by the *deshpande* : a) vegetables and sugarcane from the farmers; b) shoes from the cobbler and cloth from the weaver; c) oil term the oil presser; d) commodities from the merchants and shopkeepers of the weekly *bazars*. In a letter addressed to the *Deshmukh* and *Deshpande* of Saswad region, the government accords to Trimbak Purandare Deshpande some rights in the monday market held in Saswad such as a leather bag, fish, and meat, *supari*, etc.;²⁰ e) *Harki* and *Gunhegari* - fees from both the parties involved in a dispute. Half of such income was remitted to the state, one third of the remaining half was collected by the *deshmukh* while the rest belonged to the *deshpande*.²¹

PATIL

The *Patil* who was the chief hereditary officer of the village was also referred to as *Mokaddam*, *Gavpatil* meaning village headman. The *patil* was not only responsible for the collection of revenue but was also responsible for extension of cultivated land in his village. He was granted land as *inam* by the state in consideration of the services performed by him and was permitted to hold his office on a hereditary basis. The *inam* land and the official tenure was the *watan* of

the *patil* which gave him a coveted position in rural society and with which was associated a number of privileges. Since the *patilki watan* was a coveted one, it very often required the approval of the entire village community.²²

The *patil* was responsible for the collection of revenue from his village. His knowledge of the existing agrarian conditions in his village was considered as valuable since the state was dependent on him for information regarding productivity of land, crops, etc.²³ The amount of revenue to be paid by the village was decided by the *kamavisdar* and the *deshmukh* in consultation with the *patil*. The *patil* prepared an estimate of the crop every year with the help of the *kulkarni* and then negotiated with the *karkun* on behalf of the village. Once the tax to be paid was decided and fixed. It was the *patil* who determined the share of each family or 'jatha'. This was done on the basis of 'rivaj' or the prevalent practice and tradition of the community.²⁴ The *patil* also represented the cultivators regarding the fixing of land revenue. In case the assessment made by the *kamavisdar* was too high, then the *patil* could protest. There are instances of *patils* leaving the village along with the cultivators as a protest against the revenue that was assessed. S.N. Sen cites the example of the *patils* of Taluk Shivner who had left their villages for *kasba* Ale due to the high revenue assessment.²⁵

The main duty of the *patil* was to bring barren land under cultivation. The settlement of land in the village was normally made by the *patil*.²⁶ During settlement, the *patil* granted tenures or *cowls* to the landless in order to encourage them to cultivate land that remained fallow. The *patil* was also authorised to grant *mirasi* or ownership rights to landless peasants after due consultation with the village community. The *patil* also had the responsibility along with the state officials to encourage *uparis* (strangers) to come and settle down from other regions by offering them concessional rates of taxation in an effort to compensate for the decline in revenue brought by famines and periods of instability and also for the further expansion of cultivation. Thus when a village was colonized or rehabilitated, the *patil* as the leader of the village community used to get due recognition from the state for his work in the settlement of villages.²⁷

The *patil* generally belonged to the Maratha caste. The sale and purchase of *patilki* rights opened its ranks to *deshmukhs*, *shete-mahajans*, etc.²⁸ His office being hereditary could be sold and purchased under pressure for money such as indebtedness, etc.²⁹ It was continued adversity that often led to the sale of a portion or the whole of the *patilki watan*.³⁰ This sale and purchase of *patilki watan* often led to conflict and tension in rural society. Akoji Parsoji Bache

Patil had bought certain rights of the *patilki watan* of Bhikaji Yadav and Kuloji Yadav. But the Yadavs refused to accept the transaction and started claiming the rights of the said *watan*. Akoji, thus put up a complaint before Shambhaji II who upheld Akoji's rights.³¹ Thus the sale and purchase of *patil* rights due to family feud, financial instability, etc. led to the presence of more than one *patil* in a village. When the patilship was enjoyed by several members of the *patil's* family, the elder branch always enjoyed *huqs* and privileges on the basis of '*vadilpan*' or rights of seniority. Thus according to R. N. Goodine. "in most villages the patilship has been divided among the great number of sharers and the increasing families of those shares have caused it to be still further sub-divided and as each individual lays claim to his share in the produce of *watan* they collectively present more than the appearance of a beggarly mob of clamourants who by their feuds greatly retard the objectives of their office."³²

The *patil* was entitled to a number of rights and perquisites. One-tenth of the revenue of the village was appropriated by the *patil* and *kulkarni*, their share being 2:1. The *patil* was also entitled to a share in the produce of almost every section of the village community. For example, the weaver was to give a cotton rug; the oil miller, a quarter ser of oil; the cobbler, a pair of shoes; the *mahar*,

a pile of bamboo sticks; etc.³³ Some of the *huqs* and privileges of the *patil* were: a) *Khurda* (cash payments)- a share in the total revenue of the village which was determined by the state.³⁴ b) Services - the *patil* was entitled to receive free services from the *mahars* artisans and peasants for private purposes.³⁵ c) *Manpan* - the *patil* enjoyed rights of ritual precedence or seniority rights over other members of the community on festive occasions. During the *Pola* festival, the bullock of the *patil* was to lead while the rest followed behind. He was also entitled to receive the holy cake on the *holi* festival, *tilgul* during the *Samkrant* festival, etc. d) Payment in kind - the *patil* was entitled to receive some grain from each holding. Some of the payments in kind were *phaski* or a handful of corn, *hurda* or unripe jowar, etc.. He was also entitled to receive a share in the articles produced by every artisan in the village.³⁶

Thus the *patil* enjoyed a vast number of *huqs* or privileges and *lajimas* or dues, the former was a legal sanction that is it was related to rights while the latter was customary and optional. In addition to their *huqs* and *lajimas* which varied from region to region, the *patil* also possessed the rights to dispose off the '*gatkul jamin*' or lands of extinct families and '*pad jamin*' or waste lands of the village.³⁷ But the *patil* could not arbitrarily sell or give away such lands without the consent of the village community.

These rights and privileges and the nature land rights held by the him entitled the *patil* to enjoy a superior and privileged position in the village community. The remunerations enjoyed by the *patil* made his office a luacreative one. Being the principal village office the *patil* had a number of duties to perform, the failure of which could lead to the confiscation of his *watan*.³⁸

The *patil* was assisted by a *Chaugula* in the administration of the village i.e. in collection of land revenue, looking after the private store-houses of the villages, etc.. Some of the rights and perquisites of the *chaugulki watan* were as follows : a) An allownace at the rate of Rs.1/4 per Rs. 100 of the village revenue in cash was to be collected from the village. b) *Faski* was to be levied on sale of corn in the markets. c) Butter and vegetables were to be received from the village on the anniversary ceremonies on the death of parents. d) Oil at the rate of 9 takas was to be received from every oil press. e) One goat was to be taken on *Dushera*. f) 25 leaves from each leaf seller every day. g) A pair of shoes from the shoe-maker. h) Services of one *mahar* for menial work every year. i) Betel nut and tobacco were to be taken from the *banian's* shops.³⁹ All these emoluments were subject to regional variations.

KULKARNI

The *Kulkarni* who was the village accountant was also known as *Gavkulkarni*, *Lekhamvritti* and *Gramlekhi*. According to A.R Kulkarni, the *kulkarni* was not an invariable feature of every village in Maharashtra which was mainly due to the dearth of literate persons in the village available for clerical jobs and also due to the limited nature of the duties that he had to perform in every village.⁴⁰ Sometimes as much as eleven villages came under the charge of one *kulkarni*.⁴¹ But in 1818 when the British conquered the Maratha country they found that the office of the *kulkarni* was a flourishing one and they retained it as an essential office for the government specially in the maintenance of revenue accounts and records.

The *kulkarni* who was invariably a *Brahman* was required to maintain accounts, records of land held by each cultivator, accounts of the revenue which was due from cultivators and the arrears to be paid by them.⁴² It was also the duty of the *kulkarni* to attract peasants to the village and extend the area of cultivation. Though only second to the *patil* in terms of seniority and honour, the *kulkarni* also held considerable influence in the village community. According to custom and official regulation, the remuneration of the *kulkarni* was smaller than that of the *patil*, their

share being 2:1. Some of the *huqs* of the *kulkarni* are as follows: a) *Nakhta* or cash payments from the village in addition to his salary. b) *Kalba* or sheaves of fodder per holding. c) *Mahasil* or revenue per holding. d) *Padewari* or free services of a *mahar*. e) *Manawala* or a share in the crops and fruits which first ripen. f) *Vethbegari* or labour extracted from a person without paying for it. A record of 1740 indicates the privileges associated with a *kulkarni watan* : a) The turban granted by the government should be received next to the headman. b) Oil from oil presser or *teli* should be received from each shop daily per 9 *tankas*. c) Water from the water-carrier. d) A bundle of firewood. e) Betel leaves from the betel-leaf seller. f) Music was to be performed in the *kulkarni's* house on the *Diwali* and *Dushera* festivals. g) A share of the offerings dedicated to the shrine of *Mattand*, such as sweets, turmeric powder, etc.⁴³ In this document the term 'next to the *patil*' has been used; indicating that the *huqs* and privileges of the *kulkarni* was inferior to that of the *patil*. In spite of the fact that the *kulkarni* held rights and perquisites that were inferior to that of the *patil*, sometimes the *kulkarni* could become as influential as the *patil* and even eclipse him occasionally.⁴⁴

The appointment of the *kulkarni* required the approval of both the state and the village community. There are a number of instances where the village conferred the office of the

kulkarni on a person without seeking the approval of the king. The king simply issued an order thus ratifying the decision of the villagers.⁴⁵ If the family of the *kulkarni* of a village became extinct, the villagers used to appoint a person for a short period of time till a permanent office bearer could be found. The village council then used to sell the office to a person who was willing to accept it, thus indicating that the office of the *kulkarni* was a saleable one. The proceeds of the sale were utilised for remitting the dues of the village or for other purposes.⁴⁶

The office of the *kulkarni* was not a hereditary one in some parts of the Konkan. For instance when Cheul subha was under the control of the Bijapur rulers, there was no hereditary *kulkarni* in the village of Cheul, the state appointed *huzurdars* for maintaining accounts for which they were paid in cash. When the Marathas acquired Konkan, *kulkarnis* were appointed as village accountants and the earlier salaried posts were abolished.⁴⁷ Sometimes the *kulkarni* indulged in dishonesty like omission of revenue payment in the revenue to records or manipulation of arrears were there were non.⁴⁸ But if the *kulkarni* was found to be failing in his obligations towards the state and the village community, then his *watan* was liable to be confiscated.⁴⁹

SHETE - MAHAJAN

The *Shete* and *Mahajan* were the hereditary officials of the *peth* or market holding land in the village. They were responsible for establishing a new suburb or a market town for which they were entitled to hold hereditary rights and perquisites called the *shetepan watan*. Their payments in cash and kind were similar to that of the village officers and it was mainly the merchants and traders who paid his remuneration. A record belonging to the year 1724 indicates some of the rights of the *mahajanki watan* which was granted by Shambhaji II to Virshat Mane.⁵⁰

As a group the landed *watandars* like the *Deshmukh*, *Deshpande*, *Patil*, *Kulkarni* and *Shete-Mahajan* constituted the superior and privileged section of rural society. These *watandars* who were invested with administrative powers acted as intermediaries between the state and the village. Their power was considerably curtailed by Shivaji in the 17th century by confiscating some of their *watans*, dismantling their fortifications and appointing new officials for revenue collection. In the 18th century, under the Peshwas the position of the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* were further affected when they were relieved of their offices but their perquisites and privileges were continued. But their services were also utilised to act as a check on the state officials

and to maintain records and accounts. The British after the conquest of the Maratha territory set about to restructure the previous arrangements, they tried to modify the system by appointing new officers but they also realised the expediency of doing away with the superior class of the previous regime and established direct relations with the cultivators. They successfully dislodged the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* at the district level but at the village level they realised the importance of the offices of the *patil* and *kulkarni* as an essential and integral part of the village community and it would not be prudent to get rid of them.⁵¹ The proclamation issued on the occupation of the Peshwa's dominion stated that revenue would be collected from the new government, but all property real or personal would be secured to the rightful owners. All *watans* and *inams* and annual stipends and all religious and charitable establishment would be protected.

