



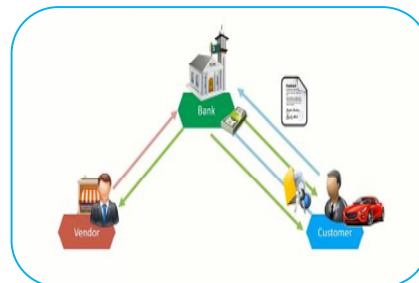
'IJARA' SYSTEM IN MARATHA PERIOD

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ABSTRACT:

During the Peshwa period Nanasaheb Peshwa, Madhavrao Peshwa and Nana Fadanvis took great efforts to reform the land revenue system. They also tried to make the peasant happy with the concessions in the assessment.¹ Between 1762 and 1785 Naro Babaji Nagarkar, the Subhedar of Ahmednagar carried out many revenue reforms. "Before his time there seems to have been as much disorder in the revenue management as during the period before the acquisition of the country by the British. His attempts at fixing rates and adjusting land measures may have been as general and as successful as the early efforts of the British. But they were far from being satisfactory or complete."²



KEYWORDS: Ijara System, Maratha Period, Peshwa period.

INTRODUCTION:

"There was no farming system under the late Government, with the unimportant exceptions...till Bajee Rao's accession...Credit was allowed in most places in the jumma bundy, but there are instances where the village charges were an extra assessment beyond the settlement."³

According to Andre Wink "... a variety of forms of land-revenue farming prevailed not only under themuch-discredited Baji Rao II, the last of the Peshwas, but was also ofregular occurrence under comparatively paternalistic rulers like Madhav Rao I and Nana Fadnis, and in fact throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century."⁴

The word most commonly used to describe a farm of land-revenue, ofcustoms-duties (zakat), or of any other item, is makta (a maqtacorruptform maksta). It was applied, in this sense, interchangeably with ijara (Aidjara; also, ijarati), or with gutka (Mar.; also, gutta or guta) ..."⁵

"First, it may be pointed out that, during at least a part of the Peshwas' rule, the districts on the frontier of the Nizam of Hyderabad were usuallyfarmed out annually, and that this was often also the case with villageslying within the frontiers of neighbouring states."⁶ "... Baji Rao II introduced asystem of farming by annual auctions to the highest bidders on a nearlyuniversal scale. It operated without the consideration for eventualitiesor the preventive checks that formerly softened the impact of farming,and it spread to all levels of the administration. Nevertheless, as even theBritish admitted, in 1818 the state of agriculture had much improved from what it was at the beginning of the century."⁷

According to G. S. Sardesai, it was a great evil introduced by Bajirao. "This measure he adopted in order to amass money and at the same time provide lucrative work for his own favourites in service, irrespective of their merit and efficiency. This method proved ruinous to all classes, especially to the

cultivators. It reduced the country to poverty and wretchedness as the revenue farmers made the best of the chance during their period of lease, and harassed the people without mercy. Bajirao's annual revenue was about a crore and quarter of Rupees, of which on an average he managed to lay by at least 50 lacs a year. In 1815 his net savings had reached 5 crores in cash."⁸ "Captain Robertson wrote to Mr. Mountstuart Elphinstone, regarding the Government of the late Peshwa: No language is too strong to describe the disgraceful conduct of the prince who living in affluent and luxurious ease gave not one moment to the consideration of the happiness of his people, but on the contrary set them the most profligate example of depravity and corruption."⁹

Andre Wink observes, "... a variety of forms of land-revenue farming prevailed not only under themuch-discredited Baji Rao II, the last of the Peshwas, but was also ofregular occurrence under comparatively paternalistic rulers like Madhav Rao I and Nana Fadnis, and in fact throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century."¹⁰

"... beforethe introduction of the tankha or 'permanent village settlement', patils held no regular assignments of either land or money from thegovernment, but remunerated themselves entirely from the surplusrevenue of their villages, which they farmed from an intermediarycollection-agent or sub-farmed from the farmer of the district."¹¹ "Under the Peshwas the settlement remainedmauzevar, and the patils' scope for manipulation with the internal,individual (kulvar) distribution of the assessment, and especially with theletting out of inam lands, may well have increased during the eighteenthcentury."¹²

