CONCLUSIONS

The resurgent class of zamindars was inheriting the disintegrating Mughal empire and it may be regarded as the most-distinguishing characteristic of the ongoing restless period (1700-50) in the history of subah Gujarat. During this period the zamindars replaced the declining Mughal authority by their own in the countryside. But the process of inheriting the imperial authority was neither smooth nor free of internal or external constraints. It was marked by a multiple struggle for acquiring supremacy over the sources of revenue. The struggle, as regards the zamindars, looked more individual in nature as almost every zamindar due to persisting disunity amongst them, had to fight the government individually. But in effect the resistance was collective in nature—despite being disunited and fragmented the class (vis a vis the Mughal government) had uniformity of outlook and interest which, under the prevailing circumstances, seem to have forged a kind of uniformity of approach among them. Thus without coming closer to each other or evolving a common strategy, the zamindars moved about and reacted the same way. But the struggle was simultaneously marked by inter-class and intra-class as well as inter-strata and intra-stratum conflicts which in turn had their own qualifying effects on the process.
In spite of commanding vast resources and superior military might the empire had its own limitations to deal with the ubiquitous class of zamindars. Topographical barriers, position of zamindaris in the imperial-provincial strategy, political character, caste and clannish affiliations, socio-economic roots and other sources of zamindar’s strength in terms of men and material beside productivity and manageability had qualifying effects on the empire’s capacity to acquire and retain complete hold over each one of them and, or, strike uniformity in all aspects of its pattern of relations with each segment of the class. Proceeding pragmatically the Mughal state took these ground realities into account and then, accepted and continued the general pattern of relations with the zamindars earlier established by the provincial kingdom\(^1\) which was subsequently absorbed within the Mughal empire.

The empire could not do away with the existing variations, whether inter-regional or intra-regional and inter-strata or intra-stratum. Rather it sought to regularise and accommodate them into its over-all administrative framework. Therefore one comes across the class of zamindars

\(^1\) These factors might have a bearing on the Sultan-zamindar relations also. S.C.Misra, op cit, pp. 204-6. It also seems that the mode of relationship as established under the Gujarati kingdom, might have acquired somekind of acceptability with the passage of time.

557
having definite signs of differentiation and a well marked order of gradation which, among other, manifested in the mode and proportion of share in revenues and relative hold over the sources thereof. The gradation is further reflected from the way different nomenclature and varied appellations having definite connotations are used to designate the holdings, their holders and imperial share in the revenues. The same may be regarded as the salient features peculiar to the zamindars of subah Gujarat. ¹

The Mughal state laid a definite claim to a (major) share in the revenues of zamindaris and sought to utilise zamindars' men and material for promoting and preserving its interests. The zamindars were assigned a well defined position vis a vis the state, as also among themselves, a position regulated by the dual policy of assuring them a (subordinate) share in the revenues and forcibly checking any attempt on their part to transgress the limits set by the state. This had created a 'balance of interests' between the state that sought to maintain it by exerting continual administrative pressure and the ubiquitous class of zamindars which was basically averse to a rigid control.

¹ Whether such or similar variations existed in other parts of the empire is difficult to answer. Its study however, may constitute an interesting subject of research.
With a view to calculating its proportionate claim in the produce and ensuring smooth flow of revenues and simultaneously regulating zamindars' shares, the empire endeavoured to reach the peasantry directly. In this way, the empire sought to contain the sphere of zamindars' influence and to control them. In this, the empire met with considerable success. Still the degree of success i.e. magnitude and extent of imperial control over the zamindars and resources at their command, widely varied, ranging from thorough subjugation of zamindaris to a nominal command.

During seventeenth century, particularly its later half, the empire made arduous efforts to tilt the 'balance' more in its favour. It attempted to intensify its direct control over the sources of revenues. The administration made a determined bid to enter into direct dealing with the riaya and thus to reduce the zamindars to size. The imperial move amounted to curtailing the zamindars' influence in the revenue matters and regulating, even reducing their actual share. Besides, the state dislodged some zamindars, dismembered other zamindaris and super-imposed on some of them the others who were duly vested with superior (such as watand-

1. For an empire-level observation to the same effect, see Satish Chandra, The 18th century in India: Its Economy and the Role of the Marathas, the Jats, the Sikhs and the Afghans, Revised edn., Delhi, 1991, p. 21.
arid) rights over and above the existing zamindari rights. Despite these attempts which were made increasingly, though within logical limits and, on a limited scale, the empire could not erode socio-economic base of zamindars to an appreciable extent. The policy of seeking thorough subjugation of the zamindars by bringing extra-pressure to bear from above without making equally effective inroads into the bastions of their power, failed to bring a qualitative change. The empire, in a way sought to reduce the zamindars to, and assign them a position which does not appear commensurate with their strength. The move was bound to invite retaliation.

