

UNIT 19 AGRARIAN RELATIONS: DECCAN AND SOUTH INDIA

Structure

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19.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- the characteristic features of the medieval Deccan village;
- the debate regarding ownership of land in the Deccan;
- the categories of land rights which existed there;
- the nature of village community;
- the relationship between the different sections constituting agrarian society;
- the agrarian structure of South India, and
- the nature of land rights in South India.

19.2 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will discuss the nature of agrarian structure in medieval Deccan and South India and the various Land rights which existed there. First, we will discuss the features of the agrarian structure in medieval Deccan.

A study of the agrarian structure and land rights means an examination of the right to use and dispose off one's landed property which bestowed on the landholder economic benefits and administrative and judicial powers. Land rights controlled the life of the agricultural societies or the village communities. They regulated the relations of landholders with other members of the village community, persons claiming superior rights over land, the king and his tax collecting officials, etc. The various categories of land rights, whether transferable or hereditary, arose due to economic benefits from land which was the prime source of income for the majority of the people in those days.

19.3 MEDIEVAL DECCAN VILLAGE: FEATURES

Before analysing the various land rights, we will give a brief description of the medieval Deccan village where these agricultural lands were situated. In later sections, we will also deal with a more complex problem regarding the ownership of land in medieval Deccan and the village community. The village is referred to as **gaon** or **uru** in the local language of the Deccan. It is also called **mauje** (a corrupt form of Arabic **mauza**), and **deh** (Persian). A bigger village that included a market place (**bazar**) was called **kasbe** (Arabic **qasbah**). The word **gaon** is derived from Sanskrit **grama**. The vast expanse of village fields was called **gaon shivan**. It consisted of cultivated (**kali**) and non-cultivated or waste lands. Cultivable land was divided into plots. Fields belonging to one family were called **thal** (Sanskrit **Sthala**). It consisted of 20-40 blocks. Each block consisted of area called **shet** or **kshetra** (Sanskrit) or **jamin** (Persian **zamin**). Each area together with the surname of the original family proprietor was registered in the village records lists called **thalazadas**. The records containing the extent of land actually cultivated, and the amount of revenue assessed, were incorporated in a ledger called **Kul ghadni**.

The boundaries of the village were well demarcated and any encroachment upon it was unwelcome. The cultivable area of a village was called **kali** (indigenous term originally meaning black soil fit for cultivation) and the residential site of a village was known as **gaon sthan** or **pandhari** (indigenous term, originally meaning white soil unfit for cultivation). The **pandhari** was surrounded and protected by a wall called **gaon Kunsu**. It was divided into house sites called **ghar**, **thikane** or **gharthana**. Each family built a house (**ghar** or **vada**) on its allotted site. The house site and the house left by a family (**gatkul**) which had either left the village or had become extinct were called **gatkul**, **gharthana** and **gatkul vada** respectively. These lands were either taken over by the village community or acquired by a new family, but the name of the original proprietor was not changed in the **thalazadas**. The original family in possession of **thal** or estate was called **jatha**. The **jatha** family was synonymous with **thalkari** or **thalwahi**, and the list of divisions in consonance with family names was known as **zaminzada jathawar**. One such division was **munda**. The villages varied in size according to the fertility of the soil, produce and population.

19.4 LAND OWNERSHIP

The question of ownership of land has been and continues to be a subject of scholarly debate. The **Manu Smriti** held that land belonged to the person (or family) who reclaimed it from the forest or brought it under cultivation. A contemporary juridical work **Parashurampratap** compiled by Sabaji Pratap Raja, a protege of Burham Nizam Shah I, throws light on the issue of the ownership of land. It reinforces the claim of the king to the wealth of the soil only, thereby conceding the proprietary rights of the cultivators. In the Nizam Shahi kingdom, Malik Ambar revived the ancient co-parcenary village institutions by recognizing the hereditary proprietary rights of the **Thakari** called **mirasi**.

The Marathas looked to the ancient traditions laid down in the **Smritis** as regards the problem of land ownership. The village co-parcenary and **gota** institutions existed in the Maratha realm in the 17th-18th century. There is evidence of a sale-deed which refers to the sale of land, transferring the **mirasi** rights to the Peshwa. In another instance, land was granted by the village community to the Peshwa for a sum of money assuring him against the claims of the former proprietors. The author of the treatise **Vyavaharmayukha** (a 17th work) points out that state is not the owner of all lands but can only realize taxes from landholders.

