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The Origins of the Peasant Agitation in Oudh:
The Awakening of the Peasants?

Leanne Bennett

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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Abstract

The Origins of Peasant Agitation in Oudh:

The Awakening of the Peasants?

Leanne Bennett

This thesis is an examination of the origins of peasant discontent and agitation in Oudh between 1917-22. The nature of the peasant cultivator situation under British rule, and the unofficial but pervasive system of exactions, both perennial and incidental, by the landlord are detailed. The origins and development of the Kisan Sabhas (peasant federations) demonstrate the peasants' ability to form groups independent of the aid of provincial or all-India figures or organizations. Two different groups of Kisan Sabhas developed in the United Provinces; one was led by political leaders from Allahabad and the other was organized by peasants. The second was originally based in Oudh and was chronologically earlier than that which developed in Allahabad. These two groups were eventually brought together and into the Indian National Congress' fold. Having examined the issues which led to peasant discontent, the organization of peasants into Kisan Sabhas and the role played by the Indian National Congress in relation to the peasants' cause, I argue that contrary to popular belief the beginnings of peasant agitation in Oudh were independent of the Indian National Congress.

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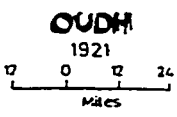
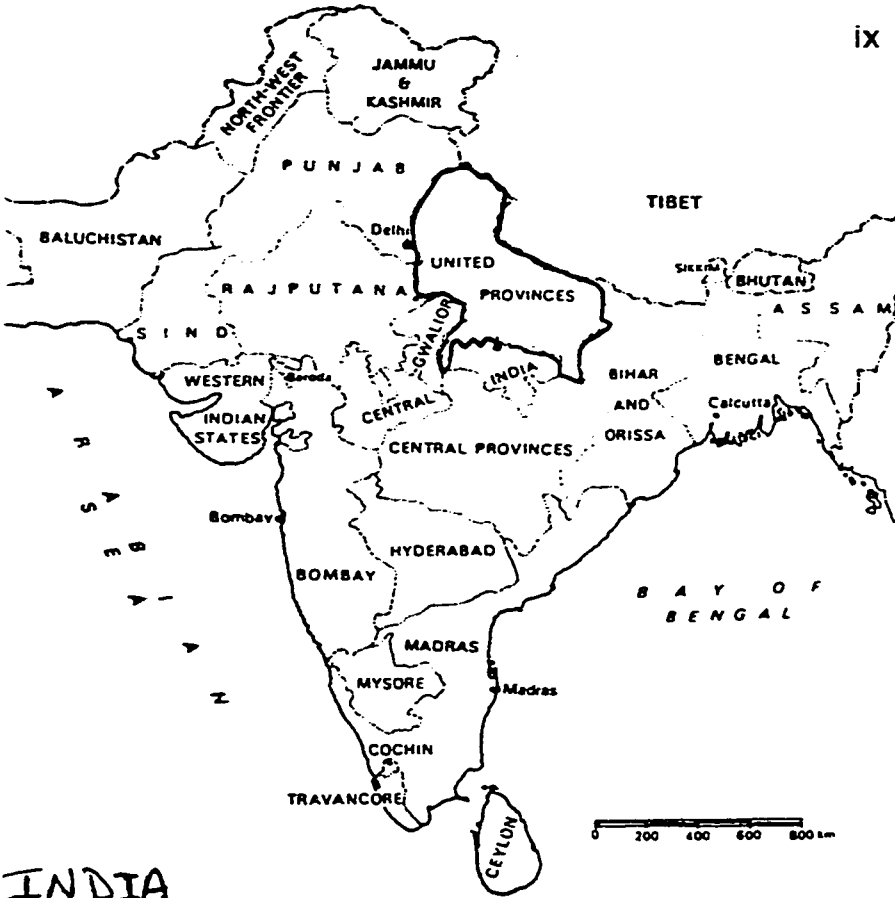
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Glossary

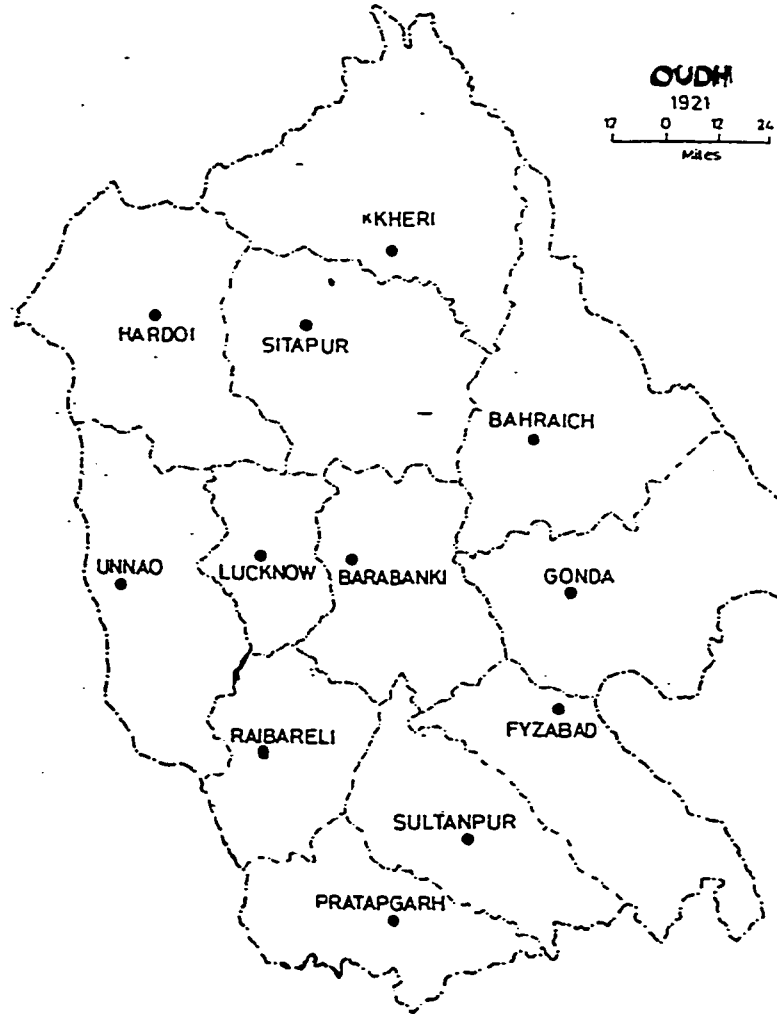
anna	an old coin, equivalent to one sixteenth of a rupee
baba	respectful form of address
bania	one belonging to the Vaishya caste, engaged primarily in money-lending
begar	compulsory free labour of peasants for landlords
beshi	system charging excessive annual rent
bhusa	straw
brahmin	priestly caste
cesses	tax
dak	mail tax
dardshan	a form of spiritual happiness induced by being in the presence of a cherished person, place, or thing
dhururai	dust raising cess
ghee	butter oil
gorawan	horse tax
gur	raw sugar
hathianna	elephant tax
hari	forced labour
hartal	strike

jagir	land grant, usually for services rendered to a king
kanya virkay	sale of daughters
kharif	the autumnal harvest
kisan sabha	peasant association
lakh	100,000
larai chandra	forced war contributions
mahajans	money lender
motrawan	automobile tax
murdafaroshi	selling of holding after the death of the lease holder
nakar	allowance or payment in land or money, usually for government service
Nasim	administrator of a province in charge of police and criminal law
nazar daura	land lords tour to collect gifts
nazarana	gift payment or extra premium on rent
patwari	village revenue accountant
rabi	the spring harvest
Raja	ruler, king
Rajput	warrior caste or clan
Rupee	major denomination of Indian currency

ryots	peasant
sanad	document of entitlement
Sepoy	Indian soldier
sir land	land under landlord's cultivation
swadeshi	use of things belonging to one's own country
swaraj	self-rule
taluka	a revenue sub division of a district
talukdar	lord or owner of a taluka
talukdari	adjective describing land settlement with large land holders
zamindar	landowner
zamindari	adjective describing land settlement with large land holders



INDIA



The United Provinces

Chapter I

Introduction

Much of modern Indian historiography adheres to the belief that peasant agitation is simply a by-product of the agenda of the dominant social groups.¹ Bipan Chandra in his Essays on Indian Nationalism explains that "...the movement [the Indian National Congress' Independence movement] was able to release the initiative and innovative faculty of the lower level activists."² In his essay "The Strategy of the Congress" Chandra states: "...Gandhi repeatedly emphasised the role of awakening the peasants ..."³ A similar theme can be seen in S.R Baksh's Gandhi and the Noncooperation Movement 1920-22. "The task", according to Baksh, "was to penetrate the masses, to arouse them from their state of apathy and isolation, to provide them with self-confidence."⁴ Further, Baksh states that the participation of the masses led to the development of peasant associations (Kisan Sabhas).⁵ There are many other authors who believe that peasant agitation was the result of influence from outside groups.

¹ In this context, the nationalists can be viewed as a dominant group (politically).

² Bipan Chandra, Essays on Indian Nationalism. (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications 1993) p.85.

³ Bipan Chandra , "The Strategy of Congress" in John Hill (ed.) The Congress and Indian Nationalism (Great Britain: Curzon Press, 1991) p. 86.

⁴ S.R Baksh, Gandhi and the Noncooperation Movement 1920-22 (New Delhi :Capital Publishers, 1983) p.248. Note that Bipan Chandra and S.R. Baksh operate from different ideological perspectives.

⁵ Baksh, p. 259.

Martin Lewis in his monograph Gandhi: Maker of Modern India states that "... he [Gandhi] seems a shrewd politician, *drawing out the latent force of India's millions*, guiding and directing it in channels ..."⁶ In S.R. Bakshi's Documents of Non-cooperation Movement he states that "The emergence of Gandhi on the political scene of India brought about new dimensions in the generation of *new awakening among the mass[es]* ..."⁷ Nanda in his study Mahatma Gandhi refers to 1921 as "a year of *awakening for India*."⁸ There are also a number of authors that do not specifically refer to 'an awakening' but more importantly do not acknowledge that the peasants became organized without the help of national figures.⁹

The agitation of peasants¹⁰ in Oudh during the second and third decades of this century contradicts this belief. The movement that arose in Oudh between 1918 and 1922 has largely been perceived¹¹ as a result of

⁶ Martin Lewis Gandhi: Maker of Modern India. Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1965 p.vii (italics mine).

⁷ S.R. Bakshi Documents of Non-Cooperation Movement Delhi: Akashdeep Publishing House, 1989 preface (italics mine).

⁸ Nanda Mahatma Gandhi London: Unwin Books, 1965, Chapter 20 (italics mine).

⁹ A few important examples of this are Judith Brown's Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy, Stanley Wolpert's A New History of India, Percival Spear's History of India Vol. 2, Erik Erikson's Gandhi's Truth.

¹⁰ A peasant is defined as "a member of a class of persons tilling the soil as labourers". A cultivator is "one who prepares the soil for the raising of crops". A tenant is "one who occupies land under a landlord". During the time frame of this study (1856-1922), in Oudh the peasants were by and large tenants. In this study the terms peasant, cultivator and tenant will be used, often for the same individuals.

¹¹ In many instances general surveys of India do not comment of the peasants' agitation as it is deemed part of the Indian National Congress' agitation. This is true in the case of Percival Spear's The History of India, Judith Brown's Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy, and Stanley Wolpert's A New History of India.

the nationalist agenda. This ignores two important aspects of the agitation. First, peasant agitation did not simply 'appear' in 1918-1922. Peasant agitation had deep roots in Oudh before the infiltration of the nationalists into the villages. Secondly, the goals of the peasants and the nationalists were far from identical. The nationalists' goal was a move toward self-government, while the peasants' goal was centered on their land rights or lack thereof. Theirs was not an issue of gaining new rights in the land but instead of sustaining what had traditionally been theirs.

The first part of this study will examine the origins of peasant agitation beginning with a description of the land system in Oudh and will focus on the British Indian land legislation. Part two will then examine some of the major abuses inflicted on the peasants. These include ejection, *nazarana*¹² and cesses¹³, as well as an examination the effects of World War I. The third section of this thesis will examine the growth of peasant resistance as demonstrated by the *Kisan Sabha* movement in Oudh. Within this section peasant agitation in Oudh will be detailed and the infiltration of the Congress into the villages will be examined. The last part of the study will incorporate an investigation of the effects of the land settlement in Oudh and more specifically, the role that the settlements and amendments played in the agitation in Oudh in

¹² Gift payment or an extra premium on rent.

¹³Tax.

the first two decades of this century.

I have selected Oudh for investigation as I found there a peasant uprising that I believe has not been adequately examined. The districts of Rai Bareli and Partabgarh were chosen in particular because a non-nationalist leader (Ram Chandra) was a significant force in these two districts. All districts were not examined in depth as such an undertaking would be impossible in a Master's thesis. Moreover as my aim is to demonstrate that there is a possibility of a movement, both the organization and the agitation, being the result of peasant initiative without influence from above I will look specifically at areas where this occurred.

Historiography

There are very few studies which focus on peasant agitation in Oudh, but within this scarcity six different approaches can be identified. The first perspective is exemplified by the writings of British authorities in India in the late nineteenth century who saw peasants as part of India's traditional landscape. A second approach, which begins in the nineteen sixties, describes specific land policy in Oudh without any focus on the peasantry itself. Studies that fit into the third grouping are

those that acknowledge the peasantry as a group worthy of investigation. In this grouping peasant begin to emerge as subjects not only objects of history. The fourth development involves the stratification of the peasantry and is represented by a number of writers who divide the category of 'peasantry' into numerous sub-groups. A fifth distinct school is the "Subaltern Studies" movement spearheaded by Ranajit Guha. The Subalternists' aim is to recover the history of the 'inferior' members of society such as peasants and the peasantry. The final group of historians, the smallest in number, are those who have studied specific agrarian unrest in Oudh in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The first grouping, that of the writing of British officials in the late nineteenth century, is highlighted by the writings of two Englishmen- H.C. Irwin and Baden Powell. This grouping represents writing on the actual British policies in force in Oudh at the time of the publications. Irwin's Garden of India and Baden Powell's The Land Systems of British India are examples of the type of study that were written about Oudh in the late nineteenth century. In general they served an administrative purpose and did not examine the situation of the peasants with more than a passing reference to them when the taluqdars were the topic.

Irwin, an officer of the Oudh Commission, wrote The Garden Of India in 1880, in which he examines the social situation in Oudh, the early history of Oudh, the nawabi period from 1800-1856, the annexation of the state and finally the taluqdari system. This book is especially interesting as the author acknowledges the lamentable position of the peasantry. He notes that “for the present at least, the need of security for the cultivator is the most urgent of the wants of Oudh”.¹⁴ This focus on the peasants was not a major theme of his writing but that they were mentioned at all in the period is noteworthy. A second book in this category is B.H. Baden Powell’s The Land Systems of British India: Being a Manual of the Land Tenures and of the System of Land Revenue Administration Prevalent in the Several Provinces which he wrote in 1892. In the section on land settlements of Oudh he examines the land tenures, the Oudh settlement, the revenue officers, their powers, duties and procedure. The subsections of his chapters on Oudh focus primarily on the taluqdars and land tenure legislation. Although the tenants are mentioned this is only in reference to the taluqdars’ situation not to acknowledge the plight of the peasants.¹⁵

The second major approach is similar to the first in content but not

¹⁴ H.C. Irwin Garden of India Lucknow, Pustak Kendra, 1973 p. 308 (originally published in England in 1880).