LOWER CATEGORY OF WATANDARS

MIRASDAR

The term '*miras*' is an Arabic term which originally meant 'patrimony' or hereditary property. It signified land held by a person in hereditary proprietorship, and the holder of the *mirasi* right was called *mirasdar*. According to A.R.Kulkarni, the term *mirasi* is used in Marathi documents to indicate any

kind of hereditary and transferable right acquired by an individual due to descent, purchase, gifts, etc. He was called the *mirasdar* and that his family belongs to a group of a original settlers of the village.⁵² The *mirasdar* was also known as *Mundekari*. in the Konkan area, the term *munda* meaning slum and roots in the unclaimed soil, and *Mundekar* therefore meant the first proclaimer of such land. The *mirasdar* was also called *Thalkari* or *Thalwahik*, the latter were indigenous terms used to indicate a land-owning peasant. The right to hold a hereditary proprietorship over land was the *watan* of the *mirasdar*; he did not lose his right to land even if he deserted his village and returned after a long period of time, for he was the *mirasdar* whose family belonged to a group of original settlers of the village. According to S.N.Sen the *mirasdars* were residents of the village who had permanent proprietary rights in their land and could not be ejected as long as they paid their revenue. The property of the *mirasdar* was hereditary and saleable and even when ejected for non-payment of tax, the *mirasdar* did not lose the right of recovering his ancesetral land.⁵³ In many of the Marathi documents the term *vatani* is often used as a synonym of *miras*; *vatani* is used as an adjective of *watan* and emphasises the term *miras*.⁵⁴ A number of documents refer to *mirasi* and *thalkari watans* belonging to different regions such as Pune, Sattara, Saswad, etc.⁵⁵

The *mirasdar*s have also been referred to as *kunbi*, *mujuri*, *raya* or *kulvadi*. The word *kunbi* is derived from the *kulambi* or *kutumbika* meaning a husbandman or an individual of the agricultural order.⁵⁶ The term *kunbawa* may be an indication of agricultural work performed by a *mirasdar* who had to pay a land tax to the government. There also existed *kunbis* who were tenant cultivators and who did not possess any permanent claim over land. He could acquire the status of a *mirasdar* when he acquired proprietary rights over land. For eg. Sivji Patel and Mankoji Bhos of *mauje* Tadali in *taluka* Ranjangaon in *prant* Junnar sold their *mirasi watan* of 10 *bighas* of irrigated land to a *kunbi*.⁵⁷ Thus by transferring the land of the *mirasdar* to the *kunbi*, the latter now acquired the status of a *mirasdar* holding hereditary rights in land.

There was also another category of cultivators called *Uparis* who were temporary residents of a village. They were migratory peasants who had left their villages due to famine, devastations caused by wars, drought, etc. and many of them worked as temporary peasants on *inam* lands owned by the village officers and *mirardars*, or on the *gatkul jamin* or on government land.⁵⁸ The *uparis* could also claim hereditary proprietary rights over land or acquire *mirasi* rights just like the *kunbis* and therefore were entitled to become permanent residents of the village. According to Elphinstone, an *upari* could become a *mirasdar* by paying a *nazar* or a

registration fee.⁵⁹ The grant of *inam* land or rent free land to the village officers by Shivaji and his successors led to the growth of the *kunbis* and *uparis* who worked as tenants and temporary cultivators on the *inam* lands and government lands. Many of them were also encouraged to become *mirasdars* by giving them *inam* land for digging wells, constructing canals, etc. Eg. Chatoji, Ramoji and Kanhoji Shivaji of *mauje* Rahalwade in *taraf* Karhepathar were granted *inam* land because they constructed a well for irrigating soil.⁶⁰

Monstuart Elphinstone in his report points out to the existence of both the *mirasdars* and *uparis*. According to him "a large portion of the *ryots* are proprietors of their estates subject to the payment of a fixed land tax and that their property is hereditary and saleable. They are never dispossessed of their land as long as they pay their tax and even if they are dispossessed they have the right of reclaiming their estate on paying the dues of the government. Though their land tax is fixed, the government loaded it with impositions and they generally paid more than an *Opre*. With all the exactions of the late Maratha government, the share of the *ryot* must have amounted to more than half of the produce of all the lands, but experience shows that men will keep their estates even after becoming a losing concern, until they are obliged to part with them from absolute want or until oppression has lasted so long that the advantages of

proprietorship in better times have been forgotten.⁶¹ W.H.Sykes also conforms to the existence of the *mirasdars* and the *uparis*.⁶² The reports of the British administrators are unanimous in their view that the *mirasdars* and *uparis* were two important groups of cultivators. From Elphinstone's report it seems that the *mirasdars* had to pay various cesses and impostions other than the normal land revenue and were some times also subject to the oppressive activities of the bigger *watandars*. But inspite of it they generally never parted with their *vatani* unless under absolute financial instability. From Elphinstone's report it can be infered that the Maratha government made the *mirasdar* pay more than an *upari*.

W. Chaplin⁶³ also claims the exsistence of the *mirasdars* and *uparis* and that the *mirasdar* who usually lets out his land to his relations and co-partners is usually considered as both the landlord and the farmer, for as the land tax is so high that it absorbs all the landlords rent, little surplus is left unless the cultivation of land is undertaken by the *mirasdar* himself. He also points out that a *mirasdar* usually paid 50% of his produce as tax while an *upari* paid much less, "for the *uparis* having but a precarious interest must be compensated by a higher profit." Thus even W.Chaplin agrees to the high rate of taxation that was levied on the *mirasdar*.

A variety of taxes other than the normal land tax was levied on the *mirasdar*, thus enhancing the burden of taxation on the cultivators. The state's share varied generally from two-fifth to a half of the total produce. The net product resulting from agriculture was shared by the state, hereditary officials and artisans, the entire burden thus falling on the *mirasdar*s, not withstanding the uncertainty of rains, famine, warfare etc. The following are some of the taxes and miscellaneous taxes that were levied occasionally and regularly on the *mirasdar* by the Maratha rulers :

Inampatti,⁶⁴ *Miraspati*,⁶⁵ *Sinhasanpatti*,⁶⁶ *Sadilwarpatti*,⁶⁷ *Kharcapatti*,⁶⁸ *Nuksanpatti*,⁶⁹ *Lagnataka*,⁷⁰ *Gadevani*,⁷¹ *Karjaepatti*,⁷² *Dasrapatti*,⁷³ *Mejwanipatti*,⁷⁴ *Gavtaka*,⁷⁵ *Mohimpatti*,⁷⁶ *Toranbheti*,⁷⁷ etc. The list of taxes mentioned above indicate that the *mirasdar* seemed to have provided the largest share of revenue to the state.

In order to escape the burden of taxation and other miscellaneous duties, the *mirasdar*s often resorted to temporary abandonment of their villages. The *Deshmukh* of Wai imposed exorbitant taxes on the cultivators as a result of which they left the villages and migrated to another village.⁷⁸ Sometimes when the prospect of harvest was bad, the *patil* along with the *mirasdar*s and *kunbis* absconded even without waiting for the harvest. The government therefore asked the *uparis* to cultivate the *miras* lands and asked them

to pay the revenue that was normally paid by the *mirasdars* under such conditions of migration.⁷⁹ There are also instances of *mirasdars* complaining against taxation by the state officials. For example one Niloji Nilkanth Rao of *mauje* Chambali in Pune, complained to the government against Ragho Bhaskar who imposed 25 *hons* of *miraspatti* on him. As per the agreement this tax was not to be levied and collected from the *mirasdars* holding lands in Pune.⁸⁰ Such migration and abandonment often led to the depopulation of villages, it was at such unstable periods that the government encouraged *uparis* and tenant cultivators to cultivate lands for which the government gave them remissions like concessional rates of taxation, loans, *inam* land, etc. Such concessions were also given when the *mirasdar's* land was affected by enemy incursions, when the aggressors carried away the cattle and other property of the peasants. For example the Mughal *Sardar* Shaibuddin Khan invaded Konkan in 1682 and carried away 4000 cattle thus affecting agricultural operations.⁸¹ The attacks of the Siddis and the Portugese caused many cultivators in villages like Kude and Dapoli in *maule* Cheul to desert their villages.⁸² During such calamities cultivation was encouraged by the following methods: concessions in tax, seeds for sowing,⁸³ loans without interest to be recovered in easy instalments,⁸⁴ and distribution of land among the new settlers of the affected villages.⁸⁵

Other than the demand in revenue and other customary levies; famine, drought and uncertainty of rains also affected the condition of the *mirasdars* which induced many of them to sell their bullocks, *watan*-lands, ploughs, etc. due to indebtedness.⁸⁶ During such periods of natural calamities, indebtedness of the *mirasdars* was a major feature of rural society. The *mirasdar* not only had to meet the demands of the government but they also had to give customary shares in kind to the village officers and the artisans. Though they resorted to money-lending, village tradition prevented the money-lender from exploiting the *mirasdars* unscrupulously beyond a limit since for instance the principle of *dam duppat* demanded that the rate of interest cannot exceed the capital.⁸⁷ (very often the *mirasdar* could not repay his debts inspite of the principle of *dam duppat*, in such cases he resorted to the sale of his land, cattle, implements, etc.) The cultivators had to depend on the moneylenders for obtaining credit and very often the *shete* and *mahajan* of the village assumed the role of money lender.⁸⁸ The rate of interest varied from 18% to 31%, many a time it was beyond the capacity of the cultivator to repay his debt. The absence of any other source of income other than cultivation, high land tax, warfare, unpaid forced labour,⁸⁹ drought and famine brought limitations on the cultivator to repay his debts. In Cheul many of the *mirasdars* were compelled to sell off their land and house in the 17th century due to indebtedness.⁹⁰

The government did not remain a blind eye to the illegal exactions and calamities that were faced by the *mirasdars*. According to Sabhasad, Shivaji endeavoured to protect the cultivators from the tyrannical exactions of the hereditary *pargana* officials.⁹¹ His policies were later followed by the Peshwas. Newly cultivated land was assessed at a normal rate. Concessions in amount were given for three to four years that is, half of a ruka per *bigha* in the first year, a quarter in the second, a half in the third, and three fourths in the fourth year.⁹² Shivaji had once asked the officials of Prabhavati to advance money to the *mirasdars* for purchasing bullocks, seeds, ploughs, etc.⁹³

The government did not intervene in the purchase, sale and transfer of *mirasi watan* while the consent of the government was required regarding the sale purchase and transfer of the *watans* of the higher category of *watandars*. A *mirasdar* could sell his land or a part of it when the need arose and the purchaser could be the resident of another village. Such sale and purchase of *mirasi watan* had to be attested by the village officials like the *deshmukh*, *deshapande*, *patil*, *kulkarni* and other members of the village community. Thus the government did not interfere in the proprietary rights of the *mirasdar*, the *mirasdars* therefore held complete proprietary rights over their *mirasi watan*.⁹⁴ Although the government did not generally interfere in the

proprietary rights of the *mirasdar*, it was the government's obligation to secure protection (from enemy incursions, etc.) for the *mirasdar* as long as he provided the revenue. For example when the *miras* right of *mirasdar* was infringed upon by the *patil* and other members of the village, the government asked the *pargana* officials to look into the matter and stop the infringement.⁹⁵ When the population of a village increased so much that it resulted in a shortage of house sites, the government ordered the local officers such as the *deshmukh*, *deshpande* of the *pargana* and the *patil* of the village to convert the lands of the *mirasdar* situated near the 'inhabited area' into house sites and to compensate the *mirasdars* by giving them the *gatkul jamin* or lands of the extinct families.⁹⁶

There are instances of village officials owning *miras* lands which they usually cultivated themselves or got it cultivated by tenants. The *patil* was entitled to appropriate the *gatkul jamin* or lands of the families of *mirasdars* who had left the village and who have become extinct.⁹⁷ Janapa Vani who was a *Chaugula* held *mirasi* land in his village Tadavali in Koregaon district.⁹⁸ Timoji Namaji Kulkarni at Loni purchased land by paying 40 *hons* to a *mirasdar*.⁹⁹ A cultivator in Kudal *pargana* sold 15 *bighas* of land to Naik *deshmukh* of that *pargana*.¹⁰⁰ Due to a famine, Kumaji a *mirasdar* of Junnar was compelled to sell 10 *bighas* of land

for 150 *hons* to Abaji Sondev of *mauje Tandali*.¹⁰¹ The above examples indicate that a group of big land owners along with the village *watandars* and money lenders were purchasing land from *mirasdars* who were in debt due to unstable conditions like drought, war and financial instability which in turn undermined their position and led to a decline in their *watani* rights. Such a practice in turn led to the conversion of the higher category of *watandars* such as the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* into big landlords which thus led to the increase in the number of dependent peasants losing their land rights and social status.

