Maharashtra : Society and Culture

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Foreword

Maharashtra : Society and Culture is a collection of my research articles presented in seminars, conferences and journals in the last few years. Particularly between 1984-2000.

I hope that they would be of some help to the scholars working on Medieval History of India.

I am deeply obliged to Shri Dattatreya Pashte of the Diamond Publication, Pune, for undertaking the publication of this book. Many thanks to his team of workers for their co-operation in bringing out this publication at a record time.

Pune
1 Dec. 2007

A. R. Kulkarni

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1

The Maratha *Baluta* System

The village servants in the medieval Maratha country were known as *balutedars* and the wages/or grain-share which they received for their services to the members of the village community, was called *baluta..*[1] This system, it may be said, is not peculiar to the Maratha country, as we find similar systems under different nomenclature prevailing throughout India in medieval times and continuing even under the British rule.[2] The emergence of a class of village servants coincides with the beginning of the early settlements ot farmers. It developed and became more organized after the second urban decay (300-1000 AD), as the jobless artisans of the deserted urban areas migrated to rural areas to seek their livelihood. The expanding villages with their growing requirements absorbed them in their fold without much difficulty as the farmers needed the services of a carpenter, a black-smith, a potter, an astrologer for carrying out their routine agricultural operations. With a view to tying them down to the village and preventing their frequent migrations in search of livelihood, the village communities assured them a definite annual income from the agricultural production of the village in proportion to their services.[3] Thus the artisans became village servants and formed an important element of the social organization of medieval India. The account of the establishment of Murud, a village in Konkan, mentions how provisions were

made to accomodate the *balutedars* called the privileged persons in the precincts of the village.[4]

Whether the system was Dravidian or Aryan in its origion has not so far been unanimously decided by the scholars. B.H. Baden Powell (1841-1901), a civil servant in the Punjab (1861-1889) who had done pioneering work on the Indian village communities, argued that the institution of village in India was more likely an aboriginal or Dravidian settlement that existed in a tribal society, before the arrival of the Aryans. He maintained that the idea of villages with a grain-share from each cultivator was Dravidian and the Aryans either copied it from them, or found it in existence in India on their arrival.[5]

A. S. Altekar, who had done pioneering work on the village communities in Western India, however, did not agree with Baden Powell. His main thesis was that the system was in vogue in North India before the Christian era or before the Dravidian influence. He maintained that the payment of the village servants in kind was mentioned in the *Arthashastra* (4th BC) of Chanakya, wherein it was instructed to the tax collectors that they should avoid collecting grain at the bottom of the harvest heaps, so that it may be utilized in making offerings to gods and ancestors in feeding cows or for the subsistence of mendicants and village servants, *grambhrutaka.* Altekar further discusses the origin and prevalence of the *baluta* system at length with the help of ancient texts.[6]

Whatever may be its origin, it seems that the *baluta* system merely was not in existence but was also well organized and as compared to the other parts of the country, well preserved in the Maratha country, since the early medieval period. The earliest reference to the term *baluta* is found in the premier Marathi work of the 13th century, the *Jnyaneshwari* composed by the saint Jnyaneshwar. *Venabai,* the disciple of the saint-poet *Ramadas* of the 17th century, also mentions the term *baluta* in her work, *Seeta Swayamvar.*[7]

Several attempts have been made by the scholars to explain the term *baluta* etymologically. According to some, it is a compound Sanskrit word *bali* (the ryot) and *apatya* (progeny). By tradition, the village is regarded as 'cow', and its agricultural production as the udder of the cow, called *kaas.* The *balutedars* are regarded as the calves of the cow, drawing at the udder of their mother, the village i.e. 'cow' for their livelihood. The *balutedars* are, therefore, classified under the three *kaas* (rows) of the village the *thorli* (the major), the *madhli* (the middle one), and lastly the *dhakati* (the minor or the youngest). This classification is based on the amount of agricultural produce shared by them for their services to the individual ryots.

According to some other scholars, *baluta* is a corrupt form of a Kannad word, a compound of *'bal'* (right hand side) and *kud* (give) meaning thereby that the *baluta* was given as the privilege of the right hand.[8] Some scholars consider it as derived from the Sanskrit term *balwant,* the strong officer or a person.[9]

Bare Balute

The numerical term.*bara* (twelve) is traditionally prefixed to *balute* in the Maratha country and many parts of the South like Karnatak, Andhra and Tamilnadu, particularly during the British priod.[10] Jnyaneshwar, the poet, however, mentions the number as eighteen in one of the verses of his *gatha*[11] but does not give any details. In the initial stages, the number of *balutedars* appears to be only five, and they were designated as *panchkaruk* and that village was called *panchkaruki*[12] It included the potter, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the barber and the washerman. The number of *balute,* though traditionally *bara,* always varied, from time to time and place to place depending upon the requirements and size of the popultion of the village. An analysis of documents covering a period from the 15th to the 18th centuries would give us an idea of the varying number of

balutedars belonging to different professions attending the *gotsabha (majalis)* or the village councils, and endorsing the decisions of the council by affixing the symbols of their profession on the *nivadapatra (mahajar)* or decision.[13] Whether the number *of balutedars* attending the council was more or less than twelve, the term *bara-balute* was used in common parlance or even in some documents. For instance, under *barabaite* in a document of 1649 dealing with the cases of partition of *deshmukhi watan* of Kari (Poona district) only eight professional *balutedars* were represented, and as some professions were represented by more than one individual, the total number of *balutedars* became twenty one.[14]

