<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>MEDIEVAL SOCIETY-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historiography of the Rural Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 16</td>
<td>Village Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 17</td>
<td>Rural Society: North India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT 18</td>
<td>Rural Society: Peninsular India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggested Readings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The village in India has always been the focus of various social, political, economic and academic discussions. It has been usually perceived that the clue to the understanding of Indian society lies in the village. The centrality of villages in Indian history can be seen in the administrative reports of the colonial administrators, political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, the pragmatic reports of early government officers and writings of various sociologists, anthropologists and historians. The discussions have been usually on the themes of village community, system of land tenures, structure of landed relations and rights and the nature of rural society. The ideas of the Indian village that we come across in these writings are varied:

a) Indian villages are seen as idyllic communities, characterized by brotherhood and equality. The idea of village solidarity and collectiveness is strongly embedded in the rural society.

b) Indian villages are self-sufficient and are not dependant on any kind of economic interactions with the outside world.

c) The villages are characterized by static, unchanging rural societies and the changes outside the village boundaries have no effect within the village. Therefore, the village is an isolated unit and inward looking.

d) The village has been primarily a revenue extracting unit for the state. Therefore, the relationship between the village and the state is based on the mechanisms of surplus extraction only.

However, the various inscriptions, records, and documents of the village and the state in the pre-modern period clearly reflect the complex nature of the village and the rural society. The rural society was not only sensitive to the changes within the village, it was also responding and reacting to the changes and developments outside the village, the larger milieu in which it was situated. Neither was it self-sufficient, interactions were taking place beyond the village boundaries with the neighbouring as well as far off villages on an extensive scale. Various studies have termed the villages as “little communities” having constant interaction with “greater communities” and both are considered to be necessary for each other’s existence. Social inequity and not equality was the characteristic feature of the village society. The relations between the rural classes was based upon caste, class, and power structures, primarily related to land, and thus creating a complex agrarian hierarchy, that was both complementary and contradictory.

In this Block we will discuss the rural society and its various aspects and what do they reflect on the nature of the village itself in the medieval period. The subject matter of this Block will revolve around:

1) Historiography on the nature of village, rural society and the village community
2) Village Community
3) Characteristics of the rural society
4) Rural society in North India
5) Rural society in Deccan
6) Rural society in South India

We will try to analyse various components within these themes to present you an outline of the rural society and village community in medieval India.
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE RURAL SOCIETY

The British Approach

The primary aim of the British administrators in nineteenth century India was to maintain law and order, assess the revenue and finalize the land settlement systems without disturbing the existing system as far as possible. They found the village as the most suitable unit for both. Thus, the village became the chief unit of their administration and prominent rural gentry comprising of the village officials, zamindars and princes became their supporters for maintaining law and order and collecting revenue. Several experiments were conducted to maximize the collection of the land revenue. A large number of them failed and some were successful. However, several reports and works were written that reflected the British views on Indian village and rural society.

Colonel Mark Wilks, a Company servant in Madras, from 1782-1801, in the *Historical Sketches of South India in an Attempt to trace the History of Mysore* remarked:

> Every village, with its twelve Ayangadees as they are called, is a little republic, with the Potail at the head of it; and India is a mass of republics. The inhabitants, during war, look chiefly to their own Potail. They give themselves no trouble about the breaking up and division of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred: wherever it goes the internal management remains unaltered; the Potail is still the collector and magistrate, and head farmer. From the age of Manu until this day the settlements have been made either with or through the Potaits. (1930, Vol.I, p.139).

This idea of the Indian village could be seen among many administrators of the East India Company, Charles Metcalfe in North, Thomas Munro in the Madras Presidency and Mountstuart Elphinstone in the Bombay Presidency, who evolved new methods of survey and settlements that had an impact on the British policy and idea of village. According to Charles Metcalfe (1810), “real India was in the villages” and village and the village community were “little Republics”, democratic with headman and his officers and this village was unaffected by the changes in the outside world. Elphinstone in 1841 shared similar views. Thomas Munro upheld the ryotwari settlement, where the settlement was made directly with the individual cultivators and the intermediaries were excluded. Metcalfe however was not in agreement with Munro and remarked, “I admire the structure of the village communities, and am apprehensive that direct engagement for Revenue with each separate landholder or cultivator in a village might tend to destroy its constitution. The village communities are little republics….“ Elphinstone also did not favour direct settlement with the ryots and was determined to follow the existing systems and methods which according to him were continuing from the ancient period.

In all these works, the main ideas were the following:

1) Village was the smallest unit of the Indian state where the government revenue was generated and collected.

2) Villages were isolated units, self-sufficient, unchanging and indifferent to the changes in the outside world.

3) Village was a ‘traditional organic and stable community of subsisting peasants’. This contrasted with higher Indian state that was ‘artificial, disorganized and unstable institution of personal aggrandizement and opulence’.
4) According to the British, the Indian villages in nineteenth century resembled the Teutonic (Germanic) villages of medieval Europe. They pointed out that, while in the nineteenth century, Europe had already experienced Industrial Revolution and its base of governance were cities and towns; India remained trapped in the mass of villages where the past was still preserved. Therefore, it was only colonial rule that could place India on the path of progress and development.

Karl Marx

The works of the British administrators mentioned above along with those of James Mill in 1848 and Sir John Campbell (1824-1892), travelogues and memoirs on India influenced Karl Marx’s opinion on the Indian village. His views as expressed in the *Das Kapital*, Vol. I, Chapter 14, Section 4 resembled those of the British administrators on the self-sufficient and unchanging character of the rural society and the village. Marx and Engels both framed their analysis within the framework of the Asiatic mode of production. It comprised of three characteristics:

1) Unstratified, communally landowning societies, where land was held as the property of the community. The rural society was self-sufficient. Whatever was required by the agricultural community was produced and consumed within the village. While on the one hand, there was an absence of division of labour, handicrafts and agriculture confined to the same household, on the other hand, there was an unalterable division of labour based on caste. Each caste represented an occupation that was fixed and was an endogamous unit. Hence, according to Marx, caste represented the forces and relations of production peculiar to India that further made the Indian villages self-contained and organic.

2) There was an absence of private property in land. Hence, there could never be any class antagonism and development. In the Asiatic system, the community was the real proprietor and property existed only as the communal property. Individual possession was there but the property belonged to the community.

3) The third feature of the Asiatic mode of production was the oriental despotic state and its absolute power, whose major concern was the extraction of the revenue surplus, which it attempted to maximize through large government sponsored irrigation. Whenever, the oriental state failed to provide the irrigation facilities, agriculture collapsed.

While agreeing with the British views that, 'each village was concerned only with its own boundaries’ his description of the rural society was as follows:

The constitution of these communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common, and the produce divided among the members. At the same time, spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side with the masses thus occupied with one and the same work, we find the “chief inhabitant,” who is judge, police, and tax-gatherer in one; the book-keeper, who keeps the accounts of the tillage and registers everything relating thereto; another official, who prosecutes criminals, protects strangers travelling through and escorts them to the next village; the boundary man, who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities; the water- overseer, who distributes the water from the common tanks for irrigation; the Brahmin, who conducts the religious services; the schoolmaster, who on the land teaches the children reading and writing; the calendar-Brahmin, or astrologer, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed-time and harvest, and for every other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a carpenter, who make and repair all the agricultural implements; the potter, who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber, the washerman, who washes clothes, the silversmith, here and there the poet, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the schoolmaster. This dozen of individuals is maintained at the expense of the whole community. (*Das Capital*, Vol.I, Chapter 14, Section 4)
The two major contributions in the historiography of Indian villages were Henry Maine (1822-1888) and H. Baden Powell (1841-1901). According to Henry Maine (Village Communities in the East and West, London, 1881), the village in North India was established by the Aryans. Rural society comprised of Aryan warrior clans. Within these clans were families arranged in a hierarchical manner. Authority in such kind of rural society was patriarchal, resting with the eldest male, who was the family chief. The land was collectively held by the confederation of warrior clans and was characterized by Aryan brotherhood, where communal eclipsed the individual. The eldest male of the senior most clan was the king who received a large share of the produce. This clan based village was exclusive and isolated and ‘was never trespassed upon by the footstep of lay person of different blood.’ The rural societies remained exclusive and unchanged even when clans were transformed into castes. According to Maine, caste, an exclusive feature of the Aryan village consolidated the isolated and changeless character of the rural society and village. The Rajputs, Gujar and Jat villages are the descendants of the Aryan village and here the past is preserved and unchanged. The village in nineteenth century resembles the village of the Teutonic (Germanic) medieval Europe.

Baden-Powell was a civil servant in Punjab between 1861-1889. He (The Indian Village Communities, 1892; The Land Systems of British India, 3 Vols. OUP, 1892) was in general critical of Maine’s Aryan village. According to him the Indian villages were ‘raiyatwari’ or ‘non landlord’ or ‘severalty’ villages. The characteristics of this type of village were:
1) Each separate household had their distinct lands.
2) Ownership was vested in the patriarch or the head.
3) No cultivated or wastelands were held in common by the village.
4) There are no joint families in ‘which the males automatically became the coparceners.’ The holders are not jointly responsible to the state for revenue or other obligations.

Baden-Powell said that the raiyatwari villages already existed in north and south India before the settlements of Aryans and the Aryan village was superimposed on it.

Nationalist Historiography

Historians like R.C.Majumdar (1888-1980) and Radha Kumud Mookherji (1880-1963) challenged the British view of the Indian village as isolated and exclusive. Their studies based on intensive empirical researches, primarily the inscriptions and texts, concluded that there were associational forms of governance in India, evidences mostly coming from South India and Deccan and in the early medieval period. Therefore, the village societies and local bodies were not a part of the primitive societies or tribal self government.

R.C. Majumdar (Corporate Life in Ancient India, Calcutta, 1918) was amongst the earliest to comment on the village organization and rural society of a brahmadeya (a brahma village), Uttaramerur (85 kms from Chennai in Tamil Nadu) as a model for village government. Radha Kumud Mukherjee (Local Government in Ancient India, Oxford, 1919) argued that the Indian villages were not ancient, and static. Rather, they were “socialist with differing associational forms as intermediate body between the state and individual units.” However, these historians were trained in political history and had simplistic approach towards social and economic history.

Marxist Historiography

The Marxist historians, namely D.D.Kosambi (An Introduction to the Study of Indian History, Bombay, 1956), R.S.Sharma (Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200, Calcutta, 1965) and Kathleen Gough (Rural Society in Southeast India, Cambridge, 1981) rejected the idea of the Asiatic mode of production and defined the Indian...
Medieval Society-1

village as feudal. The focus was on the relations between the king and the vassal (samanta) or landlords, their tenants and serfs, peasants and villages. According to Kosambi and Sharma, there was a decline of foreign trade, urbanization and commodity production by the end of the Gupta period. Consequently, the rural-urban nexus collapsed and the villages became ‘self-contained’ and a ‘closed peasant economy’ developed. Simultaneous with these developments was the political fragmentation and kings making land grants to subordinates, thus leading to the rise of a class of landlords between the state and the peasantry. These landlords had certain obligations to the king, primarily which was collecting the revenue and supplying troops during the time of war. The village according to these historians was a site of class conflict between the oppressed peasantry and the oppressive landlord. These views generated a heated debate amongst various historians. The most important criticism came from Harbans Mukhia (‘Was there Feudalism in Indian History?’, Journal of Peasant Studies: VIII.3, 273-310) who argued that the Indian peasant was not servile, but free as his labour was not controlled like in serfdom. This was because of the ‘high fertility of land’ and ‘low subsistence needs’ of the peasants which meant that they could be exploited to give much more.

Irfan Habib’s The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707) is one of the pioneering works on the agrarian system within the Marxist framework. Although the focus has been on peasant rights and tenancy, social and cultural aspects are also dealt. Issues of caste identities, particularly where landed relations are concerned also influenced the political relationships as well as interaction between the castes. For Irfan Habib this multiplicity of relations was an essential part of rural life and he emphasizes that the village social structure was wider than just land-based relations.

Anthropological and Sociological Studies

A large number of works on the village and rural societies have been done by anthropologists and sociologists. Some of the pioneers in this field were M.N. Srinivas (India’s Villages: A Collection of Articles Published in the Economic Weekly of Bombay, 1955.), McKim Marriot (Village India, Chicago, 1955), Adrian C. Mayer (Caste and Kingship in Central India., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960) and Andre Beteille (Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village, California, 1965). However, their methodology was different from that of the historians. They did not study the past but rather concentrated on the contemporary period, studying the structure and functioning of a village through intensive field work. Administration was not the focus, rather culture was. For the social anthropologists villages were “little communities” linked to various units of “complex societies” or “civilizations” and the relationship of the villagers with the world outside was based on “exchange”, “transactions”, “network” or “linkage”. One of the most influential anthropological works on the study of caste that has relevance for the rural society in India is Louis Dumont’s Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications (Chicago, 1970). According to Dumont, the village administration was never independent of the royal or central power. Caste was an overarching structure in the rural society that determined the status and hierarchy. Power was secondary and subordinated to caste. In recent years because of inter-disciplinary approach, several scholars have used the anthropological methods to study the past of the Indian village. Bernard Cohn (‘African Models and Indian Histories’, in Richard G. Fox (ed.), Realm and Region in Traditional India, Delhi, 1977) and Nicholas Dirks (The Hollow Crown: The Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom, Cambridge, 1987) are some of them.

Dr. Ranjeeta Dutta
Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi
UNIT 16 VILLAGE COMMUNITY

Structure
16.0 Introduction
16.1 What is a Village Community?
16.2 Panch or Panch-Muqaddam
16.3 Functions and Powers
16.4 Summary
16.5 Exercises

16.0 INTRODUCTION

Harold H. Mann insists that the heart of India is in its villages, and argues that “If we want to understand the history of the country we must seek far more in the obscure unprinted records of village vicissitudes than in the more showy array of documents concerning conquests and governments, princes and their retainers or palaces and their inhabitants”.

To understand the village community in a subtler manner, it is essential to know: What is a village?

The reference of existence of village is found in sources of pre-colonial India. The words \textit{deh} (Persian word for village) and \textit{gaon} or \textit{ganve} are frequently used in the literary sources and the folk traditions. Mughal Empire’s territorial divisions are well known to us. These divisions were perceived on the basis of rivers, mountains, deserts and languages. \textit{Ain-i Akbari} also reflects how the Mughal empire was divided into subas/sarkars/parganas. The \textit{parganas} had a varying number of villages. These numbers are known from the Amber- Jaipur documents, particularly from the \textit{Arsattas}, apart from other sources. Also seventeenth century documents from Rajasthan and Haryana show the small number of cultivators in the villages which reflect the small size of villages in pre-colonial India. Documents from Deccan, South India etc. also reflect the varying sizes of the villages from tiny hamlets to populous settlements. Territorial identity has also been deciphered in the sources like \textit{Marwar-re pargana-re vigat}. These sources also identify the social identities of the inhabitants and the village officials.

In \textit{Markandeya Purana}, the village is defined as a “place surrounded by cultivable lands and where inhabited a number of people available to support the able cultivators in raising crops in those lands”.

Monier Williams argues that “it is a division of territory with careful distribution of fixed occupations for the common good, with its inter-dependence of individual family and communal interests, with its perfect provision for political independence and autonomy”.

Irfan Habib writes that, “the village itself can be defined as a settlement essentially of peasants who gather to live together for better security and for the convenience of exchanging essential goods and services among themselves. Village should be seen as a community, a network of caste divisions and customary service or barter relationships. Caste was the source of the “unalterable division of labour”.

For some, like A.R. Kulkarni, village is a cluster of houses and a close-knit unit. B.D. Chattopadhyaya has defined the village by saying that “a typical village settlement is known to have been composed of three components: a) the \textit{Västu} (residential land), b) the \textit{kshetra} (cultivable land) and c) \textit{gohara} (pasture land).”


Medieval Society-1

**Taqsim** (summary accounts of the revenue of the *pargana*) documents, preserved in the State Archives of Rajasthan, Bikaner, state that villages of Eastern Rajasthan comprised of: i) the *basti* (area under habitation), ii) *raha* (tracts/ strips), iii) *magro* (rocky land), iv) *pabar* (hills if any), v) *nullah/nadi/tala* (stream, river, pond), vi) *sir* (land under special revenue arrangements), vii) *jungle* (forests), and viii) cultivable land.

From the above described perceptions of scholars it is clear that village has been defined in different ways, but concisely, it has three components: i) varying size of territory, ii) inhabitants, and iii) agriculture as the main occupation.

The most important component, i.e. inhabitants, was bound together by the village community.

The present Unit deals mainly with the power and functions of the village community during the medieval period. The relations of the village oligarchs with peasants, artisans and labourers are discussed in the next two Units of the present Block on Rural Society.

