Chapter Three
PEASANTS AND RURAL SOCIETY

Rural society was a conglomerate of these who have been generally termed the ‘dominant sections’ and the vast majority who tilled the land and sweated it out. In the previous section (chapter two) we probed into the position of the so called superiors, the kind of influence they enjoyed and the nature of their power. In this chapter, we will try to get a feel of the position of the different sections that engaged in cultivation, how they undertook the task of agricultural production and the manner in which they paid taxes.

Differentiation

The term ‘peasant’ has been used to describe those who cultivate land and pay taxes. In our documents, the terms used are raiyats, haljotas, jotas, asamis, paltis, pahis and gharuhalas. Apart from the term ‘haljota’, which is mostly used in documents to denote peasants in general and ‘raiyat’ which was also often used in a general sense, all others were specific to different sections within the peasantry and hence not inter-changeable. The existence of different categories of peasants follows from differences in the extent to which they were owners of the land
they tilled, the extent to which their implements were their own, 
the extent to which their family labour sufficed, the degree of their 
involvement in the actual task of cultivation and the rates at 
which they paid taxes. The role of caste in this differentiation, is 
best seen as a mesh.

The term ‘raiyat’ mostly appears in documents, in a general 
sense to denote cultivators. The patel, patwari etc were deemed 
separate from raiyats, even though they were also part of the 
peasant body in as much as they also either cultivated land or got 
their personal lands cultivated. In our documents, the patels, 
patwaris, chaudhrys and qanungos are mentioned separately and 
not subsumed under the term ‘raiyat’\(^1\). The uniqueness of their 
position within the peasant world is thus conceded. Cultivators of 
superior castes were usually also not referred to as ‘raiyats’. 
Documents make a distinction between ordinary peasants who are 
termed raiyats and the Brahmans ans Rajputs who are mentioned 
by their castes.\(^2\) The term ‘samast raiyat’ is used to mean the 
entire body of cultivators\(^3\). ‘Raiyati vasinda’ implied resident

\(^1\) Arzdashta dated Asoj Vadi 9, V.S. 1706/AD 1649; Chithi to Amil, pargana 
Narnual, Asadh Vadi 10, V.S. 1820/ AD 1763; Chithi to Amil, pargana 
Ajabgarh, Chait Sudi 2, V.S. 1785/ AD 1728.

\(^2\) Chithi to Amil, pargana Niwai, Fagun Vadi 12, V.S. 1810/ AD 1753 It is 
reported that the zarayati of Brahmans and raiyats has been destroyed. 
Arhsatta Laisot, V.S. 1794/A.D.1737, where it is stated that the Patel 
Rajputs and Raiyats were fined.

\(^3\) Chithi to Amil, pargana Bahatri, Asoj Vadi 4, V.S. 1820/ AD 1763; The 
state insisted that the new patwari be appointed with consent of ‘samast 
raiyat’; Also see Amber Record, Bhadva Sudi 13, V.S. 1855/ AD 1798
cultivators. Sometimes 'raiyati' and 'vasinda' are mentioned separately. The term 'gaveti' is also used in documents to denote those who belonged to the village i.e. the resident cultivators. 'Jotas' were the tenants. They sometimes undertook cultivation in villages other than their own. The term 'vasidar' appears in document in connection with the establishment of kotris by zamindars and jagirdars. Whenever officials were directed to help in the establishment of kotris, instructions were given to settle 'vasidars' in the village.

The term 'palti' was used to denote peasants of castes such as the Jats, Malis, Gujars, Ahirs and Meenas. Occasionally, the term was used to refer to the new cultivators, who had migrated to a village and in one case at least, Brahmans and Rajputs are also included in the category of paltis and listed as 'izafa asamis'. The paltis seem to have constituted the largest section within the

