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Author(s): Nilmani Mukherjee

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⁴ Abridgement and translation of Von Hammer's article in Jahrbucher der Literature under section "Oriental Literature", *Calcutta Journal*, November 30, 1821, p. 304.

⁵ Smith, George, *Life of William Carey*, 1912, p. 202.

⁶ *Friend of India* article referred to in *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XIII, 1850, p. 132.

⁷ Ranking, *op. cit.*, XXI, 1920, p. 189.

⁸ From a Resolution by the College Council, August, 1807.

⁹ The best source for the College's activities before 1819 is Thomac Roebuck's *Annals of the College of Fort William*, 1819.

¹⁰ Ranking, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁴ Letter from Carey to Sutcliffe, April 8-13, 1801, found at the Baptist Mission Archives, London.

¹⁵ Ranking, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

¹⁶ De, Sushil Kumar, *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, 1919, pp. 159-60.

THE RYOTWARI SETTLEMENT AND THE INSTITUTION OF CASTE IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY (1792-1827)

NILMANI MUKHERJEE

Land revenue administration was one of the main concerns of the British during the early part of their rule in India. But they had to take a number of factors into consideration before they could formulate their policy.

The institution of caste was one of the peculiar features of the Indian social landscape which the makers of land revenue settlement could not but recognize. Caste consciousness was one of the built-in fixtures of the Indian mind. All through the lives of the people caste exercised an influence which might be imponderable but, nevertheless, was vast. To a great extent it governed the social relationships.

The makers of the ryotwari settlement in the Madras Presidency also had to pay due attention to this institution. Col. Read during his administration of Baramahal allowed remissions to various privileged castes. The Brahmins, Muslims and merchants generally came under this category. In other words it included all those who did not belong to the *Sudra* or cultivating caste. But Munro did not agree with Read on this point and argued that all castes should pay the same assessment for the same kind of land. He argued that the assessments almost everywhere in the country were adopted to the rudest state of cultivation. Munro held that the assessments were so low that every man who had

the means of ploughing and manuring his fields might easily pay them. Were the revenue so high as to require some extraordinary exertion of industry to discharge it, a few particular castes might claim some indulgence. As this was not the case, Munro held that there was no reason why a Brahmin should pay less than a Sudra ryot. He argued that a Brahmin might perform every operation of agricultural labour except that of holding the plough. Many of the principal farmers never touched the plough any more than a Brahmin did. According to Munro it was want of stock, rather than of personal labour, that usually occasioned failures. If a Brahmin had the required stock he might manage his farm and pay his dues as well as the other farmers. If he did not have it, his only alternative was to get land at a lower rate. As he furnished neither stock nor labour it was evident that whatever he received was in effect a gratuity and a deduction from the revenue which the cultivator gave to him instead of paying to Government. Munro stated that it was his opinion that the merchants had still less right to indulgence than Brahmins because they usually had the means of stocking their farms. He laid down that there was no religious restraint on the labour of Mussalmans and there was therefore nothing to hinder them from paying the same assessment as other. Munro concluded by saying that if it were admitted that the assessments of different castes were to be diminished according to their idleness, there would be no end to the task of regulation.¹

The suggestions of Munro were evidently not adopted by Col. Read and especially the Brahmins continued to enjoy the privileges of remission and of favourable assessment. Col. Read was of opinion that the *agraharamdars* (inhabitants of exclusively Brahmin villages) should be allowed the option of holding the whole of their village on the condition of paying one-third of the usual *teerwa* to the Government or half of it entirely rent-free. Captain Macleod considered this too great an indulgence and thought they should be allowed to hold only one-third free of rent. The correspondence respecting the *agraharam* villages between Col. Read and Captain Macleod which began in 1794 was continued to 1798. It is not clear from this that any general and final orders were given on the subject². On the whole Read's policy was very lenient towards the Brahmins as a privileged caste. His assistant Macleod feared that their successors might say that they were "Brahmin-ridden or perhaps something worse"³. The makers of the ryotwari settlement in Baramahal were aware of the influence and hold of the Brahmins over the Sudra cultivators and accordingly recognized their claims to favourable assessment.