¹⁵ B.H. Baden Powell The Land Systems of British India: Being a Manual of the Land Tenures and of the System of Land Revenue Administration Prevalent in the Several Provinces. New Delhi: Crown Publications, 1988 235-255 (first published in 1892).

in chronology or authorship. This group wrote for and against specific land tenure policies of the British in Oudh and were focussed on the theory behind the legislation not the actual practise. Walter Neale's Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955¹⁶ and Thomas Metcalf's The Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857-1870, are examples of this approach. Walter Neale examines the history of land tenures and the market for land in Uttar Pradesh from the British Conquest to the first post-independence decade. His book; is divided into four parts: the first is a description of the agrarian system in the late years of Mohammedan rule, the second details the legislation in a historical narrative, the third part presents a reconstruction of British policy and the fourth sets forth in detail the relationship of these institutions to the functioning of the rural economy. Peasants do not play an important role in his 300 page work. Thomas Metcalf's study examines the revolt and the imprint it left on India. The effects of the mutiny on social reform, education, land settlement policy and the position of the tenant and moneylender are also examined. Metcalf concludes that the "structure of the Raj and the relations of the British and Indian peoples alike emerged decisively altered from the ordeal of rebellion"¹⁷, but he does not look specifically at peasants.

¹⁶ Walter Neale. Economic Change in Rural India: Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.

¹⁷ Thomas Metcalf. The Aftermath of Revolt India 1857-70 Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964 p.vii.

The third group is representative of a major change in peasant historiography as the authors in this group begin to see peasants as the subjects of history not only as the objects. Jagdish Raj's Economic Conflict in North India: A Study of Landlord Tenant Relations in Oudh 1870-1890 and Peter Reeves' article "The Politics of Order" in the *Journal of Asian Studies* are examples of this. No longer are the peasants simply a footnote in the debate of land legislation. Jagdish Raj highlights the conditions and problems of the cultivating classes in his study. He focusses on the years 1870-1890 which allows him to examine much of the early British land legislation in Oudh. Not only does he examine the legislation and the taluqdars, Raj also pays comparable attention to the condition of the ordinary peasants.¹⁸ Peter Reeves has investigated the political role of the taluqdars in the twentieth century. He has tended to do so from the top downward highlighting the role of the taluqdars' and their political significance for the British Raj. Although by today's standards this approach might be considered deficient his contribution is important as peasants are subjects in his writing.

The fourth approach is that of stratification. In this grouping the authors have acknowledged the peasants as an important group worthy of investigation independent of other main stream issues. Unfortunately this

¹⁸ Jagdish Raj Economic Conflict in North India: A Study of Landlord-Tenant Relations in Oudh 1870-1890. Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1978 p. xi.

acknowledgement occurs with a move toward stratification of the peasants. Paul Brass' Factional Politics in an Indian State¹⁹, Kathleen Gough's Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia²⁰, D.N. Dhanagre's Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics²¹, Eric Stokes' The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society²² and Neil Charlesworth's "The Middle Peasant Thesis and the Roots of Rural Agitation in India 1914-1947" in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*²³ all use stratification apparatus to label the peasants. The eagerness to divide the peasantry was prominent in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Paul Brass states that the peasantry might align themselves in different 'factions' depending on the situation and that their attachment was therefore flexible. Kathleen Gough established a list which outlined five types of peasant agitations. Dhanagre compiled a similar list with minor modifications. Stokes outlined two distinct groups, one of rich peasants and the other of pauperised peasants. Charlesworth focussed on a middle peasant thesis which outlined the role of the middle peasant whom he believed played dominant role in peasant agitation.

¹⁹ Paul Brass, Factional Politics in An Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.

²⁰ Kathleen Gough , Hari P. Sharma (ed.) Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.

²¹ D.N. Dhanagre Agrarian Movements and Gandhian Politics. Agra: Institute of Social Sciences, Agra University 1975.

²² Eric Stokes The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

²³ Neil Charlesworth "The Middle Peasant Thesis and the Roots of Rural Agitation in India, 1914-1947" in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* Vol.7 No. 3 April 1980. p.259-280.

The fifth group includes Ranajit Guha and David Hardiman. Guha began a very important series of books called Subaltern Studies.²⁴ He suggests that it is important to remember when examining information on peasants that peasant consciousness is revealed in revolt. David Hardiman wrote an article in Subaltern Studies entitled "The Indian 'faction' : A Political Theory Examined".²⁵ In this article he rejects the concept of 'factions' and instead considered the groups to be communities.

The sixth approach, and that which comes closest to the topic of the thesis, is that of studies which specifically address agrarian unrest in Oudh in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Majid Hayat Siddiqi's Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918-22²⁶ and Kapil Kumar's Peasants in Revolt²⁷ are the two major studies written on peasants in Oudh between 1856 and World War II. Siddiqi's book is divided into six chapters. He examines agrarian conditions from 1860 to 1920, the development of social tensions, the Kisan Sabha movement I, The Kisan Sabha movement II, and the Eka

²⁴ Ranajit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies: Writing in South Asian History and Society. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.

²⁵ David Hardiman "The Indian 'Faction' : A Political Theory Examined " in Ranajit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies I Writing in South Asian History and Society Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982 pp.198-230.

²⁶ Majid Hayat Siddiqi. Agrarian Unrest in North India. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978.

²⁷ Kapil Kumar Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh. New Delhi: Manohar, 1984

movement. Siddiqi examines the peasant movements in the United Provinces and claims that peasant agitation had distinct and unrelated origins. He claims that there were two movements one from above and one from below, but later he states that "The patronage of politics from above helped agrarian discontent to get organized ... The movement from below responded to the politics from above and the initially sporadic nature of kisan sabha activity was given direction by the developing trend of national political events."²⁸ So in almost the same breath he states that the movements were separate and then claims that they were linked. Finally he claims that it "... was not however as if peasant demands superseded those of the Congress. Nor was there a uniform difference between the demands of the low level peasant leaders and those of Congress."²⁹

Kapil Kumar's book Peasants in Revolt examines the struggles waged at critical phases by the peasants of Oudh. He specifically deals with the impact of imperial policies on the countryside; the emergence of the taluqdari system; the classification of peasant society; peasant exploitation; the emergence of peasant organizations and peasant leadership especially the role of militant rural intelligentsia.³⁰ Not only

²⁸ M.H. Siddiqi Agrarian Unrest in North India :The United Provinces 1918-22. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, 1978 p. xi.

²⁹ Siddiqi, p. 218.

³⁰ Kumar, p. x.

did Kumar examine Ram Chandra's personal papers, but he was the first scholar to do so in a systematic manner. Although Kumar claims that the peasant movement in Oudh was independent of the forces from above, he also states that "Ram Chandra devoted his energies to organise the peasantry to voice its class demands and thought it to be the ultimate goal of winning *freedom for India*."³¹ This contradicts the claim that the peasants agitated against the taluqdars because of their abuse of the peasants. Kumar concludes that the peasants threw themselves into the arms of the 'wrong' leaders, and their movement was doomed as a result.

My thesis will examine the question of peasant agitation in Oudh. I will particularly look at the question of why the peasants agitated, how they organized, and what the role of the Indian National Congress was in the Kisan Sabha movement.

³¹ Kumar, p.107 *italics mine*.

Chapter II

Context for Peasant Existence: the Land Revenue System in Oudh

In order to gain an understanding of the peasants' grievances it is essential to examine the land revenue system prior to the annexation of Oudh in 1856. The land in Oudh was largely dominated by Rajput clans in the first half of the eighteenth century. Muslim aggression in the north of India in the eighteenth century had forced the clans to move south. There they established themselves, after minor conflicts with the Bhars, Doms and other early settlers.³² Clan after clan disposed of or subordinated others until areas of dominance were established. The laws of inheritance here and in most of India allowed for a distribution of possessions among all male heirs. As the generations elapsed the areas of dominance became subdivided into various houses and these houses (family lineages) became *talukas*³³.

There is sometimes confusion surrounding the titles of '*talukdar*'³⁴,

³² Charles James Connell, Land Revenue Policy in Northern India. (Delhi: Neejraj Publishing House 1983; (originally published 1876)p.4.

³³ Taluqa can be translated as a collection of villages.

³⁴ A taluqdar is a holder of a taluqa.

'*Raja*'³⁵ and landlord in the literature on this period in Oudh's history. The terms '*Raja*' and '*talukdar*' were used interchangeably in some cases. Confusion occurred when the terms '*talukdar*' and 'landlord' were used interchangeably. Although there were some people who could use the title of either *Raja* or *talukdar* in this period, neither could be termed a landlord. Under the Nawabs, *talukdar* was a term used for those who had succeeded in the struggle for power in the countryside and thereby claimed the right to collect revenue from an agglomeration of villages.³⁶ Only after British involvement in Oudh did the *talukdars* become the Indian equivalent of the British landlord. There were *talukdars/Rajas* who had amassed power in specific regions but did not become landlords. Hence the terms landlord and *talukdar* should not be used interchangeably in this period.

The *talukdars* had a reciprocal relationship with the cultivators in their areas of dominance. The *Rajas/talukdars* did not own the land in these areas. They received part of the crops from the land cultivated as a tax and in return protected the cultivators. The *talukdars'* power did not come from control of the land but instead from control of the resources of the land. They were not (as the British were later to argue) the Indian

³⁵ *Raja* can be translated as King but was also awarded by rulers to important rural leaders.

³⁶ Thomas R Metcalf, Land Landlords and the British Raj. Northern India in the Nineteenth Century. (California: University of California Press, 1979) p.187.

counterpart of the English landed gentry.³⁷ Nor were they a cohesive group that mixed socially or had mutual interests as the British gentry were.

Under the Mughals the state dealt directly with the cultivators through the officials of the state whose practises were monitored in order to keep opposition in check.³⁸ This occurred during the reign of Saadat Khan (1798-1814). When Saadat Khan was establishing his authority in Oudh he had to deal with the problem of integrating his power with that of the hereditary chieftains. He solved the dilemma by acknowledging the control and power of the chieftains over their respective estates and appointing them to collect government revenue.³⁹ This system was acceptable to both parties as the Rajputs retained their control of the areas they dominated, and Saadat Khan benefitted from the Rajputs' collection of revenue and their maintenance of law and order.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the King of Oudh failed in his attempt to collect revenue directly from the village occupants due to the *taluqdars'* substantial military power.

³⁷ Bernard S. Cohn "Society and Social Change Under the Raj' *South Asian Review* Vol. 4 No. 1.October 1970

³⁸ Donald Butter, Outlines of the Topography and Statistics of the Southern Districts of Oudh. (Calcutta: G.H. Huttman, Bengal Military Orphan Press,1839) pp. 97-102.

³⁹ Rudrangshu Mukerjee, Awadh in Revolt 1857-8. A Study of Popular Resistance. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) p.17.

The disintegration of Mughal power and the gradual decline of the central authority allowed the local authorities the chance to enhance their power, some to the extent of declaring independence. Due to the decrease in the central power, the authority of those who collected revenue increased considerably.⁴⁰ Some local chiefs, revenue farmers, revenue officials, moneylenders and a host of revenue agents were able to benefit from the lack of central authority and arrogated to themselves the status of *taluqdar*.⁴¹

The Treaty of 1801 gave the British East India Company's government the right to intervene in the internal affairs of Oudh in order to regulate the perceived mismanagement. The Treaty outlined the following: the rehabilitation of *nawab* Vizier's administration, (civil, military and financial); the defence of Oudh (as it acted as an important buffer and bulwark for the Company's holdings in eastern India); the disarming of Oudh (other than that which the company would provide); and the payment of a subsidy.⁴²

The subsidiary alliance system gave the British Indian authority the

⁴⁰ Kapil Kumar, Peasants in Revolt. (Delhi: Manohar, 1984) p.2.

⁴¹ Peshotan Nasswerwanji Driver, Problems of Zamindari and Land Tenure in India. (Bombay : New Book Company , 1949) p.169.

⁴² D.P Sinha, British Relations with Oudh 1801-1856 . A Case Study. (Calcutta:K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1983) p. 1.

right to collect tax revenues in some districts of the region. In return the British left troops in the region for defence. The collection of the taxes was to be used to offset the price of providing the troops. A Resident (a British administrator) stayed in the region with the ruler and determined how and when the *sepoy* troops⁴³ could be used. There was to be no other non-Indian taken into the ranks of the ruler's employees without the approval of the Resident.⁴⁴

In 1801 the King of Oudh accepted both the Treaty and the subsidiary alliance which had given the British control of part of the Kingdom of Oudh. The subsidiary alliance system had a damaging effect on Oudh, as it made Oudh increasingly dependent on Britain for the maintenance of law and order. The King became dependent on the British when a non-intervention policy in internal affairs led to a withdrawal of troops from the countryside after 1830.⁴⁵ Saadat Khan was left in a difficult position because part of the Kingdom of Oudh had been ceded to the British and much of the army disarmed, with the understanding that in return the British would deploy troops to protect the area. Saadat Khan was without an army and without the support of British troops for which he had paid dearly.

⁴³ Sepoy can be translated as an Indian soldier in a European officered army.

⁴⁴ Stanley Wolpert, A New History of India. 3rd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p.203.

⁴⁵ Mukerjee, p. 33.

It is not surprising that the rulers who followed Saadat Khan allowed the region to dissolve into a state of disorder. The Oudh rulers had neither the training nor military force to conform to the demands of the British outlined above. Metcalf suggests that “the sensual life ...did not reflect sheer perversity or weakness of character on the part of the *Nawabs*. Indolence was rather the only appropriate response to the situation in which the princes of Oudh were placed...”⁴⁶ It is in this context that the numerous ultimatums, given to the rulers of Oudh on the subject of improving their administration, must be viewed.

Lord Dalhousie, who became Governor-General in 1848, believed Oudh was in need of British administration. He wrote to Colonel Sleeman in 1848 with an offer of the position of Resident in the court at Lucknow.⁴⁷ Sleeman arrived in January 1849 to begin the task he had accepted. Dalhousie asked him to prepare a report on the condition of Oudh. By September of the same year Sleeman’s report was ready. It suggested that the main problems in Oudh were the lack of central authority and the maladministration that followed from it. Sleeman was granted permission to tour the area and published his diary of the tour.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Metcalf, p. 39-40.

⁴⁷ P.D. Reeves, (ed.) Sleeman In Oudh. An Abridgement of W.H. Sleeman's A Journey Through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849-50. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) p.1.

⁴⁸ Reeves, p.13-4.

Lord Dalhousie hoped that within two years of his Governor-Generalship Oudh would come under British management. This he was unable to do as the King of Oudh gave him no reason to break their earlier arrangements. Furthermore, Lord Dalhousie was not certain that the Company would allow such a drastic step. It was during this time that the Company's charter was to be renewed and therefore controversy was to be avoided. Thus no action had been taken when Sleeman retired in 1854.