The *gotsabha,* in some disputes, instead of inviting all the *balutedars* called only those who were directly concerned with it. The village *mahar* was traditionally in charge of fixing the boundaries of villages. Whenever there was any dispute regarding the settlement of boundaries of two villages, the *gotasabha* used to consult the *mahar balutedars* of the disputed villages, before announcing its decision.

In the medieval period, boundary disputes of villages were very common. While settling the boundary dispute in 1618, between *qasba* Supe and *mauja* Vadhana of Pune *pargana* six *vritikar mahars (watandar mahars)* of the neighbouring villages were specially invited as they were the most knowledgeable persons in this respect.[15] A document of 1639 specifically mentions that while deciding the issue of *Patilki* of a village, the decision should be taken only after consulting the near relations and the *balutedars (bap, bhau va balute,*).[16] Similarry in a dispute of 1643 between the two families of potters of *qasba* Khed, regarding seniority and the claims associated with, it was ordered that as the *balutedars* of the village know all the details of the case, the decision should be taken only after consulting them.[17]

The office of *kulkarni* and *jyotishi* or *joshi watan* of a village

Tandali held by one Kumaji fell vacant since the extinction of that family for a long time. The villagers, in the absence of a permanent *mirasdar kulkarni* and *joshi,* appointed a *mutaliq* (deputy) to perform the duties of that office. Later on, all the relations *(bap bhau), bara-balute* and the *mirasdar kunbi* (peasant proprietors) decided to sell the *kulkarni* and *jyotishi watan* along with the house of the extinct family of the village to the two sons of Sondev for 150 hons with profit, and make him *mirasbhau.* This was accepted by the *pargana* officials, *deshmukh* and *deshpande.* This *mahajar* of *mirasipatra* of 1670 is important in several respects. It was attended by the *'bap-bhaus'*, the *watandars,* the *balutedars* and the *mirasdars* of the various villages in the vicinity of the village Tandali. It confirmed the medieval practice of the creation of village officials by the village communities, and that the government had no right to interfere with their privilege. An interesting feature of this *mahajar* is that it mentions the age of most of the persons - attending the council. One finds persons with the maximum age of 115 years (the document says "born at the time of Salabat Khan and the minimum of 20 years". There were 64 persons present in the council and the age of 32 persons was recorded in the mahajar.[18]

A *got mahajar* of 1735 deciding the dispute of the *patilki watan* of Malavali of tarf Kanadkhore, divides the sixty two members present in two categories: (i) *Hajir Got* of Kanadkhore *tarf,* including *Deshmukh, Sarkhot, Deshpande, Mokadam, Patil, Chaugule-total 42;* and (ii) *Baje Watandar* of the *tarf* which included the *balutedars*, 22 in number. The importance of this document is that the *balutedars* have been recognized as *watandars (baje watandar).*

Balutedars had, sometimes, to say on oath, whether the contents of any old *mahajar* shown to them were correct or otherwise. An unpublished document of 1724 reports the cases of a decision taken 300 years ago, and the copy of the document

shown to the *balutedars* to trace the names of their ancestors therein, was also 150 years old. The *balutedars* declared that the claimant of the *mokadami* of the village was unnecessarily fighting for the *watan* which did not belong to him. This opinion of the *balutedars,* was accepted by the Peshwa.[19] A number of documents both published and unpublished can be cited to establish the continuity of this system throughout the eighteenth and also under the British rule in the nineteenth century. The growing urbanization, and the new vistas of employment opened by industrialisation, undermined the significance of the *baluta* system, particularly in those villages which were in the proximity of cities and towns. The numerous surveys conducted by the anthropologists and the reports prepared by the early British officers for revenue administration help us in understanding the changing picture of the structure and functioning of the age-long Maratha Institution. Suffice here to make a reference to a few modern works of the anthropologists which would serve our purpose.

