

CHAPTER V

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Considered at a general plane, Gujarat society appears to have been dualistic in character. On the one hand was the fragmented, 'princely', war-oriented, uneducated, clan-organised population of Rajputs, Kolis, Kathis, Bhils, etc., which as well include migratory herdsmen and certain low caste groups. On the other was the more unified, trader-administrator, educated, caste-organised population of Brahmins, Vantias, Jains and upper caste peasants. Whereas, Muslims fell partially on both sides of this divide, the Parsis onto the caste-organised side. To some scholars this duality appears as basic cultural fact, which, in the nineteenth century, was being superceded as a more integrative political and economic structure emerged.<sup>1</sup> Although there might be an element of reductionism in such a perspective it can be taken as a working hypothesis with the caution that the pre-colonial Indian or Gujarati society was not a simplistic one and there existed a close interaction as well as tension between its various segments. The present chapter tries to outline the contours of society in Broach, the different strands and elements that composed it, and specially the way it responded to colonial rule and the changes it experienced in the process.

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1. Alice Whitecomb Clark, "Central Gujarat in the Nineteenth Century : The Integration of an Agrarian system", Ph.D. dissertation, Wisconsin University 1979, Chapter I; Also see Burton Stein, "The Segmentary State in South Indian History", in Richard G. Fox (ed.) Realm and Region in Traditional India, New Delhi 1977. On page 47 Stein talks about "the two kinds of oppositional tensions present in every part of the macroregion : that between organically, caste-organised nuclei of society and those tribally, segmentarily organized tracts of most localities and that between essentially agrarian and essentially commercial economic net works"; Also see Eric Stokes, The Peasant and the Raj, New Delhi 1978. p.34.

## 1. The Rural Setting

There was hardly a visible change in the environs of a village though relations within it seems to have changed a great deal under colonial rule. The attachment of the villagers in general and peasants in particular to their land was quite firm and permanent. James Forbes observed in 1775 :

They seldom quit the village where their fathers were born and died; there they plough the fields, reap the harvest, and tend the cattle to the groves and lakes which surround their humble dwellings, built of mud and straw, whence their wives and daughters spin cotton, grind corn, and prepare their simple repast of pulse, milk, and vegetables ... The villagers, who seldom visit cities, preserve an innocent simplicity of manners; their women are modest and decline. .... the country (Baroche Purgunna) in the highest style of cultivation, the inhabitants peaceable and happy, the villages, seldom more than two miles from each other, contained fifty to a hundred cottages, with a tank, and one or two public wells; the white dome of a Hindoo temple, or a Mahomedan minaret rising among the mango and tamarind trees, added to the general beauty.

The cultivated tracts abound with hares, antelopes, foxes, and jackals; also partridges, quails, and other game; and every village has its monkeys and peafowl; .... the lakes and rivers are covered with flamingos, pelicans, ducks, and waterfowl in great variety... The water-melons at Baroche are esteemed the best in India, especially those which grow on a sandy island in the Nerbudda, near the city.<sup>2</sup>

Forty five years later Monier Williams reinforced the above picture while closely watching the village scene.<sup>3</sup>

Another thirty years later A. K. Forbes found the village environ in the same condition. He remarked (1852) that :

each village has its neighbouring stream or tank, and most frequently its mosque and temple. The fields are... enclosed with strong and high permanent hedges, which with noble trees that everywhere abound, render the country so close, that the boundaries of a field circumscribe the view, and unless the hum of voices, the whirr of the spinning-wheel, or the barking of dogs, gives him notice of its vicinity, the traveller enter a village unawares. Hedges and trees here swarm with birds, of many varieties, from the peacock to the sparrow; game of all kinds is in the greatest abundance, and monkeys rove about in troops, or rather in armies.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Oriental Memoirs, Vol. II, London 1813, pp.77-78, 104 & 225.

3. cf. Memoir of Broach, pp. 41, 51-52.

4. Ras Mala : Hindu Annals of Western India with particular reference to Gujarat, London 1878 (reprint, New Delhi 1973), pp. 541-42.

It was in this verdant rural environment externally fixed and 'permanent' that the agrarian drama was enacted.

## 2. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The Kanbis, Kolis, Rajputs, Brahmins, and Muslim Bohras were the main agricultural castes of the district of Broach. Whereas most of the land was held by the Kanbis, Bohras and Rajputs, the Kolis tilled the land as sharecroppers and labourers though in some villages they were also the holders of land at par with other dominant groups.

The Kanbis constituted a major section of the cultivating groups. There were two main division of Kanbis : the leuwas and the ladyas; the farmer being predominant in the district. The habits, way of life, and general character of both were the same. But, although they could eat together, they did not intermarry. The leuwa was considered the superior of the two. The Kanbis were industrious cultivators but quite dominant in their villages. They were fond of asserting their independence, and the dependence of others on his aid. On this subject there were several proverbs, e.g. 'wherever it thunders, there the Koonbes is a landholder', or 'Tens of millions follow the Koonbee, but the Koonbee follows no man'.<sup>5</sup> The Kanbis were simple in their food habits and were strict vegetarians. They would also abstain from killing anything that had life. Thus the deers, the monkeys, and the birds devouring their crops were only frightened away, but never killed. Explaining this trait. Monier Williams observed that "they conceived that the Creator intended a portion of the fruits of the earth for these creatures, as well as for man, and that there is enough for all; besides that it would not sensibly, diminish the numbers of the evil".<sup>6</sup> The agricultural calibre of Kanbis was closely observed by Marshall :

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5. Cited in Ras Mala, p. 542.

6. Memoir, p. 43.

The Moonbees are attentive agriculturists : they are particularly well acquainted with the qualities and powers of all the variations of the soil, and have distinctive terms for differences that, to an experienced eye, are difficult to be perceived. They are also perfect masters of all the circumstances which are favourable or adverse to the growth of each particular subject of cultivation, and there is not a season in which this knowledge is not applied : they are by no means adverse to new experiments provided they can be made without much trouble or expense; but they do not like to wait for a tardy result; and in case of failure, they have neither enterprize nor capital to persist ... The Konbee heads of villages generally live in a very patriarchal way with their Ryots : there is a great apparent equality, but still an active superintendence, and an undisputed superiority.<sup>7</sup>

These remarks, felt Monier Williams, were generally applicable to other agriculturists of the district, but in particular to the Bohras, whose villages not only rivalled but sometimes surpassed those of the Kanbis.<sup>8</sup>

Muslim Bohras were another important cultivating group. Out of a total of four hundred villages in the district, 84 were inhabited predominantly by them. In these villages they were the bhagdar and patels. It may be noted that the Bohra peasants were distinct from the Bohra traders settled in the urban areas. Whereas the former were Sunnis the latter professed Shiaism. The ancestors of Bohra cultivating groups were supposed to have been, for most part, Nolis and Rajputs and perhaps a few Kanbis who were converted during Sultan Mahmud Begda's time.<sup>9</sup>

The Bohra peasants were among the most active, industrious and skillful cultivators in the district; their dress, manners, and language were the same as those of the Kanbi and other Hindu cultivators. Like Kanbis their marriages were formulated in terms

7. Cited in Memoir, pp. 43-44.

8. Ibid.

9. Memoir, p. 42; See also Bombay Presidency Gazetteer, Vol IX, Part 2, Bombay 1899, pp. 24-25; Asghar Ali Engineer, The Bohras, New Delhi 1980, pp. 100-141; Satish C. Misra, Muslim Communities in Gujarat, Bombay 1963, pp. 89.