Dalhousie issued a minute in November 1854 in which he proposed that the new Resident in Oudh should make an enquiry into its present state. The purpose of the enquiry was to examine whether Oudh's affairs could still be described as they had been in Colonel Sleeman's report.⁴⁹ The enquiry examined whether the improvements which Lord Harding had demanded of the King seven years earlier had been put into effect.⁵⁰ It was determined that no significant improvements had been made and that there was no real prospect of the improvements being made in the near future.

⁴⁹ In A Journey Through the Kingdom of Oudh Sleeman described the condition of Oudh before annexation. The main British argument given for the annexation of Oudh was that its administration, particularly that of the land revenue, was atrocious and that as a consequence, the condition of the cultivating classes was daily worsening.

⁵⁰H.C. Irwin, Garden of India or Chapters on Oudh History and Affairs. Vol. 1&2, (Lucknow: Pustak Kendra, reprint 1973.) pp. 137-138.

With this second report Dalhousie gave the King an ultimatum. Due to the continued mismanagement and lack of control Oudh was to be annexed. The King would be permitted to retain his royal title and position, but would be required to relinquish the whole civil and military administration of the state to the British government. There was a financial arrangement for the King and his family which could only be secured by his swift agreement to the annexation. If the ultimatum was not accepted it was implied that force would be used. In response the King of Oudh removed his turban, placed it in the hands of the Resident and stated that he could not agree to the terms because by the terms themselves he had no power to make such decisions. The King and his family went to England with the hope of having their concerns addressed, but by the time they reached England, the Mutiny had begun and their request was denied.⁵¹

When the annexation of Oudh occurred in 1856, land revenue was a primary source of income for the British. The corrupt practices of the Barons of Oudh did not go undetected by the British.⁵² With the decision to annex Oudh made, the next step was to determine what form of revenue collection would be best suited to the area. Lord Dalhousie was an advocate of the 'Thomason School' which preached that there should be no

⁵¹ Sinha, p.342.

⁵² Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh vol. 1 (Kanpur, 1957) p.134.

intermediate class between the peasantry and the government.⁵³ Both John Low, who had served as Resident at the court of Oudh, and James Outram, who had succeeded Sleeman as Resident in November 1854, expressed their dislike for the *Taluqdari* System in their reports. When the Governor-General's council met on January 3, 1856, the policy chosen was one which would limit the power of the *taluqdars*.⁵⁴

A new policy was put in place to impede the growth of the *taluqdars*. Both John Low and James Outram were of the opinion that the settlement should not be made with the *taluqdars*. Both believed that the land revenue policy of the North-Western Provinces and Punjab had functioned admirably and saw no reason that a similar system could not be put in place in Oudh. Lord Dalhousie agreed that a policy that stated that everyone should count as one and that no one should count as more than one was the best option.⁵⁵

The Chief Commissioner of Oudh ordered that a summary settlement should be made village by village with the occupants of the soil. The *taluqdars* were asked to surrender their forts or render them

⁵³ Jagdish Raj, The Mutiny and British Land Policy in North India, 1856-1868. (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965) p.18.

⁵⁴ Land revenue collection was received not only by *taluqdars*; there were also community brotherhoods and individual proprietors some of whom made arrangements directly with the treasury, but the bulk of the land was under *taluqdari* control.

⁵⁵ Raj, p.15.

defenceless.⁵⁶ This left the *talukdars* without the military force they had been dependent on to extract land revenue. There was dissension on this point within the ranks of the British. It was held that the settlement was too harsh on the *talukdars*. In response to such criticism opponents were reminded of the *raison d'être* of British involvement in Oudh. The Company had made the decision to annex Oudh because of the mismanagement and corruption which was most often linked to the *talukdars*. Could the company, in good conscience, use such a reason for annexation and then not make any changes?

Most of the officers chosen to work on the summary settlement were from the North Western Provinces and Punjab where such a system was already in place and working well. Many were trained under Thomason or John Lawrence (a disciple of Thomason). Prior to the settlement the *talukdars* held 23,543 villages, 64.2% of the total.⁵⁷ The First Summary Settlement in 1856 left the *talukdars* as a whole with 13,640 villages, 37.2% of the total number. It was determined that any lands which had been acquired through fraud or coercion were to be removed from the possession of the owner.

Those who remained in possession of land were ordered to pay the

⁵⁶ Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh vol. 1 (Kanpur, 1957) pp. 115-120.

⁵⁷ Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XIX p. 288.

final instalment of the taxes to the British themselves. There were cases of *taluqdars* who refused to pay. The Raja of Tulsipur in Gonda and Raja Man Singh were two prominent examples.⁵⁸ Eventually both were brought under British control. Other *taluqdars* experienced some difficulty in collecting taxes because some the cultivators refused to pay as they were well aware of the *taluqdars'* precarious position. Although the Summary Settlement (1856) did not eliminate all of the *taluqdars'* power, it was a significant step in that direction.

The reduction of forts and the disbandment of the *taluqdars'* armed retainers were part of the agreement of cession. Unfortunately for the British, it was not done as thoroughly as perhaps many felt it should have been by 1857-1858. The British aimed at creating a military monopoly but, as the year 1857 was to prove, they had not achieved this goal. Rebellion broke out in May 1857. By mid-June the civil government collapsed throughout the province. The *taluqdars* did not all immediately take back the lands they lost in the First Summary Settlement, however when General Havelock was unable to reach Lucknow with a relief force in August, the *taluqdars* concluded that the British cause was hopeless and began to take back the villages they had controlled before 1856.

⁵⁸ Nevill H.R. Rae Bareilly District Gazetteer (Allahabad, 1905), p.79.

It is often stated that when the 1857 rebellion occurred there were many disgruntled *talugdars* who had recently witnessed their own demise at the hands of the British and that it was for this reason that they rebelled.⁵⁹ This view suggests that many *talugdars* joined the revolt against the British with the hope of regaining their property and the rights that had been usurped. What is overlooked in this interpretation is that both those who had lost and those who had gained took part in the rebellion.⁶⁰

After a year and a half of rebellion the British were finally able to end the revolt. Although they came out on the winning side in the rebellion, the British were not confident in their position in India. In March 1858 Canning (the new Governor-General) issued a proclamation which ordered all the land in Oudh confiscated as punishment for the rebellion of its people. There was a call for major changes to be made. Canning was of the opinion that the British government could not depend on the peasants to come to the assistance of the Empire. According to Canning the rebellion of 1857 demonstrated a lack of allegiance to the British on the part of the peasants. James Outram, the Chief Commissioner of Lucknow in a letter to the Governor-General stated that:

⁵⁹ Michael Edwards, The Orchid House. (London: Cassell, 1960) p.194.

⁶⁰ Cunningham. p.159 "The argument that the rebellion of the talugdars had been provoked by the unjust manner in which the government had dealt with their estates, was met by the fact that among the most inveterate of our opponents were several talugdars, who had confessedly, benefited by the administration changes introduced in the land system since the annexation of the Province."

The system of settlement with the so called village proprietors will not answer at present in Oudh. These men have not influence and weight enough to aid us in restoring order ...I see no prospect of restoring tranquillity except by having recourse for the next years to the old Talookdaree System. The Talookdaree have both the power and influence to exercise either for or against us. The village proprietors have neither.⁶¹

Canning accepted the failure of the British attempt to neutralise the power of the *talukdars*.

Canning did not seem to appreciate that the *talukdars* who had rebelled did so regardless of whether they gained or lost in the First Summary Settlement.⁶² The villagers rallied to the aid of their local *talukdars* and submitted to their leadership. Most villagers followed their former rulers without hesitation because the *talukdars* had been in a position of power longer than the British and therefore the villagers would not think of defying them. There were perhaps other reasons that the population of Oudh was induced to rebel. The annexation had caused emotional upheaval for others outside of the *talukdari* ranks. The removal of the King meant that the retainers and armies were without employment, as were many of those who had supplied the court with its numerous luxury items.⁶³ This too was overlooked by Canning.

⁶¹B.R. Misra, Land Revenue Policy in the United Provinces under British Rule (Benares: Nand Kishore & Bros, 1942)p.102.

⁶² H.S. Cunningham, Rulers of India. Earl Canning. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1891) p.159.

⁶³ Mukerjee, p.38.

The rebellion had been terminated but the British did not want to risk the possibility of a recurrence. The British interest in India was largely economic. The collection of land revenue enabled the British to develop their administrative infrastructure as well as the army. With this in mind, the decision made by the British was to ally themselves with the *taluqdars*. The *taluqdars* were no longer considered rebels but instead “honourable enemies”.⁶⁴ To secure the material assistance of the *taluqdars* in reestablishing British supremacy in Oudh the Governor-General decided in favour of the ‘*Talookdaree*’ Settlement.

If the British had put the whole of the proclamation into effect they would have extended the military operations by months. They were also aware that confiscation of all property would lead to bitter feelings. They wanted things to get “back to normal” as soon as possible. *Taluqdars* were asked to tender allegiance, and to post police along the border of British territory. The *taluqdars* submitted “not as a beaten foe, but men yielding to a political invitation”.⁶⁵

With the Second Summary Settlement in 1858 the British established *taluqdari* supremacy in the villages. The settlement was fashioned to end the threat of another rebellion. As British authority

⁶⁴ S.Harcourt Butler, Oudh Policy.(Allahabad, 1896) p.46.

⁶⁵ Metcalf, p.186.

spread throughout Oudh the *taluqdars* were disarmed. This attempt at disarmament was much more successful than the first in 1856 as severe penalties were put in place for those who did not comply. An example of such a penalty can be seen in the case of the Raja of Kurri Sidauli in Rae Bareli who tried to conceal several cannons and as a result a large part of his estate was confiscated.⁶⁶ This successful attempt at disarmament left the *taluqdars* without the political and military power they had once possessed. The *taluqdars* had thus been moulded by the British into landlords.

By Act I of 1869 district officers were to submit a list of all *taluqdars* in their districts.⁶⁷ Wingfield, the new Chief Commissioner of Oudh, stated that not less than Rs 5000 as revenue was required to be an opulent landholder. Moreover, *taluqdari* status was to be given only to 'sole owners'. Some exceptions could be made for those with a revenue under Rs 5000 if the man was of high social standing. Once the list was made it was not to be changed. Thereafter a *taluqdar* was defined as a person whose name appeared on this list, or an heir of such a person. Within ten years the British had changed the meaning of the term '*taluqdar*' almost beyond recognition.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ H.R. Nevill, Rae Bareli District Gazetteer (Allahabad 1905) p.79.

⁶⁷ United Provinces Code, p 106.

⁶⁸ Ashok Singh, Peasant Revolt and Agrarian Reform. (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers) 1988 pp.27-28.

On the first of May 1858 the 'Talookdaree' Settlement came into effect. Lands were re-invested with their previous *owners*, and the lands of the *taluqdars* who had not been pardoned were re-distributed. Once the *taluqdars* were pardoned their land claims were reconsidered.⁶⁹ In the Second Summary Settlement 22,637 villages were settled with *taluqdars*. The *taluqdars'* share in the 1858 settlement was slightly under that of their share before annexation as the following table indicates:

	Villages	Percentage
Prior to First Summary Settlement	23,543	64.2%
First Summary Settlement	13,640	37.2%
Second Summary Settlement	22,637	61.7%

Although the Second Summary Settlement (1858) was beneficial to the *taluqdars*, they had concerns about the permanence of the system.⁷¹ They also understood the role they were being asked to play. The *taluqdars* understood correctly that the British did not want to risk another revolt, and that their new role would consist of accelerating the British goal of reestablishing supremacy. What they did not know was

⁶⁹Jagdish Raj, The Mutiny and British Land Policy in North India 1856-1858. (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965.) p. 24.

⁷⁰Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XIX p. 288.

⁷¹Walter Neale, Economic Change in Rural India . (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) p.74.

how long they would be of use to the British. Once the British were re-established and confident, some *taluqdars* feared that they would no longer be of use, and that the settlement would revert to the arrangement at the time of annexation. Official British policy, largely influenced by Canning and Outram, set out to make their investment in the '*Taluqdari System*' succeed by assuring the *taluqdars* of their hereditary rights and dignity. The British had decided on the role the *taluqdar* would play in post-rebellion India. Their aim was to make the *taluqdars* feel confident in their position so that the British endeavour in Oudh could be as lucrative as possible.

The *taluqdars* realized that their class and status depended on their loyalty to British rule. The rebellion had failed in that the British were still in control, but it had succeeded in that the British had come to realize a dependence on the *taluqdars*, as a group, which allowed them to wield much of the power they had enjoyed in pre-annexation days. In March of 1861, the birth of the British Indian Association of Oudh proved to be a concrete manifestation of the new alliance.⁷²

The villagers did not fair as well as the *taluqdars*. This was largely due to the British opinion that the villagers had been disloyal. It is often

⁷²Kumar, p.12. The British Indian Association was a loyalist conservative group of *taluqdars* whose primary mission was to defend and protect the special privileges of its wealthy members and to support the Crown Raj whenever political questions arose otherwise apathetic public opinion.

overlooked that perhaps the villagers went along with the *taluqdars* in the revolt of 1857 because as Sir William Sleeman recorded “people generally or at least part of them would prefer to reside in Oudh under all the risks to which they are exposed than to enter our British districts.”⁷³ H.C. Irwin, a ICS officer in Oudh also rejected the notion that the villagers had any preference for the *taluqdari* system of land tenures.

The utmost inference that can logically be deducted from their conduct is that their dislike of the great landholders who had oppressed them was not, in some instances strong enough to prevent their taking part with them...fighting what they believed to be the battle of their own religion, against an alien and newly imposed power.⁷⁴

The village communities had little choice but to join the *taluqdars*. The *taluqdars* had armies, forts and guns. Moreover, it would have been difficult for the people of the villages to fight for the British against their own brothers who were part of the Bengal Army.⁷⁵ What William Kaye said of Dalhousie could be said of Canning in 1858. “He had not the faculty to conceive that men might like their old ways of government, with all its imperfections and corruptions about them, better than our more refined system”.⁷⁶

⁷³ Connell, p.21.

⁷⁴ Irwin, 163-4.

⁷⁵ The revolt began in the Bengal Army .

⁷⁶ John William Kaye, A History of the Sepoy War in India 3 vols. Westport, Connecticut: Green wood Press, 1971 p.356. (First published in 1880).

The peasants had been discriminated against because they had not dared to be loyal to the government. That the peasants did not ally themselves with the British was not surprising. Outram opined that the peasants should have stood behind the British because of the settlement made after annexation (the First Summary Settlement 1856), but he ignored the fact that many peasants simply endorsed those who had the military strength to demand their loyalty. The 1856 settlement had not been in favour of the *talukdars* but this did not make it *ipso facto* in favour of the peasants. For the peasants the effects of the change in policy had barely had time to take root before the rebellion occurred. There was no significant change in their living standard that might have caused the peasants to rally themselves behind the British. The Second Summary Settlement (1858) left the peasants deprived of their right of ownership of land and was soon to deprive them of their occupancy rights. The policy of the day was peace at all cost. The peasants bore the brunt of the cost of peace in North India.

