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# MAHARASHTRIAN VILLAGE COMMUNITY IN THE DECCAN RIOTS OF 1875

By HIROSHI FUKAZAWA\*

## I. Introduction

As is known, the Deccan Riots of 1875 were peasant uprisings in which people of thirty-four villages or so in the central Maharashtra revolted against the professional money-lenders residing in the villages and towns, from May to September of 1875; and in many other villages of the region, probably in sixty villages or so, very critical state emerged approaching near-revolt.

Just after the riots the Government of Bombay appointed an official committee to enquire into the causes of the riots, and to recommend certain measures to ameliorate the rural indebtedness. The committee submitted its voluminous report in 1876.<sup>1</sup> We shall abbreviate it as the Report of the Commission hereafter.

During the British period of Indian history newly settled tribal people such as the Santhals, Kolis, Bhils and so on often revolted en masse against the local money-lenders, civil courts, and sometimes police stations.<sup>2</sup> But the uprisings of the long settled Hindu peasants were very rare; the best known examples are the revolts of the Indigo growers in Bengal during 1856-62,<sup>3</sup> and the Deccan Riots of 1875. To be sure, in the western part of India before the Deccan Riots, individual debtors sporadically attacked (sometimes murdered) their creditors, and such cases were very frequent.<sup>4</sup> The Deccan Riots of 1875 were, however, very extraordinary in the sense that they were the only massive uprisings of peasants against money-lenders in the long history of western India during the British period. They were epoch-making in the agrarian history of western India in that because of them

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, *Report of the Committee on the Riots in Poona and Ahmednagar, 1875*, Bombay, 1876: "The Report," pp. 2+127; "Memorandum on the Poona and Ahmednagar Riots," pp. ii+57+102; "Minutes by Mr. J.B. Richey, Mr. C.W. Carpenter, Mr. A. Lyon, and Mr. Shumbhoopursad Laxmeelal, and Note on Enhancement of Assessments, by Mr. C.W. Carpenter," pp. v+42; and "The Connection of the Enhanced Assessments of Land Revenue with the Embarrassments of the Ryots," pp. 171. Vol. II, Appendix A, "Papers relating to the Indebtedness of the Agricultural Classes in Bombay and other parts of India," pp. 319; Appendix B, "Action of the Law and the Civil Courts on the Agricultural Debtor, Preliminary Digest of Evidence," pp. iii+365; and Appendix C, "Notes of Evidence, Statistics, and other Papers," pp. iv+338, Bombay, 1876. This report is abbreviated as the *Report of the Commission* in the following footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, see V. Raghavaiah, *Tribal Revolts*, Nellore, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> See B.B. Kling, *The Blue Mutiny, the Indigo Disturbances in Bengal, 1856-1862*, Philadelphia, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> There were seventy-seven cases in Keda district during 1870-75, seventy-seven cases in Poona district and twenty-three cases in Ahmadnagar district during 1870-74, and ninety-three cases of incendiarism alone in Satara district during 1872-74. *Report of the Commission*, vol. I, "The Report," pp. 7-8, para. 17; vol. II, Appendix C, pp. 19-36.

the Government of India seriously began to change and reform certain aspects of judicial systems and institutions pertaining to the problem of agrarian indebtedness.

The major causes, consequences, and historical significances of the Deccan Riots have been discussed and clarified to a considerable extent by Ravinder Kumar, I.J. Catanach and Neil Charlesworth.<sup>5</sup> This article of mine will not deal with these points anew, but only refer to their works when necessary. While I was collecting some informations on the agrarian indebtedness in the nineteenth century western India from the Report of the Commission, I came to know some interesting points on the social basis of the uprisings which did not appear to have been sufficiently stressed or discussed in the previous works. The points of discussion in this article may be briefly stated as follows.