"In Parner in 1816 Ragho Chimnaji the revenue farmer failed to pay the amount he had promised. He was ordered not to appear at court till he made good the difference. Ragho Chimnaji represented that he had raised the assessment as high as he could possibly raise it. He received no answer except that he need not appear at court till he had paid the full amount of his farm. He returned to his villages and sending out his men seized people of all classes and forced them to pay till the sum he wanted was realized. Several of the injured people went to Poona, but no notice was taken of their complaint."¹³

"Whether a farm should last for one year or for a term of years depended on the pleasure of the government. In Bajirav's time it was usual to grant farms for several years and the head contractor for a district underfarmed it by villages or even by shares of villages. This minute division of farms more than anything else impoverished the people. The farmer, desirous only of securing a profit, left internal arrangements to the village officers. So long as a good round sum was forthcoming from a village no inquiries were made as to the amount of land under tillage or the share which each landholder had to pay."¹⁴

"When the revenue of a village was not farmed but was collected by the government officials, the village rental was usually settled in the lump with the head of the village who furnished security for the amount and was left to collect it without detailed settlements. The payments of land revenue were usually made by drafts on the moneylender who did the chief banking business of the village; little was collected in cash. The banker usually stood security and was allowed to collect the revenue and his own debts at the same time."¹⁵

"Little attention was paid to the fixing of instalments or kists. The rents from the early crop or tusar, and the middle crop or kharif [The early Ahmadnagar reports divide the dry-land crops into three sets or harvests, an early called tusar sown in June and reaped in August; a middle called kharif sown in June and reaped in October; and a late called rabi sown in October and reaped in February.] were taken at a guess and paid as quickly as they could be collected by the headman who sent the amount to the kamavisdar, and he to government. If the revenue was farmed the contractor usually paid about one-third in advance."¹⁶

"When the landholder had the means he paid his rent in cash. But the way in which the revenue was collected forced most of them to give a reference to some moneylender who charged them exorbitant interest. When the headman realized the required sum, he sent it to the kamavisdar's station by the Mhars accompanied by the village goldsmith. The kamavisdar remitted it to the treasury at Poona, either in money or by exchange bills. If the instalment was sent by bills and any loss was

sustained by exchange, the loss was met by the people of the village. If the cash proved short from the presence of base coin, the kamavisdar had himself to make good the loss."¹⁷

The village of Dohogaum in Pargana Newase having been farmed out to Malharji Holkar, Naro Babaji was directed to take proper security for the payment of the amount agreed upon and to hand over the village to Holkar.¹⁸

"Apart from the land-revenue, customs, and police, Baji Rao II farmed all his expenditure, including such things as 'food-supplies to the palace', to the highest bidder usually, and without consideration for defaulters, who lost their property or were themselves imprisoned."¹⁹ The food expenses of 125 persons, who daily took their dinner and supper at the principal palace, including the expenses of feeding 1000 additional men, every month was farmed for Rs. 29000 a year (A. D. 1807-1808).²⁰

"Characteristic of the system everywhere was the almost complete absence of any form of regular account-keeping. The huzur daftar, the repository in Poona of all government accounts (but not of the private treasury of the Peshwa) concerning the income and expenditure of the state, kept in great order and with much precision up to the end of the administration of Nana Fadnis, was almost entirely done away with. The rates of assessment of the districts became a distant standard of valuation which served the Peshwa as a baseline when the revenue was put up to auction. District estimates (prant ajmas) are extant for some years, but the names of the mamlatdars are not given, as they were formerly. The actual collections are not accounted for. Nor are mentioned the many new cesses which were added everywhere, often as jasti pattis or eksali pattis, first introduced as special and temporary, then becoming permanent after having been continued for a number of years."²¹

