

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter of this thesis outlines the important points emerging from the discussions in the previous chapters. It highlights the significances and limitations of the present work and future scope in the current field. A comprehensive examination of various sources reveals that most of the land tenures in Gujarat originated during ancient and medieval times continued to be in operation under the British and the Gaekwads of Baroda and even after India became independent. These tenures were continued with some changes as per expediency and potential. The theme of 'change' and 'continuity' of the eighteenth century is used in the thesis as lens to locate the rural economy of Gujarat in 19th and 20th century.

Looking at economic history of rural area of Gujarat came with problems. More than 85% of population lived in villages and yet the historical records do not give a detailed account of the life of peasantry. It mainly looked at tax collection or revenue collection from the state's perspective and therefore fluid things like condition of life in the villages and landed relationships etc., remained on the margins. Historiographically speaking much of the histories of the rural economy discussed land revenue administration and their focus was mostly on the state and not on the relationships that were forged or the mechanisms that evolved.

As is already known, historically 'land' has been the most significant means of production in the agrarian economy whether in India or in other parts of the world. This raises many questions such as who, what, when, where, why and how used the land. The current research focused on these questions and has attempted to answer them specially in the context of the regions of Gujarat in the modern historical period. It is an established fact that the main source of state income was land revenue and hence the state claimed authority over the territories or brought it under its control. However, there were some lands that continued to be owned by people. In

order to determine the share between state and its people, certain terms and conditions were applied. These terms and conditions came to be known as land tenures. Land tenures in turn determined the relationships which were formed between state and its people or between one agency with another. Over the period of time, the land tenures became so important that the lands/villages came to be named after the types of tenure prevalent in it. For instance, the earliest form of land tenure in Gujarat was *bhagbatai*, which apparently established direct relationship between state and the village community. It emerged as the simplest and most common method of distribution of produce on land. The establishment of direct relationship did not mean that there were no middle men. In between the state and village community there existed a number of middle men or intermediary agencies. These were groups who dealt with both state and the peasant and played multiple roles such as moneylenders, judges, police etc. They in fact acted a buffer and sustained the rural economy especially when there were shifts of power at the centre. In fact, it has been observed in the thesis that the state continued to dependent upon the intermediary classes almost throughout the period of study. They also enabled the state to function smoothly by offering services in exchange of certain rights and privileges over resources of land.

The ancient and medieval texts such as '*Dwayashraya*' and '*Lekh Paddhati*' discusse tenures in which revenue was collected either by the government officials or by intermediaries. It is clear hence that these two mechanisms of revenue collection had evolved during the late ancient and the early medieval times in Gujarat and continued till at least 1960. There were many similarities between pre-modern and modern systems. Since the ancient and medieval Gujarat, the ownership rights over land were approved by written documents or witnesses. This had defined the establishment of direct relationship between state and individual eliminating at times the intermediaries. Another instance is that for measuring the land a measurement unit called *visopak* similar to *bighas* was adopted. It not only determined the area of land under

individual's possession but also the amount of revenue to be paid on the basis of measurement of land and fertility of soil. Despite the fact that the state undermined the intermediaries they continued to subsist and remain on the margins.

If and when the centre would weaken the score of peripheral intermediary groups would emerge and would mediate and arrest the collapse of economic structures. For instance, during the early medieval period, the central authority had weakened. This led to the consolidation of network of intermediary classes. This was the time when *wanta* and *talpat* tenure were evolved. Thus, despite change of rule at grassroot level not much change is noted as peasants continued to pay rent to their landlords according to the old methods such as *bhagbatai* and *holbandi*. From 15th to 18th centuries, the land administration of Gujarat province came to be more organised due to establishment of powerful central authorities i.e., Gujarat Sultanate and Mughal Empire. However, territories under their control were still divided into two parts; one was one was administrated directly by central authority and another by tribute paying chiefs. The tribute paying chiefs at times also emerged as revenue collector. Over the period of time, they became hereditary chiefs or officers in management of land.

Gujarat Sultanate constituted of twenty-five *sirkars* managed by official or nobles. This created a hierarchy of officials such as *maktaa*, *thanedar*, *tehsildar*, *patel*, *mukaddam* and *desai* etc. At the time of Sultan Bahadur Shah (1526-1536), the state required an agency which could manage the fiscal administration and provide regular revenue. Therefore, state farmed out fiscal units to intermediaries through a contract. This system came to be known as *izaradari* or revenue farming system which showed continuity at least till the end of 19th century. Besides, there also emerged a network of new or additional intermediary classes such as *girasias*, *maleks*, *mehwasis* etc., who were assigned the management of villages and payment of tributes. The state did not interfere in the internal management of villages which mostly remained under the

control of these classes. By taking the advantage of weakness of central authority, intermediary agencies assumed hereditary powers. During the medieval period, the trend of granting the land called *inam* was also seen to be more in use. These were granted to army personnel, nobles or others in exchange of some services. The *maleki* village was one of the examples of such gifts. Besides, there was also a class of land which was rent-free land called *nakri*. This further enhanced the power of intermediaries and complicated the land tenure structures.

