

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS

We have noticed in the previous chapters that the breakdown of the Mughal authority created a situation of social unrest and insecurity in Gujarat in the 18th century. An attempt has been made in the following pages to understand the general effects of the unrest and the perceptions of the local people towards of that situation. We have also tried to understand the mechanisms by which they tried to meet the situation. In order to gauge the people's feelings of the effects of the invasions, we have analyzed the folk literature of the period, as we do not expect to get information on such a theme in the 'conventional' sources whose objective is very different. Some of the *garbas* written in this period provide an insight into our subject.

Garbas are the most popular and common form of poetical literature of Gujarat. These were composed and sung on important social occasions such as marriages, births and deaths. The *garbas* were predominantly associated with *Bhakti* and were usually prayers verses addressed to one or the other form of Goddess Amba. Some of them commemorated certain events that had a larger social bearing. These *garbas* thus are a useful source of information on the people's perception of events and situations; even though they do not provide elaborate information on the historical events. Also, *garbas* have

many forms, the *pavado* and the *shalakho* being the most common forms of eulogizing an event or a heroic feat. Though *shalakho* and *pavado* were distinct from each other, by our time the difference seems to have been narrowed down and the terms are used interchangeably.⁴²¹

Before we take up the information in these *garbas*, it is necessary to explain the terms that occur in them. The Marathas are referred to as *ganim* (Arabic '*ghanim*', meaning 'plunderer'), an expression of disdain, in non-Marathi sources. English sources, for instance, refer to Shivaji as *ganim* (and his guerilla warfare as *ganim kava*), because he had plundered the city of Surat. Interestingly, the Marathi sources use this word to denote a 'hero'. Hence, the usage of the word *ganim* has opposite connotations in the Maratha and non-Maratha sources of the period. Now let us examine the garba work called *Ganim no Ladai no Pavado*, composed by Vishwanath Jani in 1706. This *garba* relates to the first major battle of the century between the Mughal officers of Gujarat and the Marathas under Dhana Jadhav in which the Mughals were routed. This work is a prayer sung to Goddess Ambika imploring her to protect Gujarat from the *ganim* (Marathas). The details in the *pavado* also corroborate the information in the conventional sources. This *pavado* contains 49 paragraphs; each paragraph is a four liner. Thus it says:⁴²²

⁴²¹ U Joshi, A Raval and Y Shukla (eds), *Gujarati sahityano Itihas*, Ahmedabad, 1976, Pp. 35-36.

⁴²² In this chapter only a loose translation of the verses as been done as the intention was only to understand the Perceptions of the people.

Bhay lage ghano ganimna katakno

Vaghne sarvano nahi evo!

Jamna doot to pran laine vate

*Anal taruaarno nahiye tevo!*⁴²³

... [We are] very scared of the Ganim's valour

More than that of a Tiger!

*The Jam's men (Yam, god of death) leave after they take life
away*

But the Ganim keeps coming back...

It further says that,

Ye amare shir thaliyo che ghani!

Te to gardho thayo nevo varshe!!

Te pratipalna nathi re shakto kari!

To amari sari te kon karshe?!!

The Emperor who is suppose to protect us

Has become an old man of 90 years,

He cannot look after us anymore

⁴²³ Manjulal. R. Majmudar, Bachubhai Ravat, Manubhai Joghani (eds), *Gujarati Loksahityamala*, Vol. III, 1963, Ahmedabad, Pp. 273-282.

Who is going to take care of us then?

In another verse the *garba* informs us about the excessive revenues that were collected by the officers

Moghanu dukh ne megh aaye nahin!

To tamara janya kyam jeve?!!

'jijiyo' le ghani, ganim mare ani!..

[We have] the sorrow of high prices and the rains do not come

You tell us how do we live?

The ruler takes more (taxes) and the Ganim kills...

The *garba* also states that nobody, meaning the officers, comes to oppose the Marathas. Referring to the battle of 1706, it says that it has been ages waiting, but no Subahdar came with an army to rescue the people from the Marathas and even the Diwan is in (Maratha) custody.

Vat jota bhuda maas ekaj thayo!

Ko subo naviyo sena layino!!

Khabar leye sheherni yehne diwanji!

Te becharo padya kaid thiyine!!⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Ibid. P.298.

It has been ages waiting!
No suba (subahdar) came with an army!!
The Diwan who looks after the city (of Ahmedabad)!
He himself is imprisoned!!