BALUTEDARS AND ALUTEDARS

The emergence of a class of village servants and the custom of paying the artisans and menials by allowances of grain often accompanied by a small grant of land was very ancient and coincides with the beginning of the farmer's settlement in ancient India. During the period of the second urban decay, jobless artisans of the urban areas migrated to the rural area to seek their livelihood and catering to the needs of the farmers for carrying out their agricultural operations.¹⁰²

According to Baden Powell (in his book 'The Indian Village Community') the rural servants were employed by the

village on a fixed remuneration as well as perquisites in kind.¹⁰³ Karl Marx pointed out that "the dozen individuals, i.e. the *balutedars* were maintained at the expense of the whole village community, that they were the servants of the village."¹⁰⁴ Max Weber conforms to the existence of village servants, "like the craftsmen, priest, barber, laundryman, etc. who are not paid for their work in detail but stand at the service of the community in return for a share in the land or in the harvest. They are attached to the village and are essentially village serfs, receiving a share in the products or money payments. This we call Demiurgic mode of labour", thus claiming the existence of the demiurgic mode of employment.¹⁰⁵ Though Fukazawa agrees with Max Weber regarding the services of the *balutedars*, the term serfs cannot be applied to the *balutedars* of Maharashtra since they were not only entitled to a share of the produce as a matter of right but were also active participants in the deliberations of the village council as their service was the *watan* of the *balutedar* which also entitled him to sit in the *Gotsahba* of the local assembly despite his low caste status. In a record of 1731, the *balutedars* of village Garade, *taraf* Karhepathar, *pargana* Poona were witnesses to the grant of land awarded to a peasant by the village assembly.¹⁰⁷ Such servants cannot be called serfs since serfs cannot be the sharers of the produce and at the same time acting as important participants in the decision making process.

According to A.S. Altekar in western Indian communities, the *baluta* or the grain share system was followed. Under this system a share of grain was paid by the farmer to the village artisans every year at the time of the harvest. Payment was made in kind and not in cash and each farmer was to give a certain share to each of the village servants. He includes the *chaugula*, astrologer, goldsmith, blacksmith, carpenter, potter, leather-worker, barber, *mahar* or menial, washerman etc. in the list of the twelve *balutedars*.¹⁰⁸ According to S.N. Sen, the artisans became *watan* holders and expected that they and their descendants should enjoy a monopoly of their particular trade in the village and their right was to be recognised by all. They enjoyed a hereditary monopoly of their trade within the village and in the harvest time got a share of grain or *baluta* from each cultivator.¹⁰⁹ For him the twelve *balutedars* included *Mahar* (village menial), *Sutar* (carpenter), *Lohar* (blacksmith), *Chambhar* (leather worker), *Parit* (washer-man), *Kumbhar* (potter), *Nhavi* (barber), *mang* (ropemaker), *Kulkarni* (village accountant), *Joshi* (astrologer), *Gurao* (Hindu shrine keeper) and *Potdar* (money-assayer).¹¹⁰

All the above scholars seem to be unanimous in their view that the artisans were the servants of the village and were employed by the village community as a whole. They also agree to the fact that these artisans were not paid in cash

but in kind, that is, a part of the produce at the time of the harvest which was called *buluta*; and that the service was hereditary, fixed and monopolistic. According to A.R.Kulkarni, A.I. Chiecherov seems to be correct in his assessment of the *baluta* system for according to him the craftsmen were maintained by the community, receiving from it, a remuneration in kind paid for the services rendered by them. He calls this system a collective maintenance of the artisans by the village communities in the 17th-19th century. For him the traditional grouping of the *balutedars* into high middle and small was on the basis of actual contribution of the artisans made to the village's productive life and did not correspond to the social standing of the *balutedars*.¹¹¹ This can be seen in the fact that the *balutedars* of the higher category who received the maximum remuneration included the *sutar* and the *mahar* whose social ranking was low, while on the other hand the *joshi* or the astrologer who belonged to a high caste was ranked as the *balutedar* of the lower category. The earnings of a goldsmith might be more than that of a carpenter or a blacksmith but in the hierarchy of the *balutedars*, the goldsmith stood only at the lowest rung. This shows that it was the utility of services and not the social standing or remuneration that determined the place of the *balutedar* in the traditional grouping. This was one of the main features of the *baluta* system of Maharashtra.

The *baluta* system seems to have been a well organised system in the Maratha country since the early medieval period. The earliest reference to the term *baluta* is found in the Jnyaneshwari belonging to the 13th century.¹¹² Scholars have not been unanimous in their view regarding the etymology of the term *baluta*. According to Molesworth it is the corruption of a Kannada word, a compound of *bal* (right hand side and *khud* (to give) meaning that the *baluta* was given as the privilege of the right hand.¹¹³ According to A.R. Kulkarni the root of the term *baluta* can be traced to the Sanskrit word *bali* (the ryot) and *apatya* (progeny). The village was regarded as 'cow' and the crop grown in it was its 'udder' (*kaas*) and the *balutedars* were the calves drawing at the udder of their mother, the village or 'cow' for their living. The *balutedars* are therefore classified under the three *kaas* (rows) : major (*thorli*), middle (*madhali*) and minor (*dhakti*), according to the amount of the village crop shared by them.¹¹⁴

The *balutedars* can be broadly divided into artisans, servants and religious servants. The division is as follows :
a) Village Artisans and Professionals - carpenter, potter, blacksmith, barber, washerman, shoe maker, etc. b) General Servants - *mahar*, *mang*, *torala* and *ramoshi* who mainly performed menial work and were indispensable to the village

community. c) Religious Servants - *joshi*, *gurav*, *thakur* (priest of the tribe), *jangam* (priest of the lingayats) and *mulana* (muslim priest). These *balutedars* met the religious needs of the people.

The traditional grouping of the twelve *balutedars* on the basis of the utility of services to the village community was as follows : a) *Thorali Kaas* - *sutar*, *lohar*, *mahar* and *mang*. b) *Madhali Kaas* - *kumbhar* (potter), *chambhar* (cobbler), *parit* and *nhavi*. c) *Dhakti Kaas* - *bhat* (bard), *mulana*, *gurav* and *koli* (water carrier).

There was no uniformity regarding the composition of the *balutedars* for they were recruited according to the needs of a particular community and according to the utility of their services to the villagers. According to S.N. Sen, the twelve *balutedars* included the carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leatherworker, rope maker, barber, washerman, village accountant, astrologer, hindu shrine-keeper, money assayer and *mahar*. For him money assaying was usually done by the goldsmith, so the money assayer would be put as goldsmith.¹¹⁵ For Altekar the servants included in the twelve *balutedars* were *chaugula*, *mang*, *parit*, *mahar*, *torala* (bearer of burden) *mulana* and *nhavi*.¹¹⁶ Elphinstone describes the *balutedars* as village officers who were called the '*barabalute*' in which he included the astrologer, priest, carpenter, barber, goldsmith

and *mahar*.¹¹⁷ Grant Duff excludes the village accountant and money assayer and includes the *bhat* or bard and *mulana*.¹¹⁸

Thus the above scholars are not unanimous in their view regarding the composition of the *barabalutas*. While S.N. Sen includes the *kulkarni*, Altekar includes the *changula*, *mulana* and *torala* to his list while Grant Duff includes the *bhat* in his list. In spite of this difference in view regarding the composition of the *barabaluta*, the *balutedars* who were generally included in the list of the *barabaluta* were the *sutar*, *lohar*, *kumbhar*, *chambar*, *mang*, *nhavi*, *joshi*, *mahar*, *sonar*, *mulana* and *gurav*. These *balutedars* existed in most villages since their services were required by almost every village community. For example the *lohar* and *sutar* catered to the needs of the cultivators by making ploughs and other agricultural implements, the *chambar* supplied pots and other earthenware required for various purposes, the *mulana*, *gurav* and *joshi* catered to the religious needs of the community while the *mahar* acted as a messenger and also performed menial work for the village officers, *mirasdars* and other artisans.

This traditional grouping of the artisans into three rows and the composition of the *barabaluta* differed from region to region in Maharashtra. For instance in a record of 1799 belonging to the Saswad region the division was as

follows : a) Major row - carpenter, leather worker, rope maker and *mahar*. b) Middle row - potter, barber, washerman, blacksmith. c) Minor row - astrologer, shrine keeper, goldsmith, masjid keeper.¹¹⁹ In the Indapur *pargana* there were fourteen *balutedars*, the *chambar* was placed in the major row instead of the middle row and the *mang* was placed in the middle row while the *sonar*, *joshi*, and *ramoshi* (village guard) were included in the minor row. The *bhat* was excluded from this list ¹²⁰. Thus it can be seen that the scheme of gradation of the *balutedars* and sometimes their number including remuneration varied from region to region and village to village.

There was another group of artisans and servants called *Alutedars* whose services were not as important as that of the *balutedars*. Their services were neither essential nor universal in Maharashtrian villages; only some of them were found occasionally in some villages. Some of the *alutedars* were *shimpi* (tailor), *koli* (water carrier), *mali* (gardener), *teli* (oil presser), *dwaryagosavi* (drum beater) and *tamboli* (betel leaf seller). These *alutedars* were not regularly found in the Maharashtrian villages.

