RELIGIOUS GRANTS DURING THE MUGHAL AND BRITISH PERIOD: IN THE CONTEXT OF AWADH

SYED SHAHID ASHRAF
Archival Assistant
National Archives of India.
Janpath, New Delhi, 110001

The Practice of Providing the Revenue free land grants to the Persons involved in religious activities (associated with temples, mosques and dargahs) was originated in ancient period. In the ancient period, these revenue free grants were known as Brahmadaya (i.e. devoted to Brahmans), Devadana (devoted to Gods) and Agrahara (settlement of priest). According to the Varna system of Hindu mythology, Brahmans were considered the men of pious caste and only they had the right to perform all the religious rituals, so they had the monopoly on these revenue free lands. The lands were provided to the Brahmans in the form of Brahmadaya was ranged from few to several hundreds or even more than thousands as we have seen in the south Indian context. In the north India, we have the example of Harsha, who has granted one hundred villages of one thousand ploughs to individual Brahmans. The main objective behind providing the revenue free grants was to patronize the Brahmans, because Brahmans were considered pious, perform all the religious rituals and could also mobilize the society on their will.

Awadh

Administrative divisions of Awadh

1. The Monumental Antiquities and Inscription a North-Western Borrones and Oudh (Varanasi, 1969) p. 295
The suba of Awadh was divided into five sarkars, these are, Awadh, Gorakhpur, Bahraich, Khairabad, and Lucknow. Again these sarkars were further divided into Parganas. The Awadh sarkar had 21 Parganas or Mahals, Gorakhpur had 24, Bahraich 11, Khairabad 22, and Lucknow 55 Parganas. Thus, the suba of Awadh contained a total of 133 Parganas. These further Parganas were divided into villages. The villages were the smallest unit for the assessment of land revenue.

**POLICIES OF REVENUE FREE GRANTS UNDER THE MUGHAL EMPIRE**

The assignment of Madad-i-Maash grants to the needy, pious and scholars was a religious requirement of the state under Islamic law. The Mughal Emperors took keen interest in the field of Madad-i-Maash especially Akbar, as we find evidence from the Ain-i-Akbari. According to Abul Fazl, people of four classes were eligible for such grants: the learned, saints, the poor and men of noble lineage. It may be mentioned that this categorization applied to men of all religions. Apart from the Mughals, the emerging Muslim regional states were equally concerned to link themselves to major Hindu shrines and festivals.

Besides determining eligibility for such grants, Akbar made many other changes. He ordered the consolidation of the scattered holdings of Madad-i-Maash grants. This was considered favorable for both the government and the grantees. It seems that the main objectives behind this order were to make the administration of Madad-i-Maash grants more efficient so that the state could keep a check on the activities of the grantees, to facilitate development of the land on large scale and to encourage the grantees to engage in agriculture effectively. The position of Madad-i-Maash holders changed from more parasite class to active participants in the rural development of the region. This considerably improved the economic life of the grantees as well as tenants working under them.

Akbar tried to keep the grantees at the place of their original grant because it seems that some grantees used to acquire new grants at more fertile places, leaving the places of their original grants. This must have created some administrative problems. Akbar ordered that everyone who left his original place of grant had to surrender one-fourth of his land to receive a new grant.

All these reforms aimed at enhancing administrative efficiency but were not successful. It was reported that corruption continued in the assignment of Madad-i-Maash grants and people obtained large areas of land which they did not deserve. Therefore, a new order was passed, according to which all grantees were required to appear before the emperor personally with their document if they wanted to continue with their grants. In case they did not follow the orders their grants were to be confiscated. But this was not

---

3. C.A. Bayly, Pre-History of Communalism? CUP 1985 pp. 182
4. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System of Mughal India, Bombay, 1963 , pp 303-7
implemented effectively. On enquiry it was found that the grantees indulged in malpractices and cheated the government officials either by misrepresenting their condition or forging the document of the grant.\(^6\)