Some significant changes in the position of zamindars vis-a-vis the Mughal state (as also the rīaya) took place as a result of the inter-action of two forces representing mutually inconsistent interests and operating in diametrically opposite direction, the latter seeking to acquire greater control and the former struggling to repel it. The process led to a thorough subjugation of a number of zamindars, relatively vulnerable; more productive and easily manageable ones. These zamindars were virtually pushed a little lower on the ladder of social gradation, though the nomenclature denoting the status was by and large retained. On the contrary some other zamindars who commanded greater
resources and enjoyed more favourable geo-social position 
successfully repelled the administrative pressure, thus 
forcing the empire to concede greater autonomy and freedom 
to deal with the peasantry under them. Technically retaining 
still the same old position, these zamindars moved upward 
the social ladder and thus effected a virtual change in 
their position. Consequently the features that distinguished 
one stratum of zamindars from another tended to be blurred 
and the intra-stratum signs of differentiation gained roots, 
and the existing one became more prominent.

Imperial attempts to bring extra-pressure, in a way, 
proved counter productive. The zamindars reacted increasing- 
ly and thus forced the empire to over-stretch its 
resources.\(^1\) As a result rigidity and non-compromising atti-
tude gave way to compromises and leniency. Gradually the 
empire showed signs of fatigue and loss of vigour.\(^2\) Although 
the administrative grip over the zamindars appeared to be

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1. During this period of time emperor Aurangzeb was too 
involved against the Marathas and elsewhere in the 
task of suppressing uprisings to spare resources and 
energy for dealing with the emerging situation in 
Gujarat effectively.

2. Please see Prof. S.Nurul Hasan's observation that "the 
numerous measures adopted by the Mughal government to 
resolve these contradictions worked well, but only for 
a time. Gradually the government had become too weak to 
maintain the equilibrium between the conflicting inter-
est". S.Nurul Hasan *Zamindare under the Mughals* p.29

561
quite strong, but actually it had started deteriorating before the onset of the eighteenth century.

The process of decline of imperial control was still in nascent stage and confined to select zamindaris. It looked as though it had set in for the period that followed.

The swift movement of events and the changes that took place during the first few years of the eighteenth century acted as a catalyst, providing added momentum to the ongoing process. The process went on unabated and soon acquired unmanageable proportions. Reversing the trend of acquiring greater hold over them in their favour, the zamindars repelled the administrative control of empire over the countryside almost completely.

The new pattern of state-zamindar-riaya relationship emerged speedily but in and, at times, overlapping stages, and in consonance with the strength and position of the different strata of the class of zamindars. The lead was provided by the stronger and more resourceful of them; viz, the Superior zamindars, in the same order of gradation (i.e. zamindaran-i sarkarat-i peshkahsi, zamindaran-i ismi and the zamindaran-i mahin-o kahin) which they enjoyed vis a vis state and each other. Then the primary zamindars who were less resourceful and less powerful but more ubiquitous
followed the pattern. The intermediary zamindars were the last to join the fray.

In their determined bid to come out of the imperial net the zamindars refused to share their military might and serve the empire. The step met with complete success.

In spite of disunity the zamindars' stand for withdrawing military assistance to the empire reveals the uniformity of their outlook and interests beside indicating a kind of relationship between resourcefulness and the act of defiance. Since it met with complete success, it had significant potential: It reduced the military capability of the empire, rendered meaningless the highly systematized institution of _watan_ and _tankhwa h jagir_ as linked with the military assistance and virtually undid one of the basic conditions of holding zamindaris.