**16.1 WHAT IS A VILLAGE COMMUNITY?**

Question arises what a village community denotes and how did it function? The issue came to the fore as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century in the British circles. The Committee of the House of Commons on East India Affairs discussed the issue as early as 1810. British Indian administrators Charles Metcalfe, James Mill, Elphinstone and Sir Henry Maine deliberated upon the concept of the village community. Charles Metcalfe called them ‘little republics’, ‘almost independent of any foreign relations’, ‘unchangeable’; while James Mill designated them as ‘corporations’; Elphinstone argued that during the medieval period it ‘acted as deterrent against the imposition of the Mahometan law upon the Indian life’. Sir Henry Maine described it as ‘an organised self-acting group of families exercising a common proprietorship over a definite tract of land’. He argued that in India in the villages where a particular clan dominated then rule of the head of the clan (village headman) prevailed; while, where the village consisted of heterogeneous population (of different caste and creed) then instead of the dominance of ‘one’ the village *panchayat* acted as dominant body. Thus he looked at the phenomenon of the presence of the village community not ‘universal’ but depending on the nature of the constitution of a particular village.

Arthur Phillips (*Land Tenures of Lower Bengal*, Calcutta, 1876) argued that the village community was present in ancient India; it declined under the centralised administrative system of the Muslim rule. The growth of the *zamindari* system also contributed to its decline during the medieval period. Though the official machinery of the village headmen, *patwaris*, *chaudhuries* continued, they enjoyed their position at state’s pleasure only and the state preserved the right to remove them. B.R. Grover (2005) argues that rather ‘the type of village communities based on land tenures found in the nineteenth century was more traceable in the regions which had remained in complete suppression as a part of the Sultanate or Mughal rule than in such regions where the Sultanate or Mughal patterns of regular agrarian administration did not penetrate...In fact, the concept of village communities was governed by regional and tribal practices undergoing changes from time to time rather than by ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ patterns of government.’ However, there appears to be no uniform pattern of the presence of village community. It varied in form and substance from region to region; even the pattern of the presence of different classes and functionaries varied from region to region. (for details see Block 4, Unit 17 of our Course MHI-05) Grover argues that ‘the concept of village community depended upon the nature of prevalent land tenure and the relationship between the agricultural
and non-agricultural population residing in a village...it) must be studied in relation to the regional tribal and clannish settlements as well as the zamindari rights and jurisdictions of the dominant clans’.

Regional sources throw ample light on the working of the village communities. Sources like arhatsattas (revenue records pertaining to state income and expenditure), jamabandi (revenue assessment records), jama kharcha (income and expenditure), chithiss (letters written/issued by and to various revenue officials and the state), sanads (issued by the diwan, the department kept miscellaneous information pertaining to emoluments, privileges, etc.), dostur al amal (schedule of revenue rates) preserved at the State Archives of Rajasthan, Bikaner in Rajasthani/Persian throw ample light on the nature of village community during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. For Punjab, we have khalsa darbar records (largely contains revenue records of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign from 1811-1849) and patwari records (village accounts maintained by the village patwari (village accountant), Marathi records preserved in Pune Archives like thalzada (a record of land rights/land holdings maintained by the village accountant) and tuleband (actual receipts and expenditures of the village revenue) also throw much light on the socio-economic life of rural Maharashtra during the medieval period. Village system of Goa can also be studied with the help of voluminous Marathi records pertaining to village communities, preserved in the Archives of Goa. Similarly State Archives of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu also contain valuable records regarding village communities.

The village community was a strong pillar of the rural society. Wherever institutional or social system in a village was involving the village population in some form of cooperation or dependence, village community did exist. It dealt with the problems like law and order, revenue payments and related matters of the villages.

As early as first or second century A.D. the Buddhist text Milindpanho clearly speaks of what constituted the village community and obviously women, slave girls/slave men, hired labour, servants, ordinary villagers, sick people etc. did not count in the list. It thus clearly states how the village community largely constituted the upper strata of the village society. The above reference makes it clear that the villages were socially stratified, and the matters of the village were decided only by the upper strata who along with the village headman were entitled to levy forced labour.

During the medieval period largely peasants, village servants and labourers did form part of the village community. However, it appears that paikasht (outside cultivators) muzarian (tenants; occupancy cultivators) hardly ‘played any role in the management of the affairs of the village community’, as rightly pointed out by Grover. However, Grover argues that there appears to have occurred some shift in their position, as the muzarian appears to have enjoyed ‘transferable rights of mortagae and sale of their holdings’.

S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar has given a vivid description of village assemblies of South India. R.C. Majumdar, Burton Stein, Nobura Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu have discussed in great details the working of the Brahmanical assemblies of the Brahmadeya (revenue free grants given to the Brahmins) villages. In these villages Brahmins formed a communal self-governing body called sabha. These villages were mostly established during the Pallava and Chola times. The non-Brahmadesa villages appear to be of earlier period and numerically their strength was much more than the Brahmadeya villages. Ur was the assembly in non-Brahmadesa villages. The autonomous bodies like sabha, ur, and nattar declined and later disappeared in the Vijayanagar period giving way to nayaks or independent chieftains.

If we see the working of Brahman village assemblies of the Chola period, we get to know about the system of election and representation of individual families, their
qualification for membership and the existence of various committees performing
distinct functions (for the working of the village community in Deccan and South
India see Unit 18 of the present Block).

16.2 PANCH OR PANCH-MUQADDAM

The Vrindavan documents beginning from 16th century onwards throw a great deal of
light on the nature of functioning of the village community during the medieval
period. The documents are bilingual, i.e. Persian and Braj languages. They mainly
deal with the sale of village lands. In its Persian version village oligarchs (panch) are
referred to as muqaddam while in the Braj version they are addressed as panch and
they claim to act in concert (sab panchan milikare). This suggests that the panch
and muqaddam were used as synonym. Panch formed a collective body, known as
panchayat. Their traditional number appears to be five (Hindi panch) but the
number could be less and at times more. In Vrindaban documents their number varied
from four to as many as thirteen.

Baden Powell states that the Indian village community was an extension of the joint
family. But Irfan Habib argues that no two panch appear to be descendents of the
same father or grand father, which is very close to the Chola regulations of Brahman
villages that no single family should be over-represented in the sabha. He rather
emphasises that ‘hereditary succession had much to do with one’s obtaining the status
of panch’. Even conversion, it seems, did not deter right of a person to hold the
position of a panch. Bari Khan is mentioned in the Aritha documents (modern
Radhakund, a village near Mathura-Vrindavan) of 1640-42 as panch suggests that he
continued to be a panch even after converting to Islam. Irfan Habib’s study on
Vrindavan documents confirms that “at any one time only one member of the family
acted as panch representative”. Vrindavan document of 1594 clearly mentions that
out of thirteen panch three were Muslims. However, it appears that rights to perquisites
(biswa muqaddami) was shared equally among all heirs and not enjoyed solely
by the eldest member as panch.

Apart from hereditary succession, other factors like-caste, community, money, influence
etc. also played their role in the selection of the panch.

Writing in 1966, Grover rejects the presence of ‘village community’ during the
Mughal period. He argues that, ‘It is difficult to trace the concept of the ‘Panchayat’
system or a ‘Council of the Village Elders’ forming an integral part of the village
community during the Mughal age’...The zamindari and the muqaddami families as
well as other rieya would often meet in the village chaupal and discuss matters
relating to the interests of the agricultural community. The chaupal would as well
serve as the venue for the caste groups for discussion and enforcement of the caste
regulations. It is in this sense that the village community may be said to have existed
during the Mughal age’. Thus for Grover ‘caste’ was the chief binding factor and for
him the working of the village communities was more in the sense of caste Panchayat.
He clearly denies that it had any role in ‘matters relating to agricultural life, revenue
administration and social behaviour’.

16.3 FUNCTIONS AND POWERS

Grover argues that there was no ‘communal land’ or the ‘common financial pool’
belonging to the village community during the medieval period. He suggests that ‘the
village waste lands, the pasture lands and the adjoining jungles... (were) all owned by
the state’, though ‘village had a right to the usage of pasture land, wood from the
jungle and piscary from ponds’ in lieu of ‘nominal cesses (abwab) to the zamindari
and muqaddami families’. According to him malha (common village fund for meeting
out official’s exactions from the village) always remained an illegal cess during the Mughal period; while kharch-i deh (incidental expenditure of the village) ‘never implied a common pool of the village riaya in a village community’. Citing the farman of Bahadur Shah I (1710) he argues that it clearly ‘declares the charges on the grass and fodder from the pasture lands and jungles as illegal and forbids the muqaddams from further collection. Even in the ‘nineteenth century, in major portions of North India, the waste and the jungle lands were mostly at the disposal of the zamindar and the rights of user enjoyed by village community were extremely limited’.

However, Irfan Habib on the basis of the analysis of Vrindavan documents argues that village community definitely enjoyed rights over wastelands and there was presence of common financial pool. Vrindavan documents reflect the nature and extent of authority which panch or panchayat used to exercise over the common village lands. He argues that Panchayat possessed control over village land (zamin-i mauza). It could be pond, wasteland or cultivated/cultivable land. Aritha documents confirm that they could sell or lease out the village wasteland or else could grant permission to cultivate it. One of the deed of the Vrindavan documents shows that the panch in 1594 had given 4 biswas of wasteland of the village near Vrindavan to a bairagi (recluse) to construct some structure. Here one has to bear in mind that the village community did not enjoy rights to sell land cultivated by individual peasants. But in case some outsider (pai kasht) wanted to cultivate the land in a certain village then the permission of the village community appeared to be mandatory. Thalzada records from Maharashtra also show that a dancer, Shyama Naikin, received a grant of 60 bighas of land for her services to the Sidheshwar temple of Indapur and the dargah of Pirchad Khan.

The important question is how the money received out of the sale proceeds of the village land used to be distributed? Mughal records did speak about it to a certain extent. It appears that the Panch involved in the sale of the wastelands of the village did receive their ‘share’, but large sum out of the proceeds used to go to ‘common financial pool’ of the village. Aurangzeb’s farman to Rasikdas clearly mentions bachh (rate paid by the bhaiyachara community) villages into the common pool and behri mal (revenue paid by the community towards the common pool). S.P. Gupta mentions one such instance when even the panchayati land was taxed. He argues that it indicates the presence of ‘some sort of communal ownership of land in the village’.

It is interesting to see the expenditure pattern of this ‘common financial pool’. The largest amount thus received was spent to pay off the revenue demand to the state. Remuneration and perquisites of various officials were also paid out of this fund. Expenses of the village (kharch-i deh) were also met out of this fund. These expenditures were in the form of paying allowances and fees to the patwari, qanungo, and chaudhury. Even the common village loans were paid out of this fund. Panch could also lend money out of the common village pool in the case of the availability of surplus. In production enterprises like procuring seeds, digging up channels, etc. money was also spent by the village community out of the common village pool. All these transactions were conducted through village community (panchayat/panch). Common villagers had no control over these activities. The village oligarchs (designated kalantarana, mutaghalliban, muqaddams) were never held by the Mughal officials in high esteem. Akbar’s (1556-1605) diwan Todar Mal calls them, ‘bastards and headstrong’ who ‘do not pay their own share (of the revenue demand of the village) transferring it to the reza-riaya’ (ordinary peasants). (Habib, 1999)

B.L. Bhadani’s (1999) study on western Rajasthan also suggests the presence of some sort of common pool. From village Sewadi, pargana Jalar records we get references of ‘work for the village’, ‘remuneration in wheat (to be given) to the
village servants’, ‘according to number of persons’. The remuneration paid to the village community for onward payment to the village servants suggests presence of common village fund. It also speaks of collection of dues from the peasants for the same.

In the medieval Deccan also village headmen or village assembly possessed the right to dispose off or were privileged to take possession over the wastelands (gatkul jamin – land of extinct families) or pad jamin (land left waste on account of non-cultivation for a long period). The Marathi records mention possession of such lands by the village headmen as miras lands; while it also speaks of disposal of wastelands by them as miras as well as inam. Thus in medieval Deccan village headmen possessed the right to ‘appropriate’ wastelands, but in such case he had to pay heavy land-tax on it as per miras-rates. On account of this, comments Fukuzawa (1991), ‘the headmen of many villages would desist from taking over wastelands which would then remain unappropriated’.

In the Deccan generally disposal of wastelands appears to have been done by the village assembly (majalsi samakul pandhar). The sale of wastelands as miras lands did not necessarily involve ‘payment’ of the ‘money’ to the village assembly. Out of the three documents analysed by Fukuzawa (1991) only in one case grantee paid Rs. 100 to the village assembly. In such case the grantee happened to be an outsider. This appears in contrast to the contemporary north India where a share out of the sale proceeds used to go to the village headmen and rest used to go to the ‘common financial pool’. Similarly, there appears to be a contrast in the involvement of people in the two regions. In north India, in the sales of the village lands village panch/muqaddams were involved, while Marathi documents pertaining to medieval Deccan reveal that during the sale of village wasteland altogether 34 persons were present.

Here, apart from the village assembly (majalis samakul pandhar) others present were – an agent (kamavisdar), inamdar (held inam lands in the village), three headmen (patils), seven peasants, one carpenter (sutar), one gardener (mali), one blacksmith (lohar), one guest-bard (bhat-mehaman), two astrologer-accountant (joshi-kulkarni), one assistant headman (chaugula), one barber (nhavi), one untouchable (mahar), one keeper of the temple (gurav), as well as the deshpande (accountant) of the region, and thirteen other persons from the neighbouring villages and hamlets. (Fukuzawa, 1991) Village assembly, to meet out the common expenses of the village (paying land-tax, etc.), could sell off land as inam land over which the grantee did not need to pay any tax, instead the taxes due on that land were to be shared by the village as a whole. Fukuzawa concludes that if the lands were ‘disposed of as miras lands, it was the grantee (new mirasdar) who had to bear a heavy land-tax, whereas if disposed of as inam lands, the villagers as a group were obliged to pay the land-tax on behalf of the grantee (new inamdar), if the inam was of a fairly large scale.

In view of this situation, wastelands of many villages appear to have been left ‘waste’ without being disposed of.’

We do get references of sale of village lands in South India as well by the maha-sabhyar (members of the maha-sabha). Noboru Karashima (1992) refers to sale of number of such deeds. One of the inscriptions from Rajaraja Chola III, dated 1241 AD where members of maha-sabha of Ukkal ‘sold eastern hamlet (pidagai)... by means of a village sale (ur-vilai-piramanam) for 180 madais’. It included wet land, garden, residential area, house, trees, well, water, irrigation, road, passage, tank, bund, etc. The assembly granted ‘right of sale, mortgage, resale, inheritance and donation of this village (hamlet)’. This confirms the presence of right to sell off village land by the village community in South India. Though it appears that it did not necessarily include wastelands only.
Village servants and artisans formed an important component of the village community. As mentioned earlier a detailed analysis on the issue will be provided in Units 17 and 18. Here we will furnish only a brief account of their presence. Vrindavan documents also refer to land transfers. But how the village artisans and servants were maintained is not mentioned in these documents. Though we do get references to leather workers holding particular plots, terms and conditions of their holdings are not known.

A 1776 report from Baroch (Gujarat) throws significant light on the issue of maintenance of the artisans, “a certain portion of land of each village (according to the custom) should be tax free for the maintenance of those artisans and labourers whose services were absolutely necessary for the village”. Regarding the Jajmani system, R.S. Sharma argues that during the period of second urban decay (7-9th centuries), the jobless artisans of the urban areas migrated to rural areas to seek their livelihood and from this, in the course of time, emerged the jajmani system.

Thomas’ Memoirs on Sind also reveal similar information for 1847 Sind, where one gets to know the carpenter receiving his fee for the annual repair of the Persian wheels, and the potter for the supply of the earthen vessels. James Mill, Hegel, Karl Marx and Baden-Powell have described the attachment of the village servants and artisans to the village community. But W.H. Wiser concludes that the customary attachments tied the village servants and artisans not to the whole village but to groups of client families, their jajmans, within it. Louis Dumont feels that this is an extension of the relationship between the priest and his clients.

H. Fukazawa on the basis of 18th century Maharashtra documents writes that the servants and artisans were claiming their hereditary land allotment (watan/miras) from the village as a whole. These servants were called balutedars and were getting their share of agricultural produce known as baluta. Wilson’s Glossary discusses this system at length.

Village artisans and servants in Deccan and Gujarat and elsewhere too, whose services, like removal of litter, washerman, barber, carpenter, blacksmith and so on, were essential for the functioning of the village as an economic and social unit. They were getting tax free lands for their maintenance. On special occasions, the families of village servants received small allowances in cash and kind from the village community.

