

The Land System of Govinda Manikya as reflected in the Land Grants

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Govinda Manikya, a contemporary of Aurangzeb, was on the throne of Tripura for about eleven years in two terms, the first being from 1660 A. D. to 1661 A. D. and the second from 1667 A. D. to 1676 A. D. As a crown prince he used to manage the State business during the life time of his father, Kalyan Manikya (1625 A. D. to 1660 A. D.) as testified to by epigraphic evidence. Thus he ruled Tripura longer than the actual period of his reign.¹

He issued many land grants to his subjects during his tenure of Kingship. Some of the grants of Govindamanikya have been traced and published. These source materials have been used in this paper for reconstruction of the land system of Tripura as obtained during the rule of Govinda Manikya. These land grants spanned over one and a half decades from 1070 T. E. (1660 A. D.) to 1086 T. E. (1676 A. D.). All of these documents have been published with or without editing.²

Conventional pattern of draft

Without entering into technical details of his land grants, it may only be said that these are mostly copperplates, inscribed in Bengali language. They are dated in Tripura era but Saka dating is not also rare. Though differently structured according to the purpose of the grants, more or less a conventional draft of the document is followed with least variation in terminology. The land grants issued by the Manikya kings prior to and later than Govinda Manikya support our views.³

Types of Land tenure

Two broad types of land tenure can be extracted from the text of the grants - the rent free and rent paying. The *Lakhiraj* (rent free) tenure is hinted by the mention of *Brahmottar* (granted generally to learned and pious Brahmins), *Aima* (granted

generally to pious Muhammadans) and *Fakiram* (grant made to pious saintly or Muhammadans) and the idea of *Khiraj* (rent paying) tenure, though not stated explicitly can be deducted as a logical existence of the former. While 'Brahmottar' to the Brahmins implies religious and spiritual purpose, the rent free grants to the Mohammadans under '*Aima*' and '*Fakiran*' tenures may appear incongruous when this object is set forth as the cause. In other words, this evinces catholicity of mind and spirit of religious toleration on the part of a small Hindu monarch. "Let the donee enjoy and cultivate the land perpetually through successive generations and pray heavenly blessings for the donor king"—a pious wish rings in almost all the grants given under '*Aima*' and '*Fakiran*' tenures.

Revenue Divisions

From the close analysis of the grants one can discover that the whole Kingdom of Tripura was divided into several *Parganas*. These *Parganas* were treated as Revenue Divisions. In the grants under reference we come across the names of at least three *Parganas*, viz. Meherkul, Udaipur and Noornagar. The Meherkul and Noornagar *Parganas* were later included in the *Zamindari* Estate of Chakla Roshnabad, the impartiable part of Tripura Raj. The *Parganas* were divided into *Dehis* (a cluster of revenue villages). The mention of *Dehi* (Cf. Burichang dehi in the land grant of 1082 T. E.)⁴ points to it. The *Dehis* were possibly divided into *Maujas* or the revenue villages to all practical purposes. Fultali, Tetaiyada, Panchthupi, Candrapur, Khilpara, Basuapara, Sonamura deyara, Chagalnaiyya, Baurkhand, Phoolpur, Govindapur, Kandirpar, Solanal were some of the *Maujas* referred to in the grants.

These documentary materials do not throw any light further upon the nature of revenue administration of the period. The terms of *Parganas*, *Dehi*, *Maujas* and other revenue terms are only redolent of the Muslim practices in the land system of Tripura.

Classification of land

The *Maujas* mentioned in the grants namely Candrapur, Khilpara, Sonamura etc. are the villages of Hill Tripura while the rest of the *Maujas* were located in its western plains.

This is indicative that a common land system was followed in two characteristics land mass of Tripura. In the hilly portion of the Kingdom cultivable land was markedly limited, but the picture was different in the plains.

In the grants we find that the land was classified as *Hasila* (land suitable for cultivation and growing of crops) and *Jangla* or *Ajangla* (cultivable waste land covering low lying, marshy and reclaimable wood-lands).

Classification of Soil :—For the purpose of rental the land was further classified according to the quality of the soil. The soil was further classified as *Saila* (soil suitable for cultivation of *Sali*, a fine local variety of paddy) and *Burua* (soil suitable for the cultivation of Boro paddy generally grown in marshy land). Thus the classification of land and soil played a very important role in determining the basis of rental.⁵

Units of land measure :—The land grants give us an inkling of the unit of land measurement as was in vogue at that period. *Kani* (.4 acre) and *Drone* (6.4 acre) were the popular unit. Even today these units are used by the people of this land to indicate the amount of land they want to buy or they are in possession of.

Rate of Rent :— Land holdings under *Khiraj* tenure were charged with a small rate of *Maljama*. In the Mughal empire *Khiraj* was charged @ $1/3$ of the average production of crops per *Bigha* (0.33 acre) during the period of Emperor Akbar⁶ but the rate was increased by Aurangzeb upto $1/2$ of the average production. Govindamanikya fixed the highest rate of *Mal Khajana* to be 4 annas per *kani* for the land under *Khiraj* tenure.⁷ He also enjoined his successors not to enhance this rate of rental. They would forfeit their moral right of minting 'Siki' Coin in the event of any escalation of the rent.⁸

In case of *Lakhiraj* tenure he exempted donees from the collection of customary cesses. This is suggestive of the practice of *Abwabs* (cesses) as operated in the *Khiraj* tenure.