The zamindare, then, attempted not to volunteer their services as intermediaries between the Mughal government and the _riaya_ under them. They thus, displayed their determination to withhold payment and stop remittance of revenues to the treasury, or at least bargain the amount and pay less than due. The administration could not cope with the emerging situation systematically, much less successfully. The

1. For a similar trend at the level of empire, S. Nurul Hasan, "Zamindars Under the Mughals" p.27.
state turned to ijarahdars. Of them most of the officials-
turned ijarahdars and other outsiders failed miserably. The
ancient hereditary zamindars in their own right, or else the
ones of them who acted as sub-ijarabars appear to have
emerged as the beneficiaries at the cost of the ijarahdars.¹

The peshkash and, then, mal-i wajib which were duly
assessed and demanded regularly, came to be exacted only now
and then. Gradually the state's demand acquired the charac-
ter of a casual claim, enforced by the actual use or show of
force. On their part the zamindars offered it as the price
of forebearance, rather than as a duly established claim of
the state. The amount of peshkash, salami and mal-i wajib,
the distinction between which claims gradually and increas-
ingly was becoming extinct, came to be determined in accord-
ance with their relative strength as distinct from the
actual capacity to pay. The capacity of the administration
to enforce its claim came to be inversely related with the
resourcefulness of zamindars, i.e. the stronger and more
resourceful the zamindar the lesser the magnitude of state
demand. Zamindars' own resourcefulness and capability to

¹ N.A. Siddiqi's observation that "the total effect of
the practice (i.e. ijarahdari) on a large scale was the
ruin of a large number of ancient hereditary zamindars"
(Land revenue Administration, p.139) does not stand the
test of evidence available for the subah of Gujarat.

564
resist emerged as a prominent factor in deciding the amount
and chances of making or evading payments.

Then, the stronger of them happened to be the first to
cease as economic partners of the empire. The others fol-
lowed suit.

The capacity of the administration to effect collec-
tions deteriorated rapidly in direct proportion to the
zamindars' resistance and evasion of payments and it in-
creased rapidly and consistently. Hence the administration
could extort less and less. This development must have had
damaging effects on the provincial administration which, on
its part, had encroached upon all accessible sources of
revenue.

The zamindars also endeavoured to acquire complete
autonomy and to consolidate their position internally. In
this direction their efforts met with appreciable success.
The zamindars could successfully replace the hold of the
administration over the villages with their own. The zamin-
dars terminated the direct state-riaya relationship which
the Mughals could establish after making long and arduous
efforts and themselves assumed the position which otherwise
was held by the state officials. They thus emerged as the
authority that effected assessment and collection of reve-
nues, dealing with individual land-holders independently of
the state. Helplessly the administration accepted them in their self-assumed position as the unit of assessment, the agency of collection, and in brief, as the de facto head of the riaya under them. Under the emerging situation the Mughal administration had to depend increasingly upon the zamindars.

But the zamindars donot appear to have succeeded in their attempt to establish them as the sole authority over the whole of village(s) under them. Any perceptible challenge, came from within. In this, relations of hostility developed between the zamindars and the riaya. The zamindars seem to have succeeded against the relatively vulnerable sections of riaya, particularly the paîs whose resources the zamindars utilised to consolidate their socio-economic base. But they seem to have compromised their position and made tacit adjustments with the relatively, presumably prosperous and stronger stratum of the riaya that sought to acquire zamindar-like (such as salamiyah) position and restrained the otherwise over ambitious zamindars from having a free hand within the village. This stratum of peasantry, probably the khudkashtas rose in the social scale. Affluent and strong ones of the countryside might have gained in strength and stood in their own right. In any case the sphere of
imperial control shrunk rapidly both in terms of intensity and extent.

Along with their endeavour to acquire hold over and autonomy within the villages of their possessions and/or their own possessions, the zamindars also sought to gain freedom of action in matters external. They sought, with considerable success, to destroy and occupy symbols of imperial control that were increasingly becoming ineffective and replace them with their own ones. This step completely reversed the process of acquiring and retaining control over them and all the achievements made in this direction were undone. Again the process was initiated by the stronger and more resourceful of them and carried on further by the rest.

The phenomenon of 'sub-infeudation' is also noticeable during the period. The zamindars sought to extend the boundaries of their possessions and the sway of their rights which came to be determined by their capacity to strike. The empire miserably failed to extend protection to relatively weaker zamindars beside the raiyat and govern inter-zamindar relations. The zamindas thus came to enjoy virtual freedom to make encroachments and go their own way. They fell upon each other. The weaker of them were obliged to purchase protection and accept a sub-ordinate position under the stronger ones of them. In the anarchy that prevailed a
number of zamindars lost their rights outright and other passed under some others' control. The situation thus facilitated the rise of sub-infeudation on an increasing scale.