In spite of these reforms, the fraud could not be stopped completely. It was found that holders of such grants were guilty of indulging in illegal practices. The emperor ordered that Mir Sadr-i-Jahan bring such grantees before him. It was decided that the Sadr with the concurrence of Abul Fazl should increase or decrease the Madad-i-Maash grants after examining the merit of the cases. Regarding the quality of lands of Madad-i-Maash grants, Akbar issued an order that all grants should be assigned in the cultivated and waste cultivable land. If the whole grant consisted of cultivated land, one-fourth of it should be resumed, and a fresh document for the remaining land was to be issued to the grantee.\(^7\)

Akbar finally came to the most significant reform in the institution of Madad-i-Maash and that was to check on the power of the officials managing such grants. Akbar came to know that the qazis were in the habit of taking bribes from grant holders. He ordered to dismiss all the corrupt qazis. He also tried to check the power of Sadr-us-Sudur and found that Sadr was bribed by grantees to protect the interests. To stop such practices, Akbar adopted the policy of replacing the Sadr after short duration.

All these reforms were intended to keep the grantees under control. Since they were a strong social group at the local level, Akbar tried to make them realize that their anti-government activity was to their detriment. Their privileges would remain so long as they remained loyal to the state. Akbar imposed a check on the power of the officials who were incharge also, so that a genuine and loyal Madad-i-Maash holder should not be harassed.

\textbf{Some important Madad-i-Maash during Akbar’s Reign}

1) Qazi Masthan, son of Qazi Baban and sheikh Saad Allah, son of sheikh Ala-al-Din received the Madad-i-Maash grant of 1275 bighas of both fallow and cultivable land in pargana Sandila of Lucknow sarkar dated March-April 1560 AD and also the officials were directed not to trouble the grantees on account of fiscal dues.\(^8\)

2) A \textit{Farman} of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar Badshah Ghazi issued to hukm of Beg Muhammad Khan on 28 Sep. 1560 who informed the ammal, chaudharies etc. of Sarkar Lucknow about the grant of mauzas sehan, mehu etc. as Madad-i-Maash to Qazi Nasr Allah and Qazi Mubarak.\(^9\)

3) Akbar granted 660 bighas of land in mauzas Mahsoya, Kanjora etc. to Qazi Nasr Allah and Qazi Mubarak and also orders that they may be treated as Jagirdaars.\(^10\)

\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid. p. 280.
\(^8\) Sandila Document II NAI 2738/1.
\(^9\) NAI Document no. 1842.
\(^10\) Ibid Document no. 1386.
4) On 6 March 1580, Akbar issued Farman to hukkam, ammal, karoris and jagirdars of pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow renewing grant of 1500 bighas of land to mother of late Muhammad Saaid as Madad-i-Maash which was free from all the levies.\footnote{Sandila Document no 27. NAI 1441.}

5) The Bainama executed by Kulal for Rs.21 in respect of cultivable land in Qasba Jais in favour of Sayyid Ibrahim on 1596.\footnote{Jais Document no. 33 NAI 206.}

6) The Bainama executed by Qazi Mustafa and Qazi Hashim in respect of a plot of land in Qasba Jais in favour of Sayyid Ibrahim on July-August 1601.\footnote{Ibid Document no 39. 1380.}

7) On 14\textsuperscript{th} July 1579 A.D. Akbar issued Farman stating that Sheikh Mina and Sheikh Fattan, the caretaker of Jama Masjid of Qasba Sandila came to the court and that on their petition it was ordered that 20 bighas of land according to bamboo measurement be assigned to them from the cultivable land of the peasants as well as fallow land from khalisa in equal halves from the said Pargana as Madad-i-Maash from the beginning of kharif crop of Tawishqan-\textit{II}.\footnote{Sandila Document 3 NAI-2672/1.}

8) On 13\textsuperscript{th} of March 1603 A.D. Akbar issued Farman stating that a grant of 30 bighas and biswas of land in Pargana Sandila had been made to Jamal son of Mathan, wife and daughters of Hans Kadan for their maintenance.\footnote{Ibid Document no 5 NAI-2696/2, 3.}