Towards the end, it implores the Goddess to help the people of Gujarat as a *Khan* or a *Mir* (meaning the Mughal officers) alone cannot do anything.

Another *pavado* titled as *Rustam na Shalakho*, also known as *Ibrahim Quli no Pavado* was composed in 1725 by one Shamal Bhat of Ahmadabad's Begumpura. It is a versified version of the battle between Shuja'at Khan and Hamid Khan that took place in 1725. The Shuja'at Khan faction, consisting of three brothers, was very popular with the people of Gujarat. Their popularity is reflected in this *pavado*. Two parts of the text has been available for this study⁴²⁵, one dealing with Shuja'at Khan and Ibrahim Quli Khan's death at Ahmadabad and the other dealing with Rustam Ali Khan's death in the 'battle of Aras'. The initial verses praise the three brothers and the effects of their administration in the following words:

...vado te veer shujaatyashan!!
Jene padshahima ati Ghana maan!
Anmi mehwasi jene vash kidha!!

⁴²⁵ The verses pertaining to Ahmadabad has been extracted from a later work, R.B.Jote, *Gujaratnu Patnagar Ahmadabad*, Ahmedabad, 1929; while the part dealing with Surat have been taken from another 19th century work, Ishwarlal Icharam Desai, *Surat Sona ni Murat*, Surat, 1958.

Praja paline mota jash leedha!

*“... The brave Shuja’at Khan,
the one who had great respect at the imperial court
The one who had controlled the Mehwasis,
and earned the goodwill of the people.”*

Then it goes further:

*Tethi nanero Rustam kahiye!! Jena judhno par na lahiye!
Rupe rudone datar janu!! Sahuma shiroman tene vashanu!
Jehena naamthi taskar trase!! Dakshini gamin saat gao nase!
Tethi nanero madino jao!! Abhram kuli ladakwao!*

*“[the one] younger to him is called Rustam, I will now be describing
him!*

*He was good to look at and exalted (shiroman) in every way!
Hearing his name the looters were scared away
Southern Ganimis ran miles away! (Literally seven villages, saat-gao)
Youngest of all is Ibrahim Quli, The one who is the favourite of all”*

Then the Poet goes on to describe the battle, the details of which match with the account in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*. In the battle of Arras the Poet asserts that Rustam was killed by betrayal of Pilaji Rao

or else he could not have been defeated. Pilaji allied with Rustam first and then changed sides, as defeating Rustam was important to him.

*... partam pilujiye dago deedu chhe,
looti lashkar ne kop keedho chhe,
beejo to kanthak koli mehwasi,
deedho ratyabo, keedho bahu hashi....
Tyare Rustam khan maara gaya chhe.*

*"... First Pilaji betrayed him, angered him by looting his provisions,
then the mehwasis betrayed him by harassing his army....
It is only after all that, that Rustam could be defeated!"*

After Rustam's death the Marathas looted the places around Ahmadabad as per the agreement with Hamid Khan.

*tyathi Hamidshah Gujarate avya sarve Maratha sanghate lavya,
bhadarma aavi keedho mukam...
vachan apyu te palo tame sava dahado seher lootyu ame,
hamedshah emaj kahave seher lootyani namoshi ave,
hamedshah to sheherma raha, looti lagadi maretha gaya,
navya verano navyopar bar bar rupiya lidha be vaar.*

*"... From there (bank of Mahi River) Hamid Khan came to
Gujarat (Ahmadabad) Bringing all the Marathas with him,
He settled down in Bhadra....,*

'Fulfill the promise you made' (the Marathas said), 'we will loot the city',

[But] Hamid Khan was ashamed (scared for his reputation) to loot the city,

[Therefore he] remained in the city and the Marathas left after plundering it.

[They] started the new trend of levying vera (cesses) and took twice the amount [they were promised]"

The Pavado ends with the praise of Rustam Ali Khan's bravery,

"... The way a Tiger roars

Rustam's army goes into the battlefield,

Seeing him the enemy runs away!

The way birds fly by the approach of men,

The Marathas also run away seeing the advent of Rustam's army"

And his administration,

Surano haq, lokno Tham

Rustame tyaha jayi keedho vishram

Aavine dushman pavle lage

Rustamna sarkhu surapan bhage.