This development led to the emergence of certain new zamindari positions and rights. Moreover, it blurred the features that distinguished one stratum of zamindar from another all the more. Alongwith it the intra-stratum signs of differentiation gained deeper roots and became quite prominent. In fact, inter-strata and intra stratum mobility was a characteristic feature of the period—position of many old zamindar families underwent a drastic change, everywhere; bold, adventurous and resourceful men with or without any title to land and or to power were forging ahead.

No less, if not equally important feature of the period to note is that despite the ongoing uncontrolled process of change and fluctuations, each category of zamindars emerged out of the strife and continued to survive. Changes did take place, both within and without, affecting the positions of

1. Particular mention may be made of the desais who hardly enjoyed a social base to fall back on. They seemed to have depended on the state's patronage for their position. During the period under review they manoeuvred to acquire patronage and protection of stronger zamindars, or else the power that be, for ensuring their survival. Similarly the out-siders who acted as ijara-dars failed to ensure their survival for want of a power base.
individual zamindars directly and indirectly. Even then no category as such, did become extinct.

Particular mention may be made to the distinct section of the holders of madad-i ma'sh, most of whom were planted as holders of superior rights in land from outside. The section, for all practical purposes, seems to have gained sufficient resilience to be able to cope with the effects of the extinction of Mughal authority. The grantees suffered at the hands of other zamindars and almost collectively were exposed to bear the burden of illegal extortions levied by their own patron, the Mughal government. But as a distinct category holding superior rights which had virtually acquired the position of zamindaris, the revenue grantees managed their survival. Obviously, they had acquired roots in the soils of the land. ¹

Here it seems worth mentioning that in the ongoing multi-cornered struggle the contestants had their own limitations. The zamindars who virtually emerged as a monolithic block of power against the Mughal state, remained a divided lot, indulging in infighting which cut across family, caste,

¹ For a similar tenacity shown by the grantees elsewhere, see, Muzaffa Alam, "Some Aspects of the changes in the position of the Madad-i Ma'sh Holders in Awadh, 1676-1722" Essays in Medieval Indian Economic History, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 72-80.
clan and community barriers. They could not forge unity among themselves at any stage of Mughal rule in the region. In the struggle among themselves and against others (viz, Mughals, Marathas, defiant state officials the peasantry in particular), they tried not to pull the matter to extremity and sought to accommodate one another. Vis a vis the Mughal state and its defiant official th zamindas' obvious preference were the latter who, like them, were equally interested in coming out of the imperial administrative net and localising power.¹ The phenomenon of converting official positions into hereditary ones marks the entrance of a new element - the Mughal officials--into the category of (Superior) zamindars. Following the policy of conciliation and coercion towards the other contestants, the defiant officials volunteered concessions to the locally influential and powerful segments of society. Above all they identified themselves with the prevailing trend and grew roots in the soil of the land. Local elements' prejudice against the Mughals and predilection for the local officials turning zamindars seem to have been one of the bases of the latter's strength.

¹. Did this represent a regional or popular reaction against the empire's centralising tendency? Satish Chandra, *The 18th century in India*, p.21. But it hardly appears to be the uprising of peasantry.
Even after the inception of the revenue-grantees and Mughal officials in the class of zamindars and the emergence of new rights, its overall social composition does not appear to have changed radically. These changes were confined to the castes which already held zamindaris'. Though here and there they passed under the control of new entrants and the stronger ones among themselves, the Rajput-Koil combine still continued in the dominant position. It is also evident that no caste or community lost the rights out right.

It may also be seen that the Mughals at no stage of their rule in the subah, could manage to avoid their dependence on and undermine the institution of zamindari. Instead they continued to lean heavily and increasingly on their support. The emerging pattern made the Mughal all the more dependent upon them. They accepted them in their new position and changed role rather helplessly, as fait accompli. Further the Mughal administration sought to build new bridges to re-establish its weakening, breaking and broken links with the zamindars. Here the state sought to utilise the services of some as ijarahdars but they could not succeed. It then fell back upon its own locally influential officials who were pressed into service as go-betweens

1. S. Nural Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals" p.29.
between the administration and the zamindars. In their turn these officials endeavoured to carve out their own principali-

ties and identify themselves with the zamindars. And lastly, the administration found in the 'sacred' person of Bhat and Charan the ray of hope and through this feeble agency which was equally beyond its effective control, it sought to reach the zamindars.

