The land revenue administration and management was an important branch of administration by which any government controlled and ruled the subjects of that country. It was the basic tool which controls the monetary and fiscal movement of the country and establishes a direct link between the government and subjects. Therefore, the British government of East India Company, after acquiring the Diwani rights of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, too paid greater attention and continuously attempting to establish a sound land revenue administration which ensured a fixed, regular and permanent source of income for the company. In that process, they introduced various land revenue settlement one after another in a series of experimentation.

The Mahalwari system of land revenue settlement for estates of proprietary bodies was the final attempt in that process. Here, the settlement was directly made with the village or Mahal by the Settlement Officers, who fixed the rent with the consultation of Lambardar and the rent to be paid by the cultivating tenants. The system was known as Mauzawari in United Provinces, Malguzari in the Central Provinces, and village or mahali settlement in pre-independent Punjab. It was hybrid form of both the previous land settlement, i.e., Zamindari and Ryotwari. In all Mahalwari operated regions, the land revenue was revised periodically. Mahal simply defined as a fiscal unit, was a local area coincides with a large or forms a part of village or includes several parts of villages. In this
system, *Shijra* and *Khasra* records were the foundational pillar and basis of all land revenue assessment.

Initially, the *Mahalwari* system covered the most fertile tract of British India including *Ganga-Jamuna Doab*, major areas of *Agra* and *Awadh Provinces*, *North Western Provinces*, *old Banares*, the *Ceded and Conquered* districts and later on it was extended to *Central Provinces* and the British *Punjab*. Till 1857, the operation of the *Mahalwari* system was more or less confined upto the regions of the North Western Provinces.

North Western Provinces with *Oudh* (added to the North Western Provinces administration after T. C Robertson’s recommendation) under the Company administration was slightly more than the present day area of *Uttar Pradesh*. Under the East India Company administration, the entire territorial boundary of the state was categorized into six divisional heads, viz., *Benaras division*, Ceded and Conquered districts, *Oudh*, Regions acquired after Nepal wars in 1816, and Princely States during the British rule. It was an end result of the integration and consolidation process of different parts of the Himalayas foot-hills region under Company rule.

The proposal and suggestion of *Mahalwari* or village-wise System was first presented by Holt Mackenzie, then Secretary to the Territorial Department, Board of Revenue, in the *Minute of 1st July 1819* who declared permanent *Zamindari Settlement* as a “*Loose Bargain*” for the British Empire. Holt Mackenzie’s recommendation incorporated in the *Regulation*
VII of 1822 which attained maturity under the Regulation IX of 1833 under the supervision of R. Marttins Bird.

The study of Mahalwari System acquired immense importance in the context to analyze the agrarian structure and relations of nineteenth century Indian society. To present the existing conditions and social order of nineteenth century Indian agrarian society, then the study of Mahalwari operation need to be look into detail. Many British historians like B. H. Baden Powell in his work Land System of British India, and R. E Frykenberg in Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History, E. Whitecombe in Agrarian condition in Northern India: The United Provinces under British Rule, 1860-1900, and W. H Moreland in The Revenue Administration of the United Provinces have already touched aspects of the Mahalwari System.

Baden Powell in Land System of British India, a set of three volumes, dealt the existing land tenurial system operated in different regions of British India in depth. He dealt each and every aspect of land revenue administration of British India. He had given a good description about the mechanism of officials and their designation. The work of Walter C. Neale entitled ‘Economic Changes in Rural India: Land Tenures and Reforms in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955’ and C. J. Connell’s book entitled ‘Land Revenue Policy: Northern India’ giving good information about the working of Mahalwari System with critical approach. The book of W.
Crooke entitled *A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life* giving good description about the different landholding patterns. *The English Utilitarians and India* written by Eric Stokes had given an informative knowledge about the ideology and philosophy behind the introduction of all the different land tenures and land revenue system.


The archival source material in English and Vernacular enriches our knowledge as primary sources in the form of official minutes, settlement reports, revenue records and proceedings, official letters, acts and regulations etc. about the British land revenue policies. The minutes and settlement reports of officials were exhausted at greater level. The minutes of July 1819 and October 1826 presented by Holt Mackenzie gives comprehensive and detailed information about the operation of *Mahalwari* system. Regulation VII of 1822 and IX of 1833 provide immense information about the states’ share in the total produce. By *Saharanpur*
Rules of 1855 the British made an attempt to improve the condition of agricultural class by lowering the state’s share. However, they did not succeed that target but doubled the burden of peasantry because rental demand of state was fixed in effective terms adjusted with the current prices.