The various rights of the king in the soil have been mentioned in the grants of the Marathas. The **Vyavaharmayukha** regards **vrittis** or **watans** (consisting of land and houses) as private property. It also refers to the right of partition, sale, mortgage and inheritance which further corroborates the function and existence of **gota majlis** (village assembly).

acquired a new dimension due to various reasons. The Muslim legal theories regarding the rights of the conquered races or tributaries provide the basis for resolving the problem of land ownership. In accordance with these theories, an important duty of a Muslim ruler was to wage wars against the land occupied by the non-Muslims (**bar ul harb**). The people of the areas conquered in this process were extended protection on payment of tribute. These people were called **zimmis**. The author of the traditional Islamic **fiqh Hidayah** states regarding the conquered territories that either they should be divided among the soldiers in conformity with the way suggested by the Prophet, or they should be restored to the original inhabitants on payment of **jizya** and **kharaj** (land tax). In the latter case, property rights were vested with the original inhabitants. The amount the **zimmis** had to pay as land tax was one half of the produce, whereas the Muslims were required to pay a tenth of the produce called **ushr**. The Muslim theorists regard cultivators as tenants referred to in documents as **r'ayats**. Their right to property in the soil and in that sense ownership of land was not recognized formally by the Muslim rulers except **Malik Ambar** who accepted **mirasi** rights.

Modern theories regarding the ownership of land in medieval Deccan also deserve attention. The first theory advocated by B.H. Baden-Powell in his work, '**The Indian Village Community** (1896)', regards almost all agricultural land (except **inam** and **watan** in which case individual or institutional ownership was prevalent) to have been owned by the state. According to him: "Ownership was only acknowledged in land granted revenue free by the state and apparently in lands held on the privileged tenure of **watan**" (land held in virtue of office in a village or district). A.S. Altekar counters the above by propounding a theory of peasant ownership of all agricultural land. In his work '**A History of Village Communities in Western India** (1927)', he neither accepts communal ownership of land (as advocated by Marx and H.J.S. Maine) nor state ownership but enunciates peasant proprietor ownership. He goes to the extent of denying the **inamdars** any proprietary rights in the soil and recognizes **inamdars** as having only one right, i.e., to collect the revenue. S.N. Sen in his *Administrative System of the Marathas* (1923) categorizes three kinds of land viz., **inam**, **miras** and state's land and two classes of peasants—**mirasdars** and **uparis**. The **mirasdars** possessed permanent proprietary rights in their land and could not be evicted as long as they paid rent. The land held by the **mirasdars** was hereditary and saleable, and, even when they were evicted for non-payment of tax, they had the right to recover their ancestral lands. The **uparis** were tenants-at-will holding government land under the supervision of **mamlatdars**. These theories are based on the reports of the early British administrators and concede two important points: (1) there were two classes of peasants, and (2) the **miras** land belonged to the individual **mirasdars** on which tax was levied.

The reports however disagree on the question of rights in the land of extinct families and wastelands. They do not specify **watan** and **inam** tenures and maintain ambiguity as regards government lands.

19.5 CATEGORIES OF LAND RIGHTS

The rights and privileges enjoyed by the cultivating families comprising the village community were determined in accordance with the degree of superiority of proprietary rights in land held by them. The cultivated area of a village was divided into: (1) **Miras** lands (2) **Inam** lands (3) **State** lands and (4) lands of extinct families. The various rights in these lands would throw light on the agrarian system of the period under review.

19.5.1 Mirasi Right

The word **miras** is of Arabic origin. As mentioned in the Marathi documents, it refers to hereditary or transferable right or patrimony (**hap rotli**) obtained by descent, purchase or gift, etc. The **mirasdars** were the holders of land under the **mirasi** tenure. They owned the village land and could exact rent in money or service from persons who lived on their land. There were two categories of the **mirasdars** (1) the hereditary owners of the **miras** land, and those who had reclaimed the **gatkul** land of the village. The hereditary **mirasdars** were placed in the old land lists of the

villages called **thalazada**, but they did not possess any rights over land. The other category possessed **miras patra** (miras—deeds) attested by the authorities of the village community where the deed was sanctioned by the village communities of the neighbouring areas and by the **deshmukhs** and **deshpandes** of the district.

The practice of issuing **miras patra** was analogous to the system mentioned in the **Smritis**. The families of the **mirasdars** possessed the right to vote in the village assembly or **got sabha**. More specifically the elder member of the family exercised the right in accordance with the Hindu co-parcenary family system. In the Maratha state under Shivaji, the **mirasdars'** rights and privileges were substantially curtailed. The **mirasi** right embodied the concept of hereditary proprietorship of land. In the case of inability to pay the government dues, if someone was forced to leave his land his name continued to occur in the **thalazada** and his descendants could recover the land even after hundred years on payment of arrears to the government.