Under the Mughals (as a powerful centre), the intermediaries continued to pay tribute or share to the state. The practice of gifting/granting land such as *inam*, *jagir*, *wazifa*, *moghlai* etc., also to be continued to be practiced. The Mughal introduced the concept of survey and settlement of land but did not make any stark changes. They continued with older systems but with some modifications. The Mughals reorganised the administrative divisions and modified the system of survey and settlement introduced by Sher Shah. The number of *sirkars* was reduced from twenty-five to sixteen and were managed either by state officials or by intermediaries. The old hierarchy of officials was also continued but some more got added such as *mutasadi*, *patwari*, *mehta*, *mazumdar*, *amin*, *amil* etc. A systematic and organised survey and settlement was introduced in which soil was divided into three classes on the basis of quality of soil and the amount of revenue was fixed on the basis of that. The survey and settlement provided proprietary rights to the cultivators. The system came to be known as *bighoti* system as the assessment was fixed as per *bigha* of land. It had also re-established the direct relationship between state and village community. *Bighoti* system later was also adopted by the Maratha and the British but with further modification. The British, in fact, redefined this system this system as *ryotwari* tenure or survey tenure.

Eighteenth century is widely known as the century of transition. Gujarat also underwent multiple changes in this century both political as well as economic. This definitely had an

impact on land tenurial system but most importantly it affected the landed relationships which continued to be dynamic and outside the state control till at least the mid to end of 19th century. The Marathas established and consolidated their position in province of Gujarat especially through the *mulbagiri* expeditions in the 18th century. They, as mentioned earlier, continued with the land tenurial systems such as *wanta*, *izaradari*, *giras*, *bhagbatai*, *bhagdari* and *narwadari* etc. The other new systems that were introduced by Marathas were *chauth*, *sardeshmukhi*, *manotidari* and *ankadia* etc. The power in this century was not vested in the state but mostly in the revenue functionaries. For instance, *amin*, *desai*, *mazmudar*, *patel* etc., continued to perform their former duties and enjoyed certain privileges and rights over the land and its resources. Their offices had become hereditary and saleable. They eventually consolidated their position by establishing themselves as a single line of communication between the state and the peasants. The intermediary classes who had paid tribute to the Mughals became the tributaries of Marathas as well, thereby maintaining the administrative continuity. Thus, it can be concluded that the Maratha did not bring much change in the pre-existing systems of land tenures as well as revenue officials or intermediary classes. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Both English East India Company and Baroda State had established their political supremacy over the certain territories of Gujarat. Under Walker Settlement, the relations of tributaries to their masters were drafted in a manner of contract. The proprietary rights of tributary estates were secured. The position of tributary estates or such landlords continued to be same as they had enjoyed during the pre-British times.

Broadly speaking the early 19th century had witnessed a transition specially in the financial involvement of the state. The change had occurred because the volatile political situation of the 18th century had begun to stabilize. The nascent regional states however continued to use the intermediaries or revenue functionaries to collect revenue and manage rural economy. As a

result, intermediate revenue officials gained enough power to dictate the state's political and financial affairs.

The conditions of the 18th century continued in the 19th century. Initially, the British did not have much knowledge of indigenous systems. They carried out a thorough study of these systems and continued to experiment with it. They categorised the villages in government (peasant villages) and alienated (landlord villages) so that they could understand the nature of high revenue yielding lands.

The state could not alter fundamentally the structure of power relations and therefore had to negotiate and continue with local revenue functionaries. This became a distinct feature of Gujarat economy that constrained the state to extract resources only through negotiations with local parties. This was mostly because the state could not directly deal with individual peasant. It was more convenient for state to contact with intermediary agencies rather than dealing with individual cultivators separately. Although, the new system also affected the position of local revenue functionaries when they were shorn of their diverse powers and responsibilities and were reduced from being the master of fiscal unit to mere officers.

The main concern of the state governments was maximization of land revenue and therefore all possible means were adopted to reach that goal. Beside the settlement of government villages, the state also had to deal with alienated villages which were under the control of landlords such as *maleks*, *mehwasis*, *giras*, *talukdars*, *izaradars*, *inamdars* etc., often the government ended up recognising. The private ownership of these landlords and refrained themselves from direct interference in the internal management of landlord villages. They only took interest in enjoying a share/tribute/revenue from these villages. In some extent, they appointed their agents in the management of landlord villages. But their incomplete or half-baked knowledge of the traditional systems created multiple issues. Therefore, they resorted

the traditional systems of management of the alienated villages. The change was that instead of tribute they called it revenue. It can be safely said that the state policies were riddled by its own contradictions because various attempts were made to alter the old systems, however they were forced to continue it through political and legal means.