The British government recognised the *talukdars* as the owners of the land and thereby converted the cultivators into tenantry. With ownership of the land firmly established the next issue for investigation was whether the tenantry should be given any rights of occupancy in the

soil. Sir George Campbell, Judicial Commissioner of Oudh, was an advocate of occupancy rights for tenants. He believed that the *taluqdars* had amassed too much power at the expense of the tenantry. Beginning in 1859 Campbell submitted a memorandum pertaining to the protection of the actual cultivators of the land.

Unfortunately, Campbell was unable to convince Wingfield (the Chief Commissioner) of the need for tenants' rights. Wingfield maintained that the landlords' rights should be paramount. He also believed that the relationship between landlord and tenant in Oudh should be founded on English principles of contract.⁷⁷ Wingfield instructed his officers to record all tenants at fixed rates as tenants-at-will⁷⁸, which the officers understood as precluding them from registering anything but tenants-at-will.

Campbell, in his Judicial Report of 1860, reopened the question of tenants' rights. Wingfield contradicted himself by issuing two opposing Circulars. The first, No. 162, declared that the proclamation of 1858 confiscated all rights in property and that property rights "were granted to the person upon whom the estate was conferred". The second, No. 165,

⁷⁷ Campbell, *Memories of My Indian Career vol. 2* (London: 1893) p. 39.

⁷⁸ Tenants-at-will are tenants that enjoy the title of tenant at the will of the landlord. The landlord can legally force the tenant to leave at his whim.

gave credence to both superior and inferior interests in land.⁷⁹ In September of 1860, the Governor-General ended the controversy when he sent a letter to the Chief Commissioner which stated that he had gone 'considerably beyond' the intentions of the government. According to the Governor-General the confiscation of land annulled all property rights in the soil, inferior as well as superior rights. The proclamation produced a reversion to the order of things at the time of annexation.⁸⁰ The Governor-General requested that the Chief Commissioner cancel the orders to the Commissioner of Lucknow of May 14, 1860, and issue instructions in conformity with Circular No. 165.

The Chief Commissioner used a technical difficulty in the wording of the confiscation proclamation to annihilate the sub-proprietary rights. He stated that "The rule on which we must take a stand ... is to maintain the rights they were possessed of in 1855, or just before annexation of the province, and no others."⁸¹ If this order were followed those who were forced to the status of tenants-at-will prior to 1855 would have no recourse. It was difficult to establish land rights because in some areas the *taluqdars* had usurped the rights of former proprietors, leaving them as mere cultivators. This process destroyed even the memory of another

⁷⁹ Raj, pp.44-5.

⁸⁰ Raj, p.46.

⁸¹ Raj, p.47.

status. Canning did not outline a clear procedure to establish subordinate rights in the land. This lack of clarity was often exploited by Wingfield. As no decision had been made that year, Campbell returned to the subject in his 1861 Judicial Report.

Canning left India in March 1862 and Lord Elgin became the new Viceroy. Lord Elgin died in 1863 while still in communication with the Chief Commissioner on the subject of occupancy rights in the soil. Wingfield was able to impose another limitation on the claims of under-proprietors due to the lack of close supervision from above during this period. In a Circular he claimed that all under-proprietary rights must be claimed to be recorded. Furthermore, he insisted that the claims must be proven or admitted by the *taluqdar*. After the settlement there would be no consideration of proprietary rights if they had not been recorded.

With the arrival of Sir John Lawrence as Viceroy in 1864, Wingfield, who had long carried out his own views with little interference, now had to contend with more serious opposition. On arrival Lord Lawrence sent a note to Wingfield. The two men met in Kanpur to discuss the terms for admission of claims. One of the main issues discussed was the reinstatement of rights to the position of one year (1855). Lawrence wanted the term to be extended back for twelve years. Wingfield asked Lawrence

for time to consider the proposal.

By May 16, 1864 the *taluqdars* agreed to extend the term of limitation to twelve years from the Summary Settlement in 1858-9. However, in return the *taluqdars* demanded that full proprietary rights should not be thereby revived. They also insisted that under-proprietors should be restricted to those rights which they had enjoyed in any one particular year since incorporation of their lands in the *taluqa*, and further that those subordinate interests should be recorded which were not to be confounded with under tenancies carrying a right of property. In response Lawrence demanded that if a claim to subordinate rights failed to substantiate such a right, that the claimant would not forego the opportunity to be admitted as an hereditary tenant. The above was incorporated in Act XVI April 7, 1865 and known as the Limitation Act.⁸² By the end of 1865 the enquiry into occupancy rights had concluded, however the enquiry into the rights of under proprietors had just begun. The Governor-General wanted to see the ex-proprietor *ryots* ⁸³ established in a firm position.

The *taluqdars* accepted the terms of limitation for hearing claims to under-proprietary rights in land, but did not alter the principles upon

⁸² Raj, p.63.

⁸³ Another term meaning peasant.

which such claims should be decided. Under-proprietors who had only *nakar*⁸⁴ could claim rights in these lands only. To claim a sub-settlement of the village the claimant had to show that for more than half the period involved he held a contract for management of the village. After extensive communication and ultimatums were exhausted, a compromise was reached. Those who still occupied land in their ancestral village were given some privileges (although the privileges had been given as a favour not as a right). The *talukdars* agreed to give sub-settlement rights to under-proprietors on the condition that no right of occupancy would exist in Oudh. The *talukdars*, Strachey (who replaced Wingfield in March of 1866) and Lawrence came to an agreement on August 24, 1866. The Oudh Sub-settlement Act (Act XXVI) was thus formed.⁸⁵ Lawrence maintained throughout that the Act contained nothing which lessened the policy of Lord Canning.⁸⁶

There was some discussion as to whether or not the 1866 Compromise needed to be legalised. The decision was made that it should be legalised in the 1868 Rent Act. The 1868 Oudh Rent Act recognised only a small portion of tenants. The *talukdars* did not give proprietary rights

⁸⁴ Allowance or payment in land or money usually in return for service to the government.

⁸⁵ United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The United Provinces Code: in three volumes containing The regulations and Acts in Force in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. 5 th edition. Vol.1 Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1922.p. 87-91.

⁸⁶ Raj, p.69.

to the cultivators, even to only a small percentage of the cultivators, without the promise of considerable gains for themselves. The proposed gains were made at the expense of the majority of peasants. The *talukdars* gained in two important areas. First, the Act debarred the courts from interfering with the issue of tenants-at-will, which was a great relief to the *talukdars* as they would now be able to make terms with the tenants-at-will with the latter having no recourse in the courts. Secondly, under the Act the state invested the landlords with full discretion to make terms with tenantry. The 1868 Act was a fatal blow to the tenants. The Act only recognised those with proprietary rights within 30 years of annexation. Lawrence thought that this would benefit between 15 to 20 percent of the cultivators, but only 0.5% were able to prove their claims.⁸⁷

Lawrence's efforts proved fruitless. He had tried to champion the rights of the cultivators but in the end only a fraction of a percentage of them were positively affected. The majority of the cultivators were in an inferior position because of the gains made by the *talukdars*. Once again the unwritten agreement between the British and the *talukdars* reined supreme, leaving the cultivators at the mercy of the *talukdars*.

The next re-examination of the Rent Act occurred as a result of the

⁸⁷ Kumar, p.17-18.

Court of Wards taking over the estate of Muhammad *nasim* Khan in 1882.⁸⁸ *Nasim* Khan of Salamau *Taluqa* in Lucknow district was taken over for failure to fulfil the terms of his *sanad*.⁸⁹ The estate was mismanaged and there had been harsh enhancements of rents and ejections. Three months later the estate was restored to Khan not because the allegations were proven to be false, but instead because although they were found to be true the “oppressive practices cited against him were not uncommon in other estates”.⁹⁰

The question of tenant legislation was forced upon the British government in the 1880's because of the Salamau *Taluqa* incident as well as the compelling Famine Commission Report which cited the defects of the 1868 Act.⁹¹ The main proposal of the 1886 Rent Act was that the tenants-at-will would have a statutory right of occupation for a period of seven years during which rents could not be enhanced. After the seven year period rents could be enhanced at a rate no higher than one *anna* in the *rupee*. A second element of the Act was a provision that if the tenant

⁸⁸ The Court of Wards was a government body that took over the management of an estate when it was being grossly mismanaged, or the heir was too young to assume control. It was managed by the government until the estate was profitable and then it was returned to the taluqdar. It is interesting that when a taluqdar mismanaged his funds a government body took over to rectify the situation, but when a cultivator was unable to pay his rent, perhaps due to mismanagement but more likely due to a bad season or enhancements of the rent, there was no one to help him rectify the situation. In fact the government had given the Taluqdars the right to eject the cultivator.

⁸⁹ A *sanad* is a written grant of right.

⁹⁰ Kumar, 28.

⁹¹ Raj, The Mutiny and the British Land Policy in North India 1856-1868. p.169.

were ejected, the landlord should pay one year's rent to the tenant as compensation for the disturbance. The third major issue was that of improvements to the land. The tenant had to get permission for constructing wells, new buildings and other similar improvements to the land, but if permission was denied the tenant had recourse through municipal boards. Unfortunately these boards came to be dominated by *taluqdars*.⁹²

The *taluqdars* were opposed to the provision that gave tenants compensation if ejected as it implied a right to the land which the *taluqdars* were not willing to acknowledge. A compromise was reached in which the existing provision, requiring payment of a stamp duty of a half a year's rent, subject to a maximum of Rs. 25, replaced the year's compensation for ejection. With this compromise included the Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act of 1886 was passed.⁹³ It came into effect on January 1, 1887.⁹⁴

By the 1886 Act most under-proprietary rights had been abolished or were virtually unclaimable, and the courts had been barred from interfering with the land claims of tenants-at-will. Moreover, tenants had

⁹² United Provinces Code, pp. 265-269.

⁹³ M.P. Saxena, The Rent Law in Oudh (Hardoi, 1935) p.1.

⁹⁴ United Provinces Code. pp. 265-269.

to obtain prior permission from their landlords for construction or improvements to the land. In addition to the above restrictions, the tenants were overwhelmed by a number of abuses that were imposed on them by the landlords.

The *taluqdars* recovered from each attempt at the restructuring of the land revenue system. Each amendment had as its initial goal the amelioration of the peasant condition, but the *taluqdars*, with the aid of British officials sympathetic to their cause, were able to consistently find loopholes that could be used to their advantage. As Table B demonstrates, by the end of the nineteenth century the *taluqdars* had increased the percentage of land in Oudh which was under their control to almost 2/3 of the the villages.

Land Tenure: Table B⁹⁵

Taluqdars own no less than	65.91%
Single <i>Zamindari</i> Tenure	9.81%
Joint <i>Zamindari</i> Tenure	9.88%
Coparcenary Communities	13.48%
Directly by Government	.92%

The battle between the British for and against rights for tenants was drawn along the lines of *laissez faire* government. One group headed by Wingfield felt that the government should not interfere but allow the

⁹⁵ Rai Bareli Gazetteer 1905 p.67 part 1.

groups within Oudh to deal with their new situation. The taluqdars, in his mind, were much like the landed gentry in England and should therefore be treated as such. Moreover, Wingfield believed that the taluqdars were an important ally in Oudh. The other group headed by Lawrence believed that the British should interfere as the Second Summary Settlement was unfair to the bulk of the population. He was keenly aware that Oudh had been annexed because there was significant maladministration of the area under the taluqdars, and that the Second Summary Settlement gave the taluqdars at least equal power if not more power than they had wielded before. The evidence seems clear that Wingfield's view predominated in both legislation and practice despite efforts to mitigate its impact.

Chapter III Peasant Realities: Abusing the System...

The numerous land acts had left the bulk of the peasantry in a difficult position. Less than 1% of tenants were able to prove proprietary rights within 30 years of annexation, and therefore most tenants fell into the category of tenants-at-will. In addition to the land situation the peasants were abused in other ways. This chapter will examine the abuses that the taluqdars wielded against the peasants in Oudh. Ejectment, nazarana, cesses, increased rent, and indebtedness will be investigated, as well as the effects of World War I and famines.

One of the examples of abuse was ejectment. Ejectment from the land was a tool used by the landlord to accomplish one of three things: firstly, the threat of ejectment was often used to convince the tenant to pay illegal rent enhancements; secondly, ejectment could be used to settle accounts; and thirdly, the landlord could actually deprive a tenant of his right to cultivate a specific plot of land.⁹⁶

In the first situation a landlord did not have the right to enhance the rent legally except at the end of a seven year lease. The 1886 Act stated that a landlord could not increase the rent by more than one *anna* in

⁹⁶ Mehta Report Point #6 Ashok Singh, p. 197.

the *rupee* (6.25%) unless it was agreed to by the tenant. This did not keep the tenants safe from ejectment. The population was increasing in the late nineteenth century, as demonstrated in Tables C and D, but at a very slow rate and recurring famines indicated a reduced total population between 1901 and 1911 as well as between 1911 and 1921. The tenant did not have many options. He could pay the illegal enhancements, or leave the land, disrupt the family, and hope to find a better situation elsewhere. If he were already in debt he would first have to clear his debt and then move on.

Table C: Oudh Population⁹⁷

Year	Population	Year	Population
1872	11,221,043	1901	12,833,168
1881	11,387,832	1911	12,558,004
1891	12,650,924	1921	12,166,642

Table D: Density per Square Mile⁹⁸

Year	District Population		Density per sq. mile	
	Partabgarh	Rai Bareli	Partabgarh	Rai Bareli
1872	782,681	989,008*	542	568*
1881	847,047	951,905	587	547.6
1891	910,895	1,036,521	613	591.7
1901	912,848	1,033,761	633	590
1911	899,973	1,016,864	624	-
1921	855,130	936,403	593	-

* 1869

The threat of ejectment by the landlord was most often simply an

⁹⁷ Census of India 1921, (U.P.), Vol. XVI, Part II, Allahabad, 1932, p.6.

⁹⁸ 1904 Partabgarh Gazetteer, 1905 Rai Bareli Gazetteer.

attempt to force the tenant into paying a higher rent as shown in Table E. In 1880-1881 39% of the tenants who received ejectment notices were evicted from their holdings, 43% either remained at enhanced rates or lost only part of their holdings. In 1881-82 27% of tenants were evicted while 39% stayed at enhanced rents or lost part of their holdings. In 1882-1883 24% of tenants were evicted while 45% stayed on the land. In 1883-1884 25% were evicted while 46% stayed on the land. In the case of those who lost part of their holdings they generally paid a higher rent (proportionally) for the land which they kept.