All types of artisans and servants were having their importance. A leather worker/tanner was as important and necessary as a priest in the village. Midwife services, which were provided by the low caste women, were essential for every family-low and high. Barber, similarly was necessary not only for cutting hair but also for conducting socio-religious ceremonies. This phenomenon was general throughout India even in the nineteenth century, and Baden Powell finds it in all kinds of villages. The socio-economic ties of village artisans with the zamindars and the cultivating community continued from generation to generation.

16.4 SUMMARY

Karl Marx infers that idyllic village communities were responsible for the stagnation of the Indian economy. But nationalist historians feel that India gradually became economically backward only during the colonial period because of British land tax and other related economic policies.

The debate about the role and rise/downfall of the village communities under the British rule may continue but the village community certainly played a significant role in every sphere of life of the villages/villagers. Thus, one can conclude that the
Indian village community was very much a living institution during the medieval period.

16.5 EXERCISES

1) Define village community. Examine the roles and functions of the village community during the medieval period.

2) What is a village? Discuss the importance of the village community as a corporate body during the medieval period.
UNIT 17 RURAL SOCIETY: NORTH INDIA

Structure

17.0 Introduction
17.1 Social Formation in the Plains
   17.1.1 Rural Elites
   17.1.2 Peasants and Agricultural Labourers
   17.1.3 Stratification in the Rural Society
17.2 Social Formation in the Tribal Regions
   17.2.1 Peasantisation of the Tribal Society
   17.2.2 Exchange
17.3 Caste in the Rural Society
17.4 Social Mobility
17.5 Rural Artisans and the Village Servants
17.6 Trading Groups
17.7 Summary
17.8 Exercises

17.0 INTRODUCTION

Any discourse on society encompasses all acts of its populace. Its coverage is large. Al-Beruni (11th century) has depicted Indian society as highly ‘conservative’ and ‘rigid’. Karl Marx has perceived medieval Indian village society as homogeneous, non-stratified, unchanging and stagnant. However, the historical evidences hardly support these assumptions. Contrary to Karl Marx, Fernand Braudel finds the ‘presence of self-sufficient’ village in India an ‘exception’. As a rule, the village community was open to the outside world, subject to the markets. Karl Marx’s argument is convincingly questioned by historians like Irfan Habib. He argues that the medieval rural society was highly stratified and segmented on the basis of economic status and caste groupings. Superior castes and rich often enjoyed special status in the hierarchy and were assessed at concessional rates. There existed vibrant trading interactions between the village and the towns. As a result there occurred significant changes in the pattern and structure of the village society. The overall centralizing tendencies of the Turkish and the Mughal rulers brought significant changes in the existing social structure. These tendencies may be enumerated thus: extraction of greater surplus from the villages to the urban elites; recruitment of large scale standing army and introduction of new technologies (Persian-wheel, canals, spinning-wheel).

With ecological diversities and on account of the presence of different methods of production uniform social structural forms was not possible in the medieval age. There were regional and local variations along with cultural diversities. Hilly and forest societies, which were difficult to access, possessed atypical social set-up as compared to the plains; each influencing one another to the minimal; nonetheless interaction did exist and mobility was present.

In the present Unit we will highlight some of the specific features of the rural society. For details on the nature and pattern of agrarian structure during the medieval period see Unit 17, Block 4, of our course MHI-05.

17.1 SOCIAL FORMATION IN THE PLAINS

Northern plains with high degree of soil fertility and alluvial deposits were known for high productivity, intensive cultivation and highly commercialized agriculture. Thus
northern plains represented comparatively ‘developed’ social formations. State control was also possibly greater in the plains than the hills and the forests. The region was largely governed by uniform regulations during the medieval period.

Let us explore the prominent social groups at rural level. The creamy layer consisted of the zamindars (bhonia in Rajasthan), petty government officials (muqaddam and chaudhuri), rich peasants, local merchants, and moneylenders. The village also contained sizable population of the ordinary peasants, independent artisans and the village menials (labourers).

**17.1.1 Rural Elites**

By thirteenth century the rais, rana, and rauts of the pre-Sultanate aristocracy appear to represent ‘bigger’ chiefs in the rural hierarchy. By late thirteenth century we also hear the presence of the chaudhiris (headman of 100 villages), khots, and muqaddams (village headmen). Barani (c. 1358) comments that they were all Hindus and ‘ride good horses, wear fine clothes, shoot arrows from Persian bows, fight with each other and go out for hunt, and in a good measure, chew betel leaves’. Mid-fourteenth century also saw the emergence of the zamindar class which for almost six hundred years occupied the centre stage in rural aristocracy. The rural elite other than their caste/clan base maintained a strong military force, including the garhis (fortresses). The recognition of their power can well be judged the way they were referred to in the Rajasthani documents as riyayatis and assessed at concessional rates in spite of state’s unwillingness. We get frequent references in the Mughal farmans for not converting the raiyat kashta (peasant holdings) into the khwud kashta (self-cultivated) holdings. They enjoyed superior rights in comparison to common peasants. They were organised mainly on the basis of caste and clan ties. Their territories were often contiguous to the territories of other clan members. Since the zamindari rights became salable in the Mughal period, it led to the caste/clan monopoly becoming vulnerable.

At this point it will be interesting to trace the process of assimilation of the pre-Sultanate aristocracy and the growth and emergence of the zamindar class in the rural society. Irfan Habib finds the origin and growth of this class of the zamindars in the emergence of the Rajputs as caste/class, a phenomenon just preceding the beginning of the medieval period. The Rajputs generally trace their origin from the rajaputras (Prakrit raut; before sixteenth century we do not find the usage of the word Rajput in Persian texts; raut was in common usage in the Persian texts). Irfan Habib (2005) argues that the rajaputras are mentioned in the Bakshali manuscript (circa 200-500 AD; a mathematical work written on birch bark; so called because it was found in the summer of 1881 near the village Bakhshali (or Bakhshalai) of the Yusufzai subdivision of the Peshawar district (now in Pakistan) as ‘men who receive daily pay from the king’. There is also a reference in Chachnama (9th century) of ‘a cavalry of five thousand ‘sons of kings’ (ibna-al muluk). Irfan Habib comments that, ‘In all likelihood the rajaputras (the ibna-al muluk), being horsemen of status, rode saddled horses’. He analyses that, ‘one can conjecture that a number of the class of elite cavalry troopers began to coalesce into a larger caste...’ Lekhapaddhati (a collection of documents from Gujarat, 9-13 c.) mentions that ‘a rajputra could apply to a ranaka’ and it illustrates them acquiring key positions in the power structure. Jaunpur inscription of 1217 associate them with land. According to Irfan Habib the next stage in the development begins with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Ranas and rautas are mentioned in Minhaj-us Siraj’s account of 1259. Barani (c. 1358) also refers to them as ‘chiefs (ranas) and military captains (rautas) in the context of the period prior to Alauddin Khalji’s reign (1296-1316). However, from Alauddin Khalji’s period onwards the words in common usage were chaudhuris, khots and muqaddams. ‘The ranaka and rauts when subjugated remained fairly autonomous, being obliged mainly to pay tribute...Such a situation changed when the
sultan’s (Alauddin’s) administration began to aim at a larger tax collection, and the tributary chiefs came to be pressed into the position of intermediaries, responsible for tax collection. The rural magnate, who replaces ranaka or rana...is then the chaudhury...As for the raut we find him replaced by the khot...’ (Habib, 2005) The 1353 proclamation of Firuz has combined muqaddams (largely Hindus), mafrozis (state appointees to control land), and maliks (revenue free grantees) (largely Muslims), under one single title zamindars. Irfan Habib argues that, ‘One may think of mafrozis as the state’s nominees in place of ranas or chaudhuri and of maliks as those who, holding tax-free lands (like the khots), could join the ranks of the local dominant elements’. Thus, since then, the zamindars tended to form a comprehensive category embracing all kinds of superior right holders.

In the Mughal period zamindars often belonged to dominant castes. The nature and pattern of their rights and perquisites varied as per the rights of a particular clan/ caste. Mughal zamindars possessed forts and maintained armed retainers. Abul Fazl records that the total strength of the zamindars’ retainers was 384,558 cavalry and 427,057 infantry and 1863 elephants, 4260 cannon pieces and 4500 boats. Similarly, bhomias in Rajasthan maintained garhis (forts). We do get number of chitthis in Rajasthan that are full of complaints against the oppression and terror of the bhomias. They even did not spare the local traders and frequently looted and harassed them. At times it was difficult for the state to collect revenue from such turbulent zamindars (thus called zortalab) and bhomias. Many a time raiyat also supported the zamindars on account of the caste/clan ties. They were able to enlist the support of peasants at time of crisis/conflict against the state or jagirdar/mansabdars. Irfan Habib comments that ‘Aurangzeb’s official historians employ the word zamindarana in the sense of disloyal or treacherous conduct. The attitude reflects the suspicions of the Mughal ruling class towards chiefs and lesser zamindars who, because of their armed power, always posed a challenge to it. There was also here, possibly, a cultural divide as well: a contempt of the urban-based elite for the rural magnates’. Irfan Habib contends that, ‘In such accession to zamindari status there usually followed a process of ‘Rajputization’ ...Had, perhaps, modern conditions not intervened, a number of Jat zamindaris would have entered the Rajput caste’.

The spread of ijara (revenue farming) system in Rajasthan during the late seventeenth century led to the rise of a new class of territorial magnates – the thikanadars.

17.1.2 Peasants and Agricultural Labourers

Peasants were not a homogenous group. The rich peasants often formed part of the rural elite. They were commonly termed as khwud kashta, kalantaran, or paltis (resident cultivators, in Maharashtra they were known as thani; while in eastern Rajasthan they were called gharuhala and in western Rajasthan the privileged class of muqati and prasati formed this category) and halmir in Persian documents. They possessed their own granary, well, house, and ploughs. They used to get their land cultivated with the help of hired labour in addition to their family labour.

Next to the elite were the ordinary peasants (raiyat, reza riaya, karsas) in the rural hierarchy. They formed majority in the village. The pai/pahi kasht (in western Rajasthan they were known as osari, bahrla gaon ka; outside cultivators), and the muçarian (share croppers) were next in the hierarchy. There appears to have existed considerable economic differentiation. This economic differentiation, according to Irfan Habib, got ‘reinforced and consolidated by the caste system’.

Pahis (their counterpart in the Deccan was upari) were not the resident cultivator but they were peasants cultivating the lands in villages other than their own. Usually they were the migrants from the neighbouring villages/parganas to the villages either deserted or where cultivable land was available. They were generally assessed at concessional rates (1/3 of the produce). The village pate (village headmen) normally
Medieval Society

played an important role in bringing these new amis (pahis). State encouraged the pahis to settle in new villages. In such cases ploughs, oxen, manure and money were provided by the state. There appears to be a tendency on the part of higher castes to opt for pahi (outside cultivators) cultivation and get the assessment done at concessional rates. There is also some evidence to suggest that there was a tendency on their part to convert the pahi land into khwud kashtha holdings. However, they did not possess the right to sell their holdings or assign them on ijara (revenue farming).

The differential rate of revenue was assessed on the basis of caste. Raiyat/karsas were assessed at the highest rate. Thus the burden of taxation was probably highest upon the peasants in medieval period. A late seventeenth century dastur-ul amal of pargana Jhak in eastern Rajasthan clearly illustrates that the raiyats had to pay at the rate of 50 per cent of the produce, while patels, patwaris, mahajans, and pahis paid 40 per cent; the Rajputs were to pay 25-33 per cent; while the chaudhuris and qanungoes were charged even less (25 per cent). Khwud kashtha peasants were also exempted from paying their cesses like house and marriage taxes. However, they were not exempted from paying gaon khar ch (malba; village expenses). These small peasants were constantly under debt for meeting the expenses for purchasing seed, plough, oxen, etc. Mughal state acknowledged (Aurangzeb in one of his farman) that the peasants lived in debt for subsistence.

The pahis had the permission to build their own establishments (chhapparbandi) and they possessed their own ploughs. These pahis were instrumental in the growth and expansion of cultivation. Since the land was available in abundance these pahis could assume the proprietorship (malik). Thus the khwud kashtha (self cultivated) and pahi kashtha were not mutually exclusive categories, instead the division between the two was not very rigid. However, during the nineteenth century as a result of introduction of proprietorship laws the position of the pahis got reduced to tenants-at-will.

The muzarian were the tenants who used to cultivate the land of superior castes/landholders. They also served as state sponsored tenants. In that case they were asked to cultivate surplus lands or abandoned lands. In the village there were also share-croppers. They were referred to in Rajasthani documents as sanjhedars. Rajasthani documents show that these share-croppers were assessed at differential rates. One who belonged to superior castes was normally assessed at concessional rates; while the peasants had to pay the land tax at normal rates.

In western Rajasthan we come across another category of peasants called basi. Colonel James Tod mentions that they were neither gola (slave) nor free. Bhadani (1999) on the basis of Jalar Vigat identifies these basi peasants as those peasants who would move wholesale with their master to new settlements. They were not necessarily cultivating the land of the village where they would reside instead they could cultivate more than one village’s land. While there was presence of exclusive basi villages, there were certain villages, which were both basi and raiyati. The caste composition of the basi and raiyati villages shows that no basi or raiyati cultivator belonged to the menial caste. Gujars were entered as basi but not as raiyati in western Rajasthan. Rajputs formed the highest group among the basi cultivators. This shows that probably all major agricultural castes were part of basi cultivating castes while menial castes remained outside the fold.

Generally speaking peasants were hard pressed. Even though they were proprietors, their position was almost like semi-serfs for they were not allowed to abandon the land. In case of their flight officials were asked to bring them back by the use of force. Peasants often took money from moneylenders to pay land revenue, and for seeds, oxen, etc. as well as for maintaining their life. On account of high interest
rates these loans amounted to as high as five times the principal amount in some cases.

The cultivation of superior landholders largely depended upon agricultural labourers (majurs, halis). These landless labourers/‘menial castes’ formed about one sixth to one fifth of the village population. The ‘menial castes’ were prohibited to take on agriculture thus provided a vast battery of ‘reserve’ labour force. Tanners, scavengers, dhanuks, etc., when not pursuing their professions, worked as agricultural labourers. They were compelled to perform begar (forced labour) by the superior castes. The agricultural labourers/menials were so crucial in the rural society, comments Irfan Habib, that they formed ‘pillar of Indian peasant agriculture’. He also suggests the presence of ‘pauperised peasants often turned into wage-labourers’. But such peasant labourers were limited.

Another important aspect of medieval rural society was complete absence of agricultural slaves, though the slavery was rampant in the urban areas.

17.1.3 Stratification in the Rural Society

The above description clearly points out that the medieval rural society was highly stratified. This stratification was the result of many factors a) Resource base – availability of seeds, oxen, agricultural implements, Persian wheel, wells for irrigation, etc.; and b) Caste also intensified the stratification – the higher castes were assessed at lower rates and lower castes had to pay revenue at much higher rate; c) nature and pattern of crops produced further intensified the gulf – those who could produce cash crops would be better placed than those cultivating food crops. The differentiation further deepens on the basis of those who reaped one crop a year and those growing more than 4-5 crops. Referring to the khasra-jamabandi documents (AD 1776) of pargana Chatsu (eastern Rajasthan) S.P. Gupta highlights that out of the 36 cultivators 16 cultivated one crop only, the next 11 cultivated 2-4 crops; while 9 cultivated more than 5 crops. Out of these nine cultivators two were patels (village headmen). The khasra documents (AD 1791) of gasha Soabdaspur, pargana Sawai Jaipur also show the same trend where 6-9 crops were produced by 6 patels. Irfan Habib argues that the peasants cultivating more crops ‘usually cultivated larger areas of land’.

Irfan Habib states that the claims on individual property ‘gave rise to condition of social hierarchy’ in the medieval period. He adds that, ‘the retrogressive nature of the land tax was also likely to assist the process of differentiation...’ While commercialization on the one hand resulted in intensification of social stratification, on the other hand it led to increase in cash flow and thus added prosperity. According to Satish Chandra monetisation, cash nexus and natural calamities ‘accentuated the process of social segmentation’. But Chetan Singh thinks that it definitely benefited the prosperity of the ‘small peasants’ in the Punjab region. For him ‘social stratification was greater in the more developed region... Such change was more noticeable at the level of intermediary zamindars’. As a result of commercialisation of agriculture at Bayana, chief centre of indigo production, many rich merchants involved themselves in its production thus turned into farmers.