Enha sarikhi himatya rahejo

*Taruare jas enho toh dejyo,
Dhanya eni janani-keri kukh (kok)
Surajanne pragatavyu sukh.*

*“ Rustam would sit in peace only when his people live in peace,
Once he catches his enemy even they start to sing his praise!
Praise be to the mother, who gave birth to him,
the one who has given peace to people.”*

The importance of the last verse could be understood through the measures Rustam had taken to control the local miscreants. The *Mirat* mentions an incident where Syed Ali Waiz, a preacher, was creating social discord in Surat. Rustam imprisoned him and sent him to Baroda.⁴²⁶ This created uproar as the Waiz had Arab and Rumi *sibandis* as retainers but Rustam silenced everybody through his strong rule and established peace in the town. While Rustam was proceeding to Ahmadabad to fight Hamid Khan some people influenced him to release Syed Ali who returned to Surat. In 1726 after Rustam's death Syed Ali played an important role in instigating a riot in Surat.⁴²⁷

The resistance to the payment of *jama'* is in evidence since the last years of the 17th Century. This has also been reckoned as one of the evidence of Mughal decline. In case of Gujarat, this tendency was

⁴²⁶ *Mirat*, op.cit., Pp. 414-415.

⁴²⁷ *Mirat-ul-haqaiq*, op.cit., f. 460 (a)

sporadic in the 17th Century and during the 18th Century it became widespread with most of the region becoming *zortalbi*. Amongst the areas that were becoming *zortalb*, Cambay was perhaps one of the first. A piece of folk literature, the text of which unfortunately could not be located but it finds a mention in the *Gujarati Sahitya Kosh* indicates this tendency. *Bhan no Shalakho* was composed in 1707 in Khaksar *pargana* of *sarkar* Khambayat (Cambay). It eulogizes a fight between the ryots near Padra village and the Mughal Subahdar over the non-payment of the *Jama* as early as 1707. The people of Khaksar *pargana* gave seven *bighas* of land in *pasaitu* (revenue free village grant) to Gangadas Bhavani for composing this poem.⁴²⁸

Peshwa's rule has left a negative mark on the minds of the people of Gujarat. The widespread use of *ijara* and its institutionalization under the Maratha rule led to the oppression of the local population. Another oppressive institution that came in existence was the *kamavisdari* system in which the functions of revenue collection, maintenance of law and order and the judicial duties were combined in one person, the *kamavisdar*. The *kamavisdars* also introduced the system of collection of fines instead of handing down punishment to criminals. The *kamavisdars* were in dire need resources and hence they used every opportunity to collect money. This wrecked havoc in the social system. The rich could always get away after committing crimes while the poor could not pay the exorbitant fines. Certain *Sarsubahs*, who held the office on *ijara*, employed spies

⁴²⁸ Jayant Kothari, Jayant Gadith, Chandrakant Sheth (eds), *Gujarati Sahitya Kosh*, Part. I- Medieval, Ahmedabad, 1989, p. 94.

in the cities and nailed down people for committing crimes so that they could impose fines on them. In most cases people were falsely implicated in order to extract money from them. The *Sati Saduba no Pavado*, composed in 1816 at Ahmedabad is devoted exclusively to one such incident.⁴²⁹ It runs like this:

Naropant Abba, the *Sarsubah* of Gujarat had employed *chhadias*⁴³⁰ or agents who reported on the wealth and the private information of people around the Ahmedabad city. Based upon their information the *Sarsubah* asked such people as were accused of various crimes to pay up to retain their honour and freedom. On refusal they were harshly treated like keeping heavy stones on such persons or confining them in dark rooms. The amount so obtained was shared between the *chhadia* and the *sarsubah*. It so happened that one day Saduba, the wife of a *bhat* in the city, was accused of adultery and was being carried away by the *Sarsubah*'s men. Saduba in retaliation pleaded her husband to kill her to protect her honour i.e., perform *traga*. The *bhat* accordingly committed *traga* on his infant son and wife. This created a tumult. All the *bhats* in the city assembled before the *Sarsubah*'s Haveli and the house of the *chhadia*. Four of the Shroffs also joined them in seeking an explanation. All the merchants and such groups as the Brahmanas, Gosains, Fakirs, etc also assembled before the *sarsubah*'s place and closed down the shops. The intervention of the Gaekwad and the English produced no pacifying effect on them.⁴³¹ They demanded that the *chhadia* named

⁴²⁹ Though the text of this *pavado* could not be located, it's contents have been summarized in detail by Commissariate Vol. III, op.cit., Pp. 884-889.