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4 Chithi to Raval Ji Shri Sher Singh Ji and Bakshi Ram Ji, from Diwan Syonath, Sawan Sudi 10, V.S. 1811/ AD 1754; Chithi to Sawan Vadi 6, V.S. 1816/ AD 1759; Chithi to Bhadva Sudi 10, V.S. 1834 / 1777
5 Chithi, Asoj Vadi 10, V.S. 1812/ AD 1755.
6 Chithi to Amil, paragana Pindayan, Fagun Sudi 14, V.S. 1823/ AD 1766; The ijaradar, in this document, reports that cultivation in village Hasanpur has always been done by jotas of Kasba Harsana. Now, he complains, that the Amil has prohibited the jotas of Harsana from cultivating land in Hasanpura.
7 Chithi to Amil, Paragana Tonk, Vaisakh Vadi 3, V.S. 1809/ AD 1752; Chithi Pos Vadi 5, V.S. 1815/ AD 1758; Chithi Asadh Vadi 14, V.S. 1816/ AD 1759.
9 Haqiqati hal bail paragana Chatsu, 1666 A.D. cited by S.P. Gupta in The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan c. 1650-1750, p. 120.
peasantry. They were inferior in status in comparison to the
gharuhalas and less privileged. They paid land revenue according
to the raiyati dostoor, which was substantially higher than what
the gharuhalas paid.\textsuperscript{10} Though mostly poor, the paltis were not
uniformly landless and resourceless. Some had their own
holdings, some had ploughs and bullocks.\textsuperscript{11} Some amongst them
cultivated the lands of zamindars, udikis etc and some cultivated
the lands of the rich peasants.\textsuperscript{12} The state was keen to get them to
cultivate wasteland and land abandoned. To colonize villages and
rehabilitate the ruined ones, it was mostly paltis and pahis who
were induced to settle. They were lured with concessions.\textsuperscript{13} Once
settled, they acquired rights over land. Paltis with resources,
especially ‘hal’ and ‘bail’ were preferred by the state. In comparison
with the resourceless, those fortunate enough to possess
resources, must have had a certain measure of bargaining power.
Their could not possibly have been a case of complete

\textsuperscript{10} For comparison of the two, see Dilbagh Singh, “Caste and the Structure of
Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan during the Eighteenth Century” in

\textsuperscript{11} Arzdashta dated Asadh Sudi 4 V.S. 1762/A.D.1705; Arzdashta dated Jaith
Sudi 15, V.S. 1762/A.D. 1705. The Paltis of Rampur Sadi, it is said owned
seven plough.

\textsuperscript{12} Nihalchand Moti Ram Mahajan of Kasba Sanganer did gharuhala kheti in
village Shikarpura. He reported that for some time his land remained
uncultivated and now when he wishes to start cultivation again, the
expenses are prohibitive. He then got a patta for vih and got paltis to
cultivate his gharu land. See Chithi to Amil, Kasba Sanganar, Vaisakh
Sudi 13, V.S. 1822/ AD 1765

\textsuperscript{13} Paltis were given riyayati patta and the abandoned village was resettled,
Arzdashta, Asadh Vadi 2, V.S.1762/A.D. 1705; Arzdashta dated Jaith Sudi
15, V.S.1762/A.D.1705; Arzdashta dated Asadh Sudi 4, V.S.
1762/A.D/1705.
powerlessness and extreme exploitation, considering the situation of land abundance and labour scarcity. Umpteen number of documents testify to the fact that the state directed officials to console paltis and get them to continue to cultivate. Paltis of Rampur Sadi, when they deserted to village, were immediately consoled and brought back. Paltis, with their labour potential became assets during times of scarcity when villages were abandoned. At such times, paltis could rise up the hierarchical order. The protection of paltis, not in the sense of complete freedom from exploitation, but in the sense of care taken to prevent their exploitation from going overboard, seems to have been an axiom of the state agrarian policy.

The dependence of not just the state and the superiors but also of the higher ups within the peasant world, on the manpower provided by paltis, was qualitatively different from the dependence of the state, the superiors and the peasants on the money lending classes. (We have discussed this in Chapter Two). The latter added to the power of the money lenders in rural society. The former, at best gave to the paltis, a certain measure of bargaining power, without obliterating the fact of their dependence on the state, the superiors and the rich peasants. The dependence of paltis on these

14 Ibid., the term used in this context is 'विलासा'.
15 Arzdashta, Jaith Sudi 1, V.S. 1762/A.D.1705.
three entities was not of a uniform kind. Those without land, cultivated the lands of superiors, those without implements borrowed these or borrowed money with which to buy these, those unable to survive took loans for consumption needs. Even when they borrowed from the state, paltis had to furnish malzamini of patels, zamindars etc. They often mortgaged land and were reduced to the status of tenants, share cropper or labourers. Paltis not only paid higher rates of revenue, they also bore almost the entire burden of malba. Besides, they owed to the superiors, a variety of other services, sanctioned by custom.

Less numerous than the gavetis were pahis, who were essentially migratory cultivators. They could be either the residents of neighbouring villages or those who had deserted their original villages. They were mostly inferior by caste and status. Occasionally those from the higher castes also became pahis. The basis of the distinction between pahis and gavetis was the fact of their residence in the village. Though by and large poor, no

