

PART II: FROM 1803 TO 1827

Chapter IV

CHANGES IN THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK OF ADMINISTRATION

Part II of the monograph is concerned with the village and the region from the time the British took over administration of Nadiad and Matar parganas in 1803 to the year 1827. The present chapter describes the changes in the overall framework of administration of the village and the region during the period.

I: Officials of the District and the Pargana

I have mentioned in the preceding chapter that when the British took over the administration of Nadiad and Matar parganas in 1803, they were administered by a single Kamavisdar named Mairal Narain, a Maharashtrian Brahman. The British Resident at Baroda, Col. Alexander Walker, administered these parganas through Mairal Narain during 1803-05. On 30th June 1805 all the British parganas north of the Mahi were placed together to form a single administrative unit called Kaira Collectorate or District under a British Collector named Diggle and a British Judge and Magistrate named Corsellis, both of whom were responsible directly to the Secretariat of the Government of Bombay in Bombay.⁽¹⁾ Diggle had a British assistant named Barnewall. He remained an assistant to the Collector upto 1818 while several Collectors changed during the period, and as we shall see, he was also in more intimate relation with villages than the Collector. His observations are consequently a very important source of information for

the villages of Kaira District at this time. We have not only his letters and reports but also the minutes of his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1832.⁽²⁾

The office of the Kamavisdar continued to exist in Gujarat for a long time, until 1841, but his status and functions changed radically.⁽³⁾ He ceased to be a military governor, political agent and revenue-contractor and became a paid official subordinate to the Collector. One of his main functions was to arrange the revenue contracts of villages.⁽⁴⁾ The records of Radhvanaj show that the revenue-contract of Radhvanaj was executed and its deed signed by the village-contractors in the presence of the Kamavisdar in 1823. On account of changes in his status and functions, now Gujaratis also began to be appointed as Kamavisdars. In 1823 the Kamavisdar of Nadiad pargana was a Gujarati named Motichand Govindram, most presumably a Bania by caste. Kamavisdars began to be called talukas from 1841.

It has been mentioned that there were two principal Desais, Bapoojee and Shankerdas, in Nadiad pargana during the rule of Jageerdar Khande Rao, but only one was left at the end of the Gaekwad rule. However, when Resident Walker took charge of administration, the descendants of Bapoojee raised a dispute with those of Shankerdas for a share in the office of the Desai. As a result of the dispute a new distribution of the villages in the pargana was made for the purpose of revenue collection. Radhvanaj was placed under the charge of Prabhoodas, son of Shankerdas.⁽⁵⁾

II: Establishment of Law and Order

One of the first tasks taken on hand by the British was the establishment of law and order in their territory. Kaira town was made a military station, which in collaboration with the military station at Baroda tried to keep in check the Rajputs and Kolis on the borders of the British territory.⁽⁶⁾ When the Kolis on the Mahi refused to pay tribute, a force of 200 men was sent against them. Moreover, the Collector took from them the Bhat and other securities for their good conduct.⁽⁷⁾ In the first few years, however, Walker advised Diggle to observe "a guarded exercise of authority". No attempt was made to increase the lump sums taken as revenue from the Kolis because, as Walker instructed to Diggle, "the object is, in preference to money, to reconcile them to our government... and to prevail on them to exchange their slothful and thievish habits of life for more industrious pursuits".⁽⁸⁾ This was, however, not an easy thing to do. Two years after Diggle took charge of the District he stated that "they (the Kolis) were of barbarous spirit, referring right to the spear rather than to any deed. Most of their claims, one of the chief of which was bag-money, kothli giras, were forms of blackmail. They increased their demands in the most unfair way. Sometimes village headmen arranged with the girasia to raise his claim on the village, the headman at first sharing the spoil, but in the end the girasia gaining the whole." Diggle thought that their claims could not be denied, as they would join together and find easy shelter in the woods and ravines near the Mahi. He suggested that instead of being allowed to levy their claims from the

villagers, girasias should be paid from the Government treasuries. As Government pensioners, they would, he thought, lose much of their importance.⁽⁹⁾

Very soon steps were taken to check the Mewasis' practice of collecting giras and kothali-santh dues from rasti villages. From 1811, the Mewasis were made to collect their giras and kothali-santh dues not from the villages but from the Government treasury. An examination of the information provided by the records of Radhvanaj about the giras and kothali-santh dues given by Radhvanaj will provide us an idea of the nature of these dues before 1812 and the changes made by the British.