17.2 SOCIAL FORMATION IN THE TRIBAL REGIONS

The tribes were largely semi-nomadic in nature and of pastoral variety. During our period the nomadic character of the tribes was limited. Munhta Nainsi in his Marwar-ra-pargana-ri-Vigat mentions the Mina tribal of western Rajasthan as cultivators, while Mers were entered as revenue payers and agriculturists. In the Punjab region tribes like the Bhattis and the Jats were more or less settled in a particular region.
Pastoral/tribal societies largely recognized the ‘collective’ claim over land and its use. Therefore they were comparatively more egalitarian. But as they adopted settled agriculture hierarchy crept in. Yusufzai clan of the Afghans in Swat valley became land owning peasants but their counterpart Faqirs, who were shepherds and labourers, were to stay outside the tribe and were not allowed to be part of the tribal assembly (jirga). Other clan members were not to be taxed but Faqirs were to pay taxes. But such stratification was otherwise not evident among other Afghan tribes. (Habib, 2005)

17.2.1 Peasantisation of the Tribal Society

The dominant form of sustenance among the tribal communities was pastoralism. Nonetheless tribes’ response to situations was different as per their ecological surrounding and situations. There was subtle movement of the tribals towards sedentarisation. This process of sedentarisation of the pastoralists continued unabated throughout the medieval period. Chetan Singh believes that the commercialization of agriculture and the increase in the extent of cultivation were the two crucial factors behind this transformation. The assimilation of tribes into rural social categories could be discerned by different terminology used for them by modern historians and contemporary chroniclers. They called them zamindars, peasants, chiefs, etc.

In the case of Jat tribe this process is clearly evident. As they moved northwards they abandoned pastoralism and opted sedentary agriculture. Yuan Chwang (AD 647) mentions them as cattle herders. Similarly, in the Chachnama (Arabic 9th century; and Persian translation c.1216 AD) they were referred to as pastoralists, soldiers and the boatmen. Alberuni (c. 1030 AD) records them as ‘cattle-owners and low Sudra people’. Irfan Habib (1976) argues that their northward migration in southern Punjab from Sindh towards Multan occurred sometime around 11th century. Babur mentions Jats and Gujars residing in the hills of Nil-Ab and Bhera. By sixteenth century they emerged as settled agriculturists and prominent zamindars in the region. By sixteenth century they became widespread in the Punjab region. There occurred a great transformation of the Jats from pastoralists to ‘vigorous peasants’ during the four centuries following eleventh century. In the seventeenth century Dabistan-i Mazahib records them as ‘lowest caste of the Vaishyas’. Irfan Habib observes that the Jat migration is accompanied by sudden appearance of Persian wheel in the region of Lahore, Dipalpur and Sirhind. Thus he suggests that ‘the Persian wheel lay behind at least part of the Jatt’s conversion to agriculture and their expanding settlements’.

Chetan Singh (1985) argues that Persian wheel was not ‘fundamental necessity to the extension of cultivation’ and ‘Persian wheel was not entirely co-extensive with the area which had a predominantly Jatt peasantry’. Chetan Singh (1991) further argues that the Jats’ transformation into sedentarisation was influenced by ‘the areas in which they resided or chose to migrate’: climate and ‘topography facilitated even encouraged such a process of sedentarisation’. Chetan Singh underlines the fact that the same tribe existing in two distinct areas not necessarily reflecting the same ‘socio-economic similarity’. However, even once they sedentarised their preference to keep animal husbandry continued to remain an important socio-economic feature of their social system. During Humayun’s period in pargana Patti Haibatpur Afghans were recorded as zamindars later in Akbar’s period they got replaced by the Jat zamindars. Jats thus moved up in the existing social hierarchy. Chetan Singh (1991) accepts that this change was prompted more as a result of the ‘socio-economic developments’ rather than political interference’. However, we do get instances of creation of zamindars as a result of state action. While sedentarisation of one section of the Jats took place quite early; another section living in inhospitable terrain continued with pastoralism. The process of the transition of the Jats from pastoral to settled agriculturalists was by no means complete in the seventeenth century.
The tribes like Ghakkars and Khokkars experienced the same process of assimilation in Punjab. This encroachment often met with resistance. By 19th century the Khokkars’ presence among Jats and Rajputs points to their assimilation. Babur mentions Jat villages with Ghakkar chiefs. Ghakkar chiefs were incorporated into the mainstream by the Mughals who granted them mansabs. Gujjars were also assimilated by the same process. Akbar established a separate town Gujarat for them. Similar was the case of the Bhittis bordering Rajasthan. They continued as pastoralists even in the nineteenth century. While they were mentioned as rebels of Lakh Jangal by Jahangir they were the noted zamindars in the Bet Jalandhar Doab and Bari Doab regions of the Punjab.

The tribal societies that got assimilated into agricultural society appear to have subsumed their tribal identity with some sort of ‘caste’ in the existing rural caste based multi-layered hierarchical society. The social position of these tribes assimilated into the rural society was often fragile. Though in certain cases, like Ghakkars in the northwest, who dominated over the sedentary agriculturists, in general there appears to be subordination of the tribes to the settled agriculturists, particularly as seasonal labourers or else employed as soldiers. Niccolao Manucci (1656-1712) refers to employment of Bhittis of Lakh Jangal in the military service of the faujdar. With increasing commercialization there was more demand for labour force. This requirement was fulfilled to a certain extent, at least in the peripheral areas surrounded by hills and mountains, by the tribal population.

D.D. Kosambi in his _An Introduction to the Study of Indian History_ argues that tribal ‘elements being fused into a general society’ once tribes got assimilated into the broader social structure. Their status in the hierarchical varna categories largely depended on the profession they pursued. Agricultural communities, generally speaking, joined the peasant caste of that region. However, the hunting-gathering tribal groups generally formed the lowest ranks, outside the four fold varnas. Irfan Habib believes that the tribals formed a substantial part of rural ‘menial proletariat’.

### 17.2.2 Exchange

Tribals were generally represented as notorious highway robbers involved in loot and plunder by the contemporary historians. Bhittis were particularly mentioned by the contemporary historian Bal Krishan Brahman (early years of Aurangzeb’s reign) and traveller Niccolao Manucci (1656-1712) as plunderers and raiders in the region of Lakh Jangal. Around Attock region Khattars were involved in robbery and sedition. Plunder was their means of livelihood. The difficult terrain provided them easy route to escape. According to Chetan Singh (1991) the chief reason behind these constant raids and plunder were their ‘non-pastoral requirements’ (foodgrains, cloth, etc.).

The process of assimilation, to a certain extent, depends upon the pace of the economic growth. The greater the economic growth faster would be the assimilation. During the medieval period, since state’s interest was in expanding cultivation to maximise the revenue returns, it often resulted in clashes between the two. The state often tried to expand at the cost of the forest/tribal regions. Likewise, the tribals/pastoralists were in constant requirement for agricultural and craft products, particularly cloth. Thus there had to be a constant link between the pastoralists and the sedentary agriculturists. This reliance and exchange between the two continued unbroken.

In certain strategically located areas this interaction resulted in the involvement of the tribals in trade and they functioned as crucial link in the trading network. Lohani Afghans were the known tribal traders in the Ghazni (Ghazna) region. Their migration to India was a result of their movement in the territory to procure goods from India for trade. They served as the mediators and crucial links in the overseas trade. Alexander Burnes argues that their seasonal migration suggests links ‘either coincidentally or intentionally’ with the trading communities. Some smaller tribal groups
must be operating in this trading network, though at comparatively modest level, what B. R. Grover refers to in case of Gujjars of Punjab, who used to exchange merchandise in small quantity during their seasonal movements.

The Juns and Khattias of Punjab were the suppliers of butter to the towns. Supply of refined butter from *sarkar* Hissar Firuza to the imperial kitchen must have been supplied by the pastoral communities of the region. Bhadani (1999) has calculated the total amount of *ghi* extracted in the form of tax amounted to 21775 *sers* in *pargana* Phalodi in western Rajasthan for the year 1667-68. He mentions that a *Qanungo Bahi* records that total amount of *ghi* transported for sale in 1662 amounted to approximately 650 maunds from *khalsa* villages (villages whose revenues were reserved for imperial treasury). *Magith* or *madder* was brought for sale in the market was actually procured from the Abor and Miri tribes of Assam. Gumlac was also obtained from hills of Assam and Himachal. Honey and wax were also largely the forest produce. Timber was the regular item of supply via riverine route from the hills. Lahore boat-building industry survived on timber obtained from the mountain regions of Punjab. Muhammad Kazim (1668) mentions that the fine aloe-wood was obtained in huge quantity from the mountains of Assam from the Nang (Naga) tribe inhabiting the mountains. Similarly, musk that was largely produced in Kashmir and Assam, Tavernier (1640-67) reports that he bought musk worth 26000 rupees at Patna. This suggests hectic exchange of forest/hill produce during the medieval period. Mirza Haider Doughlat (1546) in his *Tarikh-i Rashidi* informs us about the involvement of Tibetan nomads in trade with India. They used to carry sheep loads at times as much as 10000 and used to return back with rice, clothes, sweets, grains, etc. Interestingly, these transactions used to take place in the hills itself.

17.3 Caste in the Rural Society

‘Caste’ was at the ‘core’ of the rural social structure. No aspect of rural society could well be explained without understanding caste equations. Irfan Habib comments that ‘the caste system remained an important pillar of the system of class exploitation in medieval India’. Babur found it somewhat astonishing that, ‘In our countries the people who are nomads of the steppes are distinguished by names of different tribes; but here (in Hindustan) people settled in the country and villages are distinguished by names of tribes’. Generally speaking, Indian villages consisted of one caste only. Generally speaking, Indian villages consisted of one caste only. Though, instances of presence of more than one caste in a single village are not absent at the same time. Munhta Nainsi also refers *basi* (settlers) peasants brought from outside by the local potentates. These settlers were from various caste groups.

Caste was the major component in establishing hierarchy in the rural society, particularly in the multi-caste villages. Athat Ali proposes that in the medieval period, ‘The caste defined who could be a peasant; it created hereditary menial labourers to sustain peasant agriculture; and it provided for the village artisans and servants to serve the material and social needs of the peasant’. In the rural set up superior castes enjoyed the privileged position. Higher castes peasants, on the basis of superiority of their castes, were assessed at concessional rates as compared to the *raiyat* (ordinary peasants). The *khasra* papers (AD 1808) of *maunza* Piplod, *pargana* Jaipur clearly point out that the superior castes were assessed at much concessional rates. While an ordinary cultivator was taxed at Rs. 2 per *bigha*, *mahajans* and Brahman and new *asami* paid at the rate of Rs. 1.50 per *bigha*; while *chaudhuris* and Rajput were charged only Rs. 1.25 per *bigha*. (S.P. Gupta) Even the resource base of the superior castes was distinctly larger than the *raiyats* and the menial castes. The documents from eastern Rajasthan clearly suggest that the land holdings held by the superior castes were much larger than the *raiyats*. The superior castes were even able to produce cash crops in large amount as compared to *raiyat* and menial castes. If we analyse caste-wise distribution pattern of Persian wheel owned by individual peasants in *pargana* Jalor in western Rajasthan, it confirms that large amount of
resource base was concentrated in the hands of the superior castes during the
medieval period. The table given below clearly points out that the rural resources
(Persian wheels) were almost wholly monopolised by the superior castes (Rajputs,
Brahmans, Patels).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste of Owners</th>
<th>Number of Persian-wheels</th>
<th>% of the Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajputs</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>46.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmans</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>26.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutra (carpenter)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanchi</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunbhar</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raibari</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patiyar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhedh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jogi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirvi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagarwal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirwan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhanbhi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: B.L. Bhadani (1993), ‘Some Aspects of Village Society in Marwar during the 17th
Century’, Rajasthan History Congress, Jodhpur Session; See also Bhadani

Caste-wise Break-up of Cattle in Pargana Mauzabad (Eastern Rajasthan)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Mauza Jhak</th>
<th>Mauza Pachal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Asamis</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patwari</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahir</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nai</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujar</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumbhar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teli</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipro</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharwal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khati</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gupta, S.P., ‘Agrarian Stratification of Peasants and Superior Right Holders in Eastern
Rajasthan’.

Rural Society: North India
Medieval Society

Ain (c.1595) records the zamindars by castes. Since these zamindars maintained fortresses and armed retainers, Irfan Habib comments that there appears ‘undoubted connection between caste and power’. Muntha Nainsi in his 17th century compilation on Rajasthan, Marwar-ra-pargana-ri-vigat has also recorded the inhabitants of each village by their peasant castes. But we do find other villages in the same parganas, i.e. Merta, where both Jats and Rajputs were living side by side.

Higher castes, such as Brahmans, Rajputs, Bania, Chars, etc., generally did not work in the fields. They used to get their lands cultivated by wage labourers or through the system of begar by the menial caste labour. Denzil Ibbetson while writing about the Rajput peasants of Haryana comments that, “He cultivates badly, for his women are more or less strictly secluded and never work in the fields, while he considers it degrading to actually follow the plough, and will always employ hired ploughmen if he can possibly afford it”. Thus caste was one of the main factors of rural differentiation.

17.4 SOCIAL MOBILITY

Sociologists and historians debate over the mobility aspect of caste. Max Weber is highly critical of the caste being the main hindrance in the mobility of professions in India. However, high degree of commercialization in the rural areas appears to be one of the major factor instrumental in social mobility and change. Referring to the Punjab region Chetan Singh (1991) argues that ‘the encroachment of the market created possibilities of greater social mobility in a rural community where custom permitted only a marginal change in the social status.’

Irfan Habib mentions a zamindari sale in pargana Sandila in which a non-Muslim carpenter sold his milkiyat of a village to two non-Muslims of Kalawar (distiller) caste. Mulla Daud (1379) refers to one Brahman leading a tanda (caravan of bullocks) from Puri in Orissa to Govar in eastern U.P. (Satish Chandra, 2005)

The professional class of mahajans was not necessarily the ‘preserve’ of the Bania. Dilbagh Singh’s study on eastern Rajasthan suggests the presence of Brahman moneylenders who not only used to lend money but also provided surety (malzamini). A Brahman family of Merta who held sasna (revenue free grants) as katha narrators to the village temple they engaged in all sorts of moneylending. They charged from the peasants for lending money for sowing purposes an interest as high as 36 per cent. Nainsi records Bhojags, who were a priestly class, as mahajans. (Bhadani, 1999) Similarly, S.P. Gupta mentions that in eastern Rajasthan some wage labourers (majurs), when they obtained bullocks of their own, got the allotment of land in their favour as peasants.

Transformation of tribals from nomads and pastoralists into sedentary agriculturists and their interaction with settled societies led to cultural transformation of these tribes. In this regard mobility of the Jats is worth mentioning. The Jats, a pastoral tribe of 8th century Sind assumed the status of peasants/zamindars by sixteenth century. In spite of initial resistance, the tribals were brought into the fold of traditional Hindu social structure. The tribals of Jharkhand/Chhotanagpur and also the Mongoloid Tharus got subsumed into the kshatriya fold and called themselves as Raj Gonds, Raj Bhars, Chyavanavasi Cheros (claimed descent from rishi Chyavana), etc. Cheros started worshipping Hindu and Buddhist images along with the worship of thier traditional deity. Buchanan mentions them eating and mixing freely with the Rajputs and wearing sacred thread. In Ranchi and Chhotanagpur region presence of huge network of temples also suggests the same process of assimilation of the Bhumij and other tribals into the Hindu social structure. The construction of fabricated genealogies to assume kshatriya status clearly points out the upward movement of the tribals in the region. Popularisation of legends emphasising the association of ‘Hindu’ gods like Shiva and Parvati; and Pandavas and Hanuman helped greatly in the acculturisation of tribals.
Irfan Habib remarks that this process of mobility in the caste based society was often accompanied by a process of ‘sanskritisation’. However, where ‘sanskritisation’ failed, argues Habib, ‘monotheistic movements condemned the ideology of the caste system’. Almost all great bhakti saints hailed from lower castes. (for details see Bolck 6, Unit 22 of the present Course)

17.5 RURAL ARTISANS AND THE VILLAGE SERVANTS

The relationship of the artisans and the village menials/servants (kamins; Ziauddin Barani has used the term balahar for them) vis-à-vis other members of the village community forms part of one of the most interestingly argued debates among the historians, anthropologists, and sociologists. Karl Marx calls it the existence of ‘an unalterable division of labour’ wherein the rural artisans and menials served the village as a whole in lieu of customary payments in kind or in the form of land assignments. Max Weber terms this caste-based labour as demiurgic labour. But W.H. Wiser in his The Hindu Jajmani System argues that in the jajmani ties services were provided by the village servants to individual families. Louis Dumont, on the basis of this, concluded that there existed ‘ritualistic relationship between the upper caste families (the Brahmans – the pure) and the menials (artisans and labourers – barber, etc. – the impure). But such relationship only existed in case of family priests. (for details see Unit 18 of the present Block). In contrast, it appears that the services rendered by the village artisans were provided for the entire village and not to individual families. Documents from western Rajasthan even show that the services of priests to temples and that of charan were also for the entire village and not for individual families. Hira, a charan of village Kaleti, pargana Jalor surrendered his share once he decided not to render service to the village. We hear as early as 1000 AD (from the Lekhapaddhati documents of Gujarat), about the presence of panch karuka viz. carpenters, ironsmiths, potters, barbers and washermen who received grains from the peasants in lieu of their services. This hereditary basis of village servants was mainly instrumental in creating the ‘self-sufficient’ villages. It also hampered the ‘mobility’ aspect of the artisan classes to a ‘certain’ extent.

