

“THE ROLE AND POSITION OF KUMBHAR (POTTER) IN BALUTEDARI SYSTEM OF MEDIEVAL MAHARASHTRA”

Mr. KumbharRamchandraVasant*

• **Abstract :**

The Balutedari system was important part of socio-economic life in medieval Maharashtra and Kumbhar was its important member. As a Balutedar, Kumbhar was found in every village of medieval Maharashtra. Also Kumbhar was a member of '*Panchkaruki System*'. As a Balutedar, Kumbhar had given certain duties, which was traditional. Every year Kumbhar produced and supplied various types of earthen wares to the villagers. The Kumbhar also supplied earthen wares to the king since from ancient time. In the medieval Maratha country, tax had been taken from the artisans including Kumbhar. In Peshawa period, Kumbhar assessed at twelve rupees per house yearly to the government.

Traditionally the twelve Balutedars were grouped under three rows called '*Kass*' or '*Olee*', perhaps on the basis of the importance attached to their services to the village community. As a Balutedar Kumbhar had given first place in middle row of this classification of twelve Balutedars. As a Balutedar, Kumbhar had given certain rights. He received two to four *Paylis* of grain as his Balute and some corns known as '*Hurda*'. Kumbhar was one of the member of '*Gotsabha*(village judicial court)' and his sign was a wheel. Kumbhar sometimes granted rent free land as a *Watan*. In some villages Kumbhar were granted the '*PatilWatan*'. In some villages Kumbhars were doing job as a priest of local temple. After the death of Hindu Shudra Person (except untouchable) Kumbhar priests (Upadhye or Mehtar) was doing "*Dak or Dahaka or KumbharkriyaVidhi*" (religious rite) in the house of death person. This rite

* **Asst. Prof. & Head of History Department, Rayat Shikshan Sanstha's Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu College, Kolhapur**

was doing after 11th days of death and only priest Kumbhar (Upadhye or Mehtar) had allowed to do this rite. Thus as a Balutedar Kumbhar was performing very important role in socio-economic and religious life of medieval Maharashtra.

Keywords: Doing Ph. D. on, ‘Study of Kumbhar Community in 20th Century Kolhapur District’.

- **Introduction :**

The Balutedari system was important part of socio-economic and cultural life in medieval Maharashtra. The village servants in the medieval Maharashtra 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 It was socio-economic system, which was essential to the self-sufficient villages of the medieval Maharashtra. Traditionally twelve Village servants were called as Bara-Balutedar. Kumbhar (Potter) was one of the important members (servant) of Balutedari system. In this research article researcher described the role, position, importance of Kumbhar balutedar (Potter) in medieval village community of Maharashtra.

- **Origin of Balutedari System :**

The Balutedari system is of ancient origin. B. H. Baden Powell (1841-1901) mentions that, this system is of Dravidian origin. He writes, Aryan copied this system from Dravidian or found it in India before them. However, Indian scholar A. S. Altekar rejects this view and gives own opinion in his book, ‘A History of Village Community in Western India.’ In his view, Balutedari system is of Aryan origin. This system existed in north India long before the Christian era, when there was no influence of the Dravidian on Aryan. It was prevalent all over India in the days of Chanakya (4th century B.C.) or even much earlier. But another Indian Scholar Dr. R. S. Sharma says that, this system developed and became more organized after the second urban decay (300 – 1000 A.D.). Dr. A. R. Kulkarni says that, it is not possible to make final statement about the origin of Balutedari, but well organized and as compared to the other parts of the country, well preserved Balutedari system was found in the Maharashtra, since the early medieval period.²