The Report of the Commission clearly shows that as the indigenous merchant caste of the Deccan was numerically very small, immigrant merchants such as the Marwaris and Gujaratis along with certain indigenous Brahmins and so on were doing most of the money-lending business in the Deccan villages since before the British period, but a large number of the immigrant money-lenders increasingly flowed into the villages especially after the British rule was established, and they became the major targets of attack by the rioters in 1875.<sup>6</sup> While demonstrating this, the Report of the Commission gives us an unmistakable impression that the territorial cohesiveness of the Maharashtrian villages had become so loose and disorganized under the British rule that immigrant merchants very freely came to the villages to open their shops and start the business of money-lending right upto the time of the Deccan Riots; till then there was no hindrance to or check of the migration and free enterprise of the immigrant money-lenders by the village community.<sup>7</sup> The territorial solidarity of the village seemed to have passed away long ago, whereas we may point out that in the Maharashtrian villages in the eighteenth century, merchants had to get the agreement and permission of the village authorities when they wanted to open their shop in a certain village.<sup>8</sup>

The same Report of the Commission, however, provides us with not a few evidences to the effect that the territorial cohesiveness of the Deccan villages was not completely lost by the time of the Deccan Riots, but was latently maintained in many of the villages to a remarkable extent and became manifest when the hostility of the villagers against the money-lenders reached its extremity; behind the apparently economic struggle of the rural debtors against their creditors, there was a certain social cohesion among the villagers based on the territorial unity of their village. The remnant of the solidarity of village at the time of the Deccan Riots was touched upon by Ravinder Kumar,<sup>9</sup> but does not seem to have been sufficiently demonstrated. Accordingly this article will discuss only this aspect of the Deccan Riots.

It is needless to mention that I never intend to say that such a cohesiveness was ob-

<sup>5</sup> Ravinder Kumar, "The Deccan Riots of 1875," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24.4, August 1965, pp. 613-35; Do., *Western India in the Nineteenth Century, A Study in the Social History of Maharashtra*, London & Toronto, 1968, Chapt. V, pp. 151-88; I.J. Catanach, "Agrarian Disturbances in Nineteenth Century India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 3.1, March, 1966, pp. 65-84; Do., *Rural Credit in Western India, 1875-1930*, California University Press, 1970, Chapt. I, pp. 10-55; Neil Charlesworth, "The Myth of the Deccan Riots of 1875," *Modern Asian Studies*, 6.4, 1972, pp. 401-21.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the Commission*, vol. I, "The Report," p. 23, para. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to *ibid.*, vol. II, Appendix A, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> See R.V. Oturkar ed., *Peshvekalin Samajik va Arthik Patravayavahar*, Poona, 1950, nos. 63, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-86.

servable in most of the villages of the Deccan. There were some villages where no sign of hostility against the money-lenders was observed as will be shown later. I only intend to demonstrate that it was clearly manifest in not a few villages, and was more or less observable in many others.

The hostile movements of the villagers against the money-lenders could be divided into two categories: first, the boycotts of the money-lenders by the villagers, and second, the forcible attacks by the villagers upon the money-lenders. The village-wise cohesion of the people was more manifest in the first category of hostility than the second.

## II. *Boycott of Money-lenders by Villagers*

There seem to have been three types of boycott of money-lenders by the villagers. The first was their opposition to a new money-lender who intended to settle down in their village. The Collector of Nasik reported in his Administration Report of 1873-74 that the general condition of the people was hardly satisfactory throughout the district, more especially in the northern part, where the people had had a number of indifferent seasons and were largely in debt; what more than all kept the people down was the unfortunately common custom of the peasant making over the whole of his crop to his money-lender, who took it at his own valuation, and thus the peasant, when once in the money-lender's hands, was never able to get free; the grasping nature of the money-lenders was most marked in the Ghat villages, where occasionally it had reached such a pitch that the money-lender's house had been attacked, all books and papers burnt or destroyed and at times he himself ill-used. And he states as follows:

“As illustrating the feeling regarding the presence of money-lenders in these villages, I may mention that at one village at which I encamped, the people came to me to pray that a *Marwari* who wanted to settle in the village might not be allowed to do so, and they said it had been decided that if he was permitted to build a house the whole village should migrate.”<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear whether the Collector was then empowered to prohibit a merchant from settling down in a village to do a business. What ultimately happened with this matter is also not stated in the report. At any rate the above statement clearly shows that more than a year before the Deccan Riots, in a remote village in western Nasik, ‘the whole village’ was so strongly opposed to the intended arrival of a Marwari merchant that the villagers were determined to leave the village in case he came. This shows that the hostility and hatred of the village folk against the immigrant money-lenders was widely spread even in such a district as Nasik where the riots did not take place in 1875.

