Chapter III

THE PEASANT UNDER THE CANAL COLONY REGIME

In this chapter we look at the revenue and irrigation policy as pursued in the Canal Colonies. The focus here is not on policy formulation per se; rather, we examine the nature and extent of revenue demand on the peasant, and the efforts made over time to increase this. What were the reasons the state advanced to explain this increase? Did it affect all equally? We also go into some details of the process of distribution of Canal water; the problems faced therein and the role of the 'canal bureaucracy'. Lastly, we examine the impact of both, land revenue and water-rate demand. Did it benefit all or were some entitled to relief under Kharābā? To what extent was relief given? What impact did state policy relating to these issues have vis-à-vis landlords and peasants or different strata of the peasantry?

The Background

As early as 1856, John Lawrence, recognised as the main force behind the 'Punjab School', wrote above revenue policy that:

moderation of demand is not only due morally and actually to the people, but is also conducive to the best interests of the government. 1

Henceforth, Lawrence's statement was repeated in the course of almost every discussion on revenue policy in the state in a ritualistic manner. Often this was done so as to ward off any criticism of land revenue policy as it evolved; by keeping alive the memory of the paternalist tradition, Punjab officials also hoped to justify as 'moderate' the revenue demand even in the face of successive revision.² Bhattacharya, while discussing the fiscal burden on the peasantry in Central and Eastern Punjab, also draws attention to the relationship between evolution of settlement policy and the political needs—the former geared to ensuring a "long term increase of fiscal demand," while the latter pressed for "sustaining rural passivity if not loyalty".³ Often the effort was to contrast this thrust of policy to highlight the point that British rule brought peace and prosperity to Punjab as against the anarchy and tyranny of Sikh rule. In the years to come, the record-breaking financial returns from the Canal Colonies were specifically cited in official writing to draw vivid pictures of this prosperity in Punjab. It needs to be noted here that while the province

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2. The ideological context, its purpose and limitations, in relation to land revenue policy have been recently discussed by Charlesworth in his study of agriculture and agrarian society in the Bombay Presidency. Charlesworth points out that while maintaining its 'closeness' to the utilitarian ideals, revenue policy in Bombay Presidency was also "basically empirical, worked out to accord with local reality". cf. Charlesworth, N., 1985, pp.40-60.

as a whole was contributing a large chunk to the royal
treasury, in the form of revenue and irrigation receipts,
within Punjab it was the Colony tracts which yielded the
most; by 1928 the eight Colony districts contributed more
revenue than the rest of the twenty-one district put
together.4 At the time of the 1915 settlement, the demand
on account of land revenue and cesses in the Chenab Colony
alone amounted to Rs.69,45,345, the sum exceeding that
paid by any other district in India. If irrigation
receipts were also taken into account, the Chenab Colony
assumed an unchallenged position, prompting the Financial
Commissioner to comment:

that such pride of place should have been attained
by a tract which thirty years ago was an arid
wilderness, is a phenomenon which can never be
sufficiently dwelt upon by those who seek to
appraise the results and achievements of British
rule in India.5

Government demand in the Colony tracts consisted of
two broad heads - of land revenue and water charges. Both
were of a fluctuating nature. The reasons behind this
initially being (a) the tracts being subject to river
action and the uncertainties thereof and (b) the continued
extension of irrigation itself ruled out a fixed demand
since the state wished to share in benefits arising from
new lands coming under cultivation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the retention of the fluctuating system had become the subject of a full-fledged controversy involving the Government of India and the Government of Punjab on the one hand and, the latter and its own district officers at another. The agriculturists, whose interests were at stake, were hardly allowed a say in the matter. Meanwhile pressure mounted on the Government of Punjab to ensure a greater fixity of demand, with the Revenue Department emphasising that the system of assessment should be as simple as possible and the larger the amount of fixed revenue, the greater was the degree of simplicity that could be ensured. The government's position was that it stood to lose so long as fluctuating demand was retained, though how it did so, was never made clear. The specious argument that the cultivators' preference for a fluctuating assessment was based on the fact that "people think by paying a small sum of illegal money they are able to escape a large legal demand" was not acceptable to its own settlement officers. They in fact, were more inclined to accept that under a fluctuating demand the cultivator could clutch on to the hope of getting some remissions due to Kharāba while this option would be totally closed under a fixed assessment.

Government's desire for a fixed revenue demand needs to be understood in the context of its attempt in this period to consolidate its revenue base through revision of settlements based on new procedures, which were supposedly derived from the experience of the early settlements. But government's general desire to achieve consolidation, did not lessen the dilemma settlement officers faced at the local level in trying to make the most of what could at best be described as a very fluid situation:

If I propose a fixed demand either on their present irrigation or on the average irrigation of the last seven years, and this demand is a fairly full one, the assessment is bound to break down and be too heavy by the time the canal department have attained the utopia of 70 per cent. If, on the other hand, I assume that the average matured area is 70 per cent and base a fixed assessment on this government will lose very large sums of money during the period that the irrigation of a village now doing 115 per cent of its allotted area is being cut down to 70 per cent. A successful fixed assessment depends on a successful forecast of what is about the average matured area which a village can expect for the cycle for which the assessment is proposed.

Meanwhile, landholders hesitated to accept the fixed demand having "already had too much change." illustrating their point they said:

7. For a fuller discussion of the different phase of revenue policy in Punjab cf. P.S.M., Douie, 1930, Chapter IV.

The government had lately enhanced malikana; subsequently an owner's rate was imposed; now it was proposed to enhance the land revenue and fix the revenue demand, after which it may decide to fix water rates; all this meant new arrangements with tenants and dislocation of agricultural arrangements. 9

The resistance that government's pressure to impose a fixed assessment met with from landowners has been interpreted as indicative of the power of the elite. 10

Ali argues that:

fluctuating assessment provided many more opportunities than fixed demand for illegal agreements with subordinate officials; flexibility and uncertainty could be used by the strong for their own interests. 11

Ali points to the losses of state revenue with regard to both land revenue and water rates, maintaining that:

it worked against the interests of the rest of the population, by denying public revenues of their due share of profits from the capital invested in the canal projects. 12

Ali has a point, but it may also be pointed out here that it was unlikely that a shift to fixed assessment would have cut into this big landlord canal bureaucracy network, or, for that matter, that had the state acquired

9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
a bigger share as revenue, these would have benefitted the rest of the population. Given the prevailing social inequality, a fixed demand was likely to have further increased the burden on them.

This is supported by the fact that the advocates of a fixed demand were also pressing for a high scale of assessment, arguing that higher assessments would not really injure the mass of the peasant owners while those having reservations on the fluctuating demand itself were quick to point out that a fixed demand would have to be pitched "so low as to entail a very large loss of revenue which is fairly due to government as representing the general tax payer and, even so, would tend to ruin quite a considerable proportion of the cultivators on the Canal, and in short would give rise to evils of greater magnitude than are necessarily attached to a system of fluctuating assessment."13

Unable to convince its own officers either way, Punjab retained the system of fluctuating assessment till the 1930s, when a 'sliding scale' based on prices was evolved as a basis of land revenue assessment.

Section I - The Trends and Components of Revenue Demands

Trends in Quantum Demanded:

Table 3.1 shows the quantum of revenue demand and increase in the same over a period of years for different districts. Here a few points need to be made. Firstly, the figures bear out the fact that there was a substantial increase in demand over the years. The official contention, nevertheless, remained one of 'leniency' of revenue demand. In fact it was even argued that 'land revenue, measured in rupees, has during the last 35 years only kept pace with the increase in the total cultivated area,' and that in order to pay land revenue, a cultivator had to sell, at village prices, "a much smaller fraction of his total produce than he had to sell for this purpose 35 years ago." 14

Some of the points that emerge from the table may be noted before proceeding further. The early period marked an increase in land revenue despite a fall in cultivated area registered in some districts - Shahpur and Multan specifically. While assessment reports for Montgomery and Gujranwala testify to a similar trend in parts of the district, the extension of cultivation in other parts of the same districts seems to have balanced

### Table 3.1

**INCREASE IN CULTIVATED AREA AND LAND REVENUE**

**SAHPUR:**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cultivated area (in acres)</th>
<th>% of increase</th>
<th>Land revenue (in Rs.)</th>
<th>% of increase</th>
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<th>% increase on 1875-1878</th>
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## Table 3.1

### LAHORE:

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<th>% increase on 1875-76</th>
<th>Land revenue (in Rs.)</th>
<th>% increase on 1875-76</th>
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Source:  
PAR, Relevant years up to 1900.  
ASBI, Relevant years, after 1900.
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Cultivated Area (in acres)</th>
<th>% of Increase on 1907-08</th>
<th>Land Revenue (in Rs.)</th>
<th>% of Increase on 1907-08</th>
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Note: District formed only in 1904.

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<th>% of Increase on 1920-21</th>
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</table>

Note: District formed only in 1919.
out the trend in the overall district-level figures. A second point that emerges is that while there were years when increase in cultivated area was more than increase in revenue these were fewer, and are likely to have preceded the years just before a fresh settlement was made, the proportion of increase in land revenue generally seems to have surpassed the increase in cultivated area. This seems to stand out all the more sharply in the case of the depression years for nearly all the districts. Despite these facts, the Land Revenue Administration Reports of the 1920s, viz, pre-Depression, drew attention to the 'ease' with which the large sum of over four crores of land revenue was collected. As a reflection of this 'light burden,' the decline in execution of cases of distress even in relatively less prosperous districts such as Gujranwala, were highlighted. Some hastened to add that the people of the province, "who pay this large sum so punctually must be essentially contented." 15

On the question of the pitch of revenue demand again there were differences within official circles. Whereas, the Chenab Colonisation Officer, Young had insisted that it would be a grave political mistake to press the Colonist too severly, others felt that government was perfectly within its right to raise the demand after the initial years. 16 When

15. LRARP, 1922, p. 2
the Chenab Settlement was undertaken in 1915, it was found that the revenue from Rakh Branch circle alone was "in excess of that of any district of the Province except Lyallpur itself," although the area of the circle did not exceed that of an average tahsil.\textsuperscript{17} The increase in this circle alone was one of 258%\textsuperscript{18} Not surprisingly, the number of objections and appeals was higher in the circle, despite the Settlement Officer's claim that "the assessment leaves no single settler with a reasonable ground for complaint."\textsuperscript{19}

In fact right through our period, objections to assessment proposals, far from being unknown, were fairly common. In Lahore, the time of the 1935-39 settlement, of 309 objections received, all but 15 were rejected. The official reply as in most such cases, attributing objections to discontent engineered by political agitators who, in this particular instance, were alleged to have even "distributed in the village printed forms for objections."\textsuperscript{20}

It may be worthwhile to recall here that as far as revenue demand is concerned, the early settlements had been crucial. Many of the later settlement reports recorded that

\textsuperscript{17} A.R., Rakh Branch Circle, 1913, \textit{op.cit}, para 1, FC's Review.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{19} C.S.R., \textit{op.cit.}, p.2  
\textsuperscript{20} S.R., Lahore, 1935-39, p.9
high assessments in the early period had posed serious difficulties for the peasants. The Gujranwala settlement report for 1860, for instance, noted that "notwithstanding a reduction by Mr. Morris of 17% on the summary settlement, the assessment generally was too heavy and it has required considerable modification." It was also pointed out that Mr. Morris had great impediment to overcome, and met with much opposition from the people. Had the problem been merely one of high assessment, it would still have been passable, but what happened in Gujranwala was even more shocking. The Settlement Officer, Temple found that on announcement of the jamās in 1853, "the people were unwilling to enter into any engagements at all for cash payments..." and that many "refused to engage for the government revenue, mainly because of high demand." Temple nonchalantly recorded that the matter was 'amicably' settled with proprietors renouncing their right to the land, and the land was 'transferred' to others. As conceded later:

"Such resignation was in reality caused by poverty or by the pressure of the assessment, or by the prospect of balances accruing, which the proprietors felt they could not pay. So that in reality these transactions were not essentially different from

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p.7.
sale or transfer for realisation of government demands, ... Obviously, the effecting of such transfers through the agency and machinery of the settlement office, was not legal. There are processes which the Settlement Officer is by law empowered to use, in the event of proprietors refusing to engage for the assessed revenue, but sale is not among those processes ... the result has shown subsequently that when the assessment is so reduced as to render land really valuable the people even in this district, do never wish to resign their rights and that when they become tolerably well to do, they are content to cease to agitate ... 24

In this context the officer expressed concern over how "provoking and contumacious" the people were between 1853 and 1855 and how they "almost behaved like a mob," with sometimes as circle of villages "combining to offer passive resistance to the progress of the settlement." 25

It may be placed on record that when reductions were announced and old settlers staked their claims, the Lieutenant-Governor ruled that the 'transfers' be set aside and old owners reinstated, with new settlers being compensated elsewhere if necessary. 26

In Gugera tahsil, Montgomery, similarly, a reduction of over Rs. 15,000 had to be announced two years after the first summary settlement in 1850. But in the course of the subsequent revised settlement the demand was scaled

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
again so that the problem continued till in 1892-93 again reductions had to be announced. It was observed that "with a diminishing sailab and a demand pitched until quite recently at more than the people could pay, collections have been unusually difficult, balances chronic and, recourse to coercive measures frequent." Despite this, in Pakpattan tahsil, also in Montgomery district the demand imposed in 1892 was in parts 81 per cent in excess of the previous settlement.

Components of Revenue Demand

The next question that arises relates to the problem of what was the actual demand on the cultivator? What were the different heads under which the 'surplus' was appropriated from the peasant? To what extent and in what manner did this increase over the years?

Before going into the specifics of revenue demand it is necessary to note that at the beginning of the twentieth century the cultivator in the Colony tracts was perhaps as confounded by the plethora of dues as with the proportion of total demand. Further, the distinctions between these different dues were none too clear to the

28. Ibid.
peasant or, at times, even to the officials. At the top of the list of heads of demand was land revenue collected from the landowner by the State; he in turn collected rent from the cultivator. On those who had not yet acquired proprietary right, mālikānā was levied; then there was the tirni or grazing tax; kirāya teh zamini, interpreted as the ground rent; there were also various cesses, viz., malbā a local rate, lambardārī dues and chauktidarānā.\(^{30}\)

A large part of the income to government, however, came from irrigation receipts. These fell under three heads: (a) direct receipts resulting mainly from water rates. (b) Indirect receipts also known as water-advantage rate, nahri partā, owner's rate and so on, and (c) Extraordinary receipts, comprising of interest on sale proceeds of crown waste lands in those areas where fresh irrigation had been introduced.