"While under Nana Fadnis and Madhav Rao I great attention is said to have been paid to representations of the rayats and patils, the knowledge of which operated to some extent as a restraint on the kamavisdars, no complaints were listened to under Baji Rao II. Apparently, all direct intercourse between the government and the cultivators ceased. But we must presume that, given the fractionation of the revenue into amals, there was safety in numbers."²²

"Turning to the effects which this system of revenue farming had on the different classes of the population, the first outstanding fact seems to be that, with the darakdars, the hereditary zamindars were mostly set aside and their payments discontinued: they and the other great landholders were its main victims, not the rayats. Such equalizing effects were, however, not universal."²³

"The outline of the Revenue system adopted since our acquisition of the Country is contained in my letter dated July 10th, conveying instructions to the Collectors, and in that dated July 14th, enclosing instructions for Mamlutdars. The leading principles are, to abolish farming, but otherwise to maintain the Native system; to levy the Revenue according to the actual cultivation; to make the assessment light; to impose no new taxes; and to do none away, unless obvious and unjust; and, above all, to make no innovations."²⁴

"The principal innovation introduced by our Government ... We have abolished the farming system. The legitimate authority of Patells is now substituted for much arbitrary power exercised by themselves and other petty officers. The rents are collected more directly from the Rayots. The Rayot enjoys greater security of property and protection from exactions, the amount and mode of his payments are more defined, and he is aided when requisite with tuccavy."²⁵

This system proved as an evil method and it ruined all the classes, especially the cultivators. It reduced the country to poverty and revenue farmers got this as an opportunity to harass the people without mercy.

¹ Raju Gholap, "Subha Ahmednagar Under The Peshvas: An Economic Study (1759-1818)" (PhD diss., Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, 2022), 86.

² James Campbell, ed., *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency: Ahmednagar District* (Mumbai: Gazetteer Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, 2003 [Originally published in 1884]), 511.

³ Henry Pottinger, "Replies to queries, 31 July 1822: Revenue Enclosures in Mr. Chaplin's Report, 20th August 1822", in *Selections of Papers from the Records of the East-India House, Relating to the Revenue, Police, And Criminal Justice under the Company of Government of India* 4, (London: J. L. Cox, 1826), 751-52.

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- ⁴ Andre Wink, "Maratha Revenue Farming," *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 4 (1983), 591-92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/312237>.
- ⁵ Ibid., 595.
- ⁶ Ibid., 592.
- ⁷ Ibid., 594.
- ⁸ G. S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, vol. 3, *Sunset Over Maharashtra: 1772-1848* (Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1948), 447.
- ⁹ R. D. Choksey, *The Aftermath: 1818-1826* (Bombay: New Book Company Ltd., 1950), 1.
- ¹⁰ Wink, *Maratha Revenue Farming*, 591-92.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 597.
- ¹² Ibid., 598.
- ¹³ Campbell, 430-31.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 431-32.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ganesh Chimnaji Vad, "Peshwa Madhavrao I," in *Selections From The Satara Rajas' And The Peshwas' Diaries 9 no.1*, ed. Kashinath Narayan Sane (Poona: The Deccan Vernacular Translation Society, 1911), 142.
- ¹⁹ Wink, *Maratha Revenue Farming*, 621.
- ²⁰ Ganesh Chimnaji Vad, "Bajirav II," in *Selections From The Satara Rajas' And The Peshwas' Diaries 5*, ed. Bapu Purushotam Joshi (Poona: The Deccan Vernacular Translation Society, 1908), 43.
- ²¹ Wink, *Maratha Revenue Farming*, 622.
- ²² Ibid., 621.
- ²³ Ibid., 623.
- ²⁴ Mountstuart Elphinstone, *Report on the Territories conquered from The Paishwa* (Calcutta: The Government Gazette Press, 1821), 42.
- ²⁵ "Affairs of the Deccan: Extract Revenue Letter from Bombay, 5th November 1823", in *Selections of Papers from the Records of the East-India House, Relating to the Revenue, Police, And Criminal Justice under the Company of Government of India 3*, (London: J. L. Cox, 1826), 812.