Thomas Coats, a surgeon by profession, conducted a survey in 1819 of a little 'township of Lony' a village 12 miles to the north-east of Pune towards Ahmadnagar side. He enumerated the population of the twelve (actually thirteen) hereditary servants i.e. *balutedars* of Loni. The *balutedars* were *the joshi,* the carpenter, the iron-smith, the washerman, the barber, the potter, the silver-smith, *the gurav* (dresser of idols), the *kolee* (water-earner), the shoe-maker, the *mang* (rope-maker), the *mahar* (watchman) and lastly, the *mulana* (Mahommadan sacrificer). The iron-smith *(lohar)* and rope-maker *(mang)* were non-residents of Loni, the *kolee* had no house of his own, but was a resident living in the house of a cultivator. It means that the *lohar* and the *mang* had not enough work in Loni, to maintian themselves on the *balutas* and other minor jobs, but the village community had recognized them as its *balutedar.* Another significant point is that except the *mahar,* and the *chamhar*

(shoemaker) all others had only one house-one family: but the number of *mahar* families was 13 living in 13 houses, the Joshi had 3 families living in 3 houses, and the single hutment of the shoe-maker was shared by two families. Of the thirteen families of *mahars,* all could not be *balutedars* at one and the same time, but would be serving the village by rotation, and the rest might be seeking employment elsewhere. The three brahman families were holding the offices of *kulkarni* and *joshi* together, and they too must be serving the village by rotation. The total number of houses in Loni in 1819 was 107 shared by 130 families, with a total population of 557, of which the number of *balutedar* families was 26 with a total population of 109 living in 24 houses. This means that the 26 families of *balutedars* were serving 130 families of Loni in 1819, a fairly large number compared to the requirements of the village.[20]

When G. S. Ghurye,the social-anthropologist of Bombay resurveyed the same village Loni (now called Lonikand) after 125 years he was surprised to find the existence of the *baluta* system in Loni in a skeleton form. Howevr, he was not optimistic about its continuance for a long time, as the villages were not entirely depending on it now.[21]

Thomas Marshall, another British officer, was simultaneously preparing 'a statistical account of *the pergunna* of Jumboosur (Jambusar) in south Gujrat, where the *baluta* system was known as *wusway* or village establishment.[22]

Iravati Karve and Y.B. Damle of the Deccan College, Pune, selected four different types of villages of Maharashtra with a view to studying the group relations in village community. As this study discusses the place of the age-long *baluta* system in a modern village, it helps us to understand the various phases of social history. The *baluta* system is studied here as a part of the economic relationship based on the economic interdependence of servants and masters.[23]

As regards the decline of this system, it is maintained that

'the rise of market towns selling ready made goods, and the possibility of Industrial employment have dealt a blow to the *balutedari* system'. The study, however, revealed at the time of enquiry (1961-63) that this system was not only found in all villages, but was felt to be useful and necessary by both *balutedars* and non-balutedars. The majority found this system to be convenient because they were receiving services without having to pay in cash, and many could acquiesce in this system because it was traditional. The study, thus concludes with the remark, 'the *baluta* system reveals interdependence of various castes. But this is fixed in a frame-work of social status obligations and rights which reflect great social inequalities and not free social intercourse'.[24]

Trimbak Narayan Atre, a revenue official in the service of Bombay Government in the late 19th century, collected a good deal of information about the structure and functioning of the villages which he visited as a part of his offical duty. He made good use of the training which he had received under Enthoven, the superintendent of the Ethnographical Survey, Bombay Presidency, in analysing the information which he had collected. He published the material in a book form in 1915 under the title *'Gaogada' or* "Notes on rural Sociology and village problem with special reference to Agriculture'. It contians a full chapter on the system of village servants as it existed in the Maratha country in the early decades of the present century. This book has been considered by scholars as the best piece of literature in Maruthi on sociology.[25]

Classification

Traditionally, the twelve *balutedars* are grouped under three rows called *kaas* or *oal* or *olee,* perhaps on the basis of the importance attached to their services to the village community. These three rows are mentioned, perhaps for the first time in a document of 1799 belonging to Saswad.

a) *Thorali kaas*	:	(major row) *Sutar, Lohar, Mahar,* and *Mang* (4)
b) *Madhali kaas*	:	(middle row) *Kumbhar, Chambhar, Parit,* and *Nhavi* (4)
c) *Dhakali or Dhakati*	:	(minor row) *Bhat* (bard), *Mulana, Gurav* and *Koli* (4)

This grouping, however, was not uniform throughout the Maratha country. For instance, in the Indapur *pargana,* the *chambhar* was placed in the first row by shifting the *mang* from there to the second row; and in the third row, the *bhat* was removed and an addition of three more servants—the *sonar,* the *joshi* and the *ramoshi-was* made to the *dhakati* or third row, thus making its strength five, and the total number of balutedars fourteen instead of the traditional twelve.

It is quite clear, from the analysis of the documents regarding the *baluta* system, that there-was no fixed number of *balutedars,* it varied from village to village depending on the requirements of individual villages. A professionl was admitted to the class of *baluta* only after the approval of the village community. Because once he was admitted he became entitled to many privileges as a member of the community. Thus, like other offices, the office of *baluta,* also called *watan* was created and recognized by the village community. Similarly, there was no fixed grouping of the *balutedars* as such, as we do not find much reference to such grouping in historical documents, except one of Saswad of the 1799.