Table E: Results of Notices in Oudh⁹⁹

l=Total number of eviction notices served
 A=Tenants actually evicted from the whole of their holding
 B=Tenants evicted from part of their holding
 C= Tenants who remained at enhanced rates

Year	l	A	B	C	Percentage		
					A	B	C
1880-81	56,686	16,368	7,122	17,010	39	13	30
1881-82	56,232	15,536	8,112	14,025	27	14	25
1882-83	91,242	22,268	17,188	23,560	24	19	26
1883-84	50,547	12,675	12,203	11,030	25	24	22

A tenant had the right to appeal to the courts in the case of illegally increased rents, but it would be a very difficult battle. The court system was not readily available to most peasants as they were unable to invest the time, money and energy needed in order to win their cases. Moreover, many of the courts were staffed by *taluqdars* themselves. If a peasant

⁹⁹Kumar, p.27.

did take a landlord to court and won, he would be seen by the landlord as having betrayed him and some new reason for enhancement of rent or ejection would be found.

A second reason for the threat of ejection was to settle accounts. Non-payment of rents was often used as an excuse to eject tenants. The claim of non-payment was not always valid. As receipts were seldom issued, a tenant had no proof that he had already paid the rent. He could then be forced to pay the rent (again) on the threat of ejection. Often the rents that were paid were used for rents in arrears (whether valid or not), or used to pay *nazarana*¹⁰⁰ or other cesses. This was often done without the tenants' knowledge or approval. The tenant could then be ejected for being in arrears although he had already paid his rent. This system of charging double and triple the actual rent was called the *beshi* system and was prevalent in Oudh. Concealment of rents collected was also a common practise according to *pandit* Janardhan Joshi, Deputy Collector of Rai Bareilly. He wrote that in one estate out of a rental of Rs. 77 000, Rs. 9 500 were concealed. In another estate examined by Joshi Rs. 13 000 out of Rs. 32 000 were concealed.¹⁰¹ Tenants were urged to demand receipts but often they were not issued. In the absence of rental receipts the tenants had no recourse in the courts.

¹⁰⁰ An extra premium on rent taken as a gift payment.

¹⁰¹ Fauthrope Report on Eka Movement United Provinces Gazette, May 13, 1922 Part VIII p. 276.

The third use of ejectment was implied in its name. It was used to eject a tenant from a plot of land. In these cases, the landlord wanted the tenants to leave the land. This could occur because the tenant did not live up to his responsibilities such as paying rent and providing labour, but it could also occur because the landholder wanted to use the land himself. Most often it occurred because the landlord wanted to be free of the tenants to whom he had obligations and bring in new tenants who did not have as much of an understanding of the regulations or were so desperate that they were willing to ignore them. These new tenants could be charged the *nazarana* and *cesses* that the old peasant had already paid thereby increasing the landlords' monetary intake. The new tenants most often paid a higher rent than the tenant who had been ejected. The difference between the old and new rent would certainly be greater than the one *anna* in the *rupee*, (6.25%) allowed by law. Ejectment was thus a very effective and efficient tool used by the landholders against the tenants.

The landlord found it more profitable to increase rent on each eviction than to share profits accrued through improvements. The indebtedness of the low caste peasantry stemmed not from undue expenditure but from perpetually increasing revenue demands and rents,

high prices, and the usurious rate of interest on loans. The natural calamities such as floods and famines only added to their miseries.¹⁰²

Nazarana

Nazarana was another tool used to line the pockets of the *taluqdars*. A legacy from the last King of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah, *nazarana* was what the revenue authorities paid to the minister before they were permitted to enter on their charges. According to Oudh *taluqdars*, *nazarana* was an extra premium on rent taken as a gift payment from the cultivators. This had to be paid on top of the regular rent. The payment of *nazarana* was required and legal if a tenant wanted to renew his lease after the seven year period expired. Eviction from the land was used as a tool by the landholder in order to pressure tenants into paying higher *nazarana*. The demand for *nazarana* did not only occur every seven years with a new lease but could occur at any time throughout that period, and did in fact occur many times within the period. Often *nazarana* was taken from one tenant, but the land was given to another in an attempt to double the *nazarana* collection.

Some tenants were in such desperate situations that they felt compelled to commit *kanya virkay* (sale of daughters) in order to meet the

¹⁰² Ashok Singh, Peasants Revolt and Agrarian Reforms p.51.

nazarana demand.¹⁰³ In the Hindu tradition the crime of *kanya virkay* is punishable by eternal hell. Some poor peasants, in order to avoid the living hell in this life, preferred incurring eternal damnation in the next. Cases of *kanya virkay* came to light during an investigation conducted by the Deputy Commissioner in 1920 to probe the causes of agrarian disturbances in Partabgarh as seen below in Table F.

Table F : Kanya Virkay Cases in Partabgarh¹⁰⁴

Girls of (years)	sold by	to a husband aged (years)	For Rs.
5	brother	40	300
12	father	60	300
7	father	50	200
12	father	30	300
5	father	40	300
7	father	40	200
10	father	40	400
10	father	40	500

The Mehta Report¹⁰⁵ examined the issue of *kanya virkay*. It was reported that:

One Gayadin Dubey, a poor dilapidated Brahmin, (...) nearly broke down when he began his statement before me ... two years ago the mufrid zamindar sued him for arrears and suit was decreed. He paid the money by selling his cattle. Then the mufrid zamindars wanted to eject him and held out the ultimatum that if he did not pay Rs. 500 he would be ejected. He had nothing left so he had to sell his daughter ten years old to a husband about forty. ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Singh, p. 57.

¹⁰⁴ Mehta Report pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁵ V.N. Mehta was commissioned to examine kisan grievances in Oudh in 1920 and to report on them. He was the Deputy Commissioner of Partabgarh.

¹⁰⁶ Exhibit. "S", Mehta Report, F. NO. 753/ 1920, Rev. A, U.P.S.A., pp. 10-11.

The enormous disparity in the ages of the young girls and the men they were sold to led Mehta to remark "that the girls marriages were consecrated before the funeral pyre." ¹⁰⁷

After the death of the tenant *nazarana* was demanded from his family. This too was illegal, since Section 48 of the Oudh Rent Act allowed for landholders to eject heirs only at the termination of the septennial period of lease.¹⁰⁸ Such a demand was very difficult for the peasant family because it came at a financially straitened time. The primary money earner was dead and the family had to pay not only funeral expenses but also *nazarana* and a higher rent. This combination often forced tenants to move.

The practise of collecting *nazarana* after the death of the head of the family -*murdafaroshi* (literally, the practise of selling corpses)-- occurred not only in *talugdari* estates but also on estates administered by the Court of Wards (i.e. by the British government). In Rai Bareli district the increase in the percentage of rents, of the *murdafaroshi* settlements in the estate managed by Court of Wards, varied from 12% to 86 % with an

¹⁰⁷ Independent September 24, 1920.

¹⁰⁸ Mehta Report Exhib "L" p.98-9.

average increase of 29% in the year 1920.¹⁰⁹ This was far above the 6.25% allowed by law.

The Court of Wards was a government body that took over the management of an estate when it was being grossly mismanaged, or the heir was too young to assume control. When the estate was profitable or the heir came of age the estate was returned to the *talukdar*. This propping up of the *talukdars'* estates was done in order to keep them as a firmly established group in Oudh. This was important to the British as they felt their authority was dependent to a large extent on the *talukdars*. The Court of Wards played an important part in the history of the administration of Oudh, as many of the principal estates were under its management for considerable periods.¹¹⁰

Cesses

In addition to the ejectments and *nazarana* there were also numerous *cesses* imposed on the tenants by the landlords. Some of the *cesses* were customary in that they were collected on a regular basis and others were created by the landlord to meet specific needs, usually his own. The customary *cesses* in many cases amounted to an additional 10%

¹⁰⁹ Mehta Report Exhibit. "I".

¹¹⁰ Between March 1860 and July 1872 the estate of Chitpalgarh was administered by the Court of Wards. In June 1861 Baispur was taken over due to the minority of the talukdar and managed by court of wards until 1875. In 1861 Patti-Saifabad, Hissa XI was taken over for the same reason. The second time the property was taken over (in Jan 1902) it was impossible to preserve the property intact. Also see Peter Reeves' book Passism.

to be paid on top of the original rent and *nazarana*. The *cesses* originally charged on the revenue amounted to 2.5% and consisted of the road and school *cesses*, each of 1%, and the district *dak*¹¹¹ and marginal *cesses* each of 1/4%. By 1871, the local rate of 2 1/2 %, and the famine rate 2% were added and in 1878 the *cesses* were amalgamated and a total of 7% of the revenue was charged. This figure was consolidated by Act V of 1894.¹¹² In 1889 a 3% *patwari* rate¹¹³ was reintroduced as well as a 6% *cess* which had been in force in the first year after annexation and had been abandoned after the Mutiny in favour of the old system of *jagirs* or rent free grants. This brought the total amount of the legal *cess* to 16% of the nominal revenue demand as demonstrated in Table G.

Table G: Demand for Revenue and *Cesses* Rai Bareli¹¹⁴

Year	Revenue	Cesses	Total
1900	324,813	33,023	357,836
1905	324,402	23,567	347,969
1910	335,224	33,241	368,465

In Partabgarh district the consolidated local rate was 7%, in addition to which there was a 3% *patwari* rate and a 6% rural Police rate.¹¹⁵ In 1902, the total amount of *cesses* levied was Rs. 198,536 or nearly 15% of the gross demand as demonstrated in Table H.

¹¹¹ Tax.

¹¹² Gazetteer Rai Bareli 1905 Part 1 p.116.

¹¹³ Village official.

¹¹⁴ 1915 Gazetteer Rai Bareli Appendix xiii Table X.

¹¹⁵ Partabgarh Gazetteer 1904 part 1 p. 127.

Table H :Demand for Revenue and Cesses For **Partabgarh**¹¹⁶

Year	Revenue	Cesses	Total
1902	1,301,817	198,536	1,500,353
1922	1,316,863	139,008	1,455,871
1932	1,316,126	132,626	1,448,752

There were numerous examples of “created” cesses. An example of such a cess can be found in one of the districts, where a large landlord demanded a ‘gramophoning’ cess when his son toured the villages playing a musical instrument.¹¹⁷ In another instance a Thakurani *taluqdar* in Partabgarh had a boil on her leg. She paid large sums of money to priests who prayed for her recovery. This money was collected as a ‘septic’ cess from her tenants. Other *taluqdars* would raise the rents or collect extra, often new, cesses to pay for things such as a holy pilgrimage.¹¹⁸ A cess was also accorded for elephants (*hathianna*). This cess was for about 2-3 rupees annually. Although all the peasants were made to contribute to the purchase and maintenance of the animal only the richest peasants had any hope of using the elephant, perhaps for a marriage procession.

Holy days were also used as an excuse to collect cesses. Ironically there were Muslim landlords who collected for both Hindu and Muslim holy days. The landed magnates tended to be landowners first and Muslims

¹¹⁶ Partabgarh Gazetteer 1904 Table X p.xi.

¹¹⁷ H.D. Malaviya , Land Reforms in India. (New Delhi: 1954) p.104.

¹¹⁸ Partabgarh Settlement Report 1896.

second.¹¹⁹ The tenants were expected to offer money or a gift to their landlord on many different occasions such as marriage, birth and death. A cess was levied for animals grazing, another was levied so that the landlord would get their share in the profit of animals used for commercial purposes.¹²⁰

Gorawan (horse tax) was a cess that was levied for the purchase of estate horses. In one estate investigated in the Mehta Report it was found that the occupiers of the village were forced to buy lottery tickets valued between 8 *annas* and 2 *rupees*. The winner would have to take the prize (the *talukdar's* old horse). This system worked well for the *talukdar* as the tenants were forced to buy tickets regardless of their interest in having a horse or their ability to maintain it, thereby generating enough money from ticket sales for the *talukdar* to buy a new horse. In the Haripur estate of Partabgarh the landowner purchased a horse and carriage for 300 Rs. The horse was old and not of much use to him so the landlord started a lottery. He made Rs. 500. When the winner of the horse tried to sell it he was only able to get Rs. 75 for it.¹²¹

A *motrawan cess* was imposed when the *talukdar* wanted to buy a

¹¹⁹ Francis Robinson, Separatism Among Indian Muslims. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p.192.

¹²⁰ Kumar, p.40.

¹²¹ Mehta Report p. 73.

new car.¹²² When a landlord made a visit to the village another cess was to be collected called *Nazar Daura* (landlords tour to collect gifts). In earlier times the *Nazar Daura* were unforced offerings to the landlords. The gifts were given as a sign of honour and were generally returned. This cess, on the contrary, was a forced gift of between 1 and 5 *rupees* and was retained by the landlord. In some estates this cess was collected even if the landlord did not make a tour of the village. A interesting cess was levied in Kheri called *Dhururai* (dust tax). This cess was created to financially compensate the landlords who would be disturbed by the dust created when a herd of animals went by.¹²³

Many of the cesses were illegal but the court system rarely offered the peasants any relief. Litigation could drag on for a number of years. The court could be that of a *taluqdar* raised to the rank of assistant commissioner resulting in the case going against the tenant. Even if the case was won by the tenant, it was very possible that he would not get possession of the land from the landlord. The tenant could then go to a higher court as an appellant but once again the litigation could drag on for years. By this point the tenant would have lost everything.

¹²² Mehta Report pp. 72-3.

¹²³ Kumar, p. 45.

Rents

When a fair rent was being determined issues such as *nazarana* and *cesses* were not considered. When these extra demands are examined we obtain a picture of a peasantry that paid triple and quadruple the amount of their rent. In 1882, Major Erskine made inquiries into the movement of rents in Oudh. He concluded that the rents charged had no relation with the productive value of the soil. Rents ran high throughout the district of Partabgarh in comparison with surrounding areas. This was considered natural as the area was densely populated and therefore there was much competition for land.¹²⁴ In Rai Bareli the rise in rents was not as dramatic as it was in Partabgarh although, as demonstrated in Table I, both involved, at the very least, significant rises.

Table I: Rise in Rents in Oudh (1858-1882)¹²⁵

District	Percentage of Rise
Rai Bareli	25.5
Partabgarh	49.4
Lucknow	27.1
Sultanpur	26.8
Unao	23.3
Bara Banki	19.2
Sitapur	37.3
Hardoi	29.7
Kheri	29.2
Fyzabad	21.3
Bahraich	41.2
Gonda	13.9
<hr/>	
Oudh Average	28.6

Rents were not only high but they rose each year. As Table J

¹²⁴ Partabgarh Gazetteer 1904 Part 1 p.116 pp.136-7.

¹²⁵ Kumar, p.19.

demonstrates the average annual rise since settlement was positive in all cases for the districts of Oudh. Moreland concluded that "there has certainly been widespread enhancement beyond legal limits since settlement..."¹²⁶

Table J: Movements of Rents¹²⁷

District	Average Annual Rise Since Settlement		Average Annual Rise 1905-1911
	No. of years	/Average Rise	
Rai Bareli	14	1.2	1.0
Sitapur	13	1.1	0.2
Hardoi	12	1.2	1.7
Kheri	11	2.8	1.1
Fyzabad	15	0.7	1.2
Gonda	7	0.6	0.7
Bahraich	12	1.4	1.1
Sultanpur	12	1.0	0.5
Partabgarh	16	0.8	0.7
Bara Banki	15	1.3	1.3

The increase in rents led to the further indebtedness of the peasants. This forced the peasants into the arms of the *Bania*¹²⁸ (money lenders). *Bania* were of two types, those who had traditionally been in this occupation and a new class of *bania* who were landlords. This new class emerged out of the very system we have been examining. It was

¹²⁶ Notes on the Agriculture Conditions and Problems of the United Provinces and its Districts by W.H. Moreland Esq., C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S., Revised up to 1911 Allahabad, printed by W.C. Abel off. Supdt Government Press, United Provinces 1914 p. 110.

