



Cover Page



## FROM MALGOOZAR TO PROPRIETOR : THE UPHEAVALS IN CENTRAL INDIAN SOCIETY FROM ANNEXATION BY THE BRITISH TO THE FORMATION OF PROVINCES, 1818-1861

**Nandita Banerjee**

Associate Professor, Department of History, Sidho kanho Birsha University  
West Bengal

### Abstract

In 1818 when the British succeeded the Marathas to the ravaged districts of the Sagar and Narmada territories and parts of Nimar and acquired the partial control of the Nagpur kingdom with its dependency, Chhattisgarh, they were scarcely familiar with the working of the agrarian relationships of these regions. The preceding Maratha rule, before finally, tottering to collapse, had been trying abnormal: expedients to organize a last ditch defence against British inroads on their territories. In the process, they had somewhat distorted the agrarian structure of the region. The village Patel (headman) who had been in the habit of acting as a front for all the cultivators in all their transactions with state authorities like the Deshmukh (Pargana level officer) or the Amil or Mamlatdar (revenue collector) and who could collect only what was due from each cultivator according to the rate (ain) of each field in his occupancy, was suddenly transformed into a contractor who was to distribute the state demand (istimalut) among the cultivators and collect the amount along with the additional cesses (puttees) that the state demanded from time to time. Failure to collect this amount would be by the replacement of the patel by a new man who would be prepared to pay the necessary amount to Patel was invaded by men of non-agriculturist origins court favourites, Maratha Brahmins, land speculators and marwari mahajans. The malgoozars or patel from this time was not necessarily a representative of the cultivators looking after their interests. The malgoozars office had become an object of profiteering pursued by men from all walks of life. The British conquerors of these districts were unable to make a distinction between the administrative ideals prior to "the time of trouble" and the shape of things which had emerged during the last days of Maratha rule. They continued to rely on the same agencies for the collection of revenue, thus depressing the position of the cultivators who could no longer refer to a fixed rate for any field in their possession .

**Key Words-**Malgozars, Amil, Mamlatdar, Deshmukh.

### Introduction

In 1818 when the British succeeded the Marathas to the ravaged districts of the Sagar and Narmada territories and parts of Nimar and acquired the partial control of the Nagpur kingdom with its dependency, Chhattisgarh, they were scarcely familiar with the working of the agrarian relationships of these regions. The preceding Maratha rule, before finally, tottering to collapse, had been trying abnormal: expedients to organize a last ditch defence against British inroads on their territories. In the process, they had somewhat distorted the agrarian structure of the region. The village Patel (headman) who had been in the habit of acting as a front for all the cultivators in all their transactions with state authorities like the Deshmukh (Pargana level officer) or the Amil or Mamlatdar (revenue collector) and who could collect only what was due from each cultivator according to the rate (ain) of each field in his occupancy, was suddenly transformed into a contractor who was to distribute the state demand (istimalut) among the cultivators and collect the amount along with the additional cesses (puttes) that the state demanded from time to time. Failure to collect this amount would be by the replacement of the patel by a new man who would be prepared to pay the necessary amoupatel was invaded by men of non-agriculturist origins court favourites, Maratha Brahmins, land speculators and marwari mahajans. The malgoozars or patel from this time was not necessarily a representative of the cultivators looking after their



Cover Page



interests. The malgoozars office had become an object of profiteering pursued by men from all walks of life. The British conquerors of these districts were unable to make a distinction between the administrative ideals prior to "the time of trouble" and the shape of things which had emerged during the last days of Maratha rule. They continued to rely on the same agencies for the collection of revenue, thus depressing the position of the cultivators who could no longer refer to a fixed rate for any field in their possession and who were exposed to the rapacity of set of profit-seeking revenue collectors. Moreover, the assessment was fixed at such a high rate on some mistaken notions that revenue collectors often failed in their duties and had to give way to new sets of men. The three consecutive five years settlement in the Sagar Narmada Territories and Nimar wrought havoc in the agrarian society of these districts. Cultivators often left the villages to escape extorting and malgoozars were also difficult to find. The authorities in the North West Provinces who were in charge of three territories therefore decided to go for a longer and more moderate settlement and the twenty years' settlement was launched to bring back some stability in the landed society of three regions. In the prevalent atmosphere of instability all around, young British officers could think of no alternative but to clutch at the *malgoozars* turned *mahajan* (moneylender) or vice versa for the steady collection of these severe. Thus at the end of the twenty years' settlements the *malgoozars* appeared to be only anchors round whom the surplus extraction from rural society might survive. By 1953 therefore they began to talk of conferring proprietary right on the *malgoozars*. They knew that the *malgoozars* were deeply indebted and the conferment of proprietary rights would immediately force their estates to be put up or auction. But by the time, it was not the person of the *malgoozars*, but the institution of *malgoozaree* or the practice of relying on this set of people for the collection of revenue had emerged as the acceptable solution to the problem of revenue collection of these regions. Such considerations influenced decisions in the Nagpur country and Chhatisgarh as well as the British passed through different stage of control through a Resident guiding a Regency councils during the maturity or the Raja Rahuji III I (1818 - 1830) controlling the policies of the Raja through the Resident once the Rajah and attained maturity and finally the assumption of full control of the Nagpur territories in November 1853 when the Bhonsla king failed to leave a legitimate heirs on his death. All these year the Resident had to rely on the agency of the *malgoorars* for the collection of revenue and in the process the position of *malgoorars* as lords of the villages for which they were responsible, was strengthened. In Chhathisgarh too, the *gaontias* replicated the *malgoorars* and become the focal point of village administration. Although the office of the *malgoorars* changed hands many time all these places, yet the indispensable nature of this office was slowly taking root in administrators' minds. Thus in 1861, when these scattered territories were put together as the Central Provinces under a Chief Commissioners, it was decided that the office of the *malgoorzar* would be used as the priotal agency of revenue collection from these territories and the *malgoozars* would be invested with proprietary rights. This decision was not wholly unexpected. In fact it merely set a seal on the course in which events were moving. The elevation of the *malgoozar* to the detriment of the cultivators who were in possession of 'tenants'. During Gond, Bundela or he early years of Maratha rule the village patel or *malgoozar* merely acted as a representative of the cultivators for the collection and payment of government dues. This positive was no better than a *primus inter pares* (first) among equals), the village belonged equally to all the settlements in the village. It has never been the exclusive property of the *malgoozars* settlement. This discounting of the right of the cultivators was something quite unprecedented. Although the developments following the peace of Deogaon (1803) had virtually begun such a state of affairs, yet the formal elevation of the *malgoozars* above the rest of his flock was sanctioned only June 1854 I the Sagar and Narmada Territories an by the orders of Lord Caering in June 1860 in the Nagpur country and Chhathigarh. They were extended to Nimar as well when Nimar was incorporated into the Central Provinces in 1864. thus a silent revolution took place in the agrarian society o central India and a group of landlords was foisted on the cultivators of these regions who had never known lord between the state and the tillers of the soil.

