

PART I: FROM THE 13TH TO THE 18TH CENTURY

Chapter II

FROM THE THIRTEENTH TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURYI: Rajputs and Their Estates

The earliest evidence about the history of Radhvanaj belongs to the year 1234 A.D. I found, among the ruins of a small shrine on the outskirts of the village, a fragment of an epigraph engraved on the base of an image of goddess Mahismardini. The epigraph reads: Raja Jagdev . . . Samvat Shri 1290 Shravan (= King Jagdev . . . 1234 A.D., August-September). The plinth of the shrine and the stone frame of the front door are still in tact, and there are several mutilated sculptures. There are also sculptures, some strewn around, and some built into the walls of another shrine in the village. According to Dr. R.N. Mehta, an archaeologist in the University of Baroda, it can be stated on stylistic grounds that the plan of the Mahismardini shrine and the sculptures in both the shrines belong to the thirteenth century.⁽¹⁾

It is significant that the name Raja Jagdev occurs also in the bardic genealogy of the Rathod Rajput lineage living in Radhvanaj at the present time and described in the records of 1822-27. The Rajputs are the traditional Warrior-and-Ruler caste in Gujarat, Rathod is one of the many exogamous patrilineal clans among them, and this clan like any other Rajput clan is divided into a number of patri-lineages. Jagdev's name occurs in the genealogy at the eighteenth

generation back from the generation of the present Rathod adults. If we calculate an average of three generations for one hundred years, it may be inferred that Jagdev belonged to the thirteenth century, the period of the inscription. The bardic genealogy further shows(i) that Jagdev was second in descent from Vasanji who had inherited Radhvanaj as his share from his father's estate of several villages, and (ii) that Jagdev was married to a daughter of the chief of Matar, a town about four miles from Radhvanaj, and was given Vansar, an adjoining village, in dowry. Jagdev thus became a small chief (Raja) of two villages.

At the time when Jagdev held the estate of Radhvanaj and Vansar, the entire region of Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch and a few outlying areas were under the suzerainty of the Solanki Rajput dynasty having its capital at Patan in North Gujarat. It is possible to infer the existence of a number of Rajput estates, like that of Jagdev, in Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch at this time on the basis of bardic genealogies and other historical evidence, but the difficult problem is to understand the position of the estates in the political and administrative system of the period. It seems to me possible to reconstruct a picture of the essential features of the system by studying contemporary evidence in relation to the descriptions of the political system of Rajput kingdoms in later periods. I mention here a few relevant points.⁽²⁾

At any one point of time, there was the sovereign king of Patan, called Maharajadhiraj, at the apex of the hierarchy, and there were a number of kings, called Mandaliks, paying tribute to him according to pressure of power. The Maharajadhiraj as well as each Mandalik kept a large part of his territory under his direct administration and granted most of the rest to trusted supporters, called Samants, and to the members of the army. The Rajput rule of primogeniture was perhaps the most important factor in the creation of new Samants and new estates. When a king was succeeded by his eldest son, the latter had to grant estates to each of his younger brothers. Whatever be the origin of an estate, the holder of each estate was a king in miniature, having his small court in a small town, and following the same rules of inheritance. Each estate-holder, whether a Samant or a member of the army, also granted small estates to the members of his family. The holders of small estates were called Grasiyas (lit., gras=mouthful). On the one hand, kinship worked as a binding force between the head of an estate and the junior members of the lineage, and on the other hand, the larger portion of the estate remaining with the head provided him the means to control the junior members.

These were the normal rules, but most Rajputs always tried to increase their power and authority. A constant struggle for enlarging one's territory went on throughout Rajput society. An enterprising younger branch might enlarge its borders not only at the expense of the head and other members of the lineage but also at the expense of the estates

of other lineages. It would exercise, or threaten to exercise, physical force. The weak and timid either lost, or took refuge under some powerful neighbour, keeping enough land for subsistence. Separate independent kingdoms came into existence in this way. Sometimes an enterprising Rajput might also establish a separate kingdom by subjugating the tribal people in the high-land region. The less enterprising would seek employment where obtainable, in some other Raja's court or army, and receive an estate as remuneration. As soon as a new kingdom was established or a new estate acquired, however, the same rules of inheritance were followed.