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17 Yad-dashti, dated V.S. 1783/ AD 1726 Mano Mahajan of Village Samota is mentioned as a pahi in mauza Woharkhi, Pargana Malarna ; Arhsatta Lalsot VS 1794/ AD 1737 A Brahman pahi of mauza Vadkopado cultivated land in Devali. Similarly Bakhto Brahmin of Bras was a pahi in mauza Khanpur See Satish Chandra, “Structure and Stratification in the Village Society in Eastern Rajasthan” in Medieval India Society, The Jagirdari Crisis and the Village, 1982, p.27. Also see Arhsatta, Lalsot, V.S. 1794/A.D.1737, Harji Brahman is mentioned as a Pahi of mauza Vadkopado, who cultivated land in mauza Devali.
summary conclusions about their economic and social conditions are possible. Those with hal and bail were better off and these were more likely to be singled out by the state for concessions. Those of high caste could become gharuhalas over time. The terms and conditions of the concessions offered to pahis varied regionally and depended on factors such as the availability of cultivable wasteland and the need to rehabilitate ruined villages. Considerable effort seems to have been made to get pahis to cultivate virgin and abandoned land.\textsuperscript{18} It is infact in the state's treatment of pahis that the exercise of compensatory power (i.e. submission won through the offer of affirmative reward) can be best understood. Through the offer of concessions in the payment of land revenue, through help extended in the construction of chhappars, through the allotment of more land to them in comparison to the ordinary cultivators, the pahis' labour potential and whatever resources they had, was put to use in the interest of the state. It may be safely concluded that the vulnerability of pahis due to the insecurity in their land tenure, their dependence on the moneyed sections for loans as well as agricultural equipment and the inferiority of their status, must have mellowed down, to some extent at least, by their labour potential which rendered them invaluable in a land abundant and scarce labour situation.

\textsuperscript{18} Chithi to Amil, pargana Chatsu, Pos Sudi 14, V.S. 1820/A.D.1763, Pahis were called to cultivate land and given pattas of vato chautho.
The ‘gharuhalas’ derived their privileged position, either by virtue of their caste or on the basis of their position in the administrative machinery. It was mostly the upper castes—Brahmans, Rajputs and Mahajans who were accorded the gharuhala status, besides the village and pargana level functionaries. There seems to be some difference of opinion among scholars as regards use of the term ‘riyayati’ as a substitute for gharuhalas,¹⁹ the extent of use of hired labour by gharuhalas²⁰ and the caste element in the gharuhala tenure²¹. The picture is complicated and the evidence sketchy. The term riyayati does appear in some documents, though not as an equivalent of the term gharuhala. In a chithi dated Mageshra Sudi 15, V.S. 1820/AD 1763, Saligram Kanungo of pargana Niwai reports that the Amil consoled him, got land cultivated and issued a riyayati patta.

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²⁰ R.P. Rana has argued that a moderate use of hired labour was essential for gharuhala cultivation. He has cited evidence of the spread of gharuhala holdings of individuals over several villages. See “Agrarian Revolts in Northern India during the late 17th and early 18th century”, IESHR, Vol. XVIII Nos 3 & 4, Pg. 290, foot note 21. Rana has thus modified Dilbagh Singh’s argument that gharuhala cultivation was carried on with the help of family labour only.

²¹ Though gharuhalas were mostly of the higher castes, as suggested by Dilbagh Singh, Harbans Mukhia has cited two cases of oil-pressers paying land revenue at concessional rates. See “Illegal Extortions From Peasants, Artisans and Meanials in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th Century” IESHR, Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1977, Pg. 238.
In another chithi dated Kati Vadi 8, V.S. 1820/ AD 1763, it is reported that a Meena of village Malahpura, pargana Dausa wishes to bring waste land under cultivation and wants ‘riyayat’ in vih-vat. In both these documents and several others, ‘riyayat’ means concessions. Since the gharuhalas always paid revenue at concessional rates, they were in that sense, riyayatis. Not all upper castes were however riyayatis and those of lower castes were also riyayatis without necessarily being gharuhalas. Interestingly in several documents the term gharuhala is not used for those who paid at concessional rates. In several chithis, Amils were instructed by the state to take revenue at concessional rates from petitioners, without referring to them as gharuhalas. Absence of the term ‘gharuhala’ in these documents, was in all likelihood, not an act of omission and an error since it was harassment over shares which was being reported by the petitioners and in circumstances like these, the petitioners, had they been

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22 R.P. Rana has cited evidence to show that only those Rajputs who were armed and offered service to the Raja and those Brahmans who recited the gayatri mantra, enjoyed concessions in revenue demand. “Agrarian Revolts......” Pg 291, foot note 22.

23 Perna, Syama and Bihari Meena of Mauza Bhagotsar paid at the riyayati dastoor of 1/4 th, Chithi to Amil, pargana Chatsu, Pos Sudi 12, V.S. 1816/A.D. 1759.

24 Chithi to Amil, pargana Narayana, Sawan Vadi 7, V.S. 1810/ AD 1753; Chithi to Shri Saligram Ji Sah Shri Raj Ram, from Diwan Raja Hargovind Kanhiram, Asadh Sudi 9, V.S. 1810/ AD 1753; Chithi to Amil, Kasba Sanganer, Chait Vadi 11, V.S. 1809/ AD 1752; Chithi to Amil, pargana Maujavadi, Jaith Vadi 1, V.S. 1810/ AD 1753
gharuhalas, would have been tempted to highlight their privileged position, let alone mention it.