The English East India Company's entry into Gujarat was purely for ensuring that their trading privileges were transformed into permanent rights. So far as acquiring political control was concerned, efforts were made throughout the course of the 19th century to maximise land revenue collection. In order to do so they devised a land revenue mechanism which attempted to convert rent-free (alienated) lands into revenue yielding units alongside fixing maximum amount of revenue in the state lands and private lands. The scheme introduced in the early 19th century came to be revised from time to time under the crown's rule (after 1858). The land revenue mechanism although has been identified as 'new land revenue' policy but it was hardly new. As has been already established, the systematic attempt to increase state revenue had been made by various medieval as well as early modern regimes. All the other features of the new land revenue policies were mostly continuation from older system as mentioned in chapters (3, 4, 5 and 6).

British Gujarat consisted of five districts of Gujarat and almost 40 % of the population has been the focus of many studies carried out by historians and administrators. These studies have carried forward the rhetoric of the imperialists emphasizing in the 'change' element. Chapter 4 of the thesis attempts to relook at this idea. The Bombay Government had introduced the concept of survey and settlement in the first half of the 19th century but it came to be systematically implemented only by the second half of the 19th century. The old land tenures such as *bhagdari* and *narwadari*, *senja*, *wanta*, *giras*, *talukdari*, *maleki*, *mehwasi*, *sarkati* and *inam* tenures etc. were taken into consideration for settlement in different phases – Original,

Revision and Re-Revision Survey and Settlement. The main focus of the revisions was to maximize the revenue collection. Therefore, the colonial government made various attempts to change the nature of these tenures. However, they could not completely eliminate or abolish these tenures. Therefore, modifications were carried on the base of their potential and expediency. It can be safely said that the roots of the Indian traditional systems were as much as strong that the most powerful Empire of the time could not uproot it.

The colonial government made continuous efforts to establish control and charged very high revenue. They either continued or settled the old land tenure systems or modified the old systems by carrying survey and settlement and introduction of survey or *ryotwari* tenure. They continued to blame the middle men as exploitative. Hence, the revenue functionaries, whether hereditary or non-hereditary, began to be painted in poor light and attempts were made to eliminate them.

The princely states which were indirectly controlled by the colonial government present a slightly different picture. In the Baroda State till the second half of the 19th century, the revenue functionaries were quite powerful and had evolved as key political groups. It was only by mid-19th century that the Baroda State made attempts to take back the control. This meant that for almost a century the land tenures were governed/managed on the basis of relationships that were forged between the peasantry and independent revenue functionaries. System like *izaradari* continued to be in operation till the end of 19th century. This practice was totally disapproved by the state but continued to prevail all over Gujarat. The reason was because the power of revenue farmers extended beyond revenue collection. It included legislative, executive and judiciary powers. Traditionally the historians have looked at such systems as crippling the agrarian economy yet the evidence in the thesis prove this view to be inconclusive if not outrightly wrong. As is evident from the account of chapter 5 in Baroda State, the *izara*

was calculated not on the revenue that was assessed randomly by the state but on the basis of the relative collection of the previous years. They were in touch with the peasantry directly and hence quite connected with the reality. Additionally, the contractual amount also remained flexible, based on the actual agricultural production keeping in mind the calamities both natural and human made. It should be also mentioned that there had emerged layers of functionaries. Although, *izaradars* had assumed supreme authority over the territories under their jurisdiction, the administration of villages was into the hands of local revenue functionaries such as *desai*, *mazumdar*, *patel* etc.

Another feature of the eighteenth century that continued in the 19th century in the state of Baroda was that the state government was financed by the intermediaries connecting the urban economy with the rural one. The landed gentry and many of the state functionaries also held multiple positions. In the early 19th century, there developed a close nexus of Baroda Government with revenue functionaries percolating down to those agencies which had little money to invest further. There emerged local firms which were identified as banking firms or *sahukari pedhis* by historians. These *sahukari pedhis* collected revenue at regional and local levels. The fiscal administration was managed by a unique agency of the '*potedar*'. They were state financiers and had controlled the financial affairs almost till mid-19th century.