In the report of R.N. Goodine on the village community of Ahmednagar district, the division of the *balutedars* in three rows called *kaas* or *olee* is mentioned. Again, in some lists the *watandars* or village officers like the Patil, the Kulkarni and the Chaugula (the assistant of Patil) are included in the list of *balutedars.* However many *mahajars* or *nivadpatras* specifically mention these classes or groups of village communities like the *watandars,* the *mirasdars* and the *balutedars* separately; it would

be, therefore, better not to include them under the class of *balutedars.* The village officers also required the sanction of the entire village community whenever a new officer was created, and these officials also enjoyed certain privileges like the *balutedars,* or in other words, they were maintained by the village community out of its own income. All these officials and professionals may therefore, be put under one category, 'the village servants'.

A Russian scholar A.I. Chicherov, in his study of 'Indian Economic Development in the 16th-18th centuries', tries to relate the patriarchal agriculture with the domestic industries, which was the traditional form of economic organization of handicraft production in India during the medieval period. The principal feature of this organization, he writes, "was that the craftsmen were maintained by the community receiving from it remuneration in kind for the services rendered": According to him the traditional division of *balute* in three groups shows that it corresponded to the actual contribution an artisan made to the villagers' productive life and did not correspond to the social and material standing of the *balutedar.*[26]

One would agree with his assessment of the *baluta* system that it was independent of the social heirarchy based mainly on caste. The main criterion was the priority which the cultivator gave to the services of a particular village servant, whether his services were absolutely required for agricultural production. For instance, the earnings of a goldsmith may be higher than that of a carpenter, or a *mahar,* but in the hierarchy of the village community based on services, the gold-smith would always stand at the lowest rung of the ladder.

However, these balutedars, could be better classified on the basis of the nature of their services to the cultivators and the village community as a whole under the following three categories :

(i) *Village artisans :*
carpenter, black-smith, barber, washerman, shoemaker, rope-maker, gold-smith, etc.

(ii) *General or menial servants :*
mahar, taral (baggage carriers), ramoshi (village guard), koli (water carrier), etc. and

(iii) *Religious servants :*
joshi, gurav, thakur (priest of tribes), jangam (priest of lingayat community), and mulana (servant of the muslim community).[27]

Bara Alute : The term *aluta* or *alutedar* is not found in the historical documents, but in common parlance we do find a distinciton between the regular or effective village servants, the *balute* and the irregular or occasional or non-effective village servants, the *alute.* The term *karu* (artisans) and *naru* (village servants secondary to *baluta* or *karu)* are also used as synonyms of *baluta* and *aluta* respectively. However, there was no fixed division of village servants as *balute* and *alute* as we often find artisans moving from one group to another according to the requirements of the village community. The only difference between the two was that the *balutedars* as recognized members of the village, were entitled to all privileges accruing to that office, whereas the *alutedars* belong to the category of *uparis,* a group of workers who have no locus standi in the village organization. According to Molseworth, the term *alute* is possibly a mere alliterative derived from *balute.* Wilson considers *alute* as a collective designation of the persons whom it was customary in some parts of the Deccan to retain as village servants in addition the *balute.*[28]

The twelve *alutedars,* enumerated by Grant Duff, on the basis of information that he collected at Satara while he was working there as Political Agent (1818-1822), were: the *Sonar,* the Jangam, the *bhat* or *thakur,* the *koli,* the *taral*

or *yeskar (the* gate-keeper or the porter of the village), the *mali* (the gardener), the *ramoshi* or the *bhil,* the *dauarigosavi (*a religious person moving in the village for alms playing on a small tambourin), the *ghadsi* (the piper),the *tamboli* (the betel-leaves vendor),the *gondhali* (the beater of kettledrum),the *shimpi* (tailor), and lastly the teli (oil-presser); the last six are all paid in kind.

He adds further that the *dhor* (the tanner) and the *kalawantin* (the dancer and vocalist in the temple service) are sometimes mentioned in the list *olute.* He, however, sounds a note of warning that, "although the above is given on the best information I can obtain, there is a difference of opinion. There are few villages in which more than the most useful part of the *Ballowtay* and *Allowtay* are to be found and probably none in which both these establishments are complete."[29]

Duties of the *Balutedars*

The duties of the *balutedars* are indicated in many cases, by their professional or caste names. We therefore, do not get any detailed description of their duties in historical documents. However,as the early British officers were anxious to know about this system while settling the demands of the *balutedars* on the village income, they collected detailed reports from various parts of the Maratha country in this respect. For instance, the replies of Grant Duff to the 'interrogations' of Mountstuart Elphinstone, present a complete picture of the functioning of this system, Grant's report in this respect was based on oral information and observations, in the Satara Raj. It may be argued here that whatever was prevailing in Satara did not differ much in the rest of the Maratha country. To this if we add, the modern works of sociologists-anthropologists, based on field work, we get a good account of the functioning of the *baluta* system in the past and present."[0]

Grant Duff had enumerated twleve *balutedars* and twelve

alutedars who were common in most of the villages, and described their duties towards the village communities. As pointed out earlier, a hard and fast line between the two *categones-balute-alute,* cannot be drawn; it would be convenient, therefore, to consider their duties as village servants to understand the functioning of the system as a whole. In his report he discusses the powers and functions, emoluments, perquisites and the mode of their payment and how they were charged to the ryots.

i) The *Sutar* (Carpenter) : To make and repair all the wood work of the implements of husbandry free of expense to cultivators for-which he holds *inam* lands and makes *baluta* collections in kind. The wood required for making these implements was supplied by the cultivator, and if necessary, he had to supply labour also.

ii) The *Lohar* (black-smith) : To make and repair all the *inam* work. The word *inam* work means, all free services rendered to the cultivators for which he received land grant or *baluta* or both from the village community. For the blacksmith performed for the cultivator as *inam* work the cultivator had to supply iron, fuel like wood, coal, *sheni* (a lump of dried cow-dung) and a servant to the black-smith.