There were two classes of *balutedars*, the *watandar balutedar* or *mirasdar balutedar* and the *upari balutedar*. The terms '*watan*' and '*miras*' meaning native country, patrimony

or inheritance indicate that the former had a permanent right to work and receive remunerations in the village. Such a right was called the *watan* or *miras* of the *balutedar* which was permanent, heritable and saleable. The term *upari* meaning outsider or stranger indicates that the latter did not possess a hereditary monopoly of a profession. Just like the *upari* peasants, the *upari balutedars* were migratory and temporary artisans. But the *upari balutedar* could also become a *watandar balutedar* by buying a part or a whole of the *watan* of a *watandar balutedar* or when the *watan* had been lying vacant for a considerable period of time and the *upari* had worked in the village for a long period of time. The clear distinction between an *upari* and a *watandar balutedar* is seen in the record of 1763. It relates to a dispute over a *loharki* or blacksmithery *watan* in Koradh village of Junnar province between a family of blacksmiths and group of families holding the carpentry *watan*. The carpenter claimed that both the *loharki* and *sutarki watan* belonged to them. They related to the local governor that one of the members of their family had earlier been engaged in blacksmithery in the village and so the *loharki watan* actually belonged to them. But the carpenter blacksmith or *lohar sutar* gave up the profession and migrated to a nearby town due to the ill-treatment meted out to him by the local officers. The villagers therefore brought another blacksmith called Satva from another village to continue the work of blacksmithery in Koradh. This was

objected by the group of carpenters of Koradh and so the villagers asked them to continue the blacksmithery themselves and pay the new blacksmith the remuneration for the work he had already done. But Satva did not agree to this arrangement. He claimed that the *loharki watan* was his on the ground that the *watan* had earlier been held by his family since his grandfather's time. But his father had left the village due to famine and settled down in another village where he was brought up. So when the carpenter-blacksmith left the village Koradh he was approached by the village officers of Koradh to come back to their village since the *loharki watan* had belonged to him. The matter was referred to a *Panchayat* consisting of the *deshmukh*, *deshpande* and *patils* of nearby villages. In its verdict the *Panchayat* stated that there was no evidence in the statement of the villagers to show that Satva was a *watandar lohar*, nor was there any evidence to prove that his father and grandfather resided in Koradh earlier. Satva simply practised blacksmithery as an *upari* for which he received the *baluta* remuneration. He enjoyed the benefits from the blacksmithery for only 32 years and therefore could have no claims to the *watan*. On the other hand there was evidence to show that the carpenter's grandfather and great grandfather lived in the village for three generations and that the blacksmith who left the village was a carpenter by caste.¹²¹

From the above document it can be inferred that a) there was a kind of occupational mobility that was prevalent amongst the *balutedars*, i.e. a *balutedar* could perform or engage himself simultaneously into occupations. b) there was a clear distinction between one who rendered a particular service which was his *watan* and one who rendered the same service but did not have any claims to the *watan*, i.e. it was a *gairwatani*. c) the absentee *watandar* blacksmith did not demand any remuneration for the period he was absent while the *upari* blacksmith received remuneration for the period he had worked. There are a number of instances to show the hereditary claim of the *balutedar* over his *watan* and which was duly recognised by the village community.¹²²

Thus like the cultivators the *balutedars* were divided into permanent and temporary residents. The right to perform service and the right to receive remuneration was duly recognised as their *watan* which was heritable, saleable and divisible. The *upari balutedars* did not possess any claim to a *watan* since they were considered as outsiders and temporary residents but they received the same remuneration as the *watandar balutedar* for the services they rendered. For example Sadashiv of Nevase region who was a goldsmith was judged as an *upari* by the village community but he was to receive the *baluta* remuneration for performing the work of goldsmithery.¹²³

Remuneration of the Balutedars :

There were three kinds of remuneration for the *balutedars*. They were as follows : 1) *Baluta* remuneration was both in kind and cash. There were three methods a) the produce of all the peasants were collected in a certain place in the village and each category of *balutedars* got a customary share of the produce. The *patil* was responsible for the collection and distribution of the produce. b) the revenue which was already fixed in kind or cash did not require the peasant to assemble his produce at a given place. Once again, it was the *patil's* responsibility to see that each cultivator paid a certain amount of his produce to each category.¹²⁴ c) when the revenue was paid in cash, each category of *balutedars* would receive a certain amount of cash ranging from Rs. 2.5 to 10 per year. In a document of 1799, the *balutedars* of the major row like the carpenters, leather workers, rope worker and *mahar* received Rs.10 per year as their remuneration; the *balutedars* of the middle row like the potter, barber, washerman, and blacksmith received Rs.5 and the *balutedars* of the minor row like the astrologer, shrine keeper, goldsmith and *mulana* received Rs.2.5 as remuneration.¹²⁵ 2) *Huqs* (rights), *Lajimas* (perquisites) or *Manpan* (privileges) - the *balutedars* were entitled to a number of rights and privileges which varied among the different kind of *balutedars*. A record of 1738 points out

some of the rights of the *mahar* and his services towards the *patil*. The following were some of the rights, obligations and privileges of the *mahar* : a) the *mahar* was to perform 12 to 16 hours of service at the *patil's* house, b) he should work on the *patil's* land as and when required, c) it was the *mahar's* right to collect whatever was fallen on the ground, d) The *mahar* should bring a bundle of wood in exchange for food during festivals, e) the carcasses of buffaloes, cows, etc. that belonged to the village officers. rightly went to the *mahar*, f) the *prasad* of the *holi* festival should be carried by the *koli* and the *gadshi* or vocalist which in turn was to be received by the *mahar*, g) the *patil* was to give a piece of cloth to the *mahar*.¹²⁶ Another record of 1766 indicates the *huqs* of the *mahars* of Parna region, the offerings dedicated to the temple was to be given to the *mahar*, carcasses of the cattle belonging to the *mang* was to be given to the *mahar* etc,¹²⁷. 3) *Inam* land : *Inam* land was given only to the *watandar balutedars* which was as a rule cultivated by themselves. The *mahars* enjoyed the *maharik* and *harati* lands, the former was awarded to the *mahar* when they performed services towards the government¹²⁸ like cultivating lands belonging to the government and the latter was awarded to the *mahar* for attending to the *patil* and *kulkarni*.¹²⁹ *Inam* lands were also given to various artisans and professionals like musicians, dancers, etc. There is also an example of a sweeper receiving an *Inam* land of 1.5 hectares.¹³⁰

Thus, the burden of paying the *baluta* remuneration mainly fell on the *mirasdars*. The *balutedars* were also entitled to *huqs* and *manpan* which was looked after by the entire village including the village officers. The amount of remuneration was fixed per *watan*, since each category of *watandar balutedar* held *watan* rights. When a *watan* was divided amongst several families performing the same occupation, what was divided was the amount of remuneration and not the sphere of activity. The total number of emoluments were divided among the families, the original amount of remuneration and emoluments remained the same as before.¹³¹ The division of a *baluta watan* amongst its holders did not result in any extra burden on the peasants which was probably one of the reasons as to why the division and sale of *baluta watan* did not require the consent of the government or the village community. It was merely an agreement between the two groups; a confirmation by the local assembly was required for recognition of the division of rights and privileges of the claimants.

An important feature of the *baluta* system of medieval Maharashtra is that the *balutedars* were important members of the *Gotsabha*. They took part in the deliberations regarding various disputes relating to *watan*, caste, etc. In a letter dated 1731 the carpenter, gardener, washerman, blacksmith, barber, *mahar*, etc. were witnesses to the grant of land to

one Jagdale of village Garade by the local assembly.¹³² V.T. Gune in his book 'The Judicial System of the Marathas' cites a number of documents pointing out to the participation of the *balutedars* attending the *Gotsabha* and the *Panchayat* between the 13th and 18th centuries.¹³³ Even the *mahars* and *mangs* who were considered as untouchables and who had held a low social status took part in the decision making process.¹³⁴ Their role in the village community was considered as one of the most important and useful for they performed services such as guarding the village boundaries, skinning the dead cattle and making ropes, acting as watchmen and carrying the luggage of the village officers. The traditional work of the *mahars* can also be inferred from the life of Chokhamela who was a bhakti poet of the 13th century. Some of the duties of the *mahar* was to carry mangoes to Pandharpur on the orders of the *patil*, dragging dead cattle out of the village, making proclamations to the villagers asking them to congregate in the centre of the village for an announcement.¹³⁵ Grant Duff accords to the *mahar* an important role, he claims that the *mahar* "acts as scout, as guide, frequently as watchman, he cleans travellers' horses and is obliged if required to carry the travellers' baggage; he is the principal guardian of the village boundaries; in Maharashtra the *mahars* are very active, useful and intelligent race of people".¹³⁶ The *mahars* and *mangs* despite their low social ranking were also associated with some of

the social and religious activities of the village. For example, the mahars and mangs of village Muruda partook of a common meal during the *shravan* month for changing the sacred thread.¹³⁷

The *balutedars* had to pay a number of taxes and miscellaneous duties to the various *pargana* and village officers which were mostly in kind. Some of the following taxes were : *Megastaka* or a tax on the weavers; *Paiposi* or a tax on the cobbler; *Telpatti* or a tax on the oil presser; a blanket per loom to be given by the weaver, etc. All the artisans paid a tax of 1/4 of a *taka* annually. Other miscellaneous taxes were *Kharcapatti*, *Ghartaka*, *Jangampatti*, *Dasrapatti*, *Gavtaka*, *Vethbegari*, etc.¹³⁸

Thus the *balutedars* were regarded as important members of the village community who were not employed by individual families but by the entire village community. They served the villagers whenever their services were required. For example if a *mirasdar* required a new plough then he would require the services of the carpenter and the blacksmith and provide them with the necessary material for making the plough. They received the regular payment or *balute* from all the cultivators, the amount of which was customarily fixed per *watan* i.e. per *loharki* or *sonarki watan*, this remuneration which was mostly in kind and occasionally in cash was paid

to the *balutedars* twice a year.¹³⁹ In addition to their remuneration the *balutedars* were entitled to certain perquisites and privileges like customary shares of offerings dedicated to the village temples, etc. Thus the *balutedars* were collectively maintained by the village as a whole, they did not cater to the needs of a particular family i.e. they were not the servants of individual families but functioned as servants of the village as a whole except for the *Upadhyay* or the *Brahman* priest who performed religious rights for specific families who held a high caste status.¹⁴⁰

There was thus a clear hierarchy and stratification amongst the *watandars* of the village community. The higher category of *watandars* such as the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil*, *kulkarni* and *shete-mahajan* constituted the dominant class which received its wealth from control over the rural economy appropriating the surplus of the rural produce while at the same time holding land as *inam* and *miras*, receiving a share of the state revenue and customary perquisites from the village community. The *mirasdars* and *balutedars* who constituted the lower category of *watandars* stood at the bottom of the hierarchy and occupied an inferior position in rural society. The *mirasdars* not only had to give a part of their produce to the hereditary officers and the artisans in return for their services but were also entitled to pay a number of customary and miscellaneous taxes other than the

normal land tax. The *balutedars* on the other hand had to perform services towards the entire village community for which they received a customary share of the produce of the *mirasdar* while also paying some taxes and levies. But it must be remembered that both the categories of *watandars* inspite of differences in income, wealth and status played an important role in the deliberations of the village assembly in the settlement of disputes relating to various issues like caste, *watan*, inter-village disputes, etc.

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Chapter III

THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

WATANDARS AND THE STATE

The *watandari* was an 'article of private property' for both the categories of *watandars*; the holder could sell, divide and transfer a whole or part of his *watan* as and when the need arose. But the ultimate authority to recognise ownership of *watan* lay with the King.

Inspite of constituting the privileged section of rural society and inspite of enjoying considerable power and authority over the village community, the higher category of *watandars* were subject to royal control. There existed various customary rules and regulations that curbed the functioning of the higher category of *watandars*. The intervention of the state was clearly felt in the *watandar's* territory through the assessment and measurement of land by the state officials. This was one of the main factors that led to the absence of a complete administrative autonomy enjoyed by the hereditary officers. It was the state which ultimately retained the right to confer, confiscate, transfer and renew the *watan* of a *watandar*; such actions of grants, remissions, confiscations, etc., was an important instrument through which the state sought to control the *watandars*. The extent of imperial control can be seen from the fact that when a possessor asked for a recognition or renewal of *watan*, the

authority he addressed himself to, was the king. A document dated 1731 shows an order of Shambhaji II to the *Deshmukhs* and *Deshpandes* of *pargana* Mulgund that the *deshmukhi watan* of the said *pargana* is continued to Sidoji Hindurao Ghorpade, along with a grant of the village Atikate. Similar orders to 37 revenue officers are also referred to.¹ In another record of 1732, Shambhaji II grants the renewal of *Nadgaudki watan* of Malkapur to Yashwantrao Malaji Gaikwad.² The following document dated 17th April 1737 shows at the request of Ramchandra Naik Punda, Shambhaji II continued the *jotish kulkarni watan* of village Todoli to him. Formerly during the Adilshahi reign the said *watan* belonged to one Bapuji Janardan Kshirsagar, who being unable to pay government dues, had sold it to Suryaji Ghatge Deshmukh. Shramji Naik Punde, father of Ramachandra Naik Punde bought this *watan* from Ghatge Deshmukh. But in his absence at Jingi, there was a break in the possession of the *watan*.³ There are several such documents that indicate the fact that it was the state which possessed the right to sanction the renewal of a *watan*.⁴