What was supremely important in the gharuhala tenure was the ability to provide inputs in terms of ploughs, bullocks, seed, manure, irrigation facilities etc. The higher castes had a natural advantage, since they were better placed in terms of resources needed for agriculture. They leased out ploughs and livestock to the paltis, pahis and labourers. Some owned large holdings, spread over several villages\textsuperscript{25} and hired labour to cultivate these. Gharuhalas entered into various kinds of sanjha arrangements as well\textsuperscript{26}. In return for assets lent out, the poor mortgaged their land to gharuhalas. The tendency of gharuhala holdings to expand through mortgage and purchase, was pronounced over the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{27} Despite official curbs\textsuperscript{28}, land passed into the hands of gharuhalas, setting in motion, a vicious cycle, which made the poor poorer. The real value of the gharuhala tenure lay in its

\textsuperscript{25} Chithi to Amil, pargana Maujavadi, Pos adi 7, V.S. 1808 / AD 1751; The petitioner, whose name is unclear did kheti in Kasba Maujavadi, Jaisinghpura and Akhaipurya; Chithi to Audhadar, Baspurtha, Bhadva Sudi 11, V.S. 1818/ AD 1761; Swami Jeevaram did Kheti in Baspurtha and Lavayana

\textsuperscript{26} Dilbagh Singh, \textit{The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century}, Delhi, Manohar, p. 27

\textsuperscript{27} Dilbagh Singh, \textit{The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century}, Delhi, Manohar, p 20, 202, 203 etc.

\textsuperscript{28} Chithi dated Bhadva Sudi 10, V.S. 1783/ AD 1726; A Sarkar's Charakar who had mortgaged land, wells etc of several raiyats was reprimanded and the state ordered that these be resumed in Khalisa and handed back to the raiyats.
entitlement to assessment according to the riyayati dastoor as well as complete or partial exemption from malba. It is important to note that although the grant of such concessions to the higher castes was an old tradition in Rajasthan, some sort of a confirmation by the state was required. During times of payment of revenue, Amils frequently demanded sanads from gharuhalas, to uphold their claims of concessions and Gharuhalas requested the state for sanads, specifying details of their tenures.29

Agricultural labourers were without rights over crop as well as land. They are referred to as 'halis' and 'majurs' in documents. In return for labour they were entitled to wages or 'majuri'. There were different kinds of labourers. Some relied totally on majuri while some took to part time agricultural labour to supplement their meagre incomes. The hard pressed raiyats belonged to the latter category. Vasidars of bhomias derived special advantages on account of their caste affinity with the bhomia. Their residence in the vasi of the bhomia, in a way, set them apart from the village community. Together with the Kamins, the labourers fulfilled the labour needs of the entire land owning peasantry. We know very little about the exact method of their remuneration. What is for sure however is that agricultural labourers were scare, hence the

29 Chithi to Amil, paragana Malpura, Asoj Vadi 2, V.S. 1809/ AD 1752; Chithi to Amil pargana Tonk, Mageshra Vadi 2, V.S. 1811/AD 1754 Chithi to Amil pargana Maujavadi, Jeth Sudi 8, V.S. 1822/ AD 1765.
effort to attract them. Theoretically, some power must have accrued to them, owing to their scarcity in a land abundant situation – the power not to govern and rule, but certainly a power to bargain, howsoever inabsolute.

Kamins were the menials and artisans of the village. They were also known as ‘naniponis’ or ‘begaris’. According to the caste based hierarchy, they were the lowliest, usually from castes like Chamars, Thoris and Balahis. The social disabilities suffered by them went hand in hand with the customary exaction of begar from them. Kamins served both as full time as well as part time agricultural labourers. Their labour services were particularly called for during the sowing and harvesting seasons. The artisans amongst them were better placed for they paid revenue at concessional rates, could possess land and were exempted from several other dues. As the most depressed section of rural society, kamins were particularly vulnerable to famines and draught.

What emerges is a very tentative picture. Generalizations as to the exact position of the different categories of peasants is best avoided, until such time at least, when we are on surer grounds. What is established beyond doubt is that peasants in Eastern Rajasthan in the 17th and 18th centuries certainly don’t constitute
an undifferentiated mass. They are heavily differentiated, be it in terms of economic strength or social status. There are not just gharuhalas, paltis, pahis and labourer but also the rich and the poor gharuhalas, the dependent and the not so dependent paltis, pahis with resources and those without resources and so on. There are various layers, multiple identities and differentially valued positions in society. There are relationships of inferiority and superiority and pockets of dependence and interdependence even within the peasant word. Power configurations are best seen moving along the several axes which differentiate the peasant world.