### **The Sagar and Narmada Territories :**

The Sagar and Narmada territories were in a most disturbed state when they come into the possession of the British. They had witnessed many wars. Phindering bands of a armies had passed through them, Settled conditions were still a distant dream. Cultivators had left their fails and taken shelter in mountain fastness. It was very difficult for the British conquerors of this place to settle the land or to make people work, Captain Terman, the Deputy Commissioner First Class o Nursingpur, who was asked reply on the state of affairs in these districts wrote – The country had been



Cover Page



afflicted for years by plundering hordes of Pindaris, Boondelahs and Marathas, villages were deserted or often occupied without any right by Newcomers, followers of nature armies or of our own .... No records existed defining titles. In such dilemma few questions were asked and people with title or no title were left much as the fortune of war had left them on the day of cession to the British Government." <sup>1</sup>

Nature was also averse to the people of these territories and excursive rain in 1818 - 19 combined with the disturbed conditions destroyed the crops in the Jabulpore Division and gave rise to famine conditions.<sup>2</sup> Relief could not be organized properly as it should have been under settle conditions. The administrators were how to the place it took them a lot o time to grasp the ways of this place. They had very little option but to follow the earlier practice which had been prevalent in this place. T. H. Madhock, the Assistant to the Agent to the Governor General wrote about the options that were available to the administrators during those days -

"Though it was necessary or was deemed so to make several innovations, the subversion of the system before prevailing was never contemplated and modifications were attempted that should preserve all that was good in the former mode without effacing its general scope and outline. It was convenient to follow what was known and understood by the people as any sudden or radical changes might have crated difficulties in practice at the same time that they would have been likely to effect injuriously the rights of individuals and it would have been hardly and impolitic to strike at the root of former customs with only theory to guide us as to the superiority of the system to be adopted in their place".<sup>3</sup>

The new administrators found the remnants of the practice of the last days of Maratha rule ready to hand. They did not have the opportunity to analyse the reasons or the changes that had taken place since the inglorious peace of Deogaon in Maratha revenue and as a result in the agrarian relations of the country. They took the Maratha Assessments as the foundation on which to work on. They through collection through the agency of *malgoozars* the normal practice. Just as failure on the part of *malgoozars* to meet their revenue obligation had made them liable to replacement by new men similarly the British too through old incumbents prove to subversions, deceptions and Royalties disloyalties. They were not aware of the revenue capabilities of the soil, They though that old incumbents had greater facility to misrepresent their resource and understate the value o their estates. New men were perhaps more likely to offer them the most for their contracted estates. They could not offer more than they would think themselves capable of collecting and they would surely keep enough margin for the estates in their care for containing the agriculture cycle from season to season. It never crossed the mind of early administrators that they were heirs to an abnormal regime which was grouping for resources to ward off an impending defeat which had finally crushed it out o existence. They mistake the distorted survivals of a fading administration to" be its true legacy and in the process tended "to continue and inveterate the evils which we found, as R.M. Bird, Member of the Sudder Board of Revenue, North West Provinces was to realise several years later.<sup>4</sup>

The high assessments that followed the British annexation of Sagar and Narmada territories did not have their origins wholly at local levels . The Governor -- General, Lord Hastings, wanted to present the annexation as a lucrative preposition to the Directors of the east India Company to justify the cost of the Pindaree war. He would therefore like to pitch the assessments high as possible. He never thought that the pacification o the country and its return to normally

<sup>1</sup> Extract from a report made by Captain.Terman, Dep.Com. 1<sup>st</sup> Class, Nursingpore, on the Sagar and Narmada Territories, 7 October, 1854 in selections relating to the Revision of the Revenue Settlement in Sagar and Narmada Territories, 1850 - 62.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces to the Secretary to the Government of India, 27 July 1868 in Letter to Govt. of India serves in Madhya Pradesh State Archives, Bhupal (MPSAB).

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<sup>4</sup> Note on the Saugor and Nerbudda Territories by R.M. Bird, 31 October, 1834.