The second type of boycott was the refusal of the whole body of villagers to cultivate the lands whose occupancy right was obtained by money-lenders. In this regard the Collector of Ahmadnagar stated in October 1875 that while he feared more than three-fifths of the peasants in the district mortgaged their lands to their money-lender, and were thus little better than his tenants-at-will, in most cases the ancestral land still stood in the peasants' name, who lived by and cultivated it themselves, as it was not as a rule the money-

<sup>10</sup> *Report of the Commission*, vol. II, Appendix A, pp. 35-36.

lender's object in the first place to get the land in his own name, since he could not cultivate it himself because of his caste, and "often when he has got it, the ryots of the village, by combining not to cultivate for him, make it less profitable to him than it was before."<sup>11</sup> This type of boycott was also observed in Poona. For instance, in a village named Kheirgaon where a riot took place, a Marwari money-lender who had acquired the occupancy right of lands with the assessment of Rs. 60 stated that the land was waste, as no one would cultivate for him except the original owners, and they only on condition of getting their bonds, etc. given up, which he would not agree to.<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, it cannot be supposed that this type of boycott was widely prevalent since long before the Deccan Riots. There were numerous cases where the money-lenders had acquired the legal title of lands. In the *taluka* town of Parner, Ahmadnagar district, for instance, fifty out of fifty-two money-lenders had acquired the title of land each from a few acres upto 685 acres by the time of the Deccan Riots and paid about a quarter of the land revenue assessed on the town.<sup>13</sup> In this district, the Brahmin money-lenders were said to be sometimes more interested in acquiring the title of land than money.<sup>14</sup>

But at the same time, the immigrant merchants, and especially the Marwaris, who were the most dominant and influential class of money-lenders in the Maharashtrian villages at that time, and were accused of having rapidly acquired the land from peasants, are estimated to have obtained roughly five percent of occupancy right in the Deccan by the time of the Deccan Riots and their land was more concentrated in *taluka* towns and nearby villages than in remote ones.<sup>15</sup> This small size of land transferred to immigrant money-lenders may indicate that the transfer of the land title to them was especially resented by the villagers causing the second type of boycott, and the resentment was stronger in the isolated remote villages than large market towns.

The third type of boycott was the total socio-economic boycott of money-lenders by the villagers as a whole as is shown by the following examples. The Report of the Commission gives this episode. Towards the end of 1874 there was living a Deshmukh (former hereditary chief of a *pargana*) in a village named Kardeh in Taluka Sirur, Poona district. He was unable to repay his debt to his Marwari creditors, and one of the Marwaris first obtained some personal ornaments and property from the Deshmukh and then got his house and land auctioned by the civil court, which he bought for himself. The Marwari started to pull down the Deshmukh's house, when the Deshmukh requested him not to do so and proposed to pay rent during his occupancy, but the money-lender refused to stop the pulling down of the house. The Deshmukh "took to the heart these proceedings of the sowkar, and he collected together the village ryots and resolved that as the Marwaris have commenced to ruin them, it would be better neither to borrow from them nor to serve them or purchase anything from them in future. This unanimous resolution of the villagers put the Marwaris . . . to the greatest inconvenience for want of servants, etc. They therefore proposed to remove themselves to Sirur with the aid of the police by the 5th January 1875. . . . One of the villagers has opened a grocer's shop at which all purchases are made."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix C, pp. 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix C, pp. 180-97.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix A, p. 295.

<sup>15</sup> Charlesworth, "The Myth of the Deccan Riots," *op. cit.*, p. 408.