Interestingly, the official policy is to maintain and even increase differentiation and this is done primarily through the policy of discriminatory taxation. One of the explanations for this may be the desire of the state to maintain the privileged groups within rural society as some kind of an insurance for continuing cultivation in lean years as well as the realization that it was the rich and privileged groups which could expand cultivation and engage in cultivation of superior crops.

The possibility of transformation from one rank to another, within rural society, has to be taken note of. Raiyats sank to the

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30 Satish Chandra, 'Structure and Stratification ....' in 'Medieval India.....'
position of agricultural labourers. Riyayatis became literally rentiers. Gavetis joined the ranks of pahis. Majurs improved their position and became raiyats. Paltis rose up the hierarchy and pahis became chhapparbands.

**Sources of Power within the Peasant World**

In the previous chapter we probed into the position of the superiors, with the intention to understand what went into the making of their positions of power and strength and eminence. Having stressed on the fact that the peasant world was anything but uniformly oppressed and disadvantaged, let us take a closer look at the factors which created within the peasantry, situations of power for some and powerlessness for others.

**Caste**

The connection between caste and power, though undoubted, is slightly complicated. The complication arises because one has to consider both the status that accrued to individuals directly as a result of their position in the caste hierarchy, as well as the power that accrued to them, or was

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31 Chithi to Amil, Pargana Lalsot, Mageshra Vadi 10, V.S. 1821/A.D. 1764.
32 Chithi to Amil, Pargana Mauzabad, Sawan Sudi 9, V.S. 1826/A.D. 1769.
33 Chithi to Amil, pargana Chatsu, Kartik Vadi 3, V.S. 1809/A.D. 1752.
34 Chithi to Amil, pargana Phagi, Mageshra Vadi 14, V.S. 1808/A.D. 1751.
35 Chithi to Amil, pargana Gazi ka Thana, Jaith Vadi 10, V.S. 1811/A.D. 1754.
36 Chithi to Amil, pargana Gazi ka Thana, Sawan Sudi 7, V.S. 1825/A.D. 1768.
appropriated by them in the economic and political sense because of their favourable position in that hierarchy. Caste as a source of power for some and powerlessness for others is best seen in terms of the divisions it creates. There was first the simple division of society into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Each of these had several sub-castes and sub-groups. Members of any and every caste, took to agriculture, without giving up their traditional occupations.36 There was then the division of peasants into the categories of gharuhalas, paltis, pahis, labourers and menials. The caste composition of each of these has been discussed. Gharuhalas belonged by and large to the upper castes – Brahmans, Rajputs and Mahajans. Paltis and pahis were usually from the middle castes such as Jats, Ahirs, Gujars etc. Agricultural Labourers belonged mostly to the low castes and menials were invariably Chamars, Thoris, Balahis etc. We have also discussed the exceptions to this broad rule – that all high castes were not gharuhalas, that the low castes too, could be riyayatis, that those of the high and middle castes could also become pahis and that the middle castes also took to agricultural labour. It was caste again which was the basis of the division of the agrarian class into caste peasants on the one hand and the

36 It has been argued by G.N. Sharma that members of any varna, who found their traditional occupation un-remunerative, took to agriculture. See *Rajasthan Through the Ages*, Vol. II, p. 259.
menial labourers on the other. From the inequalities perpetuated by the caste system rose situations of power and powerlessness within rural society. The situations was complicated and cannot be understood merely in terms of the 'powerful high caste vs. the powerless low caste' notion. Without undermining the inequalities and injustices which were a hallmark of the caste system, I would like to argue that caste did not create conditions of complete and total power for some and utter powerlessness for others.

Caste was both an entitlement to material well being as well as a re-inforcement of the situation inherited from the past. It has been shown on the basis of documentary evidence that there was considerable difference in the economic position of the various castes. In qasba Chatsu, Rajputs had an average of four bullocks each, Lodhas, Deswalis and Nagoris had three each, Malis Gujars, Telis, Brahmin and Kayasthas had two each, while the Meenas had only one bullock each. Rajputs were thus best placed. Brahmins and Kayasthas were assessed at lower rates and probably had other means of income. Malis Telis Gujars and Meenas were the worst off. The upper castes must have owned

37 See Irfan Habib, “Caste in Indian History” in Essays in Indian History, Towards a Marxist Perception, p. 177. Habib wrote of these as the “two antagonistic camps”.

38 Satish Chandra, “Structure and Stratification in the Village society in Eastern Rajasthan” in Medieval India: Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village, p. 23. This article had been published earlier in conjunction with Dilbagh Singh in Proceedings, IHC, XXXIII, 1972.

39 Ibid.
more land as well as resources. Besides, it was mostly the upper castes which were assessed at concessional rates.

