

### **History of Land Settlements in India: A Regional Perspective**

Established by Zahiruddin Babar in 1526 and flourished to its full form of glory by Emperor Akbar in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Mughal Empire imposed on the greater part of the sub-continent a fair measure of political unity. Centralized administration, a uniform revenue policy, a network of inland trade fostered by Mughal peace and an expanding overseas commerce created conditions in which economic stimuli travelled fast enough from one part of the empire to another.

For the preservation of a powerful state like the Mughal required sound finances. And obviously the land revenue formed the back-bone of the Mughal finances. The rulers derived largest income from this source. Briefly, it is a historical fact that from very ancient times, long before the Mughal Empire, the kings or Rajas and other lesser chiefs were accustomed to take from the cultivators of the soil in their dominions, a certain share of produce of every cultivated area, unless, that share was remitted.<sup>1</sup>

#### **2.1. Pre- Colonial Land Management System in India**

Our Knowledge of the land system in the ancient period of the Indian History is very scrappy. Casual reference in the Vedic texts afford only stray glimpse. It may be concluded from the instances, that land belonged to him who first cleared it for cultivation. So it may be assumed that peasant proprietorship was recognised. He also had the right of transfer.<sup>2</sup> Whatever its real origin, there can be no doubt about the fact that the levy of a produce –share became general at a remote period. It is mentioned, as a thing long known and established, in the “Laws of Manu”. The share was one-sixth of the gross produce, and Manu notices that the sixth might be raised to one fourth in time of war or other emergency.<sup>3</sup> From Megasthenes’s *Indica* we came to know that the Mauryan king Asoka reduced the state share of crops produced from one-sixth to one-eighth.

One of the most interesting topics that engage the attention of the student of Indian history and economics is the nature of relationship between the sovereign and the actual tiller of the land in mediaeval India.

The land revenue system during Mughal era was formalised and got definite shape during the reign of Akbar. The ideal form of the original Hindu system of land tenure with a few foreign elements survived till his time. All that was done was that a few greedy sovereigns distorted the original ideal system by engrafting certain undesirable elements upon it. But the basic principles of Manu's Code were never totally lost sight of, nor were they not in any faint degree even recognized.<sup>4</sup>

Under the Sultanate of Delhi true it is that several changes were effected in the system of administration along with the parcelling of the empire under new denominations and consequently the revenue system too underwent a change. Even though the Government's share of produce increased and new taxes were imposed upon the people, their lot was not so appalling like the conditions that prevailed at the break-up of the Mughal Empire.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly the changes for the worse innovated by Sultans like Firuz Shah Tughlak entailed several hardships upon the people. But instances like this are few. Even a highly centralized autocracy conferred benefits, as the institution of such a system of government meant the removing of the precariousness of security and peace during the mediaeval ages notorious for the scrambling for empires, and the people were content. Nicolo de Conti, travelling about the year A.D. 1420 attests to the fact that the state of India was flourishing with beautiful gardens and opulent cities. Ibn Batuta's impressions about the reign of such a cruel and scheming autocrat are nothing but generous, and it is a tribute paid to the satisfactory state of things then prevailing.

Babar and Humayun did not introduce any changes into the existing nature of things.<sup>6</sup> They were the first conquerors in their dynasty and were mainly occupied with subduing the land and maintaining peace and order. Their time was pre-occupied with suppressing internecine quarrels and open rebellions, and consolidating the Empire. So, when we come to the end of the reign of Humayun, we find relief in the benevolent reign of Sher Shah.<sup>7</sup>

Sher Shah is the real inaugurator of Mughal land revenue policy, even though the statement looks technically inaccurate. The short period of his reign was marked

with many improvements shaped by him in the administration of the country. He found the coinage had degenerated and reformed it by the issue of an abundance of silver money, excellent both in design and purity. Money is the medium of exchange among the people as well as the means for the realization of State revenue.<sup>8</sup>

Sher Shah did many other things for the benefit of the people. The Ain stated "Sher Khan or Selim Khan, who abolished the custom of dividing the crops, used this Guz for that purpose."<sup>9</sup> The Guz referred to was one of thirty-one fingers in length which consequently falls short of the Ilahi Guz of Akbar. From the passage quoted above, it is evidently clear that Sher Shah anticipated Akbar in ways more than one. He made use of a definite unit of measurement; he abolished crop division and adopted a fixed rate of assessment which is beneficial to the *ryot* in as much as he is in a position to know definitely about his dues to the State; and made a survey or measurement of all cultivated land.<sup>10</sup> Akbar followed the policy of Sher Shah with greater precision and correctness, and then extended it to the various provinces of the country.<sup>11</sup>

The objectives of Akbar was to eradicate the evils innate in the existing order of things resolve themselves under three heads: correct measurement of the land under cultivation, ascertaining of the produce per *Bigha* of land and the fixation of the state's dues that each *Bigha* ought to pay coupled with the rate of commutation in money. The legislation of Akbar as regards the land revenue system was directed towards the realization of these objects.

Besides political purposes, in order to estimate the exact amount of revenue of the empire, Akbar parcelled his empire into fifteen *Subahs*, one hundred and eighty-seven *Sarkars*, and three thousand three hundred and sixty-seven *Mahals*; or rather, his empire consisted of so many divisions and sub-divisions.<sup>12</sup> Then, a Settlement was ordered to be made and a standardization of units of measurement effected. First, what was known as the Ilahi *Guz* was made a definite unit of measurement. It consisted of forty-one fingers and its modern equivalent varies from twenty-nine to thirty-two inches. Akbar also reformed the *Tanab* which is a chain of measurement consisting of sixty Ilahi *Guz*.<sup>13</sup> The *Tanab* which was in use throughout Hindustan before the time of Akbar was made up of rope which left large scope for injustice being done to the *ryots* since it was subject to variations of length owing to dryness or humidity in the atmosphere. Akbar ordered that the *Tanab* be made of pieces of

bamboos joined together by iron rings, which guaranteed the integrity of the chain throughout the year. The third change that Akbar effected was the definite measurement given to the *Bigha*. It consisted of three thousand six hundred squares *Ilahi Guz* and corresponds in modern measurement of something more than half an acre. Several *Bighas* went to make a *Mahal* or *Purganah* and several *Purganahs* which followed the same code were grouped into *Dasturs* (rate list).<sup>14</sup> The *Purganah* answers to the lordships of hundred towns in the revenue divisions of *Manu*.

After obtaining the correct measurement of land, Akbar next turned to the ascertainment of the amount of produce per *Bigha* and the state's share in it. For the purpose of making a comparative estimate of the produce of lands, Akbar divided them into four kinds and fixed different revenue to be paid by each.<sup>15</sup> *Polej* is the ideal and the best sort of land throughout the empire which was cultivated always and was never allowed to lie fallow. *Paraity* is the land that was kept out of cultivation for a short period in order to regain its lost fertility. *Chachar* is a kind of land allowed to lie fallow for three or four years and then resumed under cultivation. *Banjar* is the worst kind of land that was left out of cultivation for five years or upwards. *Polej* and *Paraity* lands were divided for purposes of assessment into three sorts, viz. good, fair and bad.<sup>16</sup>

Akbar next proceeded to fix the rate of assessment. An aggregate of the rate of revenues from A.D. 1570 to 1579 was made and the decennial average was fixed as the state demand of revenue. The evolution of the revenue system under Akbar, leading to what is called the *dahsala* or ten year system, was the logical evolution of the system of measurement (*zabt*) adopted by Sher Shah.<sup>17</sup> Henceforward the collections were made with certainty and the people were satisfied as we know from the statement of the official historian of Akbar's reign, Abul Fazl.

We may now turn to the Government's share of produce under Akbar. Akbar took one-third of the *Mahsul* as tax.<sup>18</sup> But the ideal rate of assessment in the Hindu period of Indian History is only one-sixth. Akbar was not unconscious of the excessive demands he was making when he demanded one-third of the produce as the rate of assessment. The *Ain-i-Akbari* mentioned that twenty-nine taxes were abolished by Akbar in order to give compensation to the peasant for the greater proportion of revenue demanded by the state. There is no direct evidence whether Akbar's orders for the abolishing of those cesses were carried out to the fullest extent. But this much is

certain that the payment of the revenues was lenient, and remissions many.<sup>19</sup> The constructive revenue system of Todar Mal has two aims in its view: the increase of revenue ostensibly, of course, not by extortion but by the increase of cultivation and the security of the peasant.

We may now turn towards the different means of realizing the State's proportion of the produce and those systems legalized by Akbar. We may broadly divide the various systems of revenue collection into three heads: the *Ghallabakhsh*, the *Zabti* and the *Nasaq* systems.<sup>20</sup> Let us now consider the nature of the separate systems and their merits and demerits. The *Ghallabakhsh* is the original Indian system where an actual division of crop was made between the cultivator and the state. This system was prevalent in parts of Sind, Kabul and Kashmir. The *Zabti* system is the alternate system chiefly used by Akbar in order to eliminate the uncertainties and difficulties inherent in the system of crop-division. Under this system one third of the produce was fixed as the state demand. This system was applied to the heart of the empire from Sind, Berar, Malwa, Ajmir and part of Gujrat. *Nasaq* assessment is the third and last kind of revenue collection. Under this system the revenue was fixed by arrangement or contract. This system was in force in Bengal, Bihar, part of Kashmir and part of Gujrat.