It is also evident that the Mughal state did not make any tangible efforts to resolve the crisis, or else to come out of the tangle. The state could not go beyond allowing its officials rather conceding them the right to corner more than one official positions into one hand. The process of downward devolution of power (viz, sub-ordinate officials grabbing the powers of their superiors) solved hardly any problem and created more for the empire. Those who had thus grabbed power at the provincial and lower levels, oppressed, whenever possible, the rīaya within easy reach with impunity.¹ Well devised system of 'checks and balances' was rendered defunct. Channels of redress otherwise available were closed down. These developments added further momentum to the on going process of deterioration of administrative

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1. Please see also Harbans Mukhia's 'Extortions from peasantry, Artisans and Menials' in Perspectives on Medieval History, N.Delhi, 1992, pp.206-16.
control, and, to cap it all, to the erosion of its credibility.

The process of downward devolution of power seems to have stopped at the level of the zamindars at the village level. A significant feature of the process and the crisis that followed appears to be that every echelon of the ruling class remained part of the same struggle, the same confusion that the crisis was leaving behind. None seems to have come out of the cage. The zamindars who had seized the initiative against the empire, emerged as the largest single but badly divided group of beneficiaries, still remained a part and continued to stick to the same socio-economic pattern.

Thus replacing the Mughal authority by their own, the zamindars succeeded, to a significant degree, in assuming independence by stepping into the shoes of imperial government at local level. Long before the extinction of Mughal garrisons from Ahmadabad, they had pushed the Mughals out of the interior of the province where they had come to establish their own authority.

The break up of Mughal empire was a momentous event in the history of India and as such it was certain to touch all aspects of contemporary life. Its effects on society were as multifaceted as the causes of its decline were diverse. In many ways the class of zamindars possessed those critical
elements which could have allowed it to emerge in triumph from the crisis that had overtaken the empire during the first half of the eighteenth century. The zamindars had a permanent and hereditary title to their lands and all their rights; any enhancement of agricultural production would have been in their long term interest. In large number of the cases, a caste affinity tied the peasants to the zamindars. Their local roots were of an enormous advantage to them. They also possessed the resources necessary for investment in land. There was neither a scarcity of cultivable land, nor of labour, though between the two the latter was slightly less easily available. The subsistence level in India being very low, the cost of labour was almost ridiculously cheap. Land, on the other hand, was extremely fertile.

As the mighty hand of the Mughal empire, which had kept the zamindars on a tight leash, was loosening its grip, this class was perhaps capable of evolving a new mode of agricultural production altogether—hiring wage-labour, producing for the market and reinvesting the surplus. However, what it really did was not to break away from the old political and economic system but only to strengthen its own bases within the existing system at the cost of other sections of the ruling class. Its conflict with the ruling class could
never acquire any shape other than the conflict between
assertions within the same ruling class. During heyday of the
empire the zamindars held a dual position within the ruling
class: as revenue collectors and as tribute and/or revenue
payers. It was not an inter-dependent position which was the
reason why the zamindars had always remained a very turbu-
 lent part of the ruling class. So they wished to shake off
the latter part of their relationship with the empire. In
this, they had succeeded within the first half of the eight-
eenth century as the empire collapsed and they felt no need
to go any further. It is not surprising, therefore, that
among the new states founded by the zamindars, as amongst
the provincial states inherited from the collapsing empire,
there was a remarkable continuity of the Mughal institu-
tions.\(^1\) The zamindars provided a leadership that remained
essentially conservative from the point of view of long-term
social and economic change.

But then it is a moot question whether any element in
Mughal society was capable of taking it forward to a new
stage of development.\(^2\)


2. See Irfan Habib, "Potentialities of Capitalistic Devel-
 opment in Mughal Economy", *Enquiry*, Fall, 1971; Harbans
Mukhia, "Peasant Production and Medieval Indian Socie-
ty", in T.J. Byres and Harbans Mukhia, eds., *Feudalism
and Non-European Societies*, London, 1985, pp. 228-51