Cover Page



would require some more time to yield the expected returned. The three initial settlements that ran for five years each exhibited an extreme insensitivity to the problems of a territory to recover from the effects of war and plunders. The country needed a light revenue to encourage settlers and to promote improvement. But the district officers in the early years of British rule did not seem to understand that. While conducting the settlement operations of the Hoslingabad district at a much later date, C.A. Elliot recapitulated the goings on of former years -

It (the first five years' settlement for scone and parts of Hsolungabad) probably was the worst settlement ever made. Major Macpharson had to deal with a depopulated country and an improvised and dispirited people, whose ties to the villages they inhabited had been loosened by fifteen years of suffering and oppression. He probably was one of those sanguine men who held the opinion, much more common at that time than it is now, that the benefits of peace and security conferred by our rule would at once common themselves to nature feeling, and would attract capital and population, so as to cause a complete revolution in the state of things then existing. This was one of those tremendous mistakes, the effects of which many years of subsequent moderation and justice have been able to wipe away.<sup>5</sup>

The district officers were perhaps misled by the several ....Succession of good seasons around this time in framing their demands. The presence of the Nerbudda Field force in Narsighpur created a great demand for the grain of this region and prices were deceptively high for a year. The district officer had been his estimates on this price index and inflated the assessment beyond all reasonable limits. In Hoshugabad the revenue was raised 70% over the former Maratha assessments and 50% above what was demanded in the first years.<sup>6</sup> it was -much more than what was assessed in 1865. "Major Machherson expected amount of improvement to take place in five years", remarked Elliot, "Which has not taken place in forty five."<sup>7</sup> In the Damoh district also, the assessment was twenty seven percent higher than the land revenue of 1888 - 1891 and there were incalculable arrears of half a lakh of rupees.<sup>8</sup> Collection was made difficult by the sudden withdrawal of the Narmada Field Force in 1822 from these territories. There was no other source of demand on a comparable scale. The prospects of export were black. Communications were so poor that exports were not possible on a scale. As Sleeman recollected -

Their roads are scarcely anywhere passable for wheeled carriages at any season and now here at all seasons - they have nowhere a navigable Canal and only in one live a navigable river. Their land produce is conveyed upon the backs of bullocks that more at the rate of six to eight miles a day, and add one hundred percent to the cost of cost of every hundred percent miles they carry it in the best seasons and more than two hundred in the worst."<sup>9</sup>

The surrounding regions were more or less self sufficient and as peace returned they began to cultivate their own food. So there was no demand from the neighboring regions either to make up for the loss of demand as a result of the withdrawal of the armies. This resulted in a price depression for quite some time which made it yet more difficult to realize the assessments.<sup>10</sup> the balances were largest in Jabalpur, Narsinghpore and Baitool. Initially, Sagar assessment was collected with scarcely any balance, regardless of the distress it caused.<sup>11</sup> But in the next few years the Sagar assessment crashed and Mr. Molony, the Agent to the Government General, had to reduce it from Rs. 102,600 (during the first settlement) to Rs. 84,000 (at resettlement) and then again to Rs. 78,000 (next settlement) requiring yet further revisions.<sup>12</sup> often relief was slow to come as officers were unwilling to admit failure and disappoint government expectations. Notwithstanding the falling off in the collections, there was a nominal increase to the *jumma*. Even if

<sup>5</sup> Settlement Report, Hoshungabad (1865) Chapter III, Para 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid Chapters II, section III Para 47.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> S.R. Damoh (1880 – 1891) Para 34.

<sup>9</sup> W. Steeman, Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official, Chapter 10, P 158.

<sup>10</sup> C.A. Molony, AGG to George Swinton, Secretary to the Government Fort William, Jabalpur Office, 12 November 1822, in Wills' Collections.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Wardlaw, P.A., A.G.G. to Wilder, A.G.G., 8 February, 1825, Wills' Collections.





Cover Page



reductions were provided, they were never sufficient. In the words of R.M. Bird, Member of the Sudder Board of Revenue, North West Provinces, who toured through these territories to study the conditions first hand and provide relief, these were the time when an attempt was going on "to drop up by temporary expedients a revenue confessedly excessive."<sup>13</sup>

The initial British demand was based on former Maratha demand without reference to assets. Therefore, it had to be adjusted three or four times in course of one settlement.<sup>14</sup> However, British demand did not have the flexibility characteristic of native assessments. "The inflexibility of our revenue system", remarked the settlement officer of Narsinghpur, increased the pressure in a ratio far exceeding the mere numerical augmentation of the revenue."<sup>15</sup>

The assessments were so exorbitant that old, agriculturist *patels* with age-old connection with the village agricultural community found it difficult to accept the *malgoozaree (revenue contract)* and villages often passed to new men. These men often held contracts for several villages and were often not residing amongst the peasants.<sup>16</sup> Settlements were often made with persons who were not chosen for their association with the agricultural community or ability to bear responsibility for the welfare of the village but for their willingness to pay the assessments. In fact assessments were often made regardless of village assets according to the circumstances of individual *malgoozars*. In the words of the settlement officer of Baitool –

I assessed each village according to its individual state and circumstance.....Adjacent villages having apparently similar soil and enjoying similar facilities vary exceedingly in point of rates ...Made not so much with reference to the intrinsic capabilities of each village, but to the personal circumstances of the *malgoozar* and his ability or otherwise of managing his property."<sup>17</sup>

The collection of the assessments often made encroachments on capital as 85% of the assets was demanded as revenue.<sup>18</sup> Colonel Sleeman also wrote now -

"to deduct a sum to remunerate the holder for the trouble of management to cover all the risks to which he becomes liable from calamities of season, defaulting cultivators etc. and to defray all the incidental expenses of the village ..... In other district this has generally been 25% from the gross assets, but in Sangor, Hutta and Rehli only fifteen was assumed. Neither of these seems insufficient under the actual circumstances of the greater part of these territories, where the soil was for the most part greatly exhausted from overtilage the cultivators poor from oppression 85 the returns of the season almost every where depending upon seasonable shares of rain, Thirty percent was the least that would have been left to the holders of villages and whenever less has been given the country has suffered."<sup>19</sup>