There appears hardly any change in the social status of the menial castes. Their subjugation by the superior caste peasants continued unabated. Irfan Habib argues that “the basic line of division...between peasants and the landless...was set socially by the caste system which by compulsion prevented the ‘menial’ castes from tilling the soil on their own”. They served as ‘reserve workforce’. The jajmani ties were the most crucial aspect of village artisans’ relationship with other members of the village community. The village artisans were of two types, independent and the ones tied with the entire village community. The latter rendered compulsory customary service in lieu of which they received customary share from the agricultural produce. Rural artisans under ‘jajmani’ ties were paid from the common village fund for rendering service to the entire village.

The loose category of village artisans referred to in the medieval texts were potter (kumhar), leather worker (bhanbhi, dejgar), barber (nai), ironsmith (lohar), carpenter (sulhar), washerman (dhobi), rope maker (sargara), tailor (darzi), sweeper, goldsmith (sonar), sharpener (siqligar), cobbler (mochi), leather worker (dhedh), bearer of burden (mawal), cotton carder (pinjara). Tailor (darzi), sharpener (siqligar), and cotton carder (pinjara) are not found in the list of balutedar in the Deccan. In western Rajasthan we come across terms like khut, mahtar (counterpart of vadilpana in the Deccan) indicating the head/chief of a particular profession/artisan class. We also get references of pawan jat or pauni jat (professional castes) carrying the suffix/prefix of thirty six indicating the traditional number of artisans like the twelve (bara) balutadas of Maharashtra. The prefix pawan (pawana) is interesting. It means payment-receiving castes. Nainsi elaborates that pauni were service class who rendered service to various sections of the rural society. The Brahman priests, charan
Medieval Society

(bard), qazi (Muslim jurist), bangiya (muezzin, prayer caller), Joshi (astrologer), and bhat (genealogist) possessed claim over peasants’ produce but did not form part of pauni jat. Presence of khut and mahtar also emphasises the presence of hierarchy within the same group of rural servants. It is also significant that state used to charge (probably one time) a fixed amount from artisans for establishing themselves in a particular village. Probably it was extracted by the state for granting permission/privilege to monopolise a particular service by a particular family in the concerned village. Once these rural servants abandon the village, on their re-entry they had to pay once again to the state re-entry fee. Interestingly, the khut and mahtar were assessed at much lower rate than other peasant castes. In fact, in general, as compared to other peasant castes rural servants (sonar, darzi, lohar) were assessed at concessional rates.

Brahmans and charans served village as a whole and they were also employed by individual families. However, Bhadani (1999) argues that in western Rajasthan the term jajman was used with reference to charan and Brahmans in the sphere of individual/specific ruling families and refers to patron-client relations.

These village servants could be paid either in cash (called surkhi in western Rajasthan; khalek in Shekhawati region; hakpalla in Amber; and agwar in Benaras region) or in kind (could be in the form of plough or Persian wheel) or in the form of land (called pasaita in western Rajasthan; given at concessional rates or its revenue free assignment). In addition they also received miscellaneous supplementary collections. B.L. Bhadani (1999) has calculated the remuneration to the village servants in western Rajasthan in pargana Jalor ranging from 0.12 to 2.00 per cent. In Jodhpur pargana the practice of granting land to village servants was prevalent in almost every village.

### Sukhri and Rekh, Jalor (1663)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Village</th>
<th>Rekh (in rupees)</th>
<th>Sukhri (in rupees)</th>
<th>C as % of B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syana</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godhan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samujo</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanwlo</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harji</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alasano</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mithri</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thobau</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akeli</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiparwara</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>16.50</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niblano</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhanani</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagal</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dechhu</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahore</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pado</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chainpura</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaghora</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simo</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pasaita Ploughs, Jodhpur (c.1660)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Village</th>
<th>Total Number of Ploughs</th>
<th>Pasaita Ploughs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jhalamand</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchahero</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kudi</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dighari</td>
<td>6 1/2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanawado Khurd</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanawado bado</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesawas</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moklawas</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noghdo Khurd</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godhawariyo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dholgano</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Pasaita lands were granted both by the state and the pattayats (pattas were revenue assignments and its holders were known as pattayats). Rural servants enjoyed pasaita as well as received remuneration in cash and kind. It appears that rural servants’ position was hereditary and permanent. In pargana Jalor a village footman (payak) named Pura received back his rights on his return. During the intervening period customary remunerations were enjoyed by another person for rendering services. This presents contrast with Deccan situations. In the Deccan in case of abandonment one had to loose the customary right. Similarly, it was considered an offense in case someone abandoned the service right. In pargana Jalor Hiro, a cotton carder, was fined Rs. 41 (a substantial sum) by the state on his return for abandoning the service right. (Bhadani, 1999)

Largely the pattern in the north and the Deccan was quite similar as for the nature and pattern of rural servants’ rights and perquisites are concerned. The lower castes worked as agricultural labourers without controlling land. Jalor Vigat refers to Nais as forced labourers of the Rathors in Jalor. Similarly, Dhedhs were asked to weed out grass from the fields of the bhumias. (Bhadani, 1999) But artisans like Mali, Mina, Raiibari, Kharol, Ghanchi/Teli (oil-presser), Sulhan (carpenter), and Kumhar (potter) were engaged in cultivation.

17.6 TRADING GROUPS

Pedlars and merchants were a common feature of the rural society. Merchants were an important link in the disposal of agricultural produce for revenue payment. They were also important for certain other processes of revenue collection like cartage, sale of grain, etc. Since the state preferred to collect the revenue in cash peasant were eager to sell off the grains immediately after the harvest to make revenue payment. Even when the revenue was collected in kind the state was in hurry to dispose off grains. The need to sell agricultural products at the earliest made the role of rural merchants very significant in the whole operation. During our period we hear for the first time the presence of specialised grain merchants (karwanis, banjaras). Multani merchants (Hindu merchants) also emerged prominent during this period. There appears to be hierarchy among the grain dealers. Sahs were usually purchaser of ‘revenue grain’ and they appear to have operated within the locality and were generally not involved in cross-pargana trading. They also acted as moneylenders. Barani mentions that they became enormously rich by advancing loans to the Turkish nobles. Banjaras were itinerant merchant class; but anyone involved in transporting grain and other goods in bulk was called a banjara.
Mahajans (grain dealers and moneylenders) and bohras (moneylenders) also occupied an important position in the rural society. Tavernier (1640-1667) comments that, ‘In India a village must be very small indeed if it has not a money changer, called a shroff’. Mahajan generally hailed from the caste of Banias. But the word implies anyone involved in moneylending and trade. They provided the crucial link with the larger commercial world. They also acted as broker between the state and the peasant. The peasants largely depended upon this class to meet their financial requirements for agricultural as well as non-agricultural purposes (particularly in times of natural calamity), at times even the jagirdars and zamindars had to depend on them for their monetary needs. In eastern Rajasthan they were legally entitled for biyaj-ghtwai (interest) and it was binding on the bohras to advance agricultural loans. These bohras used to lend money to the state and the state in turn used to advance loans to the peasants. The bohras preferred this mode for it provided better security to their money.

These loans were not necessarily in cash, it could be in the form of bullocks, seed, plough, manure, etc. These loans were often detrimental and resulted in loss of peasant land to mahajans. Dilbagh Singh provides an instance of how in 1763 in qasba Chatsu out of 350 ryot (peasants) lands 175 were either purchased or bought by the mahajans of the village at the time of scarcity. At times these mahajans themselves got involved in agricultural operations through hired labour.

The rate of interest charged by the mahajan was very high (10-25 per cent in eastern Rajasthan and upto 36 per cent in western Rajasthan). Often it resulted either in the form of the flight of the peasantry or else in the sale of land. Dilbagh Singh reports one such case of Khiwa Jat of village Choru, pargana Fagi in eastern Rajasthan who was unable to pay the loan of the mahajan and committed suicide. The land was finally sold to recover the loan after his death. Peasants’ inability to pay interest along with principal often led to the loss of land holdings. The moneylenders often appropriated superior rights in land through this method. Rural elites, zamindars, were often under debt of the mahajans. In times of scarcity or famine they even advanced loans to the state. Mahajans appeared to be very powerful and influential in the rural society on account of their loan giving capacity. In one of the instance in eastern Rajasthan village community gave him precedence over the patel (the village headman). State also provided protection to this class. Jaswant Singh (d. 1678) once ordered his officials to ensure speedy recovery of mahajans’ loans from the peasants.

17.7 SUMMARY

Medieval society was generally perceived as ‘homogeneous, non-stratified and unchanging’. However, recent researches have shown that the medieval society was highly stratified. Though ‘caste’ played an important role in determining social relations, social mobility was very much present. Since the land to man ratio was favourable, state’s interest was to keep the peasant tied to the land. This period was also marked by large scale peasantisation of the tribals.

17.8 EXERCISES

1) Critically analyse the pattern of rural stratification in the medieval north India.
2) Examine the process of peasantisation of the tribal society in the medieval period.
3) What role did the ‘caste’ play in rural society during the medieval period?
4) Analyse briefly the position of rural artisans and village servants in the medieval period.
UNIT 18  RURAL SOCIETY: PENINSULAR INDIA

Structure
18.0 Introduction
18.1 Structure of the Rural Society
18.2 The Rural Society and the Larger World
18.3 Rural Society: Deccan
   18.3.1 Composition of the Rural Society
   18.3.2 Land and Social Hierarchy in the Rural Society
   18.3.3 The Village Council
18.4 The Village Servants: Deccan
   18.4.1 Composition
   18.4.2 Services and Remuneration of the Balutedars
   18.4.3 Status of the Balutedars
   18.4.4 Other Village Servants
   18.4.5 Rural Servants: Debates
18.5 Rural Society: South India
   18.5.1 Rural Society and Institutions: Seventh to the Twelfth Century AD
   18.5.2 Rural Society: Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century
18.6 Summary
18.7 Exercises

18.0 INTRODUCTION

The rural society was not uniform in nature. It differed from region to region in the specific structure of caste, organization of work and distribution of land. There were different types of habitations and settlements that influenced the nature of the rural society. There were peasant villages and non-peasant villages (brahman dominated village). There was single caste and multi-caste villages. In the Tamil region, brahmadeyas were Brahman dominated villages and vellan-vagai urar or agrarian settlements were predominantly non-brahminical villages. Both influenced the respective characters of the rural society. (Kesavan V eluthat, 1993.). Villages were also bi-lingual or trilingual. For instance, Dewara in the tribal district of Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh has Marathi and Telugu speaking Hindus and Muslims and three separate tribal groups.

In medieval period, new villages were constantly formed. People were migrating from one place to another. Forest lands were constantly cleared and brought under cultivation and new groups were made to settle down and tribes were transformed into settled peasant groups. All these changes influenced the structure of the rural society. Even the boundaries of the villages differed ranging from natural boundaries like rivers, fields and mountains to artificial or imagined ones, based on caste or community privileges. Several villages with growing population and economic prosperity developed into towns and urban centres. For instance, in the Tamil region several temple towns like Chidambaram and Kanchipuram were originally large agrarian settlements.

All the factors, viz., social organization, size, population and occupation contributed towards the multiple natures of the rural societies. However, despite differences in the rural societies of each village, a common pattern emerges, where the rural elites were mostly priests and landed classes. Social privileges varied according to the social rank and this was related to the rights and control over land.
18.1 STRUCTURE OF THE RURAL SOCIETY

The rural society had a stratified and complex structure. The social relations based on caste comprised of relations between brahmanas, non-brahmanas and other menial castes. Generally the landed classes belonged to the upper castes. However, there were several landed classes (like Kunbis) who did not have a high caste status but were powerful in the village. The peasants belonged to the lower castes and the rural labourers, who were landless, belonged to the menial castes. Such castes are called ‘dominant castes’, a concept evolved by the famous anthropologist, M.N. Srinivas. According to him, “A caste is dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area, and economically and politically exercises a preponderant influence. It need not be the highest caste in terms of traditional and conventional ranking…thus any caste can be dominant, one does not see this in case of untouchables.” Though this study is based on contemporary anthropological field analysis of the Okkaligas, a ‘dominant peasant caste’ in Rampura village of Karnataka, it has relevance for the medieval period too. Caste groups like Reddis, Kammas were not ritually high caste, but wielded power on the basis of superior land rights and the authority to collect taxes on behalf of the state. Hence, in this manner, they were the dominant castes.

Caste relations stratified the rural society on ritual basis. Even within the peasants, there were numerous castes and sub-castes. High peasant castes like the Velalas and Thakurs rarely tilled the land themselves and hired wage labourers and sharecroppers. Within the same peasant caste also there was differentiation. One of the most significant ways in which caste influenced the rural society was evident in the settlement patterns. There were separate settlements of brahmanas, non-brahmanas and menial castes. In South India, such segregated settlements can be seen till day. Although these relations were governed by norms and values of the rural society, the state also played a significant role in shaping these relations. For instance, in the relation between the landholders and the tenant, the state evolved a complex revenue extracting mechanism that altered and influenced the agrarian relations.

Other important rural classes who were poor artisans, service castes and other occupational groups largely designated as bara-balutas in the Deccan and ayas in South India. They belonged to the lower end of the rural hierarchy.

Despite kinship relations within the caste that contributed to caste solidarities, one should not assume that castes were self-sufficient units. They were economically or otherwise also interdependent. It was not always that the traditional structure of caste had stranglehold over the rural society. The economic relations often freed itself from the caste system. The jajmani system, also known as balutedari in Maharashtra and ayas in Karnataka involved a network of economic relationship and reciprocity between various castes in a hierarchical manner, between the landlords and occupational specialists breaking the myth of caste as self-sufficient unit within the village. Political and economic changes further influenced the caste equations within the rural society, when one group replaced another as the powerful landed elites. For instance, in a village called Ukkal situated in the lower Kaveri valley of the Tamil region, the brahmanas were prosperous landholders controlling the agricultural production till twelfth century. However, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they were selling their lands. The immediate cause was the heavy taxation imposed by the Vijayanagar rulers. But the decline of this prosperous brahmadeya ‘should be viewed in the context of agrarian change, particularly differentiation in agrarian society during this period.’ The non-brahmanas bought the land in Ukkal, thereby emerging as new local magnates of the village towards the end of Chola rule. (Noboru Karashima, 1992, p.121). Socio-religious movements with their respective ideologies based primarily on bhakti ‘undermined the caste status and threw open various avenues for social mobility within the rural society and influenced the changes within the caste structure.'
18.2 THE RURAL SOCIETY AND THE LARGER WORLD

The rural society had always been a part of the wider economy. Many landlords lived outside the village. The moqasadars and jagirdars had administrative functions within the village, but lived in cities and towns. Since revenue was usually collected in cash, the agricultural surplus was sold outside the village in the markets. In fact, markets provided a space for not only economic, but social interactions between various individuals of different villages. Occupational castes within the villages provided service to the village, but other occupational castes came from outside on occasions like fairs, festivals, marriages and temple worship and rendered services.

While kinship ties strengthened the caste groups within the village, they also cut across the village boundaries fostering social relations between villagers, linking members of every caste to people in other villages. In north India, marriages took place outside the village. This is called exogamy, through which ‘extensive’ ties were created. But in south India, marriages took place within the same village or nearby villages, with certain near relatives, like cross cousins (father’s sister’s daughter or son) and cross niece (sister’s daughter). This is called endogamy and the ties were ‘intensive’, operating within a limited social space.

Since the state considered village as a revenue unit and assigned administrative duties primarily, of collecting taxes to various officers and village elites, hence a political network was constantly evolving linking the individual members of the rural society to people occupying various administrative positions within and outside the village. The role of the village community was also seen to be important in this respect.

A village at times had a ritual space like a temple or a Sufi shrine that not only attracted people of that village but also attracted devotees from other villages too. In such a common religious arena, the caste distinctions of the rural society were often blurred.

Thus the rural society of a village was not isolated and self-sufficient. The outside world of cities and politics influenced the rural life in many ways. In fact, it is difficult to separate the internal activities of the village from the external. The rural society becomes the context for meeting and interaction between various larger political, economic and social forces.