Caste also constituted the backdrop for inter-relationships within rural society. All kinds of relationships - exploitative, egalitarian, conflict ridden or consensual, were mediated by caste, though not necessarily constrained by it. It has been shown how caste ties roused peasants to collective action. We will see in a later section (Ch. V) how collaborations, collusions etc within the peasant world were mediated by caste.

**Land and Resources**

From the unequal access to land and resources arose several imbalances and dependencies in rural society. The connection between clan affiliation and land control has been discussed in chapter two. The relationship between land and resource (cattle, ploughs etc) ownership and caste has also been underlined in the previous section. Our documents suggest that ownership of land on a hereditary basis was the general rule. Those who brought virgin land under cultivation were recognized as proprietors. They enjoyed immense security of tenure. Even in

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the early period of colonization, tillers of land had been by the large left undisturbed. Assignments and land grants by rulers also did not come in way of the long established rights of cultivators.\textsuperscript{42} In our region, we hear of owners of land, who had abandoned cultivation and migrated, returning after years and claiming back their land. As long as peasants cultivated their land or got it cultivated and paid taxes, they could not be dispossessed. Along with this basic right, which was upheld by the state, however, come an obligation – the obligation to remain on land and till it and the state was equally adamant about the fulfillment of this obligation. Considering the situation of land plenty and labour scarcity the state policy i.e. keenness to offer to peasants security of occupancy without conceding to them the right of abandonment, was natural. Land ownership in 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th}c Eastern Rajasthan, therefore did not confer upon individuals, the right to abuse their private land. Leaving land uncultivated and abandoning it was tantamount to an offence. (We will discuss this in Chapter V and VI). We hear of individuals being fined for leaving land uncultivated. We also have proof of diligent search of peasants who had run away and inducements to bring them back.

\textsuperscript{42} We have the classic case of a Brahmin grantee being told by the Jat proprietor that he would be given everything the king had a right to i.e. the tax and that patrimony would not be surrendered. \textit{Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan}, Vol. I by James Tod, p. 406.
Although land had "no intrinsic value"\textsuperscript{43} as such, it cannot be completely under played. Land under cultivation and the better situated fields were still, valued possessions, though certainly not as valued as in the later times. This is borne out of the fact that land was often the subject of disputes.\textsuperscript{44} (We will discuss this in the next chapter) and when land changed hands (as for instance in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, when a large number of the rich peasants purchased or mortgaged the lands of the poor raiyats) the repercussions for rural society were serious.

The possession of resources (ploughs, bullocks etc) needed to cultivate land was an important source of power. It instantly increased the possessors' reckoning in society as well as in the eyes of the state. Our documents, whenever they list the peasants of a particular village or those who had come to a village to bring land under cultivation, mention the number of ploughs and sometimes cattle brought in. We know of poor peasants being dependent on those who owned cattle and implements and lent these. This dependence was very real, tangible and immediate and so was the power which the lenders consequently enjoyed over their debtors. Control over sufficient resources, at a time when

\textsuperscript{43} Irfan Habib, "The social distribution of Landed Property in pre-British India: A Historical Survey" in "Essays in Indian History", p. 92.

\textsuperscript{44} Madhavi Bajekal, \textit{Rural Disputes in Eastern Rajasthan in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century}, M.Phil Dissertation, CHS/SSS/JNU, 1980 (unpublished).
they were in great demand to bring land under cultivation, would have given to the resource owner, an opportunity to realize his own interest and impose his will on others. Enormous power would naturally accrue to the resourceful. Besides, we have evidence of more land being allocated to those who had resources. Possession of resources was thus so valued, that it also became an entitlement to more favourable treatment in the allocation of land.

Money

The nature of power that accrued to individuals by way of money is best evident in the position and status of moneylenders in rural society. We have discussed in, Chapter II, the kind of influence moneylenders enjoyed in society. We have also discussed their advantaged position in relationships with peasants as well as the leverage they had in dealings with the state and the ruling classes. The power that moneylenders enjoyed was a power that arose out of the strength of their purse. It was born of the financial dependence of entities of all kinds i.e. their need for money. It was on the strength of the money at their disposal that moneylenders acquired land, as well as offices and also tracts on ijara. It may not be farfetched to say that in the rise of moneylenders to eminence, we see money power competing with traditional leadership of the village and the dominance of caste, clan etc. The poor and needy were dependent on the money lent out by moneylenders.
Indebtedness added to the vulnerability of the needy. Usury intensified exploitation. The state sought to minimize exploitation by the moneyed sections, if not control it. So essential was the availability of credit for agricultural production that the state seemed concerned to ensure a harmonious relationship between moneylenders and peasants. As providers of credit, moneylenders and the state complemented each others' efforts. What is interesting to note is that the process of distribution of 'tagai' also generated power for some. Since tagai was distributed through the dominant groups of the region, some within society were in the enviable position to be able to advice the state on the feasibility of granting tagai to individuals and help decide who was credit worthy.