The high assessments and slender margin of profits made revenue contracts very unattractive and *malgoozars* were difficult to find.<sup>20</sup> The collection of the assessment often encroached on the agricultural capital and involved the *malgoozar* in irretrievable debt.<sup>21</sup> Anseley, the P.A. to the Agent to the Governor General reported that except a few *mahajans* Kimlassa, Koorye and Pithoureea (in Saugor) the inhabitants were in state of extreme poverty and were not having any resources at their disposal either agricultural or personal.<sup>22</sup> F.J. Shore, the Commissioner Jubbulpore reported

<sup>13</sup> R.M. Bird, Note on the Sagar and Nerbudda Territories, 31s October 1834.

<sup>14</sup> S.R. Seonee (1867) Para 240

<sup>15</sup> S.R. Narsingpur (1866) Para 122

<sup>16</sup> S.R. Baitool (1866) Para 98

<sup>17</sup> Ibid Para 233, 243 and 244.

<sup>18</sup> S.R. Hoshangabad (1865) Chapter II, Section II, Para 54.

<sup>19</sup> From W.H. Sleeman Principal Assistant to the A.G.G. to Francis Curwin Smith, A.G.G. 27 September 1831 in *Sleeman Correspondence in MPSAB*.

<sup>20</sup> S.R. Hoshangabad (1865) Chapter IV, Section III, Para 17

<sup>21</sup> F Wilder, Agent to the G.G. to H. Mackenzie, Sec to Govt in Territorial Dept. Fort William, 18 March, 1826 in *Wills Collections* in MPSAB.

<sup>22</sup> Anseley, P.A. A.G.G. to T Wilder, A.G.G. June 1825 *Wills' Collections*.



Cover Page



during a tour through the district that the *patels* were in a state of object poverty. Not a single one of them owned a horse.<sup>23</sup> Many of them would have liked to give up the leases and conducted the management of villages with great reluctance.<sup>24</sup> Cultivation could be continued only with the help of the money lender under such circumstances and it would have been impossible to carry on the settlements without his aid. The close association of the moneylender with the agricultural operations of these territories has been described in a letter of the Assistant to the Agent of the Governor General in 1821 –

"The universal custom in this part of India seems to have been for the *sowcar* to advance grain on an understanding or on written obligations that it should be returned at the harvest with interest in kind *je* at the rate of 25% on the principal. The former part of the engagement was, however, of a nominated nature only, for grain, equal in quantity to the original seed, was generally buried in pits after the harvest and the percentage delivered to the *sowcar*. Where the engagement continued in force the interest in kind was annually delivered over to the *sowcar* and though there was no stipulation to that effect, it was an understanding between the parties that as long as the interest was regularly paid the proprietor should not remove the principal from the village and there is a prescriptive proprietary right to the grain in the cultivators of the village so binding on the *sowcar*, that, although he may transfer his right of receiving the percentage to a third party, he could not without the sanction of authority carry away the principal from the village."<sup>25</sup>

As it was understood that the entire system was hinged on the capital supplied by the moneylenders and it was impossible to make the cultivators pay the revenue installments in advance of the harvest while the crop was still lying on the ground and it was impossible to carry on agricultural operations without the necessary advances from the moneylender desperate administrators sometimes blamed it on the intransigence of the money lenders for their inability to collect the assessments in full. They often forced the money lenders to open their stores and lend grain to the cultivators or advance the seed without making any corresponding payment.<sup>26</sup> Such instances of interference were bound to destroy the confidence of the moneylenders in the administrative system of the British and they might move elsewhere leaving these territories absolutely demanded of capital. The pivotal role of the money lender in sustaining the agricultural operation in the district overburdened with a high revenue was fully appreciated by the Sudder Board of Revenue. North West Provinces and they made their disapproval of all attempts to interfere with their activities very clear in a letter to the commissioner of Jubbulpore Division –

The Manuari Mahajans have an equal claim to justice with all other parties who may have legally and peacefully acquired a property or interest in land. To eject them on the ground of hard-heartedness, villages from ages which they have taken up in exchange for lost capital would be a great encouragement to the people to break faith with the only class who will at present advance money at all and would operate effectually to deter others from coming forward in future."<sup>27</sup>

When *malgoozars* could not be found for villages, the village were sometimes taken under direct management (*Kham*) by British administrators.<sup>28</sup> The trouble consequent upon such attempt at direct administration has been neatly summed up by Col- Sleeman –

That system attempted to substitute government officers for good farmers and was adopted from the erroneous persuasion that there was no just ground for the complaints and resignations of the holders of Villages; and the hope that we should be able to manage without their aid. The result was in almost every case, most lamentable. The tillage became

<sup>23</sup> S.R. Hoshangabad (1865) Chapter III, Section IX Para 134

<sup>24</sup> Anseley to Wilder, 1 June 1825, Paras 9 & 10 op.Cit.

<sup>25</sup> A.A. G.G. Saugor to C.A. Malony, A.G.G. Sagar and Narmada Territories, Jubbulpore, September 1, 1821 in Wills' Collections MPSAB.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. R.M. Bird, Note on the Saugor and Nerbudda Territories, 31 Oct 1834.

<sup>27</sup> Extract from a letter paras 6,8 and 9 from the Sadar Board of Revenue to the Address of T.C. Smith, 16 Sept 1834 in Betul District office Records File 55 of 1834 in MPSAB.

<sup>28</sup> W.H. Sleeman, Principal Assistant to the AGG to Francis Curwin Smith, A.G.G. 27 September 1831, 8 & 9 in Sleeman Correspondence MPSAB

<sup>28</sup> W.H. Sleeman, Principal Assistant to the AGG to Francis Curwin Smith, A.G.G. 27 September 1831, 8 & 9 in Sleeman Correspondence MPSAB



Cover Page



bad and deficient. The cultivators, deprived of the aid of paternal care and encouragement of the holders to which they and their fore fathers had been accustomed to look up in their difficulties, were reduced to beggary though one half of the revenue was never realized; and these holders, whose ancestors had formed the tanks and temples, and planted the groves which enriched and adorned the villages, and formed almost the only local ties between the people and the soil, were involved in debts from which the greater part of them have never recovered. The whole agricultural system, by which the village communities had been preserved and the lands had been kept in village through so many invasions and revolutions of Government, was partially unhinged by an overweening confidence in our won powers of management and unjudicious attempts to substitute the superintendence of our own officers for that of men so deeply interested in promoting the prosperity of the villages, and in conciliating the good feeling of the inhabitants." <sup>28</sup>

In appreciation of the pivotal role of the money lender in the village economy it was urged that *malgoozars* should be allowed to underlet their villages. When reliable and solvent men were hard to come by, there was no alternative to accepting money lenders as *malgoozars* and it might so happen that a single person could hold the contract for several villages, some of which he might like to underlet since it would not be possible for him to look after all the villages that he was in charge of by himself. *Local* officer therefore sometimes wanted a sanction for underletting the villages as it was understood that money lending *malgoozars* had come to stay and they could not conduct the work of village management all by themselves without the help of some other men. <sup>29</sup>

The moneylender's from in the village economy received a further recognition in the creation of a rule enabling unexpired leases' to be made over by the *malagoozar* to the moneylender with the consent of the district officer. <sup>30</sup>

In the general atmosphere of insecurity, cultivators and even *Wuttundar* cultivators of very long standing refused to receive *pattas* which might tie them down to their tenements and compel them to pay an amount previously agreed upon. In the words of Sleeman –

They were averse to bind themselves to fixed money rates for even a single season. They had been in the habit of engaging at the commencement of tillage to pay only certain portion of the collective assessment to be fixed at the harvest; and this assessment was generally moderate enough to allow the humbled cultivator a sufficient share of the returns to maintain his family. They dreaded the engagements to pay fixed sums under all circumstances and under a Government like ours, which rigidly enforced the performance of all such contracts; and high assessments and successive seasons of Glamity left them little hope of finding great profits to compensate great risks." <sup>31</sup>

Similar reports came from Baitool district where cultivators gave up leases and left the villages for other places and there was no certainty that the person who had accepted the cultivating lease in one year would stay till the next. <sup>32</sup>Desertion of villages by cultivators was a common incident. <sup>33</sup>In *Kham* (directly administered villages) the administrator often compelled the cultivators to cultivate an allotted portion of land. <sup>34</sup>Those who remained in the village were forced to work for those who had left. <sup>35</sup> Deserted villages soon fell out of cultivation and soon became unfit for cultivation altogether. We learn from Sleeman, "If a Cultivator's bullocks are sold, he leases his land, and it becomes covered with rank grass (*Kans*), deer become numerous and they are followed by Tigers. Those who cultivate in the neighborhood even cannot guard their crops from the Deer because the tigers carry them off if they venture to remain in their fields at night upon the highest 'Muchans'. The malaria which follows the growth of the grass and thick underwood prevents any

<sup>29</sup> Low, Principal Assistant, Jubbulpore to F.J. Shore, offg Com. Jubbulpore, 6 May 1836 in Wills' Collection MPSAB.

<sup>30</sup> Lt Col Sleeman, commissioner to Macadam, D.C. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jubbulpore, 19 June 1946 in Wills Collections MPSAB.

<sup>31</sup> W.H. Sleeman, Principal Asst. to the A.G.G to Francis Curwin Smith, A.G.G. 27 Septs, 1831, Para 30 in Sleeman Correspondence MPSAB.

<sup>32</sup> S.R. Baitool (1866) Para 98

<sup>33</sup> S.R. Baitool (1866) Para 98

<sup>34</sup> Anseley to Wilder, 1 June 1825 in Wills' Collections MPSAB

<sup>35</sup> F. wilder, Agent to GG to H. Mackenzie Sec to Govt in Territorial Dept; 18 March, 1826



Cover Page



but those who have been born and bred in such places from going near them; and all the roads near become unsafe for travellers."<sup>36</sup>

The unsatisfactory working of three quinquennial settlement in the Sagar and Narmada Territories alarmed the Sudder Board of Revenue North West Provinces which was in charge of these districts. They sent their member, R.M. Bird in 1834 to study the conditions of these areas first hand and make recommendations for their remedy. Bird's solution was to try to bring back stability to these areas by making a longer settlement for twenty years. This settlement was to be made with the *patels* who were in possession. They were not to be removed during the term of the settlement except for default. They were also to be assured of renewal of lease on condition of good management. They were not to be removed without the sanction of the Sudder Board. The settlement was to be made for the whole territory at a jama, which the local officers would recommend, as fair and equal.<sup>37</sup>

These rules laid the foundation for the creation of a proprietary title. Henceforth changes in *malgoozarship* were somewhat less frequent. Old lessees were confirmed in 2080 out of 2,535 villages. They were granted proprietary right in November 1853 in view of long occupancy and good management. The orders of the Government of North West Provinces on November 30, 1853 laid down that -

It (the settlement) shall be concluded on the basis of apparent or approximate proprietary right in so far as such right can with any approach to certainty or confidence be traced and that the leading object in so doing shall be to recognise fixed rights or claims and interests in whatever form they may already have grown up and to avoid an interference with them by any speculative acts or views of the officers of government."