Cesses :— The grants throw light on some cesses which were paid compulsorily by the ryots of the *Khiraj* tenure in addition to normal *Mal Khajana*. The list of cesses includes "Panchapanchak, vet, Begar and Birsingha." 'Panchapanchak' means $1/5$ of the yearly revenue assessed to a plot of land which the king collected on the occasion of State festivals or other

festivals.⁹ But 'Rajgi' defines it a special cess for panchayet work.¹⁰ 'Vet' is a Hindu word which means presents. It was obligatory on the part of the subjects to offer some presents to the king during some state festivals. This may have some look of the 'Nazarana.' 'Begar' is Persian word meaning forced labour. The King enjoyed the fruits of free labour from his subjects without paying for it from public offer.

The revenue officials arranged such 'Begars', on demand by the King, for the personal service of the king¹¹; During a war it was obligatory for the subjects to help the King with weapons. This occasional cess is termed as 'Birsingha'.¹² But Cumming holds that this cess was possibly named after some revenue officials named 'Birsingha'.¹³ In the later grants of Manikya Kings it is even mentioned as 'Brisingha'.¹⁴

Land system as emerged from the Land grants

On the close examination it may be discovered that the land holdings granted to the donees varied from 3 = 20 acre to 128 acre. Some of the holdings included a mixed classification of land, both cultivable and jungle waste land, while their exclusive kind was not altogether rare. Evidences are there that the land grants issued by the earlier Kings required their renewal by the new King at the time of or shortly after his accession. These settlement under *Lakhiraj* genre conferred upon the holder of permanent and heritable right in the land. The remission of taxes and *abwabs* (customary cesses) specified in the grants indicates their general enforcement at least during the particular reference year. The land measurement and its units *drone* and *Kani* were in practice as referred to in the grants. The grantees, either under *Brahmottar* or *Aima* tenure were empowered with the ownership of land, not only to cultivate and enjoy it but also to get it cultivated and enjoyed by others. And this is suggestive of sub infeudation of land. The classification of soil constituted the basis of rental for land. In fine, it may be said that the land grants of Govindamanikya provide direct data on the land system of Tripura which certainly make the stray literary evidences not only much less vague but much more definite. The English version of the land grants is appended in Appendix I.

Appendix - I

English version of the Grants

1. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of the fierce battle, - a man with a great heart, orders in his Council at the Capital Hastinapur of the 'Sarkar' udaypur ; that for the pleasure of his adored Lord the Vishnu, on the occasion of Solar eclipse, Sri Dwij Ratnanarayan, the priest, of Mauja Candrapur of udaypur pargana be allotted the brahmottar of 20 drones of 'Sali and Baro' land for "Talapurush and Mahaannadan." Let the donee be exempted from payment of land rent and 'bhet', 'begar', 'Birsingha' etc and be allowed to enjoy the property heriditarily by cultivating it properly.

Under my seal on this day the 25th Baisaka 1070 T. E.

<i>List</i>	<i>Land</i>
<i>Aman growing</i>	
Mauja Candrapur	1/-
Khilpada	12/-
Basuapada	1/-
Sonapura	1/-
Diara	1/-
	16/-
 <i>Baro growing</i>	
Tola of Hangsadhaj of Nalgair	2/-
Tuinalia	1/-
Chagalnaia	1/-
	20/-

20 drones only.

2. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of the fierce battle, a man with a great heart, orders in his Council at the Capital of Hastinapur of the 'Sarkar' udaypur ; that Ekdil Kaji of Meherkul pargana was granted on 33 T. E. aima of $1\frac{1}{2}$ dron half 'Hasila' and half 'Jangla' land. Now on his death his brother and sons Sri Kaji Hussain and Sukkur Muhamud be granted 12 kanis of cultivable land each as aima in the Telaiada mauja. Land be cultivated in his own hand and be prayed heavenly

blessings for the donor king and be enjoyed the property with pleasure. Let the donee be exempted from payment of 'Panchapanchak' 'bhet' 'begar' etc.

Under my seal on this day the 11th Karttik 1077 T. E.

3. His Excellency Govindamanikya, the victor of the fierce battle, a man with a great heart, orders in his Capital Hastinapur of 'Sarkar' udaypur; that Abdul Gani of Mauja Phoolpur of the pargana udaypur was granted by the deceased king one dron of land, now be allotted again for the pleasure of the adored Lord, the Vishnu. Let the land be cultivated, according to the 'ferman', by using plough in his own hand and be prayed heavenly blessings for the donor king and be enjoyed the property with pleasure. Let the donee be exempted from payment of 'Bhet' 'begar', 'panchapanchak' etc.