The separation of land revenue and water revenue was a continuation of Prinsep's Scheme, devised in the 1860s during his tenure as Settlement Commissioner. Since the canal water-advantage rate was not uniform, nor fixed - it, therefore, served the purpose of securing to the state a share of the profits arising from the rapid expansion of

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\(^{30}\) This part of the discussion is based on information
canal irrigation. Although it was levied on the landlord, it was clear right through that if the owner's rate was Rupee 1, it practically authorised the landlord to take double that from the tenant. For this very reason, many within the government opposed the imposition of owner's rate. This opposition was based not so much on concern for the tenant as the fact that the adoption of owner's rate "amounts in practice to the endowment of the landlords with a large portion of the canal revenue." Instead, a revision of water-rates, i.e., occupier's rate, from time to time, was considered proper and expedient. Interestingly, for quite some time the government of Punjab resorted to both options - viz., retention of owner's rate, as well as the periodic revision of water-rates, in 1905, 1912 and in 1924-25. After the abolition of owner's rate however, in 1912, in the Colonies, land revenue became a purely fluctuating assessment levied on the area sown.

The water-rate or occupier's rate, was the price for canal water, levied by an average rate, as per the Northern India Canal and Drainage Act, 1873. By the 1900s it was accepted that differential crop rates were to be imposed, the pitch of the rate being determined by the quality of land which was receiving the amount of water

31. Ibid.
ordinarily required to ripen a particular crop, and the additional value of the outturn of the crop per acre due to irrigation. This was ascertained by comparing the rents per acre paid by tenants-at-will in the same area for nabri and barani lands.\textsuperscript{33}

Of the other dues mālikānā was collected as per the statement of conditions made at the time of allotments. This too was a rate levied per acre. Theoretically, mālikānā was to be 4\% of the market value of land in its waste condition or a sum not less than half the land revenue. On the Lower Chenab Canal, however, it was fixed at 6 annas for the first ten years and 9 annas thereafter till proprietary right was attained. On the Lower Jhelum Canal mālikānā was fixed at 4 annas.\textsuperscript{34} Lambardāri fees amounted to 5\% of the land revenue in the Chenab.\textsuperscript{35} The mālba was cess imposed by landowners on themselves to meet common village expenses incurred to maintain certain basic services. While at times the patwāri kept mālba accounts, this was not always the case, and the villagers were free to make their own arrangements.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} P.C.M., Wace, 1933, p.187. \\
\textsuperscript{35} C.C.G., 1904, p.145. \\
\textsuperscript{36} P.S.M., 1930, op.cit., p.50
Thorburn discusses the origin of the cesses, highlighting that in fact cesses were devised as an indirect means of enhancing demand on the peasants. Tracing the matter back to 1871, Thorburn points out that the 'local rate' for instance had its roots in a decision whereby Punjab was asked by GOI to contribute £120,000 each year towards the famine insurance fund. This amount was to be raised from the peasantry - "they being prosperous, lightly assessed, accustomed to bear burdens without murmuring and, prospectively, the chief beneficiaries from the tax." 37 However, since it was not possible to raise revenue in the middle of a settlement term:

"the legal difficulty was surmounted by calling the enhancement a 'cess', accordingly an additional 'local rate' cess of 6% on the land revenue was legalised and levied." 38

Thorburn maintained that:

"its imposition was morally indefensible, and the government was roundly accused of a breach of faith. The distinction between a 'cess' - a rate levied on the land revenue - and an enhancement of that revenue was explained, but such caustic refinement was incomprehensive to simple Punjabis, who did not care what the Collector might call the component parts of their rating provided that its aggregate was not raised whilst a settlement was running." 39

37. Thorburn, 1883, p. 236.
Apart from these, officially, no cess could be levied, not even with the concurrence of the people from whom it was realised, without the previous consent of the Government of India.

However, the position with regard to cesses varied from district to district. Thus in Gujranwala district two trends were noted at the same time (a) uniformity in the cesses as a result of the settlement as compared to the old system whereby the patwāris and zaildārs were remunerated by a varying percentage on the land revenue of their circles or zails and (b) persistence of considerable variation in incidence of cess demand even in adjoining villages.40 A later settlement report noted a decrease in cesses in this district from about 21% in 1890s to 13 ½ % in 1913, through abolition of patwāri cess-5%, ālā lambardāri 1% and a reduction of 1/5 in local rate.41 Multan, on the other hand, was witness to the phenomenon of cesses "climbing up".42 While at the first regular settlement cesses amounted to Rs. 10-2-0% of the land revenue, and Rs. 13% at the revised settlement this was later raised to Rs. 20-14-8 and by the time of the 1901 settlement these had come upto Rs. 21-10-8%.43 Shapur district had by 1897 recorded an increase of about 8% in cesses on the regular settlement of 18 from Rs.19-6-8%

41. S.R., Gujranwala, 1913, p.34.
42. S.R., Multan, 1901, op.cit., p.32.
43. Ibid.
to Rs. 25-0-0. 44 But in this district too the abolition of patwāri cess and famine cess in the 20th century, resulted in a reduction of cess. 45

This apart, a gradual change that came about in the course of Colonisation in the Chenab Colony was that malbā which was a fund for common village expenses paid by all to the village headman who administered it on behalf of the rest, came to be administered by the state, and the Colonies Committee went so far as to suggest that a permissive clause be added to grants to enable government to sanction a malbā cess and that "provision for malbā ought, in the case of future Colonies, to be made in the statement of conditions." 46 Complaints were also received alleging that Colonists in many cases were not receiving payment for labour spent in silt clearance of government channels. 47 Officials took refuge under the argument that money had been disbursed but had probably failed to reach the complainants.

Tirni and kirāya tah zamini were other demands made on cultivators and other residents, which aroused widespread resentment and discontent. Of these, tirni, had its origins in Afghan rule and appears to have been retained by the Sikh rulers with the object of making professional cattle-

46. C.C.R., p.760.
47. Ibid.
breeders, "who did not otherwise contribute to the expenses of the state, share in the burdens of the rest of the population. Agricultural cattle were exempt from taxation."\textsuperscript{48} Sheep and goats, however, had always been taxed.

Unfortunately, however, the British, while taking on the earlier practice of tirni, lost sight of the real purpose behind exemption of agricultural cattle from taxation and proceeded to levy the tax on these as well. As a consequence income from tirni which in 1857-58 was a little under Rs. 32,000 had risen by 1872-73 to Rs. 1,08,009 and by 1881-82 to Rs. 1,48,000.\textsuperscript{49} The method of collection at this time was through farming out of tirni contracts to zaildārs etc., who in turn engaged with villages on the basis of a rate per head. In the 1890s, the contract was fixed on a five-yearly basis. While officially everything seemed to have been put in order through livestock surveys and the quinquennial tirni assessment, the fact was that there were many loopholes. Thus, while officially tirni was an optional levy in effect it was not so, since under the system followed, entire villages were declared tirni-guzār or ghair-tirni-guzār.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} C.C.G., op.cit., p.20.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} S.R., Jhang, 1880, op.cit., p.165.
The settlement report for Jhang noted that "it is compulsory and it is doubtful whether the compulsion is legitimate." It was pointed out that the tax was also levied on old settlers whose villages were located within the vast area now appropriated as government wastes, and these settlers were being made to pay for what had originally been rightfully theirs. It was much later that agricultural cattle was made exempt from tirmi.

Kirāva tah zamīn was similarly resented, being looked upon as "quite a new and frightful thing." In their evidence before the Colonies' Committee, there were hardly any among the Colonists who did not complain about it. The levy, charged as a ground rent for house-building sites, was opposed by Colonists who argued that they should be deemed owners of the site on which they built their houses. Sayad Mahdi Shah, Honorary Magistrate, Chenab Colony, further argued that artisans and menials, such as blacksmiths, weavers, mirasis, cobblers, washerman, dyers, scavengers, and others should be exempt from payment of the levy since the "founding of a village is impossible without these menials." Rai Bahadur (later Sir) Ganga Ram, describing it as a "most

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
obnoxious tax and highly distasteful," pointed to the fact that its abolition would facilitate increase in population and afford greater facilities to zamindars to harvest and put many more at their disposal for agricultural work.56

The tax, never levied on the Jhelum Canal, yielded an annual income of about Rs. 1 lakh on the Chenab, while its critics pointed out that in non-Colony villages proprietors did not make any such demand on their tenants.57

SECTION II
Policy Regarding Revenue Reassessment

A study of available assessment and settlement reports reveals that till about the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a level of complacency with regard to returns from land revenue since extension of canal irrigation to new lands itself yielded enormous returns. This is not to argue that attempts were not made at the time of settlement to raise revenue demand, but after the initial disasters of the summary settlements, the period up to 1910 was marked by a note of caution. Till then there were occasions when after a preliminary survey reassessment operations were shelved. In Sharakpur, for example, the settlement officer pressed for status quo,

56. Ibid., p.219.
57. Ibid.
if not relief, since several estates in the region had been ruined due to "continued pressure of a revenue demand beyond their capacity."\textsuperscript{58} The Chenab Circle of Hafizabad tahsil, Gujranwala also escaped reassessment since the district officers were insistent in pointing out that the area had not witnessed any increase in production.\textsuperscript{59} Gugera tahsil in Montgomery could not escape an increased demand but none less than the Chief Secretary himself remarked that the assessments, "even as finally sanctioned, were higher than it was quite prudent to take" in view of its past history and the serious danger of driftage of tenants to the Chenab Colony.\textsuperscript{60} Such comments were hardly ever forthcoming in later assessment reports.

While the advance of Colonisation ensured a fair amount of financial stability, it also raised another problem - of maintaining an ever-increasing flow of revenue returns. Settlement operations in the colonial set-up, therefore were the scene of a tussle between the state which asserted that it was losing out on heavy investments that it had made in canals; the landlord posing as the aggrieved party vis-a-vis both the tenant below and the state above him; the tenant at the other end, trying to

\textsuperscript{58} Reassessment Survey, Sharakpur, Gujranwala, 1909.  
\textsuperscript{60} Rev. Agri. Rev., October, 1894, File 9(5).
ward off any increase in demand on him but ultimately almost always losing the battle over the surplus at best, or for survival, at worst. As is the case in any such tussle, both the state and the landlord posed as champions of the poor tenant in order to present their own case in a favourable light.

An important aspect of settlement was the scale on which revision of demand was undertaken—for, a sudden increase often came down very heavily on the peasant. On this question the Government of Punjab took a more tough position vis-a-vis even the Government of India, and successfully evaded till 1928, any limit on proportion of increase at the time of new settlement.

In a comprehensive Resolution on Land Revenue Policy, dated 16.1.1902, Government of India specifically discussed the question, whether, "save in exceptional cases, the Settlement Officer should be guided by rules preventing him from enhancing above a certain percentage." Maclagan, Revenue Secretary, was of the view that if a Settlement Officer proposed to assess above the limit the onus should be on him to prove that exceptional circumstances justified such an increase. In 1911 he again wrote to the Government of Punjab, expressing his concern at the "evils resulting from a large and sudden increase in land revenue when the economic conditions of a district or other large tract have
adapted themselves to a lower scale of assessment."61

By this time, in many other provinces, rules had been
framed, with varying degrees of definiteness and liberality,
to prevent "serious hardship by deferring for a period of
years the imposition of the full assessment that theoretical
considerations might justify, so as to enable the revenue-
payers to adjust their arrangements to the impending curtail-
ment of their income."62

The Punjab Government differed. Fenton, Revenue
Secretary, Punjab wrote back to Maclagan that any rule
which fixed a maximum percentage of enhancement would be
'fatal' to all Colonisation schemes. He argued that these
tracts had earlier been the home of nomad graziers who
clustered around a few wells and, to regard the revenue
assessed then as a factor determining the ultimate land
revenue of the Colony was obviously a "palpable absurdity."63
He believed that "where 10 rupees was paid before, 100
rupees would be paid without any compunction, notwithstanding
that the increase was one of 1000%.64 Others who supported
him, pointing to the remittances and expansion of trade etc.,

62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
argued that Punjab hardly presented a case for "experiments in artificial restrictions in assessing the share due to government, especially since almost the whole of this prosperity was due to improvements made and maintained by the state."65

Reassessment at a higher rate remained one of the main instruments of increasing demand and it was only in 1928 that legislation to restrict the scale of enhancements at the time of each settlement to not more than 25% was adopted in Punjab.

In this exercise of reassessment, various methods were resorted to so as to justify an enhanced revenue demand. Reclassification of land was one such method. Whereas earlier land revenue demand was based on calculations revolving around averages, by the time the Lower Chenab Colony lands fell due for settlement, there was a change in official thinking. Whereas from the 1880s onwards assessment circles were more clearly related to adventitious factors of rainfall, irrigation and water-supply, as compared to class of soil, by 1910 it was being conceded, that even the notion of a 'fair average demand' remained questionable for:

"it could be easily paid in an ordinary year by the peasant whose square has given him an average crop; it will be a very light demand for the man

65. Ibid.
whose square is above average and whose crops are good, but it will be a crushingly heavy demand for the man who has inferior land." 66

The Canal Colonies Committee report also recommended differential rates by land, consequently, subsequent settlements recorded greater details regarding soil variations (Chapter I, supra).