18.3 RURAL SOCIETY: DECCAN

The term used for village in medieval Deccan was ganva, mauje or deh. A bigger village that included a market place was called kasbe. The cultivable area comprising of black soil was known as kali. Kali was divided into blocks called thal (derived from Sanskrit word, sthal) or land and each thal was named after its original proprietor. Thal consisted of fields called shet or set (Sanskrit is kshetra) or zamin. The inhabited area called pandhari comprised of white soil that was unfit for cultivation. The pandhari was divided into house-sites, gharthana or gharthikana, each of which was owned by the patil (village headman) and his family, other village officers, peasants and village servants and artisans. When a family left the village and migrated, its land was called gatkul (gat means gone and kul means a lineage or a family) and the house site and the house left behind was called gatkul gharthana and gatkulvada respectively. Around the cultivable area were the meadows (kuran). It was meant for common village use and was called people’s meadow (lokacha kuran).
18.3.1 Composition of the Rural Society

The rural society of Deccan consisted of primarily five groups:

1) The large landholders who held administrative positions in the village. They were primarily the deshmukhs and deshpandes.
2) Village officers such as the headman or patil and muqaddam, accountant or kulkarni and so on.
3) Proprietary peasants called mirasdars or thalkari or thalvaik.
4) Temporary peasants called uparis.
5) Village servants and artisans collectively called balutedars.

The patil usually belonged to the peasant caste of Kunbis that later came to be assimilated into the Maratha caste. The accountant was generally a brahmana and the balutedars were usually menials or untouchables. The upper strata of the rural society thus comprised of the deshmukhs, deshpandes, patils and kulkarni collectively forming the zamindar class and were therefore the rural aristocracy.

With large income from the land tenures they maintained large forts and a private army. There was a class of outsiders who served the village residents, but had no status within the rural society. In course of time they became an integral part of the village.

One of the important phenomenon that shaped the rural society in Deccan was the settlement of new villages by bringing land under cultivation. Several Marathi chronicles give us an account of how various lands were settled into villages and the groups involved in this process, who ultimately occupied the village. The settlement of a village called Murud in the Konkan area refers to the first settlers being the Chitpavan brahmanas who were granted lands by the king. The documents of Murud describe the members of the rural society. They were rural officers with social and religious duties. Yavanas i.e. the Muslims were provided with land on the outskirts of the village where they could build their houses and mosque. Another category of Muslims called the Navayats came from the West Coast and settled in the village. Occupational groups like the sonar (goldsmith), gavada (fisherman), kumbhar (potter), parit (washerman) and several others were mentioned in the Murud chronicle. Another example is of the Pune region which was a part of Shahji’s (Shivaji’s father) jagir. The region became desolate due to the famines of 1630-31 and invasions of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur. According to the Marathi chronicle, the manager of the jagir requested the Mavalas, i.e. a hilly tribe to kill the wild animals and robbers, cut down the forest and settle these areas for cultivation. In return for their service, they would be suitably rewarded. The chronicle states that the manager gave them a legal document ensuring their permanent settlement. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, ‘The Indian Village: With Special Reference to Medieval Deccan’, General Presidential Address, Indian History Congress, Fifty Second Session, Delhi)

In Eastern Deccan, in the region of the Kakatiyas of Warangal (AD 1000-1326) in Andhra Pradesh, the expansion of the agrarian base and transformation of the rural society involved construction of new temples. Such constructions required endowments of land to the temple for the maintenance of the priests, various temple servants and requirements for the worship of the deity. Numerous donations of land, especially the uncultivated forests, were made by the local chiefs, merchants, and the members of the royal family. For example, Mailamba, the sister of the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati was responsible for founding three villages. These lands were cleared of forest, irrigation tanks were built on them and cultivation was initiated. Several tribes who inhabited these forests became peasants and incorporated into the lower rung of the rural society. The brahamana functionaries of the temple as well the brahamana landholding class remained at the upper end of the hierarchy. The chieftains and their local lineage groups also formed a substantial part of the rural elite. Thus, the
construction of the temples, donation of land and building of irrigation tanks resulted in an increase in the rural population. The temple served as the ‘social and political integrator’. It employed the peasants, artisans and pastoralist on the temple lands and for various temple activities and incorporated these different communities of the rural society within a single framework of religion. (Cynthia Talbot, 2001, Pre-colonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra, OUP, Delhi. p.93-106).

18.3.2 Land and Social Hierarchy in the Rural Society

Land and landed rights were the basis on which the various sections in the rural society enjoyed privileges and acquired a certain status. It also defined the relations between the different sections in the village and established a rural hierarchy and stratification. There were six kinds of landed tenures and rights associated with them.

1) **Mirasi Tenure**: Originally an Arabic word, mirasi meant ‘patrimony’ or hereditary property’. Therefore, a mirasdar held proprietary rights on his miras lands. Usually mirasdas and their kin groups were the original settlers of the village. Even the state could not infringe upon the mirasi rights. In case of infringement of these rights by the village headman, the state would intervene on behalf of the mirasdas to stop such violations. If the miras holders left the village and returned after a long gap, they and their descendants could reclaim the land by paying the due compensation to the government. Their names were not removed from the village records because according to the tradition, land belonged to those who reclaimed it first and brought it under cultivation.

The mirasdar peasants belonged to the Kunbi caste and were permanent residents of the village. They regularly paid land revenue to the state. Though it was not a frequent practice, they could sell their own land. This can be seen from sixteenth century onwards. In the eighteenth century, the village headmen could appropriate the wasteland of their villages as miras land and the village assembly could dispose off the wastelands as miras lands through sale or gift to the willing peasants.

The mirasdas were influential members of the village community and participated in the deliberations of the “village panchayats and gotsabhas with their symbol ‘plough’ being affixed on all the mahajars (decisions) for attestation”. (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.33) They were mostly the rural rich. For instance, the Reddis of Eastern Deccan lived in stone houses and their women wore gold and silver jewellery and the Maratha peasants of the Western Deccan even had one or two slaves in the eighteenth century. (The Cambridge Economic History of India, p.472).

2) **Upari Tenure**: Peasants in this case were the temporary residents of the village. They usually migrated from their native villages under duress, like famines, destruction due to wars and other calamities. Many of them were tenants on the mirasi and inam lands. Thus, upari tenure was a temporary one and its holder was a tenant-at-will. They also held land on lease. Upari peasants could become mirasdas on payment of a regular fee, nazrana, to the state.

In the seventeenth century, the number of upari peasants was small. However, in the eighteenth century their population increased. This was because of the conscious policy of agrarian expansion under the Peshwars in Maharashtra. For expanding cultivation, peasants were needed. Therefore, several upari peasants were mobilized from other villages. Incentives in the form of privileges and concessions were promised provided they brought land under cultivation. They were allowed to build their houses on the border of the village and were exempted from house-tax and forced labour. Consequently, numerous peasant groups migrated to the Maratha region in the eighteenth century.
3) **State Lands**: was called *sarkarchi sheri, sherichen shet, khalisa jamin*. These were scattered all over in various villages in the Deccan. State lands were granted in *inam* or allowed for house-sites or were cultivated.

4) **Inam Land Tenure**: *Inam* is an Arabic word and means a ‘gift’. This was not service tenure but a reward for the services rendered to the village, like religious duties, administrative duties and works of social welfare. An *inam* was created by an agreement called the *inam patra* or *karar* between the state and the individuals. *Inam* lands were held on hereditary basis by an individual or a particular institution. Village officials like *deshmukh, deshpande, patil, kulkarni*, village watchmen, village astrologer and several others held *inam* lands. There were also the *inams* like the *dudhabhat* (milk and rice) and *sadi-choli* (*saree* and bodice) which were given by a king or a chieftain to their daughters for their maintenance. (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.32).

5) **Watan Tenure**: Village officers, viz., the *deshmukhs, deshpandes, patils, kulkarni* and one of the *balutedars*, the Mahar community (the Mahars are discussed in the next section), held large *miras* and *inam* lands and were entitled to certain rights and privileges called *haklavajma*. They also received a certain amount of produce from the peasants and services of the village artisans. All these privileges along with their respective administrative positions (except probably in the case of the Mahars) were called the *watan*. The holder of a *watan* was called the *watandar*. *Watan* meant a patrimony which was not only hereditary but also saleable and transferable. *Watandars of pargana*, like the *deshmukhs and deshpandes* were superior to the *watandars* of the village, the *patils* and *kulkaranis*. The *watan* was valued, for it was not only a lucrative source of income, but also a symbol of social prestige. Despite acquiring political power and position in the state hierarchy, the Marathas were always keen to retain their original village *watan* which compared to the political power was permanent in nature. Several holders of temporary land tenures like *saranjam, jagir, mokasa* were always anxious to get these tenures converted to *watan* or *inam* that could remain with their family in perpetuity.

6) **Mokasa, Jagir Saranjam Tenures**: These were essentially military tenures. Though they were in principle temporary, in course of time, they became hereditary. Civil functions were often attached to these tenures. These military tenures were common in the seventeenth century in the Sultanate of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur in the north Karnataka region. They were powerful members of the Adil Shahi administration and held offices of the *vazir, amir* and *diwan*. In case, the *mokasadars* failed in performing their duties, they were transferred or replaced or sometimes their *mokasas* were confiscated. Like the *watandars* and the *mirasdars*, they also participated in the village councils. According to A.R.Kulkarni, “The *mokasadars* sometimes created sub-tenure to favour their relations or assistants. For instance, Shahaji who was a *mokasadar* of Pune, Supe and Shirval *parganas* under the Adil Shahis, granted a *pot-mokasa* of 36 villages of his Pune *pargana* to his son Shivaji.”(A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.34)

According to Satish Chandra, the *mokasa* was proprietary right in land, whether rent free or at low quit rent or on revenue farming terms on conditions of service. (Satish Chandra, 1982, *Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village*, Delhi, p.106)
The *jagir* tenure was comparatively for a longer period than the *mokasa* tenure. The *sarjam* tenure was purely a military one. Its holders were entitled to a share in the village administration and land revenue. According to A.R. Kulkarni, the practice of granting military tenure was discontinued by Shivaji, for he feared that the *mokasadars* would become powerful at the rural level especially if they united with the sections of the rural aristocracy. (A.R. Kulkarni, p.36). Besides they also oppressed the peasantry. Satish Chandra does not agree and points out that Shivaji continued with this practice. (Satish Chandra, 1982, p.108-123) However, the *mokasa* increased during the Peshwa period, with the aim of encouraging the Maratha *sardars* (chieftains) like the Holkars, Shindes, Pawars and so on to join the military service.

In the Kakatiya kingdom of Eastern Deccan, various landed elements especially the powerful chieftains of the Andhra rural society were incorporated into the Kakatiya political network. These chiefs already possessed hereditary rights over their own plots of land and had a fixed share in the agricultural produce of the village. In lieu of their services to the Kakatiya state, they were granted additional land that was assessed at concessional rates. Such tenure was called *vritti*. These *vritti* lands were cultivated by tenant cultivators. In the post Kakatiya period, such a tenure was called *jivitamu*. Further, in order to incorporate the chiefs and warriors in to the political framework, the Kakatiya state created a new type of tenurial rights over territories called *nayankaramu*. Though better known in connection with the Vijayanagar Empire, the *nayankaramu* was a Kakatiya innovation. These were primarily revenue assignments delegated over several villages. The rights of the holders are difficult to determine. They were also obliged to maintain troops for the State.

Thus, the rural society in Deccan was not a homogeneous unit. Agrarian hierarchy and stratification can be seen in the caste structures as well as in the various classes whose status was based on the land and landed rights. The upper sections always attempted to exploit the peasant groups and were often successful. Tensions were inbuilt within the rural society. The rise of the Marathas can be traced to the tensions primarily within the rural society. The struggle for control over land brought the bigger, middle and smaller *watandars*, *mirasis* and *uparis* in conflict with each other.

Shivaji united these different sections of the rural society providing a base for a strong movement. Several peasant groups like the Kunbis, Kolis and some tribes supported Shivaji in lure of loot and a high social status. The Marathas themselves belonged to the Kunbi caste. According to Grant Duff, the Maratha Kunbis were military families who claimed a Rajput-Kshatriya status. One aspect of this movement was the united front of the Marathas and the Kunbis. By joining Shivaji, low caste peasant groups could acquire political power and rise up the social scale. Therefore, the rural society was never stagnant and had avenues for social mobility.

However, there was a scope for co-operative interaction. For instance, in Western Deccan region, the village documents record the attestation of the villagers in landed transactions. In Eastern Deccan, the inscriptions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries refer to village groups called *ashtadash-praja* making endowments of land to the temples. Literally meaning eighteen people; *ashtadash-praja* also implied eighteen castes that represented the entire village. Brahmanas, land controllers (*bhumi-prabha*) and peasants (*kampu*) are mentioned separately as making donations. Probably they did not belong to the group of eighteen castes. According to Cynthia Talbot, “It is possible that the *ashtadash-praja* was an officially recognised local body with distinct responsibilities in reference to the Kakatiya state, for instance in the sphere of revenue.” (Cynthia Talbot, 2001, p.167). Since this body of the ‘village collectives’ was gifting lands to the temples, it also implies that they were an important part of the temple culture and the Kakatiya state.

Neither was the village a close-knit, self-sufficient unit. Interactions with the neighbouring and distant villages took place. Land was sold to the outsiders. There
was inter-village mobility. Incase an outsider bought a land in the village, he need not live there and could visit his land in the village periodically. Similarly, though the village artisans served the village, they were not compelled to remain within the same village. Often they sold their rights to the members of their own caste and migrated elsewhere. They also worked in nearby markets, villages and urban centres to supplement their income.

The interaction of the village with urban classes also took place. Merchants invested in the land and made donations to the temples. For instance, a fourteenth century inscription in Chittapur, Metpalli taluk of Andhra region records an endowment of land to the temple for construction of a tank. The donor was one Bairi Setti, a merchant trader, who had actually purchased the field from the village brahmanas, Bairi Setti did not seem to have economically benefited. However, he was a recipient of religious merit which appeared to be important to him. Talbot (2001, p.96) and Stein (Burton Stein, 1980, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, OUP, Delhi.p.425-426) call this, “rural development entrepreneurship” as it resulted in agrarian expansion and personal gain for the entrepreneur themselves. The State also interacted with the members of the rural society. Numerous peasants were recruited as soldiers. As stated before, there were state lands in the villages, the state invited cultivators, and incorporated the powerful landed aristocracy within the political administration.

18.3.3 The Village Council

The village council was called panchayat at the village level and gotsabha or majlis at the pargana level. The panchayat not only settled disputes within the village, it was also a representative body of the village community set up by the community itself to manage its affairs. There were jatigota, Dharma Sabha and Kula-Sabha to deal with the matters of a particular caste, religion or a group of families. The rules of the caste were quite strict. A document dated 1693 specifies rules regarding the readmission of a converted person to his original caste. The individual was to be readmitted only after consultation with the other caste members. The Poona Shimpi (tailor) community admitted one person. This was disapproved by the Shimpis of the Saswad region on the ground that they were not consulted and that the Poona Shimpis could not alone decide on an issue affecting the entire Shimpi community. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.43).

The numbers of the members of the village council was not fixed. At the village level, the panchayat comprised of all watandars, mirasdars and balutedars. Balutedars also played an important part in the village council which will be discussed in the next section. At the pargana level, the pargana and village hereditary officers, state officials and the leaders of the village community concerned with a particular dispute were invited. The king did not interfere with the decisions of the village council, unless he received a complaint.

18.4 THE VILLAGE SERVANTS: DECCAN

The village servants were primarily artisans and formed an important section of the rural society in Deccan. They were called balutedars and their income, which was a share in the agricultural produce, was known as balutas. They were the counterparts of the Kamins of North India (Unit 17.5.6). However, compared to the kamins, their status was better off in the Deccan rural society. Several village documents, for instance, the talebands (village budgets), thalzadas (roll of land holdings), jamabandis (village rent roll), watanpatras (watan grants), gaonkharcha (village expenses) and so on record the participation of the balutedars in the decision making process of the village, especially where the disputes were concerned.
18.4.1 Composition

The term *bara* (twelve) was usually prefixed to the *balutas*. Based on their income, which was their respective share in the village produce, the twelve *balutas* were grouped into three rows called *kaas* or *oal*:

1) *Thorali Kaas*, i.e. major rows. In this category there were *sutar* (carpenter), *lohar* (blacksmith), *Mahar* and *Mang*.

2) *Madhali kaas*, i.e. the middle row. This category comprised of the *kumbhar* (potter), *chambhar* (cobbler), *parit* (washerman) and *Nhavi* (barber).

3) *Dhakti kaas*, i.e. the last row and this category included *bhat* (bard), *mulana* (servant of the mosque and the Muslim community in the village), *gurav* (temple priests) and *koli* (water carrier).