The villagers not only refused all the services to the Marwaris but also threw the carcasses of animals and other filth into their premises, and generally showed such a strong hatred, that the money-lenders on retreating to the Sirur town petitioned the District Magistrate that they were in bodily fear of the villagers. The Magistrate considered this state of affairs to be of a dangerous nature, and reported it to the Police Commissioner accordingly. The example set by the people of Kardeh was soon followed by other villages, and before any actual outbreak occurred the Marwari money-lenders had in several places been subjected to similar social boycott.<sup>16</sup> Though this boycott at Kardeh did not develop into a popular uprising, a similar boycott soon took place at the *taluka* town of Parner of Ahmadnagar district.<sup>17</sup>

It is not clear whether the villagers of Kardeh wrote the unanimous resolution mentioned above on a paper. But the villagers of Kallas of Taluka Indapur, Poona district wrote an agreement (*Sama-Patra*) dated May 7, 1875, the English substance of which is shown in the Report of the Commission. This agreement is rather famous and referred to by Bombay Gazetteer and Ravinder Kumar.<sup>18</sup> But it is quite interesting and reproduced as follows:

1. Fields belonging to Guzars which may have been leased to village ryots should not be cultivated hereafter. Any fields that may have been cultivated should be given up.
2. No male or female shall enter in the service of a Guzar.
3. Any person cultivating fields belonging to Guzars, or serving them, will be denied service by the village barber, washerman, carpenter, ironsmith, shoemaker, and other "Balutas" (village servants).
4. Fields belonging to persons, other than Guzars, carrying on money-lending business should not be taken on lease by any one. Fields already leased should be given up.
5. Should the village Mahars undertake to dun the ryots on behalf of Guzars, they should be refused their usual alms and bundles of Kurbi (stalks—quoter's).
6. The villagers should abide by the aforesaid conditions. If the "Mokadam" Patel joins the Guzars and other, money-lending people, his hereditary rights will be discontinued; the "Mokadam" will also not be allowed to claim his rights from the villagers, who may act in any way they please.
7. The foregoing clause applies equally to the village Priest (who is generally the Kulkarnee or village Accountant). Should he join the money-lending class of people, his claims will not be given to him; the ryots shall engage any priest they choose, and the claims of the hereditary priest will not be recognized.
8. Should the Mokadam or Priest have to undergo any expenses about the matter, or to pay any pecuniary penalties, the villagers shall subscribe to raise the sum.

All ryots shall behave in accordance with the above rules; any one acting to the contrary will neither be allowed to come to caste dinners nor intermarry amongst his own society. Such person should be considered an outcast. He will not be allowed to join the community without their unanimous consent, and will have to pay the fine which the community may inflict on him, and further to give one meal to the com-

<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Commission*, vol. I, "The Report," pp. 1-3, paras. 1-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, Appendix C, p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. XVIII, part 2, Bombay, 1885, p. 120, note 1; Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-85.

munity.<sup>19</sup> (All brackets are as shown in the Report unless otherwise mentioned.)

As is well known, any caste in India is spread over such a wide area as several districts or a province, so that when the people of a certain village alone decided to excommunicate a certain person from his caste, such decision would be hardly effective. Therefore it is not clear why the people of Kallas added the last clause to expel such a person from his caste who would violate the agreements. At any rate these agreements show that the immigrant money-lenders were to be totally boycotted, other indigenous money-lenders were to be refused the cultivation of their lands, even the headman and accountant of the village should be denied their rights and claims if they joined the money-lenders, and any villager who defied the agreements should be denied the service of village-servants. And a letter written by several persons of this village a week after the resolution states, "All the villagers have given up cultivating the fields belonging to Guzars, and no one is now performing their service."<sup>20</sup>

This boycott, however, did not last long but failed soon. There were two causes for the failure. The first was the non-cooperation of a nearby village named Akola. Soon after the boycott was started, a Gujarati money-lender of Kallas requested the headman of Akola to send two persons to serve him. Although the Akola headman was aware of the state of affairs at Kallas, he accepted the request for unknown reason, and sent two persons of his village to serve the Gujarati. Though the headman, accountant and watchman of Kallas warned and threatened to beat the two persons, they continued to serve the money-lender,<sup>21</sup> while several persons of Kallas sent a letter of protest to the headman and people of Akola without effect.<sup>22</sup>

The second cause for the failure was the intervention of the police. Some time after the beginning of the boycott, the Superintendent of Police visited the Kallas village, 'advised' the villagers to keep their relations with the village money-lenders as usual, and 'directed' them to subscribe to a written declaration to that effect. Accordingly 141 villagers, 'in obedience to that suggestion,' agreed to abide by the 'instructions' of the Superintendent of Police and passed a written declaration to give up the boycott.<sup>23</sup> The population of this village was 1,066 at the census of 1881, indicating that there were more or less two hundred families. So if we may take each of the 141 villagers to have represented a family, that means that more than half the villagers gave up the boycott of the village money-lenders following the 'advice' and 'instruction' of the police.