of territorial circles.<sup>10</sup> They did not generally intermarry with Sunni Bohras living south of the river Narbada and marriage with Surti Sunni Bohras was strictly forbidden.<sup>11</sup> The Bohra peasant had the reputation of being quite bold in his worldly attitude. It was generally said of them that they were "not even fearing to place the Collector in the Civil Court".<sup>12</sup>

The Kolis were a populous group of cultivators in the district, almost equalling the Kanbis in numerical strength. They were considered to be the aboriginal inhabitants with a general reputation for robbery and piracy.<sup>13</sup> But the Kolis of district Broach generally appear as cultivators, divested of most of their reputedly unwholesome qualities. To quote Monier Williams, in Broach the Kolis were "quite a reformed race, and in many villages they are as industrious and skilful cultivators as any in the collectorate."<sup>14</sup>

In Hansot pargana some of the villages held by Koli patels and bhagdars were among the most fertile. Their population in the pargana was a little more than a third of the total population. Ankleshwar pargana also had large Koli settlements; here they constituted nearly one-fifth of the total population. Most of those who took to agriculture belonged to the Talbada division. Where the Kolis did not possess their own land they held it as tenants, or worked as agricultural labourers. In situations like the latter they were subjected to economic and occasionally to

10. Memoir, p. 42; For Kanbi patidars' matrimonial circles, See G.H. Desai, Hindu Families in Gujarat, Baroda 1932, pp. 227-28; David Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat, Delhi 1981, pp. 41-42; Alice Clark, op.cit., Ch. XIV; and Alice Clark, "Limitations on Female Life Chances in Rural Central Gujarat", I.E.S.H.R., 20, 1 (1983), pp. 1822.

11. Memoir, pp. 42-43.

12. N.B. Beyts to J.G. White, No. 1025, 20.1.0.1871, Bombay Selection, No. 407 Bombay 1902, para 77, p. 48.

13. Memoir, p. 44; Ras Mala, pp. 78-79.

14. Memoir, p. 44.

sexual exploitation by the Kanbi patels.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes the Kolis were employed as village watchmen.<sup>16</sup> From this it can be gathered that the Kolis had become an integral part of the agrarian society in Broach district.

The process of integration into rural society, i.e. a process whereby erstwhile war-oriented or non-cultivating social groups gradually took to settled agriculture, tilling the land and participating peaceably in the affairs of the village, was also observed in the case of the Rajputs of Broach. The Rajputs were known for their warlike qualities and their abhorrence of the plough. They were transformed from a "turbulent character to that of quietness, obedience, and industry".<sup>17</sup> Many villages in the district were inhabited by a large Rajput population with bhagdari rights vested in them. The dress, appearance and manners of the Rajputs did not differ much from the Kanbis. But it is significant that not all the Rajputs had shed their warrior-like character. At the beginning of the 19th Century there were still a few wanta holding Rajput grasias who did not use the plough, and were still prone to murder and mayhem, killing their rivals, burning the fields and properties of those who did not comply with their dictates.<sup>18</sup> But with the consolidation of British rule, this role receded into the background and gradually the wanta holding Rajput grasias took to the plough becoming quite inhabitants of the village.<sup>19</sup>

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15. On sexual exploitation of Koli women by patels see Alice Clark, "Limitations on Female Life Chances", *op.cit.*, pp. 24-25; also Raj Kumar Hans, "A Report on Instances of Caste Violence in Nineteenth Century Broach", *P.L.H.C.*, 45th Session, Annamalainagar 1984, pp. 678-83.

16. Memoir, p. 44.

17. Ibid,

18. G.L.Prendergast to the Court of Circuit and Appeal, 16.11.1805; Prendergast to Bombay, 20.11.1805, R.D., 49, 1806.

19. Memoir, p. 46.

Another instance of the integration of a non-agricultural caste into agrarian society is that of the Bhats or Barots. The Bhats were the traditional village genealogists, and storytellers, playing the role of preserving the history of the region to which they belonged. They also provided security in transactions between the villages and the government, enforcing the faithful discharge of obligations by the threat of shedding their own blood, and the readiness to execute that threat.<sup>20</sup> About the latter, Monier Williams observed that it was "almost obsolete and forgotten in this Collectorate". He also noted that in Broach many Bhats had completely abandoned their original calling and lived "entirely by cultivating the land".<sup>21</sup> The cultivator Bhats formed a substantial portion of the population of Hansot pargana. When part of their lands was resumed they gave a tough resistance to the government.<sup>22</sup>

A notable feature of the agrarian society of Broach was the participation of some Brahmins and Parsis in agricultural pursuits. There were a few villages in Ankleshwar and Hansot parganas where the patels belonged to the Parsi community.<sup>23</sup>

Besides the various agricultural groups described above rural society embraced several categories of artisan and village servants. Among their number one could count : i) suthar (Carpenter), Lohar (blacksmith), Kumbhar (potter); ii) darji (tailor), hajam or waland (barber), mochi (shoe-maker), dhobhi (washerman); iii) kosis (water-drawer), parbia (water-supplier); iv) khalpa (tanner), dhed (peon and watchman) and bhangi (scavenger and sweeper). Besides these groups there were brahmans gosaiees, fakirs, etc.

20. James Forbes, Oriental Memoirs, II, pp. 89-91; Alexander Walker to Bombay, 28.2.1805, R.D., 46, 1805 para 3; See also Neil Rabitoy, "Administrative Modernization and the Bhats of Gujarat, 1800-1820", I.E.S.H.R., VI, I, pp. 48-49; and A.M. Shah & R.G. Shroff, "The Vahivanca Barots of Gujarat : A caste of Genealogists and Mythographers", in Milton Singer (ed.), Traditional India, Philadelphia 1959, pp. 40-70.

21. Memoir, p. 45.

22. Neil Rabitoy, op. cit., pp. 46-73.

23. Memoir, p. 45.

Of the non-agricultural groups enumerated above, there were not more than one or two families of each settled in one village. Only the dheds and bhangis had several families in each village.<sup>24</sup> The dheds carried not only letters, but also money from one village to another and at times performed odd duties such as of a watchman or of a porter.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes the bhangis could also be employed as watchmen for the barnyard.<sup>26</sup>

The dheds and bhangis were the 'untouchables' placed at the bottom of the village society and their houses along with those of Khalpas (tanners) formed a distinct part of the village, generally situated on its outskirts.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. LIFE CONDITIONS OF THE PEASANT

The peasants lived a most simple life bound by the usual routine of agricultural activity. In a popular ballad, called "The Kumbis' Griefs", sung mainly by the peasant women of Gujarat in the 19th century we have a depiction of their life :-

Hear Shree Krishn ! Our prayers,  
The Koonbee's grief we relate.  
Our sorrows remove, thou who are the earth-sustainer,  
Ram as you place us we remain.  
Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

July comes, the clouds rise,  
They begin to pour forth rain,  
The cart-rope and the goad are in the Koonbee's hand,  
Wet is the Koonbee's body.  
Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

24. Monier Williams to Bombay, 14.5.1818 R.D., 130, 1818; also Memoir, pp. 46-47.

25. Memoir, p.46.

26. Ibid. p. 49.

27. Ibid. p. 46.

In August it rains uncertainly,  
 Drenched through are both men and women,  
 Says the son's wife to her father-in-law,  
 "Babajee please to plant a little rice".  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

September comes in well.  
 Drenched are the Koonbee's women,  
 The children on their hips are crying,  
 Rain-drops fall from the bundales  
 of grass upon their heads.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