However, many historians preferred to be critical on Mughal administration and precisely the land management system. Mughal administrative system was imported ready-made from outside India. As Prof. Sarkar puts it, "it was the Perso-Arabic system in Indian setting". It may be curious for us to notify the chronic antagonism between the tax-payer and the tax-gatherer of the day.<sup>21</sup> The prevalence of *Abwabs*, perquisites and presents is another striking feature of the Mughal land revenue system. *Abwabs* were illegal cesses collected throughout the empire. The *Ain* mentioned that Akbar abolished twenty-nine illegal cesses and taxes.<sup>22</sup>

Looking critically, the appearance of intermediaries is another feature to be noted. Akbar recognised the necessity of such men and when conditions required gave them a commission to the extent of 2 per cent of the State revenues for their labours. This system seemed to be broadly congenial to the government as well as to the people in as much as the collection was speedy and effective.<sup>23</sup>

Another prominent feature to note is the State's sole proprietorship of the lands throughout the empire. Besides, there was no hereditary peerage in Islam. The property which was accumulated by the exertions of an ambitious and diligent nobleman reverted to the State at his death.<sup>24</sup>

Under the Mughals, the *Sarkar* was the territorial unit while the *Mahal* was a revenue division; or, to put it in another way, the *Mahal* was the fiscal unit while the *Parganah* is a fixed historical division. All the revenue documents of the Mughal time reaffirmed their avowed objectives, the extension of cultivation on the one hand, and the improving of the crops on the other. But both were so designed to accelerate the revenue collection of the State. Above all, it should be noted that the revenue system need not necessarily be uniform throughout a *Subah* or a province, but was subject to the determining elements of local conditions.<sup>25</sup>

Amidst the complexity of arrangements for assessment and collection, one major aim of the Mughal administration was to secure the bulk of the peasant's surplus. In Mughal India the land revenue was usually collected in cash. Akbar left it optional with the cultivators to give grain or cash as they preferred.<sup>26</sup> In Kashmir and Southern Sind; crop-sharing was prevalent for collection of revenue but in Bengal the revenue was levied in cash.

There was a contradiction in the revenue system of the Mughals. The contradiction was to assess the revenue upon the individual cultivator or the convenience of collecting the revenue from a few intermediaries (*Zamindars*, *taluqdars*, *muqaddams* etc). The individual assessment was preferred more because it enabled the administration to have a more accurate figure of land revenue and it was supposed to prevent an unfair distribution of the financial burden among the revenue payers by the intermediaries. In Mughal India the village was the basic unit of assessment and the intermediaries were the real assesses.<sup>27</sup>

The collection of revenue was enforced by severe methods. Eviction was in vogue but the more usual methods were imprisonment and torture of the headman.<sup>28</sup> So from the above discussion it can be concluded that the Mughal land revenue tax was a regressive one. Because the per-unit of area varied according to the crop, and not according to the size of the taxpayer's holding. Thus the fiscal burden rested more heavily on the small cultivator by intensifying the differentiation among

the rural population. The Mughal revenue system tended to subvert superior cultivation and simultaneously it increased the distance between the rich and the poor.<sup>29</sup>

On communal cultivation in Mughal India the question was raised by Ashok Rudra 'was there any collective cultivation of land or was cultivation carried out individually and separately as now?'<sup>30</sup> There was very little evidence about communal cultivation. The only references to such activities we find are of the nature of the settlement of new areas and reclamation of new land or forest land. As to an earlier period, we have from Irfan Habib that in the Mughal period when peasants deserted old lands and settled in new ones they did so communally.<sup>31</sup> The question of private ownership of land in the pre-colonial period is a debatable issue among the historians. As is all too well known, during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries some European Travellers originated a long lasting myth by describing the king as the sole owner of land in India. As is also well known, this idea has now been very largely rejected. Like wise, another idea inherited from the past is that land was held in common and cultivated jointly. But this idea has also been largely rejected.<sup>32</sup>

On the question of communal ownership the generally accepted view is that, "the question whether the land was owned by the Raja, the *Talukdar*, *Zamindar*, the cultivator or the king was not a real question. Each had claim based upon custom or upon grants made by the king or a raja, or upon grants made by a *Talukdar* or *Zamindar*. But in addition to these claims each did or did not have the power to enforce his claims or to enlarge his claims. There was no appeal if a usurper had the power to usurp." "The village did not hold its land common. Common were its officials and servants".<sup>33</sup>

On the question of peasant differentiation there was an idea that in the traditional village society there was a single class of self sufficient peasants producing for their own consumption, Irfan Habib writes, "The Indian peasants, labourers, appeared an undifferentiated mass, all living miserably under the blind and increasing oppression. The picture was not an unfair one, it does not also conflict with the concept, developed later, of the Indian rural population divided up horizontally among village communities, each a self-sufficient entity, left to its own devices by the despotic regime of the court so long as the heavy land-tax was paid."<sup>34</sup> But this idea was unanimously refuted by the most of the historians. Quoting Habib we can say

that, "economic differentiation had progressed considerably among the peasantry. There were large cultivators, using hired labour, and raising crops for the market, and there were small peasants, who could barely produce food grains for their own subsistence. Beyond this differentiation among the peasantry, there was the still sharper division between the caste peasantry and the menial population."<sup>35</sup>

More specific references to peasant differentiation goes as far as following when we get the mention in the Mughal literature of *Khud-Kashta* or owners of the land in the official documents, *pahi* or *upari* or outsiders who came from the other villages to cultivate the land and lastly there were the *muzarian* or share-croppers who rented land from the *Khud-kast* peasants or the *Zamindars*. There was also a small class of landless peasants who were also enrolled as casual labours at times of harvest and sowing etc.<sup>36</sup> From the writings of Moreland and Bernier it was seen that there were also the agricultural labourers also.

Now the question comes that what is the role of the *Zamindar* class in the production process in rural India during the pre-colonial India. We do get some information about the way they controlled the rural society from the writings of B.B. Chaudhury. He provides us evidences to draw the picture of the rural society of Bengal where the *Zamindars* constructed and maintained the irrigation works and reclaimed the waste lands. The *Zamindars* also collected rents. So we can come to the conclusion that the *Zamindars* were existed in the pre-colonial period and it was not a modern phenomenon. In pre-colonial India the revenue-collection process was highly stratified and complex involving a number of tiers of colonial agents. In different parts of the country these agents were designated by the different names but their roles were more or less the same.<sup>37</sup>

By the middle years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Mughal Empire was started crumbling. The government began to lose its grip on the civil administration. The resultant chaos had its inevitable effects on agriculture and revenue. The imperial treasury had standing instructions to advance capital for improvements. But the work was not done. The imperial governors did not formally deny their loyalty to Delhi, but one after another they had asserted their autonomy.<sup>52</sup> Thus within fifty years of time Delhi lost its glory as the power centre of whole northern India. Among the newly emergent regional states mention should be made about Bengal, Maratha kingdom,

Hyderabad, Awadh, Sikh kingdom and Trevancore, which politically denoted the decentralization of Mughal power.<sup>38</sup>

The recent historiography of the 18<sup>th</sup> century India showed that there were regions with considerable amounts of resources, which actually attracted the European traders in India and pushed them off an open competition for the mastery over the land. Out of this open contest the British East India Company emerged by overpowering the other European trading companies.<sup>39</sup>

The expansion of the empire in India in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century marked, according to P.J.Cain and A.G.Hopkins, an extension of the “Gentlemanly capitalism”, upheld by an alliance between landed interests and financial power that was in ascendancy in London after 1688, and that was the reason why “the revenue became and remained the central preoccupation of imperial policy”<sup>40</sup> But the other factors such as search for revenue; the quest for trading privileges and the imperatives of military exigencies-all determined the specific course of territorial expansion.