The village land was held by the **mirasdars**: 1) on the basis of joint co-parcenary terms according to which the village land was divided into several shares, and 2) on the basis of a single proprietor ownership of the village.

Mirasi rights held on the basis of village coparcenary or ancient Thal system.

Such lands were held in common or jointly by the members of different families of a village. The share and the rights and immunities which went with these were clearly demarcated. The original **thal** was held by the **jatha** in the form of several shares. The **jatha** collectively comprised the lineal descendants of the first occupants of the **thal**. As a corporate body, the **jatha** was responsible for cultivation and payment of government and other dues. In case a member of the **jatha** did not leave behind an heir, his land was divided among his surviving relatives in accordance with the Hindu law of inheritance. Each individual member of the **jatha** was accountable for his share of payment of dues to the government although the payment was made collectively by the members of the **jatha**. Sale of one's patrimony was not easy and was carried out only if absolutely necessary. The sale could not be done without the approval of the village community. The members of the **jatha** were related to each other and were called **ghar bhau** ('Home Brothers'). The purchasers of land or new members of the **jatha** were referred to as **biradar bhau** (brothers by village) coparcenary and they were bound to meet all the obligations of the original holders. The **mirasdars** had to pay a permanent land tax to the government called, **swasthidhara**, although the government also levied certain other cesses such as **miraspati** from time to time. In case a family ceased to exist, its share went to the village coparcenary. The **gatakul** or abandoned lands of the village were placed at the disposal of the village co-parcenary or **patel** (village headman).

The chief characteristics of miras tenure: The **mirasdars** could sell their land as and when required. The purchaser could be an outsider who might not settle in the village where he had bought land. He could arrange for some members of his family to stay in the village where he had purchased land. Buying and selling of **miras** lands required the sanction or recognition of village officers and neighbours. The sale could be carried out without the prior approval of the state which lends support to the view that the state did not possess proprietary rights over the **miras** land. The purchaser on payment of revenue to the state was at liberty to use the land. The state sanctioned the sale by issuing a document for which it charged a fee equal to one fourth of the sale price.

The **mirasdar** possessed complete private proprietary rights in the **miras** land. The state could not encroach upon the **mirasi** rights. Also the headman and other people of the village could not infringe upon the **mirasi** rights. However, if the state wanted it could convert the **mirasi** lands into house sites after giving due compensation to the **mirasdars** in the form of **gatakul** lands. The corporate functioning of the village and **desh** was ensured due to the existence of the **mirasi** tenure.

19.5.2 Inam Lands

Inam is an Arabic word originally meaning gift or reward. In its broadest sense, it suggests either simply **inam**, **inam** villages or **inam** lands. Mere **inam** implied grant of a specific amount of revenue of a village to a person. The **inam** village was assigned on a hereditary basis to persons or officials.

was a privileged category of land right. **Inam** was assigned to different categories: hereditary village officials, state officials, temples and **balutedars** (priests). The holders were designated **inamdars**. There were both resident and absentee **inamdars**. There is sufficient evidence to prove that these land assignments were hereditary. Rights in the **inam** land held by a **watandar** (hereditary village office holder) were saleable and transferable together with the office or **watan**. However it cannot be said with certainty whether the **inam** lands and the **watan** could be sold or transferred separately. It has not been established whether the **inam** lands held by institutions such as temples, monasteries, etc. could be sold without any constraints.

19.5.3 State Land (Crown Land)

Land held by the government as a corporate body or by the Peshwa/ruler could be treated as state land, although there might have been some kind of difference between the two. State lands existed in many villages of the Deccan managed by the local bureaucrats. They could be sold by them after taking approval from the central government. These lands were granted in **inam** or could be developed into house sites.

19.5.4 Waste Lands or Lands of Extinct Families

The **mirasi** rights and **inam** rights were unambiguous; however, the rights in the land of extinct families or wastelands contained a large degree of vagueness. These lands could be sold by either the village headman or village assembly or state. The lands of the families which had become extinct were called **gatkul zamin**. Lands which were left uncultivated for long periods were called **pad zamin**. Even the **miras** lands contained **pad zamin**. We will discuss those lands which had become barren due to the extinction of the proprietors. Both **gatkul zamin** and **pad zamin** meant wastelands. The term **khalisa pad zamin** referred to state wastelands.