Granting of fresh *watans* was another method through which the state exercised its prerogative. These actions of grants, omissions and confiscation distinguished the royalty from other *watandars* for the king himself was a *watandar*.⁵ There is also an instance of the state owning half of the *patilki watan* of mauje Mal Wadgaon.⁶ There are a number of

instances which show that fresh *watan* grants were made to various people for their services. In a record dated 1748 Shambhaji II grants Santapa and Kalapa Kalantare the *shetye watan* of Wadi Ratnagiri for their devoted services rendered to him when he made a pilgrimage to Wadi Ratnagiri. The perquisites of the *watan* are mentioned in detail.⁷ In another record, Nilo Raghunath Kulkarni had started a new *peth* in a village and had established a market there. He was thus given the *mahajanki watan* for setting up a market there.⁸ A very interesting document dated September 1742 throws light on the conferment of a new grant to a servant. It is as follows: "Dwarkoji Yadav had highly pleased Queen Jijabai and King Sambhaji by doing everything which a dutiful servant should do, indeed Sambhaji felt that a servant should be like Dwarkoji. The King and Queen therefore, conferred on Dwarkoji the *naiki watan* of Kolhapur comprising of sixty-one villages. The names of the villages as well as the exact rights and perquisites to the *watan* are given in detail. Dwarkoji was also given a plot of land in the town of Kolhapur to build a house suitable to his position."⁹ In another document dated 1742 Bal Joshi, the royal astrologer had predicted the exact date of the fall of Shirol, which was besieged by the army of Shambhaji II. As the prediction came true Sambhaji II granted him the *sarjotishi watan* in his State. The grant was Rs. 2 per hundred of octroi duties, Re. 1 for marriage and half a rupee for thread ceremony in a *Brahman* family, and in the

case of *Sudras*, half a rupee for a marriage and one quarter of a rupee for remarriage. The collection was to be made throughout the Kingdom.¹⁰ Thus a *watan* could be granted or conferred on anyone by royal authority; the main criteria for such grants was performance of service and anyone could benefit from such acts of generosity of the King. If a *watan* remained vacant for a long period of time, anyone could request for a grant and if found suitable it was granted to him. In a record dated 1752, Shambhaji II grants the *jotishi watan* of the village Nannde to Madobhat Gulawani. This *watan* formerly belonged to one Rambhat Pait. As he died without a male issue and as his widow had no right to adopt the son of her daughter, the *watan* was lying vacant. The King gave the *watan* to Madobhat but insisted that if the widow returned to her place, she should be given maintenance grant out of the *watan* so long as she lived.¹¹ In another instance, one Rakhamji, a peasant from village Borivada made a request to the king to grant him the *magdumki watan* of the same as it was lying vacant. The grant was made at his request.¹² Therefore even a cultivator could lay claim to a *watan* and become the possessor of a *watan* by royal action thus indicating prospects of an upward mobility. Though the recognition of the village community was essential, more important was the legal stamp bearing the king's name. Shivaji created new *watans* by granting rent-free lands under various considerations and according to the nature of service

that was performed.¹³ Shivaji conferred the *patilki watan* on Bukaji Pharzand, his loyal servant,¹⁴ and Ramachandra Naikantha got the *sabnisi watan*.¹⁵ There are numerous examples which indicate some of the fresh grants made by the state.¹⁶

Confiscation of the *watan* of a *watandar* was an important instrument of control which the state sought to retain. A *watandar* could be deprived of his *watan* under various circumstances. Even though the *patil*, *deshmukh* and *deshpande* were considered as important and influential people of their region, their *watans* were liable to be confiscated if they defied imperial authority and their actions did not go unnoticed. For instance, the *watan* of the *Patil* of Ranje was appropriated by the state for his misbehaviour¹⁷ In two documents dated 25th February 1745, Shahu reprimanded the *Deshmukh* and *Deshpande* of *parganas* Jamakhandi and Henegunda for defying Chatrapati Shambhaji II. He asked them to mend their ways.¹⁸ Shivaji had confiscated the *watan* of the *Deshkulkarni* of Poona as he had joined hands with the Mughals.¹⁹ There is also an instance of a *watandar* who was deprived of his *watan* for failure to strictly observe religious practices. Sakho Moreshwar Belsare Joshi Kulkarni was excommunicated and his *watan* was confiscated because he did not observe mourning for a death that had occurred in another branch of his family.²⁰ This indicates that violation

of caste and religious norms by a *watandar* could affect his *watandari* right, thus showing the importance of caste and religion in Maratha society. In case of crimes committed by a *watandar*, remission of *watan* was also a possible punishment. The following document dated 1750-51, records a heinous crime committed by a *Deshmukh* and *Deshpande*. The following action was taken against them : "Laxman Mahadev of Sattara came and informed the *Huzur* that Kondaji Deshmukh and Gomaji Govind Deshpande of *pargana* Kotul along with four to five hundred men committed dacoity at the house of Yado Moreshwar Deshmukh. They plundered Yado's property, killed his brother and robbed himself (Laxman) who was residing in the house, of Rs. 6, 061 and wounded him." A *sanad* containing the following instructions was sent to Krishna Rao Subedar of *pargana* Gangothadi : "Considering that Kondaji Deshmukh and Gomaji Deshpande though *watandars*, had the authority to act in this legal manner, their *watans* were to be placed under attachment. The *huqs* and *lajimas* of the *watan* should therefore be credited to the government. Yado Moreshwar's *deshmukhi* should be continued. Apart from the confiscation of *watans* fines were to be levied on the accused who had to forgo some of their rights and transfer them to the complainants.²¹

For the higher category of *watandars*, disputes were ultimately referred to the *huzur* for arbitration. These

disputes were of various types but mainly regarding possessions or inheritance.²² When a dispute about the *sarnaike watan* arose among Naroji, Jotaji, Hangoji and Bhikaji, they referred it to the government official, the *mamledar* of Panhala who in turn referred it to the *Panchayat* court which finally decided the case. Accordingly a decision was reached at, and Shambhaji II accepted it.²³ The usual practise was that along with the village community the officers of the *Huzur* investigated the cases and gave judgements. *Nazars* were levied from people in whose favour the case was decided. In a record of 1757 one Nagya Hanbar claimed the *patilki watan* of *kasba* Khanapur which belonged to Yesaji More Patil. The dispute was referred to the *Panchayat* which looked into the case and it was found that during the Adilshahi period, the Hanabar family was given some land in that place, and on the strength of that land grant, Hanabar was claiming the *watan*. The *Panchayat* decided the case against him.²⁴ There is also an instance of a *Patil* whose *watan* was attached on his inability to pay the money for the *watan* he claimed to have bought. The amount of Rs. 5, 000 was to be collected from the proceeds of the *watan*.²⁵ In most of the cases the *watans* were attached during the period of arbitration.²⁶

If the *watandar* was dissatisfied with the extent of his *watan* then he could request the king to augment his *watan*. In

a record of 1737. Dwarkaji Yadav complained that as his family was large, the income from the *patilki watan* was not adequate for the maintenance of his family. Hence some land was given to him.²⁷ In another document dated 1730. "Krishnaji Parashuram Pratinidhi informs the *mukaddams* of village Donoli that the income from the additional grants given to the posts of the *patil* and *kulkarni* of their villages was not adequate for the maintenance of their families. Hence they were given additional grants.²⁸ There are also references of *patils* receiving additional grants of a *chaugulki watan* and a *kulkarni* receiving a *mahajanki watan* of village Patpanal and Majnal to Mahadaji Malhar Kulkarni. The details of the *watan* are also mentioned.²⁹

The above actions of grants, renewal and confiscation of *watan* which the state sought to retain, mainly pertained to the higher category of *watandars*. The state sought to control the position and authority of the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* by such acts of grants, renewal and confiscation. The pronounced emphasis on the aspect of regular service to the state on the one hand and towards the village community on the other hand was an important criteria for the conferment, confiscation or even renewal of a *watan*. The position and authority of these *watandars*, specially that of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* had been considerably reduced by Shivaji. Earlier, the increasing

authority and control over their territories, led Malik Ambar of the Nizam Shahi kingdom to reduce the functions of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande*, that is to deprive them of their intermediary function of revenue collection while leaving them to enjoy their customary rights and privileges. Shivaji curbed the power of the *watandars* considerably by dismantling their fortifications, appointing his own officers to supervise the work of revenue collection, confiscating the *watans* of those *watandars* who refused to co-operate³⁰ etc. According to S.N. Sen the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* in the district and the *patil* and *kulkarni* in the village formed a revenue collecting agency but Shivaji did away with them (*deshmukh* and *deshpande*) and appointed new officers for the work of revenue collection.³¹ The policy of Shivaji was largely followed by the Peshwas when the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* lost a great deal of their rights and privileges. They were relieved of their original duties but they were used as a check on the officials of the Peshwa government. The displacement of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* according to Elphinstone "is considered to have been attended with beneficial effects as delivering the people from the oppressions and exactions of the *zamindars*."³² The *patil* on the other hand always remained the link between the village and the state authority. His function as the dual representative of the state and the village community burdened him with additional responsibility. Regarding the

assessment of revenue the state could not behave arbitrarily, since the *kamavisdar* was required to consult the *patil* at the time of assessment. If the *patil* felt that the revenue was too high then he could make revenue collection impossible.³³

Regarding the lower category of *watandars* the government did not intervene in the sale, purchase or division of the *mirasi* or *baluta watan*. A *mirasdar* could sell and purchase land as and when the need arose without the consent of the government. The *mirasdar* held proprietary rights in his land; the government did not arbitrarily infringe upon the *miras* right.³⁴ The selling and buying of *miras* land did not require the consent of the government; the only obligation of the government was the protection of the peasant while that of the *mirasdar* was payment of land revenue. According to Prof. A.R. Kulkarni the records reveal that every possible assistance was given to the cultivators and every effort was made to protect him and create conditions conducive to agriculture.³⁶ The government provided several incentives to the cultivator for the promotion of agriculture, in the form of reduction in revenue dues, concessional rates of taxation, loans for purchasing seeds, bullocks etc.³⁷ Similarly the *balutedar* also possessed proprietary rights over the his *watan*. The sale, purchase and division of a *baluta watan* did not require the permission of the government; but such actions required confirmation of the hereditary officers and

the local assembly.³⁸ Disputes which arose amongst the lower category of *watandars* over the *mirasi* and *baluta watans*, caste etc. were usually settled and decided by the *Panchayat* or the local assembly. When a dispute took place between a carpenter and a blacksmith over the blacksmithery *watan* of a village, all the villagers, land holders, and the twelve *balutedars* were required to gather and settle the dispute.³⁹ The complainant also had the right to refer his case to the government directly. In such cases the complainant would first go to the *huzur* or the district office (such as the *thana*). Then the government or district officer would refer the case to the *deshmukh* of the *pargana* where the dispute originated, to be later settled by a meeting of the local assembly. A document of 1735 reveals a dispute about religious rights between Appaji Anaji Rokha, Dharmadhikari goldsmiths and Malhari Metappa and Ramji Shankarji Rokha goldsmiths. The dispute was referred to the *Deshmukh* and the local community of the region for decision by Shambhaji II. They unanimously decided that rights belonged to both the parties equally. Royal orders were therefore issued accordingly.⁴⁰

Though the state did not intervene in the internal matters of the *mirasdar* and *balutedar*, that is regarding disputes, sale, purchase, division or transfer of their respective *watans*; there are instances where the king

conferred *watans* to the lower category of *watandars*. A document of 1757 records that Shambahji II grants the '*gavadki watan*' to Javaji Bhivaji and Changoji who were shepherds by caste. The details of the *watan* are also mentioned.⁴¹ As mentioned earlier Rakhamji, a peasant was granted the *magdunki watan* by Shambhaji II as it was lying vacant.⁴² The state also conferred *inam* lands on artisians for the services performed by them.⁴³ A document of 1740 records that 25 *bighas* of *inam* land was conferred by the state to an astrologer of the Khed region.⁴⁴ A *mahar* was granted an *inam* land as a reward for the services performed by him.⁴⁵ Land which was granted by the government to the *mahar* as *inam* for the performance of the *sirkar* (government) duty was usually called *Maharki*.