The first step of this process of territorial expansion was the Grant of Aurangzeb’s *farman* by which they got the right of duty free trade in Bengal in return for an annual payment of Rs.3000.<sup>41</sup> The condition of the British traders became more stable after getting the grant through a *farman* by the Mughal emperor Farruksiyar in 1717 which granted the Company the right to carry on duty free trade and the right to rent 38 villages around Calcutta and to use the royal mint. But the then autonomous ruler of Bengal-Murshid Kuli Khan did not like all these privileges of East India Company. The result was the continuous and consequent conflict between the next rulers of Bengal and the Company which took its final shape in the Battle of Plassey. Through this battle the British East India Company sowed its seeds of political supremacy in India as Siraj-ud-daulla, the ruler of Bengal was defeated in this battle and put to death. The new *Nawab* Mir Jafar became a puppet in the hands of the English.<sup>42</sup>

But a sincere attempt of defeating the Company was made on the part of next Nawab of Bengal, Mir Kasim with the help of Mughal emperor Shah Alam II and Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh. But their combined army was routed by the Company’s force at the Battle of Buxer in 1764. The result was that the Company got the Grant of *Diwani* (revenue collecting rights) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal

emperor Shah Alam II in 1765. Thus by 1765 eastern India almost came under the control of the Company.<sup>43</sup>

And by the period of almost over a century, from 1757 to 1856, the English East India Company annexed the Indian territories that came to constitute British India. After Awadh was annexed in 1856, more than 60 percent territories of present India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh came under British control. And after this date no further conquests had taken place as the Mutiny had taken place in 1857 as a response to the annexations. But the British maintained close control over the affairs of the princely state. This relationship has been called “indirect rule”.<sup>44</sup>

**Table-1: Major Annexations of Indian Territories by the East India Company (1757-1857)**

Year	Territories annexed	Area (,000 square miles)
1757	Bengal and Bihar	15
1765	Carnatic	4
1766	Northern Sarkars	2
1775	Benares	1
1792-9	Dindigul, Malabar, Canara etc.	4
1801	“Ceded Districts”	7
1803-18	Maratha Territories	19
1825-42	North-east and Burma	15
1843	Sind	5
1848	Satara	1
1849	Punjab	10
1853	Jhansi, Nagpur, Hyderabad assigned	13
1856	Awadh	2
<b>Total</b>	Annexation	98(62%)
	Indian States remaining	59(38%)
	India	157

Source: Michael H.Fisher, *The Politics of British Annexation of India 1757-1857*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993, p.xvi

## 2.2. Land Management System of India under Colonial Rule

Since the Grant of *Diwani* for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, the major aim of the East India Company was to collect as much as revenue as possible. Agriculture being the main basis of economy and main source of income, both before the British rule, and during it, several land revenue experiments were introduced to maximise

extraction. Though the native officials were in charge of collecting taxes and the supervisors were the European officers, but their corruption as well as lack of understanding of the local situation and languages led to complete disorganization of the agrarian economy as well as the rural society in the *Diwani* provinces within a couple of years. As a result of severe demand of land revenue and devastating famine in 1769-70, the one third of the population of Bengal was wiped off.<sup>45</sup>

Viewing the condition of the *Diwani* provinces the Company appointed Hastings as Governor of Bengal to regularise the process of revenue collection. In 1772 he introduced the farming system, which suggested the revenue collecting right was farmed out to the highest bidders. But this system ultimately failed to improve the situation as the farmers tried to squeeze as much as possible without any concern for the production process.<sup>46</sup> The peasants were over-burdened with taxation resulting in the complete ruination of agricultural population. Lord Cornwallis was therefore sent to India with a specific motive to streamline the revenue administration.

On his arrival in India, Lord Cornwallis found it impossible to continue with the existing system of land revenue as he realised that system was impoverishing the country and was not producing large surplus for which the Company expected for. In addition, the decline in agriculture also affected the Company's trade as it depended on agriculture for its raw materials. It was thought, therefore, that the only way to improve the situation was to fix the revenue permanently. But it should be mentioned here that before Cornwallis's arrival, number of Company officials were in favour of permanent land revenue settlement. Their advices and ideas had given the birth of Permanent Settlement of 1793, which introduced the policy of 'assessment for ever' in Bengal.<sup>47</sup>

The servants of the East India Company in India always wanted to adopt a system which had roots in the soil, which the people knew and were accustomed to follow and which would create minimum difficulties for the new rulers. The East India Company with certain modifications adopted the Mughal system of land revenue and it forms the basis of the agrarian administration of British India.

The Pitt's India Act of 1784 and the appointment of Lord Cornwallis as the Governor General marked a new era in the social and economic history of Bengal. It was felt by the British government that absence of private proprietorship on land was

major deterrent towards agricultural development which in turn would ensure higher revenue for the State. The Permanent Settlement was an agreement between East India Company and the *Zamindars*. Every part of land in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa became part of *Zamindari* system and the *Zamindars* had to pay the tax fixed upon them. He was the owner of his *Zamindari* and he could sell, mortgage and transfer it and his *Zamindari* became hereditary. But if he failed to give that fixed amount his land was liable to be confiscated by the Government and would be put on auction for sale. The new buyer will become the new owner of that land. Thus this settlement created the private propriety over land, which ushered improvement in agriculture. The Permanent Settlement vested the landownership right in the hands of *Zamindars*, who had previously enjoyed only revenue collecting rights. The *Zamindars* were declared as the proprietors of the soil.<sup>48</sup>

But most surprisingly in this settlement the interests of the peasants were overlooked. The peasants were left at the mercy of the *Zamindars*. Their customary occupancy right was ignored and they were reduced to the status of tenants. The *patta* or the written agreement which was made between the *Zamindars* and peasants providing a record of given amount was often violated by the *Zamindars*. Thus the peasants were overburdened by excessive taxation and sometimes by illegal taxes. After 1799 the *Zamindars* also got the right to seize the property of the tenants due to non-payment of taxes without the permission of Court of Law. Thus the peasants or tenants were not the beneficiaries of the settlement.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand though the settlement was pro-*Zamindar*, but they too had to face number of difficulties. The old *Zamindars* in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa suffered greatly. As Daniel Thorner has argued, creation of private property in land was a misnomer, as the absolute ownership was retained by the imperial authority<sup>50</sup>. But the other factors such as *Zamindars* had to pay a fixed amount of revenue by a particular date (the so-called 'sun-set' law), failure of which led to the sale of his *Zamindari* land. Between 1804 and 1818, 51% of the original *Zamindars* were alienated due to auction sales.<sup>51</sup> Their officials and rich tenants bought their estates. Another big result of these settlements was the beginning of the process of sub-infeudation.<sup>52</sup> The subsequent tenancy legislation in 1859 and 1885 somewhat protected the rights of the tenants by recognizing their occupancy rights. But the

powers of the *Zamindars* remained unchanged and there was no alteration in the relation of Raj with the powerful *Zamindars*.

The new legal reforms failed to heal the poor cultivators. These reforms on the other hand gave more power to the rich peasants and the *Jotedar* who were the real landholders at the village level while the *Zamindars* enjoyed only the revenue collecting right.<sup>53</sup> Beneath all the changes effected by colonial policies, the Rays argue, the power of this class and their control over the rural society remained unaffected and allowed the basic rural social structure to be continued in colonial Bengal.

The Permanent Settlement however did not mean a complete freezing of the land revenue, and the Company could secure an increase in it time to time. The numbers of estates of defaulting *Zamindars* and the large portion of the waste lands which were not included in the *Zamindar*'s estate at the time of the settlement became increasingly profitable with the growth of cultivation and rising prices.<sup>54</sup> The Bengal model was, however, rejected in Orissa and Assam because of the growing feeling of the freezing of the land revenue demand. Both in Orissa and Assam the revenue demand was increased from time to time.<sup>55</sup>

Lord Cornwallis wanted that the Permanent Settlement system should extend to other parts of India. Lord Wellesley and Henry Dundas of the Board of Control equally shared the same view i.e. the extension of the *Zamindari* system to Madras Presidency. But the problem they faced was that they could not find the sizable section of *Zamindars* like Bengal. But in spite of that they introduced the Permanent Settlement system in large areas under their control. The local *Poligars* were recognised as *Zamindars*, and in other areas, where the *Poligars* were not found, villages were aggregated into estates and were sold in auction to the highest bidders.<sup>56</sup>

But after some time the British officials were disillusioned with the Permanent Settlement, as it did not raise the income of the Government from the Madras Presidency. Then the Scottish officials like Thomas Munro and Elphinstone had taken the initiatives to change the land revenue administration. On the other hand David Ricardo's rent theory also helped the officials to change the system.<sup>57</sup> But the real reason for a new type of settlement was the financial crisis of the Madras Presidency

caused by the rising expenses of war. This was the background of the implementation of the *Ryotwari* Settlement in Madras Presidency.<sup>58</sup>

The *Ryotwari* experiment was taking place in Baramahal in 1792 by Alexander Reed and was continued by Thomas Munro from 1801 when he was in charge of the revenue administration of the ceded Districts.<sup>59</sup> Under the *Ryotwari* system they began to collect revenue directly from the peasant. It created the individual proprietary right in land. But this system created distinction between the public and private ownership.<sup>60</sup> By this system the annual agreements were to be made between the peasants and the Government after a general survey of the lands. Peasants were free to take decision to accept or refuse the agreement. If he agreed he was given a *patta*, which would become a title to private property. But after sometime the revenue was fixed without the detailed land survey and as a result the Government often failed to collect the revenue as the peasants denied paying the unjust revenue imposed on them. Thus the *Ryotwari* system did not last long in Madras Presidency after Munro's departure in 1807.<sup>61</sup>

But after 1820 the situation changed as Thomas Munro came back to India and became the Governor of Madras. He argued that *Ryotwari* was the ancient Indian land-tenure system and therefore best suited to Indian conditions.<sup>62</sup> He also argued that historically land in India was owned by state, which collected revenue from individual peasants through a hierarchy of officials paid through grant of *inam* land. So through the *Ryotwari* system the Government should collect land tax directly by eliminating the over mighty *poligars*. The British government in London was also supported the view of Munro as this system would give direct authority and power in the hands of the British officials.<sup>63</sup>

The Madras Government was under drastic economic pressure and decided to introduce the *Ryotwari* Settlement in most part of the presidency. As a result the revenue of the government increased but it put the peasants in great distress. In many areas no survey was carried on and the taxes were fixed arbitrarily based on village accounts. Contrary to Munro's argument the *Ryotwari* system failed to wipe out the intermediaries between the Government and the peasantry. The existing village power system was not changed and in some cases was more strengthened by the new system. But after 1855 some reform measures were undertaken to improve the situation of the peasants.<sup>64</sup> But these measures actually could not solve the problem of the peasants.