- **Nature of Balutedari System :**

There is conflict between the scholars, about the nature of Balutedari system. Marxist historian A. I. Chicherove used the term, '**The Economic organization of Handicrafts**', for the Balutedari System. But he forgot socio-cultural aspects of the Balutedari System. Another scholar W. H. Wiser says that, Balutedari system **was Jajmani System**. Jajmani is essentially a service relationship between the employer and the employee. But the Jajmani system cannot be applied to the Balutedari system, because Balutedar's service was not only individual but also collective. German Socialist Max Weber compared the Balutedari system with **Demiurgic system**. In his view Balutedars were essentially village serfs. Hiroshi Fukazawa also agreed with this view. But this view is not exactly correct. Because Balutedars were not only village servants but also active participants in the deliberations of the village or Pargana council in all disputes affecting the efficient functioning of the village communities. Dr. A. R. Kulkarni used ancient term 'Grambhrudak or Gramsevaka' for the Balutedari system.³ Finally, Balutedari system was socio-economic and cultural system, which was based on Caste system and which had been maintaining nature of the self-sufficient villages of medieval Maharashtra.

- **Kumbhar(Potter) as a Balutedar :**

Kumbhar was one of the important member of Balutedari system. Traditionally twelve Village servants were called as Bara-Balutedar. But in the initial stages, the number of Balutedars appears to be only five, and they were designed as '*Panchkaruk*' and that village was called '*Panchkaruki Village*'. Kumbhar was also one member of that system⁴.

The Marathi word 'Kumbhar' originated from Sanskrit words 'Kumbh' and 'Kar' and meaning of 'Kumbh' is the pot of mud, and meaning of 'Kar' is the maker. Thus literal meaning of Kumbhar is pot-maker of the pot of mud.⁵ In many ancient books, the 'Kulal' word have been used for the potter. As a Balutedar Kumbhar was found every village of medieval Maharashtra. Because Kumbhar is the common name of Balutedars appearing in many Mahajars (Documents of Justification).

- **The Role and Duties of Kumbhar as a Balutedar :**

As a Balutedar, Kumbhar was useful village servant in the medieval Maharashtrian socio-economic life. He prepared various articles of mud; such as bricks(vita),

tiles(kaule), earthen wares, idols of mud etc. He produced several earthen wares , such as Ranjan (a long earthen water jar), Ghagar (a round vessel of mud to store water), Madake (water jar), Mogha (a pitcher upright and of a narrow neck and a wide mouth), Maat (a broad & spread earthen jar), Panati (earthen lamp) etc. Kumbhar also produced idols of mud, such as images of God-Ganesha, images of God-Naga(snake), images of Oxen etc. Kumbhar also produced Chul, which is useful article for cooking⁶.

The Kumbher made use of donkeys to carry the burden of pots, mud and fire wood. Some Kumbhars made use of the mules and horses too. He collected the soil useful for making earthen wares on the bank of river or a brook. He was not required to purchase soil at above mentioned places. But he used to purchase soil which was useful for making the bricks⁷. As a Balutedar, Kumbhar had given certain duties, which was traditional. Every year Kumbhar produced and supplied various types of earthen wares to the villagers. He had to give some earthen wares to the Patil, Deshmukh, Deshpande etc. Watandars⁸.

In village fairs and festivals Kumbhar had certain duties. In the festival of Bendur (Pola), he provided to the villagers the small image of oxen made of soil. For this service he received some grain. In the Holi festival he received five Naivedyas. On the occasion of AkshayaTrutiya, he supplied a earthen pot and received some grain. Kumbhar provided the villagers small earthen pots knows as Ghat which was used during Dashera festival. In the festival of Sankranti he supplied five small earthen pots to villagers and received one pot of grain as Asvad and sweat cakes knows as Poli. LingayatKumbhar received only grain and did not take the meals im the other houses. In the festival of Ganesha-ChaturtiKumbhar supplied earthen image of God Ganesha and in the festival of Nagapanchami he supplied earthen image of Naga (Cobra) to the villagers. Kumbhar could earn some money by selling big vessels in the neighboring market or even in his village; those earthen wares which were not covered by Baluta⁹.

In the marriage also Kumbhar brought the earthen pots and built the pile of pots on the stage of marriage ceremony. He supplied the big pots for water and jars for drinking water and other useful article for cooking known as ‘Chul’. For these serviceKumbhar received a blouse piece, turban, some eatables and sometime also sari. However he could carry these material with him

after the ceremony was over. Kumbhar also exchanged the old tiles and repaired the roofs of the houses. For this service he received grain or money in cash¹⁰.