Reclassification marked an even later stage in this process, when land earlier classified in one category was moved into a higher category for purposes of assessment. The reason advanced for this was that "improvement in land had occurred through the assiduous attention of high class cultivators and the levelling up tendency induced by cooling of soil and greater stabilisation of irrigation." 67 Since reclassification generally, though not invariably, led to land moving into a higher category, it resulted in a net increase in revenue demand. Thus on the Upper Jhang Branch, the Settlement Officer recorded that giving full play to the principle of differentiation of squares had enabled him "to put the bulk of the area of certain villages which were let off too highly before into higher classes." 68

Sometimes, by this process, there was no land left in the

lowest category. In Lyallpur tahsil it was observed that there was a "marked tendency of the land in the bottom classes to move up in the scale." In Samundri similarly, an "upward trend" was noted resulting in an "appreciable increase" so that the highest acreage could be found in Classes I, II and III.

The whole exercise however, remained a bone of contention for it was really a part of the cultivator's struggle to retain a larger share for himself, and the state's to get a higher share of the produce for itself by classifying the land as being of better quality and, therefore, producing more. That officers acted with undue haste at times becomes clear from repeated instructions given to them that "no square should be transferred for assessment purposes into a higher class until the Collector has satisfied himself at two successive quinquennial inspections that a square has really improved." It was repeatedly emphasised that it was against the spirit of the Land Revenue Act to place during the currency of the new settlement any square in a class higher than that in which it will now be placed and so increase the assessment now imposed. But it was

precisely this injunction which perhaps led to large scale reclassification at the time of assessment itself. Even jangli chaks, usually comprising of inferior lands, were not spared and the reports while normally chiding them for their lack of industriousness, at such moments found it necessary to record that the assessment of these chaks had to be raised in recognition of the progress made by them.74 It may be noted that 'reclassification' featured more prominently in the operations of the 1930s - at a time when cultivators were pressing for reduction of revenue demand owing to the prolonged slump.75

Conflict vis-a-vis reclassification however, surfaced at two levels - firstly, between landholders and the state, and secondly, amongst the landholders themselves. The Settlement Officer, Lyallpur for example, when under attack from "unkind critics", for manipulation in classification of squares, observed that in fact there was opposition to the whole exercise from "proprietors of leniently assessed chaks and, generally speaking, the more influential men who happen to hold good land and who are at present not paying a full assessment."76 They officials pointed out, often turned out

75. A.R., Lyallpur, Samundri and Toba Tek Singh Tehsils of Lyallpur district, op.cit., Passim
to be the most ardent advocates of maintenance of status quo. Thus, in Lyallpur, in some chaks where all squares were previously assessed to one revenue rate, the more dominant proprietors with squares considerably above the average run of the chak pressed for imposition of a sarsari parta once again: "a feigned cloak of complete harmony in the proprietary body was put forward as justification for this course... No owner whose square is raised to a higher class will admit that it was thoroughly inspected, or that its new higher class is justified."77 The officers advanced the plea that present classification if allowed to remain unchanged would not be in consonance with approved settlement principles for the success of the settlement lay in the "degree of fairness with which the demand is distributed over holdings."78 Problems however remained on this count. As noted at one point, reassessment could be used to raise the pitch of demand but it "did not remove the inequalities of assessment between estates."79 This was illustrated by the fact that a number of Rakh Branch estates were assessed in 1912 at.

77. Ibid., p.24.
78. Ibid., p.23.
at Class III rates while Jhang Branch chaks similarly circumstanced were assessed in 1921 at Class II or even Class I rates. 80

The village survey of Kala Gaddi Thamman shows that the land revenue in the village till 1911 was eight annas per acre. Adding to it the other dues, for water etc. the total demand per acre worked out to Rs. 2-4-0. In 1925-26 the land revenue demand alone was Rs. 5-0-8 - while the total demand was Rs. 10-10-0 indicating that while at the beginning of the century land revenue was a very small component of total demand, by 1926 the proportion of land revenue in total demand has gone up considerably. 81 The survey also recorded that while earlier land was only categorised as barani or nahri, in 1921 classification by soil was also adopted. 82

In Gajju Chak, Gujranwala, the incidence per cultivated acre of fixed land revenue increased from Rs. 0-5-3 to Rs. 1-3-5 between 1853 and 1912-13. In 1925-26 however the records showed a decline with incidence per acre coming equal to

80. Ibid.
81. BEIP, P.V.S. 4, 1932, pp.67-68.
82. Ibid.
to only 0-14-2 this fall being attributed to an alteration in the method of assessment" rather than a reduction in demand. The fluctuating revenue, for irrigation rose from a total amount of Rs. 61-0-0 in 1912-13 recording an all-time high of Rs. 249-6-0 in 1921-22, being Rs. 103-11-0 in 1925-26.

It was with this in mind that differential land revenue and occupiers' rates were adopted from 1910 onwards. We give below (Table 3.2) the rates adopted on the Lower Chenab Canal in the first round of settlement and those adopted in the 1930s for the Lyallpur district tahsils which also included some of the earlier circles.

**Table 3.2**

Rates by Class of Land - 1924 and 1940

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1940</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I</td>
<td>6-0-0</td>
<td>7-8-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II</td>
<td>5-8-0</td>
<td>6-12-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class III A</td>
<td>3-0-0</td>
<td>6-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class III B</td>
<td>4-8-0</td>
<td>5-8-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class IV A</td>
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<td>Class VI</td>
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<td>2-4-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. A.R. Samundi, p.34.
Calendar of Revenue Payment

Another aspect that needs to be looked into is the timing of revenue instalments. Government maintained that local authorities exercised flexibility in the timing of revenue payment viz., the *kharif* instalment was to be paid in the month of January or February, and the *rabi* in June or July. The exact dates were announced by the *Tahsildar* who was bound to give at least one month's notice. The village survey of Kala Gaddi Thaman testifies that when questioned about this the cultivators expressed the opinion that for *kharif* payments any date after the middle of February was more suitable while for *rabi* the first or second week of July was better, for otherwise there was no time to take the wheat to the market. Flexibility regarding the date was also desirable since the convenience of the cultivator depended largely on the harvest. Thus in a year of a good cotton crop, the *kharif* instalment in January could be paid with relative ease whereas in a bad cotton year when the cultivators dependence on *toria* to pay revenue increased, a date in the middle of February might have been more convenient. 85

In contrast to this opinion expressed by the cultivators and endorsed by the investigator, between 1918-19 and 1926-27, in 4 harvests out of 9 *kharif* payment had

been due and collected before the 15th of January, in two years in the latter half of January, while in the remaining three also payments had been due before the 14th of February — in contrast with the opinion expressed in favour of kharif instalment being due after mid-February. In the case of Rabi out of 8 harvests for which details were available, 6 years payments had been made in the month of June and the other two on the first and second days of July as against the first or second week of July preferred by the cultivators. 86

That the grievance of the cultivators was not entirely baseless was supported by the comments of the Deputy Commissioner Lahore Division. Confessing to the problem faced in collecting the rabi demand he wrote that the reason perhaps was that the "period between the harvesting of the rabi and the date fixed for payment of revenue is not sufficient to allow the zamindars to dispose of their wheat properly..." 87 He, however, also felt that in the case of the kharif, it was perhaps the other way round which provided baniās with an opportunity to take away the produce even before the state demand was met. 88

He accepted that to "insist upon payments before the

86. Ibid.
87. LRARP, 1901, p. 1 (extracts from district reports).
88. Ibid.
revenue payers have had ample time to arrange for them inflicts hardship.\footnote{Ibid.} The importance of the harvest calendar, and the revenue qist or instalment with regard to its impact on the peasantry has been highlighted in a recent study of peasant production in Colonial India with respect to sugarcane cultivation in Gorakhpur district in the United Provinces.\footnote{Amin, S., 1985, op. cit., pp.69 ff.} Amin draws attention to the complex relationship between the peasantry and their harvest cycle, the compulsion to seasonal borrowing in view of their low absolute sum of cash income which was inadequate to meet the requirements of foodgrains, seed and cash for rent, the rigidity of the timing of revenue payment struck particularly hard in such circumstances. Amin rightly emphasises that:

\begin{quote}
the function of money as a means of payment on a particular date was the vantage point for the penetration of usurious capital.\footnote{Ibid., p. 80.}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Canal/Non-Canal Lands}

Another harsh fact of Colonisation was the impact of canal irrigation had on those lands which were not provided with canal water to begin with. The importance attached to irrigation and its price in a way led to neglect of those lands which were not getting water and,
therefore, not paying for it. Contrary to general impressions in many such instances, the incidence of revenue demand actually went up in the face of decline in quantity and value of the produce:

the people have gradually devoted more and more attention to their valuable canal crops and neglected the cultivation of the un-commanded land with the result that in many villages the incidence of the portion of the village has become absurdly high. 92

The assessment report for Deg Circle, Gugera tahsil, Montgomery, focussed attention on the non-Colony tracts in the early period. The tenants in this case had left for more prosperous tracts, consequently the villages were increasingly becoming "over-assessed". Here it was found that "revenue was collected" with difficulty. At times proprietors themselves worked as labourers on the neighbouring canal tracts, very often coercive proceedings were started and the settlement officer concluded that while there was very little scope for enhancement at reassessment, "in some villages reductions are urgently required". 93 Even so, when the settlement was announced, Douie, Chief Secretary, found that the revenue demand sanctioned was "higher than it was quite prudent to take in view of the past revenue history of

the tahsil the character of the agricultural population, and the serious danger of driftage of tenants from the well lands to the Chenab Canal..."94

In Gujranwala, the 1906 settlement report gave the following figures for the average incidence on matured area.

| Table 3.3 | 
| Average Incidence on Matured Area, in Different Circles 1900 to 1903 |
|------------|-----------------|------------------|
|            | Average incidence per acre | Variation in village incidence |
| 1. Bar, Canal-irrigated | 0-10-10 | 0-4-2 to 1-3-8 |
| 2. Bar, non-canal-irrigated | 1-3-10 | 0-12-5 to 2-10-6 |
| 3. Bangar, Canal-irrigated | 1-2-3 | 0-6-0 to 1-12-9 |
| 4. Bangar, non-canal-irrigated | 1-9-66 | 1-3-9 to 4-4-6 |
| 5. Chenab Circle | 1-7-66 | - |

Source: S.R. Gujranwala, 1906, p.7

The report mentioned that many objections were received to the assessment proposals but hardly any entertained. This state of affairs seems to have continued till about the late 1920s, when the settlement officer was specifically instructed to "shift the burden from those who were no longer able to bear it to those who had

94. Ibid.
prospered greatly." The way in which this was to be achieved was by lowering the rates for chahi and barani lands and raising the assessment on nahri crops.

Section III - Standard of Assessment: Theory and Practice

What was the basis on which land revenue was assessed in the first place? What considerations were influential in fixing the demands? The standard of assessment of land revenue was a fixed proportion of the net produce or net assets. In the 1870s Egerton, Financial Commissioner had advocated the use of gross assets or gross produce to calculate the revenue demand. However, the use of net assets as the basis of assessing revenue came to be the established practice. In the course of instructions issued by Government of India in 1893 and again in 1914, it was clarified that net assets referred to "the average surplus which the estate may yield after deduction of the expenses of cultivation".

Any income which the proprietors derived from the "spontaneous products of their waste and uncultivated lands and, strictly speaking any dues of whatever sort which they get in their capacity of landowners", was included in the "net assets".

95. S.R. Gujranwala, 1927.
97. Ibid.
While this definition was generally acceptable, the problem that remained was one of establishing how net assets were to be calculated. As per the instructions it was clarified that "a full, fair rent paid by a tenant-at-will, though sometimes falling short of the net assets may, generally in practice and for purposes of assessment be taken as a sufficiently near approximation to them on the land for which it is paid..."\textsuperscript{98}

Since so much depended on the calculation of net assets, the settlement officer was entrusted with the duty of framing the "most careful estimate" possible of net assets and it was categorically stated that to manipulate the estimate in any way with a view to diminish the divergence between it and the proposed demand was "tantamount to dishonesty".\textsuperscript{99} All the assessment reports consequently, devote considerable attention to this task of calculating 'net assets' and a land revenue demand based on "half net assets".

The pressure exercised by the provincial government on the district officers in this matter was not to be ignored. Thus in his comment on the report for the Upper Jhang Branch, Lower Chenab Colony, the Lieutenant Governor chastised the officers for the,

\textsuperscript{98} Rev.Agri.Rev., August 1892, A.Pro.17, F.100. 
\textsuperscript{99} P.S.M., op.cit., p.168.
almost heroic efforts which the assessing officers have made to keep down the produce estimate attributing it to the old problem of:

a settlement officer animated by the fullest sympathy for his landholders, adjusting his estimates unconsciously in order to suit the assessment which he thinks he can take. It is a practice which has been strongly denounced by the Punjab Government since 1889 and, I can only hope that the Financial Commissioner will see to it that it is not revived again... 100

Till 1928, the principle of half-net assets remained the bulwark of assessment policy. All other questions such as proportion of enhancement etc. were considered of secondary importance. The Punjab Land Revenue Amendment Act III of 1928, however, laid down guidelines for the amount of enhancement permissible, the period of settlement etc. More important, however, was the fact that the Act "lowered the maximum standard of assessment from one-half of net assets to one fourth." 101 It also limited the "increase permissible in any assessment circle to 25 per cent, over the former assessment, except where canal irrigation has been introduced since the last assessment was imposed." 102 At the same time, the period of assessment was fixed at 40 years, except in undeveloped tracts. 103

102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
The second problem, related to the fact that cash rents formed the basis of calculating the net assets of a landowner. It was widely accepted that cash rents fulfilled the criterion of competitive rents. However, for a large part of Colony land leased to tenants, rents were produce rents fixed in quantity and in such cases calculations became difficult on account of variations in prices over a period of years. For produce rents fixed as a share of the crop also the problem came up since the quality of value of crop, quantity and price, all three were variable. Government accepted that in most districts of Punjab "difficulties of this latter kind are met with". It further found itself making hypothetical calculations in the case of petty proprietors. At the same time, it needs to be pointed out that cash rents were primarily paid by tenants-at-will, who invariably paid higher rents. In such a situation it is clear that with calculation of half-net assets on the basis of an average derived from cash rents, those landowners holding better quality land offering higher outturn stood to gain vis-a-vis government. Whether this benefit trickled down to the tenants will be discussed later.