It seems to me that the net result of about three centuries of Rajput rule in Gujarat was an increasing sub-infeudation of territory, which became the chief source of weakness in the political system when the Muslims invaded Gujarat at the end of the thirteenth century.

In 1299 A.D. Alauddin Khalji, the Sultan of Delhi, conquered and removed the Rajput sovereign of Gujarat, but it did not lead to the removal of the large number of lower chiefs (mandaliks and Samants) and small estate holders (Grasiyas). In 1323, twenty-six years after the Muslim conquest, the Delhi Sultan's Governor in Gujarat requested (and not ordered) the illustrious Thakurs of Petlad, a town in the centre of Charotar, to protect the land granted for the maintenance of a well.⁽³⁾ It was only toward the end of the fourteenth century that most of the bigger Rajput chiefs were removed from plains Gujarat. In Saurashtra, Kutch and highland Gujarat, however, most of the Rajput chiefs continued to exist until recently.

The Grasiyas or the Rajputs holding small estates left in plains Gujarat frequently challenged the authority of the Muslim rulers by refusing to pay revenue, by making sporadic attacks on 'loyal' towns and villages, and by looting travellers on highways. It was only after the establishment of the Sultanate of Gujarat, an independent Muslim power with local base, and the almost simultaneous transfer of the capital from Patan to Ahmedabad, a more central place, that the Muslim rulers could subdue the Grasiyas in Central Gujarat. This area also received close personal attention of the Sultan because it was the khalsah area reserved for his own treasury whereas other areas were assigned to nobles and others⁽⁴⁾. One Arabic⁽⁵⁾ and two Persian chronicles⁽⁶⁾ tell us that during the reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1411-1442), three fourth of land in each Rajput village was appropriated as khalsah or Crown land under the denomination of Talpad (lit., indigeneous) and one fourth was left with the Rajputs under the denomination of Wanta (lit., share, portion). The Rajputs also agreed to pay the Sultan a nominal amount of revenue as a tribute or offering called salami, (lit., salutation) for their Wanta land, and military service whenever called upon. During the reign of Mahmud III (1458-1511) the Wanta-holders too were forcibly ejected from their estates, and it led them to raise a revolt. The revolt was put down in a most sanguinary manner.

During the period of conflict between the Sultans and the Mughals, the Grasiyas again raised their head and continued to do so even after Akbar annexed Gujarat to his

empire in 1572. The Persian chronicle Mirat-i-Ahmadi states: "During the vice-royalty of the Khan-i-Azam (A.D. 1588-92), the desais (pargana headmen) muqaddams (village headmen) and peasants of most of the parganas complained to the Imperial Court that the agents of the governors and jagirdars were seizing all the revenue (or produce) through (various) cesses; and after their taking it away, the Rajputs, Kolis and Musalmans (Molesalams ?) raised a tumult, laying waste the produce and fields of the petitioners.... It was, therefore, ordered that..... one-fourth of the land of the Kolis and others be set apart, no revenue demanded therefrom, and trustworthy sureties taken for their good conduct."⁽⁷⁾ This means the Grasiyas regained their Wanta lands during the reign of Akbar. The arrangements made by Akbar remained almost unaltered until the British began to make modifications in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The Rathod Rajputs of Radhvanaj held Wanta land in both Radhvanaj and Vansar at the beginning of the nineteenth century; it formed roughly one fourth of the total land in each village; and the Rajputs paid salami to the Crown (see below pp.). The records of the early nineteenth century also mention the tradition that the Rajputs of Radhvanaj had been holding Wanta land in the two villages since the time of the Muslim rulers. This later evidence confirms the evidence of the thirteenth century epigraph and the Barot records, which encourages me to emphasise the suggestion I have made earlier, that one can get a fairly accurate idea of the Rajput estate system during the twelfth and thirteenth

century if the early nineteenth century records and the Barot records are studied in relation to other historical records. This will in turn suggest several other ideas about the political, economic and social system of the period.