The micro-level studies on *Ryotwari* Settlement in Madras Presidency revealed the fact that the Settlement actually strengthened the power of the village magnates by accentuating the process of social conflict. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the rich landlords controlled the large farms and leased out the surplus lands to landless peasants and sharecroppers. The economic condition of the intermediaries was though satisfactory but creditors and the intermediaries did not waste the chance of exploiting the poor peasants. As a result the peasants had to be satisfied with small plots of lands.<sup>65</sup>

The British frontier in Western India rapidly advanced under the Marquis of Hastings, and whole of the Deccan came under British rule in 1817. After analysing the valuable reports on agriculture and peasantry of the newly acquired territories the *Ryotwari* Settlement was implemented in the Bombay Presidency. Initially the British had been collecting the revenue through the *Deshmukh* and village headman. But the amount of the revenue could not satisfy the authority. So after 1813 they started collecting the revenue from the *ryots* directly. But *Ryotwari* Settlement ended in failure.<sup>66</sup> The government demand for rent was fixed at 55% of the produce. As the rate of the land tax became very high the peasants had to mortgage their lands to the money-lenders or abandon the cultivation due to crop failure or migrate to neighbouring princely states where rates were low. A re-survey was commenced by Goldsmid and Lieutenant Wingate in 1835. And both in Bombay and Northern India, Settlements have been made for long period of 30 years from these dates. But it failed to give any relief to the cultivators.<sup>67</sup> Riot broke out in Deccan in 1875 as the cultivators were unable to pay the enhanced demand of land revenue. A commission was then appointed to look into the matter. The Bombay Revenue jurisdiction Act was accordingly passed in 1876.<sup>68</sup>

The region comprising the north and north-western India which was once the heartland of the Mughal Empire, including the Ganga-Jamuna Doab, formed the North-Western provinces. The agrarian structure of this region was controlled basically by the two magnets – *Zamindars* and the *Talukdars*. According to the description of Nurul Hasan the *Talukdars* were “intermediary *Zamindars*” who “contracted with the state to realise the revenue of a given territory”. The *Zamindars* were “the holders of proprietary rights over agricultural as well as habitational lands.”<sup>69</sup>

Initially the British Government proceeded to collect the land revenue of this region from the *Talukdars*. But this short-term settlements were based on artificial and faulty estimates of the productivity of the newly conquered lands, and therefore the revenue assessment was abnormally high. The *Talukdars* refused to pay the increased revenue demand and were liquidated with utter ruthlessness. Many were driven off and defaulting estates were sold off by the government. As a result, by 1820, “many of this magnate class of upper India”, as Eric Stokes described them, had “either lost their position entirely or were left in a shrunken condition”.<sup>70</sup> The land sold in auction was often bought by the *amlas* and *tehsildars*. These people came to constitute “a new class of landlords” who were outsiders to the village community and had different attitudes to the land.<sup>71</sup> The situation created nevertheless a alarm that land was passing into the hands of the non-cultivating classes.

So from *Taluqdars* British preference now shifted to the “primary *Zamindars*” and village communities. Now settlement was to be made with the village community or with a *Taluqdar* where available, and in addition to the rights of the proprietors, the rent to be paid by the resident cultivating peasants was also to be ascertained and recorded. Thus the *Taluqdars* were not completely eliminated, but where possible joint proprietary right in land were vested in the village community. This settlement was known as *Mahalwari* (village or *Mahal*) Settlement.<sup>72</sup> But this settlement was full of confusion and corruption from its very beginning. In practice it was virtually impossible to implement because of complex existing administrative machinery. The net outcome was the over-assessment. The situation was worsened by the agricultural depression of 1828. After this situation some reforms came by the Regulation XI of 1833. Two thirds of the net income of the land was fixed as revenue and the settlement was made for thirty years. But this settlement also resulted in the over-assessment as it was based on imperfect surveys. The peasants were compelled to sale their lands which in many cases passed into the hands of the moneylenders and merchants. The grievances of the rural society of north India were soon to be expressed rather violently in the revolt of 1857.<sup>73</sup>

Thus from the above discussion it can be said that by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British East India company was able to make three different plans to extract maximum revenue from land by creating private property in land and conferring that proprietary right on three different groups- the Permanent Settlement

was made with the *Zamindars*, *Ryotwari* Settlement with the peasants and the *Mahalwari* Settlement with the village community. The latter system was extended to Punjab and central India when those regions were conquered subsequently, while the *Ryotwari* system was introduced in Sind, Assam and Coorg. The *Zamindari* system was tried in the northern districts of the Madras Presidency where *Zamindars* could be found. According to a rough estimate, in 1928-29 about 19 percent of the cultivable land in India was under *Zamindari* settlement, 29 percent under *Mahalwari* settlement and 52 percent under *Ryotwari* system.<sup>74</sup>

So by analyzing the land administration of the different provinces of India during the first 13 years under Crown Administration it can be said that many real reforms were affected. Protection was given to the cultivators of Bengal, Oudh, and the Punjab, against unjust increase of rent by private landlords. The system of settlements in Northern India was improved and assessment was made on the tangible basis of the rental of villages. Relief was given to Madras cultivators by the introduction of the Thirty Years settlement rule. Help was given to Bombay cultivators by the Agricultural Relief Act and by the Revenue Code, both passed in 1879. And in the Central provinces, the recognition of proprietary rights in *Malguzars*, and the long term settlement begun in 1863, were a boon to the harassed population. The cardinal defects as argued by R. C. Dutt from which agriculture still suffered are:<sup>75</sup>

1. Enhancements were not limited by definite and specific rules at Revision Settlements.
2. Assessments were not made according to the half Rental rule, but often absorbed the whole rental in Madras and Bombay.
3. No independent tribunals watched the enforcement of rules.
4. Special cesses on land, in addition to the land revenue, violated the half Rental Rule.

As the process of maximization of land revenue was pursued with great determination under the British Rule, so the common feature of all the settlements was the over-assessment because the one and only motive of the Company was to maximise the land revenue income. A number of tax-free tenures were subject to taxation. Taxes were collected more efficiently than before. The net results of the excessive taxation

were- raising indebtedness, increasing land sales and last the dispossession of the peasants. But contrary to this argument, the modern research has established that the effects of these changes were less specular than once imagined, and had significant regional variations, as the land transfer could not fundamentally alter the structure of landholding everywhere. The agrarian society thus proved to be more resilient than once thought to be. But the groups and classes that survived had substantially different rights, obligations and powers. These changes and grievances generating from these dispossessed peasants were largely reflected in the series of agrarian disturbances in the later part of the British rule.

### **2.3 The Land- man relationship of India under Colonial Rule**

The exact impact of British rule on the Indian rural society continues to be a debatable issue. The traditional view postulating a qualitative transformation of the rural society has recently been questioned, the opposing point of view being that what looked like a transformation was really largely a continuation of the pre-British system.<sup>76</sup> The main point of disagreement relates to what may be called the “social fabric of Indian agriculture”, since both the views agreed that ‘the basic process of production and the level of technique’ were nearly everywhere left “virtually unaffected”, with the small peasant economy largely persisting as the basis of the organization of agriculture and with capitalistic farming affecting the rural economy only in isolated pockets. Even with regard to the view that ‘the net effect of British rule was to change drastically the social fabric’, one notices a shift in the arguments over the years.<sup>77</sup> For instance, the nationalists who assumed an increasing rural impoverishment blamed it mainly on certain aspects of the British land revenue administration, such as the high pitch of land revenue demand, the insistence on its payment in money and its relative inflexibility which by preventing accumulation of agricultural capital, inevitably impoverished agriculture. Later writers, thinking in terms of a structural change in the rural society, emphasized other factors, such as the establishment of private property in land, the creation and proliferation of a class of “parasitic” landlords, the increasing burden of rent and rural indebtedness.<sup>78</sup> All these, it is argued in the context of the growth of a cash economy and of an increasing commercialization of agriculture, caused large-scale alienations of peasant holdings, with the result that peasants ceased

to be “ self-possessing, self-working and self-sufficient” producers and increasingly depended for their subsistence on agricultural wage labour and sharecropping.<sup>79</sup>

According to the opposing point of view mentioned above, the old agrarian society was far from egalitarian, the considerable redistribution of landed property rights brought about by the British revenue laws only marginally affected the old system of land control at the village level. Also, the pre-British agrarian society was not necessarily one of self-possessing, self-working and self-sufficient producers, since it included a sizable group of agricultural labourers and sharecroppers whose number did not appreciably increase during British rule, and the system of rural credit to which the alleged increase in rural inequalities and landlessness of peasants has been attributed was scarcely a novel development during British rule.<sup>80</sup>

Identification and characterization of the agrarian changes that occurred over the vast area of Eastern India during a period of about 200 years is reasonably a difficult task, and we do not expect to recommend any conclusive answer to this debate by analysing some of the major changes that happened in Eastern India.