Under my seal on this day the 25th Baisaka 1578 Saka and imitated year 1066 T. E. 8th magh 1589 Saka and 1077 T. E.

4. His Excellency Kalyan Manikyadeva, the victor of the fierce battle, a man with a great heart, orders in his Capital Hastinapur of 'Sarkar' udaypur; that Kaji Momin, Kaji Mansur, Kaji Hasan and Kaji Ali of Mauja Govindapur and Kandirpad of the pargana Meherkul be granted $5\frac{3}{4}$ (five dron and 12 kanis) of land of which 12 kanis 'Hasila' and 5 dron 'Jangla'. Accordingly their sons Jan Muhammad, Sukkur Muhammad and Husain be granted aima. Survey of the land is forbidden. Let the donee be prayed heavenly blessings for the king and enjoyed the property with pleasure and the donee be exempted from payment of 'Panchapanchak', 'bhet' 'begar' etc.

Under my seal on this day the 7th magh 1563 Saka and 1069 T. E. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva granted five dron 12 kanis 'Hasila' on 1077 T. E.

5. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of fierce battle, a man with a great heart, orders in his Council at the Capital Hastinapur, of 'Sarkar' udaypur; that for the pleasure of his adored Lord, the Vishnu, Sri Sakdev Sharma of mauja Fultali of Meherkul pargana be allotted Brahmottar of land $\frac{1}{2}$ dron cultivated land. Let the donee be allowed to enjoy the property with pleasure cultivating the land in his own hand using plough and be exempted

from payment of all other cesses like 'Panchapanchak', 'bhet', 'begar' 'Birsingha' etc.

Under my seal on this day the 11th Karttik 1079 T. E. 1st caitra 1591 Saka.

6. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of the fierce, a man with a great heart, orders in his Council at the Capital Hastinapur of 'Sarkar' udaypur; that for the pleasure of the adored Lord the Vishnu Sri Ganganarayan Pandit of mauja Panchthupi of the Meherkul pargana be allotted Brahmottar $\frac{1}{2}$ dron of cultivated rent free land. Let the donee be allowed to enjoy the property with pleasure cultivating it in his own hand using plough and be exempted from payment of 'Panchapanchak', 'bhet', 'begar' etc.

Under my seal on this day the 19th magh 1980 T.E. —11th Aswin 1086 T. E. and 1599 Saka.

7. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of fierce battle, a man with a great heart, orders in his Council at the Capital Hastinapur of 'Sarkar' udaypur; that the pleasure of the adored Lord, the Vishnu, Sri Haridas Pandit of Mauja Haripur under Dehi Burichang of Meherkul pargana be allotted 2 kanis of cultivated and 10 kanis of uncultivated and 12 kanis of land as Brahmottar. Let the donee be allowed to enjoy the property with pleasure cultivating it in his own hand using plough and be exempted from 'Panchapanchak', 'bhet', 'begar' etc.

Under my seal on this day the 1st Magh 1082 T.E. and 1 Caitra 1086 T. E.

8. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of fierce battle, a man with a great heart, orders in his Council at the capital Hastinapur of the 'Sarkar' udaypur; that, for the pleasure of the adored Lord Vishnu, Sri Kamdev Pandit of Mauja Panchthupi of pargana Meherkul was granted Brahmottar of $\frac{1}{2}$ dron of cultivated land, now that land be allotted to his son Sri Jadu Pandit. Let the donee be allowed to enjoy the property cultivating the land in his own hand using plough with pleasure and be exempted from payment of Panchapanchak, bhet, begar etc.

Under my seal on this day the 22nd Kartik 1083 T. E.

9. His Excellency Govindamanikyadeva, the victor of fierce battle, a man with great heart, orders in his Council at the Capital Hastinapur of Sarkar udaypur that Sri Nar-

singha Svarna of Mauja Solana of pargana Moherkul be allotted brahmottar of 18 kanis of cultivated land. The donee being exempted from payment of Panchapanchak, bhet, begar etc. and be enjoyed the property with pleasure.

Under my seal on this day the 19th Kartik 1077 T. E. and 16th Caitra 1598 Saka and 1086 T. E.

References

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3. Ibid, p. 3 ; Cumming, J. G., *Survey and Settlement of Chakla Roshnabad Estate in the Districts of Tippera, Noakhali*, 1892-1899, 1907, Appendix. IV.
4. *Rajgi*, op. cit, p. 5.
5. Dutta, J. C. "The land system of Tripura as reflected in the land grants" (in Bengali), *Gomti* (a State journal of Tripura, Magh issue, 1391 B. S. (1985), p. 18.
6. Majumder, R.C., Roy Choudhury, H.C. & Dutta, K.K. (edited), *An advance History of India*, 1981, p. 554.
7. Sen, K. P., op. cit. p. 12.
8. Ibid, p. 129.
9. Ibid, p. 129.
10. *Rajgi*, op. cit., p. 15.
11. Sen, K. P., op. cit., p. 130.
12. Ibid, p. 130.
13. Cumming, J. G., op. cit., Appendix IV.
14. *Rajgi*, op. cit. p. 7.