In October, we hoped would come,  
 The rain we were looking-for,  
 Jowaree and baujree are filling in the head.  
 The rice is drying up from the drought.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

In November comes the assessment-maker,  
 At the village boundary he makes up his book,  
 The raja's order is now proclaimed,  
 "A plant of pulse or a stalk of jowaree  
 you must not remove".  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

December has come in well :  
 The first instalment has begun to be levied,  
 Headman and accountant mount to the town-house,  
 The koonbee gets many a blow.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

In January is sown the second crop.  
 The cotton pods begin to burst,  
 Old restrictions are removed,  
 But they only make way for new,  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

February month has well come in,  
 Green are the village fields.  
 The raja's dues are paid off,  
 But frost now threatens to fall.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

March month has well come in,  
 But the blight has struck our wheat.  
 "Come, let us leave this place, and fly".  
 It is too late, for the headsman has set his guards.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

In April they meet at the town-house,  
 "Come, let us have your rent".  
 They plunder the earnings of the widow's spinning wheel  
 They carry off all by force.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

In May come the landholders,  
 They plunder us of the produce of our cows.  
 For want of buttermilk the children are crying,  
 But the cursed ones go on with their snatching.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

June month has come in well,  
 The angry Koonbee is appeased.  
 Oaths and promise they pledge to him -  
 He spreads his fields with manure.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.

The twelve months' round is finished  
 In Roopa the Koonbee's song,  
 Whoever learns it, or hear it sung  
 Will be advanced towards Vishnoo's heaven.  
 Hear, Shree Krishn ! our prayers.28

This beautiful ballad describes the peasant's round of life: the season's, the crops sown, the regime of extortion - the raja, the surveyor, the village headman and accountant - and the peasant's cyclic movement from hope to despair. Of particular interest is the reference in the fourth stanza to the participation of peasant women in agricultural operations. In fact the entire family of the cultivator used to put its labour in growing and harvesting the crops and in tending the cattle.<sup>29</sup> This situation essentially resembles the conditions of 'peasant economy', as described by Rodney Hilton, where "the large majority of the population of families who cultivate crops and rear animals on the individual holdings".<sup>30</sup>

The peasants were often described as traditional conservative, adverse to any innovations which had not descended from their fore fathers.<sup>31</sup> The superintendent of experimental cotton farm at Broach, anxious to introduce certain changes in the mode of cultivation, found after conversations with the cultivators that these "would not be adopted by the natives unless they were convinced that others who had tried them had found them profitable".<sup>32</sup> On the introduction of new Orleans cotton seeds and saw gin they would say to the superintendent : "If it succeeds with you, we will try it but cannot waste our money by planting seed that we are not acquainted with and using machines that our Fathers never heard of, but, if they succeed in your hands, we shall be very glad to take advantage of what we see from experience will be profitable to us".<sup>33</sup> Thus the peasant nurtured the practical outlook which was the product of their labouring activities where they hardly had time to speculate about the wider question of human existence. They were simple and straight. Monier Williams who studied rural society very closely

29. J.M.Davies to A.N.Shaw, the Revenue Commissioner N.D., No. 127, 29.3.1849, R.D., 204, 1849, para 4.

30. Bond Men Made Free, London 1982, p.25.

31. C.Shubrick, Broach Coll. to Bombay, 14.11.1816, R.D., 109, 1816, para 6; Also his another letter, 12.6.1817, R.D., 119, 1819, para 4.

32. C.W.Martin to William Stubbs, No. 23 of 1832, R.D., 6/413, 1832.

33. C.W.Martin to W.Stubbs, 6.11.1830, R.D., 22/350, 1831 (emphasis added)

wrote on this aspect :

the degree of intelligence generally diffused among the people very much exceeded the expectations previously formed. Their habits are simple, temperate, and innocent... In their own families, the unwearied affection and tenderness of the parent are returned by the habitual duty of the child, and these reciprocal feelings last through life : a parent is never abandoned by his child either to want or solitude. Their hospitality extends to all itinerants and strangers. But the most remarkable circumstances observed among these people, as bearing their general character, was the absence of written documents in their transaction with each other, involving money payments... The reciprocal trust implied in these transactions must be the result of a conviction of each other's honesty.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. SOCIAL RELATIONS

The association of the dominant castes with superior rights in land is a universally acknowledged feature of Indian rural history. While the possession of these rights lay at the roots of the dominant status of certain high castes, their absence lay at the root of the depressed, underprivileged status of other castes.<sup>35</sup>

In Broach district the bhagdars in the bhagdari villages and the principal patels in the non-bhagdari villages constituted the rural elite. As discussed in chapter III, these groups had acquired the status of the leaders of their villages. By holding key positions in the management of revenues and or law and order, they wielded considerable influence and dominated the village. The caste factor also contributed to their dominance. In most cases they belonged to one of the upper caste.

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34. Memoir, pp. 51-52 (emphasis added).

35. Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, London 1972, ch. 7.

From wielders of political and social influence, the elite peasantry could conveniently turn to oppression of the weaker sections of the village society. Their connection with the system of revenue collection could be utilised to influence the opinion of the government machinery including the higher officials like the collectors. Very often, with the connivance of talatis, they misappropriated the revenue and over-assessed their tenants, and smaller cultivators.<sup>36</sup> They were also able to get their lands recorded as pasaita in the village records so as to enjoy revenue exemptions.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between the elite peasants and their tenants was mostly discriminatory. As landholders they gave their tenants lands of poorer quality. After a certain period, when due to the efforts of the tenant cultivator the quality of the land improved, the 'landlord' attempted to resume it. The rights of the tenant cultivators thus always remain precarious.<sup>38</sup> The following case would testify to this practice. One Haribhai Madhow, patel of Utraj village rented eight bighas of land from his bhag to Kalian Makkan Kachhia, a vegetable grower in 1823-24. The latter agreed to pay Rs. 20 annually to the patel. He also agreed to pay half of his annual produce of mangoes (which he intended to grow) and two gers of vegetable daily to the patel. Within a few years the Kachhia succeeded in developing an orchard which grew mangoes, guava, lemon and pomegranate besides all kinds of vegetable. Envious of the rich crop from the land, the patel attempted to take back the land from the Kachhia. The dispute arising from this was referred to the collector who decided in 1836 that since the Kachhia had not failed to pay the rent he could not be evicted. Upon this the patel decided to effect the eviction by a stratagem. Luckily for him the

36. Petition of Devji Ramji Patel of Undara village, Ankleshwar pargana, 13.8.1834, R.D., 55/677 of 1835; Petition from Sulaman Daudji Patel of Bakroli village, 27.8.1836, R.D., 71/758, 1836. Petition from Nathu Cheeta Patel of Rañad village, 15.1.1834, R.D., 61/605, 1834.

37. Petition of Munohar Parag and Dayal Ganesh Patels of Kalapur village, 12.4.1834; and N. Kirkland's Report, 3.6.1834, R.D., 68/612, 1834.