Although Munro had criticised Read's policy of allowing remissions to certain privileged castes, he had apparently to revise his opinion on the subject when he had to deal with the same question as the Principal Collector of the Ceded Districts. The custom of permitting certain

privileged castes to hold land at a reduced rate was, he found, general throughout the Ceded Districts. Besides Brahmins and Mussalmans the indulgence extended in many places to some castes of husbandmen whose womenfolk being kept in seclusion could not assist them in the labours of agriculture. The proportion of remission did not appear even to have been fixed by any standard. It was usually called a fourth or a fifth but was found on examination to vary from a tenth to a half. Though this indulgence was like every other liable to abuse, it deserved to be continued, Munro felt, under certain limitations. Many of the poorer sort of Brahmins who were without employment and incapable of following any trade and many of the Mussalmans formerly serving as sepoy and peons and since disbanded, had no other means of subsistence than the cultivation of the earth. But as they were little accustomed to personal labours and derived no help from their women they could neither raise the same quantity of produce nor pay the same assessment as the caste of husbandmen. In 1805 Munro recommended that the remission should be restricted to Brahmins and Mussalmans and might be fixed at three-sixteenths but should be only one-sixteenth if a general remission of $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ was granted. He believed that it would no doubt be practicable eventually when the condition of the people was ameliorated to make all castes pay the full revenue. But till then he recommended that it would be advisable to authorize remission as a temporary measure for he realised that it would be impossible to raise suddenly or even in a few years to the full assessment those who had been accustomed to indulgence without compelling many of them to relinquish their lands and greatly distressing all.⁴

This policy of recognizing the privileged castes was continued when the revised ryotwari system was introduced. Campbell, Collector of Bellary, wrote in 1822 in connection with the taxation of *inam* or revenue free lands that the *inams* were held to a great extent by Brahmins of religious habits whose influence it was the policy of the Government to conciliate as they had great power over the people generally.⁵

In the district of Madura it was customary in *agraharam* villages inhabited by Brahmins to allot for the enjoyment of those who studied "the Vaidoms and Pooranuoms" an extent of *mannium* land yielding from 20 to 50 fanams annually and in a few but rare instances to the extent of 100 fanams. These learned Brahmins taught gratuitously and generally such pupils as might be brought to them. These allowances to the learned Brahmins were continued even under the ryotwari system.⁶

Sometimes the favourable assessment of the privileged castes was abused. The Head Assistant Collector of Cuddapah in 1822 remarked that advantage was taken of the principle of remission to the privileged castes by individuals of every caste from Brahmins to the *Pariar*. About 900 persons took advantage of this. A ryot took the name of a

privileged caste and this assumed name was entered in the *Puttah*. The nominal possessor was always ready to claim it as his own while the ryot obtained the benefit of the reduction for a small gratuity to him. The persons enjoying this advantage naturally objected to receiving Keymputtahs with a reduction of 25% on the assessment "unconditionally", since they had derived the same benefit by *tyasagari* (favourable assessment of privileged castes) for the last 15 years and the settlement "conditional". The Head Assistant Collector noted that almost all the Mussalmans and the greater proportion of persons entitled *Tyasagari* ploughed with their own hands and nearly the only exception was found among the Brahmins and Komutties. The latter were quite contented with the usurious profits which they accumulated as long as the crops were bad and the ryots poor.⁷

In 1824, Sir Thomas Munro while on his tour in Salem district noted that Major Macleod and his successor had made some addition to the revenue of the *agraharams*, left free all *bhattavarti* (lands granted to Brahmins rent free and mostly held in severalty as distinguished from the jointly held *agraharams*), assessed at less than four pagodas but imposed a small quit rent on all yielding above that sum. The Governor recommended that some remission might be granted to such of *agraharams* as were assessed higher than others of the same class and the quit rent on *bhattavarti* might be reduced one-half. He remarked that the sum was negligible to Government and would be a great boon to the owners.⁸

It appears that throughout the period under review the privileges of certain castes were recognized under the ryotwari system although from time to time objections were raised against this practice by some of the ryotwari administrators. The influence of some of the privileged castes like the Brahmins was too great to be ignored by the administration. The collectors thought it advisable to conciliate this influential section of society by giving it the usual remissions and assessing it comparatively favourably.

¹ Munro to Read, 17th July, 1797. Arbuthnot, Vol. I, pp. 12-22.

² General Reports of the Proceedings of the Board, January 2, 1826, Vol. 34-37, p. 131.

³ Baramahal Records: Macleod to Read, 5th October, 1794.

⁴ Board's Consultations, September 26, 1805, Vol. 416, p. 7086.

⁵ *Ibid.*, July 4, 1822, Vol. 918, p. 6318.

⁶ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1823, Vol. 942, p. 2402.

⁷ Board's Consultations, January 9, 1823, Vol. 935, p. 876.

⁸ Munro's Minute of 5th March, 1824, Arbuthnot, Vol. I, p. 219-229.