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The princely State Gondal and British management (1870-1884 A.D)

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Introduction:-

Before the independence of India, there were a large number of Indian Princely States. The growth of British empire in India and its consolidation helped a good deal to reduce the number of petty states. The number of Indian states , big and small, extended over 562.(1) Some of them like Hyderabad, Mysore and Kashmir were very big while others were very small covering an area of only a few square miles. Those princely States were in various stages of development. Some states like Mysore were so much advanced that they could compare with any province of British India. There were others which were governed by autocratic rulers and the people had no voice in the administration. Some of the Princely States were the personal property of the Chief. (2) Some of them were in a very backward condition. However the Government of India exercised its paramountcy over all of them through its Political Department.

Gujarat came under complete control of the British Government in 1820 A.D., Its rule lasted upto 14th August 1947. No major wars were fought during this period of 127 years and all the dynasties which existed before 1820 continued to rule. Saurashtra was placed under Captain Barnwell as the first Political Agent.(3) The total numbers of the states including small ones with area of few acres was 396.They were first divided into two divisions. The one at Rajkot included Kutch, Gohilwad, Zalawad, Sorath, Halar and Amreli Prant. Later on Kutch, Junagadh, Navanagar, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, Drangadhra, Morbi, Gondal, Jafrabad, Wankaner, Palitana, Dhrol, Limdi, Rajkot and Wadhwan were placed in Western India States Agency under the control of the Political Agent to the Governor.

Cononel Keatinge had divided the Kathiawar (now Saurashtra region) Princely States into 7 classes and they were vested with powers according to the class and size of the Princely State. In Kathiawar Junagadh, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, Dhrangadhra, Morbi and Gondal were first class States and were entitled to a salute of eleven guns.(4) The East India Company and The British Government administered these areas through their officers.

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Native States had complete internal independence but supreme power intervened when there was misrule and the princely States were put under the Administration of the officers appointed by the English. When the Princes were minor, regency council was appointed. The Princely States were governed by the ruler with the help of Diwans and other officers while there was an hierarchy of officers in British district to look after the administration.

Princely State GONDAL and the British Management :-

Princely State Gondal was in Kathiawar Prant in Gujarat. It was included in first class state. The history of the Gondal State affords an illustration of what energy, tact, and courage may achieve in the way of building up a principality. The early history is wrapped in obscurity. It may be assumed that this portion of the province shared the fate of the rest, and had, at different masters- the Yadavas, the Bactrains, the Kshatras, the Guptas, the Vallabhis, the Vala's, the Chudasmans, the Jethvas, the Muslims and the Vaghelas.

Kumbhoji (1637-1649 AD.) , grandson of Vibhoji , may be called the founder of the Gondal dynasty. Vibhoji was the real founder of the Rajkot branch. Kumbhoji is known by the name of 'Moto Kumbhoji' or Kumbhoji Senior, to distinguish him from his illustrious great grandson of the same name. Raghoji Vania was his first minister. After Kumbhoji, Sagramji, Haloji, Kumbhoji II, Muluji, Nathuji, Sagramji II were main rulers of the Princely State Gondal.(5)

The Thakor Sahib Sagramji II died suddenly on the 14th December 1869 at the age of 47, leaving a daughter named Majirajba and Kumar Shree Bhagvat Sinhji, a minor, to succeed him on the throne. After the Thakor Sahib's death, and during Kumar Shree Bhagvat Sinhji's minority, the Gondal State was at first administered directly under the Kathiawar Agency, an Assistant to the Political Agent being placed in-charge of it. The first to take up the appointment was Captain Goodfellow – 27th April 1870. His stay in Gondal did not exceed ten month , as he was only acting for Captain Lloyd , the permanent incumbent. Arrangement were made to provide home education for the Young Chief, who was then only six years old. Captain Lloyd held office till 10th June, 1872. During these two years of direct British Management the police organization was inefficient, as four village of the State were successfully attacked and plundered by gangs of dacoits. A great fall of revenue was observable, owing to locusts, which had caused extensive damage to the crops. A department of Public Works was created and placed under the superintendence of a native engineer. Captain Lloyd was succeeded by Captain Philips, who remained till the end of 1875.(6)

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During his tenure of office various reforms were made in almost all the departments of the State. The '*mandavi*' town duties were appropriated to municipal improvements, new schools were established, and two new dispensaries were opened at Bhayavadar and Sarsai. The circuit and field survey of some of the villages was completed, the '*Khatabandhi*' or cash system of collecting revenue was introduced in a few villages, and a separate establishment was created for the purpose of horse breeding. The temple of Swaminarayana, commenced by the late Thakore Saheb, was completed. Dharmashalas, traveller's bungalows, bridges and roads were some of the works carried out during this period. During Major Scott's period (1875-1878) was one of general progress in all the department of the State. Money was freely spent on public works, among which may be mentioned the Gondal Hospital, telegraph and post offices, the State '*utara*' at Rajkot, the new palace at Gondal, the Peile (Ex-Political Agent) Bridge over the Bhadar river, and grain and vegetable markets at Gondal. The '*Khatabandhi*' system of collecting revenue, introduced in a few villages as a tentative measure, was not found popular with the cultivators, and had to be abandoned for the so-called '*Chokhabhag*' system.(7)