The wastelands could be appropriated and disposed off by the village headman, local village assembly and government. The lands expropriated by the village headman were regarded as **miras** lands on which land revenue was levied. The houses and house sites of extinct families could be acquired by the village headman after taking the approval of the local village assembly. However, generally this was not a lucrative proposition. The lands thus appropriated were cultivated by the **uparis** on a share-cropping basis and were subject to a high and fixed land revenue demand which could be relaxed only in the event of crop failure. Though such an undertaking added to the headman's social prestige, on the whole it was not worthwhile. Above all, the headman did not have the authority to dispose off the land according to his wishes.

Wastelands were disposed off by the local assembly either as **miras** or as **inam** lands. The purchaser (**inamdar**) of wastelands in the form of **inam** was not required to pay land tax on the lands. However, the village as a group had to pay land tax to the government on large **inam** lands thus sold. Wastelands sold as **miras** lands were subject to a heavy land tax which had to be paid by the new incumbent.

The government at the request of the headman gave away wastelands to **mirasdars** as compensation for taking over their **miras** lands located near the inhabited area of a village for converting them into house sites. The grant of wastelands to local bureaucrats and hereditary officers was a means of encouraging cultivation. Wastelands were also granted as **inam** to individuals and institutions. The king or Peshwa also received wastelands in the form of grants. Wastelands which were neither appropriated by the village headman nor by the local assembly were resumed by the government. The government granted these lands as **inam** to priests, state officials, temples, mosques, hereditary officers, etc. In this manner, the government aimed at curtailing state expenditure and also securing the allegiance of the grantees to the state.

1) What were the main features of Medieval Deccan Village?

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2) Enumerate the four categories of land rights in the Deccan.

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3) Discuss briefly the modern theories regarding ownership of land in the Deccan.

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19.6 VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The village community was based on the principle of hereditary rights in land. This principle was derived from ancient Hindu system of joint property. The village headman, accountant, artisans, landholders, etc. constituted the village community. A few autonomous village units combined to form larger territorial units called **naikwadi** or **sthal** (Pre-Muslim Hindu period) under an officer called **naik** whose tasks included assisting the village headman for collecting revenue and heading the local militia. About 84 or more villages combined to form an administrative division called **paragana** or **desh** headed by a **deshmukh**. These larger territorial units acted as links between the villages and the ruler. The **Sardesais** and **Sardeshpandes** (above the **deshmukhs** and **desais**) were other components in the chain between villages and the ruler. A village consisting of a trading centre was called **qasba**. The corporate body of the village and desh was called **gota** derived from Sanskrit **gotra** which means family. Thus the villages and **parganas** as territorial units which were constituted according to the ancient customs of villages communities remained unaffected by political changes.

19.6.1 Theories

The socio-economic writings of the 19th century project two broad theories on the nature of the Indian village community. The first theory as advocated by Karl Marx (based on two books written by British administrators, e.g., Sir C.T. Metcalfe, the acting Governor-General of India who considers the Indian village community as stagnant) regards the village community as 'self-sufficing' and unchangeable based on 'division of labour'. The individuals such as priest, barber, headman, etc. are referred to as rural servants by Baden Powell and others. According to Karl Marx, these servants were maintained at the expense of the whole community. Relying on Baden-Powell's work **Indian Village Community** (1896), Max Weber pointed out that the village servants were provided a share in land or harvest or money in return for the service they performed for the village community. This Max Weber terms as 'demiurgical labour'. Marx and Weber attribute the 'unchangeableness' of Indian society to 'economic self sufficiency' and 'Caste system combined with magical traditionalism.

The view of the historians like S.N. Sen and A.S. Altekar are in conformity with the theory propounded by Marx and Weber. Both agree that the village servants were employed by the village as a whole. S.N. Sen clearly points to the hereditary nature of occupation of the village servants.

India and the little communities enunciate the **jajmani** theory. It was first propounded by W.H. Wiser, an American Christian missionary. According to him, rural servants were engaged on a hereditary basis by certain families (patrons) belonging to the dominant castes on a trans-village level. T.O. Beidelman defines the **jajmani** system as a feudal system consisting of hereditary obligations of payment and service between two or more families of different castes in the same area. M.N. Srinivas, an eminent sociologist, does not accept the **jajmani** concept. He cites instances to disprove the element of hereditary service and also the opinion regarding the relation between specific families.