The first vital contact between British rule and the rural society occurred mainly through the initiatives of the Company for maximising the traditional share of the state in the produce of the country in the form of land revenue. Trade and commerce affected the rural society in various ways and it should be noted here that the primary concern of the Company to increase the land revenue was necessitated primarily for the needs of trade and commerce. The British policy of maximization of land revenue, however, necessitated certain institutional innovations which eventually considerably affected the composition of the agrarian society. Such innovations related at first to the choice of the social groups to which the collection of the increased revenue could be dependable.<sup>81</sup> The new *Zamindars* replaced the old *Zamindars* because the land estates were given to the highest bidders in many cases. The continuation of such a system for long would perhaps have exposed the old landed society to an increasing penetration of alien elements, eventually affecting the old method of estate management.

The new composition of the landed society in Eastern India was also affected by the growth of land market. The British attempts at integrating the old landed aristocracy into the new fiscal system in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa also only partially

succeeded. The group could scarcely prosper under the conditions of the new system, particularly the distress sales of estates of defaulting *Zamindars*, and very many of its members were eliminated in the process of the growth of a land market. The following reasons are attributed for the growth of the land market.<sup>82</sup>

- a) the insistence by the government on public sales of defaulters' estates as the chief means of ensuring the security of revenue,
- b) the inability of many *Zamindars* under the circumstances to cope with the increased revenue,
- c) and the eagerness on the part of the moneyed persons to transfer part of their fortunes to the purchase of estates.

With the growth of the land market the prices of the land also increased simultaneously. The immediate causes of the rise in land prices since 1855 were the improvement in the agricultural prices in Bengal and Bihar and the complete disappearance of the agricultural depression in Orissa by 1855. The population growth and the resultant pressure on land, the increasing cultivation of the cash crops-jute and sugarcane made the grounds for rising agricultural prices as well as *Zamindar*'s rental income. The competition for land among the peasants enabled the *Zamindars* to exact a bigger amount of rent from the peasants. The exploitation level reached so high that the background was ready for the Peasant movement.<sup>83</sup>

The view emphasised in this study is that despite certain elements of continuity the pre-British agrarian society and system was not quite the same as that which evolved during British rule. The continuity of the small peasant economy as the basic organization of agricultural production, and the continuities in terms of certain agrarian institutions, and of the numerical sizes of some economic groups, such as sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, concealed a significant process of change. The nature of the decisive influences on the agrarian society during British rule considerably changed over the years. Some of them derived directly from the immediate administrative policies and the related institutional innovations.

At first the policy caused a great deal of dislocation in the rural society-in the form of diminished power of the old *Zamindars* and of the increased misery of the peasants in very many regions, though the decision of the government to depend on the old *Zamindars* in connection with the collection of land revenue arrested this

immediate process. The urban groups purchased estates, and indeed the number of purchases by traders, merchants, moneylenders and bankers tended to increase over the years, but they could not dominate the land market, at least in the initial phases of its growth, when auction sales were far more numerous than later. The main beneficiaries at the time were the frugal and the astute *Zamindars*, persons belonging to the *Zamindari* bureaucracy and also to the official bureaucracy.<sup>84</sup>

Remarkable changes were also found in regard to the position and powers of *Zamindars* in relation to peasants. The Settlement of 1793 did not necessarily reduce the old owner peasants, as was once argued, to wretched tenants at will. It is not valid either to argue that the large increase in the gross rental of *Zamindars* over the years occurred mainly at the cost of peasants producers. However, relations between *Zamindars* and peasants changed. Where European indigo planters were the *Zamindars* the methods of estate management were drastically revised.<sup>85</sup> The new *Zamindars* were also invariably more careful about increasing their rental income, and gradually refined the existing machinery towards ensuring this. The superior legal powers of *Zamindars*, both old and new, were considerably reinforced by the developments leading to an increased demand for land among the peasants. Apart from the promotion of new cultivation the land control structure was also changed in the rural society. The public or private sales of estates leading to the replacement of old *Zamindars* by auction-purchasers affected the nature of land control at the village level. Though it is very difficult to conclude whether the rural indebtedness has increased in the British period in Eastern Indian or not. Changes also had taken place in the composition of money lenders, in the organization of credit and in the forms of appropriations by the creditors. However the general debt situation and the kinds of the creditors' appropriations inevitably affected the economic performance of the dispossessed peasants, where they were not driven out of their lands by the creditors.<sup>86</sup>

Western India comprises roughly the long narrow coastal area from the Rann of Kutch to north Kanara, the wide flat Gujrat plains and the Deccan plateaus. The British conquered western India in two main stages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The differences of history and geography led to marked regional variations in land tenures and land revenue, and the British themselves evolved a uniform system of land revenue only in 1847.<sup>87</sup> These territories were annexed at a time when no clear model

for the land revenue was available-neither the *Zamindari* system in Bengal nor the early experiments in *Raiyatwari* in Madras seemed satisfactory. The government intended to follow the principles of the Maratha system of land revenue system and Elphinstone in particular wanted to protect the established rights of headmen and *mirasdars*. But the collector and their subordinate officials were opposed to the self-rule of village communities. At last the *Raiyatwari* system was introduced in the western part which may have weakened the solidarity of the village and undermined the position of the headman and other officials.<sup>88</sup>

From the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, western India began to emerge from the sustained depression. The growth of cities and the improvement of transport widened the markets for food crops. There was a series of good harvests and the reduction of land revenue encouraged the cultivation.<sup>89</sup> The first beneficiaries of this situation were the traders and the money lenders but it also helped the peasants too. Many cultivators were able to repay their debts. On the other hand the new legal system introduced by the British had given the village money lenders more freedom than before. By the middle of the century land had a high sale value and the courts would now enforce the transfer of land for recovery of debt. According to some accounts, by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the money-lenders (*vanis*) controlled nearly all the internal trade in the Deccan and it was this control which they wished to preserve. It was true that the money-lenders generally won their cases, but this was a way of tightening the moneylender's hold over the debtor-rather than transferring the land, the raiyat preferred to sign a new bond for a higher amount of debt. The amount of land that actually changed the hand was very small. The Gujrati and Marwari money-lenders against whom the riots were directed, captured only 5% of the cultivated land. But the changes occurred in the class of moneylender's class itself.<sup>90</sup> As a result of agricultural expansion many village *vanis* moved to larger village and small town for trade and the most of the villages were left without their traditional *vanis* or moneylender. In their place, prosperous members of the traditional cultivating caste, the *Kunbis* took to money-lending. These cultivator-cum-moneylenders naturally had a much greater appetite for land than the mercantile castes. So the process of land transfer within the *Kunbis* may have been of greater importance rather than the transfer to the money-lenders.<sup>91</sup>

The price of land increased in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to rise in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it was not the *vanis* and the *sahukars* who bought these lands, so much as the rich farmers who had been able to seize the new markets opportunities. The rise of the rich peasants resulted the growth of highly stratified peasant society. The government itself increased stratification by its loan policy. It is certainly true that some peasants grew much richer and others lost their lands. But what is not at all clear is how widespread and permanent the process of stratification was, but the land was certainly very unequally distributed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the number of agricultural labourers did not grow rapidly in western India. Moreover, the number of landless labourers is reported to have declined in British Gujrat as the Census data suggest.<sup>92</sup>

South India is also a region of great social, historical and physical diversity. South Indian agrarian relations were complex and enormously varied. There were innumerable historical and geographical reasons for these variations. Villages differed greatly in size and in their relations with the outside the world. Trade was much brisker in the rich agricultural areas. Some large landholders engaged in the grain trade. One special feature of the South Indian scene was the existence of the communal system of landholding, specially the Brahmin settlements. The large landholders were called as *Mirasdars*.<sup>93</sup> The *Mirasdars* of each village originally belonged to the same caste, in Tamil areas they were usually Brahmins. There was no rule of village exogamy and marriages frequently occurred within the village. The dominant *Mirasdars* or the landholders dominated practically every aspect of village life-in irrigation or perhaps in temple affairs. Brahmins were forbidden to touch the plough, so the lands of Brahmin landholders were cultivated by others. The system of sharecropping was a dominant feature of agriculture in South India. There were day labourers who might belong to the same caste as the landholders, some were in lifetime debt bondage to their employers, others managed to become sharecroppers or small cultivators.<sup>94</sup>