The State thus sought to control the authority of the higher category of *watandars* by retaining the right to confer, confiscate, renew or transfer their *watans* while the lower category of *watandars* could also purchase, sell or divide their respective *watans* but only after confirmation and recognition by the village assembly and hereditary officers, they were not subject to government intervention. This clearly indicates that the main concern of the state was the appropriation of revenue. Since the higher category of *watadars* constituted the revenue collecting agency, the state sought to curb and control their authority and power by acts

of confiscation or attachment of their *watan* and providing incentives for performance of service by granting a new or additional *watan* or by renewing a *watan*. Another factor that emerges out of such actions of the state is that it delegated it's responsibility of such confirmation and recognition of the sale, purchase, division and transfer of the *mirasi* and *baluta watan*, disputes pertaining to *watan*, caste, etc., to the higher category of *watandars* like the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* along with the village community.

The revival of the *Saranjamdari* system reduced the extent of imperial authority and control over the hereditary officers. The *saranjam* system under the Marathas tended to become hereditary, they had supreme authority in their region and the entire administration was conducted by them. The higher category of *watandars* functioned under the supervision of the *saranjamis'* agents.⁴⁶ Thus it appears that imperial control over the *watandars* must have been more in the directly administered areas. The unstable financial conditions under the Peshwas, their policy of waging wars and expansion of territory led the Peshwas to maintain the status quo. Their main concern was the appropriation of revenue and as long as payment of revenue was ensured, the state recognised the rights and priveleges of the *watandars*.

WATANDARS AND VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The main area of functioning of the *watandars* was the village. The village of the medieval Deccan was called 'ganva' or 'grama' in Sanskrit, 'mauje' in Arabic and 'deh' in Persian. A bigger village containing a market place was called 'kasbe' (from Arabic *qasba*). In case there were two villages that were adjacent together, the bigger village was called 'budruk' and the smaller village was called 'khurd'. Eg. *mouja Mose Budruk* and *mouja Mose Khurd*.⁴⁷

The village as a rule took the collective form of inhabitation. The 'inhabited area' of the village was called 'pandhari' (literally white) and the cultivated area was called 'kali' (meaning literally black). It is said that the people originally inhabited the *pandhari* which was considered as unfit for cultivation while the *kali* was used for cultivation. The 'inhabited area' was divided into house-sites (*gharthana* or *gharthikhana*), each of which was owned by the *patil* families and other village officers, peasants and village servants.⁴⁸ When a family left the village or had become extinct it was called 'gatkul' and the house-site and the house left behind were called 'gatkul gharana' and 'gatkul vada'.⁴⁹

The 'cultivated area' (*kali*) was divided into blocks

called *thal* and each *thal* often had the name that was perhaps so called after the surname of the original proprietor.⁵⁰ Each block consisted of fields called *shet* or *set* (Sanskrit), or *jamin* (Persian). Around the 'cultivated area' there was the meadow called *kuran* or *gayeram*. The *lokacha kuran* was the meadow which was meant for the common use of the villagers. The *sarkarcha kuran* was the government's meadow from which came the fodder and wood used by the government.

The village was not an agrarian commune based on the common ownership of land. Though the king was theoretically the ultimate owner of all land there was a clear distinction or division regarding the nature of rights to land. *kali* or agricultural land was divided into a) *Mirasi jamin* held by *mirasdars* or peasant proprietors who held most of the land in the village. b) *Inam jamin* or a 'gifted land' granted by the state that was exempted from land revenue and which was allowed to be appropriated by various *inamdars* like *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils*, *kulkarnis*, artisans, religious bodies and institutions etc. c) *Sarkari jamin* or state land. d) *Gatkul jamin* and *pad jamin* or waste land.

The village land was thus shared by hereditary officers, *mirasdars*, *balutedars* and *inamdars*, whose services were essential for the village community. The growing needs of the village led it to absorb a number of persons in the

community in course of time by giving them land in the village. Such people were thus assimilated within the village community by assigning land to them. They acquired *sanads* granted to them by the state and became residents of the village.⁵¹ The village in the Deccan, in the medieval period was thus a close-knit unit. Land was the basis of the formation of village communities comprising the village hereditary officers, the peasant proprietors and the village servants who had definite duties to perform, enjoying the privileges assigned to their positions. There was a class of strangers or *uparis*, who had no 'locus standi' in the village, but who had the opportunities of becoming an integral part of the village community in the course of time by acquiring *watan* rights. They lived together irrespective of their caste and religion and worked for the welfare of the community as a whole.⁵²

The higher and lower category of *watandars* were important members of the village community. The position of these *watandars* in the village community depended on the nature of their relationship to land, their degree of usefulness to the village community and the possession of administrative power and authority. According to R.G. Gordon and Elphinstone, the *mirasdar* had what was practically an inalienable right to the possession of his land, so much so that he might even leave the village for an indefinite period

and omit to pay the assessment upon it and yet upon his return he would be allowed to retain his property even though it might have passed into the possession of another in his absence.⁵³ Advantage was taken of the *mirasdar's* devotion to his *watan* land by subjecting him to a number of regular and occasional taxes like *miraspatti*, *dahakpatti*, *dasarapatti*, *toranbheti*, etc. It was thus the *mirasdar* who bore the brunt of the burden of taxation since he had to give a part of his produce to the state in the form of land tax, to the hereditary officers of the *pargana* and the village and lastly to the village artisans for the services performed by them. They were also subject to a number of customary levies and exactions imposed by the higher category of *watandars*. Their relationship with the hereditary officers was not of one between equals. The former constituted the vast toiling masses crushed under the heavy tax burden while the latter paid no taxes or did so at concessional rates.

The cultivators who constituted the most numerous class of the rural areas thus alienated a large part of their produce to two superior authorities, the state and the *huqdars*. A document of 1740-41 detailing the various rules and regulations contained in it would provide an idea about the land revenue assessment :

"The *jamindar* of *taraf* Haveli having applied for the settlement of *Jamabandi*, the following orders were

issued to the *havalgars* and *karkuns* of the *taraf* : a) Rice lands should be assessed as before at 10 mounds per *bigha* including the levy on account of *babti*. b) Lands under sugarcane to be assessed at Rs. 5 per *bigha* as before. c) House Tax - Rs. 1 and 1/2 per house. House of poor should be levied at a lower rate. d) Tax on she-buffalo at Rs. 1 per buffalo. e) *Patils* who used to receive 3% of the revenue, in consideration of the service rendered by them to the government, it was proposed, be paid at 5%. The proposal was rejected. f) The *Adhikaris*, *Kulkarnis*, *Khot*, *Patils*, *Bhopes* and *Mahars* to be exempted from house tax and tax on she-buffaloes. g) *Jagirdar* to be exempted from marriage tax. h) Vegetable producing land to be assessed at Rs. 2 per *bigha* as before. i) Lands under crops to be assessed at Rs. 1 and 1/2 per *bigha* as before. j) The *Adhikari's* 3 *bighas* of land were augmented to 5 *bighas* at his request.⁵⁴

This document indicates the point made by the British administrators⁵⁵ that the *mirasdars* were the most heavily taxed cultivators. Secondly, while crops like sugarcane were assessed in cash, rice was assessed in kind.⁵⁶

Thus the magnitude of burden mainly fell on the *mirasdar* who had to pay various taxes as well, other than the normal

revenue. The state however remained the chief exploitative machinery. The revenue assessed was swelled by a number of cesses, "these extra impositions were called 'patti' or a device aimed at increasing the total amount of revenue without outraging the feelings of the cultivators by actually increasing the land tax itself".⁵⁷ The following were some of the extra impositions that were levied on the *mirasdars* : *Sinhasnpatti*,⁵⁸ *Miraspatti*,⁵⁹ *Thanpatti*,⁶⁰ *Dasarapatti*,⁶¹ *Mejwanipatti*, *Toranpatti*, *Sadilvarpatti*, *Gavkharchapatti*, *Thanpatti*, etc. Along with the imperial authority, the bigger *watandars* became a part of this exploitative machinery in the appropriation of the surplus produce of the *mirasdar* and also the produce of the artisan. The higher category of *watandars* exercised considerable control and authority over the lower category of *watandars* which was quite evident from their exaction of forced labour or *vethbegari* from the cultivators and artisans;⁶² exaction of customary dues and cesses; and in many cases reducing the position of the *mirasdar* to a tenant cultivator or a dependent peasant by buying off his land when a *mirasdar* was compelled to sell it under unstable financial conditions. Timaji Namaji Kulkarni at Ioni purchased the *mirasi* land of a cultivator for 45 *hons* since the latter was unable to repay his debts.⁶³ There are a number of such instances where the higher category of *watandars* purchased *mirasi* lands from *mirasdars* who ultimately resorted to the sale of their lands owing to financial difficulties.⁶⁴ Thus

the economic interest of the bigger *watandars* was not only linked to the control of the surplus produce of the peasant but their interest was also linked to the land itself. This was particularly evident when the peasant proprietor was unable to repay his debt or found it difficult to meet the demands of the state on the one hand and that of the hereditary officers on the other hand.⁸⁵

A perusal of the *haklajimas* and *manpan* enjoyed by the hereditary officers like the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* also reveal that the burden of taxation mainly fell on the *mirasdars*. These *watandars* (higher categories) who held a service tenure or a *chakri watan* arbitrarily imposed levies and miscellaneous taxes on the *mirasdars* and *balutedars* in the name of tradition and convention.⁸⁶ V.I. Pavlov assigns the *patil* the most exploitative role played by any village officer. He writes "the *patil's* participation in collecting the land tax (not only) helped him to bind *rayats* as usurers and alienate their land plots.⁸⁷ But the *patil* was undoubtedly the leading figure in the economic life of the village community. Being the most prosperous section of the village community, and apart from being a part of the taxation machinery and ensuring the protection of the cultivators, the *patil* was also engaged in money lending.⁸⁸ Along with the state the bigger *watandars* also had a claim in the appropriation of the agrarian surplus and appropriation of

cesses and levies of the artisans. Sometimes these *watandars* indulged in self aggrandisement through illegal means (illegal exactions, illegal extension of land, etc.), such illegal means were mainly resorted to when the imperial authority over the *watandars* was weak. For example, when the Mughals and the Marathas were engaged in a struggle over the control of the Deccan, *watandars* like the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* grew and strengthened themselves by building castles, extending their landed estates over the state lands, increasing their power over the villages etc.⁶⁹ Marshall comments that some local persons making use of the earlier upheavels and the weakening of central authority had illegally extended their estates and had placed them outside the taxation system. In fact, Marshall notes that the appropriation of the local officers (known under the general but indefinite name of *zamindars*) are so enormous as to have the *Sirkar* scarcely any land from which to make further donations.⁷⁰ Thus along with the state, the higher category of *watandars*, through the extraction of the normal land revenue and through the imposition of various taxes (both legal and illegal) were depriving the peasant of his surplus produce. The government's share and the claims of the *haqdars* were thus channels through which the peasant was deprived of his surplus. The existence of the privileges of the *watandars* and the miscellaneous levies collected by them from the peasants on one pretext or the other is an eloquent testimony

to the exploitative nature of the *watan* institution of medieval Deccan society.⁷¹ For Ranade, these *watandars* should not be looked merely as a part of the administration, for in reality they represented a part of the exploitative class.⁷²