**Madad-i-Maash grants during Jahangir’s reign**

1) A Farman of Salim Shah (Jahangir) dated 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1603 A.D. stating that 61 bighas and 19 biswas of land by Gaz-I-Hahi had been granted to Maulana Tahir in Pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, for his maintenance. This Farman was according to the Imperial Farman of Akbar issued during the (1599-1600 A.D.) that 61 bighas and 19 biswas of land had been assigned to Maulana Tahir and that now after his death the land has been divided among his heirs.\footnote{Sandila Document no.6, NAI-2672/2.}

2) On 12\textsuperscript{th} of August 1603 A.D. Salim Shah (Jahangir) issued a Farman granting 385 bighas of fallow land in Pargana Daryabad, Sarkar Awadh in the form of Madad-i-Maash to Sayyid Ala-al-din and others from the beginning of Tawishqan \textit{II} and orders the hakims, amils, karoris and the jagirdars of the said pargana to measure demarcate the boundaries and hand over\footnote{Document no 4 NAI 1617/17.} the same land grant to the grantees. Also tells them not to molest them on account of Mal-o-Jihat, Ikhrajat, Awarizat. They should also not to demand a renewed Farman or a Parwana every year.

The document is in Nastaliq and Taliqa comprises the Risala of Shah Muhammad and Waqia-Nigari of Arif giving the following details of the grant:-

---

\footnotetext[11]{Sandila Document no 27. NAI 1441.}
\footnotetext[12]{Jais Document no. 33 NAI 206.}
\footnotetext[13]{Ibid Document no 39. 1380.}
\footnotetext[14]{Sandila Document 3 NAI-2672/1.}
\footnotetext[15]{Ibid Document no 5 NAI-2696/2, 3.}
\footnotetext[16]{Sandila Document no.6, NAI-2672/2.}
\footnotetext[17]{Document no 4 NAI 1617/17.}


- Ala-al-din - 140 Bighas
- Sayyid Qutb-al-din, son of Mohammad - 50 Bighas
- Sayyid Daulat - 50 Bighas
- Sayyid Muhy al-din, son of Abd Allah - 50 Bighas
- Sayyid Muhy al-din, son of Ghiyas al-din - 25 Bighas
- Sayyid Rukn - 20 Bighas
- Abd al-Latif - 20 Bighas
- Sheikh Saad Allah - 20 Bighas
- Murtaza, son of sayyid Muin-al-din - 20 Bighas
- Mir Jamal - 20 Bighas

TOTAL: - 385 Bighas

3) Farman of Jahangir to Hukkam, Jagirdars etc, of Pargana Kakori, Sarkar, Lucknow about the grant of 90 bighas of land as Madad-i-Maash to Qazi Mubarak and others, also gave orders. Measure, Demarcate and relinquishment of the same in favour of the grantee, dated 1610 A.D.  
4) Jahangir issued Farman on 10th June 1615 granting 120 bighas of cultivable land in Pargana Nasirabad, Sarkar Manikpur as Madad-i-Maash to Mst. Sahib Daulat and others, and order to the officers concerned to measure, Consolidate and relinquish the land to the grantees and not to bother them for usual levies or for producing a fresh Sanad every year.  
5) Chaknama in respect of 20 bighas of revenue free, waste but cultivable Madad-i-Maash land granted to Sheikh Shams-al-din in Pargana Sandila from kharif crop of Paras II under the seal of Mir Sayyid Abul Qasim and the signatures of the chowdharies and qanungos in accordance with the orders of Mir Sayyid Abd-al-Qasim, Jagirdar of the said Pargana, dated 21st May 1614 A.D.  
6) On 28th September 1614 A.D. Jahangir issued a Farman granting 20 bighas of land by gaz-i-Ilahi in favour of Sheikh Shams-al-din, son of Sheikh Saad Allah and his sons from Pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, from the kharif crop of paras II. And gave orders to the Hakims, Amils, Jagirdars and Karoris to complete the measurement and relinquish the land to the grantee without any alteration.  