It is not clear how many villages started this type of boycott at that time. But as will be pointed out later there were some villages where this type of boycott was going on even after the Deccan Riots.

<sup>19</sup> *Report of the Commission*, vol. II, Appendix C, pp. 208-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210, Substance of a Letter addressed to the Patel and Kulkarnee of Palasdeo by certain villagers of Kasba Kallas.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211, Substance of Statements given by Narayen Mhatarji and Hari Mhaloo, under date of 18th May 1875, before the Mamlatdar of Indapur.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210, Substance of a Letter addressed to the Mokadam Patel and the Village Community of Akola by four persons of the village of Kallas on behalf of the whole community.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209, Substance of a "Kabulayat" or Declaration made by some of the villagers of Kallas before the Chief Constable of Indapur.

At any rate it must be borne in mind that under the Raiyatwari Settlement the rural debt was usually not incurred to the village as a whole but to the individual household; not only the amount of debt differed from a debtor to another, but also there were not a few villagers who were free from any debt; moreover some of the village officials and peasants were often doing small scale lending of money and grain. The examples of boycott given above clearly show that in these villages, notwithstanding the economic differentiations among the villagers, all of them, whether vitally involved in debt or not, were combined in boycott, when the serious problem faced by many of them reached a certain unbearable point. Incidentally it may be presumed that this much territorial cohesion more or less continued latently in the Maharashtrian villages long after the Deccan Riots.

### III. Peasant Uprisings and Security Power

Some days after the first uprisings in Supa and several villages of Poona district were suppressed by the police, the District Magistrate reported to the Police Commissioner, "I find the greatest difficulty in obtaining any evidence against the rioters. The whole country appears to be in league against the money-lenders. I have tried and punished about thirty persons in whose possession stolen property was discovered, and at present we have a very large number of prisoners in custody."<sup>24</sup> This indicates that in the villages where the uprisings had taken place, there was visible solidarity among the rural folks, who were reluctant to give their evidences to the police. Perhaps because of this, the Report of the Commission, despite its voluminousness, is often vague regarding the actual processes of the riots. But those of several riots are fairly clear in the Report. It shows that in some cases the people of several villages instantly gathered together and attacked certain money-lenders; but more often the riots seem to have taken place on the basis of individual villages: village-wise uprisings. We may show six cases of the riots as follows which are comparatively clear in their processes:

1. The Alligaon Village of Taluka Bhimtadi, Poona District. In this village about two hundred people from surrounding five villages assembled, headed in some instances by their Patel and village police (perhaps village watchman), and demanded their bonds from the money-lenders of this village with whom they had dealings. The Police Patel of this village, however, with the assistance of some of his villagers, arranged to drive away the assembly, who, after threatening the money-lenders with another visit, eventually dispersed. The villagers of Alligaon itself did not join in the attempt to make a disturbance on this occasion.<sup>25</sup>
2. The Rahu Village of the above *taluka*. This was a small village of about 500 population. A Marwari money-lender of this village was continually threatened by the villagers, and his bonds demanded. He refused to give them up, and ran away to a nearby town. Shortly afterwards he returned to Rahu with carts to take away his property and family to the town, but the villagers headed by the Police Patel, refused

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2, Extract from Letter No. 736 of the District Magistrate of Poona, dated 20th May 1875, to the address of the Police Commissioner, S.D.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, Extract from Letter No. 697, dated 1st June 1875, from the District Superintendent of Poona, to the address of the District Magistrate of Poona.



to allow the carts into the village, and turned them away, and told the Marwari if he showed his face in the village they would kill him. The people refused to listen to one or two police who were present, and said they were only merchants' sepoys and could not interfere with them. The Marwari remained at the town, while the villagers robbed his house. When the Superintendent of Police went to this village for enquiry after some time, the villagers were still very insubordinate.<sup>26</sup>

3. The Pimpalgaon Village of the above *taluka*. This was also a small village of about 500 population. The leader of the riot was a man called 'an old offender.' The villagers for some time annoyed the merchants by throwing carcasses of dead animals and other filth over the walls into their houses, and first took away bonds from small money-lenders. After some days they went to a Brahmin money-lender and demanded their bonds. He refused to give them, whereupon he was threatened with having his house set on fire. So he ran to a town to ask police assistance. The Police Patel of this village, who did not participate in the riot, was also threatened and abused, and was stoned on his way to report the disturbance to Police Superintendent. When the Superintendent came to the village for enquiry, the villagers were as insubordinate as they dared be.<sup>27</sup>

4. The Dhamareh Village of Taluka Sirur, Poona District. Neither the population nor the leader of riot at this village is mentioned in the Report. The houses of two Marwari money-lenders in different parts of the village were simultaneously attacked, bonds forcibly stolen, and the Marwaris stoned. One old Marwari had his leg broken by a stone flung at him, and was dragged inside his house by the rioters, the doors shut, and house set on fire. The old man was saved from being burnt to death by some people rushing in by the back way and pulling him out. Both his house and the other Marwari's were burnt down, and everything they possessed was destroyed. When the Chief Constable went to the village for investigation, he was threatened, and not allowed to carry on his work. So a party of 25 Poona Horse was rushed to the village. Twenty-five persons were arrested.<sup>28</sup>

5. The Kukrur Village, Satara District. The description of the riot that took place at this village is the most detailed of all the riots shown in the Report. This was a village of moderate size containing perhaps 150 to 200 houses. Here there was a Gujarati merchant, doing money-lending business with people of many of the surrounding villages, and 108 persons of Kukrur were indebted to him. After the Gujarati attached houses and property of two of the villagers, the villagers started annoying him, and on September 10 at night assembled at the outskirts of the village, and attacked the Gujarati shop. Having been forewarned, the money-lender got the Revenue Patel of the village to sleep with him, but this was the only assistance given him by the village officials. The Police Patel declined to help him by complaining of a sore foot, and two sepoys of the village police station tried to make some arrangements for defending the house, but in the end did nothing at all.

The rioters divided themselves into several groups; one group was set to break

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4, Extract from Letter No. 745 of the District Superintendent of Poona, dated 7th June 1875, to the address of the District Magistrate, Poona.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

into house from the front, while another group was posted near the back door, and the rest were stationed at the various approaches to prevent any interference from without. The house was broken into by the front door and windows. The Gujarati and his family accompanied by Revenue Patel managed to escape through the mob at the back into the adjoining house, and thence to that of a neighbour. The mob then tore up the account-books, piled them on the floor, poured oil on, and set fire to them. They then plundered the house and shop, which were soon completely burnt out. On this riot forty-one villagers were arrested: twenty-four Kunbis (peasants), six ropemakers, four potters, one carpenter, barber, priest (temple-attendant), quarryman, muslim hawker, leather-worker, and Mahar (menial). Hence the riot was described as 'a general combination of all castes and professions against him (the Gujarati).' Fifteen Kunbis out of twenty-four belonged to village headman's families, while three of those arrested were not indebted to the Gujarati. But no one from other villages appeared to have participated in this riot. One leader was a ropemaker, and another was a potter.<sup>29</sup>

6. The Ghospuri Village of Taluka Parner, Ahmadnagar District. The above five cases have been drawn from reports written by Magistrates or Police Superintendents. The riot at Ghospuri is described from the evidence of a Brahmin money-lender's son whose house was threatened with attack. Four Brahmin (Kulkarni) brothers residing together in one house and one Gujarati merchant were doing money-lending in this village. A son of one of the Brahmin brothers gave the following evidence. One or two days after a stalk-stack and six ploughs in his field were burnt, the ryots of the village assembled near the village temple, and then proceeded to his house. While his father had gone to Ahmadnagar, the witness and his uncles were at home. They closed the house, and the witness stood in its front, and met the villagers who told him to get his uncle from the house and return to them their bonds. He requested them to wait until the return of his father as the bonds were with him, and he promised them to obtain the consent of his father to give back the bonds. The ryots then went away to the Gujarati's house, attacked it, and destroyed the bonds before him. Meanwhile his uncle secretly went to a nearby village to report the matter to the Chief Constable. The witness himself also sent a man to his father to inform him of the details. Next day the Chief Constable arrived at the village and arrested all the ryots who had been sitting in dunning near his house. On the following morning his father also came back with the Inspector of Police.<sup>30</sup>