Many pointed out that calculation of net assets on the basis of cash rents was full of hazards:

As cash rents are practically non-existent, the rental has to be calculated from a valuation of the produce rents which are found to be paid by tenants-at-will in this district on 59 per cent of the total area of cultivation. The calculation is an exceedingly difficult one, and at every step assumptions have to be made on the correctness of which the reliability of the whole account depends. These assumptions, moreover, are based on no very secure foundations as it is necessary to reduce to an average which can be included in the account conditions which in themselves are difficult to ascertain and which vary from year to year and season to season.\(^\text{106}\)

A similar sentiment was conveyed by Government of India to Government of Punjab at the time the first round of settlements on the Lower Chenab Canal was on. The Revenue Secretary, Government of India, wrote to Punjab, pointing out that:

less than 4 per cent of the total cultivated area of the tract is let on a fixed cash rent, and that the estimate of Rs.200 as the average rent of a square is based on the rents recorded for this small proportion of the total area. In provinces where cash rents are more common than in the Punjab, it is recognised that it is very unsafe to assume that correct deductions can be drawn from competition rents paid over small areas, and cash rents paid by tenants-at-will are, therefore, dealt with very cautiously... Where the cash rented area is so small as in the Colonies, it will almost certainly be found that the worst lands for the lands that are most disadvantageously situated in regard to water-supply, or in other respects, are not taken up on cash rents at all. The assumption that the high rents paid on a twenty-fifth of the whole area can be used for the

\(^{106}\) S.R. Jhang, 1906, op.cit., p.18.
valuation of the rest is dangerous, and the Government of India are unable to accept it even as an estimate in calculations affecting the assessment of the tract as a whole. 107

Even when it came to areas that were paying cash rents, it was not necessary that the net assets assumed for assessment purposes represented the actual situation. In Lyallpur district for instance the circle rate per cultivated acre for purposes of assessment was much above the existing cash rent rate on Jangli chaks:

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tahsil/Circle</th>
<th>1/4 net assets per cultivated acre on select cash rents Rs. A. Ps.</th>
<th>Same, for Jangli chaks only Rs. A. Ps.</th>
<th>Circle rate per cultivated acre finally imposed Rs. A. Ps.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lyallpur</td>
<td>7-0-7</td>
<td>5-6-8</td>
<td>6-6-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samundri</td>
<td>5-14-4</td>
<td>5-2-9</td>
<td>5-14-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toba Tek Singh</td>
<td>5-9-0</td>
<td>4-7-3</td>
<td>5-1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaranwala</td>
<td>6-5-8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6-7-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Extensions</td>
<td>2-11-0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4-6-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakh Branch (in Sheikhupura)</td>
<td>5-15-0</td>
<td>5-4-10</td>
<td>5-9-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: S.R., Lyallpur, 1940, op. cit., p. 29.

Table III.5 gives the results of assets calculation for different circles on the basis of different estimates. In every case the cash rent basis yields a higher estimate. 107

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table: 3.5</th>
<th>NET ASSETS ESTIMATES ON DIFFERENT BASIS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### a. Gugera Branch I:  
1. Nahri, Half Net Assets by Produce Estimate | Rs. A. P. |
   | 4 3 7 |
2. -do- Cash Rents | 4 8 0 |
3. One-sixth value of gross produce | 3 11 2 |


### b. Upper Jhang Branch:  
1. Half Net assets by kind rents on matured area in 1906-09 | 3 10 0 |
2. Half Net assets by cash Rents on matured area in 1908-09 | 4 7 0 |
3. Half Net Assets by cash Rents on matured area between 1902-10 | 4 9 8 |
4. Half Net Assets by kind Rents as calculated by Financial Commissioner | 3 10 6 |
5. Half Net Assets by cash Rents as calculated by Financial Commissioner | 4 6 10 |
6. One-sixth value of gross produce | 3 2 1 |


### c. Jhang Branch I, II and III:  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>J.B. I</th>
<th>J.B.II</th>
<th>J.B.III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
1. Half Net assets by kind rents | 3 10 0 | 3 1 3 | 2 14 6 |
2. Half Net Assets by cash rents for 5 years | 4 9 8 | 3 5 6 | 3 0 2 |
3. Half Net Assets by cash rents in 1909-10 | - | 4 1 6 | 3 8 0 |
4. One-sixth value of gross produce | 3 2 1 | 2 15 6 | 2 13 9 |


### d. GUJERA BRANCH II:  
1. Half Net assets by kind Rents | 4 3 8 |
2. Half Net assets by cash rents in 1905-06 | 3 14 5 |
3. Half Net assets by cash rents in 1909-10 | 6 1 3 |
4. Half Net assets by cash rents in 1910-11 | 7 12 3 |
5. One-sixth value of gross produce | 3 7 2 |

Cont'd. Table 3.5

e. Rakh Branch:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rs. A. P.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Half Net assets on matured area by kind rents</td>
<td>6 0 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Half Net assets on sown area</td>
<td>5 9 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Half Net assets on matured area by cash rent 1909-10</td>
<td>6 4 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Half Net assets on matured area by cash rent 1910-11</td>
<td>6 4 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Half Net assets on matured area by cash rent 1911-12</td>
<td>7 4 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. One-sixth value of gross produce</td>
<td>4 12 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: A.P., Rakh Branch, L.C.C., 1913.
This is likely to result from the estimates being based on cash rents on the best lands. As in the case of the Jangli tracts referred to in the above table, the results based on rental returns on land other than the best are likely to have been lower. But these obviously did not form the basis of estimates since, as emphasised, the idea was to derive estimates on the basis of "competition rates".

Yields formed an important aspect of calculation of net assets. Thus it was found that in Lahore district, for instance, "in all cases yield assumed for calculation of net assets on nahri land has gone up".\(^{108}\) The settlement officer, Lyallpur, admitted that the high yield estimates assumed at last settlement in both Toba Tek Singh and Samundri tahsils had proved to be an instance of "belied hope".\(^{109}\) In Toba Tek Singh while cotton yields on lands possessed by good Arain cultivators were 6 maunds per acre, and only 4 maunds in most of the tail villages, the settlement officer assumed a yield of 5 maunds.\(^{110}\) Table 3.6 gives the yields assumed for the four tahsils in Lyallpur district.

Table 3.6
Yields Assumed in 4 Tahsils of Lyallpur District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Jaranwala</th>
<th>Lyallpur</th>
<th>Saundri</th>
<th>Toba Tek Singh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25 (30)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>6½</td>
<td>6½</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desi</td>
<td>6½</td>
<td>6½</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13½</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toria</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7½</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Revenue - Price Nexus

All the while, that land assessment was being successfully revised, there were two assumptions the Punjab government was basing itself on:

(a) extension of irrigation and the fact that an irrigated area yielded a higher produce in addition to ensuring security of agriculture.

(b) a continuous rise in prices - in fact the existence of boom level prices - affected, among other things by improvement in communications.

These two factors influenced the understanding evolved in the Colony tracts, of assuming both, a higher quantity of outturn and, a higher value of crops.
However, it was precisely in these two spheres that the cracks began to appear. While the position regarding irrigation will be discussed in the next section, we examine here the revenue-rising prices nexus, which was exemplified in the sliding scale system adopted as a basis for the post-depression settlements.

Firstly, it was ironical that the sliding scale-oriented to a situation of rising prices - was drawn up at a time when the rural economy was yet to recover from the devastation of the depression years. The scale, evolved with the intention of facilitating adjustment of demand with prices highlighted what government had in any case pinned its hopes on for the last three decades - i.e. the 'price boom'. The fact that in the mid-1930s the 'boom' seemed more like a bubble did not deter the government from its optimism. Since the proposed settlement was to be for a period of forty years the only 'concession' made was to defer the application of the new scale till such time as 'prices were back to normal'.

Although the sliding scale was not applied in the course of the period being studied, nevertheless it throws light on questions being examined here. An essential feature of the new scale was the drawing up of a full demand - equivalent to 100 in index numbers, which would be collected in a year of normal prices. Normal

111. A.R. Lyallpur, op.cit., p.28.
price was for this purpose construed as correspondence of the general level of market prices for the whole year with the level of commutation prices. Commutation prices, in turn, were worked on the basis of an average of forty years. By government's own admission, the sliding scale "necessarily involved assumption of comparatively high commutation prices;" This was despite settlement officers being told to guard against a common weakness which led to attribution of "a greater degree of stability" to existing conditions than they actually possessed; it was accepted that in the case of prices one was "apt to assume a permanent rise or a permanent fall, and it is quite possible to mistake the effects of short harvests for those of extended markets."

In this context, 'short harvests' referred to the depression years. The fact that the effects of the depression extended far beyond that of 'short harvests' in scale or dimension was conveniently lost sight of. This apart, it was emphasised that if prices fell, the system was geared to giving relief automatically - through comparison of the index figure for the previous year with the standard index figure. The standard index figure in turn was a multiple of (a) the percentage of specific crops on total per holding, (b) outturn in maunds and (c) commutation prices in annas per maund.

112. Ibid., p.27.
113. P.S.M., op.cit.
114. A.R., Lyallpur, op.cit., p.27.
The government hoped to achieve two primary objectives with the introduction of the sliding scale. Firstly, the adjustment of land revenue to existing conditions with provision for giving relief as and when considered necessary; secondly, to ensure for itself a sizeable share of economic benefit as and when prices rose again. To that end the sliding scale as a basis of revenue assessment was definitely an advance on the previous system. It approximated a balance between a fixed and fluctuating demand on a more rational basis. However, what is more important at this point is the discussion revolving around the introduction of the sliding scale - for this brings into focus the true nature of the 'concessions' and 'liberality' that government continually boasted of.

First, the concession: Presumably in keeping with its earlier pronouncements and show of leniency even as re-assessment operations were being completed, it was announced that:

for five years with effect from the harvest in which the new assessment is introduced, they (it) will not take more than the current demand gives even if under the sliding scale system it is permissible to take more. 115

This show of magnanimity government hoped, would assist recovery in the even of prices rising. For an

115. Ibid., pro. 3, p.2.
imperial government this appeared to be the supreme sacrifice - 'loss' of revenue that it had a right to claim by non-implementation of the new scale and assessment. It was proudly announced that if there was a sudden and high rise in prices during these five years for which implementation of the new settlement was being deferred:

government will forego the full benefit to which they would otherwise be entitled, so that an abrupt and large increase in the government demand will not immediately follow the period of acute depression. 116

Report after report, this heavily loaded proclamation of charity was splashed across the pages.

Whereas, the loss being bemoaned was actually only a hypothetical loss - from an expected rise in prices. What is more, behind this hypothetical loss lay hidden the harsh reality that given the prevailing price situation, had the new scale been implemented the government would be entitled to collect far below what it had actually collected. The same reports admitted that:

As long as prices remain at the present level the new system will involve government in a substantial loss on the revenue which government is entitled to collect in the current settlement; the loss will of course vary with the level of prices... 117

116. Ibid.
In fact, while government was bemoaning these hypothetical losses, it was actually taking more from the cultivator than would have been its due under the new settlement on the basis of the sliding scale. Thus the Samundri report categorically stated:

Had the new settlement been in force during these five years (1931-32 to 1935-36), the revenue payers would have had to pay Rs. 18,91,298 in all less than they were called upon to pay, representing an average of about Rs. 3,78,260 less per annum. The net demand recoverable would have been Rs. 48,08,398 as against the assessable demand under the existing assessment of Rs. 77,59,097 representing a decrease of approximately 38 per cent. 118

The report went on to say that since the current index figure worked out to only 53.4 per cent of the standard index figure which meant that had the new settlement been in force, cultivators would have had to pay 21.2 per cent less than what they had actually paid.

The Lyallpur tahsil report provides a similar example. In 1934-35 alone cultivators would have been entitled to 55 per cent remissions on the new demand, viz., they would have "gained by nearly 4,00,000 in this one year alone had the new settlement been in force." 119

118. Ibid.

involved a remission of 45.7 per cent in the same year and "revenue payers would have had to pay Rs. 17,31,670 in all less than they were called upon to pay." 120

In other words, postponement of the new settlement was based on the realisation that, given low prices, demand would have to be scaled down. Meanwhile, government felt cheated - because its expectations had been aroused by the preceding high prices; i.e., the 'loss' was actually no more than denial of an expected gain.

At the other end was the cultivator who felt crushed under the burden and, therefore, recoiled at the very thought of reassessment. Justifiably so since government's efforts to allay his fears that a revised scale would be lenient were meaningless in the face of his actual experience. More so when government's benign postures went hand in hand with tongue in cheek statements: which pointed out "how extremely generous the new system is and should remove any doubts as to the benefit which it will confer on the zamindars"; 121 and sought to back it up by the claim that in the last five years, "no serious difficulty was experienced by government in collecting a demand 16½ lakhs in (one tahsil) excess of

120. A.R. Toba Tek Singh, op.cit., p.29.
121. A.R., Lyallpur, op.cit., p.28.
what would have been permissible had the sliding scale system been in force." 122

While not overemphasising the point made above we will only add that of late efforts have been made to examine the more subtle features of colonial rule. We have no disagreement with those working in this direction. We only wish to reiterate that these subtleties were not necessarily at cross purposes with more blatant forms of exploitation. The experience of Punjab in the depression years particularly highlights this aspect of the Raj. The rapid increase of demand in the previous years hit all sections of the rural population in the difficult years, but was particularly disastrous for the smaller peasants.