Madad-i-Maash during Shahjahan’s Reign

21. Sandila Document no.11, NAI-2694/1, 2 and 3.
1) A Farman issued by Shahjahan to Parwana of Aqibat Mahmud Khan informing the gumashtas, jagirdars etc. of pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, about the confirmation of grant of 100 bighas of land in Mehsona to Qazi Abd al Hakim as Madad-i-Maash on 19th of January, 1630.22

2) On 13th December 1630 AD, Shahjahan issued Farman granting 20 bighas of cultivable, revenue free, waste land in pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, from the beginning of Rabi, Qui II as Madad-i-Maash to Sheikh Abd al Fattah and his sons.23

3) Bainama executed by Abd al Jalil, son of Miyan Sheikh Badr-al-din Makhdumzada for Rs.20 in respect of a plot of land in qasba Jais, in favour of Mir Sayyid Akbar, son of Mir Sayyid Ibrahim, dated 29th march, 1631.24

4) Yad-dasht of Shahjahan appointing Abd al Hakim as Qazi, Muhtasib and Mutawalli of pargana Sandila with the Madad-i-Maash grant of 200 bighas of land in succession to his late father Qazi Abd rauf, dated 23rd September 1632.25

5) Again, on 24th of October, 1637, Shahjahan issued farman intimating hukkam, ammal, jagirdar, and karoris of pargana Kakori, Sarkar Lucknow, about the confirmation of grant of 90 bighas of land to Qazi Mubarak and others, as Madad-i-Maash and ordering no interference with the grant and no harassment to the grantee on any account.26 On 23rd of November 1637 AD, Shahjahan issued a farman granting 20 bighas of cultivable, revenue free, waste land in pargana Sandila, Sarkar lucknow, as Madad-i-Maash to sheikh Ibrahim, son of Sheikh Ali Sher.27

6) Shahjahan issued farman to hukkam, ammal, jagirdars and karoris on 26th August 1944, confirming grant of rupees one per day to Sheikh Mahmud and Sheikh Ahmed out of the proceeds of qasba Lakhi for the expenses of the Khanqah of Sheikh Aman and orders the state official to ensure its regular payment to him and not to bother the grantee for a fresh sanad every year.28

7) On, 17th December 1646 AD, Shahjahan issued a farman granting 100 bighas of cultivable, revenue free, waste land in pargana Sandila, Sarkar lucknow, as Madad-i-Maash to sheikh Daniyal, son of Sheikh Dawud of the said pargana and ordering the hakims, amils, jagirdars and karoris to measure, demarcate, consolidate and relinquish the land to the grantee and not to bother him for various cesses and a fresh farman or a renewed parwancha every year.29

8) Shahjahan issued farman on 29th January 1647, intimating hukkam, ammals etc. of pargana Jais Sarkar Manikpur about the confirmation of grant of 157 bighas of land to Abd-al-jalil and others, heirs of

27. Sandila Document no.18, NAI 2694/5.
Sayyid Umar etc. as Madad-i-Maash order relinquishment of the same in favour of the grantees and directs non-interference for usual dues.\textsuperscript{30}

**Madad-I-Maash Grants during Aurangzeb’s Reign**

1) On 8\textsuperscript{th} August 1659, Parwana of Nawab Diler Khan addressed to the Muttasaddis of Pargana Sandila regarding confirmation of the grant of 450 bighas of land as Madad-i-Maash to Qazi Habib Allah and others with effect from Kharif 1657-58.\textsuperscript{31}

2) Again in Pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, Suba Awadh confirming the grant of 23 bighas 5 biswas of lands by Gazi-i-Ilahi as Madad-i-Maash to Sayyid Muhammad etc the heirs of Abd al qadir by Parwana of Abdal Nabi on 9\textsuperscript{th} October 1661.\textsuperscript{32}

3) Qazi Muhammad Habib received Madad-i-Maash of 200 bighas of land by Gaz-i-Ilahi in Pargana Sandila by the Parwana of Nawab Diler Khan on 10\textsuperscript{th} April 1662.\textsuperscript{33}

4) Parwana of Nawab Diler Khan to the Mutasaddis of Pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, regarding the grant of Mauza Husainpur to Qazi Habib Allah to meet the expenses of the poor, needy and students at his Khanqah and Mosque, on 17\textsuperscript{th} June 1663.