19.6.2 Peasants

The reports of the British administrators as well as the indigenous Marathi records throw valuable light on the categories of peasants and the land tenures which existed in the Deccan. Various terms are used for the peasants in the records such as **raiyyat**, **loka**, **praja**, **kula** or **kunbi**. The village land was held by the peasants or cultivators. They can be divided into two broad categories: a) **mirasdars** and 2) **uparis**. The **mirasdar** (**mirasi** or **thalkari**) was generally a landed proprietor cultivator (free holder). The **upari** was a tenant-at-will. He was a stranger in the village where he cultivated the land either of the **mirasdar** or government (after the second half of the 18th century). These lands were held by the **upari** on the **ukti** tenure. This was a land-lease comprising a verbal agreement for a year in which the rent rates were not fixed. The tenant cultivators also held land on **Qaul** (agreement)-**Istava** (land) tenure. It was a contractual agreement (lease for 5, 7 or 9 years) intended to encourage cultivators to bring wasteland under cultivation. The **deshmukh** who issued the **Qaul-Istawa** was allowed commission on the wasteland thus reclaimed. Large **inam** lands were cultivated by the **uparis** on a share cropping (**batai**) basis. Occasionally, the **mirasdars** could also be tenants holding **inam** lands. The absentee **inamdar** got his share of rent in cash either through his agent in the village or village headman whom he deputed for the task. The resident **inamdar** was paid rent in kind. The amount was usually half of the gross produce.

Individual peasants and hereditary village officers were holders of **miras** lands on which land tax was levied. The obligation to pay the final land tax to the government even in the case of poor harvest or crop failure induced the **mirasdars** and village headman to leave the village. The **uparis** were the tenants of the **mirasdars** who cultivated the **miras** land on sharecropping terms. They paid the rent to the government if their landlord was absconding. It was generally 2/3rd of the total produce. An important change which occurred in the second half of the 18th century was that the **mirasdars** became cultivators of lands and the **uparis** were encouraged by the government to cultivate state and wastelands. It is clear that tenancy was not prevalent on a large scale in the Deccan, sale of land was infrequent and that the **uparis** soon acquired occupancy rights in land.

19.6.3 Got Sabha or Majlis

Gota Sabha was an independent body which held jurisdiction over the administrative, fiscal and judicial affairs of the village or **pargana**. The administrative body of the village consisting of the local officials of the **pargana** was called **diwan**. The two—**got** and **diwan**—performed the role of arbiter in disputes brought to them by the village community. The **watandars** and **balutedars-watandars** participated in the meeting of the **got sabha**. The Muslim rule in the Deccan promoted the development of the **majlis** system, the **qazi** serving as the link between **gota** and **diwan**. The traditional system of naming the judgement according to the nature of transaction was discontinued. The verdict was attested by the members of the **majlis** before it became a legal document (**mahzar**).

19.7 WATAN SYSTEM

Watan is an Arabic term and **watan** system owes its origin in the Deccan to the establishment of the Muslim rule. Broadly speaking, it refers to a hereditary grant

by him to the village community. The hereditary village officers were permanent residents of the village (**desaks**) and were granted land by the state together with rights and immunities in lieu of administrative tasks performed by them in the village. The **desaks** were called **watandars** (**deshmukh**, **desai**, **deshpande**, **kulkarni**, etc). They were exempted from payment of land revenue to the government. The **Smritis** refer to **vrittis** which was the indigenous variant of **watan**, and the emolument received by the holders of **vrittis** were termed as **nibandhas**. The rent-free land held by the **watandar** was called **inam**.

The chief hereditary officer of the village was the **patel**, also called **gava patel** or **mokaddam patel** in the contemporary Marathi records. The main responsibility of the **patel** was to collect land revenue and remit the government share to the state treasury. As the village headman, he performed several administrative duties in the village. In return, he received certain privileges (**haq**) and perquisites (**lazims**) which were mentioned in his **watan-deed**. **Haq** was granted to him as a matter of right (legal grants). It consisted of a share of the total revenue collection in cash or kind which was fixed by the state. **Lazim** was voluntary payment such as **phaski** (a handful of any corn) **pasodi** (a garment), etc; free services from **mahars** and artisans; seniority rights (**man pan**) which enabled him to preside over the village festivities. Besides the **patel**, other officers such as **kulkarni**, and **chaugula** (**patel's** assistant) also enjoyed perquisites and rights in return for their services.