Not surprisingly, government encountered resistance to the pitch of demand and the basis of assessment. Consequently in the 1920s, there was talk of devising a mechanism to entertain complaints regarding land revenue. A suggestion to publicise the proposals for re-settlement of land revenue so as to afford the persons affected an opportunity to raise objections before final orders were passed was considered. This met with resistance from several officers of the Revenue Department, Punjab, who argued that such a step assumed that "the settlement

officer's proposals on which orders are passed are made without a full opportunity to all concerned of urging their views up on him", and raised questions regarding the role of the revenues bureaucracy in a colonial state. 123 The settlement officer, it was pointed out, "stands as an arbiter between the revenue payers and the Government, and his proposals must contain his considered replies to possible objections by the people that he is taking too much or by the government that he is taking too little..." 124

In the face of the imperial government's insistence that such a procedure be tried out, the Lieutenant-Governor and the Revenue Secretary, Punjab, conveyed their belief that such a step "would not really modify the situation in any manner other than increasing the small number of objections at present usually attending a Punjab settlement". 125 Ultimately Government of India's wish prevailed, and Punjab officials accepted it with the cryptic comment that this step would,

remove the objections of those who from one motive or other, are disposed to criticise the actions of government and are glad to have an opportunity of posing as the champions of the agriculturists and, as Punjab experience in 1907 and 1913 showed, endeavour to arouse in them a sense of grievance which might embarrass government. 126

124. Ibid.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid.
Section IV - Water Management and the Canal Bureaucracy

We now turn to the system of canal water management. Government laid stress on close and continuous control by expert irrigation officers on distribution of the supply in all large irrigated works. These officers were expected to keep a strict account of every cubic foot of water entering their canals; the idea being that this strict vigil would prevent unequal or ineffective distribution of the supply and localize wasteful expenditures. Further, it would ensure to the government strict accounting of every pie that was 'due' to it in return for this stupendous achievement.

In this context it is interesting that while the Irrigation Commission and every report, official or semi-official, emphasised the need for strict accounting of every drop of water that trickled on to the field, no detailed roster of record of rights in irrigation at the time of annexation was made in the course of the early settlements. The settlement report for Multan district, 1901, described at length the inundation canals made by proprietors themselves in pre-annexation days; and the watercourses to private lands constructed by individuals with the permission of the ruler. The individual who constructed these water courses was as much their owner as the constructor of a well was its owner, and could
dispose of the water as he pleased, could put up dams and *jhalars* and even sell the whole or a part of the right to irrigation from the watercourse. These rights were, however, subject to orders from the ruler or other local powerful men who drew favour from the ruler. No doubt, given the state of affairs, incessant conflict prevailed regarding the distribution of water. While the officers drew up detailed statements of watercourses in existence and so on, they studiously refrained from making any record of irrigation rights. The extra Assistant Commissioner Multan district in 1860 himself party to such an exercise, outlined 3 major factors for this (a) that it may stir up unnecessary disputes (b) to avoid stereotyping transitory disputes and (c) to avoid placing on record anything which may curb the power of distributing water that was vested in the canal officer with the passing of the Canal Act in 1873. 127

In the years to come official opinion made clear its disapproval of private initiative in canal-building. In a note submitted to the Irrigation Commission, Wilson wrote that he was "not in favour of encouraging private persons to construct further canals"; he found that their management was "rarely" satisfactory and that it was in

the interest of landowners that "government should make the canals and have complete control over them", construction of private canals should be allowed only when government was not prepared to build it and there too, "government should have full power to step in and assume the management whenever it thought proper". Another question which soon came up was that of compensation to owners of private canals. The compensation due was actually on two counts. Firstly, on account of diminution of supply in the canals and secondly, on account of loss of income from land, i.e., in their capacity as canal owners as well as land owners.

Discussion on the nature and amount of compensation began soon after Colonisation was extended to regions covered by private canals, mainly revolving around the provisions of the Northern India Canal and Drainage Act. The matter remained a ticklish one, with government initially wanting to acquire the canals and canal-owners resisting it. When it was decided that private ownership would stay the compensation could not be decided on. Matters were complicated by the fact of claims, if any of those who did not own the canals, but had some rights to their water, with or without payment. While differences continued on all these aspects, it was decided that

128. ITC. App., p.42.
one form of compensation would be lease of land on proprietary terms in the Colony tracts. The debate continued and it was finally decided that claims for compensation would be settled as and when they came up.\textsuperscript{130}

As pointed out in Chapter I above, official policy was to discourage construction of private canals once its own network of perennial canals began to spread. This was justified by drawing attention to the 'utter mismanagement' prevailing on private canals,\textsuperscript{131} but there can be no doubt that the primary reason for this was government's wish to exercise greater control over water resources. The Punjab government was being pushed into recognising "the necessity of increasing the influence of the district officer in this matter".\textsuperscript{132} The Collector, it was specified, should "have a weighty voice in a matter of such vital importance to the raiyat as the supply and distribution of irrigation water".\textsuperscript{133}

With respect to the state owned canals, to begin with, only the main canal was maintained by government and there was nothing in the shape of rajbahās to bring water to the door of the irrigation. The landlords had to make their own arrangement to bring water from the canal,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Rev.Agri.Rev., February 1909, A.Pro.4-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} IIC., Appendix, Evidence, Punjab, p.21.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Rev.Agri.Rev., June 1910, A.Pro.50-51.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
however far it may be from his holding; the rich ones, consequently made their own watercourses, while the others combined with their neighbours, or even perhaps with the rest of the village, to build a joint watercourse. As a result, often, there were a number of these watercourses - running parallel and independent - for long distances from the canals. Each of these had to be cleaned out annually and as the spoil banks became higher cost of clearing increased. It was only on later branches that the Irrigation Department constructed watercourses leading to each square.

The limit of the area supplied with water from the canal was defined by an artificial line, known as the irrigation boundary, usually a natural drainage beyond which it was inexpedient or impossible for canal water to pass by gravitation but not co-terminous with village boundaries. The irrigation boundary performed the important function of prescribing the limits to which the canal Department was confined as an assessing agency, beyond which the district revenue staff were responsible for the assessment. Similarly, branches, distributaries, village water courses also had irrigation boundaries. 134

In order to cope with the organisational aspect of maintaining canals, Colony tracts were divided into

134. CSR, op.cit., p.23.
canal divisions, approximately 60 miles long and 20 miles broad, comprising 500 miles of government channels and utilizing a designed discharge of 1,500 cusecs to be distributed through 1,500 outlets.\footnote{135}

The major factors influencing water allotments were as follows: (a) discharge factor for the channel, (b) condition of channel (c) allotted area on the outlet (d) haqq percentage (e) permissible percentage (f) command of water (g) nature of soil whether level, uneven, broken etc. (h) nature of soil - whether sandy, containing salts etc. (j) per cent of irrigation actually done.\footnote{136}

Distribution was through outlets fixed in the distributaries and each outlet served no more than one village, though there could be more than one outlet on a distributary. The area irrigated by an outlet was referred to as a chak which generally comprised of thirty squares but never more than forty. The discharge on a watercourse was generally one to three cubic feet per second. However, it was found that to irrigate every square simultaneously would be wasteful and ineffective. A more effective method was found in the 'wāribandi' or practise of turning the supply on to each square by turns commencing from the squares at the head of the watercourse.

\footnote{135. Spate, op. cit., p.470}
\footnote{136. Ibid.}
If for some reason the wārī was interrupted, it recommended from where the stoppage had occurred. On the Chenab Canal the duration of the wārī was fixed in proportion to the area of land held; each wārī was from 2 to 4 pehars each or 6 to 12 hours, once in 10 days. In case of dispute the zillādār or the Executive Engineer made out a wāribandi in consultation with the people, which was signed by the settlers and water distributed accordingly. This too did not always work smoothly as is obvious from the Superintending Engineer’s statement that in exceptional cases, for instance, if the time for sowing was nearly over and a man had not been able to sow his full area, or the Executive Engineer took a decision to this effect. 137 Apart from the peasants one square’s turn was allowed for tanks and trees, and half a square’s turn for plantation owners in each village.

On the Lower Jhelum Canal the cultivators arranged the periods for which water was due according to the mares they had to maintain; also, in some cases, according to the squares they possessed. The period was ideally proportionable to the total number of mares or squares covered by an outlet. Thus if there were thirty mares in a chak and one man possessed two, his turn would be for 2/30 of 10 days, that is two-thirds of one day if ten

days were taken as the unit, or $14/30$ of a day if a week was taken as a unit. In proprietary villages it was customary to fix the wāris on the total number of acres each cultivator possessed.\(^\text{138}\)

In order to prevent waste by water flowing off, the zamindars had to resort to kiārābandi - or partition in the field. Infringement of this rule was punishable under the Canal Act of 1873.

In Kala Gaddi Thāman, Lyallpur, the Colonists receiving water from the two large outlets co-operated - they had arranged for watch and bell which was kept with the Gurdwara priest who announced with a ring when one turn was over and the other began. No case was noticed of a cultivator selling his water turn to another: It was felt that such an act was entirely against the general sentiments of the people, though exchanges of whole or part of wāris were not uncommon. There were instances of a cultivator taking more than his share, which frequently was the cause of a dispute. Disputes were generally resolved by a committee of 4 or 5 cultivators who intervened in order to see that justice was done. The village survey noted that if the defaulter refused to give back the extra water,

\(^{138}\) Ibid., Reply by C.H.A. Muller, Ex. Engineer Lower Jhelum Canal, p.85.
other members also took extra water as in one case in this village when the wāri per square rose from 4 to 9 pehers - till the zillādar brought about a settlement. 139

Early in the history of irrigation in the Punjab the designers proposed to irrigate during the year every acre commanded, i.e. a 100% intensity of irrigation of cultivated land. However, as the earliest canals came to be plagued with waterlogging, general opinion favoured a supply sufficient to irrigate one-third of the area. Subsequently, the Lower Jhelum Canal was designed with a proposed intensity of 50%. It was hoped that even if the cultivators spread this allowance as much as they could manage to, waterlogging could be avoided. The matter however, could not be solved so easily. This was one of the questions that figured prominently in the discussions, questions and evidence related to the Canal Colonies' Committee, 1907. The Committee set about collecting responses to the official contention - whether a 'permissible area' of 75% of which 45% was for rabi was sufficient to secure prosperity amongst the cultivators of a tract in which rain crops were of negligible extent and the holdings, in some cases, as small as half a square. 140 The answer from almost all the Superintending and Executive Engineers

139. BETP., PVS 4, op. cit., p. 49.
on the various canals, was that 75 per cent permissible area was sufficient. Referring to a petition made by one Dalip Singh and 86 other peasants, the Superintending Engineer, Lower Chenab Canal Circle, argued that what was 'insufficient' in the eyes of the peasants was insufficient only in terms of the peasants' desire for 'excessive irrigation'. If excessive irrigation were to continue, subsoil water would rise rapidly leading to soil deterioration. 141 The Executive Engineer, Jhang Division, Lower Chenab Canal, was of the opinion that the reduction of permissible area though necessary, would be difficult, since the grantees and tenants had become accustomed to that much water and to a mode of life based on that assumption. 142

The Multan settlement report made a special note of the changes that were coming about which, "entail a great deal of interference by government that was unknown before, both in canal and in revenue matters..." and advised caution, "while the people are still unaccustomed to and, prejudiced against, the change of system." 143

Official reaction was similarly strong in response to a further question that the Committee put as to whether

141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.
143. S.R. Multan, 1901, op. cit., p. 35.
the hagg area originally fixed should be maintained? It may be explained that hagg referred to the area peasants had a right to irrigate while 'permissible area' was the maximum they were permitted to irrigate. On the Lower Chenab Canal, while permissible area as stated earlier, was 75 per cent, hagg had been fixed at 66 per cent.\(^{144}\) The Superintending Engineer, Lower Chenab Canal Circle, however, objected to the use of both the terms: "Permissible implies and originally meant that it is the maximum permissible limit whereas it is now intended by government to work up and down to this standard", he said while hagg was objectionable since, "government was not legally bound to supply water for any definite area."\(^{145}\) He wanted the term hagg to be dropped and the words "area intended to be irrigated annually", to be substituted for permissible area; there were others who thought that hagg ought to be used while 'permissible area' should be dropped since it tended to create problems through raised expectations.\(^{146}\)

Another proposal sought to link water supply with the depth of subsoil water, and demarcation of zones on this basis: thus for zone A with a spring level of 40 feet or


\(^{145}\) Ibid., p. 17.

\(^{146}\) Ibid., p. 16.
above, the annual irrigation permissible be 50 per cent; for zone B with a depth to spring level of 25 to 40 per cent, and for zone C, with a spring level depth of less than 25 feet, the irrigation permissible be fixed at 25 per cent. 147 This proposal, implemented on the Lower Jhelum Canal, exempted बार lands, which not being prone to a high spring level, were allowed 75 per cent. Surprisingly, the Superintending Engineer added that government, "could give no definite promise as to per cent of irrigation while reserving for itself the right to reduce canal water supply in case of a rise in spring level." 148 It was hoped that by fixing a low intensity percentage for zones B and C a check would be kept on the abandonment of wells, the steady working of which would, in turn, keep down the spring level in these low lying tracts. As the waterlogging menace increased in the Hafizabad tract, there too the intensity was reduced from 75 per cent to 50 per cent. 149

The Executive Engineer on the Lower Chenab Canal, pointed out that while the proposal was theoretically fine, it would be found "highly unpopular and difficult to arrange. Even now the department is unpopular because we try to reduce irrigation to the 75 per cent permissible

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147. Ibid. Special Question regarding colony condition on LJC, p.60.