Scholars differ in their opinion regarding the occupations included in this list. However, ten occupations were often regularly included. They were, carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leatherworker, rope maker, barber, washerman, astrologer, Hindu shrine keeper and *Mahar*. In addition goldsmith, bard, masjid-keeper and bearer of burdens were also included. (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.210). Sometimes, village officials were also included in the class of *balutedars*. However, the number twelve is a traditional one and varied from village to village. The composition and the groupings within the *kaas* also had regional variations. For instance, in Indapur *pargana*, a village-cum town in Pune district of Maharashtra, there were fourteen *balutedars*, instead of the traditional twelve. *Chambhar* conventionally in the *thorali kaas*, i.e. the first row was in this case in the *madhali kaas*, i.e. the second row. *Mang* in Indapur occupied the *madhali kaas*, instead of the customary *thorali kaas*. In the *dhakti kaas*, i.e., the third row, *bhat* did not figure at all, instead, *sonar* (goldsmith), *joshi* (the village astrologer) and *ramoshi* (the village guard) were included.

*Balutas* as a rule belonged to different occupational castes which were of lower status. However, there were some exceptions. The astrologer, bard and the accountant were brahmans in Maharashtra. Similarly, the occupation of a particular *baluta* caste was not the monopoly of that caste. For instance, the carpenter of a carpenter caste in some villages was engaged to do the jobs of a blacksmith and vice-versa.

There was another class of village servants called the *alutedars*, who did not enjoy the same status as the *balutedars*. According to Grant Duff, the number of *alutedars* was also twelve and they were also known as *naru*. According to Fukuzawa, the Marathi documents of the pre-British period do not refer to the term *aluta* and it appears that unlike the *balutas*, the *alutas* were found in some villages occasionally and not in all villages. They were certainly not as indispensable as the *balutas* for the rural society. Perhaps, the term *aluta* was formed ‘alliteratively’ with the *baluta* (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.210). Sometimes, goldsmith, bard and bearer of burdens, traditionally a part of the twelve *balutedar*, were mentioned in the twelve *aluta* category.

18.4.2 Services and Remuneration of the *Balutedars*

Various records show that the *balutas* were never employed by separate families. Rather they were servants of the village as a whole. The documents have phrases like, *ganvachi sonarki*, i.e. ‘goldsmith of the village’; *dehayachen kamkaj* or *ganvachi chakri*, both meaning, ‘work for the village’. While serving the village as a ‘territorial group’, the *baluta* also served sometimes individual villagers belonging to the village irrespective of their family affiliation.

There were two kinds of *balutas*, *watandar* or *mirasi balutas* and *upari balutas*. The nature of service of the *watandar baluta* was hereditarily fixed. Generally they enjoyed monopoly over their respective occupations. But the services of the *upari baluta* was not so. They were employed on a temporary basis either to support the...
Medieval Society-1

Existing balutas or provisionally work, in case, a watan baluta migrated or left the village. Upari means a ‘newcomer’, ‘stranger’ or ‘extra’. As already mentioned, sometimes the same family performed both carpentry and blacksmithery. In such a case, there was a clear distinction between one who rendered certain service as his watan (patrimony) and another, who did the same but as upari. Therefore, not all baluta servants held hereditary monopoly (watandar) over the services they rendered. Since watandari balutas were highly remunerative, there were often multiple claimants over the same watandari. The documents record numerous disputes over a single occupational watan amongst the claimants.

A watan baluta could be sold, divided or transferred by its holder. Sale of watan amongst the same professional caste was common. If there were only one family of a serving caste in a village, it would be treated as the servants of the entire village. But when there were several families of the same occupational caste, they served different village families. In such cases they were not treated as the servants of the families and were considered as the servant of the village. This was because the division of the occupational watan did not mean the creation of new watans. Rather it meant multiple shares in a watan. Therefore, there was one baluta watan for every occupation in the village. The division was not of the ‘service sphere’. It was the division of the emoluments such as the house sites, inam land, cash or kind. For instance two families of carpenters were expected to divide the house or the house site, inam land and other perquisites meant for the carpentry watan. Thus, the total amount of emoluments always remained the same, despite divisions within the watan. In effect, the burden of the village as a whole, especially of the peasants did not increase. Although the villagers and the village as a whole was not financially affected by the sale, transfer or division of the watan, their ‘consent’ or ‘permission’ was required for such transactions. The documents refer to phrases like, gotache sakshi (confirmation by local assembly) and gotache mahajar (the certificate of the local assembly) for such dealings to be effective.

Fukuzawa mentions three kinds of remuneration for the balutas. One was the main remuneration which could be given in cash or kind, called baluta remuneration. Both the watan balutas and the upari balutas were entitled to this kind of remuneration as long as they offered specific services to the village. However, if they were absent from the village for a long time, they were not entitled to the baluta-remuneration.

The second way of paying the balutas was small additional remunerations in cash or kind called hakk (rights), lavajima (perquisites) or manpan (privileges). This was given by the village as a whole, which included not only the peasants, but also village officers, merchants, and village servants. The payment was made in the form of offerings to the village shrine. There were variations from village to village regarding the amount and the kind of perquisites paid to each servant. Due to the lack of data, it is not clear whether there was any disparity in the payment of the perquisites to the watan holding baluta and the upari baluta of the same village. The third type of remuneration was revenue free inam lands. Since the inam land was hereditary, therefore only the watan holding baluta servant was entitled to it.

There were three different modes of payment, which corresponded to three different methods of land revenue collection by the state. Therefore, the peasants as a whole paid this kind of baluta remuneration while paying the land revenue. In the first method, the peasants brought the produce to a certain place in the village. Under the supervision of the headmen a certain amount of the produce was paid to the balutas and then a fixed proportion of the rest was collected as land revenue. In the second method, the peasant was not required to bring the produce to a specific place. Rather, fixed amount was collected from him for the payment of the balutas and the land revenue. The third method was to pay a certain amount of money to the balutas by peasants. Often the share of the individual baluta was decided on the basis of the negotiations between the peasant and artisan at the time of harvest.
18.4.3 Status of the Balutedars

As pointed out earlier, the status of the balutedar in the rural society of Deccan was higher in comparison to his counterpart in North India. Despite belonging to low castes, a large number of them participated in the decision making process of the village. For instance, documents from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century refer to the balutedars attending the gotsabha and endorsing the decisions by their professional symbols; the potter’s symbol being the wheel, barber’s was mirror, carpenter’s symbol was chisel, shoe-maker’s was thread and picker, goldsmith’s symbol was hammer and so on. Sometimes only the concerned balutedar was invited to the council. In a boundary dispute of a village in Pune pargana in 1681 AD, six mahars were invited to a council as their profession included the measuring and fixing of the village boundary. The council was attended by the kazis, deshmukhs, havaldars and patils of eighteen villages- all of whom were rural elites and belonged to upper castes. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, pp.37-38)

Despite their low caste status, the village servants had an important place in the rural society. This can be seen in the examples of the mahar, mang and the mulana community. The importance of the mahars is evident in the kind of remuneration they received. They were paid in kind and also held inam lands. The mahars were entitled to carry all dead bodies of animals in their respective villages, but had to remove the skin of the dead animals and return them to the owners. Grant Duff sums up the duties and status of the mahars. According to him, 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 a principal guardian of the village boundaries, and in Mahagashtra, the Mahars are a active, useful and intelligent race of people.” (Grant Duff,).In fact, the mahars were considered as watandars in the Maratha country and their watan continued even during the British period by special legislation. The leader of the mahar community was known as the mehtar mahar and he was entitled to one-ninth of the total mahar watan.

Mang is the corruption of the Sanskrit word, matang, meaning the most powerful person. Matang Rishi of Varanasi was supposed to be born in the mang family. The legends say that they were initially rulers of Kishkinda state situated on the banks of the river Tungabhadra and the brahmanical domination reduced them to poverty and they became nomadic tribes. The occupation of the mangs was to make leather ropes and leather bags. They also performed the duties of the village watchmen. Similarly, the mulana was found in almost all the villages even if there were no Muslims. Grant Duff writes, “the moolang….is the Moolla or Mahomedan priest…The mulana had charge of the mosques and peers’ places,-performs the ceremony of Mahomedan marriages but is often found when there is no Mahomedan family but his own and is chiefly known to the Maharatta population as the person who kills their sheep and goats when offered as sacrifices at temples or in their fields to propitiate the deities….”

We also find that the traditional division of the balutedars into thorali kaas, adhali kaas and dhakti kaas was irrespective of the earnings of the balutedars. The earnings of the goldsmith may be more than that of a carpenter or a mahar, but in the hierarchy of the services to the village community, the goldsmith would always be lower than the mahar or the carpenter. The goldsmith usually belonged to the dhakti kaas, i.e. third row and the carpenter and mahar usually belonged to the thorali kaas, i.e. the first row.

18.4.4 Other Village Servants

In addition to balutedars or alutedars there were a few other village servants in the rural society of Deccan. Two most common were the priests and the forced labourers.
Priests: Referred to as the *upadhyaya* or the *gramaupadhyaya* in the documents, the village priest served specific families by officiating in various family rituals. The service of priesthood was hereditary. Therefore, the principle which marked out their service sphere was not the village as a whole, but certain families with specific caste status. Usually the priests were *brahmanas*. Some of the *brahmana* priests served the brahmana families, while some served the families with specific caste status of ‘peasant and other caste’, collectively called clean *shudras*. However, the for the non-brahamana low caste families, there were non-brahmana priests. It is not clear whether their hereditary service-sphere was confined to certain castes or to certain families belonging to such castes. Families of *mirasdars* (land holding peasants) and *watan balutedars* could employ a priest on permanent basis. The *uparis* (temporary peasants) and *upari balutas* could not do so even if they spent considerable number of years in the village. They could employ priests only on ad hoc basis. According to Fukuzawa, since they served specific families, they were in ‘direct clientele relationship’ with these families and hence represented the ‘prototype of the so-called *jajmani* system.’ (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.235). A discussion of the views on *jajmani* system and the nature of relationship between the rural servants and the various families they served will be taken up in the next Section.

V ethbega (Forced Labour): This term is a compound of the Sankrit word *vishti* and the Persian word *begar* and means forced labour. This was prevalent in the rural society of Deccan and no payment was made in lieu of services rendered. Only free food was provided while the labour was being rendered. Also some cash or food grain was given, but not as wages at the market rate. Large scale construction of forts in the Maratha country due to increased military operations required constant construction, maintenance and repair. Therefore, the villagers had to provide compulsory service to the state. Other services also constituted *vethbegari*, viz., porterage, fodder cutting, miscellaneous jobs at the government offices, and stables and watchmanship. Regular forced labour was extracted from the artisan and the menial castes, especially in the eighteenth century. The movement of the labourer in this case was restricted. The exploitation of the skilled and unskilled labour as a forced one often led to the desertion of villages. The local officials appealed often to the State to discontinue *vethbegari* as it adversely affected the cultivation and other activities in the villages. A levy called *begarpatti* seems to be a charge collected by the State to meet the expenses of the forced labour. (Kulkarni, 1992, p.42).

18.4.5 Rural Servants: Debates

There has been a difference of opinion amongst administrators, thinkers and scholars about the nature of the service rendered by the rural servants in the village. According to Karl Marx, “this dozen of individuals maintained at the expense of the village community’, served the village as a whole and were therefore, the ‘servants of the village’. According to him, this contributed to the self-sufficiency of the village and was ‘the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies.’ (Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.I, Chicago, 1915, pp.392-394). Baden-Powell also felt that these resident craftsmen and menials were ‘not paid by the job, but are employed by the village on a fixed remuneration….’ (B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community*, London, 1896, pp.16-17).

Max Weber in his General Economic History (1924) stated that the nature of the rural services was ‘demiurgic mode of employment.’ This meant that the rural servants were ‘not paid for their work in detail but stood at the service of the community in return for a share in the land or in the harvest….They are essentially village serfs, receiving a share in the products or money payments.’ A.R. Kulkarni (1992) feels that the rural artisans cannot be regarded as ‘village serfs’ for they were co-sharers in the village produce as a part of their right (*haqq*) and were actively participating in the village councils especially in the arbitrations of disputes.
In 1925, W.H. Wiser, an American Christian missionary, on the basis of his research of a north Indian village Karimpur, concluded that the village artisans served the individual families who were the respective clients of the artisans. The artisans were remunerated by these families and not by the village community. These client families were called ‘jajman’ and the rights involved in such an economic interaction of services was called the jajmani haqq. Therefore, ‘this system of interrelatedness in service within the Hindu community is called the Hindu Jajmani system.’ (W.H. Wiser, The Hindu Jajmani System, Lucknow, 1936, pp.vii-xxi). Wiser further added that these relationships were hereditarily fixed between the jajaman (patron) and his servants and the latter could transfer their rights to their respective caste members.

The theory of jajmani system influenced the sociologists for several decades. However, Fukuzawa does not agree with this theory. According to him, Wiser did not look at village as a territorial group with social relationships. The jajmani system evolved during the British rule, when village system was disturbed as a result of which ‘village servants were transformed into family-servants’. (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.239). As mentioned above, the jajmani system was applicable only for the family priests and not for the twelve balutedars or alutedars. Fukuzawa agrees with Weber on the ‘demiurgic mode of employment’ and feels that since the jajmani system evolved during the British rule, the sociological analysis of the jajmani system as continuing from immemorial times lacks a historical perspective. A.R. Kulkarni feels that the baluta system cannot be classified as demiurgic or jajmani. The only term that explains the system is grambhurutak or gramasevak traditionally used in the literature. This implied that the balutas were essentially the servants of the village as a whole. (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.41).

18.5 RURAL SOCIETY: SOUTH INDIA

In this Section we will discuss the rural society primarily in the Tamil region. Presently the Tamil region comprises of Tamil Nadu, southern part of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The rural society in the medieval period comprised of the corporate institutions of the brahmandeya, i.e. brahmana dominated village, ur, i.e. a non-brahmana villages, temples and guilds. An interaction between these institutions formed the basis of the rural life. They also became the mechanisms through which various political groups strengthened their economic base and extended their control in various localities of the Tamil region. Hence, the brahmadeyas, urs, temples and guilds – all institutions of the rural society – were the basis of state formation in the medieval period.

Large territories in the Tamil macro-region were called mandalams (also referred to as sub-regions). Three of these mandalams corresponded to three major kingdoms of the Tamil macro-region, viz., Pallavas with their capital Kanchipuram in Tondaimandalam, Cholas with their capital Tanjavur in Cholamandalam and Pandyas with their capital Madurai in Pandiamandalam. Both Tondaimandalam and Cholamandalam were in the northern part of the Tamil region with Kaveri river valley as its core. The Pandiamandalam comprised the southern part of the Tamil region, drained by river Vaigai and Tamraparani. Each of these river valleys were the focus of dense rural settlements especially before the thirteenth century. Between Tondaimandalam and Cholamandalam was the region called Naduvil Nadu that was drained by Pennar and Vellar rivers. Between the Cholamandalam and Pandiamandalam lay the semi-arid region of Pudukkottai. The western boundary of the plain is marked by the plateau and the ranges of Eastern Ghats, parts of which lie in the upper reaches of Kaveri. This area was called Kongu Nadu or mandalam of the Tamil macro-region. The epigraphs and literary sources mention three types of agricultural land, viz., wet, dry and mixed. Each of them had their respective social milieu. The development of irrigation technology in the forms of tanks and canals transformed...
these regions into paddy growing rural settlements that were ordered according to the Brahmanical ideology and around deity worship in the temples.

18.5.1 Rural Society and Institutions: Seventh to the Twelfth Century AD

From the seventh to the thirteenth century the regions of the Tamil macro-regions were integrated and organized through institutional means of the brahmadeyas and the temple. Located in the rural surroundings they had an impact in the rural society. The expansion and integration of various peasant settlements in the river valleys and the transformation of the tribal population into settled peasant communities provided a base for the emergence of new state systems. Beginning with the Pallavas of Kanci in the northern part, the Pandyas of Madurai in the south and the Cheras in the southwest, the political processes culminated with the Cholas in the Kaveri valley by the ninth century AD. The consolidation of these states depended on the integration of various local and supra-local institutions, mainly the nadus, brahmadeyas and the temples.