II: Consequences of the Loss of Rajput Estates

The loss of estates by the Rajputs was an important development during the Muslim rule in Central Gujarat. It raises the question of its consequences. One consequence is easy to understand: whereas in Saurashtra, Kutch and highland Gujarat the Rajputs continued to live in towns as well as villages, the Rajputs in Central Gujarat ceased to live in towns because the capitals of bigger estates were lost to the Muslims. The domination of towns by Muslims had further consequences, but we are not concerned with this problem here. To deal with the changes at the village level, first we have to ask: Who were the inhabitants of the villages over which the Rajputs ruled? The Kanbis, later called Patidars, must have constituted the bulk of the peasantry during the thirteenth century as at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The historical records from at least the seventh century use the name of this caste as a general word meaning a cultivator. It seems to me that one of the chief consequences of the loss of estates by the Rajputs was a change in their position vis a vis the Kanbis.

In this connection it would be useful to see the nature of the Wanta-Talpad division at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In more than a dozen villages not only the village-land but also the village-site of each village was divided

into Wanta and Talpad as shown in Map 4. The two parts were considered two distinct villages for the purpose of administration. The Rajputs lived only in the Wanta part of the village-site with their dependent castes, whereas the Talpad part was inhabited by the Kanbis or Patidars and their dependent castes. The Patidars lived in both the Wanta and the Talpad parts, but in the former they were under the authority of the Rajputs while in the latter they were independent of the Rajputs. The Rajputs owned land in the Wanta part, while the Patidars owned land in the Talpad. The latter had its own headman (Patel or Mukhi), a Patidar by caste and responsible directly to the officials of the Crown. The Wanta part had its own head, who was called Thakur or Darbar (chief or prince) and not headman. This division into the Rajput-dominated Wanta and the Patidar-dominated Talpad exists in these villages even today.

I shall describe the nature of Wanta--Talpad division in Radhvanaj in greater details at a later stage, but two points may be noted here. Firstly, in Radhvanaj neither the village site nor the cultivable land was divided into two distinct blocks as described above. The houses of the Rajputs were interspersed with those of the Patidars and other castes, and so were their fields. Nevertheless, the division into Wanta and Talpad enabled the Patidars to gain a distinct position as against the Rajputs. The village had ceased to be an independent estate of the Rajputs and had begun to be administered by the officials of the king through Patidar headmen. Secondly, the Rajputs of Radhvanaj ceased to be the overlords of the adjoining village Vansar. On the contrary they had to

acknowledge the administrative jurisdiction of the Patidar headman of Vansar over the one fourth of land they owned in that village. They enjoyed some power in Vansar only on account of their land being cultivated by some tenants and labourers from Vansar. It can readily be realised that the complete or partial reduction of estates bigger than that of Radhvanaj and Vansar must have freed the Patidars in a large number of villages from the domination of the Rajputs.

The point I want to make is that the Kanbis, who formed the bulk of the peasantry in Central Gujarat during the rule of the Rajputs, were dominated by the Rajputs, and the most significant effect of the loss of estates by Rajputs was the gradual emergence of Patidars as a powerful group in Central Gujarat. This does not mean that the Patidars became independent of the Muslim rulers. It was a change in the position of the Rajputs vis a vis the Patidars, which was a result of the change in the position of each vis a vis the Muslim rulers. Such a change in the position of the Patidars did not take place in Sanrashtra, Kutch and highland Gujarat where the Rajputs continued to be the ruling group.

III: The Role of Commerce

It is well-known that commerce has played an important role in the history of Gujarat since at least the first century A.D., if not earlier. Nobody has however made a detailed study of the economic history of Gujarat, and it is not possible for me to go into all the available evidence. I will make only a few well-known points.⁽⁹⁾

Gujarat traded through its ports with other coastal regions of India and with a number of foreign countries. Broach, Cambay and Surat were centres of world trade. There was also considerable trade between the ports of Gujarat and those of Saurashtra, particularly between the ports situated on two sides of the Gulf of Cambay, and between Cambay, at the head of the Gulf, and ports on both sides of the Gulf. Secondly, Gujarat traded by land routes with almost all parts of India, and there was also considerable trade between the different parts of Gujarat. All kinds of trade grew to an unprecedented extent from the latter half of the fifteenth century on account of the opening up of sea routes to Europe and the relatively stable political conditions.