The four years from 1875 to 1878 were disastrous to the province in general, and to the Gondal State in particular. The monsoons of 1875, 1876 and 1878 were scanty. Cotton, the chief produce, almost entirely failed. People and cattle alike suffered for want of food and forage. Drinking-water became scarce. The next year brought excessive rain, which was as baneful in its consequences as the want of it had been before. There was a regular '*wet-famine*', as it is called, with all its evil concomitants. Owing to the scarcity the State share of the produce amounted to 56 maunds instead of the average 12,000. The State did all it could to mitigate the distress by starting relief and other public works of the aggregate cost of about three lakhs and seventy thousand rupees. The Darbar also fed large numbers of old and infirm persons daily, and sold grain at a cheap rate to those unable to pay the market prices. Considerable advances were made to Mulgirasias and Jivaidars. Tanks were excavated, and as many as 330 wells were sunk, which were useful during the season for irrigation purpose.

Government having determined to introduce joint administration into his State on the same principles as those which had been found to work well elsewhere, the plan was carried into effect on the 16th September 1878. Major Scott and Mr. Jayshankar Lalshankar being appointed Joint-Administrators.(8) The annals of the Joint Administration, extending over a period of six years, present record of uninterrupted progress and prosperity. Its first years, however, were marked by calamities over which human agencies had no control. The

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rainfall of 1878 was as much in excess of the requirement of the State. Houses and buildings were destroyed in great numbers, roads were swept away and the whole country west of Dhoraji, on the banks of the Bhadar river, was flooded for many days. In spite, however, of the drawbacks caused by loss of revenue, the State steadily advanced in the construction of public works, the foremost of which was the bridge at Supedi over the Bhadar river, which forms an important link in the communication between Porbandar and the rest of the province. A still more important enterprise was the construction of the branch line of railway from Dhoraji to Dhasa at the sole cost of this Princely State. About 30 lakhs of rupees have been invested in the undertaking.(9) The whole line was known by the name of the Bhavnagar- Gondal Railway. It is controlled by a manager working under the general direction of a Committee of Management composed of the Political Agent as President and the Chief Minister of Bhavnagar and Gondal as Members. The last Joint Administration gave a great stimulus to education progress by opening more schools- Vernacular and Urdu, night schools and girl's schools- and also by giving liberal grants in aid and scholarship to the Gondal youths studying Arts, Medicine or Civil Engineering at the Government colleges, and at the Sydepet Farm, Madras and Veterinary class, Poona.

Conclusion :-

Thus, Thakore Saheb Sagaramji left Kumar Shree Bhagvat Sinhji, then little more than an infant, to the guardianship of the British Government. At first the Princely State was placed, conjointly with Rajkot, under the Superintendence of Captain Lloyd. Then it was under a Special Assistant to the Political Agent. When the State first time came under British Management, the balance in hand was Rs. 19,61,143 and the revenue was under 8 lakhs per annum(10). There was no roads to speak of, and few schools. Law Courts were of a rudimentary description; there existed no organized police; and there was no hospital, and no regular jails. During the minority upwards 56 lakhs spent on public works, communication, education, and general improvement.

On the 24th of August, 1884 the Joint Administration was brought to a close. The young Thakore Saheb Bhagavat Sinhji, after six months' experience in the post previously held by the native Joint Administration, had gained a practical insight into the administrative work of the State, and was considered by Government to be qualified to assume the sole management of his principality.

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Footnotes :-

- (1) Joshi P.S. and Gholkar S.V., History of Modern India (from 1800 to 1964), 1980, New Delhi, page 121
- (2) Mahajan V.D., Fifty Five Years Of Modern India(1919-1974), 1975, New Delhi, page 443
- (3) Rajyagor S.B., History of Gujarat,1982, New Delhi, page 391
- (4) Jani S.V., Saurashtra No Itihas, Pravin Prakashan, Rajkot, 1998
- (5) Dave Harikrishna Lalshankar, A Short History of Gondal, 1889, Education Society Press, Bombay, page-129
- (6) Ibid- page 131
- (7) Ibid- page 133
- (8) Mishra R.R., Effect of Land Reforms in Saurashtra,1961, Bombay
- (9) Dave Harikrishna Lalshankar, A short History of Gondal, 1889,Bombay, page- 136
- (10) Ibid- page 139