In all six persons were receiving giras dues from Radhvanaj before 1812. Two of them, a Koli of Barmuvada, a mewasi village situated on the Vatrak, about sixteen miles from Radhvanaj, and a Koli of Chhapra, a mewasi village situated near Barmuvada, received a cash due of Rs.10 and Rs.5 respectively from the income of the village community. The British decided that these Kolis should collect the same amounts from the Government treasury and not from the village. The remaining four persons were (i) a Koli of Khumarwad, a mewasi village situated on the Shedhi, on the other side of Antroli, (ii) a Koli of Barmuvada, mentioned above, (iii) a Koli of Pachrania, a village in Petlad pargana, and (iv) a Rajput of Kaira town. Each of them held some land in Radhvanaj: the Khumarwad Koli, about 15 acres, the Barmuvada Koli, about 9 acres, the Pachrania Koli, about six acres, and the Kaira Rajput, about 25 acres. It is quite

obvious that these girasias living in other villages and towns could not cultivate the land granted to them in Radhvanaj. Each of them entered into an agreement with the headman and Matadars of Radhvanaj that the latter should get his land cultivated by tenants and pay a fixed amount as giras from the income of the village community. This procedure left room for a girasia to demand more money from the headman when he came to collect his due. His land was in fact only a symbol of his claim on the village. The four girasias collected Rs.45, Rs.12, Rs.10 and Rs.50 respectively. The British officials asked each girasia to collect the amount of his due as an allowance from the Government treasury. They declared his land as the property of the Government and gave it for cultivation to a tenant chosen by the Government. The girasia was free to be the tenant of the land he lost, but he paid the rent to the Government in the same way as any other tenant of the Government would pay. From 1812 the British officials thus began to give a total amount Rs.132 as giras allowances from their treasury.

The seven persons who began to receive kothali-santh allowances from the Government treasury from 1812 were (i) a Rajput of Kaira town, (ii) and (iii) two Muslims of the neighbouring village Sandhana, (iv) a Rajput of a nearby village Sekhada, (v) a Koli of Gothaj, a village about eight miles from Radhvanaj, (vi) a Bhat Bard of Hariala, a village about six miles from Radhvanaj, and (vii) a Brahman of Kaira town. Each of them held some land in Radhvanaj and used to collect his cash due from the income of the village. The

seven persons held in all about 24 acres of land and received in all about Rs.25½ in cash. The British declared the land of all but one of the seven persons as the property of the Government to be cultivated by the tenants of the Government, and asked them to collect their dues as fixed allowances from the treasury. The one exception was the Kaira Brahman, who retained his land as his private property and also received a cash allowance from the treasury. The Government thus began to give a total amount of Rs.25½ as kothali-santh allowances from the treasury from 1812.

The kothali-santh dues were so called because they were collected as santh (rent) from kothali (the money bag of the village community). The giras dues were also collected from the money bag of the village community, but they were not called kothali-santh. It seems to me that giras dues were given only to Kolis and Rajputs to recognize their power, whereas kothali-santh dues were given to any body including a Rajput or a Koli either to recognize power or to reward some service, although the British officials always associated both giras and kothali-santh with the lawlessness of Kolis and Rajputs.

It is also noteworthy that the giras dues collected during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were different from the land held by the Rajput Grasiyas during the Rajput period. The Kolis called their dues as giras only in order to claim the same social and ritual status as that of the Rajputs, but they have never been successful in getting their claim to being called Grasiyas accepted.

Finally, it can be seen how the British were carrying their Pax Brittanica to the village level by fixing giras and kothali-santh allowances.

III: Encouragement to the Extension of Cultivation

Another objective of British policy in Central Gujarat, as elsewhere in India, was to increase the amount of revenue. They could not think of raising the rates of revenue at the beginning of their regime because that would make it unpopular. Economically the most beneficial and politically the least harmful way was to encourage the extension of cultivation. Ever since Diggle took charge of administration of Kaira District, every Collector encouraged the cultivation of virgin and waste land by leasing it at low rates of rent. Each Desai was made to enter into a written agreement with the Government in 1805 that he would encourage cultivation of land in the villages under his charge. Prabhoodas, the Desai in charge of Radhvanaj, had also entered into such an agreement.⁽¹⁰⁾ The records of Radhvanaj state that he invited Patidars from Run and other villages to settle in Radhvanaj and cultivate its waste land. One record remarks, "Prabhoodas made the village prosperous."