¹²⁷ Notes on the Agriculture Conditions and Problems of the United Provinces and its district by W.H. Moreland Esq., C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S., Revised up to 191 Allahabad, printed by W.C. Abel off. Supdt Government Press, United Provinces 1914 p.110.

¹²⁸ Traders, moneylenders and also a caste.

found to be financially beneficial to lend money at high rates of interest; in fact, it was so lucrative that many landlords with extra money became money lenders. This contributed to the problem of the lack of improvement to the land. Rather than re-investing the profits in the land, the landowner chose to become a *bania*. The decision was not a difficult one to make. The landowners knew that if they were to make improvements to their land higher land revenue would be demanded by the government. There was no profit in improvements as a higher revenue demand was sure to follow. As *baniyas*, the landlords were guaranteed profits. They were also often the landlord of the tenant who owed them money. Once again the tenant was in a difficult position as the landlord could record his rent as an interest payment on his loan, and the tenant could be ejected for arrears in rent. This system allowed for yet another attack on the peasantry.

As demonstrated in Table K, the large majority of the tenants were in debt. Cultivators borrowed money at exorbitant rates of interest in order to buy seed or pay their rent. When it was time to repay the loan their produce was sold to the *bania* and *mahajans*¹²⁹ at rates beneficial to the buyers. This system kept the cultivators indebted and forced them to borrow money at a higher rates of interest because of their past record.

¹²⁹ Moneylender.

The *bania* bought produce and seed at low rates (in season), and hoarded and resold the seed to the cultivator, (out of season), at much higher rates. When the crops had been harvested the cultivator was forced to sell his produce to the *bania* at rates that were significantly lower than market rates. Many were unable to break out of this circle of indebtedness.

Table K: Tenant Indebtedness in Oudh¹³⁰
percentage of indebted tenantry

District	1868	1878	1882-3
Lucknow	80	60	hardly any tenant absolutely free from debt
Unao	90	65	66 (2/3)
Bara Banki	N/A	95	25
Sitapur	60-80	75(3/4)	large number
Hardoi	-	under 50	large number
Kheri	-	75(3/4)	41 to 48
Bahraich	under 50	under 50	-
Gonda	-	33(1/3)	very little
Fyzabad	90	75	-
Sultanpur	75 (3/4)	-	generally indebted
Rai Bareli	80	70	-
Partabgarh	the large majority	37	1352 tenants examined and all were indebted

There was also labour exploitation in Oudh. This came in two forms *begar* (forced labour) and *hari* (forced service). Members of the villages were forced to work in the fields of their landlords for days. In fact a total of 40 *begar* days a year was common practise. Most often tenants were not paid for their *begar* days, and in the rare cases that they were

¹³⁰ Kumar, p.21 (Bases on Oudh Revenue Administration Reports, 1880-1881 and the Erskine Report).

paid it was well below the market wage for a day's work.¹³¹ The *taluqdars'* agents had the arbitrary powers to pick up anyone they wished for *begar* services.¹³² This service was usually demanded of the cultivators at the time of sowing or harvesting. This could have a devastating effect on the tenants' own crops as attested to in the

Independent:

The tenants' needs are cruelly ignored, the urgency of his work is completely lost sight of, all that the tenant is required to do is ... unhesitatingly follow the arbitrary will of the *taluqdars*. . . lest he may bring on him the wrath of the taluqdar..¹³³

Hari forced the tenant to offer his plough for the cultivation of the landlord's holding. A landlord could demand oxen and plough twelve times a year without remuneration. Once again this would occur at specific times of the year when the plough and oxen were most needed by the tenant. When government officials visited the area the tenants were obliged to serve the officials at the landlord's home and to donate *bhusa*¹³⁴, *ghee*¹³⁵, and milk free of cost as a mark of respect. Every section of rural society contributed to the comforts and luxuries of the

¹³¹ Mehra Report. p.60.

¹³² Siddiqi, p.107.

¹³³ Independent September 24,1920.

¹³⁴ Straw.

¹³⁵ Butter oil.

landlords in Oudh.

World War I

The next major intensification of peasant exploitation occurred, to a large extent, due the effects of World War I. The *talukdars* gave generously to the war effort. They supplied large amounts of money and men. The money was raised from their tenantry in the form of *cesses*, *Larai Chandra* (forced war contributions) and enhancements. Some of the money went towards the war effort, but the remainder lined the pocket of the *talukdars*. Tenants were coerced into making payments and joining the war effort. Some of the incentives used to encourage people to join the British service were that arrears in rent could be written off, no rent was demanded as long as a member of the household was in military service, and favourable rates for rent on the soldiers' return. Much of this did not actually occur.¹³⁶

A large amount of money was extracted from the peasants, as can be seen in Table L which shows the amounts the *talukdars* in Oudh contributed to the war cause. The peasants became heavily indebted because of the excessive demands made on them for these war loans.

¹³⁶ Kumar, p. 52

Table L: Larai Chandas¹³⁷

Name	District	Demands
1- Mir Tawaqqal Hussain	Fyzabad	Tenants Rs.45,000 Personal Rs.15,000 a number of recruits and labour
2-Lala Ganesh Prasad	Maurawan Onao	209 recruits and subscribed liberally to war fund
3-Mahbub Hussain Khan	Fyzabad	Furnished 140 recruits
4- Bhagwati Prasad Singh	Balrampur	2.5 lakh Rs.and number of labourers and fightingmen, 2 ambulances
5- Raja Pratap Bahadur Singh	Partabgarh	large number of labourers helped in furnishing recruits and war loans. Subscribers Rs.7000
6- Raja Rukmangad Singh	Katari Hardoi	sent a number of combatants for army and subscribed liberally to war fund
7- Raja Udit Narain Singh	Ramnagar Dhawin Bara Banki	furnished number of recruits,subscribed liberally to war fund
8- Mohd. Mehdi Ali Khan	Hassanpur Sultanpur	furnished a number of recruits
9- Raja Pratap Bahadur Singh	Kurwar Sultanpur	
10- Mohd. Tasadduq Rasul Khan	Jahangirabad Bara Banki	much assistance in recruiting,investing liberally in war loan and gave motor ambulance
11- Raja Saiyid Abu Jafar	Pirpur Fyzabad	recruits & labourers maintained recruiting party subscribed liberally to war fund
12- Rani Surat Kumar	Kharigarh Kheri	furnished number of recruits subscribed

		to war fund liberally
13- Raja Ahmad Ali Khan	Salempur Lucknow	Rs. 1000 annually until war was over
14- Raja of Balrampur	Balrampur	Rs. 5000 monthly until war was over

War loans that benefited the British also benefited the *taluqdars* as they retained large amounts of money collected under the name of *Larai Chanda*. Moreover, the *taluqdars* also benefitted from their efforts to collect contributions in that they received more concessions and favours, such as appointments to legislative council positions, from the government. The contributions were procured as a result of the peasants' sacrifices; but the *taluqdars*, not the peasants, reaped the rewards.

A second effect of World War I was a rise in prices as demonstrated in Table M. Rice rose from 3.1.8 in 1890 to 9.8.0 in 1920-21; and wheat rose from 2.3.7 in 1890 to 6.6.0 in 1921-2. As prices rose during this period the peasants were unable to take advantage of the increased market value of their produce. Many of the peasants were largely in debt to their landlords or money lenders due to the war extractions, *nazarana*, *cesses* and enhanced rents. The cultivators were unable to take advantage of the prices because they could not sell their products at market value. Their products were bought by the *taluqdars* and moneylenders at reduced rates to pay for loans. The cultivators were the first to endure the low prices

and the last to gain any benefit from high prices. Tensions were brought to a head by the high prices during the immediate post-war years.

Table M: Rise in Prices¹³⁸
Prices of Food Grains in Oudh (rs.-annas-pice per maund¹³⁹)

Year	Rice	Wheat	Barley	Bajra
1890	3.1.8	2.3.7	1.10.9	2.2.1
1895	3.1.9	2.3.7	1.10.2	2.3.7
1900	4.0.1	3.7.8	2.4.11	2.9.8
1905	3.10.3	2.11.0	1.12.5	2.3.6
1910	4.8.6	3.1.2	1.14.6	2.4.2
1916-17	4.5.0	3.11.0	2.8.0	2.15.0
1917-18	4.0.0	4.2.0	2.11.0	3.6.0
1918-19	6.11.0	6.6.0	4.7.0	6.11.0
1919-20	7.4.0	5.1.0	3.8.0	5.8.0
1920-21	9.8.0	5.15.0	4.0.0	5.3.0
1921-22	5.13.0	6.6.0	4.0.0	5.11.0

This period was also very difficult for cultivators because of the problems in agriculture. Agriculture supported the bulk of the population of Oudh. As Table N demonstrates there were many years of poor harvests and general distress. The years 1912-13, 1913-14, 1918-19 and 1920-21 were considered to be poor with regards to harvests. This was compounded by the fact that over 80% of the population was engaged directly in agriculture as demonstrated in Table O.

Table N: Harvests in the Indo-gangetic plain central¹⁴⁰

1911-12	excellent
1912-13	both harvests normal (1913 monsoon failed)
1913-14	cropped area was short by 2 1/4 million acres and both harvests were very poor
<u>1914-15</u>	<u>Neither</u> crop was good

¹³⁸ Agriculture Statistics of India, 1916-1922, Kumar, p 59.

¹³⁹ A maund equals c.80pounds or 37 kilograms.

¹⁴⁰ Indian Census 1921 United Provinces of Agra and Oudh vol.XVI part 1 Report by E.H.H. Edye I.C.S. Allahabad 1923.

1915-16	harvests were better
1916-17	very good
1917-18	only slightly less good
1918-19	a bad monsoon in 1918 resulted in a very poor <i>Kharif</i> and an indifferent <i>rabi</i> . Distress was general.
1919-20	reasonably good
1920-21	poor

Table O¹⁴¹ : Means of Livelihood

Population supported by	Rai Bareli		Partabgarh	
Agriculture	754,999	80.6	736,428	86.1
Industry	89,971	9.6	63,897	7.5
Commerce	35,977	3.8	19,150	2.2
Profession	7,282	.8	2,397	.3
Other	48,174	5.1	33,258	3.9

Public health was of course connected with failures in crops. As Table P demonstrates the bulk of the population in this decade was not "healthy". The years 1918 and 1919 were the worst of the period due to severe epidemics of plague, cholera and fever.

Table P: Public Health¹⁴²

1911-12	unhealthy - severe epidemic of plague was by itself responsible for a mortality of 7 per mile. serious epidemic of cholera and fever
1913-14	cholera almost disappeared - public health good
1917-18	Health more or less good
1918-19	worst on record- severe epidemics of plague and cholera province devastated in the late summer and early winter by influenza. In a few weeks this disease carried off according to the estimate of the sanitary Commissioner about 2 millions of the

¹⁴¹ Census 1921 United Provinces Part 1 Subsidiary Table III p.174.

¹⁴² Census 1921 United Provinces Part 1 Subsidiary Table III P.174.

population but in reality [as I (the author) will try to show later] many more.

- 1919-20 Influenza persisted in 1919-20 very unhealthy year
 1920-21 Public health unsatisfactory (malaria very present)

The death rate also demonstrates how far reaching the agriculture failures and famines were. (See Tables Q & R) In the years 1905, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921 the number of deaths exceeded the number of births in Rai Bareli. In Partabgarh deaths exceeded births in the years 1905, 1908, 1918, 1919 and 1920.

Table Q: Vital Statistics¹⁴³In Rai Bareli

Year	<u>Births</u>		<u>Deaths</u>	
	Total	Rate per 1,000	Total	Rate per 1,000
1901	46,122	44.62	34,504	33.38
1902	48,277	46.70	28,686	27.75
1903	49,087	47.48	44,742	43.28
1904	47,150	45.61	37,087	35.82
1905	43,141	41.73	54,488	52.70
1906	40,654	39.33	34,838	33.70
1907	40,348	39.02	43,089	41.68
1908	39,794	38.49	57,830	55.94
1909	29,976	28.99	37,334	36.11
1910	39,913	38.62	36,910	35.70
1911	44,564	43.11	41,771	40.41
1912	39,578	88.92	25,200	24.78
1913	50,161	49.33	38,147	37.51
1914	45,407	44.65	45,151	44.42
1915	46,075	43.33	30,675	28.83
1916	38,707	88.06	24,812	24.40
1917	43,925	43.19	34,110	33.54
1918	37,193	86.57	89,540	83.05
1919	28,463	27.99	42,605	41.91
1920	30,057	29.56	35,311	34.72
1921	26,721	26.28	30,440	29.83
1922	21,064	22.49	20,129	21.50

¹⁴³ Rai Bareli Gazetteer 1926 Appendix iii Table III .

The major causes of death in this period were plague, cholera and fever. The plague was prevalent in 1904, 1905, 1907, 1910, 1911 and 1912-1918. Cholera was prevalent in 1901, 1903, 1905, 1908, 1910-11, 1913-15, 1918, and 1919. Fever was prevalent in most of the time period as can be seen in Table S. As demonstrated in Table N above the harvests of the years 1918-1919 were very poor due to a bad monsoon in 1918. The double attack of poor harvests and poor general health are demonstrated in a rate of death that was higher than the rate of birth for the years 1918-1920.

Table R: Vital Statistics¹⁴⁴ In Partabgarh

	Total/	Births rate per 1,000	Total /	Deaths rate per 1,000
1901	40,501	43.79	26,058	28.54
1902	42,797	46.27	23,509	25.42
1903	43,075	47.19	36,988	40.52
1904	42,888	46.98	31,002	33.96
1905	37,557	41.14	48,217	52.82
1906	32,424	35.52	27,366	29.98
1907	38,628	42.31	33,876	37.11
1908	35,255	38.62	42,142	46.16
1909	31,272	32.26	29,332	32.13
1910	36,808	40.32	35,787	39.20
1911	39,826	43.63	38,338	42.00
1912	39,836	44.26	22,614	25.13
1913	43,883	48.76	29,880	33.20
1914	39,493	43.88	31,379	34.87
1915	38,198	42.44	27,902	31.00
1916	37,008	41.12	22,021	24.47
1917	39,457	43.84	29,476	32.75
1918	33,667	37.41	89,148	99.05
1919	25,996	28.88	36,478	40.53
1920	28,024	31.41	30,245	38.60
1921	26,477	30.96	26,192	30.63
1922	24,448	28.58	20,148	23.56

¹⁴⁴ Partabgarh Gazetteer 1915 Appendix iii.

Fever was not usually linked directly with the famine in the official reports¹⁴⁵ but it is very likely that the fever was a symptom of the starvation. Fever itself as a cause of death was an illness that was infectious, but in the times of famine similar symptoms to fever were remarked in people starving to death. It is therefore difficult to differentiate between the two. I suggest that many of the deaths attributed to fever during periods of famine were actually deaths of starvation. (See tables S & T.)