38. Alexander Mackay, Western India, p. 71.

opportunity came soon; Kachhia cut a few trees that came in the way of other crops and the patel now claimed half the value of the trees. This time the verdict at the collector's went in favour of the patel. Moreover, when Kachhia petitioned that the patel should pay the cost of the trees as he had put his own labour in growing the trees, the collector went a step further and made over the entire land to the patel alongwith the trees and the standing crop Kachhia resisted this order with the specific plea that i) he had invested 800 rupees in planting the orchard and improving the land; and ii) the crop which was handed over to the patel was a great loss to him because it values 400 rupees. The collector of Broach after hearing the plea admitted that injustice had been done.<sup>39</sup> The Bombay government looked into the case and advised Kachhia to seek redress from the civil court.<sup>40</sup>

Scores of similar incidents from different villages of the district may be cited to show the highhandedness of upper caste groups in their dealings with the 'lowly-born'. Such oppression did not remain confined to matters related with land, but were recurrently extended to the person of the low-caste people, often taking a violent turn which resulted in murders. It may not be inappropriate to cite here a few cases which, more or less, are representative of caste-violence in Broach during the 19th century.

Around 1807 a Kanbi patel named Bhukan Bhakti got infatuated a married Koli woman Sukhar. As the man coaxed the Koli woman into frequent quarrels occurred between Sukhar and her husband Kasla. In 1811 Kasla procured a field of sugarcane from

39. Petition, 21.1.1849; Coll's report, 4.7.1840, R.D., 142/1226, 1840.

40. 'Resolution' of Governor in Council, No. 2384, 23.7.1840; R.D., 142/1226, 1840.

Bhukan patel on a share-cropping basis, while his two sons worked as day labourers on the fields of other patels. One day Kasla, particularly annoyed with his wife's intimacy with Bhukan beat her. Bhukan and Sukhar now planned to kill Kasla. The opportunity was contrived by a deliberate verbal altercation initiated by Sukhar leading to a scuffle between husband and wife. Bhukan waited for his chance. When Kasla went to the field, he assaulted him on the head with an axe killing him on the spot. Reportedly Sukhar had actively assisted in her husband's murder. Kasla's head was disposed off in a tank, and his body buried in the neighbouring field belonging to another Kanbi. The murder came to light after ten days when wild animals dug up the corps.<sup>41</sup> The judge passed a death sentence on the murderers.<sup>42</sup> The Governor-in Council confirmed the death sentence on Bhukan,<sup>43</sup> but reduced the women's sentence to life imprisonment.<sup>43</sup>

In another case, brought before the Higher Criminal Court at Broach in 1848, sixteen persons were tried for "serious assault".<sup>44</sup> A theft had taken place in the house of an ughratdar patel, Nursi Rughnath of Towra village. Acting on suspicion Nursi, with the active collaboration of another patel Udho Morar of the adjoining village Jhadeshwar, raided the houses of Bai Champli (Nursi Patel's tenant) and Bhagwan Ganesh, both Koli residents of village Bhorbhata. They forcibly carried both of them to a stable jointly owned by Nursi and Udho in Kasia Bhatia village in order to coerce them into confessing the theft. The suspects were suspended from a beam and beaten mercilessly with sticks by the patels and their hirelings. Not satisfied with this, the assailants employed what are today known as 'third degree methods'. Nursi Rughnath applied a hot brick to Bai Champli's posterior. Another accomplice of Nursi, Baji Deepa

41. Thomas Day, Judge at Broach to Bombay, 16.1.1812, J.D., 61, 1812, folios 80-101.

42. Thomas Day to Bombay, 17.8.1812, J.D., 61, 1812.

43. 'Resolution', 29.1.1812, J.D., 61, 1812.

44. The details of the case are based on the 'Proceedings' of the Acting Senior Judge of Broach, 30.9.1848, R.D., 99, 1849.

Patel, even prepared a hot chillum (smoke pot) to be applied to the women's genitals. But the measure was not carried out when one of the accomplice of Nursi pleaded a softer attitude towards the women, who, he said, belonged to his caste. Bhagwan Ganesh was less lucky and Nursi had a brick fastened to his testicles while another put fire to his beard.

Still unable to force confession, the accused, seized Bai Champli's husband, Keswa Mansung, subjecting him to a similar treatment. After severe beatings Keswa and Bhagwan were compelled to implicate two persons, Gokal Meeta and Bhana Dial in the theft falsely. The latter were also brought to the stable and beaten mercilessly until they agreed to return the money supposedly stolen by them from the Patel's house.

Upon her release from the patel's clutches, Bai Champli lodged a complaint with the police amaldar. To hinder the follow up proceedings on her complaint, the patels nabbed the woman and her husband and kept them in confinement for three months in the house of one of the accused. The victims could be released only after Narsi, Udho, and two others were taken into police custody on the reports of Gokal and Bhana.

The court trying the case found the patels and their hirelings guilty of making serious assault on the victims. Narsi Ragnath, Udho Morar and Baji Deepa were sentenced to a year and nine months' rigorous imprisonment in addition to a fine of Rs 400. each. It was found that Narsi Ragnath had misused the office of patel which he enjoyed at that time, to perpetrate the violence; hence he was deemed unfit for the office and was very soon removed from the patelship. His personal share of the patel watan was also confiscated, as a measure of additional punishment.<sup>45</sup>

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45. J.M.Davies to Bombay, No. 195, 22.5.1849, R.D., 99, 1849.

In another case Kanbi patels of the village Gulihod (in Ankleshwar pargana) are reported to have violent methods against Bhils, to assert their supremacy over them. A Bhil, who was grazing his cattle in the said village, was accused by a Kanbi patel of "trespassing, upon which words ensued and a scuffle took place ... Another Kanbi patel who appeared on the scene put into the first Kanbi's hand a stick having a goad at one end and a small semicircular iron at the other; used for eradicating weeds. With this latter instrument the Bheel was struck in the head and the iron fractured his skull. The parties were taken into custody immediately by the Police Patell of Gulkhore and forwarded to the thana at Unklesur, where Bheel expired that same night".<sup>46</sup>

The common thread running through all the three incidents narrated above is that of the Kanbis as perpetrators of violence on depressed sections of rural population. This, and the fact that the incidents occurred in geographically dispersed villages of the district, indicate quite firmly that they were not chance happenings, disconnected with each other. On the contrary they grimly point towards a social organization wherein the Kanbis had a definite edge over the other groups.

One could trace the same pattern in the attitudes of other high cast landholders, though Kanbis and Rajputs might possibly have had more of a penchant for violence compared with Brahmins and Banias with more subtle and subdued forms of exercising dominance. Owners of land, the high caste patels wielded power over the lower caste inhabitants of the village.<sup>47</sup> All the village servants rendered service to the patels. A magistrate of Broach noted that the patels considered that "they had a right to their (servants') labour".<sup>48</sup> Another session

46. Broach Magistrate to Bombay, No. 313, 3.9.1849, R.D., 71, 1849.

47. Louis Dumont, *op.cit.*, pp. 196-229.

48. Acting Joint Magistrate of Broach to Bombay, No. 48, 16.4.1838, J.D., 7/534, 1839.

Judge at Broach, W.C.Andrews, accurately stated the situation when, referring to a case wherein two patels had been convicted of 'culpable homicide', noted that :

the Court observes with regret that this is not the first instance of similar atrocities exercised by individuals of better classes towards the lower when they have got them in their power or have the opportunity or any pretence for ill-treating them.<sup>49</sup>

Besides inter-caste conflicts noted above, village society was also infested with tensions between people belonging to the same caste. The most important illustration of this conflict is offered, once again, by the Kanbi patels who were a highly differentiated community. They were at least three layers of the Kanbi peasants. The bhagdars (holders of land under the bhagdari tenure) and the principal patels in the non bhagdari or bhigoti villages constituted the upper layer; patidars and small sharers formed the second or middle layer; at the lowest rung of the community were the Kanbi peasants holding small patches of land or subsisting by cultivating the lands owned by others and by doing petty jobs. A similar pattern obtained among the Bohra patels.