As a ‘peasant micro-region’ and an eco-type, the nadu had already emerged before the seventh century. From seventh century onwards, these nadus increased in number, representing a process of agrarian expansion based on the irrigation projects sponsored by the Pandyas and Pallavas in the wet and dry areas. Often such an expansion took place at the expense of the erwhile tribal population, who eventually were sedentized as peasants. Palar-Cheyyar valley in the north and Vaigai-Tambraparani in the south exhibited such agrarian developments. Thus, nadu as a territory was a grouping of vellanvagai villages, i.e. the agrarian settlements. The nattar was the spokesman of the nadu locality, primarily of the vellanvagai villages. These villages included habitation sites, cremation ground, irrigation channels, cultivated area, and pasture lands and so on. They had residential quarters of the landholders, cultivators called ur-nattam, residences of artisans or kammanas called kammanaccheri and that of the agricultural labourers or puraiyas called paraiaccheri. There was therefore, stratification in these villages, with landholders at the top of the rural hierarchy, artisans in the middle and agricultural labourers at the bottom. The landholders seem to have enjoyed parity in an economic sense with the brahmanas where the control over land was concerned. These owner-cultivators, i.e. the kaniyudaiyar got their lands cultivated by tenant cultivators, i.e. ulukudi. Both were known as vellalas. The assembly of the nadu was known as ur, dominated by the nattars, the powerful landed class of the rural society.

These river valleys also witnessed a proliferation of the brahmadeyas and the temples that restructured and integrated the rural economy and society. The brahmadeyas were land grants given to the brahmanas and thus were the centres of the landowning groups of brahmanas. The temples were the ‘nerve centres’ of these brahmanical villages. Since the brahmadeyas and the temples dominated by these brahmanas were the repositories of better irrigation technology and farming methods, the land granted to them became a mechanism for the extension of agriculture into unsettled areas and extraction of the surplus from various peasant groups. The assembly of the brahmadeyas was called the sabha or the mahasabha, which also controlled the large irrigation systems. Such irrigation systems created favourable conditions for dense population in these areas. Paddy cultivation was dependant on irrigation and was labour intensive. There was network of relations between big and small brahmadeyas and brahmadeya and non-brahmadeya villages, indicating the fact that the rural society was not isolated.

The conversion of the brahmadeyas into tan-kurus or taniyurs from the tenth century AD led to the emergence of independent revenue units (separated from the nadus) that had significant economic and political ramifications. Taniyurs acquired several villages (pidagais and purams) and craft centers. A new type of nadu called
the *perimalai nādu* evolved around *taniyurs*, comprising of velalas and cultivators. The *taniyurs* had distinct socio-political characteristics and introduced a hierarchy amongst the *brahmadeyas*.

The significance of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples stemmed from their brahmanical ideology that provided the social rationale for integrating diverse peasant and tribal groups through the institution of caste. For instance, the temples controlled by the brahmanas and situated in the *brahmadeyas* and the *vellan-vagai* provided a space for ritual integration to the new entrants within the *varna-jāti* paradigm. The tribal divinities were made an integral part of the brahmanical temples. The hierarchical structure of the *varnasramadharma*, i.e. the caste system was relevant in these villages, where the distribution and circulation of resources took place within the authority structure of landed rights. Besides peasants, various categories of chiefs, artisans and craftsmen were incorporated through ritual ranking within the temples. Thus, commanding an allegiance of various local groups, this institution of the *brahmadeya* generated economic activities of diverse nature that eventually became the basis of urbanization. Therefore linking peasants, local chiefs and other groups to the royalty, both *brahmadeya* and the temple were also utilized as the institutional channels of transmission and dissemination of the royal ideology in the village settlements. Naturally, then the location of the royal centres coincided with the location of the temple and *brahmadeya* centres spread over numerous rural settlements. The semantics of *koyil* acquired a new dimension with the royal patronage to the temples. Earlier used for palace, it now implied the temple as well. Hence, temple and palace became interchangeable with both representing the temporal and the sacred sphere, where obedience to the authority, i.e. the king and the god was mandatory.

The process of agrarian expansion that provided the crucial resource base to the Cholas and Pandyas brought forth the wet zone areas of the Tamil sub-regions, particularly in the Kaveri and Tamraparani valleys. The villages of these wet zone areas became the centre of king’s and chiefs’ authority and financial claim. By thirteenth century, five hundred and fifty *nadus* had come into existence indicating large number of agricultural settlements, majority being in the Kaveri valley of Cholamandalam. The proliferation of *brahmadeyas* and temples located in the *nadus* of these river valleys were also instrumental in extending agriculture. They implemented the royal irrigation projects and this gave them the crucial right to organize and manage the production and water resources, often with the *velala* community, i.e. the powerful non-brahamana landowners. These landowners also partook in the administration of the temples along with the brahmanas. Therefore, created at the royal initiatives, the *brahmadeyas*, and temples were often strategically situated in the non-brahamana villages to ensure their loyalty and provided the much-needed manpower for the vast irrigation projects.

One of the direct consequences of the agrarian expansion was the escalation of commercial activities that led to the growth of market centres, *nagarams* and a network between them that linked towns and villages. The spread of guild activities and trading associations, namely the Ayyayole 5000, Tamil Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurrvar, foreign merchant organization, Anjuvannam brought forth the mercantile community with its diverse groups of traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and itinerant traders. Often the mercantile communities invested in agriculture, gifted to the temples, further strengthening the ties of integration, and inter dependence within the rural society and with the urban centres and the village. One such weaver community, the *kaikkolas* had significant links with the temples and became an important social group within the rural society. By ninth century, clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temples had developed into centres of urban growth, thus connecting villages, rural society, urban centres and royal capital, diverse population and religion within the same complex. Thus, the *nadus*, *brahmadeyas*, temples and *nagarams* with their respective assemblies, viz., *ur, sabha* and *nagarams* linked the villages, various peasant communities and locality chiefs to the political network of the Cholas and Pandyas.
18.5.2 Rural Society: Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century

By the end of the twelfth century, the clusters of agrarian settlements both in the wet and dry zones comprised of various agricultural and artisanal castes. Brahmanas and Velalas emerged as dominant, followed by the Pallas, Parihas and Vanniyars and several others. Though hierarchically arranged within the caste structure, these groups were linked to each other with ties of economic interdependence. For instance, in the Pandya kingdom, the hilly regions with their tribal population were linked to the core area dominated by the Vellala peasant groups, due to their forest products and constant flowing streams which could be exploited for irrigation purposes. Since uncertainties were intrinsic in such an economy due to constant warfare and resource appropriation that most of these peasant groups were armed and had such military alliances with the tribes. In several places, the kaikkolas formed their own-armed bands and emerged as the ‘merchant- warriors’.

Amidst such a diverse socio-political fabric, the temples formed the most crucial as well as stable institution within the rural society. The ‘superordinate’ character of the temple was evident in its complex role in strengthening the territorial sovereignty at the rural level through negotiations and transactions that culminated into a network of alliances between the various locality chiefs. Such alliances were significant in the contemporary situation where warfare, unsteady boundaries and shifting frontiers were common. This shared power structure manifested in the institution of gift giving to the deities in the temples. This ritual gifting generated a redistributive system that facilitated the disbursement of resources and political power within the rural society. The gifts to the temples in turn were recirculated in the society in the form of ritual goods, for instance the prasadam (food offering), stimulating economic transactions. The local chiefs also made gifts to the king or donated to the temples in the name of the king and received titles and honours that enabled them to become the members of the royal alliance network. Sometimes, these chiefs made grants to the temples situated outside their local domains and built their individual power network, connecting the two rural domains. Apart from its political ramifications, the temple further provided the ‘ideological apparatus’ for different sections in the South Indian rural society by bringing together the religion of various social groups. Therefore, a heterogeneous religious pantheon developed with numerous gods and goddesses and led to the celebration of temple festivals within the village. The calendar of these festivals was often linked to the agricultural calendar of sowing and harvesting.

By the twelfth century, inscriptions record the gradual marginalization of the brahmadeyas, their institutional capacity to integrate was exhausted. This led to the rising importance of the temples in the society in general and the agrarian settlements in particular. Though the sabhas continue to function and the various political powers till the eighteenth century continued to establish brahmadeyas. The Pandya and the Chola records of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cite several instances of the brahmadeyas converted into vellan-vagai villages and donated as devadanam to the temples. Either the brahmanas migrated from the Tamil country to the northern regions or converged increasingly towards the temples, further highlighting the latter’s significance. This coincided with the re-emergence of the local chiefs within the agrarian localities.

In addition, with the occupation of the Kaveri delta by the Hoysalas, the migration from the Karnataka region was accelerated. Hence, an altered base of power and power structure emerged. The expansion of agriculture led to an increase in landed transactions, private and temple holdings, particularly in the non-brahmana villages. This created a hierarchical structure of the landed rights with the increasing prominence of the Vellalas as the dominant agricultural community vis-à-vis the lower agricultural groups, escalating the tensions within the agrarian community. The growth of urban centres and intensification of mercantile activities led to the rising importance of the nagarams, merchants, craftsmen and weavers, especially the kaikkolas that altered
their relationship with the *nadus*. Hence, the rising social importance of the various non-brahmana groups, especially within the rural society led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans and dominant peasant caste for a respectable ritual space within the temples. This bid for social mobility in the twelfth century culminated into a ‘societal crisis’. The conflicts that escalated this social crisis were usually between the artisans and agriculturists, sub-castes of the artisan like the *kaakkolas* and *saliyas*, hill and forest people and the different merchant groups. The existing social structure weakened and led to the crystallization of the low caste non-brahmana communities into a dual vertical division of the *Valangai* (Right hand castes) and *Idangai* (Left hand castes), within the traditional caste structure of the rural society. However, the Vellalas and the brahmanas remained outside this dual division.

In this altered social environment within the village localities, undoubtedly temples forged links amongst chiefs, merchants and the newly emergent groups. The popular religion of the Saivas and Vaisnava community responded to this social change by providing a broad social base with ideological sanction, which would accommodate the diverse ethnic groups. Attempts were made to provide them a ritual place within the respective temples.

From thirteenth century onwards, the core riverine areas of Kaveri, Pennar, Tamraparani and Krsna-Godavari with numerous agricultural settlements and important trading centres became the focus for competitive resource appropriation, particularly amongst those social groups who were located in areas of narrow resource base. One of the most important political developments that influenced the social composition of the rural societies in South India was the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire in the fourteenth century with its capital Hampi in Karnataka. This initiated a chain of political processes that integrated the peninsular region south of river Krsna by bringing together the three cultural zones of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka.

The most important factor underlying these political processes was the phenomenon of migration. From the end of the twelfth century, Kannada and Telugu peasant groups migrated from areas of marginal resource base to the wet riverine regions, ‘receiving new traditions and religious symbols from the valley culture and leaving their own marks on the society of rice-belt.’ Changing political boundaries, ever mounting military requirements of the kingdoms, especially of the Vijayanagar Empire and the expansion of the agricultural frontier contributed to the increasing migration of the Telugu warrior class to the river valleys and peripheral areas of potential development. Referred to as the *nayakas*, they impinged upon the pre-existing local power groups and their respective spheres of control and emerged as the major benefactors of the temples in the rural settlements. Migration also brought into prominence a new class of itinerant merchants and traders to the villages, several of whom gradually settled down and emerged as powerful landowners. The inscriptive references to the Kaikkola, Vaniya, Sikku Vaniya Vyapari, Mayilatti, Kamnala, and Komatti traders, Pattanulkar (silk weavers) from Saurashtra point to the development of a brisk trade and increased craft production which found a thriving market in the rural and urban areas.

Apart from the groups mentioned above, peasant communities and agricultural specialists like Shanars (tank-diggers) formed one of the significant migratory groups that modified the pre-existing regional population. New irrigation technology and forms of production were introduced that ‘established new domains for competition over territorial control.’ Consequently, the migratory processes integrated the dry upland areas and the river valleys of Kaveri and Tamraparani. By fifteenth century, agrarian expansion not only took place in the wet areas, but also in the dry zones through artificial irrigation technology, especially the tank and well irrigation. The corporate and individual efforts of the migrants and investment in labour and capital facilitated the implementation of...
the new technology particularly in the black soil region. In these dry upland zones, the agriculturists came into conflict with the hunters and pastoralists that often led to the incorporation of the latter into the agricultural community. These changes provided the context for the emergence of a warrior peasant class, both economically and politically powerful and primarily non-brahamana and Telugu in composition. The settlement of the migratory Telugu or the Vaduga groups in the central Deccan and the Tamil wet regions often displaced the older Tamil peasants and landholders; especially brahmanas already settled there and created a new class of landed magnates with new groups of artisans and merchants. Further, some of the locally entrenched Vellala landed communities emerged as big landowners with titles like *nadudaiyan* or *nadalvan*. Largely, the local and the migrant landed community paid regular tribute to the Telugu commanders of the Vijayanagar army and allied themselves to the local chieftains. In this context, the Reddis, Velalas, Gavundas, and Manradis further enhanced their position as the dominant peasantry and acquired armed power. Further, new network of relations were forged between the dry upland zones and the wetland agricultural community. Thus, the whole of peninsular India witnessed a concerted warrior-peasant effort that culminated into a new regional order, with the coercive power of the new warrior kings.

Each agricultural zone, dry, mixed and wet had a distinct social and material milieu. Kinship networks organized into specific caste groups were important for striking alliances and exchange networks, over the control of agricultural production. The Chola period *nattars*, mainly the Vellalas tied to each other by kinship transformed themselves due to changes in the land holding system and influx of the migrants. Thus, a multi community composition of the agriculturists emerged who related the local rural society to the political authorities. There were diverse agricultural communities and building of sub-regional agrarian domains around important towns in developing agricultural zones. The medieval configurations of the *nadus* vanished, replaced by a set of sub-regions defined as hinterlands of towns along routes of transport and communication.

By fourteenth century, new changes took place with the influence of the *nayakas* as a military class. The old elites confined to the wet zones depended for their protection on these *nayakas*. Over a period, these *nayakas* became influential, as they were ‘protectors, patrons, and arbiters, whose power rested first on military might, and more essential in the long run-on their resourcefulness in their transactions with the existing dominant elites in temples and local assemblies.’ The *nayakas* were more successful in bringing together the wet rice areas and the unsettled migrants together. They also encouraged commercial activities and often employed merchants and moneylenders in the rural administration.

Against this backdrop of migration of various social groups and the growing power of the martial communities in both wet and dry areas, the worship of the warrior goddesses became popular. This period registered a dramatic increase in the Amman shrines, which had become new cult centres for the various rural elites and peasant and artisan communities within the rural society. These cult centres were associated with the particular lineage god and then with the brahmanical temples in the villages. Hence, a large pantheon was created comprising of the local warrior gods, goddesses and the brahmanical divinity of Siva and Visnu. This represented a vast cross section of the society that was linked through temple rituals in a hierarchical manner. Further, the non-brahmanical Vellala village priest also participated in the ritual activities of the large temples along with the brahmana priests. In this way, the brahmanical temples were linked through a priestly network with the village deities. The religious scenario became more complex as the some of the migratory groups carried their own gods and goddesses from outside the Tamil region into the new regions, and ‘constructed a new temple, thereby creating a cross- section of worshippers beyond the locality and developing a network of intra-regional devotion and pilgrimage.’
The political as well as the economic aspects converged in the temples, which became the mechanism for generating agricultural developments and a network of linkages with the help of the powerful sectarian leaders based in these institutions. The numerous endowments made by the diverse social groups generated resources that were managed and invested by the temples for tank irrigation. Hence, areas of limited agricultural opportunities transformed into that of high yielding mixed agriculture of food and cash crops with a flourishing trade. Such developments continued even in the eighteenth century.

18.6 SUMMARY

This Unit highlights various themes that have been researched on the rural society of Deccan and South India. The rural society in Deccan comprised of hierarchical land rights that influenced the nature of agrarian stratification. The village artisan class usually called *balutedars* also played an important role not only in the economy but also in various matters of the village. This can be seen in the documents that refer to their participation in the deliberations of the village council. The rural society of South India was a complex network of corporate institutions like the *brahmadeya* (with their assembly *sabha*), *nudu* (with their assembly *ur*), and the temples that integrated various social groups within the village as well as the localities and larger political kingdoms. However, this process of integration was influenced by several factors of ecology, migration and control of the corporate institutions by powerful political group. The aim of the Unit is to show that the villages and the rural society were not self-sufficient isolated units, neither were their internal structure homogeneous and stagnant.

18.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss briefly the composition of the *balutedars*. Analyse the types of services performed by them and the pattern of remuneration.

2) Critically examine the position of village servants in the rural society.

3) Analyse briefly the structure of rural society in South India during 7-12th centuries.

4) Analyse the role of the corporate institutions in the integration of various social groups of the rural society in South India.

5) How did migration in the 14th century influence the rural society?
SUGGESTED READINGS


Ludden, David (1989), Peasant History in South India, Delhi: Oxford University Press.


Ramasvamy, Vijaya (1985), Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.


Singh, Chetan (1991), Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century, OUP, Delhi.

Singh, Dilbagh (1990), The State, Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century, Delhi.


Stein, Burton (1979), Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA THROUGH THE AGES
MHI-06

ILLUSTRATIONS
(for Blocks 1 & 2)

Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Social Sciences
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi