



Farming of Land Revenue in Karanja Residency

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Karanja is a small island about eight miles long and four miles broad, situated at latitude $18^{\circ} 15'$ and longitude $73^{\circ} 21'$. It lies about six miles south east of Carnac Pier oil Mumbai Harbour. On the east it is cut off from the main land by the Bendkhal Creek, which at high tide is inaccessible from Panvel by road. The island rises in two rocky hills, km in the north and high in the south, between which lies a strip of land wooded with mango trees and plains. To the east of the island, there are salt pans which divide the Creek into several small branches, while one arm of the Creek runs from Mora : Bunder in the north to Uran³ in the south. It is deep enough for boats to ply⁴.

Since Company's control over Mumbai they tried to possess Karanja several times.⁵ On failing which Aungier, the head of Surat factory wrote to the Directors to improve the fortification of Mumbai. In his opinion the Marathas threatened not only the trade of the Company but its very existence on the Western coast of India.⁶ He wished to enter into a defensive treaty of friendship and free trade with the Portuguese. He concluded that the safety of Mumbai depended very largely upon the neighbouring islands of Karanja and Salsette, which were the Portuguese Possessions.⁷ He, therefore, suggested that the two neighbours should act together Aungier's draft treaty contained some commercial clauses which would have conferred on the. British, the freedom of passage at Thane and Karanja. The Portuguese did not like to grant these necessary concessions for British Trade.⁸ Aungier urged the Company authority to sanction him some additional men and money so as to enable him to capture Karanja "finally, the Company conquered the island of Karanja in 1774 and made it a Residency."

Land Revenue was the most important source of income for state in India during the medieval period, right upto the beginning of modern times. Its nature and incidence changed with successive kings and dynasties. However, every rules tried to maximize his revenue to the optimum extent possible without considering its impact on the subjects. 11

Raja Todarmal, an important Rajput Sardar in the court of Akbar and Malik Ambar, a minister, in the Nizamshahi kingdom of Ahmadnagar have been recognized as pioneers in the field of efficient assessment and collection of land revenue. Accurate measurement of the land held by each landholder maintaining upto date registers of each farmer's landholding, assessed land revenue on the basis of average yield of a piece of land were some of the characteristic features of their revenue policy Generally. 25 or 40% of the average yield was collected as land revenue and it could be paid either in cash or in Kind.¹²

During the first quarter of the 18th Century the Maratha power under Peshwas began to expand. As a part of this process of expansion Shivaji's policy of not granting anyone Miami or watan lands was given up. Peshwas started liberal grants of Inami. or Watan lands to various Maratha sardars with view to induce them to participate whole heartedly in the process of expansion. Alongwith the grants of Inami or watan lands and with a view to mitigate their financial difficulties they auctioned the land to the highest bidder."

The Company officials adopted the Maratha system of land revenue in Karnja when it came under their control. On carefully going through the revenue records of the Maratha period the Resident concluded that yearly land revenue collection in Karanja was to the tune of Rs.51134-1-1. He further found that although most of the farmers paid their land revenue regularly large arrears of land revenue had accumulated over a period of time, in all revenue of Rs.10089-3-1 was in arrears.¹⁴

Apart from the details of land revenue assessment and collection the Maratha records also contained lot of information about custom duties taxes-rents, import and export of Karanja and other sources of income of the island of Karanja, Hog and Elephanta. The Maratha records also contained details of the Maratha Garrison in the Karanja island-its strength, its supplies and its expenses During the year 1771 the garrison spent a sum of Rs. 26088-1-22 on Various- items.¹⁵

Farming of salt batty grounds, Sail pans, fishery, rights of passage boats, sale of tobacco and mowah arrak were various sources of income for the East India Company in Karanja. These rights were farmed out to the highest bidder in specially held public auctions¹⁶. The Karanja Resident rented out every inch of land, even small pieces of also situated very near the Karanja fort The Marathas never rented out these lands to anyone on account of security reasons.¹⁷

In 1778, Ogilvie Giddies, a Portuguese inhabitant of Karana was rented out some land in the Elephanta and Hog islands on conditions that Giddies conducts himself properly and that he does not give the local inhabitants any cause to complaint.¹⁸ Unfortunately Giddies dies soon thereafter without paying the stipulated rent to the Karanja Resident. With a view to recover the rent amount from his successors, Mumbai Governor instructed the Karanja Resident to attach the property of the deceased. Since it was found inadequate to pay the stipulated rent, the Governor instructed Karanja Resident to cancel the rent deed executed in favour of Ogilvie Giddies.¹⁹

The Mumbai Governor then instructed the Karanja Resident that such lands be rented out to individuals only for a period of seven years.²⁰

In 1798, Seigeant Major Thomas, Cooke of Karanja and Burjorjee Navrojee of Mumbai individually sought to rent some land in Elephanta island for a period of seven years. for which they were prepared to pay Rs.550/- & 690/- respectively per annum along with the usual security deposit. They were also willing to protect the plants and trees on the rented land and improve its cultivation to the fullest extent.²¹ Since the lands in question were already fetching much more rent than offered by Thomas Cooke and Burjorjee Narojee the Resident rejected their offers."

With a view to increase his revenue the Resident modified the period of renting out, first to 3 years and then to 5 year.²¹ The period was ultimately' reduced to one year. Ever alert to the problem of increasing the Company revenue the Mumbai Governor tallied the revenue income under different periods of renting out land, and asked the Karanja Resident David Carnegie searching questions in case of any discrepancy.²⁴

Usually, the highest bidder had to give a security deposit to the company which was liable to be forfeited in case of non- performance or default on the part of bidder.²⁵ Rents demanded by the Resident were so exorbitant that successful bidders found it very difficult to pay them regularly inspite of their sincere efforts. This led to the accumulation of large arrears of rent, to recover which the Resident was at liberty to use any measure²⁶ Thrashing the person concerned, locking him up for several days, sometimes without food were some of the measures used, although the Mumbai Governor had explicitly instructed him not to do so, but allow the concerned person sufficient time to pay the stipulated amount of rent. ²⁷ The Mumbai governor had also instructed the Resident to keep the person concerned under a strict watch so that the doesn't run away to any other dominion or sell his harvested batty or other grains.²⁸

However all these precautions did not have the desired effect, consequently the Resident decided to initiate legal action against the defaulter. Some of the defaulters were also sent to Mumbai to be suitably dealt with by the Governor.²⁹ Some of the defaulters chose to clear their rent dues and arrears once their properties were attached which more then returned to them 30 in 1792 attached properties of defaulters Mohd. Asif & Lala Laxmidas were returned to them when they cleared their rent dues. As they promised to not to default any more they were allowed to keep the rented land for the stipulated period.³¹

There were several complaints against the revenue assessment and collection system followed by the Resident in Karanja. That the rent or revenue collected was exorbitant, double assessment of land revenue rented land being - imposed upon reluctant farmers, were some of the more frequent complaints. Karanja inhabitants were reuthlessly exploited by the Residents, who did not care much for rules and regulations in force, in this respect and when asked to explain their actions, they always brought out untenable excuses. The farmers were being assessed for land revenue at the same rates as was done by the Marathas was a frequent excuse given by the Residents 'While the Residents ruthlessly exploited the inhabitants of Karanja they never thought of giving them any facilities or concessions to improve their cultivation. Even those who were friendly towards the Company, had helped the Company and authorities in various ways were not spared.

Mohammad Sadick a Muslim inhabitant of Karanja helped General Keating while capturing Karanja and later David Carnegie in administering Karanja. On 21 January

1784, Resident Carnegie issued a letter of no revision in the land revenue or Toka 33 of Mohammed Sadick to be paid to the Company for his inherited land and waster land converted into batty land. This was by way of reward to Mohammed Sadick for the services he rendered to the Company.

In June 1790 on assuming the Residency Richard Church took over the land of Mohammed Sadick on the pretext that the land could fetch much more land revenue or toka.⁴

Mohammed Sadick produced the above certificate which he had acquired from David Carnegie in support of his claim and requested the Resident to restore his land. But the Resident Church did not accept the demand and reported to Sadick that he should have produced the certificate to Resident Rivett,³⁵ his predecessor and sought the facility. Accordingly Moahammed Sadick contacted James Rivett, considered the request of Mohammed Sadick and informed Resident Church to accept the demand of Mohammed Sadick as it was already conceded by Whitehill, the successor of David Carnegie. Consequently, Mohammed Sadick was restored with the land and allowed to pay the same toka which was sanctioned by David Carnegie, the first Resident³⁶

Lala Ramdas an inhabitant of Badodara village in Karanja owned some rent to the Karanja Resident. He died before clearing the rent. The Karanja Resident under instructions from the Mumbai Governor, attached his property, auctioned it.⁵⁷ The auction fetched Rs.1553-95 which was promptly deposited in the Company's treasury towards the payment of Ramdas's rent arrears. Roop Kuvar his widow tried to plead her case before the Resident and told him that her husband also owned the dues Rs.2463/- to the people from various places,³⁸ but the Resident turned a deaf ear to her plea. Moreover, since the auction money fell short of the rent arrears, the Resident died to find out whether Ramdas had any property elsewhere, especially in Salstte which could be attached.³⁹

Karanja Resident Charles Richard wrote to Stephen Whitehill, head, Salstte to enquire about Ramdas's property. Stephen Whitehill appointed Laldal Nagardas, head Brahmin, Salstte for the purpose. After careful search it was found that Ramdas had neither any property in Salsette nor had Roop Kuver, his widow any relatives to depend upon them for her survival.⁴⁰

During Portuguese rule some inhabitants of Mahalon district in Karanja had reclaimed some wasteland from sea and had converted it into batty fields, spending a huge sum of money which they had borrowed at high rates of interest.

Both the Portuguese and later the Maratha authorities assessed this land moderately for land revenue.⁴¹ However James Rivett, the Karanja Resident, Steeply increased the revenue assessment for three successive years, claiming that the increase was temporary." Later Resident Church continued to asses these lands at enhanced rates and wanted the land holders to pay half their produce towards land revenue. The landholders then offered to pay half their produce, excluding the cost of seed and labor charges, as land revenue, but the Resident' rejected their offer. The landholders then appealed to Mumbai Governor for a reasonable assessment of land revenue which they would pay willingly.⁴³

Considering their appeals the Governor decided that the revenue assessment rules, of Salsette should be enforced in Karanja.⁴⁴ However, the assessment under the Salsette rules was heavier than the assessment under old rules, Consequently, some cultivators in Karanja began to leave their land leases under one pretext or the other. Thus Gulam Mohd. of Nagaon wanted to give up his lease under the false excuse that his eyesight had failed completely.⁴⁵ Inspite of this novel protest of the cultivators, the Karanja Resident insisted on assessing land revenue according to the Salsette rules.⁴⁶

Every village under the Karanja Residency had a number of orchards, which formed a part of the land rented out to various bidder. Now, under the new revenue system, the Resident decided to exclude them from the land rented out. These orchards were handed over to some Kunbis of Karanja on the condition that they hand over all then produce to the residency. This was done with a view to augment the revenue but the Resident soon found out that since the orchards were not maintained properly hey could not fetch the anticipated revenue. The Resident therefore formulated a plan for their improvement as a part of which orchards in Karanja were handed over to the Kunbis for a period for twenty years.⁴⁷ He also planned to plant some pepper vine in Satratvady orchard of Matawly village.⁴⁸ There were 25 such orchards in Karanja. The Resident planned to improve this and then rent them to various bidders for which purpose he invited proposals or tenders from the Karanja inhabitants. 49

Several inhabitants submitted their proposals. Mohd. Masud Ismail offered Rs.3100- for all orchards under the Karanja Residency while Mohd. Abdulla Kazi offered Rs.1300 for orchards in the Nagaom villages per annum. Others offered between Rs.62 and 82 for individual or single orchards per annum. Resident decided to rent out these orchards simply to various bidders. The orchards at Satratwadi, where pepper vines had been planted, was rented out to Ibrahim Patch Mohd. for Rs.150 per annum⁵⁰ Offers of Raghoba Rangoji, Dadoba Narayan Bhat and Malid Dawood were rejected as they were not submitted in time. Thus renting, out orchards in Karanja proved to be a lucrative sources of income for the Karanja Residency. ⁵²

The Resident used to collect Deshinukhi⁵³ dues from the inhabitants of Karanja on the same basis as they were collected by the collectors of Broach⁵⁴ and Salsette ⁵⁵ deshmukhi dues were also collected on grains shipped through the port of Karanja to Mumbai. In August 1798, a ship belonging to the Angres with batty on its way to Mumbai anchored for some time in the Karanja port. Consequently, Rs.75/- were recovered from it as Deshmukhi dues.⁵⁶

The Karanja Resident used to rent out salt pans on the Karanja coast. However, the Karanja salt was of inferior quality than that made in the Mumbai salt pans. It, therefore fetched a lower price. ⁵⁷ However, the Mumbai Governor wanted to sell the Karanja and Mumbai salt at the same price, which meant that the Karanja salt was to be sold at a higher price. The Pazandars⁵⁸ of Karanja, who owned almost all salt pans there, thus stood to profit by it. ⁵⁰ The Resident went on increasing salt pan rents even when he was not in a position to offer any facilities to those who rented them. Govin Reghunath Sali purchased a piece of waste land known as Gant Khar for Rs.2150/- on 10 November 1976. with a view to convert it into a salt pan, for which he had to spend an additional sum of Rs.7000/- Such waste land used to be assessed for rent at Rs.10/- until such time as it became a productive salt pan. Some time it was also exempted from any tax or revenue. Forgetting this long prevailing practice the Resident went on increasing its rent each year, because of which Govind sali was put logical inconvenience. He lamented that had he known or had any idea of Resident's disregard for the long standing practice he would not have bothered to rent the waste land spent additional money to convert it into saltpan. However, he was willing to pay any reasonable rent for it.⁶⁰

On the other hand buyers of waster land were given many concessions in the Maratha territory, including one of exemption from rent and taxes for 12 years. Therefore the rent amount was increased gradually.⁶¹ However, the Karanja Resident conveniently ignored this practice and went to increasing rent of waste land in a high handed manner. The Resident claimed that all land in Karanja, except land which was legally occupied by the inhabitants and for which they were able to produce some documentary evidence, belonged to the East India Company." Obviously this was a convenient excuse with which to deprive Karanja inhabitants of their legally owned land.⁶³ Under the Maratha administration no one possessed any documentary evidence of his land ownership.⁶⁴.

In 1730 Mia Dawood's father had advanced some loan to Mohd. Hussain Siraj against the mortgage of his orchard at Bacci Pacari. The loan remained unpaid till 1796 when Mohd. Hussain died without any issue. According to the prevailing practice the mortgaged land should have reverted to Mia Dawood. However, the Resident took it over under the pretext that after Mohd. Hussain's death the mortgaged land had lapsed to the Company⁶⁵ This was another example of the Resident's high handed policy.

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29. ibid. Diary, 782, letter dt. 6 May, 1798, p.30
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6. Nandlal Kishore of Mumbai Rs.126/-

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50. Ibid, Diary No.790, letter dt.9 Aug., 1798, p. 45
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54. Broach Baroach, is the headquarters of the District of the same name in Gujarat State. In 1616 a British factory and in 1617 a Dutch factory were established over there British factory at baroach was made subordinate at Surat and Subsequently to Mumbai in 1772, the city was captured by the British from the Nawab. Edmund C'ox. A short history of the Bombay Presidency. Thacker & Co. Ltd. London 1887 P. 169.
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56. Ibid.Diary.790, letter dt.17 May., 1798. p. 50
57. Ibid.Diary.767, letter dt.24 Dec., 1775. p. 41
58. Fazendar is derived from the word Fazenda which means an estate or a large farm. The Fazendar was the estate owner since the time of Portuguese. He was given allowance in batty annually by the Government The allowance was 1/3 of the produce from his farm or estate, Ibid. Diary No.767, letter dt. 24 Dec., 1775, p.43, and Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. I, Clarendon Press. London, 1970. p. 682.

59. Karanja Residency, Diary, 767, letter dt.2 Dec., p. 42
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61. Ibid.Diary.793, letter dt.28 July., 1801. p. 63-64
62. Ibid.Diary.790, letter dt.19 July, 1798. p. 41
63. Ibid.Diary.790, letter dt.25 July., 1798. p. 42
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