5) Another Parwana of Nawab Diler Khan on 19\textsuperscript{th} February 1664 to the Mutasaddis of Pargana Sandila regarding grant of village Kuntia as Madad-i-Maash to Qazi Habib Allah who helps and supports the travellers and students.

6) On 11\textsuperscript{th} March 1666, Emperor Awrangzeb issued Farman to Hukkam and others officials of Pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, Suba Awadh granting 40 bighas Land free from cesses and taxes as Madad-i-Maash to Sheikh Abd al-Sattar. And order to demarcate and relinquish of the land in favour of the grantee who, in no case, should be harassed for renewal of the Sanad.\textsuperscript{34}

7) Parwana of Khwaja Mirza to the Gumashtas of Jagirdars and karoris of Pargana Nasirabad Sarkar Manikpur, Suba Allahabad regarding confirmation of the grant of 37 bighas, 14 biswas of land as Madad-i-Maash, to Sayyid Abdal Rahim and others on 23\textsuperscript{rd} November 1666.\textsuperscript{35}

8) On 21\textsuperscript{st} May 1667 Jafar Khan issued Parwana to address the Gumashtas of jagirdar and Karoris of Pargana Sandila, Sarkar Lucknow, Suba Awadh communicating confirmation of the grant of 40 bighas of land as Madad-i-Maash to Sheikh Abd al Sattar, grandson of Sheikh Minha who was a student.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{30} Jais Document no. 83, NAI 1706.
\textsuperscript{31} Sandila Document no. 108 NAI 1624.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid document No. 112 NAI 1248.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid document No. 115 NAI 1428.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid Document no. 128, NAI 1658.
\textsuperscript{35} Allahabad Document no. 132 NAI 2331.
\textsuperscript{36} Sandila Document no. 136 NAI 1240.
9) Bainama executed by Bika, Badli, Rai Singh, Lakhan and others for Rs 281 and 5 Annas in respect of their land with its garden, well and tank in mauza Bonamau, Pargana unam, Sarkar Lucknow, in favour of Mir Sayyid Piarev Muhariz on 1st September 1667.37

10) On 12th April 1669 Aurangzeb issued Farman confirming the grant of 592 bighas of cultivable land in Pargana Haveli Gorakhpur, Suba Awadh to Sheikh Habib Allah Khatib and Sheikh Pir Mohammad and their sons as Madad-i-Maash for delivering the khutba and leading the prayers on Friday, Id days etc. And also orders the officials concerned to leave the land in their possession and not to bother them for state levies.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

In the families of the Madad-i-Maash holders of the Suba belonged to different social sections.38 Qazis, Sajjadanashins, Brahmans and who managed educational and religious institutions were the main beneficiaries. They were expected to render some services to the state, and to help the people. The role of Madad-i-Maash holders in society, therefore, should be seen in the background of their duties and functions. The grantees who managed the Mosques and Temples made arrangement for worship so that people could perform their religious obligations easily. The expenses of such arrangements were borne from the Madad-i-Maash assigned to them.39

The Madad-i-Maash holders of the Temples did not charge pilgrimage tax and thus encouraged pilgrims to visit the temples in large numbers.40 It may be mentioned that in Medieval Indian society, religion occupied most significant place in the life of the people. The arrangements and facilities extended by the Madad-i-Maash holders for religious functions were indeed significant. Such arrangement included construction of Mosque and employing there some functionaries. This also helped the state retain a popular image in the society. The Muslim grantees mostly belonged to the Ulema class, an influential group in society. The activities of such persons ensured the common Muslims that religiously they were protected.

The Sufi shrines khanqahs provided housing and food to the travelers, there were many khanqahs in Awadh where the Sajjadanashins such arrangements. Besides, other Madad-i-Maash holders also helped travelers. In 1664 QaziHabib Allah was assigned Madad-i-Maash lands in parganaSandila, SarkarLucknow to help the travelers.41 Qazilmad-al-din and zakaria extended facilities to the travelers in ParganaSandila, SarkarLucknow. Such help provided by Madad-i-Maash holders gave the travelers a bond of security. Consequently the people were encouraged to extend their social contacts. Since the khanqahs gave shelter to Hindus and Muslims, people and got opportunity to exchange ideas. Moreover, the accommodation and food facilities enabled even the poor to travel in different areas.