So uneven was the availability of credit within the peasant world, that while the well endowed amassed fortunes, the poor often abandoned cultivation due to non-availability of credit. There were thus the moneyed sections and those without money and the relationship between them was essentially of an exploitative nature. This did not however rule out the possibility of collaborations between these two sections. We also come across instances of peasants siding with providers of credit against bhomias and jagirdars etc.
It is in the large scale sale and purchase of offices that the importance of money in power play is best exemplified. Offices were purchased by those who had money. The moneyed sections would thereby make a dent in the existing pattern of dominance. Money was thus able to shape and alter the existing power configurations.

Office

Whether or not one was part of the administrative machinery made immense difference in one’s status. We have already discussed the distinguished position of the Patel in rural society. We have also discussed the kind of power enjoyed by Chaudhries, Qanungos, Patwaris etc., the emoluments they were entitled to, the concessions extended to them, their jurisdiction as well as responsibilities. What needs to be born in mind is that by conferring offices and hence power on individuals, the state was not creating seats of power out of dust. It was mostly not non-entities, but the leading men, the dominant ones, who were absorbed into the state machinery. Hence official position as a source of power is better understood in terms of additions to the powers of individuals.
Agricultural Production

Agriculture was in a sense the matrix of rural society. It governed the lives of the majority living in the countryside. Without due attention to this basic, primary act – the act of agricultural production – one cannot understand rural society, the way it functions, the power structure etc.

Eastern Rajasthan is a semi-arid region with alluvial soil of different kinds. The soil, if it is irrigated, can grow diverse crops. Rainfall is sparse and uncertain. There is no major perennial river in the region with the exception of Banas. Due to the limited sources of irrigation and the dependence on rains, agriculture entailed risks and irrigation facilities were crucial. So unpredictable was rainfall and so much depended on it that documents are full of inquiries by the state about rainfall and reports from officials about the rainfall conditions. Besides rain, wells and tanks were used to irrigate land. Ecological constraints rendered irrigation facilities indispensable. Several documents testify to the change in fortunes of villages with the development of irrigation facilities, especially wells. Over the 17th and 18th centuries, Eastern Rajasthan witnessed a strengthening of its

45 Dilbagh Singh, The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century, Delhi, Manohar, p. 51.
irrigation network.\textsuperscript{46} Equally important for agricultural production was the availability of bullocks, ploughs, seed, manure etc.

Considering the unequal position of sections of the peasants vis-à-vis their potential to invest in agriculture, considering also the indespensibility of these investments (be it in the need for cattle, ploughs, seed, manure or irrigation facilities) due to ecological handicaps of the region, the reliance of a substantial number of them, both on moneylenders as well as the state becomes clear. The poor peasants borrowed ploughs, bullocks, seed etc. or money to buy these. Tagai was advanced by the state for the requirements of agricultural production.

Economic differentiation within the peasantry had a bearing on agriculture. Superior crops, with their requirement of larger investments, were largely the prerogative of the rich. The higher returns on these crops benefited the rich and this in turn enabled them to extend and enlarge their holdings and grow superior food crops.\textsuperscript{47} The poor and ordinary peasants depended on kharif cultivation of millet and a few leguminous crops.\textsuperscript{48} There was considerable difference in the size of holdings cultivated by the

\textsuperscript{46} Dilbagh Singh, \textit{The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century}, Delhi, Manohar, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{47} Dilbagh Singh, \textit{The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century}, Delhi, Manohar, p. 58

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 59
peasants. Regardless of economic differentiation, most cultivators grew more than one crop. Rotation of crops was practiced. A large proportion of land was under double cropping. Rabi crops needed more capital investment. Inter cropping was known.

**Economic Trends**

Mid 17th to mid 18th century was a period of growth and development in the agrarian economy of Eastern Rajasthan. The area under cultivation increased. There was an increase in the production of cash crops accompanied by a proportionate increase in production of the rabi harvest as compared to the kharif. This signified investment in agriculture on a considerable scale, since the cultivation of cash crops and rabi crops both required greater inputs. The development of irrigation facilities around this time has been noted.

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49 Dilbagh Singh, *The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century*, Delhi, Manohar, p. 57. He mentions 37 crops of the kharif harvest and 18 of rabi.

50 S.P. Gupta “The Agrarian........” Pg. 43; Dilbagh Singh, *The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century*, Delhi, Manohar, p. 55


54 Dilbagh Singh, *The State*......, p. 52
century prices registered an upward trend and consequently there was an increase in the cultivation of zabti crops.