## Nimar

The Nimar districts were acquired from the Poona government between 1819 and 1824. Only the two parganas of Zeinabad and Mainjrode in the Tapte valley were retained by Sindhia till 1860. But although Sindhia was in nominal control, he failed in his money obligations to the Selance chiefs for which the British were guarantors, and had to surrender the five parganas of Dhurgaon, Burwaye, Selance, Poonassa and Khundwa to the British in 1823 for payment of the (money payment). In the same manner in 1825 some more parganas -Aser, Bamngarh, Moondee, Bilora, Attode and Peplode although nominally Sindhia's - Came under British control. All these districts were quite intermixed and their likeness to each other and natural connexion with each other made it difficult to administer them differently. Thus from the beginning they were brought under the same kind of control.

At the time of annexation Nimar was exposed to danger from all sides. These parganas were very close to the territories of Sindhia and Holkar, while they were quite distant from other British outposts. Until the British conquest, they had been regularly visited by marauders and freebooters like Beemah Bhyee, Persram Holkar or Munfroop Sing, the Selance chief of Bhikutagarh and blackmail had been paid to them by levying contribution on the ryots. The British therefore decided to keep this district in the charge of a succession of military officers from the day of this annexation till May 1, 1864 when it was included in the Central Provinces. These military officers were to be responsible to the Governor-General's Agent at Indore. A British force had also to be stationed on the banks of Narmada "to check that propensity to rapine and plunder so evident in all ranks of the people in Nimar."<sup>38</sup>

When these parganas came into the possession of the British, they were quite depopulated, desolate and without cultivation. Kanapore and Beria -exhibited nothing but one continued scene of desolation and ruin; all traces of former cultivation had ceased to be perceptible and extensive tracts were observed overgrown with jungle and with the exception

<sup>36</sup> Sleeman to Currie, Sec to G of 16 July 1846 in Sleeman Correspondence in MPSAB.

<sup>37</sup> Op. Cit. Note on the Sangor and Nerbudda Territories by Robert Mertins Bird, Member of the Sudder Board of Revenue, NWP, 31 Oct, 1834.

<sup>38</sup> Major F.C. Smith Commanding in Nimar to Brigadier General Sir John Malcom Mundlairsar, 26 June, 1818 in Inward Nimar Letters





Cover Page



of Kanapore not a dwelling or an inhabitant was to be seen in any part of the country."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, F.C. Smith reported that – "The pargana of Burrdeah is situated close to that of Kunnappoor on the south east. It was one of those districts formerly in the possession of the Poonah government and at one time contained 19 or 20 villages, but in now perfectly desolate and gone to jungle."<sup>40</sup>

The immediate task facing the military officer in charge of the district was to resettle the pargans, to clear it of jungles, to invite cultivators and to get the lands cultivated. Major Smith engaged the Bheels to cut down the jungles, replaced some of the turbulent chiefs with more loyal ones, invited back the cultivators with promises of loans and village *patels* were given allowances to resettle the villages. Thakoor Mandrup Singh of Rampoor, the chief of Bhukatgarh on the north bank of the Narmada, who had constructed a fort (*Gherry*), and had become 'the terror of the ryots' and 'trouble some to his neighbours' was replaced by Rao Ruttun Singh. The country that Rao Ruttun Singh found was a total waste, without any ryot or without any revenue. Therefore an allowance of Rs 100 had to be made for him for his maintenance. In Kanpore too, the 'Jemindars' had to be paid Rs 60 per month and in Beria Rs 50 per month for their maintenance till the land was in a position to yield a revenue. The 'Jemindar' and 30 Gossains too had to be paid regularly for the protection of the frontier villages from Bheel and Gond incursions. These advances of Cash were made to enable themselves to buy cattle, instruments of husbandary and seed.<sup>41</sup>

The '*Jemidars*' (*Pargana officers like Mundlaee or Canoongo*) of these places were persuaded to call in the *patels* of the different villages and they were induced by promises and encouragements' to bring back the ryots and the old inhabitants. As the land was overgrown with jungle and it was not possible to reclaim it without a lot of efforts and expenditure Major Smith had to make some of the land rent free for two and some for three years. The cultivators did not possess either plough cattle or seed. So, on the security of the *patel* or the '*Jemidar*', Major Smith also made cash advances to ryots to make them work. The amount that was but out added up to Rupees 1600 and no interest was to be charged on it. It was to be realized from the crop of the season 1819.<sup>42</sup>

But inspite of all these judicious measures these tracts did not impose much as quick returns were expected. While recapitulating the events of these early years of British rule in Nimar, Forsyth, the settlement officer of Nimar remarked that it was not the fault of the military administrators that the county could not recover from its depressed state. The problem lay higher up—"Rulers pressed them for an increase of revenue and even refused to allow the reductions they recommended, who totally failed in fact to appreciate the duties of a government towards a country desolated by years of monstons anarchy and oppression."<sup>43</sup>

In Kanapore Smith had invested Rs 1600 while he was expecting a return of 8000 to 10,000 on his own estimate. He expected Rs 2500 to 3000 from Mundlaisir and Rs 25,000 to 22, 000 and ultimately realized Rs. 20,000 nearly "a sum" he thought, "in every respect inadequate to the General appearance and condition of the country."<sup>44</sup> Smith thought he had lightened the burden of this district and expected to win over the people gradually and to be able to collect more information about their resources but the attitude of the people as gathered from his description demonstrated that the people were still very stressed out and considered themselves too overburdened to reveal anything about themselves.