The hereditary officers of a **paragana** were **deshmukh** and **deshpande**. The **deshmukh** was the head **patel**. For his services he was paid in kind from land and also received services and goods from the village servants, merchants, etc. Besides, he also held land in the village. The **deshkulkarni** supervised the work of the **kulkarnis** in his **paragana**. He was however subordinate to the **deshpande**. The **deshkulkarni** received remuneration in the form of rent-free land as well as payment in cash and kind which was usually half the amount the **deshmukh** received.

Seth and **Mahajan** were hereditary officials of the **qasba** or **peth** (market village). They received emoluments in cash or kind and land. A **taraf** or **karyat** consisted of a few villages. This territorial unit was smaller than a **paragana**. The hereditary officer of this unit was the **naik**. His task was to collect taxes from the cultivators. Later in the Muslim-ruled states, this officer was replaced by the **havaladar**.

The **deshmukhs** and **deshpandes** were the **zamindars** (**haqqadars**) who did not possess proprietary rights over all the lands under their jurisdiction. They sold their lands only under desperation, but the rights and privileged attached to their office could not be sold separately. Their position remained unaffected even in times of political upheavals.

There was a sharp distinction between the **mirasi** and **watani** rights. **Mirasi** was a hereditary proprietorship right in the land, whereas the **watani** right flowed from the office held and services offered by the **watandar** which was transferable. A **mirasdar** could also be a **watandar**, but a **watandar** need not necessarily be a **mirasdar**. A **watandar**, however, held **inam** lands on a hereditary basis.

19.7.1 Balutedars

The rural servants in Maharashtra villages are referred to as twelve **balutes** (**bārah balute**) or **alutas**. The scholars differ regarding the composition of the **balutedars**. However, the following were invariably included in the list: carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leather-worker, ropemaker, barber, washerman, astrologer, Hindu priest and **mahar**. The term (referred to by Grant Duff, etc) twelve **alutas** was probably an extension of the word **balutas** and had the same connotation. The **alutas** are not mentioned in the 18th century Marathi documents and, thus, it appears that they were found only occasionally in villages. There were two categories of the **balutedars**: 1) **watan** holding **balutas** and stranger(**upari**) **balutas**. The first category possessed hereditary monopoly over their services. They were employed by the village as a whole and served the individual villagers. The **balutedars** were paid by the peasants in three ways:

- 1) in kind or cash called **baluta**;

- 2) in the form of perquisites, rights and privileges in cash or kind, and
- 3) in the form of revenue-free inam lands.

It is not clear whether the perquisites were enjoyed by the upari-balutas also. Regarding the inam lands, it can be safely said that only watan-holding balutas were entitled to hold these lands. The baluta-watan could be transferred divided or sold without the consent of the village as a whole, but such a transaction required the sanction of the village assembly.

The division of the baluta-watan did not imply division of service duties, but of emoluments. The amount of emoluments did not increase; therefore, such a practice was not discouraged. The balutas remained the servants of the whole village and not of any family.

The balutas generally belonged to different occupational castes. The priest and the accountant were Brahmins. The priests did not hold any watan. Their function was confined to certain castes or families because of the peculiar nature of Hindu rites and ceremonies. These families (jajman) were either temporary or permanent clients of the priests. Thus, the jajmani principle is applicable to priests, but not to the twelve balutas. In the final analysis, it can be stated that the watandars and balutedars were maintained and controlled by the village as a body.

19.7.2 Feudalism

The pargana and the village community represented a vertically stratified structure, whereas jati was structurally horizontal and had a trans-village character. The latter constituted an important component of a village and paraganas. It also had a tribal structure which imparted to it a mobile and militant character. Thus the community structure of the local society in medieval Deccan was pluralistic, but stratified either horizontally or vertically. From this we can infer that the Indian village community was not self-sustained and isolated but had linkages with neighbouring villages. The factor which regulated the functioning of the community structure was the watan system which represented division of labour between peasants and artisans in the village community. The increase in productivity in the local society led to the accumulation of surplus which got converted into perquisites of the community leaders. In a society where land was available in plenty a system based on landed property could not have evolved. Instead, the peasant proprietors turned community leaders were metamorphosed into the rural ruling class which acquired the attributes of exploiters by the end of the 16th century. Around this time, the watan tended to become the private property of the grantees. It was sold separately and freely in this period. The perquisites of the rural ruling class absorbed into the political structure of the state were transformed into rights of exaction. This tendency is seen by historians like Fukazawa as feudalisation from below. However, we find that class relations between peasants and rural ruling classes were not lord-serf relations as in medieval Europe, but they can be termed as communal-based agrarian relations. In the context of medieval Deccan, the peasants were the direct producers who possessed the means of production carried on by a nuclear peasant family. The community leaders who became the exploiting class of the local society did not become landlords or feudal lords because landownership in a society where land was abundant was not an important criteria for appropriating the surplus produced by the peasants and artisans. In such a society it was the community which was supreme, and the rural ruling groups could not monopolise the judicial rights over the peasants.