We shall discuss several relevant points mainly on the basis of the above examples. First, whereas there were cases like that of Alligaon, where people of several villages joined together in attacking certain money-lenders, the riots seem to have taken place more often on the village-wise basis. The case of Dhamareh is vague, but the other four cases conform the point. Moreover, the fact that the villagers of Alligaon itself did not participate in the riot also indicates that the village had some territorial unity.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12, Memorandum of the Riot at Kukrur, in the Shirala Petha, Satara District, by Mr. Shewan, the Magistrate in charge of the Taluka.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71, Abstract of Evidence taken by the Commission in Disturbed Villages.

Second, it does not seem, however, that all the people of the village where an uprising took place joined in it. To be sure, there were instances where more than one thousand, five hundred or three hundred persons assembled together in uprisings.<sup>31</sup> But the people of five villages who threatened to attack the money-lenders at Alligaon were about two hundred in number; it seems to be too small a number even if only for the male adults of the five villages. Again in a large town of Talegaon of Taluka Sirur, with a population of more than six thousand, the people who assembled together to demand the bonds from money-lenders were only about fifty.<sup>32</sup> And then on the riot at the Kukrur village of Satara, the Magistrate reported, "some of the others denied they knew anything about it, though they were in their houses close by the whole night."<sup>33</sup>

There may be pointed out two possible reasons for the state of affairs that not all the villagers participated in the uprising while the village usually was the territorial unit for it. First was the fact that there was a great economic differentiation among the rural folk; many were more or less indebted to money-lenders, while some others were free from it, or sometimes doing small money-lending business for themselves. Although there are cases such as that of Kukrur where some persons free from debt were involved in the riot, or at least were arrested, most of the rioters seem to have been actually indebted to the money-lenders whom they attacked. For instance in the Mandavgaon village of Poona, where the rioters took away the bonds from village money-lenders, amounting to Rs. 6,000, they were "handed to various villagers according to name, and by them either torn or kept."<sup>34</sup> Moreover it may be added that not all the debtors seem to have participated in attacking the money-lenders to whom they owed money. For instance, in the case of Kukrur as shown above, 108 villagers were indebted to the Gujarati money-lender, while only thirty-eight of them were arrested for the outbreak.

The second possible reason may be found in the very delicate position of village officials such as headmen and accountants. Whereas the people of five villages who assembled to attack the money-lenders at Alligaon as well as the people of Rahu were led by their headmen, the riots at Pimpalgaon and Kukrur were guided by persons who did not belong to headman's families, and there as well as at Alligaon the headmen, on the contrary, protected the money-lenders or reported the disturbances to the police. The position of village officials was economically delicate. While not a few village officials or their family-members were indebted to money-lenders as shown in the case of Kukrur on the one hand,<sup>35</sup> on the other many other village officials were doing money-lending business on their own account as best demonstrated by the Kulkarnis of Ghospuri.<sup>36</sup>

Their legal position was more delicate. Although their post was rotated by heredity among certain families, they were at the lowest ladder of the administrative set-up paid and maintained by the government rather than they were the representatives of the villagers.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6 (Karathi), p. 8 (Kalgaon, Gargaon, and Pimpalgaon).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> See Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-50; Charlesworth, "The Myth of the Deccan Riots," *op. cit.*, pp. 412-13.

<sup>36</sup> See the names indicating Patels, Kulkarnis and their families as shown in the columns for creditors in ten villages of Ahmadnagar district in *Report of the Commission*, vol. II, Appendix C, pp. 96-167; and also see the Awatees among the money-lenders at Parner, *ibid.*, pp. 180-92.

Especially the headmanship was divided into Revenue Patel and Police Patel, who were obliged to carry on the official functions of the government at the village level.<sup>37</sup> So long as they were bound by the legal position, it must have been extremely difficult or exceptional for them publicly to join or lead the uprisings of the villagers.