"Every enquiry that we made into the state of the country was at feat time considered by the people and is still a presage to some new tax or arbitrary collection and consequently it became an object among all classes to conceal the full extent of the Revenues and the real value of e lands."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> 1818-21, Nimar Dist Office Records, Vol in MPSAB

<sup>40</sup> T.C. Smith to John Malcolm, 23 June, 1819 Inward Nimar Letters, 1818-21, Nimar Dist office Records, Vol 1, MPSAB

<sup>41</sup> Op Cit. T.C. Smith to Malcolm, 26 June, 1818.

<sup>42</sup> Op. Cit. T.C. Smith to Malcolm, 23 June, 1819.

<sup>43</sup> S.R. Minar (1869) Para 98

<sup>44</sup> Op. Cit Smith to Malcom, 23 June, 1819

<sup>45</sup> Ibid



Cover Page



"Finding the person about me as mysterious as before on the subject of revenue and as every species of record relating thereto was designedly withheld from me," Smith was beginning to think of measuring the land by the *beegah* But the project had to be abandoned as –

"I perceived that it gave offence and created considerable uneasiness and that in fact the measure, if carried into effect militated against the prejudices and customs that prevailed in the province."<sup>46</sup>

Smith did not understand where his fault lay, but from the description of his survey and assessment operation it seems that the inhabitants found these proceedings quite oppressive and had offered serious resistance.

Smith also tried bringing the waste into immediate cultivation and made a three year settlement for those lands. Such high assessments in anticipation of results when the work had not yet been started and the inhabitants were quite exhausted after years of anarchy and oppression betrayed a lack of sympathy with the local inhabitants and an inability to comprehend their problems. Thus he reported with satisfaction that " the *Kulla Jumma* has been doubled for the current year and progressively increased the second and third."<sup>47</sup>

That was probably the reason why these *parganas* could not register a recovery even after a lapse of three years and Capt. Delamain, Smith's able successor still found the 'renters' (*patels*) very poor, who had to be supported and an advance of Rs 25 per cultivator had to be made to keep the cultivation going in backward villages. "They want in fact, "as Colonel Delamain remarked, "time to breathe after 20 years of unremitted desolation"<sup>48</sup>.

From 1829 Nimar was set on a course of quinquennial settlement with *malgoozars* as in the case of the Sagar and Narmada Territories. As the villages were let out on a purely temporary lease with no rights of property whatsoever, the leaseholders came to be known as 'renters' in the official parlance. Only 44% of the *Wuttundar patels* took up such leases between 1829 and 1933. Some 34% of the leases went to hereditary *pargana* officials like *Mandolees*. 8% of the villages were still administered as *Khalsa*. And 14% of the leases were taken up by strangers<sup>49</sup>.

The renters were left with a margin of only 62/3% as the government *Jumma* took 79% of the produce, 3V2% went for village expenses and 105/6% went to meet the to meet the *Zamindar's* (*pergana* officials) hues. Some of the renters failed in their engagements before the expiry of the lease so that the leases had to be auctioned and the way was opened to the admission of total strangers to 38% of the leases. The assessment was much higher than in the neighbouring districts of Holkar and Sindhia so that cultivators often left the British administered *parganas* for Sindhia's or Holkar's territories. Agreements were therefore centered into with these *pargana* authorities for the mutual extradition of cultivators. Cultivation had to be kept up by force the renters having to use government help to keep cultivators.<sup>50</sup> Matters were so serious that even a partial drought brought a famine in 1833. As Forsyth remarked- "The grievous revenue exactions during the preceding years of our management following on a long period of anarchy and spoliation, by preventing the acquisition of any agricultural capital, must have predisposed the country to extreme suffering from a partial drought, which under a better system would have been but a temporary inconvenience"<sup>51</sup>

The second five years' settlement (1835-1839) saw a continuation of revenue collection by means of Venters' who had many speculators among them. The original assessments were somewhat reduced at this time and instead of taking half the gross produce from the cultivators, a third was only taken. But the assessment of culturable waste in Shindhia's Nimar since 1839 and the collection of the amount in anticipation proved to be very oppressive. A sudden fall in prices

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Capt. Declamain to Gerald Wellesley, Resident at Indore, 15 May, 1822 in Inward Nimar Letters 1818-21 in Nimar Dist. Office Records, Vol 1, Page 129 in MPSAB.

<sup>49</sup> S.R. Nimar (1869) Para 170

<sup>50</sup> Ibid Para 172, 173

<sup>51</sup> Ibid Para 176.



Cover Page



almost broke down this settlement and remission had to be made. An outbreak of cholera at this time aggravated matters even further.<sup>52</sup>

In 1845 there was a failure of monsoon in British Nimar and the farming system was declared to be a total failure. The assessments had been pushed high to meet the expectations of the higher authorities but the decline in the resources during the intervening period of war and conquest was not taken into account. As Forsyth summed up the situation - "While the rents demanded from the cultivators were such as could not be realized in any but the most favourable seasons and then only by absorbing all but a bare subsistence, the margin left to the farmer by the Government demand was insufficient to enable him to meet these seasons of failure"<sup>53</sup>