The grant of jagirs and saranjam (mokasa) to state officials for realizing revenue from the paraganas and villages has been termed as feudalization from above. But these terms should be used with caution considering the peculiarities of the situation in medieval Deccan.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss in brief the two theories which throw light on the nature of Indian village community.

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- 2) What do you understand by the term 'Watan System'? What were its chief characteristics?

- 3) List the two categories of peasants which existed in medieval Deccan.

19.8 SOUTH INDIA: AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

In the 17th and 18th centuries, reports were prepared by the British administrators on the land-tenure in South India. Stone inscriptions and local village documents (**kalfiyat**), resolutions adopted at the village level written on palm leaves and contained in Mackenzie collections, Christian missionary documents, foreign travellers accounts are the various sources which throw light on the land system of South India.

The reports of the British officers refer to communal holding of land in South Indian villages. In the pre-modern period, land holding and cultivation were the basis of production. There were two types of villages in South India: **brahmadeya** and **non-brahmadeya**. The Brahmins were granted villages by the rulers called **Brahmadeya**. In these villages the Brahmins established a communal self-governing body called **sabha**. These villages were mostly established during the Pallava and Chola times. **Non-brahmadeya** villages were more ancient and numerically more than the **brahmadeya** ones. From a study of inscriptions of the same locality and of the same period the following point emerges: 1) individual (big landlords held many villages) landholding prevalent in **brahmadeya** and communal landholding among **urar** (peasants) in **non-brahmadeya** villages. **Ur** was the assembly in **non-brahmadeya** villages. In the Vijaynagar period, the village was the major unit in which land rights were vested. There was a shift in focus from **nadu** (locality) called **nattar** and **okkul** (in Karnataka) during the Chola period to village as the prime unit in the Vijaynagar kingdom. The autonomous bodies like **sabha Ur**, and **nattar** declined and later disappeared in the Vijaynagar period giving place to **nayak** or independent chieftain.

The village servants (**ayagars**) were given **manya** or tax-free land, or subject to quit rent. Land tenures for Brahmins and temples were called **Ekobhogam** and **devadana** respectively. Private right (income shares) accruing from increased productivity due to investment in agriculture was called **dasavanda** or **katku-kodage** in Karnataka. An important change in the landholding system and agrarian structure occurred in the 16th century. The warrior chieftains (**nayaks**) of Vijaynagar penetrated into the local kinbased peasant societies in the Tamil country. Temples in the Tamil region had functioned as autonomous landholders and corporate institutions for a long period. The Vijaynagar chieftains took over the management of temples. The agrarian economy underwent a drastic change since the temple lands were transformed into contractual tenures. By acquiring control over these tenures, the chieftains got metamorphosed into agrarian magnates.

19.9 NATURE OF LAND RIGHTS

The various categories of agrarian rights (**kaniyatchi**) that existed in the rural society

will throw valuable light on the interaction between the **nayaks** and the peasants. The agrarian surplus produced by the peasantry and successfully extracted by the Telegu **nayaks** was the basis of the power of the Vijaynagar state. The dry plains of the Tamil country were settled by migrant Telegu warrior clans like Thottian, Panta Reddi, Naidu and Kambalattar. The traditional Tamil peasant elites and their groups like **nattavar** (villages) and **uravar** (peasant settlements) were displaced by Telegu-speaking groups who transformed this area into a peripheral zone.

The warrior-chieftains promoted agricultural development by bringing hitherto populated (**kongu**) region under intensive cultivation. Tank irrigation was introduced in the black soil belt of kongu, and cultivation of cash crops like sugarcane was encouraged.

The later 15th century witnessed the conversion of temple lands (**devadana**) into semi-private landed estates (**kaniparru**) of the warrior chieftains. There is an inscription of A.D. 1511 which refers to conversion of a peasant settlement with a temple tenure (**tirunamathukkani**) into a **kaniparru** of a warrior chieftain. The right to cultivate as well as levy taxes was transferred to the grantee. Various land and fiscal rights were contained in these land transactions of the 16th century. The traditional peasant elites, viz., **uravar** and **nattar** and the peasant assemblies such as **ur** were replaced by the dynamic and expanding **nayak** created agrarian political structure.