⁴³⁰ *Chhadia* literally meant a person who reports or one who indulges in gossips, Ibid.

⁴³¹ A.K.Forbes, *Rasmala II*, op.cit., Pp. 429-430; R.B.Jote, op.cit., Pp. 154-155. The incident also

Uttam be handed over to them. At length the *chhadia* was handed over to the mob that beat him to death. Later, a shrine was constructed and dedicated to the memory of Saduba and she was given the status of a *sati*.⁴³²

Another *garba*, relating to the times of Aba Shelukar, the *sarsubah* of Ahmedabad is available in parts. Aba Shelukar was the Sarsubah of Gujarat around 1800 and was a partisan of Nana Fadnavis. It is said that he took Ijara of the place for ten lakhs of Rupees. To collect this exorbitant amount he blatantly harassed the people of Ahmadabad. This *garba* called *Shelukar no Garbo* describes his atrocities in detail.⁴³³ It starts with:

*Punethi shelukar aaviyore
Karva amdavadna rajre,
Shelukar sheed avyo' to ser mare.*

"Shelukar has come from Poona

To rule over Ahmadabad

Why has he come and what for?"

Then the *garba* describes the details of his reception and his lifestyle.

Raypur darwaje pesiya re bhare chadhavi asvari,

finds mention in *GOB IX*, Pp. 127-128.

⁴³² A.K.Forbes, P. 482.

⁴³³ The Gujarati version of the text is given in the footnote, R.B.Jote, op.cit., Pp: 150-151.

Pesta te hatya kareere, kapyo rastano piliyo.

*“He entered from the Raipur gate with an impressive [number
of] followers!*

*Immediately he committed a murder, cut down all the pipal⁴³⁴ trees on
the road!”*

It further says:

*Aavyo tare doshala odhi, gayo tare chadro odi,
Shelukar te jas na lidhore,
... gayo tare taliyo bahu padiyo!!*

*“[He] entered openly wearing a shawl (doshala) and left wrapped in
a sheet (chadar)!*

*He did not earn any goodwill!
..... When he left people clapped a lot (expressing happiness)!”*

The above verse shows that Aba Shelukar was unpopular with the people of Ahmedabad. Aba Shelukar was defeated and imprisoned by Govind Rao Gaekwad in 1800. He was a supporter of Nana Fadnavis and opposed BajiRao II's accession to the office of Peshwa in 1797. Subsequently, when Nana Fadnavis died in 1800 Shelukar rebelled against the Peshwa. Baji Rao II commissioned Govind Rao Gaekwad to quell the rebellion and arrest Shelukar. Subsequently, the

⁴³⁴ Pipal trees are considered to be sacred in Gujarat as in the rest of India as they provide shadow and refuge from heat, to the travelers. The composer here calls cutting down these trees a murder.

Gaekwads were given the *ijara* of Ahmedabad and this ended the chapter of Shelukar's rule in Gujarat.

The Peshwa's *sarsubahs* in general were exploitative. *Ahmedabad no Itihas*, written during the 19th century recounts that the wealthy people were scared to display their wealth or wear good clothes in public, as that would have attracted the attention of *Sarsubah*'s men. It also mentions that the robberies committed in the city used to go unnoticed, as the *sarsubah* was believed to take a *chauth* in the stolen property. Even though no documentary proof supports this statement, but the level of lack of confidence in the integrity of the *sarsubah* is clearly evident.⁴³⁵

It may be mentioned that there were a few exception to this general rule of conduct by the Maratha *Sarsubas*. For example, Raghunath Mahipat, popularly known as *Kaka Saheb* who was the uncle of was Vithalrao Babaji, the Gaekwad *Sarsubah* of Katiawad, was extolled for his kindness and welfare measures. In Mahipat's time, there was an increase in the *jama* and was also credited with repairing the Kankaria tank and make it serviceable. He ruled for ten years from 1800-1810. He was known to be soft spoken and good to the ryots.⁴³⁶

During the famine of 1813, called *Agnotaro Kal*, another *sarsubah*, Ramchandra Kishan took appropriate measures to

⁴³⁵ Maganlal Wakhatchand, *Amdavad no Itihas*, Ahmedabad, 1851, Pp. 105-106.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.* P.46.