A noticeable feature in the behaviour of the rich peasants regardless of their caste entity or affiliation, was their disposition to seek gains at the cost of their lesser brethren. It is though important that poor peasants from higher castes retained a superior social rank despite being bracketed economically with the lower caste small peasants.

We come across a number of petitions against the high handed attitude of big bhagdars. In a petition, Lukmidas Jeewan, Bhagti Ganesh and a few others belonging to Khanzamabpur village stated that their ancestors were sharers of seven and a half anabhag out of the twelve anas of land in the village but had

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49. Letter to Bombay, 16.5.1849, R.D., 99, 1849 (emphasis added).

been hounded out of the village by Bhowan Limba a bhagdar of two and a half ana share in the village. This happened at the time of the death of the third, holding a share of two anas. Since the latter had died heirless his land was to be equally divided between the two remaining bhagdars. But Bhowan Limba manipulated to get the petitioners' forefather killed. As the petitioners were still minors at the time of the incident they were harassed to quit the village. Attempts by the ejected bhagdars to get redressal were thwarted by Limba's son Bhikha a clerk in the Collector's office. Nor did he allow the aggrieved bhagdars access to the documents. The petitioners charged that Bhikha had been defrauding the government of Rs. 1500 every year. He collected more from the cultivators than he declared.<sup>50</sup>

In another petition they alleged that Bhikha Patel was "an opulent person", who had contacts with clerks and bribed people at various levels to manipulate matters.<sup>51</sup> Although collector admitted that Bhikha Bhawan was a patel of substance, not above the charges made against him, he did not take him to task.<sup>52</sup>

A petition filed by Devji Ramji Patel, a bhagdar of Undara village brought to light the misdeeds of Govind Bapu the head patel. In 1820-21 Govind Bapu got a loan of Rs. 3000 against the name of the other bhagdars of the village after forging their signatures on a bond which contained the additional condition that for fifteen years i.e. till the debt was cleared, the other share holders will have no say in the village management. Govind

50. Petition, 19.7.1814, R.D., 94, 1814, folios 1544-48.

51. Petition, 8.5.1816, R.D., 106, 1816.

52. J.H.Bellasis to Bombay, 26.1.1815, R.D., 97, 1815.

Bapu also manipulated for himself 208 bighas as revenue free land. When the petitioners brought these irregularities to the notice of the collector, they were advised to file a suit in the Court. The bhagdars, however, expressed their inability to bear the financial burdens of litigation. After Govind Bapu's death his son, Mota Govind, continued oppressing the lesser bhagdars and cultivators using both influence and money.<sup>53</sup> Here too the collector admitted the petition to be correct but advised the aggrieved bhagdar to seek the help of the court.<sup>54</sup>

Dasu Ibrahim Patel of Kalmar village stated in a petition that due to his "pecuniary embarrassment" he had borrowed Rs. 200 from another bhagdar of his village, namely Bhaiji Ibrahim. The loan was extended against a bond of Rs.250, and the mortgage of Dasu Ibrahim's land and his house valued at Rs.600. In a period of four year, Dasu Ibrahim stated, he paid back Bhaiji Rs.200 but the latter got the bond renewed for a sum of Rs. 250. In order to get back the land Dasu's wife sold her ornaments for Rs.125, but Bhaiji refused the assistance of the mukhi patel of the village. Both these men had connections with influential people with the result that nobody in the collector's office gave an ear to the complaints of the poor cultivators.<sup>55</sup>

During the 1830's when poverty loomed large, the wedge between the rich and poor widened. The case of a small village Sanjali in Ankleshwar pargana would illustrate the growing gap between the two groups. The bhagdars of Sanjali had opted for the lease system around the time it was introduced in 1832. They, however, could not keep up to it, like so many bhagdar

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53. Petition of Devji Ramji, Patel of Undara, 13.8.1834, R.D., 55/677, 1835.

54. Principal Collector to Bombay, January 1835, R.D., 55/677, 1835.

55. R.D., 55/677, 1835, folios 183-185.

leaseholders of other village, owing to the insolvency of the majority of bhagdars and the lease had to be cancelled. The collector reported in 1838 :

The greater part of the Bhagdars of this village are in a miserable state of poverty unable to conduct their shares and yet unwilling to resign them altogether... Two of the Patels, however, Saliman Akoobjee and Esal Salejee are respectable men, and being anxious to take the village in farm provided some arrangement is made with regard to the pauper bhagdars.<sup>56</sup>

Consequently the poor bhagdars gave written undertakings relinquishing their claims to their bhags. "The respectable bhagdars being secured from the interference on the part of those in indigent Circumstances agree to take the village in farm on reasonable terms".<sup>57</sup>

It would seem that though all the bhagdars of this village belonged to the same caste i.e. the Bohras, they had come to be divided on class lines. On the one hand there were just 'two respectable' rich bhagdars who could satisfy the state demand. On the other was the economically humbled majority of 'pauper', 'indigent' bhagdars, forced by circumstances to forego their ancestral rights in land.<sup>58</sup> There is no dearth of evidence, especially in the form of petition reflecting the growing disparities<sup>59</sup> and differentiation within the community of peasants.

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56. Broach Sub-Coll. to Principal Coll. at Surat, No. 112, 26.9.1838, R.D., 18/870, 1838 (emphasis added).

57. Ibid.

58. As seen by Teodor Shanin, "Peasantry as a Political Factor", in Shanin (ed), Peasant Societies, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 238-264.

59. For instance a Petition filed by Narsing and other patels of Shukaltirath village dated 5.7.1838, R.D., 120/108C, 1830; Plaint of Bhawa Vujesing, a bhagdar of Dehgam, 25.7.1850; and J.M.Davies' letter to Bombay, No. 158, 26.7.1850, R.D., 198 of 1850.

The collectors themselves testified to the fissures developing in the villages. George Coles reported that quarrels had arisen among the bhagdars, factions were being formed and favours distributed by the few holding political as well as economic power in the village.<sup>60</sup> While the avowed policy of the government was to maintain and promote the bhagdari tenure, Arbuthnot pointed out that "the Bhagdars quarrel among themselves, and [the] more powerful endeavour to advance their interests at the expense of their humbler neighbours."<sup>61</sup> J.M.Davies drew the attention of the government to an alarming situation where most of the bhagdars had been brought to a "a very indigent condition". Some bhagdari villages had been dissolved and many were on the verge of collapse due to the great pressure of the land-revenue.<sup>62</sup> But the very dissolution of the tenure was full of implications for the existing socio-economic relations. J.M.Davies reported in 1850 that many patels of the dissolved bhagdari villages were applying for the restoration of the original tenure. But he opined that it should be viewed with caution :

The very fact of the dissolution breaks many ties between the Patells and the ryets which, except under a very unusual good understanding, are rarely to be again cemented. The ryets have had an interval of independence; and that interval is unfavorable to the claims of those who as land-lords were harsh and illiberal; and the Beegotee system in guaranteeing to every industrious cultivator an irrefragable tenure of his holding is hostile to the hereditary (but broken) rights of the Patell clique .... The respectability of the village elders has vanished with their credit, the sub-tenants are prostrated by the efforts made by their late landlords to keep up appearances; recriminations are fostered into mutual dislike, and the ryets contrast their present condition with only the latter times of the Bhagdaree lease.<sup>63</sup>

Thus changes were afoot inspite of the conscious colonial policy of converting, or leaving untouched the corner stones of the

60. George Coles to R.Arbuthnot, No. 234, 12.8.1842, R.D., 17/1459, 1843, para 6-17.

61. R. Arubuthnot to William Simson, R.C., No. 559, 6.10.1842, R.D., 17/1459, 1843, para 10. (emphasis added).

62. Letter to D.A. Blane, Rev. Comm. N.D., No. 202, 30.9.1847, R.D., 16 of 1849, paras 14-16.

63. J.M.Davies to A.N.Shaw, Rev. Comm N.D., No. 193, 17.9.1850, R.D., 14 of 1852, para 16 (emphasis added).

social structure so long as they did not clash with its interest. In the last resort these changes were the result of economic and administrative process that emerged in the wake of colonial rule.