The farming system having been proved to be a failure, the British Administrators began to try direct management. The *patel* or *malgoozar* was now engaged merely as a manager while the government was directly looking after the cultivation. This involved the British administrators into more responsibilities which they found it quite difficult to bear. Large advances had to be made to the cultivators as *tuccavee* (advances). Land was abundant, population was scarce and no one had any attachment to the soil as the British did not recognize any proprietary right. Offer of attractive terms to extend cultivation under the circumstances was also working adversely as this tended to draw the cultivators from old lands to new land and gave rise to dearth of cultivator in one place instead of another<sup>54</sup>. The extraordinary situation of these parganas made the enforcement of rules and regulations absolutely difficult. In the words of Col. Sandys - "the present state of Nimar, its scanty population and the general poverty of its inhabitants to eject a ryot for instance from his field and distraint for rent by the seizure of his little property, would lead to directly contrary effects to those contemplated by the enforcement of the law in such a case little or nothing could be realized by the sale ; the peasant would be gladly received in neighbouring territories and granted new lands on most favourable terms, whilst the field from which he was ejected would either be left to be follow, from the difficulty of providing a substitute and the whole rent be lost or have to be leased out on a reduced tenure to any one who might be persuaded to till it, in either case causing loss to government".<sup>55</sup>

Government of North West Provinces wrote of - "The constant pressure of a rate of assessment which left no small a profit to the industrious cultivator of old occupied land as to afford no sufficient inducement to the investment of capital either in the extension or improvement of cultivation"<sup>56</sup>.

The remedy might lie in an opposite course of action - "in a thinly peopled country, where much good land is available the partial sacrifice is immediately compensated, to the state as well as the individual derives profit from the reduction of assessment. The fixed revenue is certain and punctually paid and new leases are rapidly brought under cultivation and rendered productive".<sup>57</sup>

The country was so poverty stricken at that time that even inducements of open up new land tempted cultivators of old land to move to new land and lease their former holding to escape the pressure of assessments. Nor did cultivators attempt improvements as improvements were invariably followed by higher assessments. The North West Provinces government therefore proposed the grant of a proprietary right, for a fixed term for the old resident cultivators or *Joonardars* who had some element of stability in the midst of uncertainty all around. The British administrators were awakening to fact that in Nimar "it is the competition for cultivators that - regulates rent and not the competition for land".<sup>58</sup> They therefore wanted to give the *Joonardar* a fixed lease for 20 to 30 years for the land in his possession

<sup>52</sup> Ibid Para 181.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid Para 186

<sup>54</sup> From C.Allen, Offg. Sec to Govt., NWP to RNE Hamilton, Resident at Indore, 16 October 1948 Nimar Dist. Office Records, Vol.2 MPSAB.

<sup>55</sup> Sandys to Lt. Col. C.K. Wade, 15 Dec, 1841 in Para 5 in Outward Nimar Letters 1840-42 Nimar District Office Records, MPSAB.

<sup>56</sup> Thornton, Sec. to Govt. NWP to RNC Hamilton, Resident at Indore, 8 June, 1847 Inward Nimar Letters 1841-50 Nimar Dist. Office Records Vol. 2 MPSAB.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid Para 5

<sup>58</sup> RNC Hamilton, Aents Governor General for Central India to W.Muir, Secretary to Govt. NWP 23 August, 1854 in Nimar Dist. Office Records, Vol 3, MPSAB



Cover Page



with 5 beegahs of adjoining waste, without any additional demand, as a stimulus for exertions. It was expected that the *Joonardar* would have "the greatest possible inducement permanently to fix himself in the land and improve it to the utmost".<sup>59</sup>

It was to be a new grant from the government, personal to the present holder and open to revision on succession.

Offers of individual right to *Joonardars* and collection from them on an individual basis was bound to create certain administrative problems for the rulers and individual fortunes might vary according to 'the industry, capacity or prosperity of the owner'. Such problems could be avoided by making *Joonardars* collectively responsible for an entire *mauza*, being assessed on the *mouza* as a whole *mouzawar*). The *Joonardars* might distribute this *jumma* upon their holdings and agree to become severally and jointly responsible to the government for the payment of the whole revenue. The *patel* and the *patwari* were to be at their service and their remuneration was also to be decided by the *Joonardars*. The lease was to run for twenty to thirty years and was to be renewed on similar terms upon the then assets of the village".<sup>60</sup>

ms was simple and well known. But so far the British had not been able to achieve this simple solution that Hamilton now proposed." Our new settlements "Hamilton reassured with the revised and reduced jummas will remove this obstacle."<sup>61</sup>

Hamilton's remarks regarding the efficacy of *patels* as village managers and leaders, deserving proprietary rights were echoed soon afterwards in higher quarters. The Secretary to the Govt. of India with the Governor General wrote to the Resident at Hyderabad on 28 October, 1858- "the holders of these offices are nearly the only remaining representatives of the proprietary class as between the government and the ryot, these officers are the best medium of communication, that they possess the good will of the people in a surprising degree."<sup>62</sup>

Nimar was incorporated into the Central Provinces in 1864 and integrated into its administrative structure.

### ***The Nagpur Country.***

In Nagpur Sri Richard Jenkins came as the Resident during the minority of Raghuji III, but from the beginning he decided to assume the reins of control in his own hands bypassing the Regency council led by Banka Bace. Banka Bace would have liked to rely on the *f*-counsel of Sadeek AH, the Minister. But Jenkins did not allow anyone except Goojabba to keep close to the minor king Raghuji III. As Jenkins wrote very clearly to the Governor General –

"The establishment of the new government on principles combining our own reputation and interests with the good of the country could only be effected by the plain and simple path of taking into our own hands for a time at least, the direct administration of affairs.

<sup>59</sup> C. Allen Offg Sec to Govt. NWP to RNC Hamilton Resident at Inore 16 October 1848.

<sup>60</sup> Thornton to Hamilton, June 8, 1847 paras 6 – 16 in Nimar Dist. Office Records Vol. II P 503.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid Para 6

<sup>62</sup> Nimar Dist. Records Vol. 3