The growth of commerce led obviously to the importance of the merchant class in the society, but I think it had also had considerable influence on villages. The exports of Gujarat included a number of agricultural commodities, such as indigo, cotton, hides, clarified butter, millet, pulses, sesame, dried ginger and myrobalan, opium, tobacco, and honey. The exports also included several goods made mainly from agricultural raw materials, such as cotton yarn and textiles, leather goods, sesamum oil, carpets, canopies and bed tapes. Indigo, cotton, and cotton cloth formed the bulk of the exports. Furthermore, there was considerable growth of urban population after the fifteenth century on account of the growth of commerce and of Muslim courts and bureaucracy, and this meant greater demand for food grains and other agricultural produce. The demand for foodstuffs increased so much that the local

cultivators could not satisfy all the demand, and even such essential foodstuffs as wheat and rice had to be imported in large quantities from several parts of India during the Mughal period. The greater demand for all kinds of agricultural produce made Patidars, the principal cultivator caste, prosperous. It is important to realise that Central Gujarat was situated between the great port of Cambay on one side, the capital city of Ahmedabad on the other, and the large town of Baroda on the third. There is considerable direct evidence to show that the peasants of Central Gujarat were producers of a large number of commodities for towns and for export outside of Central Gujarat. The economic prosperity of Patidars helped them rise as a power group in Central Gujarat and occupy an eminent position among Patidars in the whole of Gujarat and Saurashtra. Their power became manifest only in the eighteenth century (see below pp. ____), but it was a result of changes that had taken place in the previous centuries, viz. the loss of estates by Rajputs and the growth of commerce.

IV: The Kolis

Although the Kolis form about one fourth of the total population of Gujarat we do not have much information about their early history. At the present time they are found living in the plains as well as in the highlands. In the highlands their life is in many respects similar to that of such 'tribal' groups as the Bhils: they are relatively isolated in the forests, have simple technology, are very little influenced by Sanskrit culture, and do not have in their

villages such crucial groups of Hindu caste system as the Brahmins and the Untouchables. The Kolis in the plains, however, seem to have lived as petty landholders, tenants and agricultural labourers along with other Hindu castes, and been influenced by Sanskrit culture, for a very long time. It is therefore difficult to describe the entire group as a caste or a tribe.

There is fairly clear evidence that those Rajputs who established their kingdoms in the highland region could do so only after fighting with the 'tribal' people, and there is some evidence to suggest that there was some armed conflict between the Rajputs and the Kolis in the plains region. The Solanki king Karna I (1064-94) is mentioned, in a somewhat later record, to have fought with the Bhils and Kolis in the area around modern Ahmedabad.⁽⁹⁾ Similarly the Muslim king Ahmad I (1411-42) is mentioned to have fought with the Kolis in the same area.⁽¹⁰⁾ Throughout the period of Muslim rule in Gujarat the Kolis are frequently referred to as dacoits, robbers, marauders and pirates, and as helping many a political adventurer by joining their irregular armies. The Kolis plundered the camp of Emperor Humayun at Cambay, and gave considerable trouble to Aurangzeb when he was the Governor of Gujarat.⁽¹¹⁾ It is clear from all this information that the Kolis had always had political ambitions. Such political activities were, however, pursued only by certain sections of the Koli population, by the Kolis living in the highland region, in the plains areas gradually merging into the highland region,

near the rugged ravines of rivers and in the sandy wastes near the coast line. In these areas the Kolis had established petty chiefdoms and claimed the status of Rajputs and Kshatriyas. The Kolis living in the villages in the plains along with Rajputs, Patidars and other castes were poor and weak and did not claim the Rajput and Kshatriya status until the nineteenth century.

V: Concluding Remarks

I began this chapter with an account of the earliest evidence about the history of Radhvanaj, but the necessity to understand the significance of the evidence led me to turn the chapter into an account of some of the major developments in the history of Central Gujarat from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. What happened in the village was not an isolated event but a part of widespread developments in the region. The chapter has also provided a general historical background to the detailed description of the major castes in the village and the region in later chapters. It must also have been noticed that I have tried to use the information provided by the early nineteenth century records and the present day ethnography of the area in reconstructing the earlier history.