Besides the tensions brewing among the landholders belonging to the same caste; family disputes over property matters were on the increase during this period. Specially, these originated in the fragmentation of landed property and the claims and counter-claims of relatives who had shares in the property. Dassu Dajee of Deewa village stated that when his father and uncle died, he was an infant and his aunt managed the land and brought him up as her own son. But after her death, her daughter (i.e. Dessu's cousin) made attempts to deprive him of the ownership of his share of land. Though the village patels were of the opinion that Dessu was the legal heir of the deceased woman, he was prevented from exercising the right by the manipulations of his cousin and her husband, the latter being on friendly terms with the clerks of the collector's office. In view of this Dasu moved to Bombay and presented his case in a petition to the governor.<sup>64</sup> The Bombay government advised him to go to the law-court<sup>65</sup>

In another case one Koli Prema Poput of Ekalwa village complained that he was being cheated of 15 bighas of land by his uncle and nephew who had influenced the Kamavisdar.<sup>66</sup>

The disputes over the claims of the office of the mukhi

64. Petition of Dassu Dajee of Deewa, dated 12.11.1816, R.D., 109, 1816.

65. 'Minutes', 7.12.1816, R.D., 109, 1816.

66. Petition, R.D., 67/754, 1836, folios, 141-42.

patel were furious and often involved litigation. The collector of Broach outlined a case of the patels of Hasanpur where two persons, an uncle and his nephew, competed with each other through various representations for the office of ughratdar or revenue patel.<sup>67</sup> It appears that as the competition for landed property and offices became intense, a relatively small section of people with money and influence gained the upper hand.

One more index to the growing disparity and conflict is the increased rate of 'crime'. Official statistics show that after 1820 the incidence of thefts and robberies went up. The number of deviants apprehended in Broach rose from 433 in 1822 to 673 in 1823.<sup>68</sup> Burglaries and robberies were on the increase throughout the 1830's as immiseration cast its net wider and wider.<sup>69</sup>

**TABLE I**  
**INCIDENCE OF ROBBERIES IN BROACH DISTRICT**  
**1843 TO 1846**

Year	Robberies			Gang-Robberies		
	With murder & other forms of violence	Simple	Total	With murder & other forms of violence	Simple	Total
1843	9	307	316	2	2	4
1844	14	429	443	2	4	6
1845	136	426	562	1	6	7
1846	92	404	496	7	13	20

Source : Bombay Government's letter No. 2405, 19.7.1848, J.D., 5/376, 1848

One noticeable trend (Table I) is the increase in the number of robberies that were accompanied by violence. Generally the

67. J.M.Davies to D.A.Blane, Rev. Comm. N.D., No. 119, 14.6.1847, R.D., 77 of 1847.

68. Broach Coll. to Bombay, No. 8, 7.2.1823, J.D., 5/5, 1823; and Broach Judge & Magistrate's letter No. 17, 25.3.1824, J.D., 3/59, 1824.

69. Judicial Commissioner of Gujarat to Bombay, 16.3.1835 J.D., 3/56, 1836; Acting Judge & Magistrate of Broach to Assistant Judge, No. 48, 16.4.1838, J.D., 7/534, 1839.

robberies were committed by the poor belonging to low castes and tribes. The targets obviously were the rich bhagdars and money-lender shopkeepers. The village police appear to have been in chaos. The Magistrate of Broach reported in 1846 that "several extensive Gang robberies having lately occurred in this district, and the distress existing among the village Police owing to their wretched pay being insufficient to procure the necessaries of life led to their deserting their villages in several instances".<sup>70</sup> The distress was so widespread that even the village watchmen, invariably poor, were reported to have joined the robber bands.<sup>71</sup>

The colonial stereotypes characterising of certain 'castes' and 'tribes' as habitual plunderers or thieves and criminals are of course untenable. Very often economic deprivation and inequitous societal norms or attitudes lay at the root of unlawful activities. To the eyes of a few contemporary officials at least, these 'crimes' proceeded from "the decayed state of Manufactures and General Want of employment... and [were] seldom committed by those who have means of procuring livelihood".<sup>72</sup> A later report makes a piquant observation on 'criminality' in the context of increasing destitution. It said, the so-called 'lawless tribes' were "urged by want even beyond their habitual love of plunder".<sup>73</sup> Presumably the crime record partakes something of class tensions, though it should be admitted that our documentation, for the moment, is not adequate to extend the argument any further.

What the above account does suggest is that an analysis of society in Gujarat purely in terms of 'caste and community', as envisaged by David Hardiman,<sup>74</sup> would not be fully satisfying. Nor

70. Broach Magistrate's letter No.88, 4.6.1846, J.D., 69/1217, 1846.

71. Ibid.

72. Broach Magistrate of Police to Bombay, No. 4, 1.1.1822, J.D., 3/3, 1821-22

73. Register, Bombay Sadr Foujdari Adwulat to Bombay government, No. 188, 21.1.1848, J.D., 5/376, 1848.

74. Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat : Kheda District 1917-1934, Delhi 1981, p. 36.

would it be if the framework is one of 'classes' alone.<sup>75</sup> Rural society can best be seen in the convergence of both the categories.

### 5. Peasants and Moneylenders

Although the dependence of peasants on money lenders is recognised feature of Indian rural history, the dependence took a more vicious form during the colonial period. The crushing state demand, falling prices and mode of revenue collection itself, all led to a common end, the increasing sway of usury on the conditions of peasant agriculture.

In the mid-nineteenth century Ravenscroft, the collector at Broach, had pointed toward this phenomenon. He remarked that "the embarrassment in which the great bulk of cultivators" were "notoriously involved owing to longstanding debts" was made up of compound interest.<sup>76</sup> His assistant stated that the peasants were reduced to such straits that the sahukars were "willing to accommodate them with loans" as they did in former times.<sup>77</sup> Such poor credibility, he observed, was the result of "much of the general distress, much of the increasing and hopeless poverty of peasants" caused by heavy assessment.<sup>78</sup>

A notable feature of the system of money-lending in the villages was the existence of differential scale of interest decided on the basis of the social and economic status of the borrower. The higher 'classes' were charged interest ranging between 9 and 12 per cent; the 'second class', consisting of

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75. Hardiman himself admits that "caste and class were not, however, unrelated", Ibid, p. 35.