Rai Bareli
Table S: Deaths According to Cause¹⁴⁶
Total deaths from:

Year	all causes	plague	cholera	small pox	fever	Bowel complaints
1901	34,504	-	4,140	16	21,934	1,533
1902	28,686	2	340	390	20,427	930
1903	44,742	343	2,231	3,578	27,369	1,193
1904	37,037	4,021	24	312	23,967	1,124
1905	54,483	7,355	10,912	188	28,147	1,147
1906	34,838	1,247	600	2,090	23,634	637
1907	43,089	4,497	152	1,556	28,338	631
1908	57,830	667	1,358	2,692	41,349	464
1909	37,334	582	47	62	31,427	233
1910	36,910	3,101	3,053	39	24,392	221
1911	41,771	4,870	4,517	28	24,628	304
1912	25,200	2,422	154	16	16,969	158
1913	38,147	3,402	3,120	739	22,837	269
1914	45,151	1,581	2,715	2,026	23,324	345
1915	30,675	1,280	2,830	9	20,148	288
1916	24,812	1,568	261	4	17,701	183
1917	34,110	3,246	237	66	22,543	402
1918	89,540	4,592	6,969	12	2,202	271
1919	42,605	62	3,131	238	34,622	105
1920	35,311	632	58	8	30,705	69
1921	30,440	933	728	13	25,343	70
1922	20,129	56	37	2	17,494	39

¹⁴⁵ Report on the Administration of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh 1921-1922. (Allahabad: the Superintendent Press, 1923) pp.144-5.

¹⁴⁶ Rai Bareli Gazetteer 1926 Appendix Table IV.

Starvation was often linked to famines but it also occurred as a result of indebtedness. There was in fact food that was available in times of starvation but many peasants were without the means to purchase it because they were in debt. Therefore starvation and fever were not only symptoms of general scarcity and famine but it also occurred in times when food was available.

Partabgarh Table T: Deaths According to Cause¹⁴⁷

Year	Total deaths from:					
	all causes	plague	cholera	small pox	fever	Bowel complaints
1901	26,058	-	927	125	13,568	601
1902	23,509	280	568	220	11,254	686
1903	36,988	1,205	1,425	2,218	15,635	789
1904	31,002	2,025	96	281	16,316	447
1905	48,217	3,236	11,087	152	21,382	557
1906	27,366	606	1,890	160	16,654	314
1907	33,876	1,331	288	1,961	17,911	378
1908	42,142	168	674	5,288	25,096	254
1909	29,332	76	3	32	21,874	106
1910	35,787	557	3,795	18	22,018	171
1911	38,338	1,977	3,545	89	21,506	220
1912	22,614	1,231	316	16	13,031	105
1913	29,880	227	2,130	134	16,244	112
1914	31,379	510	2,076	852	15,169	108
1915	27,902	197	5,246	30	14,546	76
1916	22,021	558	391	9	13,645	47
1917	29,476	2,291	1,682	26	16,467	92
1918	89,143	3,372	13,178	29	64,828	100
1919	36,478	3	2,146	81	29,504	43
1920	30,245	131	74	182	25,333	121
1921	26,192	33	50	181	21,774	25
1922	20,148	8	25	8	16,999	49

As demonstrated in Table U the population statistics reflect a

¹⁴⁷ Partabgarh Gazetteer 1926 Appendix Table IV.

similar story. There was a decrease in population between 1901 and 1911 and another decrease between 1911 and 1921 in the United Provinces as a whole, Oudh as whole and the districts of Rai Bareli and Partabgarh in particular. This coincides with the bad harvests and plagues.

Table U: Population¹⁴⁸

Year	United Provinces	Oudh	Rai Bareli	Parta-bgarh
1921	46,510,668	12,166,642	936,403	855,130
1911	47,997,364	12,558,004	1,016,864	899,973
1901	48,476,793	12,833,168	1,033,761	912,848
1891	47,682,197	12,650,924	1,036,521	910,895
1881	44,876,499	11,387,832	951,905	847,047
1872	42,626,990	11,221,043	989,008	782,681
Variation				
1911-1921	-1,486,696	-391,362	-80,461	-44,843
1901-1911	-479,429	-275,164	-16,897	-12,875
1891-1901	+794,596	+182,244	-2,760	+1,953
1881-1891	+2,806,698	+1,263,092	+84,616	+63,848
1872-1881	+2,249,509	+166,789	-37,103	+64,366
Net Variation in Period 1872-1921				
	+3,883,678	+945,599	-52,605	+72,449

The peasants were in a devastated position by the second decade of the twentieth century. Their rents had increased as had the *nazarana* and cesses that they had to pay. They were still in a very difficult position with regards to the landlord as many could be ejected at the landlord's whim. The rise in prices due to World War I, forced war contributions, famines and epidemics left the peasants in debt with little chance of

¹⁴⁸ Census of India Oudh and Agra . Part I p.9

getting out. This is the context in which the development of peasant agitation must be examined.

Chapter IV

Peasant Revolt : Agitation and Kisan Sabhas

The *Kisan Sabha* movement in the United Provinces emerged in 1917 on the heels of increased cases of ejection, nazarana cesses as well as famine and a period of severe epidemics. There were two types of *Kisan Sabhas* that developed.¹⁴⁹ One was the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* which originated in Allahabad in 1917. This movement was led from above. Many nationalist leaders were involved in the U.P. *Kisan Sabha*. The Home Rule League advanced the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* Rs 4,000 to aid the organization.¹⁵⁰ The U.P. *Kisan Sabha* was formed to secure the cooperation of the agricultural masses for the Home Rule movement. Under Malaviya's patronage the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* began to spread out into the districts.¹⁵¹ Through its relationship with the Home Rule League and Malaviya the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* also became linked to the Indian National Congress (hereafter INC). The INC lent its support both moral and material to the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* from the time of the Delhi Congress in 1918.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Singh, p. 64.

¹⁵⁰ Kumar, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Siddiqi, p. 122.

¹⁵² Siddiqi, p.125.

Although, the U.P. *Kisan Sabha* was formed to secure the cooperation of the peasant masses for the Home Rule League,¹⁵³ it only occasionally raised its voice on the issue of the conditions of the peasants, and never attempted to mobilise them. Instead the leaders of this Kisan Sabha eschewed direct action and adopted a policy of prayers and petitions to obtain government action on peasant grievances. The second *Kisan Sabha*, and the one that is most important for the purposes of this thesis, had different origins and leadership. The INC was not involved in this Kisan Sabha until 1920 when nationalist figures were invited to join the Kisan Sabha in their fight for relief from nazarana and cesses. Jawaharlal Nehru admits that “from an all India point of view it [the Oudh peasant’s movement] was a local affair and very little attention was paid to it.”¹⁵⁴

The Kisan Sabha was formed at Rure in the Partabgarh district of Oudh. It was formed by Jhinguri Singh and Sahdev Singh both of whom were apparently Rajput villagers reduced to agricultural tenancy status.¹⁵⁵ This Sabha had aims that were very different from those of the U.P. *Kisan Sabha*. The *Kisan Sabha* in Rure was formed to be a platform to discuss peasant problems and to develop methods of organisation through which the problems could be solved. The aim of the

¹⁵³ Siddiqi, p.123.

¹⁵⁴ Nehru, p.62 (italics mine).

¹⁵⁵ Kumar, p. 71.

Kisan Sabha was to voice demands of the discontented peasants. Much of their effort was focused on relief from *taluqdari* exploitation.¹⁵⁶ There is no evidence that links the two *Kisan Sabhas* prior to 1920. In fact it is believed that they did not know of each other's existence until that year.¹⁵⁷

Baba Ram Chandra, as he came to be known, was born in 1864 in Gwalior and he played an important role in the Oudh Kisan Sabha movement. He was a Maharashtrian Brahmin whose birth name was Shridhar Balwant Jodhpurker. Ram Chandra was in Fiji from 1905-1916 as an indentured labourer and later went on to take an active role in the movement to emancipate indentured labourers. He left Fiji in 1916 to avoid arrest.¹⁵⁸ When he returned to India he became involved in the questions surrounding land claims and peasant-landlord relationships in Oudh. He began by seeking to harmonise tenant-landlord relations. Ram Chandra soon considered this to be a wasted effort and began to mobilise the peasants. He encouraged peasants to withhold all cesses, to refrain from providing *begar* and *hari* and to pay only the nominal rent. He also advocated an eight point program for the betterment of the peasants. First, the reservation of jungle tracts for the grazing of cattle; second,

¹⁵⁶ Independent Hindustan p.11 vol. 1 No. 8 April 1921.

¹⁵⁷ Kumar, p.71.

¹⁵⁸ Kumar, p.84.

that payment of rent should be made in advance of the fixed time; third, that the tenants should sink wells and dig tanks; fourth, the planting of orchards where possible; fifth, that half the area to be sown should be sown with grain crops and the other half with cotton; sixth, the establishment of seed or grain depots at every three kos; seventh, the acceleration of female education; and eighth, the creation of a union among kisans and labourers.¹⁵⁹

Under Ram Chandra's leadership the peasants were beginning to play an important role in the eyes of many Indian leaders. This occurred for two reasons. It was at this time that the peasants were able to make themselves heard through their demonstrations which were organized by Ram Chandra. Their actions were often viewed with concern by the INC leaders, but more importantly they were noticed. The second reason that the peasants began to be important in the eyes of the INC leaders was because the INC was trying to fashion itself into a mass party. The INC had been largely a middle class movement until the introduction of Gandhi. It was at this point that attempts were made to somehow incorporate the masses into the movement so that it could claim to be mass based. This was important to the INC because the British were not willing to recognise them as the political voice of Indians if they did not speak for

¹⁵⁹ Mehta Report p.2.

all Indians, or at any rate a broader spectrum of the Indian population.

At the Delhi (1918) and Amristar (1919) annual meetings of the Indian National Congress, peasants were welcomed to participate.¹⁶⁰ The regular dues were discarded for *kisans* and arrangements were made for their room and board. This was part of the Congress' attempt to, at a minimum, look like a 'mass' party. The leaders of the Congress realized that they could not claim to speak for all Indians when only representing a small number of them. Gandhi was instrumental in this change towards a mass appeal in Congress. He was able to convince important leaders of the usefulness of the peasants. Madan Mohan Malaviya was the president of the 1918 session. In his address he welcomed the *kisans* with the following statement: "One special and particularly happy feature of this Congress is the presence at it of nearly 900 delegates of the tenant class who have come at great sacrifice, from far and near to join their voice with the rest of their country men in asking for a substantial measure of self-government".¹⁶¹

The president of the 1919 session was Motilal Nehru.¹⁶² There was a problem with seating arrangements which eventually led to 1800 *kisans*

¹⁶⁰ Siddiqi, pp.126-7.

¹⁶¹ Jawaharlal Nehru. An Autobiography (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1936). p.54.

¹⁶² Motilal Nehru (1861-1931) was a distinguished U.P. lawyer a Congressman and the leader of the Swaraj Party as well as the father of Jawaharlal Nehru who was to become the first Prime Minister of India.

rushing through one of the gates. The peasants had been denied access to the seats that they had occupied earlier and had been treated without respect when they were told to take planks at the back of the pandal.¹⁶³ Motilal did not approve of the *kisans'* behaviour as the gate had been broken as well as many chairs. The *kisans* were not offered free tickets for the 1920 Nagpur session of Congress. This can be seen as an early indication of the lack of commitment on the part of some INC leaders to the peasants' cause.

Kisan Sabhas were becoming more popular and numerous in the Oudh region. By the end of 1920, *Kisan Sabhas* had been formed in many other districts including Rai Bareli, Fyzabad and Sultanpur. Towards the latter part of 1919 Ram Chandra led the peasants in a protest against the *Taluqdars*. In the district of Partabgarh a movement hailed as *nai dhobi band* was followed. This meant that the peasants would no longer perform menial tasks for the *taluqdars*, such as cutting and shaving, washing clothes and scavenging.¹⁶⁴ This protest was significant because the *taluqdars* depended on the peasants for these tasks. Caste restrictions stated that the people of higher castes, of which most *taluqdars* were part, would pollute themselves by performing tasks such as scavenging. Indian society was stratified in such a way that only the lowest in the

¹⁶³ Siddiqi , pp. 126-7.

¹⁶⁴S. Gopal. (ed) Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru. vol. 1 p. 197.

hierarchy performed such tasks, therefore the taluqdars were more than simply inconvenienced by the nai dhobi band movement.

In June 1920 Ram Chandra wished to broaden the movement and therefore attempted to engage Mahatma Gandhi and other urban leaders into in this peasant movement to give heightened popularity to their cause. Ram Chandra organised a march from Patti to Allahabad (about 70 km) in which about 500 peasants participated, to mark the occasion of Saptami bathing day. It was at this point (1920) that the two *Kisan Sabhas* came into contact.¹⁶⁵ Ram Chandra attempted to bring the various *Kisan Sabhas* together. The 'Oudh Kisan Sabha' was formed at Partabgarh on October 17, 1920 as an amalgamation of the various local village *Kisan Sabhas*. Jawaharlal Nehru spoke at a meeting of the Oudh Kisan Sabha at which there were representatives from each village where a *Kisan Sabha* was established. He was the first major national figure to address the peasants. Nehru spoke little about the *kisan* agitation and moved on to his main concern which was to spread the message of Gandhi.

The inauguration of the Oudh Kisan Sabha and its new ties with leadership from the Indian National Congress was to be considerably more beneficial for the INC leaders than for the *kisans*. The Allahabad leaders

¹⁶⁵ Kumar, p. 91.

made considerable gains by obtaining the support of the *Kisan Sabhas*. The INC/*Kisan Sabha* collaboration gave the INC the ability to claim mass rural support. The Allahabad leaders had killed two birds with one stone. The *kisans* had been unified under a central banner, and more importantly the peasant movement had been harnessed to the band wagon of non-cooperation.¹⁶⁶ As official discussion about the condition of the peasants in Oudh took place in late June 1920, Ram Chandra urged the peasants to intensify their struggle. He encouraged them to withhold illegal exactions and to stop cultivating the taluqdars' *Sir*¹⁶⁷ lands. More importantly, he emphasized the importance of not taking up the land from which other *kisans* had been illegally ejected.

On August 28, 1920 Ram Chandra and thirty-two tenant leaders were arrested.¹⁶⁸ A large group of peasants (4,000-5,000) were on hand September 1, 1920 in the court compound to support their leaders. Due to the large number of peasants, officials thought it preferable to try the leaders in jail so that they would not have to face the crowds.¹⁶⁹ When the peasants became aware that the cases were being held inside the jail, they rushed to the jail gates. The crowd was told that Ram Chandra would

¹⁶⁶Independent October 27, 1920.

¹⁶⁷ Land under the landlord's cultivation.

¹⁶⁸ Leader September 23, 1920.