As the British expanded their hegemony over South India through different types of land system, they were faced with three types of problems- to maximise the land revenue, whom to settle with for the land revenue, and how the Company should arbitrate between different interests to consider the issues of land law and rights. The

first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of hectic and sometime unsuccessful experimentation for the British to collect the land revenue.<sup>95</sup>

But the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was on the whole a period of agricultural prosperity, probably for most agricultural classes.<sup>96</sup> But this period of relative agrarian prosperity was interrupted by the widespread famine of 1876-78. As usual it was the agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and small cultivators were worst sufferers. Gradually traditional ties were loosened in some areas. The landed and the landless both became more mobile. The rich farmers widened the sphere of their activities and invested their capital to industries. They extended their money lending business. The non-cultivating landlords specially the Brahmins, sold out or leased out their land to cultivators and moved to the cities or took to trade and money lending in the village. Labourers moved in response to new demands to newly irrigated area. Emigration to Burma, Malaya and Ceylon continued to be substantial. The depression of 1930s hit not only the richer men but also the labourers and artisans and the sharecroppers. There was a return of the migrants in 1930s. But the less affected were the middle farmers.<sup>97</sup> We don't have enough statistics to substantiate the view that land was increasingly passing into the hands of richer farmers and the moneylenders. But the village surveys show that large land-holdings were broken up. This resulted the break-up of the joint-family system especially in the Tamil areas. Most interesting point is that as admitted by S.Raghavaiyengar that in the 19th century the dependence of *Raiyats* on professional money lenders had actually fallen because of the growth of the money economy.<sup>98</sup>

The money value of the debt must have continued to increase over the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the depression the burden of debt became so pressing that the government was forced to take action. A survey made on Hyderabad shows that there were far fewer land transfers during the war than in the depression years and it was probably true of other regions too.<sup>99</sup>

The upper Gangetic region, which today falls largely within the boundaries of U.P, exercised a primary influence on the evolution of the Indian landholding system in the colonial period. Here the key-stone of the arch of the British revenue settlements was formed by the "village republics". From the *Doab* or Mesopotmia of the Ganges and Jumna, constituting the heart of the North Western Provinces, the settlement system which accorded modern proprietary title to holders of jointly-

owned or jointly-managed village estates was extended after 1849 when the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab came under British rule. In the southern portion of Jumna, the village *mahalwari* system was equally influential in instituting a form of village proprietorship under very different tenurial conditions from 1862 throughout much of the region brought within the Central provinces. The key question lies here that how far without the technological changes in agriculture, the fiscal and the legal apparatus of the settlement system prompted a decisive structural change in agrarian society of the Northern and Central India.<sup>100</sup>

For the necessity of academic analysis we have to reduce the difficulty of the hierarchy of traditional rights over land into two broad divisions, according to whether a holder may be classified as “primary” or a “secondary (intermediary) *Zamindar*”. The rights of the latter extended solely to land revenue collection at a superior level. The primary *Zamindar* was the land holder having immediate ‘proprietary’ dominion over the soil. Some form of joint extended-family management and partial ownership was by far the most common tenurial form. The primary *Zamindars* were generally to be found settled as dominant lineages in a number of continuous villages. Their grip was most tenacious where the primary *Zamindars* were identical with the cultivators. But in the 18<sup>th</sup> century we can see that the dominant position of the Rajput over the primary *Zamindari* rights was steadily eroded, but the more immediate significance was the partial loss of village landholding rights to local intermediaries.<sup>101</sup>

When the British annexed the upper Gangetic region, they initially made considerable use of the magnate element for local revenue collection purposes. Apart from utilizing the agency of the local magnets, the British employed as revenue officials the so-called “contract tahsildars,” who were remunerated with a percentage commission on what they paid in the Government treasury.<sup>102</sup>

The extent to which transfer of proprietary title carried with it more than a mere change in revenue management and afflicted the internal constitution of the village depended under the British, as it had done before them, on the strength of the primary *Zamindari* group. In the Central *doab* and Eastern districts agriculture was sufficiently secure. In the joint *Zamindari* tenure, primary *Zamindars* were a single joint family, and the profits were divided on ancestral shares after meeting the government revenue demand. The financial advantages of proprietary right were here

more limited. Excessive revenue pressure could, of course reduce the village *maliks* to a virtual equality of payment with subordinate cultivators and so obliterate the tributary right. But the same situation occurred in the place where the agriculture was insecure. The pressure on the land revenue compelled the peasants to migrate elsewhere. While the *malgur* or the revenue engagement right could undergo frequent transfer over the heads of the village communities, it was impossible to introduce an alien landlord element among them because there was nothing corresponding to landlord rent to support a non cultivating owner.<sup>103</sup>

Although revenue farmers were employed extensively in the early administration of the upper Doab and Rohilkhand there was also absence of the large-scale transfer of proprietary rights to outsiders. But from the early 1850 there was a change in the land control structure. Land control was passing steadily into the hands of the non-agricultural classes i.e. *bania* and *mahajans*. There was, therefore, a constant dualism between proprietary and cultivating rights, the one yielding rental income, and the other agricultural profits. Once the proprietor had been forced to embark on direct cultivation, it was always question how far he should retrench the one and enlarge the other. Transfer of proprietary title was, therefore, a very different thing from a man losing his land. Indeed a man could part with title in all but his sir land and still leave his actual cultivating holding entirely unaffected. He might indeed be prepared to sell off his rental rights in order to supply himself with the means to enlarge his own direct cultivation.<sup>104</sup>

The rise in the value of proprietary titles from 1840 was not achieved at the expense of the tenant. Proprietary profits had been increased not by raising rent rates but by letting out the arable waste land by expanding the irrigated area. The Mutiny of 1857 had a great impact on the landlord-peasant relationship. The automatic extension of the Bengal Act x, 1859 had established the occupancy right for any cultivator who could show the twelve years' unbroken possession. This act cut across the traditional distinction between the non-resident *pahi* cultivators and the resident cultivators.<sup>105</sup>

While village *maliks* and larger *Zamindars* alike became aware of their interest in preventing outsiders from establishing a foothold in this way, they also became gradually aware that the law armed them with powers to raise occupancy rents if they chose to do so. Hitherto such rents had been recorded at the time of settlement and had been recorded at the time of settlement and had remained

unchanged during its thirty-year currency. The growth of tenant right did not appear to hold back the growth in the value of proprietary right.<sup>106</sup>

The land holding structure was pyramidal in nature. Instead of conforming to the received image of a land of village proprietors, by far the greater part of the United Provinces was held by a relatively small group of large landholders. The rural society was strongly polarised. On the one hand, the number of middle-sized properties held by a 'gentry' class tended to diminish and to leave little between the large-revenue payer and the cultivating holder. On the other hand, the growth in what were in effect sub-proprietary rights meant that the upper landholding elite were confronted not by a body of tenants but by a mass of peasant sub-proprietors. The crucial economic divide was not, therefore, between land and tenants but between the absentee rent-receiver and the cultivating landholder. The British policy was aimed at resuming all revenue-free grants wherever possible and at remunerating the village elite class by a proprietary profit on a long-lease revenue engagement.

As a whole it can be suggested that there had been a grave upheaval in agrarian relations and tenures in north western provinces as a result of British rule. But the statistics of the land transfer showed that the land was not transferred into the hands of the non-agriculturists. Certainly there was no massive change in the rural society. But behind the problem of alienation and mortgage lay the much larger problem of indebtedness. But there was no simple relation of cause and effect. How far the rural society of the United Provinces underwent increasing stratification it is not easy to say.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of mounting British concern over indebtedness revenue officers were instructed to take into account the condition of the tenants in the official adjustment of rents. The last half of British rule in the United provinces witnessed a sharp intensification of agrarian difficulties and an increasing responsiveness of the land revenue administration to political pressure. By the beginning of the century the net cultivated area reached almost its maximum extent. But simultaneously the price level became high resulting unprecedented severity during the inflationary period of the First World War. As a result some sort of agrarian unrest touched the eastern and south-eastern Avadh. *Zamindari* Abolition appeared to complete the work of dismantling the British land revenue system. At

independence the land tenure holding system of the Northern and Central India was totally changed.<sup>107</sup>

To understand agrarian policy-formation it is necessary to consider several major questions other than how historians of British rule have seen the matter. An obvious first question pertains to the impact of British initiatives on pre-colonial agrarian production and the welfare of rural peoples. This has always been difficult to answer because comparisons with the pre-colonial past can be nothing except imprecise, and because the evidence for making estimates of cultivation, yields and-most especially-per capita output did not become available before the middle of the nineteenth century. Until recently, imperialist and nationalist readings of the pre-colonial period have presumed a decline in agricultural production caused by the dissolution of the Mughal order and by the wars which helped to establish the new British order. However, an historiographical view of a different sort has recently emerged, arguing that the pre-colonial 18<sup>th</sup> century rural economy was generally a healthy one, partly so because the state regimes of this period were directly and constructively involved in the promotion of agrarian production, and that this vigour continued well into the colonial age.<sup>108</sup>