If any additional work beyond the *inam* work was assigned to him, the cultivator had to pay him at the market rate. In his study of the *Gaon,* the American scholar, Henry Orenstein, mentions that as there was no carpenter, the black-smith also did carpentry for which he got *baluta* for wood work. As a black-smith he did only minor repair work in iron and a little manufacturing of new implements. He also made new wooden parts for agricultural implements.

iii) The *Chambhar* (shoe-maker) : He used to supply pair of shoes to the villagers on payment but kept them repaired free, if necessary, throughout the year, as he used to receive *baluta* for such services. The cultivators supplied material to him for

stitching the leather bags *(mote)* used for drawing water from the wells to irrigate the fields, but no fees were charged, as in the case of shoes, for their repairs. He also supplied leather thongs for bullock-whips and acted as the village torch-bearer *(mashal),* as a part of his *baluta* services for which he held *inam.* These jobs continued in the *'Gaon* of Henry', referred to above, even in 1954 or so. He found the leather workers of his *Gaon,* who were atleast partly dependent on agriculture, 'fairly well off, considering their caste rank, and had been upwardly mobile in the recent past', but the ranks remained unchanged.[31]

iv) The *Mahar :* Grant Duff considers *mahar* as one of the most useful of all the village establishments. It was believed by the British officers that in Maharashtra, the *mahars* were very active, useful and intelligent race of people. According to Grant Duff, the main duties of the *mahar were* to carry the baggage of his own villagers, and of travellers, to convey all letters and papers from village to village, to carry the money sent in payment of revenue to the treasury office of the headmasters, to act as a watchman, to attend to the travellers and supply their wants, to act as a guide, frequently as a scout and spy. The *Mahars* had to guard the boundary of the village, and as pointed out before, in case of a dispute regarding the village boundary, their opinion was sought as they were the best informed villagers respecting the limits and land marks of the village boundaries. They attended the village officials like *patil* and *kulkarni* when they travelled. They acted as messengers on most occasions of the rural society. A *mahar* also acted as a grave digger and was entitled to the outer winding yarn (soot-yarn; thread) of the corpse. He was also entrusted with the job of digging the grain pits *(peva),* and as a reward for this he was allowed to take away the damaged grain.

Atre, in his book *Gaogada* gives an elaborate account of the duties of *mahar balutedar,* who was regarded as one of the *gaomokadam* i.e. the village officials. According to some, the

mahars were' the original settlers of the Maratha Country and the term *Maharasbtra* is a compound of *Mahar* and *rashtra.*. Wilson, the well-known orientalist argues that just as the country of the Gujars means Gujrat (Gurjar *rashtra),* so Maharashtra is the country of *Mahars,* a tribe still known in the province. They were regarded as *bhumiputra* (sons of the soil) in Maharashtra.[32]

Besides receiving the *baluta,* the *Mahar* enjoyed a number of privileges in the villages and also held *inam* land for the services he was rendering to the village community. This *inam* land is classified according to Grant Duff under three heads:

(i) *Maharki :* The land given for the performance of *sirkar* (government) duty generally. If a *mahar* was enjoying *mharki inam* or *watan* only then he was called *padevar* or *vrittikar (vritti* is the original Sanskrit term which was later replaced by the Arabic term *watan).*

(ii) *Hadola :* Land grant for removing and skinning the dead cattle from the village. The *mahars* were entitled to carry all the dead cattle found within their village boundaries and take the skins of cows and buffaloes, but they must return the skin of bullock to its owner .

(iii) *Hadki :* A land grant for attendance at the places of village officials, *patil* and *kulkarni.*

But this classification does not seem to be accurate. One can at the most make a distinction between mharki and hadki-hadola without separating the latter."[33]

If the *mahar* community in a village was particularly large, a senior person was selected to act as its leader called *mehtar mahar,* who was in general management of the duties of the community and also to represent it on the village council assembled to decide village disputes. According to Grant Duff, "there is a *mahar mehtar* or head of the *mahar:* who regulates the distribution of the labour and has the general management of their offices, he is selected by themselves and entitled to one ninth of the whole *mahar watan* whether of land, grain perquisite

or donation-the remaining eight-ninths are then distributed among the members of the *mahar* community"[34]

The *mahars* sometimes resented their agreements with the village officers regarding free services or *rahata mahar.* A village *patil* complained to the authorities that the *mahars* of the village were not behaving properly with him. In this, respect an agreement of 1738 between the *patil* and the *mahars of qasba* Lalgun Budhpanchagau is a very interesting one. The terms of agreement were as below:

The terms of the *Patil* were as follows :

i) *Rabata mahar* for twenty four hours throughout the year
ii) The rest of *mahars* should serve the entire *pandhari* (residents of the village) as per the orders of the *Patil.*
iv) The terms of the *Mahar* were as follows :
i) Harati *(hadki-hadola)* be enjoyed and serve the *Patil*
ii) *Maharki* be enjoyed and serve the government
iii) Collect the *baluta* as *mehatar*
iv) Collect the residues of the *peva* (grain-pit)
v) Collect *baluta* due to *mahars*
vi) *Mahars,* who are, it was believed by all, entitled to fifty two privileges *(bawana hak)*, should enjoy them. Besides this, whatever they would find lying on the *pandhari,* belonged to them.

It was also decided that the *mahar* community should supply the services of a *mahar* to the *patil* on demand; on festive occasions, he should supply a bundle of wood-fuel first and then ask for eatables; the skin of the dead cattle of the *patil, kulkarni* and *chaugula* should be returned to the owners, and in the case of the cattle of the *khot of pandhari* and the senior cultivators *(mokhtasar kulwadi),* only the skin of bullocks be given; for the *'holi'*festival, the *mahar should* bring fire to ignite the *holi* material and in return should receive half dried kernel of coconut, and *pan supari* from the *patil;* he should receive the *prasad* (sweets) at the hands of the *koli* and *ghadsi* who would receive

it from the *patil.* He should collect two *rukas* as *rakhawali* or protection charges from each shop-keeper coming to the market of the qasba.

This account of the agreement between the *patil* and the *mahars* would reveal how exploitative the *baluta* system was at the lower level. This also shows the element of feudalism that was prevailing in the medieval society. It was, but natural for the *mahars* to lodge a complaint against the *patil with* the government who in return ordered *the pargana* officials to bring about an appeasement between the two contending parties of the village.[36]

The *mabar watan* continued even during the British period by special legislation. However, Dr. B.R. Arnbedkar, the champion of the cause of the *mahars* opposed to the continuation and modification of the Bombay Presidency Hereditary Act, 1874 as far as it was related to *mabar watan.* The *mahar watan* was finally abolished in August 1959. He considered this *watan* as the greatest barrier to the progress and upliftment of the *mahar* community, the chief cause of its deterioration, killer of the ambition and self-respect of its members, and thereby making them dependent on others.[37]

v) The *Mang :* The main job of the *mang* as a *balutedar* was to supply the leather material like the ropes, the *mot* the *aasud* (bullock whip),thongs or narrow leather straps required by the cultivators as reins for fastening the plough, for tying loads of forage or fodder etc. He often did the job of *rakhawaldar* or watchman of the village property. He also participated in the various village festivals with his musical instruments like *hulgi (*a kind of tambourin) and *damdama* (kettle drum).

Grant considered the *mangs* as a hardy strong built race of men, but neither as intelligent as the *mahars,* nor as active as the *ramoshis* as village guards. The *mang* community, according to some scholars were rulers, before they were admitted to the village community.[38] However, they were not enjoying many

privileges in the village, perhaps because of their late entry into the fold of the village community.

We do come across several instances of disputes between the *mahars* and *mangs* over their *haqs* as *balutedars.* For instance, when there was a dispute between the *mahars* and *mangs* of Indapur about their rights in the village, the matter was referred to the *dharma sabha* of Paithan for decision. It was decided that the *mangs* should maintain themselves only by making ropes and other leather articles and should not interfere with the traditional right of the *mahars.*[39] Whenever there was any epidemic, to avert the calamity, a procession of vessels made of grass called *"pendyachighagar"was* organised in some villages. To *carry* the vessel, was traditionally the privilege of the *mangs,* but the *mahars* of Sasvad objected to that, and raised an issue against the *mangs.* But ultimately wiser counsels prevailed, and the young and old members of the *mahar* community collected information in this respect from four other *qasbas* in 1754 and accepted that it was the privilege of the *mangs* to carry the *pendbyachi* or *pedhyachi ghagar.*[40]

There was no dearth of causes for disputes among the different sections of the village communities. In one of the festivals of the village the male buffalo called *tonaga* was sacrificed to a deity after a long procession in the village. The *mahars,* as a matter of right carried *the pedhyachi ghagar* in front of this procession, and the *tonaga* was then sacrificed to the deity. The *Mulana,* then cut the dead body of the *tonaga* into pieces and gave the necessary permission to eat the flesh. The *mang* should take away the skin for fitting the kettle drum of the village temple. If any dead cattle was found at the *mang's* place, the *mahar* would take it away from his house. But the *mangs* of village Garade refused to accept this custom which led to the dispute between the *mahars* and the *mangs.* When a bullock was found dead in the house of a *mang,* the *mahar* started removing it, as per custom and tradition, which was objected to

by the *mang*. The *mahar,* then lodged a complaint with the village office and was told that the corpse of the bullock, should be lifted immediately by him, and its flesh be taken and the skin be kept as a deposit with the *mang*. Both of them, should then go to Poona for a verdict from the Peshwa's court. This happened in 1810.[41]