¹⁶⁹ Leader September 23, 1920.

be released the following day.¹⁷⁰ The authorities feared the crowd if Ram Chandra was not released but they they also feared releasing him in front of thousands of peasants as a dangerous situation might arise. Therefore Ram Chandra was released in a sugar cane field in Sugahibagh the next day. After Ram Chandra's release from jail a crowd assembled to see their leader. The crowd grew to about 60,000 *kisans* by evening. From a tree top Ram Chandra received *darshan*¹⁷¹ of numerous *kisans*. The *kisans* returned to their villages that night with assurances from officials (who had been moved to action due to the sheer numbers involved) that their grievances would be looked into.¹⁷²

All the commotion attached to Ram Chandra's teachings and arrest as well as the peasants' agitation compelled the Deputy Commissioner to start an inquiry into the peasant situation. The result was the Mehta Report which investigated the grievances of the peasants. Mehta cited many abuses in his report, most importantly the abuses in the areas of ejection, *nazarana*, *cesses*, estate management, rent and improvements to land. Harcourt Butler, the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces and an ardent friend of the *taluqdars*, refused to have the report printed in its entirety, stating that "Mehta is apparently completely ignorant of the

¹⁷⁰ Independent September 12, 1920.

¹⁷¹ A form of spiritual happiness induced by being in the presence of a cherished person, place or thing.

¹⁷² Siddiqi, p. 133.

whole Oudh controversies on the question of tenant rights".¹⁷³

Ram Chandra and other leaders met with the *taluqdars* to try to come to an agreement. The suggestion of mediation by a conciliation officer was met with great resistance when the question of payment of the officer was raised. The *Kisan Sabha* refused to pay, the landlords were divided on the question of their paying the officer's salary and the government explained that it was not in a financial position to do so.¹⁷⁴ Another meeting was held in the second week of October 1920 in the Deputy Commissioner's house. The meeting ended with assurances from the *taluqdars'* representatives. They unofficially regularised the code to govern the practise of *begar, hari* etc., and illegal *cesses* were condemned. Finally, a plea was made to fellow *taluqdars* to act with moderation with regard to ejection.¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately, as there was no legal strength to the resolution there was also no radical change. Although the peasants did not get all they had asked for, they did learn that when grouped together they could have a voice, a low whisper of a voice, but a voice all the same. They had forced the *taluqdars* to hear their complaints. They were no longer the silent masses.

¹⁷³ Kumar, p.104.

¹⁷⁴ Siddiqi, p. 132.

¹⁷⁵ Mehta Report exhib. O.

A *Kisan* rally was called for December 21-22, in Ajodhya. A two-day *Kisan Sabha* congress was held which 80,000 to 100,000 peasant were said to have attended.¹⁷⁶ Ram Chandra was concerned about the space for all those who were expected. Information was given out which encouraged peasants to take in their brethren during the conference. When mass meetings were arranged, Ram Chandra always encouraged the peasants to open their homes to peasants who had travelled far to attend the meetings. According to Ram Chandra this was beneficial as it allowed peasants to travel considerable distances to meetings without the added cost of room and board. Moreover, it gave the peasants from different areas a chance to meet, exchange ideas, discuss hardships and to get a feeling that they were not alone. The meetings and the communal accommodations allowed for a bond to begin to form, connecting peasants across Oudh. The Oudh Kisan congress ended peacefully but some peasants interpreted Gauri Shankar's remarks as incitement to agitation. Gauri Shankar stated that "the object of the congress [was] that it was held to put an end to the landlords atrocities..".¹⁷⁷

There were numerous agrarian disturbances in the year 1921 as demonstrated in Tables V and W. Most fell into three broad categories:

¹⁷⁶ Independent January 25, 1920.

¹⁷⁷ Nehru, p. 54.

disturbances against *talugdars*, disturbances against *bantias*, or disturbances with the aim to release imprisoned rural leaders.

Table V :Criminal Justice¹⁷⁸

Year	offences against public tranquillity		offences against life		grievous hurt	
	1=Rai Bareli	2=Partabgarh	1	2	1	2
1901	42	61	15	23	24	12
1902	26	42	22	13	19	16
1903	45	87	28	23	24	14
1904	81	64	20	18	23	16
1905	78	30	27	26	43	21
1906	50	27	10	15	29	16
1907	34	44	1	7	25	14
1908	20	57	5	13	23	18
1909	6	8	8	13	14	13
1910	7	58	41	15	7	21
1911	10	43	33	12	16	5
1912	41	76	13	3	149	163
1913	29	60	17	21	189	2510
1914	42	48	16	11	198	159
1915	61	21	12	7	221	122
1916	46	62	6	15	181	182
1917	44	52	12	18	133	123
1918	34	36	14	10	99	114
1919	32	41	16	5	154	104
1920	25	103	7	7	264	178
1921	140	130	11	11	137	155
1922	39	28	15	7	113	226

On January 5, 1921, 3000 peasants besieged Thakurain Sheoraj Kumworr's house in the Rai Bareli district. The peasants demanded exemption from ejectment and money.¹⁷⁹ On January 6, 1921 there was a riot at Fursatganj Bazaar. The crowd swelled to between 8,000 to 10,000. Shots were fired when the peasants refused to leave. Three people were killed.

¹⁷⁸ Source: 1904, 1915, 1926 Partabgarh Gazetteer 1905, 1915, 1926 Rai Bareli Gazetteer.

¹⁷⁹ Leader January 1, 1921.

This agitation was directed against the *baniyas* whom the peasants felt were retaining heavy profits at their expense.¹⁸⁰ An example of the third type of disturbance occurred on January 7 1921 at the Munshiganj bridge near Rai Bareli. A crowd estimated at 10,000 gathered at the bridge to protest the rumoured arrest of Ram Chandra. The crowd wanted to secure his release as the *kisans* had done in September 1920 in Partabgarh. Shots were fired and 10-14 people were killed and many others were wounded.¹⁸¹

Table W: List of Disturbances¹⁸²

- 1917 development of Kisan Sabha
- 1919 withdrawing of cesses nazarana and begar nai dhobi band movement
- 1920 -May Ram Chandra and 1000 peasants marched to Deputy Commissioners House to lay their complaints before him
 -June 1920 500 peasants March from Patti to Allahabad. They left with assurances that Nehru would visit their district.
 -August Ram Chandra is arrested but peasants protest and he is released.
 -December Kisan Sabha Day peasants march to Ajodhya
- 1921 -January Taluqdars' crops destroyed
 -Munshiganj two men killed and two wounded at peasant agitation
 -March police open fire at Kisan rally
 -April Rae Bareli collectorate set on fire

The years between 1917 and 1921 had demonstrated that peasants

¹⁸⁰ Siddiqi, p. 156.

¹⁸¹ Leader January 12, 1921.

¹⁸² Compiled from Census Reports District Reports as well as the Leader and the Pioneer.

were capable of instigating and of maintaining an organisation independent of INC initiative. In the year 1921 the *Kisan Sabha* demonstrated the great political potential of agrarian revolt. The peasants had become a formidable force in Oudh. They had been able to achieve some of their goals, through agitation that led to official recognition of peasant grievances. They along with Ram Chandra hoped that the support of the INC and especially Nehru and Gandhi would finally allow them to settle their grievances with the *taluqdars*. Instead Gandhi and the INC took a different approach. Gandhi condemned the actions of the *kisans*. Not only did he publicly chastise them, but he announced in a speech in Fyzabad that “You [the peasants] should bear a little if the zamindar¹⁸³ torments you. We do not want to fight the zamindars... [they] are also slaves and we do not want to trouble them.”¹⁸⁴ The U.P. Kisan Sabha did have leadership from above, but the Oudh Kisan Sabha did not. Its origins were without any connection with national politics. Peasants organized the movement and set its agenda.

One must question who the ‘we’ are in Gandhi’s statement. Could he be referring to the group of peasants who formed the *Kisan Sabha* without the aid of the INC. The same group that had fought both in word and action for relief from their overlords? The same “we” who put their trust in

¹⁸³ Title for land holders.

¹⁸⁴ Collected Works of Gandhi p. 332 vol. XIX. (Speech at Fyzabad Feb. 1921)

Gandhi and the Indian National Congress to help them attain their goals? The INC and Gandhi had other plans. They certainly wanted to have the *kisans* under their banner, as it allowed them to claim that they were a “mass” organisation. But at the same time they did not want to attack the land-owners and thereby alienate them from their cause as they believed that a divided India could not take on the British. The *kisans* were a casualty of the INC/British war. The emphasis of the INC had shifted from their professed stance of abolishing *nazarana* and ejection back to *swaraj*¹⁸⁵ and *swadeshi*¹⁸⁶.

Ram Chandra was arrested at Benares on 10 February 1921. He believed that his arrest was made possible with the assistance of Gandhi and Nehru. When the news reached Bara Banki (a district in Oudh) a “spontaneously struck *hartal*”¹⁸⁷ took place.¹⁸⁸ Many peasants tried to secure the release of their leader, but it would seem that the political leaders were content to have Ram Chandra in jail. Gandhi commented that Ram Chandra’s arrest was a “sacred incident”.¹⁸⁹ The U.P. Kisan Sabha brought out a leaflet signed by Motilal Nehru as president and Gauri Shankar as vice president, exhorting the peasants not to get excited about

¹⁸⁵ Self-rule.

¹⁸⁶ Literally “of one’s own country” it was used as a slogan against the buying of foreign goods.

¹⁸⁷ Strike.

¹⁸⁸ Independent February 16, 1921.

¹⁸⁹ Leader February 13, 1921.

Ram Chandra's arrest. Ram Chandra's removal from the scene and the subsequent arrest of many other rural leaders left the INC to establish their hegemony over the peasants.

The peasants did succeed in hastening the arrival of the Oudh Rent Bill (1921) due to their earlier agitation. The Pioneer, a conservative mouthpiece for British thought, stated on many occasions that "unless agrarian unrest is to become a permanent feature of rural life in U.P. more elasticity will have to be introduced."¹⁹⁰ In the same issue it was stated that "the amendment of the tenancy laws is long overdue [...]it will now have to be undertaken by the reformed council in which the interests of the land lords predominate."¹⁹¹ The provincial government reacted quickly to agitation in Partabgarh, Rai Bareli and other areas of Oudh by announcing the preparations for legislation to remove peasant grievances due to tenure and rent.¹⁹² The Act was introduced into council on August 4, 1921, but it had been in the process of formulation for some time before that date. The peasants had been able to push for the legislation at the peak of their agitation but by the time the Oudh Rent Bill came to council the peasants no longer had a leader to defend their rights. Their only hope was in the hands of the INC and of Gandhi, who had earlier

¹⁹⁰ Pioneer January 28, 1921.

¹⁹¹ Pioneer January 28, 1921.

¹⁹² Peter Reeves. "The Politics of Order" in *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 25 (Feb.) 1966 p 264.

counselled the peasants "to bear a little if the zamindar torments you..we do not want to trouble them."¹⁹³

The Oudh Rent Act of 1921 gave the tenant a life tenancy and his heir a five year tenancy as long as he did not misuse the land or default.¹⁹⁴ Rent was now to be agreed upon by the landlord and tenant. It would seem Oudh peasants had finally won a substantial victory. However, the same legislation abolished the 6.25 % maximum rent increase, thereby giving great power to the landlords as they were no longer limited in the augmentation of rent. The practise of *nazarana* remained un-checked, since it was not considered an offence.¹⁹⁵ The issuance of a rent receipt remained at the discretion of the landlord. The landlord was not punishable for neglecting to give out a receipt but a tenant was liable to ejection in the absence of a receipt. *Cesses* also remained untouched. The 1921 Rent Act did not improve the position of the tenants, and they were unable to rise against the 1921 Act as their leaders were jailed and the Indian National Congress would not take up their case. The *taluqdars* had a faithful ally in the United Provinces' Governor, Sir Harcourt Butler. The same cannot be said of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress in the case of the peasants.

¹⁹³ Collected Works of Gandhi vol. XIX p. 332 .(Speech at Fyzabad Feb. 1921)

¹⁹⁴ Saxena, p. 271.

¹⁹⁵ Saxena, p.194.

Chapter V

Conclusions

Peasant agitation in Oudh 1917-1922 has been labelled a by-product of the dominant social groups. This thesis has shown that the peasants had different and valid reasons for their agitation that were independent of the Indian National Congress's goals. With the initiation of the *Kisan Sabha* movement in 1917 the peasants came together as a group to lobby against their oppressive landlords. Originally the movement was organised to fight the abuse of power by the *taluqdars*. The 'agitation', according to a Commissioner in Fyzabad, "began with a genuine agitation of the tenants against cesses which they considered not only burdensome but illegal..."¹⁹⁶

The peasants' goals were not compatible with the goals of the Indian National Congress. In fact, before the creation of Oudh Kisan Sabha in 1920 and the infiltration of Indian National Congress leaders into that organisation, the concept of independence from Britain was not a priority for the Oudh *Kisan Sabha*. The peasants' grievances focussed on their claims to land, but specifically they were concerned with the issues of

¹⁹⁶ Misra p.212.

nazarana, cesses and ejectment from the land. The famines, World War I and the rise in prices all made a bad situation worse. Tenants became further indebted.

With the Oudh *Kisan Sabha* agitation the peasants came to know about their power in numbers. By 1919, with the *nai dhobi band* movement in Partabgarh, the peasants learned that they could make themselves heard. Unfortunately for the cause of peasant leadership, one of the groups that heard was the Indian National Congress. In 1920, when Jawaharlal Nehru became involved with the Oudh Kisan Sabha, the original aims of the peasants who formed the *Kisan Sabhas* were set aside and nationalist leaders began to shift the focus to the movement for self-government. A movement that had begun at the village level, with peasant interests at its base and with non-nationalist leadership, was transformed into a vehicle for the nationalist cause.

It was in the best interests of the Indian National Congress to include peasants in their movement as they were convinced that they needed to have a mass base if they were to be the voice of all Indians; and more importantly the leaders of the Indian National Congress understood that their aim of self-government would be considerably more difficult to achieve if they did not represent the bulk of Indians. A mass base was

pivotal to the the Indian National Congress' cause.

Initially, Ram Chandra believed that the affiliation of the *Kisan Sabhas* to the Indian National Congress would be in the best interests of the peasants as influential leaders like Nehru and Gandhi were in a position to make the peasants' demands heard. He was soon to be disillusioned. It was at this point that the peasants' movement was hijacked by the nationalist movement. The peasants were sacrificed because the Indian National Congress did not want to make a move against the *talukdars* as it would alienate them from the Indian National Congress. The peasants' issues were put on the back burner until the main goals of the Indian National Congress were achieved.

The peasants were not 'awakened' by the Indian National Congress in 1919-22, they had been 'awake' since at least 1917 when the first *Kisan Sabha* was established, three years before the infiltration of the Indian National Congress. The peasants in Oudh had specific grievances and goals prior to the Indian National Congress' hijacking of their movement. They had non-nationalist leadership, specific grievances and had an organisational base prior to nationalists' involvement in their movement. It was instead the Indian National Congress that was 'awakened' to the possibilities associated with mass mobilisation. The peasants were in

fact 'put to sleep' by the Indian National Congress and Gandhi when the decision was made in February 1922 to end non-cooperation.

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