ameliorate the sufferings of the common people. During this famine the price of grain rose exorbitantly. The *Sarsubah* created a stock of grain at a centralized place and also posted *chaukis* over the shops to ensure that grain is not taken away for hoarding. He then organized a grain distribution system so that every family got the requisite amount of grain.⁴³⁷

The harassment of the population and exaction of undue taxes was not confined to the Marathas alone. In the first half of the eighteenth century the Nazims also behaved similarly. *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* has many references to high handedness of the Naib-Nazims in collecting illegal taxes, the most common being *Bewarah*. The Naib-Nazims also collected fines instead of punishing the criminals and made exactions without any scruples and falsely imprisoned people.⁴³⁸ The Nazims targeted certain communities of traders and extracted money from them on various counts, including putting fine on the entire community for a crime committed by one of its members.⁴³⁹

Besides the Marathas, the local communities like the Girasias, Kolis and Kathis also contributed towards the disorder. The Kolis had always been turbulent and created disturbances in the Mughal heydays as well. Since the last years of the 17th Century they increased their plunder and pillaging activities. The Kathis who lived in central Saurashtra bordering the sarkar of Ahmedabad, similarly harassed the areas between Juangadh and Ahmadabad. Their main base was *Than*

⁴³⁷ Ibid. Pp. 47-48.

⁴³⁸ *Mirat*, Pp. 398, 459, & 487-489.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. Passim.

which was destroyed by Shuja'at Khan I in 1690. During the 18th Century the Kathis became even more recalcitrant. Fatehsing Rao Gaekwad commissioned the Nawab of Cambay to deal with the Kathis as Cambay's territories bordered those of the Kathis. The Nawab received a grant, called *kathipal* consisting of seven villages and forty thousand rupees annually from the Gaekwads for the same. Khambayat bore the brunt of the Kathi depredations the most being contiguous to the Kathi territory. They established *giras* claims over certain villages of Cambay.⁴⁴⁰ By the end of the Century, however, their power declined considerably and they were obliged to apply for protection from first the Nawab of Junagadh. Later they sought the help of the British against the aggressions of the Bhavnagar chieftain, as already mentioned.

VERAS

Vera in Gujarati was used in the sense of cess or an additional tax. These cesses came to be levied since the beginning of the Century due to the slackening of Mughal authority and got included in the *jama'*. The *Mirat* refers to the extra taxes that were levied on the residents of towns as *bewarah*. Though we have not been able to understand the difference, if any, between the two, the concept of *vera* and *bewarah* appears to be the same. The tax realized from on houses from individuals is called *bewarah* in the *Mirat*; in later sources the

⁴⁴⁰ *Bom.Pres.Gaz- Cambay*, op.cit., P. 220.

same is referred to as *vera*.⁴⁴¹ The levying of various cesses shows the attitude of the rulers to extract as much money from various sections of the people as they can and *bewarah* was one such additional demand to meet that end. *Bewarah* came to be levied for the first time after the death of Shuja'at Khan by Hamid Khan, the uncle of Nizam-ul-Mulk.⁴⁴² This subsequently became a major source of revenue for the Nazims especially when the city was under siege. This cess was levied on various pretexts. For instance, when Mubariz-ul-Mulk became Nazim he arrested important traders of the Bohra community and tortured them, even killing one of them. He extracted fines up to Rs. 3 lakhs from the traders of this community and imposed *bewarah* of various counts repeatedly on the community.⁴⁴³ During the Maratha rule many other kinds of *bewarah* came to be levied, like the *bewarah-i-janoi* that was collected at the time of the Hindu thread ceremony; a *vera* was levied on the Kanbis (peasant caste) at the time of widow marriages; the Kanbi community allowed widow remarriage termed *dhariwa*. The *vera* on *dhariwa* was realized at the rate of one rupee four rupees per marriage. People attending such marriages also were required to pay four annas person as *nazrana* to the *Sarsubah*, the *darogah* of *Katra Parcha* and the *faujdar-i-gard*. People coming from outside the city to attend the marriage had to pay ten annas for the coconut.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ *Mirat* for *Bewarah* and *Bom*. *Prez. Gaz-provincial series-Gujarat* for different kinds of *vera*, passim.

⁴⁴² *Mirat*, P.426.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.* P.459.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.* P.899. It seems that there is printing mistake in the English translation of the *Mirat* as it states that four annas was levied on such marriages whereas people attending such marriages were required to pay four rupees. The reverse seems more probable.