148. Ibid.

149. Thompson, 1925, p.22.
limit, what would it be if we were to try and reduce the percentage of some of the villages now doing 110 per cent and more to about 60 per cent or so as would be necessary under the zone system.\textsuperscript{150} He was of the opinion that Colonists would not take to well irrigation, with its heavy work, and the "result will be discontent..."\textsuperscript{151}

The problem was more than merely one of nomenclature or percentages of intensity. The real cause of the dispute was the reduction of supplies to the early Colonists as canal irrigation and Colonization progressed. The Chief Engineer, Irrigation Works, Punjab, explained to the Colonies' Committee that extensions on the Chenab Canal were being undertaken since there was sufficient waste land lying uncultivated which could be irrigated and distributed among potential Colonists. While asserting, on the one hand, that the river supply was sufficient to irrigate these lands in addition to the permissible areas already under irrigation, on the other he conceded that the only result affecting settlers would be "reduced supply to those obtaining more than necessary for their permissible areas."\textsuperscript{152} He asserted that the canals carried a "larger supply than is necessary for the areas to be irrigated. The extra supply is allowed to be used by peasant settlers.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., Reply to Question 4, p. 13.
pending it being required on extensions so as to benefit both them and the public revenues, rather than allow it to be wasted by being sent down the river and not taken into the canal."\textsuperscript{153}

Meanwhile government stepped up a crusade against 'waste' of water. The reports are replete with descriptions of how water delivered from the canals was allowed to go waste; of heavy irrigations being applied to fallow fields with no provisions for subsequent cultivation. It was also 'discovered' that most crops were receiving at certain times of the year, much more water than was actually needed. The greatest waste as per official statements, occurred in the months June to September, when there was plenty of water in the rivers and canals ran full supply as well. Fodder crops, officials pointed out, seemed to be the recipient of most of the excessive supply since these could withstand excessive irrigation with less damage. Government, consequently, was at pains to evolve methods by which economy in irrigation may be enforced.\textsuperscript{154}

The picture presented is that of an irrational peasant who was loth to refuse water even when he was getting surplus. Yet if one approaches this very evidence from the viewpoint of the cultivator, a different picture emerges. Thus, between 1892 and 1905, when the first

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid. Answers File, Passim.
Major disturbances took place in the Colonies - the agriculturists had witnessed the proverbial stretching of the cloth: As land under cultivation increased, the water available, in the rivers and the canals, was reduced; further the prevailing conflict and confusion regarding 'permissible' and 'hagg' area raised many a doubt in the peasant's mind; to add to the uncertainty, the Irrigation Branch initiated a process of remodelling or altering outlets on the one hand, while going ahead with charges for waste and improper use of water; to top it all, while complaints regarding distribution of water accumulated, government proceeded to announce enhancement of water charges. This was really the last straw, as far as the Colonists were concerned. We are not at this point going into the reasons of, and nature of the 1905 disturbances. What is being pointed out here, however, is that in the face of the stance government took vis-a-vis the distribution of water the peasant was not irrational. If at all he was, his 'irrationality' was in response to the irrational or 'arbitrary' posture that government was adopting.

Questioned about the reasons for which remodelling or alteration of outlets was undertaken and whether this would result in certainty of supply, the Superintending Engineer, Lower Chenab Canal Circle confirmed that "there can be no finality about the size of outlets on this or
the circumstances? The matter has been reported and referred by the local government often enough, but no real reformation has been attempted.¹⁷³

The problem lay not just at the government end. The discussion around the question of waste of water and charges for the same amply brought out that among the agriculturists themselves, some were taking advantage, at the cost of the others. The Superintending Engineer, Lower Jhelum Colony stated that "it is undoubtedly the case that petty canal officials receive pecuniary consideration for failure to bring cases of waste of water to notice."¹⁷⁴ Opposing the proposal for bulk sales of water, the Chief Engineer, Irrigation Works, Punjab expressed the opinion that "great difficulty is likely to arise in the distribution of water by the different cultivators among themselves and in the collection of proportionate payments from them, unless both distribution and assessment were done by an outside superior authority; and government alone would be such; the strong would certainly take advantage of the weak and much injustice and suffering would result."¹⁷⁵

The Executive Engineer, Lower Chenab Canal, thought that while this "might be effective in a yeoman or capitalist village where the management of a number of squares rests with one man who looks after his tenants and serves the supply just where

¹⁷³. I.T.C., Appendix, op.cit., p.50.
¹⁷⁵. Ibid., Question No.10, p.35.
he sees a necessity; it would be quite different in peasant villages where each individual has to get a turn and where each one is selfish enough not to be prepared to give up a part even of his turn to benefit his brother. The strain of this is apparent in the winter months with the rabi crops where through short supplies in the river these canals have to run their branches in turns. One cultivator may be lucky enough to get his supply in a turn in which he can sow wheat and the canal may just be closed when another's turn come on. This cultivator may be deprived entirely of a crop if the internal management is left in the hands of the individuals - of a village.176 The Executive Engineer for Jhang Division of the Lower Chenab Canal was certain that considering even when the cultivators pay for the actual matured irrigation there was trouble in seeing that each of the shareholders gets his share in proper turns; "if the water were to be sold by bulk, we will require a staff, almost as big as the present one, to see that the rich lambar ār does not rob the poor of his share or what sometimes does much more damage, give his share at a time when he does not want it."177

The extent to which canal water made a difference was reflected in some of the proverbs in this region: 178

176. Ibid. p.38.
177. Ibid.
178. BEIP. PVS. II, p.82
any other canal", for the discharge varied with the head of water pressure, silt movement and so on. 155

The complaints received by the canal administration fell in two categories: those made by cultivators at the head and those made by cultivators at the tail of the channels. While "those at the tail complain that we do not give them enough water, those at the head complain that we so frequently alter their outlets that they do not know where they are". 156

Whereas, government had already by the first decade of the twentieth century begun talk of restricting supplies, the first round of settlement operations in these areas brought to light the fact that canal water supply to many of the Colony tracts was yet to stabilize. The assessment Report for Jhang and Sugera Branch Circles, Jhang district, observed that while irrigation in the tract had generally improved, the villages in the Chiniot tahsil at the tail of the Wawala, Kot Ahmadyar Branch, and Kot Wasana Minor still do not achieve their 'minimum permissible area' in all cases; while these were said to be improving, "the supply at the tail of the nazrānā distributory in mauzā 98 and 99, Jhang Branch, sometimes breaks down". To this

156. Ibid. Evidence File, p. 581.
was added the great lurking fear in the back of the zamindars' mind that "when the Triple Canal Colonization Scheme opens, his water-supply will be reduced."157

Almost all assessment reports of the region refer to complaints of this kind. Going by the issues that came up before the Colonies' Committee, the major problems were on account of (a) high land (b) tail villages (c) changes in outlets (d) inadequate and improper drainage and (e) corruption. All these plagued the different canals in varying degrees.158 Government, while admitting these problems, adopted measures which either ignored or worsened the conditions. Thus it was not uncommon to restrict supplies at the Head Works, especially during the monsoon; at times carrier canals were closed during the kharif seasons; closure of distributaries was also resorted to, particularly in water-logged tracts; sometimes a reorganisation of the village water-courses was undertaken by which shorter 'wāris' were arranged; the building of ridges or bunds was at times enforced - involving extra labour which proved to be a very laborious process for moderate cultivators.

There was no dearth of proposals from government quarters. Thus at one point settlement officers were

asked to explore whether any persons on one outlet, more especially yeomen and capitalists, would take a fixed demand for land revenue and occupier's rate (ābiānā), based on the average of the past for a short period.\footnote{159}{Ibid.}

The Settlement Officer for Jhang and Gugera Branches reported back that he had in fact received some applications to this effect, adding that in each case, the applicant had expressed a willingness to take up such a contract, provided government assured them that their outlet would not be reduced during the period of the contract. The reply received from the Executive Engineer, Lyallpur division, maintained that the Canal Department, "reserves to itself the right to reduce outlets when it chooses". Not only were all the applications withdrawn but the settlement officer himself expressed the view that, "failing such a promise I much doubt that anyone would be willing to adopt such a contract."\footnote{160}{Ibid., Evidence of Sayād Kalam Shah, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Multan, p. 57.} Approximately 110 persons gave evidence before the Colonies' Committee regarding the water distribution problem, with the majority of government officials arguing the official view point. The zāminīārs represented their case before the committee pointing out that their complaints to zillādārās regarding distribution of water went unheeded while complaints to higher authorities set the zillādārās
against them - resulting in their getting even less water. In some cases complaints drawing attention to the bad state of crops in certain villages met with the stock reply that, as per statistics, the area had been matured while the Colonists absolutely denied this. In any case the validity of statistics did not improve the state of the crop.

Cultivators also came forward with complaints of extortion in the canal department. Shahabu, a lambardar of mauza 104, Jhang Branch, narrated how people were sent from one officer to another for matters such as changes in outlets etc. and how they had to pay everywhere: "the treasury officials loot us; all officials loot us", he emphatically stated. Father Cageton, of mauza 51, Gugera Branch, whose estate lay on the tail of the Khunnan Minor complained that when he complained of withered crops not only did he not get a sympathetic hearing - he was instead told that the fault lay with his cultivators while the fact was that the trouble was due to the "unsatisfactory way in which the Khunnan Minor, and in particular, the water courses of his village worked." While Father Cageton drew attention to the heavy debts his tenants had incurred due to these and other problems the officials wryly commented that

161. Ibid., Passim.
162. Ibid.
163. Ibid., Evidence File, p.39.
his tenants were "sweepers by caste and were no doubt prone to extravagance." 164

Risâldar Major Chiragh Khan, a capitalist grantee of twenty five squares in Lyallpur referred to overseers and mistris who had great power of making extortions in connection with the fixing of outlets:

"If a zamindar has succeeded after great trouble in getting an outlet of a certain size sanctioned by the superior canal authorities, the local mistris can still cause him great loss by the way in which he erects the moga, fixing it either too high or crooked so that it will not discharge properly." 165

While numerous such complaints were forthcoming wherever the Committee gathered evidence, resistance to the Committee itself was mounted by none less than the Chief Engineer, Irrigation Department. Mr. J.J. Mullaly in a note to the Committee, charged that, "the agitation against the Canal Department was the result not only of question put by the committee but also of the known bias against the Canal Administration, but of the district officers in charge of the canal tracts." 166 Arguing that the complaints were "so few and so contradictory," he asserted that "we should have heard nothing of these complaints against the Canal Administration, just as we should have heard nothing of the demand for proprietary

164. Ibid.
165. Ibid., p. 362
166. Ibid., Answers File, Note dated 3.8.1908
rights, had not the people been given to understand that such complaints were quite expected."167

It is clear that the entire process of reaching water to the fields and enforcing the will and wish of government policy was not only arduous, but also that its successful prosecution "depended to a large extent on the maintenance of the personnel of the Public Works Department at an adequate strength."168 There emerged a canal 'bureaucracy', within the local Public Works Department, functioning under the Chief Engineer and Secretary to government, Irrigation, officers employed exclusively for the purpose of construction, management and development of the canals.

The Irrigation Commission believed that on the one hand "the effect of imposing on the Irrigation Officer the duty of supervising the assessments and the internal distribution of the water-supply has been to bring him into a closer and kindlier touch with the cultivators, and to give him a more detailed knowledge of their wants than would have been possible in Northern India under any other system of management."169 Sitting members of the Commission, however, also bemoaned the fact that whereas "many years ago it was the most popular branch of the Public Works Department in North India, and consequently commanded the services of the most competent engineers, now this is all changed.

167. Ibid.
Engineers are reluctant to enter the canal service, and anxious to leave it. At the lower level on the contrary, the introduction of canal irrigation led to a keen competition for appointment to the post of lambardars, and in many cases sanction was sought for an increase in lambardari. 171

That the situation was not free from hazards for the peasants, the 'beneficiaries' of canal irrigation is clear from the endless number of complaints against canal officers referred to earlier. The corruption prevalent amongst the canal patwāris, and lambardars; both, in distribution of water and timing of water and more so in an indiscriminate imposition of fines, legal and illegal, was made amply clear by hundreds of witnesses who appeared before the Colonies' Committee. 172 (See Tables 3.7 and 3.8).

The Irrigation Commission itself sounded the warning note while arguing for maintenance of high standards amongst officers. Taking exception to the heterogenous mass of imperial engineers, provincial engineers, temporary engineers picked up anyhow - it concluded: "the confusion is terrible. How can a proper standard be gained under...

170. Ibid., p. 102.
171. S.R., Jhang, 906, p. 47.
### TABLE 3.7

FINES IMPOSED ON COLONISTS 1898 TO 1907

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imposed</th>
<th>Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fines warranted by condition</td>
<td>32,399</td>
<td>27,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines imposed in lieu of confiscation</td>
<td>1,59,722</td>
<td>41,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines not warranted by conditions</td>
<td>1,16,239</td>
<td>51,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines for illicit cultivation (unclassified)</td>
<td>36,052</td>
<td>21,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3,44,453</td>
<td>1,41,110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Canal Colonies Committee Report, 1909, p. 765.

### TABLE 3.8

FINES IMPOSED ON COLONISTS 1900-1907

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imposed Rs.</th>
<th>Collected Rs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>5,945</td>
<td>3,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>21,399</td>
<td>11,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>23,635</td>
<td>3,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1,15,426</td>
<td>11,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>66,292</td>
<td>29,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>55,734</td>
<td>38,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>44,958</td>
<td>38,637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>10,087</td>
<td>4,743</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Canal Colonies Committee Report, 1909, p. 766.
"Mūch dā faqīr, te pand dā amir"
(A beggar near the head of the canal is as good as a rich man at its tail)

The fact that money exercised its own power was also well-known:

"Pand dā pich, nā pit nā parit, zar zardijit".
(Irrigation at the tail of a canal cannot be got for love: he wins who spends money and supplices)\textsuperscript{179}

The village survey for Multan, specifically mentioned that "the poorer cultivators seldom sought justice from the Canal Department, regarding \textit{wāribandi} laws under Section 68 of the Canal and Drainage Act of North India of 1873. It noted that even if a cultivator was driven by desperation to petition "when the case is referred to a Court, he will withdraw it the next morning either from fear or through the persuasion of the big landlords."\textsuperscript{180}

The Executive Engineer, Burala Division, Chenab Colony sought to brush away the problem by blaming it on the 'primitiveness' of the Jangli: "in ordinary villages there is no such trouble though I have frequently heard of quarrels about petty matters in Jangli Villages such as are never heard of from others."\textsuperscript{181}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{179} \textit{Ibid.}, p.86.
\item \textsuperscript{180} \textit{Ibid.}, p.83.
\item \textsuperscript{181} \textit{Ibid.}, Evidence File, p.390.
\end{itemize}
The Superintending Engineer on the Lower Chenab Canal Circle sought to clarify the government's position on the question of size of outlets in this context:

"Just as a zamindar is entitled to ask that an outlet shall be enlarged if at any time it is found to be too small, so also the canal officer must have power to reduce an outlet at any time, if he finds it is too large; any other arrangement would be one-sided and impossible. The head through the present outlets can be increased by the people themselves by clearing their water-courses thus lowering the level of the water surface." 182