76. Letter No. 256, 20.8.1846, R.D., 161, 1847, para 4.

77. E.L.Jenkins to Ravenscroft, 1.6.1846, R.D., 161, 1847, para 3

78. Ibid, para 4.

Bohras, other Muslim groups and Rajputs, from 12 to 18 per cent; and the poor "whose habitual poverty requires those advances to be given on securities of the most precarious nature" could only borrow at the exorbitant rate of 18 to 21 per cent "added to a premium varying from 10 to 25 Rupees per cent, until each Rupee, invested on these profitable speculation, is doubled in the course of two years.<sup>79</sup>

To get loans the peasants had to mortgage lands and forego standing crops. About twenty per cent of the poorest class of cultivators and field labourers - Kolis, Talavias, Bhils, and Dheds were said to require advances of grain for food seed. The grain-loans were paid back at the time of the harvest. As a general rule the quantity of grain repaid exceeded by one-fourth what was borrowed.<sup>80</sup>

In Wagra taluka higher rates were charged varying from one and a half to double the amount advanced. Grains advances were generally paid in cash, and seldom in kind.<sup>81</sup>

The sources contain references to a more pernicious form of money-lending. It is reported that in some villages the headman or other well-to-do peasants used to extend money to the needy Koli, Bhil or Talavia towards meeting marriages or funeral expenses. In these cases the borrower would mortgage his 'labour', this being regarded as his sole property : i.e. he agreed to furnish labour-services to his creditor turned master. The duration of mortgage was generally for a year but in some cases even extended to two or three years.<sup>82</sup>

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79. A. Richardson's letter No. 9, 1.4.1846, R.D., 161 of 1847.

80. Broach Gazetteer, p. 451.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid, p. 452.

Numerous petitions were filed by peasants specially after 1830 when decrees were served attaching their lands and household effects in order to satisfy the claims of the creditors. The attached properties were auctioned.<sup>83</sup> The consequences were noted by officials in the early 1870's :

One of the most noteworthy changes that have taken place of late years is said to be the extent to which the waste lands of villages and the holdings of the poorer class of cultivators have been taken up by townsmen of capital, Parsis and Hindus of various castes.<sup>84</sup>

Besides the traditional moneylenders, belonging to Vania, Brahman and Parsi castes, many new elements entered into the money-lending business : revenue servants, pleaders in the civil courts, and various government employees placed "each disposable rupee for a liberal and certain return, in the hands of their connections".<sup>85</sup> The working of the land revenue system had placed moneylenders at a vantage point. With the state squeezing the peasant of his resources, the moneylender often proved to be the sustainer of agriculture and the helpless peasant. Therefore, inspite of all his guile and cunning he came to be described as the abroo of the peasant.<sup>86</sup>

#### 6. Colonialism and the Response of the Peasantry

In studies of the response of agrarian society to colonialism scholars have tended to either view the peasantry as a conservative, forbearing, passive mass or focus only on periods of great activity. Both these positions have been questioned in recent

83. For instance a petition from the patels and ryots of Broach pargana, dated 20.11.1843, R.D., 36/1593, 1844.

84. Broach Gazetteer, p. 388.

85. A. Richardson's letter, 1.4.1846, R.D., 161, 1847, para 2.

86. Ras Mala, p. 548.

years. The present consensus seems to be on taking into account the varied and complex manifestations - 'non-dramatic expressions' - of dissent, grievances, and popular resentment. Neeladhari Bhattacharya has candidly put it : "To see the peasantry always in revolt is to miss the significance of the phases of apparent 'passivity'".<sup>87</sup> The evidence on the response of the peasants of Broach to colonial policies is of a piece with perspective formulated by Bhattacharya.

We have an official description of how the peasants reacted to the new government's cotton monopoly, which prevented them from a free disposal of their produce and also made it compulsory for them to sell it at a low price to the government.<sup>88</sup> In protest the ryots assembled in a large body before the collector's office at the time of the jamabandi on 26th February 1805, and pressed for a hearing. They were allowed to send in two or three representatives to discuss the issue. The representatives expressed the resentment of the ryots at the ban imposed on the free sale of cotton and low price fixed by the government for its purchase, but were informed that no change in the policy was possible at that stage. The angry ryots again "beset the Durbar... in a very tumultuous manner" the next day. When the revenue commissioners (the collector and the judge & magistrate of Broach) strongly repeated the government's resolution "they proceeded in a body of 200 or 250 to the Fort Flagstaff and were assembling the remainder of the Patells and those who came in with them from the villages and were determined to persist in their riotous conduct".<sup>89</sup>

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87. "Colonial State and Agrarian Society" in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, (eds.), Situating Indian History for Sarvapalli Gopal, Delhi 1986, p. 138.

88. Alexander Walker's letter of instructions to Farbhuram Assaram, 30.9.1803, R.D., 39, 1803, para 5; Walker's letter to William Steadman, 17.2.1804, paras 8-9; and of 18.3.1804, paras 3-4, R.D., 44, 1805.

89. G.L.Prendergast, Judge & Magistrate of Broach, to Jonathan Duncan, the Governor, 5.3.1805, R.D., 48, 1805.

The third day of their agitation (28th February), "the Patells assembled in another part of the town in a still more indecorous manner and were swearing each other Hindoo & Musulman by their respective faiths to oppose the intentions of Government in the purchase of cotton". At this point, the commissioners deputed four amin patels to order the peasants to immediately leave for their villages or face punishments. The amin patels, however, could only persuade the patels of four villages. They informed the officials that the ring leaders were Ali Musa Patel of Seetpur village and Mohammad Raje, the patel of Kantharia and they were "outrageously calling on the rest on their oaths &ca to proceed in a body to the Flagstaff and to resist the orders...." Thereafter the patels were surrounded by Government servants, and the leaders arrested. Ali Musa and Muhammad Raje were sentenced, on the spot, to receive 25 and 30 batons respectively. They were put in irons and confined.<sup>90</sup> Jonathan Duncan, the Governor of the Presidency, entirely approved the officials' "judicious conduct in repressing the sort of mutiny".<sup>91</sup>

The account impresses upon us quite a few things. The most obvious is the ryots' clear cut awareness that the government's cotton monopoly was destructive of peasant interest and needed to be opposed. Secondly, the event marks a degree of collective organisation as well as leadership from within<sup>92</sup> coordinating peasants coming from different villages - in the absence of these two element a corporate protest like the one described above, is difficult to conceive. And finally differences of caste and creed did not come in the way of united action for a common objective, though calls for unity did take account of them. One may perhaps also add the non-violent character of the agitation and the

90. Broach Rev. Comm. to Bombay, 25.8.1805, R.D., 48-a, 1806, paras 32-37.

91. Letter to Prendergast, Consultations' of 10.12.1805, R.D., 48, 1805.

92. The officials however, suspected the hand of the desai and majmudar in instigating the patells. But the evidence is thin. Upon their agency being sought by the officials to disperse the patels, the desai & the majmudar left the town on the second day of the agitation. Even the intervention of amin patels (who came of peasant stock) on the Government's behalf failed to yield the desired result. Broach Rev. Comm., 25.8.1805, R.D., 48-a, 1806.

willingness of the peasants to discuss and negotiate. The latter is linked to the overall approach of the peasantry to their economic and political problems during our period. Formulation of strategies to oppose oppressive measures, particular economic ones show a recognition of the mode and methods of colonial rule. Throughout the first half of the century we find peasants filing suits in law courts and making petitions directly to the Bombay Government. Their number multiplied with the years. After 1820 when the peasants' condition became worse under the growing pressure of revenue exactions, there was flood of petitions which are preserved in the files of the Bombay Government's Revenue Department. For the 1830's and 1840's there are at times three volumes full of petition in a single year from Broach district alone. The complaints contained in these petitions are comprehensive. They refer to everything that caused distress : heavy assessment, high handedness and corruption of state revenue functionaries, oppression by the rich bhagdars or the bureaucracy including the collector, moneylenders and the functioning of legal courts. By way of substantiation a few representative cases, reflecting the response of the peasantry to colonialism, are offered below :-

In 1816 the collector of Broach reported that 29,019 bighas of beer (grass) land in Ankleshwar and Hansot parganas had been brought under assessment at the rate of two rupees per bigha.<sup>93</sup> But the patels were resisting payment of revenue on it. He wrote that the patels "delivered in Petitions against the measure, and declined taking the Beer upon any terms, the balance of the Beer appearing in the accounts against the patells who still resisting any entreaty to pay the amount I prosecuted one of the principal parties, in the adawlut and the cause was given against me".<sup>94</sup>

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 93. Besides gouchar (pasture) as common property, there was custom in the district to keep some land as beer (grass land) to produce fodder for the cattle heads. The grass land was also a common property of the villagers and it was revenue-free. But the British on finding that beer was culturable deemed fit to bring under assessment. The peasants strongly resisted the imposition of tax on beer.