- **State and Kumbhar :**

The Kumbhar also supplied earthen wares to the king since from ancient time. Ancient Indian book 'BoudhayanShrotsutra' depict that, King had been invited to Kumbhar for the making of bricks, earthen wares useful for cooking and also 'Ashvamedha' etc. rites. In ancient time the government was not taken tax from Kumbhar, but Kumbhar had compulsion to give free service for king and his officers¹¹. In the medieval Maratha country, tax had been taken from the artisans including Kumbhar. In Peshawa period, Kumbhar assessed at twelve rupees per house yearly to the government¹².

At the time of marriage ceremony of king, Kumbhar had to perform certain duties. He had to supplied various articles of mud to the king. For example – in 1791, marriage of two daughter of Maratha king, Kumbhar was ordered to supply seventy five big earthen pots(Ranjan), seven hundred fifty water container (Ghagar) and hundred and fifty cooking vessels (Madake). Similarly in 1782, at the time of marriage of TukojiHolkar's son, Kumbhar was ordered to provide a hundred big earthen water containers (Ghagar), two hundred small pots (Mat), three hundred water containers (Ghagar), two hundred earthen covers for pots, five hundred small earthen containers (Paral, Randhani, Morave etc.) and four thousand earthen saucer for lamp (Panties)¹³.

- **Position of Kumbhar as a Balutedar :**

The Kumbhar was an important Balutedar. He enjoyed respect in the village. His products were very essential for daily use, that's why Kumbhar had taken important place in Balutedari system of medieval Maharashtra. 'Kumbhar' is the common name of the Balutedars appearing in many Mahjars (documents of justification)¹⁴. The Kumbhar made their settlement in village Gaonhan (main settlement) and area of their settlement was known as 'Kumbharwada'. Generally Kumbharwada had taken place at the one side of the Gaonhan and did not outside of the Gaonhan¹⁵.

Traditionally the twelve Balutedars were grouped under three rows called 'Kass' or 'Olee', perhaps on the basis of the importance attached to their services to the village community. As a BalutedarKumbhar had given first place in middle row of this classification of twelve Balutedars¹⁶.

- **Rights And Privileges of Kumbhar as a Balutedar :**

As a BalutedarKumbhar had given certain rights. He received two to four Paylis of grain as his Balute and some corns known as 'Hurda'¹⁷. At the time of festivals and ceremonies, such as marriage ceremony, Kumbhar received foods, grains and other gifts. Kumbhar was one of the member of 'Gotsabha(village judicial court)' and his sign was a wheel¹⁸.Kumbhar sometimes granted rent free land as a watan. In some villages Kumbhar were granted the 'PatilWatan'. According to an unpublished letter, Patilki (PatilWatan) of Nandlapur village (near Karad) were granted to the Vithoji and Maloji Bin GondajiKumbhar Patil¹⁹.

Kumbhar had a right to take the bride and bridegroom on the horse in a marriage procession²⁰. In some villages Kumbhars were doing job as a priest of local temple. After the death of HinduShudra Person (except untouchable) Kumbhar priests (Upadhye or Mehtar) was doing "Dak or Dahaka or KumbharkriyaVidhi" (religious rite) in the house of death person. This rite was doing after 11th days of death and only priest Kumbhar (Upadhye or Mehtar) had allowed to do this rite²¹. Thus as a BalutedarKumbhar had lot of rights and he enjoyed respect in village too.

- **Conclusion :**

Thus Kumbhar was very important and useful village servant. He supplied various earthen wares which were of daily use and very much essential for cooking and storing water, grain etc. Kumbhar provided basic needs of medieval Maharashtra Community, that's why Kumbhar had given various titles such as, '*Chakrarao*', '*Raje*' etc²². Also Kumbhar's service was very important to religious rites. Thus as a BalutedarKumbhar was performing very important role in socio-economic and religious life of medieval Maharashtra.

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