Several scholars have contributed to this revision of early modern Indian history<sup>109</sup> According to these scholars, the rural economy of 18th century India enjoyed substantial if uneven growth, notwithstanding the destructiveness of wars which culminated in British rule, and notwithstanding the breach of large zones of supposed political order. The Mughal order-whose collapse an older generation of historians argued must have plunged the north Indian rural economy into decline and chaos by the middle of the eighteenth century-is now seen to have been replaced by another order. Now, smaller states and their consuming and tax-gathering regimes replaced the Mughal imperial order. Market networks proliferated and became to a degree interlinked in what the historian Tapan Raychaudhury call it a layer effect.<sup>110</sup> Revenue farming, though regarded by some scholars like Raychaudhury as an 'evil', is seen by others as one of the driving forces of agricultural commodity production which was led by the rural investments of the *Ijaradar* (revenue farmers) of the age.<sup>111</sup>

To some of these revisionist scholars, the economic dynamism continued well into the colonial period. This view conflicts with that of most "nationalist" historians,

who have assumed that the imposition of British rule in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a determining economic and political disjuncture. According to the latter conception, the uneven agrarian as well as commercial growth of the 18<sup>th</sup> century came to a close in about the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the consequences of the earliest colonial policies began to produce the distortions with which colonial domination in India has generally come to be identified.<sup>112</sup>

This formulation has been criticized by some historians; Neeladri Bhattacharya is one among them. His objection to an argument about the fundamental continuity of agrarian policies and conditions over the colonial divide is that elements which appear to be continuous are actually restructured, and should therefore be understood differently.<sup>113</sup>

If our knowledge about the impact of colonial policies on productions are inaccurate the same thing can hardly be said about the impact upon the welfare of a major part of the Indian rural population<sup>114</sup> The Madras official S.Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar finally admitted that “the great majority of the agricultural classes was very poor...(though) there certainly has been an improvement in the material condition...of the upper strata of society and a reduction in the percentage which the lowest grades bear to the total population.”<sup>115</sup>

What this rural “upper strata” of beneficiaries of British rule might have consisted in during pre-colonial times is another question of importance when evaluating agrarian policies. In this regard Thomas Munro’s report on social stratification in the Ceded districts of Madras was important. This report showed the fact that this sort of stratification developed during the pre-colonial era. The same may be said of the distinction between rich and poor peasants reported elsewhere in early British India.<sup>116</sup>

It has been observed from the discussion above that among the three land settlements, there were bewilderingly wide variability on who were deemed the proper payers of land revenue, on what was the proper unit of assessment, and on whether revenue liabilities were to remain ‘temporary’ (as in most of British India) or were to become ‘permanent’(as in Bengal). Making an threadbare accounting of the extent of the degree of variability was not easy.<sup>117</sup> A major factor was political, in the sense that these were systems of revenue collection seen as desirable or necessary

means of establishing British dominance in different places and times. Another factor was historical, i.e. an adaptation of procedures encountered by the founders of British systems in various parts of the subcontinent and modified to their purposes of conquest. <sup>118</sup>

But whatever the reasons for the various agrarian policies and land-revenue schemes established in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the level of extraction decreased as the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was therefore less consequential in monetary terms. In real terms, land revenue began to retreat from the punishing high pitch set in the early part of the century, before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of rising agricultural prices. Agricultural credit and debt had become major causes of rural poverty and exploitation for the poor. <sup>119</sup>

A long-lasting and perplexing debate on land revenue extended throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century without being resolved. Efforts to define a justified land-revenue policy failed for another reason: because from the beginning to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all sort of commercial, military and political problems dictated that a large “surplus” ought to be appropriated for imperial needs in India, in Britain, and in extending the British empire in Asia and Africa. In none of this was the welfare of the rural population of India as important as the interests of colonialism. <sup>120</sup>

Therefore, it can be argued that a general objective of colonial policy was to enhance agrarian commercialization and to link it to world trade. The following changes are widely agreed among scholars to have been directed towards this objective:

1. the establishment in law of private, alienable property, not only in Bengal, with the *Zamindari* settlement, but everywhere in British India and its client “princely” regimes,
2. The reinforcement of class differentiations among rural people through legal and administrative protection to the richer section by privileged ownership-rights and local administrative offices,
3. The monetization of the heavy revenue demand and the timing of its collection in such a way as to require a massive expansion in rural credit and money-lending by professional lenders and rich peasants, which resulted in crisis borrowing, debt-traps, and disadvantageous cash cropping arrangements for small producers,

4. direct compulsion in the cultivation of indigo and opium, but even more widespread indirect pressure for the cultivation of jute, sugarcane, oil-seeds, and very important, irrigation schemes intended to increase the acreage under the cash crops, the cash returns to the state and some private investors.”<sup>121</sup>

This deepening capitalist infiltration generated agrarian crises and challenges to the stability and legitimacy of the colonial state later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it led to the quest for appropriate agrarian policies. Modest relief measures were undertaken, including subsidized grain distribution and public works, and especially, the restoration of small scale irrigation.<sup>122</sup>

As the English Company extended its political control throughout India, it annexed the most economically productive areas, both agriculturally and commercially. Thus it began in Bengal, one of the richest Indian provinces, and then it quickly gobbled up most coastal areas to facilitate commercial enterprises and gradually grabbed the fertile Gangetic plain to Punjab. When Queen Victoria renounced any further British annexation, the princely states were located mainly in less economically productive areas. Jammu and Kashmir encompassed desolate mountains, Rajputana was a rain-deficit area, some Rajput-ruled states of Gujrat had unhealthy and unproductive tracts, the Orissan states stretched across the inaccessible jungle hills and the large block of central Indian States was riven by the deep defiles of the Bindhya Range.

But notable exception with extensive natural resources included the coastal states of Travancore and Cochin with a small but lush agricultural base in both food and cash crops, the cis-Sutlej Punjab states possessing fertile soils and early access to canal irrigation, and Hyderabad and Mysore with diverse economies. Unfortunately the economic landscape of the princely states remains clouded by a lack of scholarly research. So most of the overview is impressionistic and calls attention to the need for intensive research on the economic structure and development of the princely states.

As in the British Indian provinces, the economies of most princely states were mainly agricultural with widely varied patterns of land control, land revenue assessment and tax collection. The general types of settlement- with prominent individuals, with landlords, and with individual share-holders, took its appearance with minor variations in other regions of India including the Princely States. Local

conditions were the main factors behind the choice of proprietary body. The British administrators did never make abrupt changes in the land administration of Princely states. In the areas of Gujarat under the Marathas, which the British acquired, settlements were made with a group of warrior chiefs around Ahmedabad whom the British called *talukdars*, with shareholders called *patidars* in Kheda district, and with individual cultivators in Broach. Pre-British Kerala had a system of tenancy where upper caste non-cultivating land-lords rented out land to a hierarchy of tenants with different degrees of occupancy rights and under different forms of contracts.<sup>123</sup> The British in Malabar readily granted proprietary rights to the land-lords. Until 1850s in Hyderabad both the revenue farming and the *Ryotwari* settlement were followed by the British. In Awadh, the former revenue collectors or *Zamindars* became proprietors of land in legal terms. As a result they lost various perquisites and status. Many members of their extended families claimed rights to the lands resulting subdivision of the estates. On the other hand, many forms of customary tenants found their claim to tenure under proper legal protection. Many rulers monopolised a significant portion of their states as *khalsa* or crown lands but frequently more would be under the jurisdiction of *jagirdars*, as in the Rajputana states such as Alwar and Jaipur. In some princely states there were powerful cultivator-owners. Many observers claimed that princes extracted more from their peasants than did the British Indian Government, but that the peasants in princely states were “happier” than those under colonial rule.<sup>124</sup>

The condition of the Princely state of Cooch Behar was not different from the other Princely States as far the revenue administration was concerned. Though the territorial boundary of this state was not so vast like the Maratha State but the strategic importance of this state was no less important because it was surrounded by Bhutan, Nepal, and Ahom Kingdom. Cooch Behar was historically as well as culturally connected with the western plains of North-east. As a result, in designing the land revenue administration, the Koch Bihar state was strongly influenced by the land administration system of the Ahom kingdom. Maharaja Naranarayan had introduced the Paik-system, quite similar in many respects with that of the Ahoms in Upper Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>125</sup>

After the fall of the great kingdom of Kamrupa in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, many petty tribal kingdoms emerged in this part of India. These kingdoms were

mostly tribal infested and tribal social system as well as land management systems had dominated those regions. Therefore, Koch Behar had cultural and social synergies with those regions. The ruling class of these kingdoms began the process of embracing Hinduism since the 15<sup>th</sup> century when their kingdoms attained sufficiently large production base through the introduction of advanced system of production or through extension of territories by conquering the neighbouring countries. These developments helped the ruling elites of the tribal kingdoms to become independent of both tribal military forces and the community-based production system of agriculture. Changes in their agrarian system from shifting cultivation to settle one certainly brought about changes in land ownership.<sup>126</sup> These economic changes had brought remarkable changes in tribal society and culture. The situation in the tribal state of Cooch Behar was not a different one.