In consequence of this many outlets draw off more water than was intended and "inspite of the fact that outlets have been reduced water does not reach the tails of certain distributaries when authorised supply enters the head." 183 He believed that the size of the outlets must be reduced for those villages which were found to get more than their share of water in order to benefit other villages which were badly off. By the mid 1930s when a fresh round of settlement operations was undertaken, extensive remodelling of outlets had been undertaken in the large part of the Lower Chenab Colony at least. While describing the remodelling of outlets operations, the tendency on the part of officials was to highlight that a substantial measure of equality had been achieved in the distribution of water. This was partly attributable to the Adjustable Proportionate Module which made control and check on water discharge easier and more

182. Ibid., Question 6, p.22
183. Ibid.
efficient. In Lyallpur, it was claimed that "the marvel
is that there is not a tail chak but is now receiving its
permissible supply or more. Indeed the general feeling of
content regarding adequacy of supplies is so apparent that
the irresistible conclusion is that even-handed justice has
been done all round." 184 In the last twenty-five years,
government claimed, the full supply factor at the outlet
head had been steadily raised from 200 to 264 acres per
cusec in 1925, and that with a water allowance designed to
mature only 75% of the allotted area the zamindar in fact
matures 40% and even 50% greater acreage: "matured area
statistics should give quietus to carping critics who are
never tired of clamouring that canal supplies have been so
vigorously reduced as to endanger the well-being and pros-
perity of the Colony population." 185

In Samundri tahsil, after remodelling "the result
was so satisfactory that there is no chak of the tahsil
now where the state of irrigation warrants field to field
Kharaba inspection--remarkable since long distributaries
bristling with minors intensify the troublesome task of
securing adequate supplies for tail chaks." 186 That some
problem persisted with the tail chaks is brought out by the
following statement in the same report: "in abnormal years
of deficient supply in the river, occasionally resort has

185. Ibid.
to be made to the unsatisfactory expedient of rotational closures to convey adequate supplies to these chaks."187 The fact that the results were not evenly spread out was supported by the fact that while on the Tandlianwala distributary the average area matured as per cent of allotted was 115 on the Killianwala and Khatuana distributaries it was as low as 85% or 87%."188

In Toba Tek Singh, despite remodelling, "difficulties persisted in a number of chaks at the extremities, particularly at the tail of Jhang Branch."189 In at least three chaks the full supply factor was reduced from 264 acres to one cusec of water to 175 acres to the cusec "to compensate for inferior soil and difficulty of distribution."190 Further, in these, the water allowance per acre was increased from the normal 2.84 cusec to 4.29 cusecs per 1,000 acres. While the average figures for matured area between the years 1923-33 approximated over 102, falling below that only during the depression years, coming down once to 80 but also going up to 107, on the tail chaks the percentage of area matured ranged between 61, at its lowest, and 87 at the highest.192

187. Ibid.
188. Ibid.
190. Ibid.
191. Ibid.
The Settlement Officer testified that in some of the chaks in the Toba Tek Singh tahsil:

"Poor supply appears to be chronic. 264-GB is particularly unfortunate. For a single chak of 59 squares there is only one outlet. In the hot weather irrigation turns come so late that the crops raised cannot attain any degree of excellence. Add to this the fact that the soil is poor. The proprietors are Gaddi Biloches - not the best of agriculturists. It is small wonder that the proprietary body is depressed. The Tarkhani tail chaks 185, 186, 187 and 188 are no better. The Superintending Engineer, East Circle, has been particularly sympathetic to the chaks on the tail of Mungi and Tarkhani distributaries and has been endeavouring to improve their irrigation; but I doubt if there can be any tangible permanent result." 192

Considering this to be the "least fortunate circle in the district in the matter of irrigation," the officer concluded that the poorer chaks "should not be assessed to full abjānā rates." 193 The Report for Gugera Branch Circle, Lower Chenab Canal referred to three Jangli villages, numbers 537, 538 and 539 "which have been approached from all directions, but which defy all efforts made to irrigate them adequately." 194 In some years the villages had to be altogether deserted. Thus in 1907-1908 when the rains failed, crops on only two acres out of twelve-and-a-half acre holdings were matured. 195

192. Ibid.
193. Ibid.
194. A.R., Gugera Branch Circle, Lower Chenab Canal, p.3.
195. Ibid., p.22.
In some villages, as in the case of Gajju Chak, in Gujranwala district, canal water was not utilized to the extent that it might be. This was attributed primarily to the fact that canal water was available only in the *kharif* harvest, except for a preliminary watering for *rabi* crops before sowing, after which the canal closed down. In order to mature *rabi* crops cultivators had to work the wells - which increased expenses on cattle and labour. In such instances, cultivators found their expenses going up disproportionately due to payment of water-rates. Increase in water-rates in 1924 strengthened the cultivators' disinclination to use canal water, and to depend more on wells; use of canal water, however, went up if the rains failed - as happened in the case of 1921 and 1922 *kharif* harvest. 196

In general, however, in this village the cultivators tried to work the wells and avoid canal water rates. There was, at the same time, no holding which was purely *barani*, *chahi* or *nahri* holding - for all cultivation was mixed. 197

To conclude this section we may briefly say that while government was adopting a double-edged strategy - of both cutting down supply as well as charging more for

196. *BBTP, PVS*, 6, p.60.
it the cultivator was at the receiving end. The supply remained erratic, both in timing and quantum; distribution remained uneven while those who were more well-placed took advantage of their economic status and location of their lands to ensure a full supply and perhaps more; the corruption rampant amongst the canal bureaucracy created further bitterness, especially among those could not pay.

What were the options before those deprived of an adequate supply? The incessant demand for remissions on account of failure of crops was one option commonly resorted to; agitation was another - as happened in the case of the 1905 disturbances; a third option, which did not attract this kind of attention was, however, equally important and long lasting - viz., the shift in cropping patterns which was to a large extent related to the question of quantity, timing and charges for supply. While we now turn to the question of remissions, the pattern of land use will be discussed in the next chapter.

Section V: Crop Failure and Revenue Remission

The incidence of kharāba or failed crops on total area sown was directly linked to revenue and irrigation policy. Having had its origins in a high proportion of crop failure and famine conditions prevailing in Punjab throughout a large part of the nineteenth century, the
issue of kharābā also got linked up with the debate on the question of fixed and fluctuating land revenue demand. Since 1882, when a broad classification of secure, insecure and fluctuating tracts was drawn up, revenue instructions had talked of 'elasticity' and 'moderation'. The 1902 instructions tried to interpret 'elasticity' in the specific context of (a) widespread calamities such as famine, drought and general failure of crops and (b) local or isolated calamities such as hail, floods and locusts. In the course of discussion on these issues, government made a clear distinction between 'elasticity' of assessment and 'elasticity of collection'. Having expressed itself in favour of fixed assessment, government logically followed it up with its disapproval of kharābā, emphasizing that in principle the revenue-payer "has not by rule or contract any right to an abatement of the fixed demand assessed upon his lands at assessment". This was justified on the grounds that demand was so pitched as to allow for, "ordinary variations of season during the period of settlement, and the demand ought in theory to be paid in bad years as well as in good."

199. Ibid., Pro.33.
200. Ibid.
rigidity of collection in adverse seasons," it also accepted the need for remissions. While accepting the need for remissions, the point was carefully driven home that these were "a measure purely of grace and not of right", lest these come to be looked upon as a regular feature of the administration.

The same understanding prevailed with respect to kharāba in the Colonies. Since in the Colonies Kharāba was linked to non-availability of water, it was blamed on the cultivators' desire to spread irrigation over more than the 'permissible area. In view of this: "tendency of the settlers to attempt the cultivation of a much larger proportion of their holdings than it has even been intended to irrigate annually..." government expected him to pay for his gamble. Whereas it was proposed to bind the peasants to bring under cultivation one-third of the area of their holdings within three years from allotment and half within five, they had practically broken up nearly two-thirds within the first three years. From one point of view this was most satisfactory but the tenants were aiming at "quantity rather than quality, the cultivation is naturally of

201. Ibid.
202. Ibid.
the roughest and poorest character, and the canal is very severely taxed to afford the required supply". 204 It was suggested that in cases where tenants had "recklessly attempted to irrigate more than a certain proportion of their holdings in either harvest, remissions should be restricted." 205

Strangely though, while on the one hand washing its hands of the responsibility of for kharāba, government felt entitled to charge ābianā on the entire land actually irrigated, including that for which kharāba was being claimed. 206 Since the government insisted on asserting its right in terms of charges for water the, cultivator felt equally justified in claiming compensation for crops that had failed to mature on account of what he saw as insufficient irrigation. Till 1912 the government succeeded in having the best of it both ways: disapproving of kharāba which in official terms resulted from improper cultivation and illegal spread of canal water - and charging water-rates for it at the same time. The role of other factors leading to failure of crops or, high incidence of kharāba was rarely recognised.

There were other problems as well. What was the 'unit to be dealt with while granting relief? What was

204. Ibid.
205. Ibid.
to be the scale of relief for varying degrees of crop failure; what authority was empowered to sanction relief? Under what circumstances were suspensions to be converted into remissions, and so on.

Regarding the circumstances in which relief was to be given, it was generally believed, up to 1901, that relief was not to be given for up to half a normal crop although it did not follow that the failure of more than half a crop will always justify relief. The need was all this while felt for a standard scale of relief on arithmetical basis, with the degree of relief increasing as the yield decreased. It was finally worked out as follows:

With a 16 anna crop being treated as normal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Degree of relief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 annas and less than 8 annas</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 annas and less than 6 annas</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 4 annas</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since promptness was an important factor in relief, it was envisaged that a field-to-field enquiry would be impossible, therefore, it was decided that suspensions be announced on the basis of information compiled by villages or homogeneous groups of villages, and the collector be given the right to make alterations later. Gradually the

opinion gathered strength that in situations where collection seemed impossible, it was better to remit at once rather than keep the demand hanging over the heads of revenue payers. Revenue which had been under suspension for three years was to be remitted as a matter of course. Government also decided that as a general rule no revenue which had been suspended should be collected until after one fair harvest subsequent to the failure had been reaped in the affected tract. 208

Having come to an understanding regarding these in 1905, the Department of Revenue and Agriculture heaved a sigh of relief in the belief "that the administration of the fixed land revenue system will be freed from the evils of excessive rigidity which have in some places hitherto attached to it, and that a degree of elasticity will have been introduced - sufficient to ensure that in times of agricultural calamity the burdens of the cultivating classes are not aggravated by any unreasonable insistence on the demands of government." 209

Even during the time kharābā was retained, it should be clear that no everyone who needed relief, got it. There was, first of all the tedious process of getting relief sanctioned. Since remissions were granted only in cases of grave loss, there were numerous instances, of

208. Ibid., Pro. 9.
209. Ibid.
crops being damaged but not "sufficiently destroyed" to entitle them to full remissions. Even in the year 1907 when incidence of crop failure was high, full remissions were given on only one branch, the rest getting between 25 to 50 per cent. The assessment report for Upper Jhang Branch Circle narrated how toria, "a crop which gets very little 'kharāba' suffered extensive damage. Whereas in the case of toria it was hard to tell the damage till the crop was cut, it was not always feasible that the cultivator leave the crop standing till the zillādar found time to inspect it - the cultivator had to choose between the option of risking further damage by shelling, frost or rain, or to cut it and forego all kharāba, very often he chose the last. Needless to say that remissions were granted only on crops which had not been cut or grazed prior to kharāba inspection.

The importance of the decision to abolish kharāba in 1912 except in special circumstances can be seen by a glance at the incidence and scale of remission in the first decade of the twentieth century (Tables 3.9-3.11).

The assessment report for the Gugera Branch Circle, I, 1911, stated clearly that in three mauzās the proportion of area irrigated to area allotted was only 30 per cent

<table>
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<th>S. No.(Vill.)</th>
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### TABLE 3.10

**EXTENT OF KHARABA - JHANG BRANCH III, L.C.C. IN CLASS 7 AND 8 VILLAGES, IRRIGATED**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No. (Vill.)</th>
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<th>1907-1908</th>
<th>1908-1909</th>
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<tr>
<td>469</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: A.R., Jhang Branch III, 1911.*
### Table 3.11

**Extent of Kharaba - Upper Jhang Branch, L.C.C. in Class 7 and 8 Villages, Irrigated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Villages</th>
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<th>1906-1907</th>
<th>1907-1908</th>
<th>1908-1909</th>
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<td>57.06</td>
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<td>30.50</td>
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<td>38.50</td>
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<td>30.1</td>
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<td>15.10</td>
<td>34.90</td>
<td>49.09</td>
<td>10.1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: A.R., Upper Jhang Branch, 1911.
in the year 1907-08 where there was no rain to supplement canal supply. Of the 30 per cent irrigated also, 20 per cent failed leaving each of these Jangli term grantees only 3 out of 12½ acres matured.\textsuperscript{211} On the Rakh Branch Circle with the abolition of kharābā, the area subject to land revenue increased by some 30,000 acres in this one circle alone.\textsuperscript{212} Since kharābā was abolished around the same time as fresh assessment was being undertaken, the net increase in the revenue from the canal areas would have been enormous with a corresponding increase in the burden on peasantry.