94. Charles Shubrick to Bombay, 14.11.1806, R.D., 109, 1816, para 4.

In Ankleshwar pargana the collector had to file a suit against the patels of Raveedra village for the recovery of revenue on beer land, which the patels had declined to pay.<sup>95</sup> In their rejoinder to the suit the patels, Hasanji Saleh, Yusufji and Ismail Chand, categorically stated that imposition of tax on the beer went against custom and should be withdrawn :

Captain Williams came to survey our village, and included the Beer or pasture land which has from time immemorial been used as Common. Whosoever Cultivate Government land either residing on it or residing elsewhere as in the Busravee Purgunnah is allowed Ten Biswahs of Beer land for Pasture for every Beega which he cultivates. This always has been the case and that Beer land is not cultivated how should we pay Rent for it. It never has been paid. How are the cattle to be supported without the Beer Land. ∴ Please do enquire into this for the sake of the inhabitants.<sup>96</sup>

Deposing before the court a witness Yusuf Saleh (who was present in the collector's office at the time of the dispute) made the following statement as to the standpoint of the patels :

the said patels came there, Mr. Wilkins told them they would have to pay for the Beer land, they said we cannot as it is unusual. You are Master dispose of the Beer Land by auction or cut the Grass and sell it we cannot pay for it and we give it up.<sup>97</sup>

To a further question as to what Mr. Wilkins' reply was he answered :

He said they would have to pay and the Patels again said "you are our Master You can do as please, but we cannot pay for the Grass and will not approach it".<sup>98</sup>

95. T.Barnard, Judge at Broach, to Bombay, 6.5.1817, R.D., 116, 1817.

96. An enclosure to T.Barnard's letter, *Ibid* (emphasis added). In this 'Rejoinder' the translator has probably translated the beer as pasture wrongly.

97. Another enclosure to T.Barnard's letter, *Ibid*.

98. *Ibid*, (emphasis added).

The court's verdict in the case went against the collector and patels were rescued from having to pay the revenue on the beer.

The Assistant Collector of Broach faced a serious problem at the settlement of jamabandi of 1822. Struck by the growing awareness of the peasants, he wrote to his superiors that resistance to the revenue assessment by te patels of Jambusar had been in the making for several months and at one time he feared that "a general combination of the patells would have put a stop to any assessment". He further added :

The voice of opposition seem to awaken every year with increased (sic) vehemence and resolution, and only stand in a need of a little more knowledge, to render it triumphant - That knowledge, happily cherished by a more general acquaintance with Regulations, and by the decrees of the Udalut, must every year disperse more widely.<sup>99</sup>

The growing number of complaints and petitions is a significant index that the peasants were gradually picking up the rules and regulations of the new policy and while these held out a hope, grievances would be vented through 'constitutional' channels. They were not even frightened of filing cases against the powerful authority of the collectors. A number of complaints regarding their lapses were lodged with the Bombay government. Consider, for instance, the boldness of this report (1820) against Charles Shubrick and his cohorts :

the collector himself understands nothing, but acts merely according to what he is told by Moolchund and the other native agents, and by the

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<sup>99</sup>. W. Godon, Asst. Coll. to Andrew Burnett, Acting Coll. Broach, 8.3.1822, R.D., 14/38, 1822, folios 62-63 (emphasis added)

Moolchund and Purbhoo Lukhmunjee an attempt has again been made to force all the ryots by threatenings and imprisonment, to draw out a testimonial in favor of Mr. Shubrick thro' fear of whom the ryots are perfectly remediless... Until lately all the ryots have been well satisfied with the English Govt, but for the last two years... we have been most hardly treated. Moreover when the collector goes out to collect revenue, Lukhmunjee takes along with him a Company of dancing girls... and on seizing the patels obliges them to pay money to these girls, such a proceeding never took place under any former native agent during the collection of the revenue - again, when the Hon'able the Governor came to Broach the cultivtors of Hansot were compelled to furnish carts without receiving payments; and the jumedar of the sepoy's kicked the bullocks and frightened them, so that a driver fell off and the wheel went over his back when he instantly died... When the ryots went to lodge a complaint before the judge of adawlut, a jumadar and sepoy's were sent to seize... thus they were prevented from making their Complaint, neither were they permitted to bring their complaint to the Governor, who was then in the place.<sup>100</sup>

The petitioners, after citing many other cases, concluded on the note, "The ryots say that if you will refer this matter to the adawlut for investigation they are all ready to prove the above mentioned facts."<sup>101</sup>

A similar petition against the 'malpractices' and contravention of 'Codes of Regulation' by the offices of the collector was sent to the governor by Dayal Lakhmidas Patel of Jhadeshwar village. The petition displays an acute awareness of legal niceties and the proper conduct of public authorities. The

100. Translation of a petition signed by Patel Devji Kuber of Amblesar village and several others belonging to different villages, dated 13 Bhadrva yud 1876 samvat (4.10.1820 AD) R.D., 164, 1820, folios 7610-14. The petition was submitted to the governor with the remark that "All the ryots came and requested a few of the Patels of the Broach Purgunnah to represent on their behalf the oppression which they endure". They referred to a 'certificate' which the majority of the patels had signed in favor of one Ganpat Dada Bhandariji, an employee in the collector's office, who was being implicated by native revenue officials on false charges as he had taken a strong stand against their corrupt practices.

101. Ibid.

complaint was against Ravenscroft, the Collector and Magistrate of Broach (mid 1840's) who in the petitioner's view was flouting the laws :

that it is evident the government has been pleased time to time issued the orders, Enactments & Regulation for the Direction and guidance of both the Ryot and the local authorities, and accordingly Vested the power to the public functionaries to observe it strictly, and to punish them, who may be (sic) deviated - it being so, - but Mr. Ravenscroft, the collector & Magistrate of Broach; your petitioner would not have say (sic) so, that, that Gentleman possess no understanding, but on misrepresentation of his Dufturdar, laying aside the Codes of Regulations, his proceeding is so, tht it injures both the Ryot & the Circar, and augmenting the malpractices in his establishment - On this counts & points your petitioner is desirous to represent a petition, but your Petitioner entertaining a doubt, that on representing a petition to Government by a poor Patell against a great man whether its just enquiry will ever be made or redress, that he be allowed to do so.102

On being permitted to depose Dayal Lakhmidas made a brilliant representation to Ravenscroft, the collector, bringing out the irregularities and corruption of the state functionaries, embezzlements by talatis and the injustice done to the peasants.  
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102. Petition to George Arthur, President and Governor, 4.4.1845, R.D., 36, 1845.

103. Dated 16.5.1845, R.D., 36, 1845.