IV: Changes in the Revenue Management of Villages

Although the British decided not to increase the rates of revenue for many years, they realised two things very soon after, or perhaps even before, they assumed administration:

(i) Many people in the society were not paying what they were expected to pay by their own customary rules, that is to say, a number of people were fully or partially exempted from the

payment of revenue. Obviously this depended upon what the Britishers considered to be just and unjust. We frequently find them making such remarks as 'fraudulent' and 'abusive' in their discussions of exemptions from revenue. (ii) A considerable portion of what the villagers paid for the Government was taken away by the intermediaries, Kamavisdars, Desais, Amins, revenue-contractors, headmen, etc.

We have already seen that the Kamavisdars ceased to be revenue-contractors. As regards Desais, for the first five or six years, for the sake ^{of} political expediency and administrative convenience, the British officials did not make any change in the functions of Desais but only supervised their actions. Walker instructed Diggle at the time of his appointment: "I am disposed to impute the success which has attended the realization of these revenues (i.e. during 1803-05) generally to the good understanding which has been maintained with the Guickwar Government, and to the employment of men, in the collections, of respectability and professing some influence, with a knowledge of the resources of the country. We owe something to these men, and so long as they are desirous of it, and are punctual in the performance of their duties, we should retain them in their present situations. This is no less requisite for the support of our political interests than for facilitating the recoverances of the revenue, and for maintaining a due consistency in our measures".⁽¹⁾ And Diggle also wrote after two years of his administration, "While it is judged necessary to continue the present system of settling the revenue, the

custom of thus ensuring the influence and services of the Ameens and Dessoys (officers are confounded in Gujarat, although constitutionally different) will always be useful, these officers being the natural channel of communication between the subjects and the Government. As local agents they are much respected and regarded by all classes of people. They also possess a general knowledge of the circumstances of the different villages of the districts they belong to, which when engaged on the side of Government is a great and one of the most material checks which we at present have to oppose to the frequent, false and unsubstantiated assertions and clamours of disaffected Patells who never fail at the settlement of every jummabundy to insist that they are over-assessed, and to do every thing in their power to obtain abatements.... It was found expedient to avail ourselves of the aid of this agency, and it was at the same time deemed prudent, by some means, to interest them, as forcibly as possible in the due discharge of the important concerns; which are attached to their situations." (2)

From 1810 or 1811, however, the British began to apply the policy of removing intermediaries and establishing direct relations with peasants, to introduce what they called the amani or 'direct' system of revenue management. This system was adopted in early settlements in Madras Presidency, and the Bombay officials had preferred it to the system of permanent settlement adopted in Bengal. As a first step towards the execution of this policy the

Collector of Kaira ceased to enter into revenue-contracts with the Desais of Nadiad, Matar and Mahudha parganas from 1810 or 1811, and began to enter into contracts directly with village headmen, employing the Desais as assistants in this task.⁽¹³⁾ In Radhvanaj also, from 1809 to 1827 revenue-contracts were given mostly to the headmen and sometimes to the headman and the other two Matadars together.

The British officials, however, soon discovered that the Desais, in collusion with village headmen, were not only not acting in the best interest of the Government but were also acting against it. The Collector wrote in July 1812, "Since the establishment of the Honourable Company's power, the policy of pursuing the system of farming, having become apparent, no less to our Honourable employers in England, than to the Government in this country, the improved plan of aumnee management has by its introduction, already brought to light many abuses and exposed those inconveniences which of long existence were not before so perceptible. These officers (the Desais), in some of our purgunnahs, consider themselves as independent of the Government, as possessing a separate interest in virtue of which they cause separate writing to be executed by the heads of villages for the amount of their fees and issue their own process for the recovery of these sums... The favour of the heads of villages is of much greater importance to the agent (i.e. Desai) than the favour of his superiors, for his emoluments depend on the former, while he being the principal channel of communication with the

latter, the fear of an unfavourable report, or the disclosure of any latent resources, rendered it the immediate interest of the villages to preserve his friendship and support." (14)

As soon as the British officials began to deal directly with village headmen they discovered that the power of a village headman rested on his ability to conceal his dealings with the villagers. There was nobody in the village who could inform the higher official of his activities in the village. There were village accountants but they were servants of the headman and not of the Government. The British officials did not know how much revenue each peasant was expected to pay, how much land he owned, how much he cultivated, what was the nature of the soil, what crops he grew, and what exemptions, if any, he got from the payment of revenue. Barnewall, the Assistant Collector, remarked, "The accounts, in the possession of this department, from the Patels, of the revenues of their villages, were in most cases framed in a way so complex and unsatisfactory as to be entitled to little or any confidence." (15)