37. document No. 138 NAI 2125.
38. Zameeruddin, Institutions of Qazi under the Mughal.
40. M.A Ansari, Administrative Documents of Mughal India, Delhi, 1983, No 35.
41. NAI. 1270.

Copyright © 2015 Published by kaav publications. All rights reserved www.kaavpublications.org
CONCLUSION

The state considered it a duty to provide for the needy and the pious in ancient India and in Sultanate period this practice continued in the form of assignments of revenue free land. However, in Mughal time some changes were made in the system and it was made more systematic. During this period revenue free grants were generally known as madad-i-maash, sayurghal or aimma. In Akbar’s reign a definite policy was adopted in connection with such grants. The eligibility of the recipients of madad-i-maash grants was determined. It was decided that grants were assigned in both cultivated and waste-but-cultivable land. For the retention of such grants for long periods, the loyalty of the grantee to the state was the main consideration. This policy of the assignment of madad-i-maas lands continued through the Mughal period. The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study. First, through the assignment of madad-i-maash grants, the state created a class at the lowest level of administration set-up, expected complete loyalty in return. They were to pray for the endurance of the empire and watch the interests of the state in their respective regions. The lands assigned in the madad-i-maash grants were both in cultivated area and in the waste-but-cultivated land. The assignees were expected to bring under plough the cultivable land making their assigned land was resumed and in its place a fresh half of waste-but-cultivable land was assigned. This practice was perhaps with two considerations:-

I. The quantum of assistance in terms of yield, was initially determined on the basis of the two different kind of fertility of assigned land. But once the cultivable waste was converted into cultivated land the actual yield from the total land must have exceeded the stipulated return. Therefore, to retain the quantum of assistance the practice of resumption of cultivated land and assignment of waste-but-cultivable land must have continued.

II. This practice would have provided a mechanism for expanding the size of the actual cultivated land of the empire, thus making the some available to the state for the use as khalsa or jagir land.

Some changes were made in the nature of assignment of these grants in the second half of the seventeenth century. These grants were made hereditary with no reduction in size at the time of renewal. In the absence of a son, the grant was renewed in favour of relatives in the prescribed sequence. Continuation of such grantees or their families in a particular area made them socially strong and motivated them politically to establish their authority at the local level. They acquired zamindaris and became restive, creating administrative problems. It is difficult to believe that these grantees remained rural based. In the light of this study it could be said that they were both urban and rural based due to a variety of reasons. The grantees over a period of time emerged as an economically strong group. The grants which were initially assigned to them as maintenance increased manifold either through additional grants or by illegal occupied of land. The grantees did not remain confined to their socio-religious duties; they gradually developed an interest in trade, commerce and education. It provided them greater respectability in society and in turning them into an elite class. The madad-i-maash grants were assigned to women also. This had not only provided them social recognition but also made them economically self-reliant and more actively associated with the
socio-reliant and more actively associated with the socio-economic life of the area. The assignment of madad-i-maash in different pargana of the suba varied from area to area. The statistics in the Ain indicate this variation from 0.41 percent to 23.30 percent in different parganas. The total assignment of such grants was 4.2 percent of the total jama of the suba. The madad-i-maash grantees gradually acquired proprietary rights (milkiyat) over their land, thus leading to the emergence of a new class of landed aristocracy in the rural areas. The emergence of the grantees as a class with a new socio-economic status not only created vested interests but led to socio-political tension at the regional level.

BIBLIOGRAPHY - PRIMARY SOURCES:

Acquired Documents, National Archives of India, Delhi.
Allahabad Documents (NAI)
Jais Documents (NAI)
Sandila Documents (NAI)
Home Department, Public, Pros. 18-21, NAI, 1864.
Home Department, Judicial, Pros. 73, NAI, 1880.
Finance And Commerce Department, Separate Revenue, Pros. 162-177, NAI, 1895.
Foreign Department, Pros. 116-117, NAI, 1868.

SECONDARY SOURCES:
Mohammed, Jigar., *Revenue Free Land Grants In Mughal India*, Delhi, 2002.