The two reasons above described, however, do not seem to explain satisfactorily why the territorial cohesiveness of the village was less manifest in the actual uprisings than in the boycott movement against the money-lenders, for we cannot presume that the economic condition among peasants was more differentiated and the economic and legal position of village officials was more delicate in villages where the riots took place than in villages where only the boycotts occurred.

In the ultimate analysis, the preparedness of security power to crush the uprisings seems to have mattered most. As was shown above, the people of Rahu, Pimpalgaon and Dhamareh showed intense hostility to the police. In the town of Talegaon Munsif (low class judge) "was afraid of his Court being attacked and plundered."<sup>38</sup> But during the Deccan Riots no government office was ever attacked by the people; the people so much feared the security power of the government, which mobilized not only the ordinary police but also the military force. They not only suppressed the actual riots but also prevented the popular discontentments from developing into uprisings.<sup>39</sup> Thus it was stated that "besides actual rioting there were numerous gatherings which were prevented from coming to violence by the timely arrival of the police or military."<sup>40</sup> Many villagers, even if vitally involved in debt, must have refrained themselves from partaking in the riots for the fear of the security power, and hence the territorial unity of the village was less evident in the actual uprisings than in the negative boycotts.

#### IV. Conclusion

After the riots were crushed, people of some villages were carrying on the boycott of money-lenders. For instance, a member of the Commission stated that "the villagers, after the riots, passed prohibitory rules as regards social matters, against the Marwari and Guzar sowkars, e.g., no barber or a washerman, etc., was to give his services to them, and in these arrangements the leading men of the community took part publicly."<sup>41</sup> But it is difficult to presume that this kind of boycott went on for any long period of time, when we remember what happened with the boycott at the Kallas village.

In many villages it appears that the amount of debt of the peasants to immigrant money-lenders at least was more or less reduced during and after the Deccan Riots. In villages like Ghospuri, people showed the least intention of renewing the bonds they had taken away from their money-lenders. They said, "Now our friends have gone to jail.

<sup>37</sup> See Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-50.

<sup>38</sup> *Report of the Commission*, vol. II, Appendix C, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> When the people of nearby villages coming to Talegaon town to demand the bonds from the money-lenders therein heard on the way that people of other village had been arrested, they instantly turned back to their villages (*ibid.*, p. 5). The boycott against money-lenders at Parner was also prevented by the police from developing into an uprising (*ibid.*, p. 66).

<sup>40</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. XVIII, part 2, *op. cit.*, p. 122, note 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Report of the Commission*, vol. I, Memorandum by Mr. Shambhuprasad Laxmilal, p. 1.

why should we incur fresh obligations?" They considered that the punishment had made them 'quits.'<sup>42</sup> In some of the affected villages *panchayats* were formed by the villagers to arbitrate the reduction of debt to money-lenders.<sup>43</sup> Again, "from many villages the Marwari money-lenders fled on the first news of the outbreak. In other villages they opened negotiations with their debtors for a general reduction of their claims, and in some cases propitiated their debtors by easy settlements."<sup>44</sup>

Following the recommendations of the Commission, the Government of India amended the Code of Civil Procedure in 1877, and enacted the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act in 1879, which extended the period of limitation, prohibited the attachment and auction of farming tools and cattles as well as unmortgaged lands, exempted the debtors from being imprisoned for debt, enabled them to be declared as insolvents, and extended the judicial and arbitrating facilities into the countryside.<sup>45</sup>

In short, the peasants in the Deccan maintained to a remarkable extent the latent cohesiveness of their villages which apparently had gone away long ago. And when the problem of rural indebtedness became extremely serious and the popular resentment towards the money-lenders rose to an extraordinary degree during 1873 and 1875, they manifested their solidarity, organized the total boycott movements against money-lenders in many villages, and sometimes burst into popular uprisings. This series of unhappy events caused not a little hardship both to the convicted rioters and to the affected money-lenders. But it disclosed the major agrarian problems of the region accumulated under the long British rule, and awoke the public opinion about them for the years to come.

(November 25, 1975)

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, Appendix C, p. 70.

<sup>43</sup> Catanach, "Agrarian Disturbances in Nineteenth Century India," *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. XVII, Bombay, 1884, p. 319; vol. XVIII, part 2, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XVIII, part 2, pp. 128-31.