Among the surveys and reports which threw light on the socio-economic characteristics of the Koches during British Period, Buchanan Hamilton's description in 1809 was certainly worthy to mention. Therefore, his accounts provided us inputs regarding the structure of the land administration and the agrarian conditions found among the Koches or Rajbansis who certainly formed majority of population of this place. Buchanan describes about the Koch Kingdom in this way, "The lands are let by the plough, and each person who has a plough has a certain proportion of land fit for transplanted rice, and may occupy besides whatever he requires for his house... and sugar fields. Those two portions are fixed. He may besides cultivate as much of the high land that is fallow as he pleases, and it is usual to take from one field a succession of pulse, mustard, and summer rice, and then occupy another, that has been allowed some years of fallow".<sup>127</sup>

The agricultural conditions so described above suggested that a transition took place from the shifting cultivation to the settled agriculture. Thus a shift in the form of land settlement from the plough tax (*Haldhori*) to the regulated rates occurred in 1788, when the British colonial government introduced measurement of lands into the district.<sup>128</sup>

Buchanan also made observation on the internal conditions of the peasantry. He has showed that out of 62 villages of Patgong estate about half of the villages were leased by 30 large farmers (*Jotedar*) who directly paid their rents to the *Zamindari* office, and the remaining half was directly administered by officers to whom the

villagers paid their rents. The *Jotedar* hired out part of their holdings to the under-tenants and had cultivated half of the portion with the sharecroppers (*Adhiars*). Thus the wealthier section of the Koch peasants became *Jotedar* who had strong influence in rural areas and differences of economic condition between *Jotedars* and the Koch (Rajbansi) peasants were clearly visible by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>129</sup>

Though Cooch Behar had been an independent state till 1773, it had adopted the features of revenue administration of Bengal Subha under Murshid Kuli Khan to make its own structure. The feudal structure of revenue collection through the *Izaradars* seems to have been a direct adaptation of the *malzamini* system of Murshid quli Khan. After the Anglo-Koch Behar Treaty, the Company's government from time to time tried to control the administration of the Koch Behar State and repeatedly attempted to introduce the Bengal Regulation System into this kingdom. The land revenue system of the Koch Behar State in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be characterized as *Izaradari* System which was first introduced into this kingdom by the Commissioner Amuty of the East India Company.<sup>130</sup> He observed that the process of direct collection of revenue from the *raiya*s was plagued with corruption, oppression and inefficiency. Amuty advised the young Raja to adopt the Public farming system all over the Country. Accordingly, the *Izaradari* System was introduced in the Koch Behar Kingdom. Initially the contract was made annual but the duration gradually extended to 5 years. But it failed to bring any good result and became a source of great oppression to the tenancy.<sup>131</sup>

Most of the land in this kingdom was farmed by *Izaradars* who were 100 to 125 in numbers and they obtained farms through a process of auctions. Influential persons such as the Queen, members of the royal family, high ranking officers and the spiritual guide (guru) of the Raja usually secured the farms. But they did obtain this *Izara* in their dependent's name instead of their names. Most of the time, the *Izaradars* were subletting their *Izaras* to the subordinate people. The *Izaradars* collected their rents either directly from the peasants or through the *Patwaris* and *Bosneas* of the villages.<sup>132</sup> The *Izaradars* were entitled to collect one twelfth of the *Jama* as their commission (*Izaradari Haq*) and another twelfth as the expense of collection (*Saranjami*), in addition to the Raja's share. Besides, the peasants had to pay additional cesses to the high ranking officers of the State. Such cesses were collected by the *Izaradars* and passed on to the respective officers.

According to the Jenkins's Report it was known that, by this time, "All the officers but one are from the Bengal Provinces...even the interior situations are all neatly held by foreigners." For example, "The Sepoys and Barkandazes are Hindoostans... none of these employments being held by natives." And outside the Public offices, the principal Merchants are Marwari Shoroffs" whose main business lay in the exchange of Narayani Rupees.<sup>133</sup> Thus the State Administration was almost entirely manned by foreigners, except some top offices which were held by the members of the Royal family. Many of these outsiders after obtaining public offices secured lucrative *Izara* for themselves. Thus the process of land alienation was started by oppressing and dispossessing the original inhabitants of the country. During his stay in Koch Behar, Jenkins received many petitions from the people who had titles of either Nishya or Doss, complaining of over exaction, false claim of arrears, turning out of houses, looting, confined eviction of family, and taking away of *Jotes*. These malpractices were committed by persons with the titles of Chowdhury, Sanyal, and Lahiri." Thus intrusion of Bengal caste Hindus into the country was effected through the working of the state mechanism and revenue farming in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>134</sup>

Thus the *Izaradari* system introduced in 1790 became an instrument of oppression on the peasantry. The British administrators who played the role of the guardian of the raja of Cooch Behar during 1860-1870 felt the need of the fundamental land reform in the State. After receiving the reports on the various evils of the *Izaradari* System, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell, ordered its abolition in 1872. The *Izaradars* consequently disappeared from the agrarian scene of Koch Behar and the Government began to collect revenue directly from the *Jotedar*.<sup>135</sup>

On the ill effects of the *Izaradari* system, we shall quote Beckett's excellent report (dated 30 May, 1872):

"It is generally understood that originally the *Jotedar* were the cultivators of the soil and resident of the state, but by degree there was an influx of foreigners from other districts, who, being more intelligent than the residents of the place, began to usurp all real power, and under a weak government they managed so that many *jotes* gradually passed into their hands..... With respect to the *jotes* which passed into the hands of the influential foreigners, the former resident *Jotedar* become *Chukanidars* and their *Chukanidars* went down a lower and became *Dar Chukanidars*, the number of *Chukanidars* has greatly increased." In the same record Beckett mentioned, "54% of the lands were possessed by foreign *Jotedar*, 31% by the non-cultivating resident *Jotedar* and only 15% by the cultivating *Jotedar*. Thus there can be no doubt that the acquisition of the Jotdari rights by the foreigners or the land alienation or the dispossession of rights

in land of the Rajbansis had already reached an alarming height before the abolition of the *Izaradari* system in 1872.”<sup>136</sup>

From this time onwards, the colonial administrators were very much eager to reform the land administrative system of the Cooch Behar State. But the real breakthrough in the whole system came with the coronation of the Raja Nripendra Nararyan to the throne. The administrative machinery of the state was created on the model of British District. The land revenue system became scientific after rearrangement and resettlement. The state was thoroughly surveyed and all tenures and rights were recorded. To ensure the steady income from the land revenue they now felt the need of the Land Settlements in the State. Accordingly the Four successive settlements such as First Settlement (1877-83), *Patit Charcha* Settlement (1884-1886), *Rakam Charcha* Settlement (1886-1891), Re-settlement (1912-1927) were taken place in the State. Every encouragement was given for the extension of cultivation. Production of commercial crops like jute and tobacco was given priority. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan went to the extent of hiring the services of two tobacco experts-Mr. Paterson of America and Mr Montford of Manila. A scientific Agricultural farm was established to train cultivators so that they could produce good quality tobacco on a large scale. Kumar Gajendra Narayan was sent to the Royal Agricultural College in England. Kumar Nityendra Narayan too was sent to learn agriculture in the U.S. After completion of their education they returned home and devoted themselves to the expansion of tobacco cultivation. These facts substantiated the view that the Maharajas of the State were concerned about the expansion of the agriculture as well as the agricultural products in the state.<sup>137</sup>

These Settlement operations had brought some important changes in the rural society in Cooch Behar State. The settlement was made with the *Jotedar*. The First Settlement changed the land tenure structure of the rural society in Cooch Behar. In the first place it checked the absentee *Jotedar*. Secondly the village *Jotedar* became the proprietors of lands. Thirdly, the system of under tenures had been acknowledged and the right of these intermediaries was recognized by the state.<sup>138</sup>

The Sub-infeudation Act was passed in 1888 to check the further development of Sub-infeudation in the State and to prevent the creation of new rights in place of existing ones when they lapsed or became extinct, under the existing Tenancy Act, there must be exchange of Registered *Patta* and *Kabuliyat* at the time of creation of every new under-tenancy, and *Jotedar* and *Chukanidars* alone can create such under

tenancies by letting out *Khas* lands. Large number of new tenancies has been actually created in contravention of the aforesaid provisions of the law and generally at very high rates.<sup>139</sup>

The *Krishiprojas* who formed a large number of cultivators got the favour of the State authority. Special steps were taken to protect their rights over the lands they possessed and *Pattas* were issued against their names in the successive settlements.<sup>140</sup>

To improve the condition of the *Adhiars* and to safeguard their rights over the land, significant steps were taken in the Settlement operation. Accordingly it was ordered that any *Adhiar* who cultivates the same land with his own cattle for consecutive 12 years would acquire a right of occupancy in respect of such land. In 1910 this occupancy right was made heritable but not otherwise transferable.<sup>141</sup>

Thus from the period of First Settlement to the Final Settlement, the land revenue administration had experienced number of changes by adopting modern methods and techniques. The revenue was fixed on the basis of regular settlement and was periodically revised in different operations in which the Bengal provisional rules followed.

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