The Government of Bombay therefore decided in 1814 to appoint village accountants or Talatis paid by the Government, and passed a Regulation to legalise their appointment. The Collector of Kaira stated his reactions to the decision in the following terms: "I am more than ever satisfied of the necessity of the office (of the Talati), for the malpractices in a village must be great, where the fear of detecting them is sufficient to induce an individual to device an employment

in other respect desirable. The general investigation which the subject of Indian Revenue has undergone before the highest authorities in England, and the publication of the Fifth Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, comprising a review of the revenue system of Bengal and Madras, will be essentially beneficial in directing the views of the servants of this Presidency. The highly approved system reported on by Col. Munroe will be found generally to prevail in Gujarat. . . . The notions now entertained by the most enlightened men on the subject of Indian Revenue have undergone so complete an alteration since the period of the administration of Marquis Cornwallis, and the first establishment of the permanent system, that even the original advocates of that measure no longer uphold it, and I must say, we may rest assured, that no measure of the kind is longer likely to be attempted in these Districts. The system at present approved is so consonant with what we find established in the country that to give it effect will have the appearance more of regulating what has always been than of introducing anything new." (16)

The Collector was very enthusiastic about the appointment of Talatis, not only because it would improve village administration but also because it satisfied his partisanship for the Munroe system. He entrusted the task to his assistant Barnewall.

Barnewall went first to Nadiad. The decision of the Government to appoint village accountants had led to a great deal of resentment among village headmen in Nadiad pargana.

The headmen of all the villages in the pargana, and of some villages in Mahudha pargana, held a meeting at Nadiad on 16th September 1815 and decided not to enter into usual revenue-contracts with the Government unless an assurance was given that the Talati Regulation should not be enforced and that no enquiry should be made into the state of revenue-free lands. The headman of Radhvanaj also did not enter into revenue-contract in 1815. The leaders of this move were two Desais of Nadiad and an Amin of Mahudha. All the people who had assembled at Nadiad had entered into a written agreement and taken oath to it. It was also decided that "whoever should meet the wishes of the Sircar would be considered as outcastes, nor should anyone give them his hookah." Emissaries were dispatched to Matar and Dholka to invite the village headmen and others of those parganas for cooperation. Barnewall promptly arrested the leaders, the two Desais and one Amin, and sent them to the Magistrate, and the latter imprisoned them. Barnewall was provided with a military party for his protection and for repression of any violence among the peasants.⁽¹⁷⁾

This episode shows, among other things, (i) how political activity took place on caste lines—the records show that most of the participants were Patidars, and the sanction of outcasting and stopping exchange of hookah were traditional caste sanctions, (ii) how influential were the Desais and Amins among village headmen, and (iii) how much was the vested interest of the Desais, Amins and village headmen in the system of revenue-contracts.

Barnewall went about appointing village accountants in one village after another. A village accountant was also appointed in Radhvanaj in 1816, and in that year the headman refused to enter into the revenue-contract, and consequently the revenue was collected directly by the Talati. The first Talati was a Brahman of Nadiad, then there was a Brahman of town Dakor, and in 1825 there was a Maharashtrian Brahman of town Borsad. The village accountants in most villages in Central Gujarat belonged to towns and literary castes, were transferrable from one village to another, and were paid fixed monthly salaries. That is to say, the village accountant was an outsider in the village; he was not very much involved in the network of social relationships in the village and did not take a permanent interest in it. It definitely led to a weakening of the headman's position and power. (18)

Along with the appointment of a village accountant, a Ravania or peon was appointed to assist him, and it seems he was also almost always a town-dweller like the Talati. The Ravania of the Talati of Radhvanaj in 1824 was a Muslim of Nadiad, and two other Ravanias who succeeded him were also Muslims of Nadiad. He was given an annual cash salary of Rs. 36 and 12 bighas of revenue-free land.

When Elphinstone became Governor of Bombay, the headman became a subject of controversy among the British officials, because Elphinstone included the village headmen in the aristocracy of the country, and was determined to maintain them in their social position. But he could not do

much. He could only give them a few police powers and maintain most of their traditional allowances.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Collector of Kaira made a change in the relation between the headman and other Matadars.⁽²⁰⁾ In Radhvanaj, for example, the emolument of Rs.65 was equally divided among the three Matadars before the coming of the British, but later on it was decided that the headman should get Rs.50 and the remaining Rs.15 should be divided equally among the other two Matadars. This practice continued upto 1824. The idea was to consider the headmen more important and more responsible than the others. But from 1825 to 1827 the headman received Rs.20 and the rest of the amount was divided equally among the two Matadars. This attempt to bring about status quo was made probably due to Elphinstone's policy.