When the village council comprising the *mokadam, mahajan, shete* and other responsible members of the *qasba* Supe, found it difficult to settle the dispute between the *mahars* and *mangs* regarding their rights as *balutedars,* they referred the matter to the *dharma sabha* of Paithan for direction as per *shastras.* The *dharma sabha* pointed out the practice regarding the rights of these two communities as it was prevailing in Paithan, and after quoting the relevant lines from *dharma shastra,* advised them to follow the custom or tradition that was in vouge in their region.[42]

The *mang* was traditionally known as a *taskar* or a thief..as well as a hangman. But this must have been in the past; but it seems that since the medieval period, he was mainly engaged in rope-making..for farmers who could use them for various purposes. For this service, the mang received *baluta* payment. In some villages, the sight of a *mang* in the outskirts, was considered auspicious by the land-owners.[43]

vi) The *Kumbhar :* The *kumbhar* (potter) supplied clay vessels, water storage pots, smaller pots for grain storage, mini pots for ceremonial purposes, clay dishes used as lamps during the diwali festival for illumination and Ganesh idols to his masters free of charge in exchange of *baluta.* Travellers and government servants were also furnished with water pots, often gratis. He could earn some money by selling big vessels in the neighbouring market, or even in his village, those earthen wares which were not covered by the *baluta.*

vii) The *Nhavi :* Grant Duff gives an interesting account of the duties of the *nhavi* (barber) in the village. Besides the

exercise of his immediate profession of shaving, he acted as a beggar (free servant) to the village *brahmans,* and accompanied the *Patil* on tour to wash his clothes, tend his *gudgudee* (the huqqa) and also performed *'chumpee or shampooing'* on him after the fatigue of the day. He attended as an escort to the daughters of the *deshmukh* and the *patils* when they left their paternal residence for that of their husbands. He carried the image of *Ganesh* on the festival of *Gancsh Chaturthi* as a part of his privilege. Sometimes, his services were hired as *mashaljee* (the torch-bearer) by the towns people.

He received special payments on the occasion of the thread ceremony in his client's house, in the form of cash as well as some articles and ration in kind. The days of shaving face and tonsuring head of his clients were generally fixed, according to the convenience of each client. He also played an importnat role as negotiator in settling the marriages of boys and girls of his village on behalf of their parents. The traditional duties of the *nhavi* working on *baluta* are still carried on where the system is in vogue.[44]

viii) The *Parit :* The parit *(washerman)* performed the traditional duties in exchange of *baluta.*. They were to wash clothes on ceremonial occasions and also on the occasions of some rituals performed in the village. In case of death in any family all household clothing was washed by him. His services were required for various rituals performed at the time of weddings and sacred thread ceremonies. Besides the *baluta* payment received at the harvest, the washerman, received cooked food on bringing home the washed clothes, and if the clothes were new ones, a trifling money present from his client. According to Grant Duff, it was the washerman's duty to attend and spread the floor clothing on all great occasions of ceremony of the village and adorn the villagers in his charge with *passodis* (a large wrapping cloth worn by the Marathas, as a *shawl* around the waist) at the time of such ceremonies. "During the Bridal

Processions he attends to fan the Bride and Bridegroom which he does with a piece of cloth" [45]

ix) The *Gurav :* The *Gurav* or, the village temple priest, was the dresser of the village deities. His particular duty in exchange of *baluta* was to attend, wash, and adorn the idols in the temple and to prepare the *patravali* and *dron* (leaf-dishes and cups which the Hindus substitute for plates) on occasions of feasts. He was liable to perform the *begar* of brahmans, and attend the *kulkarni* in his tour on government duty, in the same manner as the barber attended the *patil*. They were also trumpeters by profession, and in that capacity they were employed in the Maratha armies. Besides the *baluta* payment, the gurav used to get additional income in the form of presents in cash and kind offered by the devotees to the temples on various occasions and festivals. As trumpeters they received payment in cash from those who invited them for doing this job.

The traditional duties of the temple priests were, to keep the temples clean, daily worship the deities, and to light the lamps. The leaf plates and cups were generally supplied to the brahman households in the village, but to others also on request, particularly at the time of wedding ceremonies. They carried the palanquin on the day of the village fair. The guravs like other balutedars also held some inam lands in the village for the services rendered to the village communities.[46]

x) The *Joshi* : The Joshi, to whom Marx calls calendar *brahmin,* or the village astrologer was also a village servant satisfying the spiritual requirements of the village. His main job, in exchange of the *baluta* payment was to read the almanac to the villagers and tell the auspicious time for commencing agricultural operations, for marriages, etc. He calculated the 'nativities' or time or positions of stars at the time of the birth of a child in a family for preparing its horoscope. He performed the marriage ceremony, superintened the *prayaschit* ceremony i.e. atonements necessary for readmission into caste, and assisted

in the performance of the death anniversary rituals called *shradha.* He supervised the rituals performed in the *grave yard crematorium or smashan* when the dead body was set to fire. He acted as the priest of the village households. He had to keep *the panchang* (almanac) always with him for general reference. Almanac was so important a document, that in Konkan it was publicly worshipped by carrying its procession in palanquin on the New Year's day every year in villages. The villages would offer the Joshi handful of grains when he read out the *panchang* to them in addition to the annual *baluta* payment. The big ceremonies, like marriage, sacred thread, the rituals on death, etc were performed by him by charging fees to his clients, as they were not covered by the *baluta* payment.