In the rural areas on the other hand, it was the *girasias* who extracted ransom money from their neighbouring villages in the name of *toda-giras*. *Toda-giras* literally means a payment collected at the entrance of a village. It was, however, protection money paid to safeguard a village from plunder by the *girasias*. This *vera* was known in different areas of Gujarat by different names: *vol*, *pol*, *rakhopa*, etc.⁴⁴⁵ Rajas of Rajpipla and Mandvi, were the biggest amongst the *girasias*. The *toda-giras* of the Mandvi Raja amounted to Rs. 80,000 from 403 villages annually.⁴⁴⁶ This levy was, at times, received in kind in the form of goats, animal hides, etc and it was rarely received in the form of land grants.⁴⁴⁷

Every section of society had to pay *vera* of one or the other type. Thus, *karam vero* was realized on both the agriculturists and non-agriculturists;⁴⁴⁸ *pani pidha no vero*, literally a cess on drinking water was levied on those who paid no other tax and it appears to be a tax for allowing people to live in a village; *mansa*, (cess on oil or butter); *sal-vero* (loom tax on weavers); *bambh-vero* (cess on leather dressers); *hal-vero* (plough cess); *dharala-vero* (cess on carrying arms); *kasab- vero* (cess on artisans); *betheli-vero* (cess levied on idlers), and *hadia-vero* (cess levied to support the family of a person who died defending his village by making land grants for its subsistence). Other cesses include *gulal* (realized at Holi time) and a cess realized at the time of Dussehra. It is amply clear from the list of

⁴⁴⁵ *State Gazetteer of Baroda* – II, Pp. 102-103.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

taxes cited above that the rulers were trying to augment their resources over and above the established forms of taxation.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

In a situation of political uncertainty as it existed in the 18th century Gujarat, the role of community leaders became very important. Thus, the Nagarsheths and Mahajans whose social influence was on the increase from the 17th century, came to develop a clout of their own. Their increased importance during the period has been recognised by scholars.⁴⁴⁹ The influence that they exercised over the administration can be gauged from the instances cited in the contemporary sources. In 1723, on the representation of the Mahajans and the inhabitants of the town, the Mutsaddi and Faujdar of Surat, Momin Khan was removed from the charge of *kotwal* (*chabutra kotwali*). Certain other officials like the *naib-thanedar* of Chaurasi *pargana* in Surat was removed on the charges of oppression made by the merchants.⁴⁵⁰

It seems that the Mahajans since the early 18th Century had started playing important role in the administration. Thus, for instance in 1725 the *Mutasaddi* of Surat had entrusted the levying of cess on each *mohalla* to the Mahajan of the jewellers' community as he needed resources for the payment of salaries to the soldiers.⁴⁵¹ Due to

⁴⁴⁹ M.N.Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, Delhi, 1976; Farhat Hasan, op.cit.

⁴⁵⁰ Mirat-ul-Haqaiq ff. 236(a) & 236(b).

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. f.34(b).

the active participation of the merchant class in administration, they sometimes were drawn in factional fights. For example the tussle that took place between Kapur Chand Bhansali, the Nagarsheth of Ahmedabad and Anup Singh Bhandari, the Naib-Nazim, who was notorious for harassing the traders on account of collection of *Bewarah*. Kapur Chand as the Nagarsheth, had employed around 500 *sibandis* and used them to safeguard the traders from the harassment of Bhandari's men. It was because of this that Anup Singh Bhandari later assassinated Kapur Chand.⁴⁵²

The main duty of the Nagarsheth was to protect the interests of the trading community. The members of the trading communities elected a Nagarsheth as their representative in their dealings with the State. However due to the unsettled conditions and the factional fights the post of Nagarsheth ceased to be elective and instead the Nazims appointed men of their choice to this post, serving their own interests. The appointment of Gangadas by Sarbuland Khan and that of Ahmad Bohra by Ajit Singh as Nagarsheths points towards this development.⁴⁵³ This situation also led to conflicts in some cases.

Throughout the Century, the merchants acting as leaders took the onus of saving the towns from the plunder of the Marathas and other disturbers. They took the lead in negotiations with the Marathas

⁴⁵² *Mirat*, P.388.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.* Pp. 487-489.

in settling the amount of *khandani* to save the towns from being plundered.