In order to escape the exploitation of the bigger *watandars* which was mainly felt through the imposition of extra cesses and levies and through exaction of forced labour, the peasants usually expressed their discontent against oppressive taxation and *vethbegari* by leaving their locality where such levies were covered and migrated to other regions which were free of such exactions; such levies and cesses varied from region to region. But the government at the same time sought to check such migrations by various measures. The *Deshmukh* and *Desak* of *Wai pargana* imposed exorbitant taxes on peasants. As a result of which the *rayats* left that *pargana* and migrated to another region which was free of such exorbitant taxes.⁷³ In a record dated 1685, the land in *mamle Cheul* remained uncultivated because the *rayats* were forced by the government to cultivate the *sarkari jamin* which was mainly responsible for their lands lying fallow. So, to escape this oppressive practice the peasants of *Cheul* fled to *Revdanda* leaving their land to remain uncultivated.⁷⁴ Such mass migrations of peasants indicate the following : a) it affected the cultivation and total agricultural produce in the country. b) The cultivators were

not *de jure* bound to live in a fixed area on village but in principle had the freedom to migrate, provided they paid the revenue and other dues to the authorities.⁷⁵ Efforts were made by the state to increase the produce of the land by encouraging rehabilitation in the field of agriculture. The hereditary officers were specially instructed to keep the cultivators satisfied and bring more land under cultivation. Compensatory measures like concessions in land tax, provision of loans, distribution of land among new settlers of the affected villages, etc. were adopted.⁷⁶

Such migrations were also resorted to by the artisans who were engaged in *vethbegari* by the hereditary officers and the state. For example the *sutars* (carpenters), *kumbhars* (Potters), *gavandi* (bricklayer) and *patharvats* (masons) were engaged in the construction and repair of dams and buildings.⁷⁷ The *mahars* and *mangs* were engaged in miscellaneous jobs for both the local as well as the government offices.⁷⁸ The artisans absconded from their villages when the demand for such labour by the local authorities tended to be heavy. In such cases the government would command them to reduce the demand of such forced labour.⁷⁹ In fact it was the *patil's* responsibility to induce those who had absconded to return to their native villages.⁸⁰ Thus even the artisans were not forced to attach themselves to a certain village; they could simply abandon their *watan*

or even sell it and move to a nearby town or become migratory.

Fukazawa has established that the government in many instances prevented the en masse migration of cultivators to other regions, inspite of being aware of the conditions under which such migrations took place.⁸¹ Why did the government induce the cultivators to return to their lands or why did it prevent such migrations? The chief concern of the government was land revenue, for as long as the peasants remained within the villages and cultivated their land, the state's revenue demand would be met and the village and the *pargana* officers on the other hand would be assured of their share of the produce. By such intervention the government was aiding and abetting the exploitation of the people. Because in the event of the desolation of a village the loss would be that of the state and the bigger *watandars*. They were the hereditary village officers who were responsible for the collection of revenue and in case of non-payment of revenue it was their responsibility to ensure that the stipulated amount of revenue was paid. For example it was the *patil* who was responsible for the collection of revenue of the village and in case there was any shortage in collection it was the *patil* who suffered. A *Patil* had borrowed Rs. 350 from a creditor to make up for the deficiency in the stipulated amount of the land revenues.⁸² More over the higher category of *watandars*

were also entitled to share in the produce of the peasants and also in the various articles of produce of the artisans. In fact no product of the village community whether agriculture or craft remained unclaimed in part by the *watandars* as part of their perquisites. Therefore it was in their interest to encourage as many peasants and artisans to reside in the village and pursue their respective activities.⁸³ Thus in a bid to protect its interest and the vested interests of the hereditary officers, the government was aiding and abetting exploitation of the primary producers while at the same time looking after their welfare and providing various incentives such as loans, concessional rates of taxation, *inam* land, etc. during periods of calamity. The state was thus playing a dual role to keep both the sides satisfied. According to Fukazawa the *de jure* free status of the cultivators and artisans was more or less restricted *de facto* by the politico-economic interests of the ruling classes, extending from the village *huqdars* up to the central government, and that they were actually bound to some extent to live in some specific region and village.

Both the categories of *watandars* were integral components of the village community who took part in the decision making process. In spite of the differences in status, income and wealth both played an important role in the deliberations of the village assembly called *Gota*, *Got*

Sabha or *Majlis* (or *Panchayat* in the 18th century). The *patil* usually presided over the proceedings of the *Gotsabha* in which disputes relating to land and rights, disposal of waste land, disputes over *watan*, etc. were decided. It also occasionally intervened in the caste matters of the village, though there was a separate caste-assembly called *Jati Sabha* to decide disputes relating to caste. The hereditary officers and the *mirasdars* acquired the privilege of putting their seals and attesting their signature by virtue of their land tenures (in case of *mirasdars*) and administrative power (in case of hereditary officers). The *deshmukh* put his seal and the *deshpande* his *dastakhat* or signature to the *mahjar*, the *shete* marked his approval by the sign of the balance, the *mahajan* added his designation, the *patil* affixed the *nangar* or plough in approval and the *kulkarni* marked his consent. The *balutedars* attached the fixed seals illustrating their occupation below their names, which attested to their unanimous approval to the *mahjar*.⁸⁴ For instance, the potter's wheel, the barber's mirror, the goldsmith's hammer, the carpenter's chisel etc. are some of the symbols which are found in many *mahjars*.⁸⁵

Such participation of almost the entire village community indicates that the caste status and profession of a *watandar* did not play an important role in deliberations of the *Gotsabha*. Even the *mahar*, *mang* and the *chambhar* who were

considered as untouchables and of low caste origin deliberated with the *Brahman kulkarni* and the *patil* of the Maratha caste in the *Gotsabha*. A document of 1741 records a dispute between the Harpala family and Kamath family regarding the succession to patilship in village Fursangi near Poona. The dispute was settled by summoning the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* of the region, the *patils* of the neighbouring villages and all the inhabitants of the concerned villages, thus including even the *mahar* and *mang*.⁸⁶ The *balutedars* thus played an important role in the functioning of the village councils despite the fact that they were considered as *Sudras*. In fact the *balutedars* and *alutedars* are mentioned in the Marathi documents as belonging to the *Sudra* caste.⁸⁷ Such instances where the artisans played an important role in the disputes relating to various issues were numerous. In a dispute regarding the boundaries of a village, the opinion of the mahars was considered as conclusive.⁸⁸ A document of 1642 records a dispute between two potters of *kasba Khed* regarding seniority. It was decided that the *balutedars* of the village would be consulted since they knew all the details of the case.⁸⁹ The decision regarding the appointment of a *patil* was withheld for sometime because of the disapproval of the *balutedars*.⁹⁰ In another document of 1736, Shambhaji renewed the *khoti watan* of village Fur to Vishwanath Bhat Agnihotri. One Dhondo Gopal Khandekar was claiming the above *watan* but

the *balutedars* of the said village upheld the claims of Agnihotri.⁹¹

The purpose of citing the above evidences is to show that the caste status of a *watandar* did not seem to occupy an important place in the decision making process. Such a claim can also be made in the economic relationship between the higher and lower category of *watandars*. The Maratha *Deshmukh* whose caste status was lower than that of a *Brahman Deshpande* in the caste hierarchy occupied a superior position i.e., his authority was superior to that of the *Deshpande* and thus enjoyed greater privileges. Similarly the *Brahman Kulkarni's* position, authority and privileges was inferior to that of the Maratha *Patil*. On the other hand among the *balutedars* the *mahar* and the *mang* were placed in the *thorali kaas* or major row, inspite of being considered as *atisudras* or untouchables while the *joshi* who was a *Brahman* was placed in the *dhakti kaas* or minor row. The perquisites and privileges of the *mahar* and *mang* and their services towards the village community and the hereditary offices bear ample testimony to the fact that caste status played a negligent role in the *watandari* system.⁹² Such perquisites and privileges that were enjoyed by them as reward for the services rendered by them were greatly valued. Their participation in various religious rites and ceremonies carried a social rather than an economic significance. Their concepts of social status were governed

more by civic rights expressed mainly in the form of *watan*, *huqs* and privileges or *manpan*; they attached great significance to such outward beliefs. For instance the *mangs* were entitled to receive a bowl of food in the *Dushera* festival from each family in a village in the *Parner* region and the *mahars* were entitled to five kinds of offerings and five paise in cash.⁹³ The *kasars* had the right to take their marriage procession to the temple.⁹⁴ The *kumbhars* held the prerogative to use a horse for carrying the bridegroom and bride in a marriage procession.⁹⁵ During a marriage ceremony the *mahar* was supposed to provide fuelwood and sweep the *pandal* clean while the *mang* was expected to beat a drum during the ceremony.⁹⁶

Although the artisans or *balutedars* belonging to different castes enjoyed traditional rights and privileges in rural society, their caste status seemed to have played a prominent role where social intercourse or social interaction was concerned, despite the fact that it played a negligent role in their performance of service towards the village community. The *mahars*, *mangs*, *ramoshis* etc. who were called *atisudras* or *antyayas* i.e., most despicable castes were not allowed to enter the gates of *Poona* between 3 p.m. to 9 a.m. lest their shadows defile the persons of the high castes in the streets.⁹⁷ These *atisudras* could not avail of the services of the village priest who was generally a *Brahman*,

they had to secure the services of the *Dhego Megos*, the priests of their own castes. The *Sudras* were to perform their socio-religious rights according to *Puranic mantras* and were forbidden to use *Vedic mantras*. In Shirod, a *sonar* called Sadhavachari used to perform vedic rituals in the houses of the *sonar* and *sutar*. He was reprimanded for performing such rituals.⁹⁸ Members of the *Sudra* castes were forbidden to enter brahmanical shrines during the Peshwa period. Rules and regulations framed by Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao concerning the management of the Tryambakeshwar temple at Nasik, prescribed that the *Sudras* should not enter the holy shrine.⁹⁹ The *mahars* though they possessed traditional rights and privileges were shunned as untouchables and forced to live in separate hamlets. They were forbidden to drink water from most wells and compelled to perform *vethbegari* or forced labour, inspite of rendering important services to the community.¹⁰⁰ The above examples clearly indicate that inspite of playing an important role in the deliberations of the *Gotsabha* and despite the privileges and perquisites enjoyed by them, the artisans were subject to a number of socio-religious disabilities. The subject or the theme of the role of caste in Maratha rural society is complex and varied and requires more research in this field. In the light of the above evidences an attempt has been made to show that the caste factor while playing a negligent role in the performance of service and enjoyment of traditional

perquisites and privileges amongst both the categories of *watandars*, it became an important factor in restricting the social interaction between the different sections and the caste groups of the village community.

Thus in this chapter an attempt has been made to establish that both the state and the higher categories of *watandars* constituted the exploitative machinery in the appropriation of the surplus produce of the peasants and that the main concern was revenue. The bigger *watandars* took advantage of their traditional link with the rural society in their competition with the state officials, over the appropriation of the peasant's produce. In the 17th century when imperial authority over the *watandars* (specially the *deshmukh* and *deshpande*) became weak due to the Mughal-Maratha conflict over the Deccan, the bigger *watandars* indulged in illegal exactions, appropriation of revenue etc. But in the 18th century under the Peshwas, the government considerably reduced the power and authority of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* by discontinuing their offices. They therefore sought to maintain their influence in rural society by becoming sincere supporters of the grievances of the cultivators, while earlier their main concern was appropriation of revenue. They did not fail to bring to the notice of the King the grievances of the cultivators. The *Deshmukh* and *Deshpande* of Mawal pleaded the inability of the cultivators to pay the

increased assessment due to irregular rainfall.¹⁰¹ There are many such instances to show the concern of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* towards the cultivators when their power was considerably reduced by the Peshwas and they therefore sought the support of the village community.¹⁰² The system of revenue farming or the *Ijara* System adopted by Bajji Rao further affected the position of the *watandars* where settlement was made with the highest bidder, thus attracting bankers, merchants, and *mamlatdars* in revenue farming. The Purandares of Mawal, the *Joshis* of Baramati, the Rastes of Wai were some of the prominent *Brahman* families who became leading bankers while at the same time indulging in revenue farming.¹⁰³ Though the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* were relieved of their offices, the office of the *patil* was continued since he was considered as an integral part of the revenue collecting machinery. The condition of the *mirasdars* declined further when the *patil* who was ultimately responsible for the payment of revenue resorted to extra illegal cesses like *nuksanpatti* and *khushpatti* to pay off the debt of the villagers, when they were unable to pay the required revenue because in the event of non-payment of revenue the *patil's* *watan* was liable to be confiscated. The authority and position of the rural aristocrats was thus considerably undermined under the *Ijara* system, it challenged the supremacy of the traditional rulers of rural society, that is, the higher category of *watandars*.