Unfortunately till date we have not seen any substantial modern work exclusively dealing all the aspects of the Mahalwari System which highlighting the inherent problems existed in its operation. In view of huge material yet to be utilized it is felt that Mahalwari System which occupied fertile tracts of plains with rich natural resources, ample rains and canal irrigation need to be investigated afresh. The present study is an attempt to enrich the available information which may fill the gap.

The present study is a modest attempt to examine the agrarian consequences of Mahalwari System and the apparatus of the British control over village economy. The aim of the project is also to see the Mahalwari system from the regional point of view which may enable us to understand the British land system in its totality. The project must needs attention to describe and analyze the situations regarding agrarian depression and how proprietary ownership or Malikanah rights in land have been created by the system.

The first chapter of the study deals with the evolution and implementation of the Mahalwari system of land revenue settlement. An
attempt has been made to present the geographical areas and extent of the
Mahalwari operation. The mechanism of officials with their designation of
different officials, how they supported to each other in the operation of the
settlement could be attempted to present. An effort has been to answer the
question that how the settlement officers assisted by the native officials in
the settlement operation. Though the rate of rent were continuously
decreases on every new revision and brought down up to 50% under the
Saharanpur Rules of 1855 but the realized amount of rent always appeared
larger than the previous collection because it increase in effective terms.

Chapter second discussed the basis of Mahalwari operation. An
try has been made to answer the question that what was the pattern of
landholding distribution in regions and how the holdings lots of land have
been allotted to their holders. The mode and methods of the system has
been presented there. We find here that not having a uniform and universal
method of land revenue system in all Mahalwari regions doubled the tasks
of settlement officers. How settlement officers got aware with the local
situation and condition. What type of different methods had been inducted
for the land revenue assessment according to different locality? The role
and importance of the institution of village community in the operation of
the Mahalwari settlement has been highlighted.

By chapter third an effort has been made to highlight the agrarian
consequences of the operation. How the operation of Mahalwari system
created proprietary rights in land which made land a property of a private and personal. The operation of *Mahalwari* system destroyed the economical base of village economy carried out by the village community of joint proprietary bodies has been presented. The concept of individualism acquired the place of community holdings. We tried here to highlight that how the introduction of proprietary rights in land open the gate for the capitalistic mode of production. How the rental demand of the state realized in cash forced the peasantry to grow commercial crops. An attempt has also been made to highlight that how the heavy rental demand of government raised the cases of female infanticide in the region. The peasants started the practice of female infanticide to reduce the strength of family member. In that process, they preferably killed girl child against the boy.

In chapter fourth we tried to present an economic appraisal of the *Mahalwari* operation with ryotwari and zamindari in a comparative way. An attempt has been made to depict the regional variation and imbalances regarding rent rates on the basis of available statistical information. Here, I made an effort to show the marginal benefits and magnitudes of exploitation of the three respective settlements’ areas. I also tried to sketch out the social and economic results of all the three settlements respectively.

The fifth and final chapter deals the event of *Ghadar* or rebellion of 1857 in the *Mahalwari* region. An attempt has been made to prove that the revolt of 1857 occurred as a major consequence of the operation of
Mahalwari system. In this chapter a modest attempt has been made to present the responses of all agricultural community. Was peasants reacted against the harsh and coerce method of land revenue collection and realization or they reacted against the foreign imperialism? Why the magnitude of resistance of rebellion was so powerful and confined within Mahalwari operated zone. Why the agricultural population of this region welcomes the event so enthusiastically and supported the rebel cause with full zeal. The en masse participation of peasants and taluqdars from this particular region drifted the mutiny of sepoys into the rebellion of people and rationally and rightly supported the view of V. D Savarkar about the rebellion of 1857 who declared the event as a first war of India’s independence.

The system did not work properly and practically, found imperfect, inadequate and fell heavily on the agriculture classes and created widespread discontent among the peasants. It appears to be very unpopular agrarian system and failed because of excessive state demand. It seems that the operation of Mahalwari system of land revenue settlement proved to be disastrous for the nineteenth century Indian agriculturists as well as for the administration of English East India Company.