The situation remained the same in 1780 when General Goddard took over Ahmadabad from the Peshwa's *Sarsubah*. The local leaders, apprehending the sacking of the city by the British troops, petitioned before Goddard asking him to desist from such an act. The translation of the document by Gen. Goddard assuring the people of Ahmedabad at the behest of the influential people of the place was as follows:

"Amir-ud-Daulah, General Goddard Bahadur, Fateh Jung, the servant of Shah Alam, bahadur Ghazi, year 1194 H. Be it known to Nathusha Nagaresheth, Sheikh Muhammad Saleh, the Qazi, Mia Mirza Amu, the Badshahi Diwan, and the residents and the people of Ahmadabad, that at present they should dwell in their homes with entire composure of mind; and they should not have the slightest anxiety or fear in their hearts for any reason whatsoever; and they should engage themselves in their usual avocations, because no one shall trouble them or interfere with them in any way. This injunction should be considered peremptory and should be acted upon. Written on the 5th day of the month of Safar in the year 1194 AH., corresponding to the 23rd year of the accession (11 february 1780).

-Thomas Goddard."⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁴ M.S. Commissariate, Vol.III, op.cit., P. 792.

As can be seen, the local leaders including Nathu Shah, the Nagarsheth, the local Qazi and others, along with the imperial Diwan performed the role of leaders safeguarding the city against possible plunder. A similar incident had taken place earlier when Kushal Chand was the sole Nagarsheth of Ahmadabad and the Marathas came to plunder the city. This was in 1725 following the death of Rustam Ali Khan. Kushal Chand also had dissuaded the Marathas from plundering the city. He seems to have paid money to the Marathas to save the city from plunder. The Mahajans in gratitude promised in writing to give four *annas* for every hundred rupees worth of goods that entered the city, in perpetuity to the Nagarsheth and his descendants.⁴⁵⁵ Subsequently, the city was saved from the Maratha plunder, even though the villages could not be saved.

While the rulers and high functionaries of the period in the region were preoccupied with augmentation of their resources, some of them also undertook public welfare works like construction of wells and tanks. Raja Raghunath Das, the *Diwan* of Muiz-ud-Dawlah, is credited with constructing a step-well adjacent to the Panch Kuwa at Ahmedabad. People could obtain sweet potable water from there.⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, Vajeram, the *peshkar* of Najm-ud-Dawlah constructed a step-well near Jamalpur gate.⁴⁵⁷ During the flood of 1728 in river Tapti, Nawab Behram Khan undertook relief work amongst the distressed population of Surat. He distributed loaves of bread amongst

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 420. The author has reproduced the document in Modi Script.

⁴⁵⁶ *Mirat*, P. 408.

⁴⁵⁷ *Mirat*, P. 613.

the Muslims and fried grams amongst the Hindus.⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, Lallubhai, the *diwan* of Bharuch, distributed grain in all the villages of Bharuch during the drought. He was also credited with construction of public tanks and rest houses for travellers, digging of several wells and a *bawli* (large well) with hewn stone.⁴⁵⁹

The tradition of public welfare activities by the rulers and administrators continued even in the nineteenth century, which has been recorded in the English sources. Thus, in 1803 we find Fateh Mohammad, the regent of Kutch opening fair price shops in Bhuj in times of scarcity following lack of rains. Again in 1813, he offered work on Desalsar Lake to the famine stricken people, wages being paid in grains. Grain shops with proper guards were also opened at Bhuj, Mundra, Mandvi and Anjar.⁴⁶⁰ During the many famines of 18th Century the Maharaos of Kutch distributed large quantities of cooked food to the famine stricken people.⁴⁶¹ During the famine of 1813 the chieftains of Palanpur and Radhanpur opened up grain stores. The people were employed on public works and rural watch was increased.⁴⁶² The Gaekwad chief also employed people on construction work and thus provided relief.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ *Mirat*, P. 458.

⁴⁵⁹ *Oriental Memoirs*, vol. III, op.cit., P. 250 .

⁴⁶⁰ *Bomb. Pres. Gaz-Cutch*, P. 108.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Bom. Pres. Gaz-Palanpur*, P. 315.

⁴⁶³ Walter Hamilton, op.cit., P. 701.

Thus we can say that though the social conditions of the period were not conducive to prosperity, economic or otherwise, the society was able to device mechanisms for survival.