Many towns or fortified settlements were established in this period by the **nayaks**. They served as both political and economic centres. They were conspicuous by their absence in the Kaveri delta. **Palaiyan** was reclaimed land held by the warrior chieftains where peasants, artisans, and merchants were integrated into the political and economic network established by the **nayak** chief. They extracted **kudanal** (local dues) and **sittayam** from the peasants and artisans respectively.

The land tenure of the **nayaks** is referred to as **kaniparru**. It probably refers to rights in lands, i.e., to buy and sell without the absolute right of ownership. It also refers to a variety of taxes. An inscription dated A.D. 1522 testifies to the transfer of temple land and the rights associated with land to the **nayak**. The rights were as follows:

- 1) to collect dues from the peasants;
- 2) to cultivate the land and settle people; and
- 3) to receive **prasadam** (sacred food) from the temple.

However, the transfer of land to the **nayak** did not imply transfer of the right of ownership. The **nayak** could use the land and collect taxes, but the temples reserved the right of ownership to themselves.

Kaniparru was a conditional and contractual tenure or a lease between the warrior chieftains and temples. The temples retained the right of ownership and imposed obligations on the **nayaks** to pay the temples a certain amount in cash or kind.

The process of transfer of land did not lead to eviction of peasants. They retained their share (**karal**) of land. In case of transfer of temple lands to the peasants, the peasant leaders (**mudalis**) took over the cultivation of the land. They paid **vadavathi** (tribute) to the temple. This kind of peasant land-tenure was called **kudlingadevedanam**. The peasants in such villages had a permanent share in land and could not be displaced.

The rate of taxation was high. Besides, peasants were pressed to maintain irrigation facilities. Agrarian stress was building up but was held back due to the availability of land in the **kongu** area. Later, in the 17th century, when this area ('the frontier') was closed, peasant discontent increased. This was an outcome of the agrarian policies of the Vijaynagar **nayaks**.

Land was also leased out to individuals other than the **nayaks** and to institutions. The lease included houses, wet and dry land. In certain instances, the descendants of the leaseholder also enjoyed the right of sale, mortgage, etc.

Taxes imposed by the central and local governments on the land leased out by the temples were paid to the temple authorities by the leaseholders. Land leased out by temples were not totally exempt from taxes. The taxes received from the leaseholders

were remitted by the temple authorities to the state while retaining certain other taxes like **kadamal** for themselves. The leaseholders were given the right of cultivation and reclamation and colonisation of land. Generally, leaseholders did not cultivate themselves; they got it done by others. They paid taxes to the temple treasury in cash or kind. Cultivators also got a share of the produce. The leaseholders were almost the owners of the leased land.

The **mirasi** right was an important component of the land system in South India. The **mirasdars** held tax-free land called **maniyam**. They were entitled to a share of the produce (**kuppattam**) from these lands.

In certain cases, several **mirasdars** held village land jointly. The cultivators were called **payakari** who were divided into two groups—**ulkudis** and **parakudis**. The former stayed in the village. Their rights were not transferable and could not be infringed upon. The **parakudis** were tenants-at-will whose right of cultivation was contractual. Taxes paid by the **mirasdar** or the government were referred to as **pannu**, **lral**, **vari**, etc. There were two categories of the **mirasdars**—resident and non-resident. Slave labour was also employed by the **mirasdars** to cultivate land. The **mirasdars** acted as intermediaries between the government and villagers.

Thus, **mirasi** right though hereditary was not uniform. Its nature varied from place to place. It could be transferred through sale, mortgage or gift.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss the nature of Kaniparru right.

- 2) What were the chief characteristics of mirasi right in South India?

19.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have outlined the chief features of medieval Deccan village. The debate regarding ownership of land in medieval Deccan has been discussed. The nature of the village community as well as the various components constituting village community have been dealt with. The **Watan** system which was peculiar to the Deccan has been analysed in detail. The unit also deals with the land system of South India. The various land rights as well as the agrarian relations arising out of these rights in land have been highlighted.

19.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 19.3
- 2) See Section 19.5 and Sub-sec's 19.5.1, 19.5.2, 19.5.3 and 19.5.4.
- 3) See Section 19.4

- 1) See Section 19.6 and Sub-Sec. 19.6.1
- 2) See Section 19.7 and Sub-Sec.'s. 19.7.1 and 19.7.2.
- 3) See Section 19.6 and Sub-sec. 19.6.1

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 19.9
- 2) See Section 19.9