Interestingly, just two years after the abolition of remissions for failed crops - except in special circumstances - government of Punjab, recognised the power to sanction remissions of land revenue as a reward to villagers who resisted the attacks of dacoits;\textsuperscript{213} a few years later, the Secretary, Army Department also recommended grant of remissions to certain sections. Compensation for the "losses to agriculture and kindred industries occasioned by the withdrawal of so large a population for military service, and the stimulus to future recruiting which would be given if government showed in a practical and substantial form its recognition of the exceptional sacrifices made by

\textsuperscript{211} A.R.Gugera Branch Circle I, LCC, 1911, op.cit., para 29.
\textsuperscript{212} A.R. Rakh Branch Circle, 1913, op.cit., para 8.
particular villages sub-divisions of a village or even familiar in the province."²¹⁴

The question of kharāba had featured prominently among the issues under consideration of the Canal Colonies' Committee. In the evidences before the Committee, official opinion emerged in favour of dispensing with remissions. Pointing to the link between kharāba and the corruption among lower rung officials of the Irrigation Department, Mullaly, Chief Engineer, Irrigation Works in Punjab, gave the official version of hazards stemming from kharāba: firstly, he said, given the difficulty in accurately estimating a standing crop, "no honest official will ever be able to satisfy a cultivator that the crop has been fairly assessed"; secondly kharāba entailed the "deputing of great powers to low paid officials and leads to much extortions".²¹⁵

Illegal extortions were closely linked to grant of remissions. The Deputy Commissioner for Gujranwala, for instance, stated in his evidence before the Canal Colonies' Committee that in many cases on the Lower Chenab Canal, "the Patwaris told the people to pay them Rs. 2 a killa in order that they could make recommendations for them, and in many cases the people did so."²¹⁶

²¹⁶. Ibid., Evidence File, p.356.
Officer to had "heard that considerable sums were paid to zillādārs about the recent large remissions" but did not believe that all those accused were guilty, if the regular Faślānā, which was taken not only in the Colony tracts but all over Punjab, was excluded. 217 While Sardar Khan, lambardar of mauzā 36B, grantee on horse-breeding terms in the Lower Jhelum Colony was of the view that the zillādar often did not give kharābā as, "to do so amounts to a confession of his own fault"; 218 The Deputy Collector in the Colony believed that perhaps only "five per cent of the zillādārs may take money". 219 It was "only those zillādārs, who have been promoted from patwāri-ships who still take bribes, but only very few even of these..." 220 The paltry sum of Rs. 10 given as salary to a Patwāri was also cited as one reason for the corruption prevalent.

Whether or not zillādārs accepted money from the cultivators, they did not always show sympathy to the peasants' woes; "like all subordinate government officials in this country his (zilladar's) general tendency is to decide every doubt in favour of government and he probably finds it gives him less trouble in the end to be over

217. Ibid.
218. Ibid., Evidence File, p. 62.
219. Ibid., p. 81.
220. Ibid.
severe in his assessment than overlenient". The zillādār had strong motives for not granting liberal remissions for failed crops, since majority opinion amongst officials disapproved of the "excessively liberal remissions". Just as revenue demand was found light except for incompetent cultivators, kharāba was considered to be a "premium on bad and careless cultivation", resulting from improper watercourses and distribution arrangements, as also slothfulness in making kiāris and other operations aimed at optimum use of water.

A related problem was that of the assessing agency. Owing to the system under which the assessments both of revenue and water-rates were modified annually by the application of rules regarding kharāba (till such time as kharāba was abolished) the assessing agency occupied a position of special importance in Punjab. For this reason the Canal Department which constituted the assessing agency, maintained a large staff. However, over a period of time, their effectivity and impartiality come to be questioned. Concerned at the complaints against canal officers, the Colonies' Committee explored the possibility of transfer of assessing responsibility to another agency. While on the one hand official opinion attributed complaints against

222. Ibid.
223. Ibid.
the canal officers to the problem of kharābā, on the other it was felt that it was 'impossible' for the ordinary revenue staff to supervise satisfactory canal assessments on a large scale. Since canal officers were in any case employed on canals, they were readily accessible to people to look into complaint regarding deficient irrigation. It was considered doubtful whether any advantage would be gained by transferring canal assessments from canal officers and their subordinates to Tahsildars and their subordinates; maintenance of a dual subordinate agency seemed the only possible way. In the Committee itself divergent opinions were expressed – with Major Popham Young favouring a radical change under which the whole of the assessments of canal or land revenue dues would be entrusted to revenue authorities, while Mr. Baillie argued that transfer of the work of assessment would not offer a solution since the real cause of problems lay in the system of assessment itself.

The Depression and the Remission Question

The discussion on remissions was reopened in government circles, at the end of the 1920s – the occasion being provided by the unprecedented slump in prices. Having earlier abolished general remission on the grounds that the revenue demand was moderate enough
to be paid in adverse circumstances as well (Section III supra) government had to retrace its steps in the late twenties. Uncollected balances of land revenue soared high as the West Punjab peasantry was exposed to perhaps the worst crisis in international price history. For the first time government had to seriously consider sanction of remissions on grounds of a fall in prices. The ruin aggravated by the fact that the Depression came in the wake of a series of bad harvests due to frost, dust-storm, hail, locusts, insect pests, floods, ill-times or excessive rainfall and cattle-disease. Close on all these disasters came the Depression when prices of agricultural commodities fell, in some cases to one-fourth or one-third of the boom period. While on the one hand this gave rise to serious problems stemming from increased insolvency, revenue defaulters and a corresponding congestion in jails, it became obvious that at current prices, the price of the produce of an acre was sometimes "not sufficient for the payment of even government dues." 224

The village survey for Gajju Chak in Lyallpur district recorded that on an average holding the per cent of crop required to meet government demand in 1932 amounted to 71 per cent of the produce in the case of the cotton crop, 75 per cent in the case of sugarcane and 173 per cent in the case of toria." 225


225. BBIP, PVS, 4, op. cit., p.92.
When special remissions were announced during the depression years, many problems surfaced. Thus, for instance, the zillādār who inspected the crop was not in a position to give remission of fields which deserved it but for which no dārkhwāst had been submitted; while the truth was that many Colonists, and janglis, refrained from applying as "rightly or wrongly, they have come to think that no useful purpose would be served by doing so." Drawing attention to defects which could be easily rectified, a settlement officer confessed that he himself was not fully aware of the process by which kharābā was applied for and granted. An application though given on time, was not admitted if the field number given and the field was identifiable. He felt that in the "more inaccessible parts of the jangli tract, general ignorance of even the square numbers, not to mention field numbers, effectively prevents submission of genuine petitions. Sometimes where square numbers are cited by the more intelligent janglis, the effort is often infructuous because the numbers quoted relate to the records of the first settlement." Often tātwāris did not furnish the requisite information without illegal gratification. Essentially the system of granting

227. Ibid.
**TABLE 3.12**

REMISSIONS DURING THE DEPRESSION YEARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tahsil/Circles</th>
<th>Total Abiana Demand Rs.</th>
<th>Remission (Abiana) 1928-29 to 1932-33 Rs.</th>
<th>Remissions land revenue Rs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jaranwala</td>
<td>1,79,45,655</td>
<td>4,72,594</td>
<td>8,79,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lyallpur</td>
<td>1,98,64,206</td>
<td>5,09,712</td>
<td>8,88,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Samundri</td>
<td>1,70,73,377</td>
<td>4,37,832</td>
<td>8,37,929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Toba Tek Singh</td>
<td>1,70,00,919</td>
<td>6,14,886</td>
<td>9,06,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. New Extensions</td>
<td>11,10,005</td>
<td>5,568</td>
<td>9,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rakh Branch Circle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle (Sheikhpura</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district)</td>
<td>72,60,708</td>
<td>1,88,061</td>
<td>3,00,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lahore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85,562*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For 1930-32 only.

legitimate relief, presupposed a standard of literacy and knowledge totally lacking in most cases. In order to simplify the process it was proposed that "lambardārs be empowered to submit kharābā petitions for their entire pattis" without taking away the right of individual cultivators to submit petitions.228

But the question whether relief granted to the revenue payer was extended to the actual cultivators of the soil remained? Punjab supposedly had legislative provisions for this, and government further clarified that, in cases where extension of relief to tenants could not be ensured, legislation may be enacted to preclude from relief (a) bad landlords and rack-renters (b) well-to-do landowners whose solvency was not threatened and (c) those capitalists, moneylenders and professional classes who held land purely as an investment.229 Already section 30 of the tenancy Act (XVI of 1887) empowered a Revenue Officer, when the revenue of any land had been suspended or remitted, to suspend or remit the rent of the land, whatever the nature of the may be. The question that arose was - should the rent be suspended or remitted if a fraction of the land revenue had been suspended or remitted? Or should this be done only when the harvest

228. Ibid.
was a complete failure in which case the tenant would have no produce at all in any case? If the benefits of a revenue suspension were to be extended to a tenant then how would the landlord recover it in case of a change of tenant during the period of suspension and due date of payment? In the course of this discussion it emerged that in fact the provisions of section 30 of the Tenancy Act were not properly applicable to a rent which was a definite share of the produce, and that in practice the section never had been enforced with respect to such lands.\textsuperscript{230} It was now proposed to legislate to this effect and clarify that this provision would apply to (1) rent payable in kind of which the amount is fixed and (2) cash rents.\textsuperscript{231} Officials argued that in Punjab it was rare for an occupancy tenant to be denied a share in the benefit, from remission or suspension of land revenue. Also while legally the tenants-at-will were not covered by this section, in Punjab "the demand for tenants is greater than the supply and they are able to make their own terms with their landlords".\textsuperscript{232} It was also felt that "a well-to-do tenant who happens to have the means in a bad year may prefer to pay up when he can rather than wait for the order of realisation of the land revenue, and voluntary payments

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
of this nature by a tenant to his landlord should not be interfered with. 233 (emphasis added).

It was proposed to give revenue officers the right to remit cash rents or rents payable in kind for land of which revenue had been remitted. The order passed in favour of the tenant was to be enforceable by means of the imposition of a fine which could be recovered as if it were an arrear of land revenue. This was done so that the landlord should not be free, as under the prevailing law, to accept liability under sub-sections (5) for the payment of his own suspended land revenue and to realize the suspended rent by threatening his tenant with eviction. 234 However, government was not bound to refund the fine imposed on the landlord. The revenue officer was not directed to offer a refund in all cases. Even during the depression; government was not willing to straightaway sanction remissions. In fact two of the prominent members of the Abiana Committee, set up to enquire into the question whether remission was called for, argued that reduction in water rates was neither 'practicable', nor 'justifiable'. 235 While the other members of the Committee pointed out that peasants assets had suffered terribly:

233. Ibid.
234. Ibid.
"Not only as compared with the boom period, but also as compared with 1905-06, a year which really marks the end of a by-gone economic era. The economic handicap which the price level of agricultural produce today imposes on the agriculturists vis-à-vis the price level of 1905-06 is very grave indeed when we consider the distance of time which separates the two periods and the gulf of entirely changed economic parities which intervene between the two points of time. In the intervening period land revenue has been enhanced at least once in every part of the province. Water-rates have been revised the disadvantage of the occupier during the same period at least once on every canal and more than once on some of the canals. In the case of all valuable crops, all crops which in normal times used to bring in money, the revision of rates has resulted in an immense rise, the rise in the case of cotton, sugar-cane and wheat being no less than 120, 112 and 110 per cent respectively. The combined effects of unprecedented slump in prices, abnormally high water-rates, a vigorous system of the collection of government dues, and the crushing burden of indebtedness have reduced the agriculturist to an economic wreck, and it is up to government now to rescue him."

The Committee recommended a reduction of Rs. 1 crore considering that a figure lower than that would "take away from the effectiveness of the relief which is urgently needed." This figure, it was pointed out, represented I.D. Peeny, official member on the Abiana Committee argued against grant of remissions on water-rates on the grounds that little benefit would accrue to the tenant from such a measure; since on land under cash rents the relief or burden would fall on landlords.

236. Ibid., p.39.
in any case while batai rents were not easily adjusted to changes. A reduction in occupiers’ rate would prompt the landlord to attempt to appropriate increased rent, though his success would depend on the relative strength vis-a-vis the tenant. Given the prevailing high pitch of rents, Penny was inclined to believe that landlords were likely to succeed in this effort:

“a reduction in abiana will not with any certainty benefit the poorest classes of the agricultural population in Canal irrigated areas.”

Despite the official member’s fervent plea against it, the depression years saw remissions being granted - the only time when remissions were granted on account of fall in prices - although of only up to Rs. 50 lakhs, which was far below what the Abiana Committee had recommended, and negligible in view of the hike in water charges in the years immediately preceding the Depression.

The granting of these remissions could not have brought relief to all, though. The settlement report for Lyallpur district recorded that:

“many poor peasants maintain that it is only the more vocal and influential cultivators who derive benefit from it. The fact that many inferior villages of poor angli cultivators situated far away on the fringes of Samundri and Toba Tek Singh tahsil have never been allowed a single acre of kharābā lends colour to this complaint. It will

be argued that the peasants themselves are to blame, as they never care to apply for remissions; but the absence of claims, in some measure is due to the conviction that the result will not be fruitful.  

**Conclusion**

In conclusion we may note the following trends with regard to the land revenue and irrigation charges: the land revenue from the Colony districts increased remarkably during these years; while the increase in cultivated area was also notable, it could not keep pace with the former. Consequently apart from an absolute increase, the incidence per acre was accompanied by an increase in cesses and other dues, further contributing to the burden on the peasantry. Government’s search for avenues for increase also led to its attempts at scaling revenue on various grounds such as improvement in land and productivity, increase in prices, security provided by irrigation all of which contributed to an ever-increasing estimate of net assets which constituted the basis of assessment. Further use of cash rents as the basis for the cultivation of net assets was in itself doubtful, and definitely worked against the smaller cultivators, who usually cultivated poorer lands. When in 1928 revenue for land was fixed at quarter-net assets as against half net assets earlier  

238. S.R. Lyallpur, 1940, p.20.
the total demand contrary to logic went up, that too during and just after the depression years. We also discuss the process of distribution of water, the problems faced by those cultivating land at the tail of the distributaries and the harassment cultivators suffered at the hands of the canal bureaucracy. The excessive demand and insecurity of canal supply were together reflected in the incidence of *kharāba*. Government, however, resisted any attempt to link these, and went ahead with abolition of *kharāba* except under special circumstances. The devastation brought about by the depression and the consequent announcement of remissions, though nominal exposed the hollowness of government's claims that revenue assessments were made keeping in mind all contingencies and ought to be paid in good and bad years. The smaller peasants, cultivating bad lands in fact benefitted least from the remissions announced.

What reflection did such a policy find in the pattern of economic development? Where did the peasants, thrown headlong into the all-pervasive 'market' find themselves? How far did the benefits of rising prices reach the peasantry? These are some of the questions we turn to in the next chapter.