Baroda State like British Gujarat had also introduced the concept of survey and settlement at the time of Maharaja Khaderao Gaekwad in the mid-19th century but it came to be systematically implemented only by its last quarter. The state by this time had been successfully abolished some old tenures such as *kaltana*, *tulwari* and *komwari*. However, majority of the old land tenures such as *bhagbatai*, *bhagdari* and *narwadari*, *senja*, *watan*, *ankadia*, *mulgiras*, *talukdari*, *matadari*, *salami*, *inam* tenures etc. continued despite several attempts made by state in form of Original, Revision and Re-Revision Survey and Settlement. Like the British Gujarat,

the Baroda State also could not completely uproot traditional tenures. Thus, continuity of the traditional systems was seen. The abolition of *izaradari* and *potedari* systems and introduction of government administration led to establishment of direct relationship between state and its people. However, this did again not mean that all intermediary classes were completely eliminated. A network of these classes along with the state officials was seen till the state was merged with India in 1948.

So far as the agrarian communities of British Gujarat and Baroda State were concerned, the condition of peasantry did not improve much but the state did make great profit. The tenants often ended up facing number of problems which were the result of breakdown of traditional hierarchal structures. They had to search for sources and agencies which could provide cash. This placed them under the bureaucratic control effected by the modern agricultural banks or other financing agencies. Majority of cultivators either on landlord villages or government villages enjoyed became insecure. This was compounded by agrarian and other crises such as famines and epidemics. The state policies did not only lead to deterioration of the condition of the tenants but also of the landlords. Many landlords came under the terms of new Survey and Settlement were plugged deeply into huge debt so much so that they had to sell their estates at very low prices. At the time of famines, many of the landlords found it difficult to collect rent from the cultivators hence faced threats of forceful evictions.

The peasantry of British Gujarat faced multitude of agrarian crises whether in form of artificial famines or agrarian indebtedness due to commercialization of agriculture; from eviction of lands to forced labour. This led to emergence of a sense of consciousness among the peasantry. This in turn caused the emergence of peasant consciousness which made large group participated in the national movement particularly in the first half of 20th century. The peasantry organised itself to visibly stand against the exploitative policies of the colonial state. Many

political leaders such as Vallabhbhai Patel and Vithalbhai Patel who belonged to the families of peasants took it upon themselves to use this strength of the cause of Gandhian movements. Kheda Satyagraha, Borsad Satyagraha and Bardoli Satyagraha are the examples of peasantry unifying for a common cause.

The drastic change in land administration can be seen during the post-independence period when all land tenures were finally abolished. The post-independence period is marked by two major developments: (i) the integration of the princely states and formation of Gujarat State and (ii) adoption of the measures for the tenures and tenancy reforms. Integration of princely states in Gujarat during post-independence period resulted with the formation of Gujarat State. The land policy during post-independence period removed impediments from the agrarian structure. The abolition acts streamlined the village administration and the settlement process by removing the issues of previous land tenures. After the legislations passed abolished various intermediaries that had dominated the revenue collecting process, a direct relationship was established between that state (government of Gujarat) and the peasantry. The tenancy reforms enabled the peasants to become owners of the land with an optional payment of occupancy right.

The inference drawn in the current research is based on the comprehensive examination of primary and secondary sources available in various archives, libraries and other repositories. As per considering the nature of research, the field study is not much taken into consideration. The study cannot be seen as an absolute interpretation of the nature of land tenures or landed relationships that evolved through the course of time. The research in the future could throw fresh light on land tenures and landed relationships of a particular region or time. It will highlight to new aspects of change and continuity in fields of land administration. The current research is mainly centered to economic history rather than political, social and cultural history.

Additionally, it does not much deal with technical and legal aspects of land administration. The current research has carried out a macro study rather than micro study. The inferences put forth in current research are applicable to a vast area and period. This creates scope for future research that could carry out in a specific area or period. The study focuses on both British Gujarat and Baroda State but it lacks the comparative examination of land revenue administration in these two administrative divisions. The ancient and medieval period in the current research covers the history of land revenue administration in Gujarat as a whole but the modern period is confined to British Gujarat and Baroda State despite the fact that there were other administrative divisions called Political Agencies. The current research does not include the change in land revenue administration after Gujarat State was formed. This also creates a scope for future research that could throw fresh light on changing nature of landed relationships in Gujarat.

To conclude the purpose of the state whether colonial or local was to maximize the collection of revenue. This was not an easy task to achieve due to many complexities of rural economy of Gujarat. Despite great efforts the colonial administration often complained about the issues they suffered. The data presented in the chapters clearly reflects that in most of the districts the British could not achieve much change especially so far as alienated lands were concerned. In fact, when the Gujarat government took stock of the land tenures in the post-independence period, they had to face issue related to older tenurial forms that had continued from at least the early medieval period. This can only mean that the land tenurial system were so deeply entrenched that it became impossible for the state to change it completely.