xi) The *Sonar :* The sonar or gold-smith was the assayer of coins as well as the maker of gold and silver ornaments of the inhabitants of the village. The major function of the *sonar* was assaying the coins, in his capacity as *potdar.* But with the establishment of the government mints, the sonar ceased to act as *potdar* and had to confine himself to the performance of minor jobs like pricking nose and ears, preparing rings, tak (images of household deities on small silver plates), bangles, etc for which the material was supplied by the clients. These jobs were covered by the *baluta* payment, but for skilled workmanship he used to charge his customers at market rates. As a member of the village community, he enjoyed some privileges sanctioned to him by the village.[47]

xii) The *Mulana :* Mulana literally means the butcher, and his official insignia, affixed on the various village councils' decisions, was knife. But besides that, he was the servant of the muslim communty of the village. The addition of *mulana* in the *baluta* system speaks for the progressive attitude of the villagers, who could accommodate, a person, into their fold, irrespective of his caste, creed or religion. It is to be noted here that while establishing a village in the Konkan region, in the early medieval

period, the leaders or promoters of the settlement assigned quarters to the *yavanas* (muslims) in the outskirts of the village which included land for building a mosque called *shunyalaya* i.e. abode of nothing.[48]

Grant Duff gives more details of the *mulana* in his MSS as well as in his history of the Marathas. He writes, "The *Moolana* so called by the Mahrattas is the *Moolla* or the Mohomedan priest and it is very strange how he is found engrafted on the *Ballotay* establishment of a Hindoo village; if on the *allotay,* which some day he ought to be, it would have been less unaccountable especially if we admit as is frequently done, that the institution of the *allotay* must have been at a period long after that of the *Ballotay* but this seems little more than conjecture." (italics mine). The *mulana* or *mulla,* was in charge of the mosques and burial places called dargas (shrines of muslim saints) of the village and managed, the affairs of the *inam* lands attached to these places of worship. He performed the ceremony at the Muslim marriages and assisted the muslim community in the performance of their religious duties. Sometimes, a *mulana* was found on the village establishment, even in the absence of any muslim household except his own. Under such circumstances, he was known to the Maratha population as the person who killed their sheep and goats when offered as sacrifices at temples or in their fields to propitiate the deities presiding over the different *sthals,* or great divisions of the village lands. A distinction between a *mulana* and a *khatik* was made; the *khatik* who was frequently mistaken for the butcher, was in fact the person who cleaned and exposed the meat for sale. The *mulana* kills the sheep for the *khatik,* who was not a *balutedar* but a seller of meat. It was the *mulana* who declared the flesh of an animal as *halal* i.e. purified and fit to be taken. Grant Duff, in this respect writes, "Some of the Mahrattas are unmindful of the ceremony but in general they professed not to eat the flesh unless the *Neyt* has been pronounced by the *Moolana* or some

Moosulman capable of repeating what renders the flesh of any animal *hullal,* or lawful to be eaten. To account for this extraordinary adoption of Mahomedan observance puzzles the Hindoos". These services he performed for the entire village community in exchange of the *baluta* payment.[49]

Alutedar

Alutedars may be regarded as the artisans or workers whose names were kept on the panel of village servants, with a view to requisitioning their services whenever necessary. The *alutedar* could enter- as *balutedar* on the village establishment, if his services were permanently required by the village. It is because of this, that we find different lists of *balutedars* in the different parts of the Maratha country. The *alutedars* were generally paid on job-basis, perhaps immediately after the performance of the job. The *alutedars* as mentioned by Grant Duff[50] were:-

(1) *The Jangam :* Jangam was the priest of the Lingayat sect, and was invariably found in the villages adjacent to the Karnatak State where the Lingayat community was found in majority. He was found in other villages as he used to supply the *bel-patri* (bel is a tree sacred to lord Shiva; *patri* means leaves) on Mondays when the Shiva god is worshipped by the Hindus, and particularly in the month of *Shravan* of the Hindu calendar. He was also employed to blow the *shankh* (the conch shell) at temples on festive occasions.

(2) The *Koli :* The koli, in the *desh* areas of the Maratha - Country was the water carrier. It was his duty to supply water to the travellers and public servants of the government coming on duty to the village. He was furnishing water to the cultivator for threshing out and cleaning the grain and was also obliged to supply water on occasions of feasting and entertainment. They supplied water for all temple ceremonies and for sweeping the village office. They were employed by most landowners on the occasions of important ceremonies like weddings, when large quantities of water were needed.[51]