References and Notes to Chapter III

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3. *Ibid.*, II:165.
4. *Ibid.*, II:13, 89, 160, 190, 234; III:37, 89 ; *SSRPD*, VII:669.
5. The *Deshmukhi* of Indapur belonged to Shivaji's father and this watan continued to be enjoyed by Sahu. A.R.Kulkarni, "*Deshmukhi Watan of Indapur*", *IHR*, vol.III, no.1, July 1976.
6. *SSRPD*, III:349.
7. *TKKP*, II:228.
8. *Ibid.*, II:135.
9. *Ibid.*, II:180.
10. *Ibid.*, II:181.
11. *Ibid.*, III:39.
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15. *Ibid.*, 3:2706.
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17. *SCS*, 2:240.
18. *TKKP*, II:196-197.
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19. *SPD*, 31: 38.
20. *SSRPD*, VII.
21. *Ibid.*, II:61, 5, 67, 68.
22. *Ibid.*, I:295, 299, 301 ; II:9, 13, 15, 16, 20, 22, 24,
23. *TKKP*, III:117.
24. *Ibid.*, III:113.
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30. *MIS*, XXI :6, *SPD*, 31:38.
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33. *SSRPD*, VII: 812.
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35. *SSRPD*, VII: 433.
36. A.R. Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in*, p.82.
37. *PSS*, 3:2690; *SCS*, 9:70; 8:84.
38. *SSRPD*, I: 283.
39. *Ibid.*, VII:710.
40. *TKKP*, II:130.
41. *Ibid.*, III:112.

42. *Ibid.*, III:41.
43. *SSRPD*, VII: 546, 532.
44. *Ibid.*, I:283.
45. *MIS*, XV: 272.
46. S.N.Sen, *op.cit.*, p.123.
47. A.R.Kulkarni, *op.cit.*, p.24.
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53. R.G.Gordon, *The Bombay Survey and Settlement Manual*, vol.I, edn.II, 1943, p.11.; M.Elphinstone, *Territories Conquered from the Peshwa*, p.24.
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60. MIS, XX: 10.
61. *Ibid.*, XX: 209.
62. SSRPD, VII:196, 286; III:215, 265, 415; II:283;
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83. SSRPD, VI:744.
84. V.T.Gune, *Judicial System of the Marathas*, p.13.
85. SCS, 3:637; 7:41; SSRPD, I:248.
86. SSRPD, I:248.
87. MIS, xxv:51, *Balutedars* : Under this category the following Sudra castes are included viz., Sutar, Lohar, Parit, Mali, Gosain, Sonar etc., Alutedars: Teli, Tamboli, Shimpi, Mali, Gosavi, Jangam, Mulana, etc.
88. MIS, 18:14.
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90. *Ibid.*, XIII:15; SCS, 1:127.
91. TKKP, 1:191.
92. Otturkar, no.46, 70; SSRPD, VI:816.
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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Almost everyone in the pre-British Maratha society, possessed certain rights, whether it was a right to land, right to a title, right to an occupation or right to an office. This right which was an hereditary and alienable right was called the *watan* and its holder was called the *watandar*. Almost all levels of Maratha society right from the king to the Peshwa to the *jagirdars*, *inamdars*, and hereditary district and village officials to the cultivator and the artisan possessed clearly defined *watan* rights. Such possession of *watan* rights was mainly determined the performance of service and the utility of service which constituted the main basis for the grant of such *watan* rights. *Watan* rights operating in the countryside were routinely recorded by the village officers and such rights were looked into, whenever disputes and questions arose regarding the legitimacy of such rights. At the bottom of the society, the untouchable like the *Mahars* and *Mangs* possessed certain rights and privileges that were associated with their duties and to a share in the surplus produce of the *mirasdar* while at the top or higher level, the bigger *watandars* such as the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* claimed the right to collect revenue and levy a number of customary levies and duties on the *mirasdars* and *balutedars*. The state was the guardian to such inherited *watan* rights that were

either traditional or which were granted by former dynasties. It legitimised the *watan* rights of its subjects to land, revenue and privileges, and retained the right to grant new *watans* and resume old ones.

The institution of *watan* indicated a continuity. The genesis of this institution can be traced to Rashtrakuta period when land was alienated to officials as a reward for their duties of revenue collection and in course of time they became hereditary officers enjoying a monopoly of their respective offices. These hereditary officers or the traditional *watandars* continued to function under the Muslim rulers of the Deccan, their functions and duties were clearly defined and the means of their remuneration was fixed. Their obligation of service to the Sultan was indicated by the use of such terms as '*halal-khwari*' and '*namak-halali*'. These hereditary *watandars* were basically the servants of the sultan who were subjected to his control by ties of loyalty and performance of duty. But in the 17th century, unstable political conditions led them to assume the role of petty autonomous chiefs who were not looked upon as mere office-holders at the mercy of the king, they thus looked upon themselves as the co-sharers or partners of the kingdom. With the rise of Shivaji and later under the Peshwas, the authority and power of these landed *watandars* were considerably reduced when they were relieved of their duties

of revenue collection (specially that of the *deshmukh* and *deshpande*) and state officials were appointed instead. But nevertheless, their traditional links with rural society was duly recognised and were therefore used as a check on the state officials. When the British completed the conquest of the Deccan, they realised the importance of the offices of the *patil* and *kulkarni* in the sphere of revenue collection. The prolonged existence of the *watan* system for more than six to seven centuries shows that it was so deeply rooted in Maratha society. The fact that it was so deeply embedded in Maratha society for such a long period of time indicated a kind of permanence. All rights of inheritance went by the name of *watan* and no one was willing to forgo his *watan* rights unless under extreme financial instability or absence of heir. The fact that it enveloped almost every section of maratha society indicates the importance of the *watan* institution in medieval Maharashtra. A *watan* right was a very coveted one and the desires to covet or protect such rights was the main pre-occupation of a *watandar*, thus resulting in conflict and tension in society. Disputes relating to *watan* and *watan* rights was a major feature of Maratha rural society.

The hereditary aspect of the *watan* institution assured a continuance of occupations to the various categories of *watandars*, thus guaranteeing an economic career and an

economic security, specially in the case of the *balutedars*. The hereditary nature of the *watan* tenure also created a close link between the hereditary officials and the village community, this link or relationship between the higher and lower category of *watandars* was one which was mainly based on tradition and convention. Such traditional links with the community was taken advantage of by the *watandars* like the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* when imperial authority sought to curb their power. At such times, the *deshmukh* and *deshpande* sought the support of the village community by taking advantage of their traditional links with rural society in order to compensate for their loss of power and authority against the authority of the state officials. The hereditary nature of the *watan* tenure created a feeling of security amongst the *watandars*, this feeling of security was specially evident amongst the *balutedars* such as the *mahar* and *mang*. Though they were considered as untouchables and though their low caste status was a handicap in the sphere of social intercourse, the *mahar*, and *mang* took pride in the fact that they were *watandars* and were holders of certain rights and privileges. This is quite evident from the number of disputes that arose between them over the question of rights and privileges that were associated with their respective *watans*. They attached much significance and importance to such *huqs* such as participation in ceremonies and festivals in the village community. Such rights of

participation or involvement in the activities of the village community guaranteed a kind of security to them and which also carried a social rather than an economic significance to them.

The *mirasdars* and the *balutedars* who were the lesser privileged section and who constituted the lower category of *watandars* played an important role in the village community which was mainly due to the nature of their services. But the *mirasdars* were also sharing a part of their surplus produce with the hereditary officers and the artisans, while the *balutedars* on the other hand were not only providing free services to the bigger *watandars* as and when the need arose but they also had to provide them with the various articles which they produced, without accepting any payment for them. Though both the categories of *watandars* occupied an important place in the village community, the nature of relationship that existed between them indicates that it was not one of equality it was one of domination and subordination. A perusal of the *huqs* and privileges of the higher category of *watandars* such as the *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* and *kulkarni* indicates that they were not only claiming a part of the cultivator's produce but were also demanding a number of services and commodities from the artisans in the name of tradition and convention. They claimed such rights and privileges by virtue of their superior rights in land and

their position in the administrative apparatus and the village community. The state on the other hand legitimised the exploitation of the *mirasdars* and the *balutedars* by the higher category of *watandars* for the state itself was not only a sharer of the peasant's produce but it also claimed the right to extract forced labour or *vethbegari* from the artisans and peasants. Thus the state along with the hereditary officers were the chief exploiters of the lower classes of Maratha rural society.

Both the state and the hereditary officers played a dual role in their relationship with the lower category of *watandars*. While on the one hand the state sought to protect the *mirasdars* by various measures such as concessional rates of taxation, loans for buying seeds and bullocks, providing *inam* land for facilitating cultivation etc. On the other hand it was the chief exploiter of the peasant's surplus produce and even tried to discourage the cultivators from migrating to other regions in order to ensure the payment of revenue. The role of the higher category of *watandars* was both progressive and retrogressive. At one level they were the beneficiaries of the village community playing the role of protectors and performing useful services for the community such as pleading the case of the villagers to the government in case of inability to pay the full revenue etc. On the other hand they were exploiting the cultivator by

appropriating a part of his produce and retaining the right to levy a number of customary levies and cesses on the village community. Such privileges of the higher category of *watandars* and their right to collect miscellaneous levies clearly indicates the exploitative nature of the *watan* institutions, it gave legitimation to such *watan* right of the ruling classes of medieval Maratha rural society over the village community.

The caste status of a *watandar* did not hinder the performance of service and functions. The *balutedars* were considered as *sudras* and despite their low caste they performed important functions towards the village community. Untouchable like the *mahars*, *mangs* and *ramoshis* were considered as indispensable to the village community due to the utility of their services. The *mahar* and *mang* performed services towards the brahman *deshpande* and *kulkarni* and also participated in marriage ceremonies and other religious occasions that took place in the village community, as a matter of right. Thus caste had a negligent role to play in the *watandari* system, although its presence became prominent in the social interaction or social intercourse amongst the inhabitants of the village community.

The saleability, divisability and transferability of a *watan* indicated a kind of flexibility in the *watan* system. A

watandar whether a *deshmukh* or a *sonar* held the right to sell, divide or transfer his *watan* to anyone and under any circumstances, he possessed absolute proprietary rights over his *watan*. The acquisition of proprietary rights or *watan* rights was a channel through which upward mobility and occupational mobility could be facilitated. For example an *upari* who had no locus standi in the village could acquire the status of a *mirasdar-watandar* by purchasing proprietary rights or *mirasi* rights over land or a blacksmith could also acquire a goldsmithery *watan* and enjoy the rights and privileges of both the *watans* simultaneously.

Thus the institution of *watandari* occupied a pivotal position in the administrative and socio-economic structure of the Maratha kingdom. It was deemed equally important by almost every section of Maratha society; since land did not constitute the basis of this system it included even the *sudras* and *atisudras* despite their low caste status. It was the performance of service and the utility of service which was the main criteria for claiming such *watan* rights, thus almost every section of Maratha society claimed *watan* rights. But it must be remembered that *upari* peasants and *upari balutedars* did not possess any *watan* rights or hereditary rights to a title, occupation or land. Therefore, one can not agree with R.V. Otturkar and S.N. Joshi who claim that "by the 18th century the concept of *watan* was so all prevailing

and all embracing that every conceivable profession under the sun could be categorised as *watan*. (The institution of *watan* an it's influence on 18th century Maratha society, *PIHC*, 1945).

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