By the second half of the 18th C, the upswing of the previous century had given way to a regressive trend in the economy. The area under cultivation shrank. Agricultural output fell. Area under the cultivation of rabi crops shrunk even more. From roughly 1740 A.D, agricultural prices fell sharply. The state’s realization of revenue declined. Jagirdars complained of inability to survive due to ‘Sabab Kam hasili’. We come across several complaints about tankhwahs and darmahas not being paid on

55 S.N. Hasan and S.P. Gupta, “Price of Food Grains in the Territories of Amber (c. 1650-1750)” Proceedings of Indian History Congress, 1968, Pg. 345-68; Also see S.P. Gupta’s, The Agrarian......, p. 89.
56 Chithi to Amil, pargana Narnaul, Fagun Sudi 2 V.S. 1823/AD 1766; A zamindar’s son complains that these days cultivation has decreased, due to which he cannot realize hasil fully; Also see Dilbagh Singh, The State.... p. 61
57 Dilbagh Singh, The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century, Delhi, Manohar, p. 61; Also see Yaddashti, V.S. 1825/A.D.1768; Chithi to Amil, Pargana Lalsot, Jaith Sudi 9, V.S. 1819/A.D. 1762; Chithi to Amil, pargana Gaji Ka Thana Asoj Vadi 4, V.S. 1819/A.D.1762; Chithi to Amil, pargana Chatsu, Jaith Sudi 15, V.S. 1819/A.D.1762; Chithi to Amil, pargana Malpura, Mageshra Sudi 11, V.S.1823/A.D.1766.
58 S.N. Hasan and S.P. Gupta, “Prices of Food Grains in the Territories of Amber (1650-1750)” PIHC, 1967-68, p. 353; Dilbagh Singh, The State........, pp. 66, 87; Also see Chthi to Amil, pargana Bahatri, Kati Sudi 3, V.S. 1823/ AD 1766; The ijardar of Kasba Rini complains that he cannot survive due to cheapness of grain. His ijara was consequently resumed in Khalsa.
59 Dilbagh Singh, The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century, Delhi, Manohar, p. 199.
60 Yad-dashti, V.S. 1820/ AD 1763; Jagirdar Ranch hod Das Bagh Singh Khangarot of mauza Khediram, pargana Maujavadi reported that he could not continue in service due to ‘sabab kam hasili’; Also see Chthi to Amil, pargana Udehi, Kati Vadi 9, V.S.1819/A.D. 1762; Yad-dashti, V.S. 1824/A.D.1767; Chithi to Amil, pargana, Fagui Chait Vadi 12, V.S.1819/A.D.1762; Chithi to Amil, pargana Chatsu, Bhadva Vadi 10, V.S.1823/A.D.1766.
time. There was relative decline in volume of inland trade and dislocation of inter-pargana trade.

**Land Revenue**

It was essentially the extraction of resources from peasants in the form of land revenue and other cesses, which kept the entire structure going. The exercise of power, its differential distribution, the inequalities which emerged and resistance—all hinged on the primary act of payment of land revenue by those who cultivated land.

Total revenue extracted can be disaggregated into three heads – mal-o-jihat, sair-jihat and sawai jamabandi. Mal-o-jihat (comprising of the revenue realized from crops by batai jinsi, zabti etc. and the cesses levied to meet expenses incurred during assessment and collection) and sair-jihat (comprised of non agricultural taxes like customary fees, transit duties etc as well as agricultural taxes) together constituted the muafiq jamabandi (revenue realized according to assessment) Mal-o-jihat constituted the bulk of the taxes levied on peasants. Over and above the assessed revenue came siwai jamabandi. It comprised of a variety

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61 Chithi Vaisakh Vadi 6, V.S. 1818/A.D.1761; Chithi to Amil, pargana Narayana, Vaisakh Sadi 9, V.S. 1819/A.D.1762; Chithi to Audhadar, Vaaspurya, Bhadva Sudi 14, V.S. 1819/A.D. 1762; Chithi to Sah Shri Gulab Chand Ji, Asoj Vadi 4, V.S. 1820/A.D.1763.

of taxes and included both increase in demand as well as new imposts. Siwai jamabandi was not a light imposition.63

The total burden of taxes upon peasants therefore comprised both of the basic land revenue (which was approximately 33%64 of the produce) as well as various other cesses (which added up to another 9-10%65) Peasants thus parted with a little less than half of what they produced. This burden was far from equitable. The system of taxation was most burdensome for those already most burdened. Concessionaries paid lesser, were exempted from a lot of cesses and mostly did not pay malba. Ordinary mortals paid nearly 15% to 25% more.66 Such a blatantly discriminatory taxation policy furthered existing disparities. Besides, the rich and powerful shifted part of their own burden on to the commoners.

Assessment was done both by zabti as well as batai jinsi methods. Batai, despite being more cumbersome a method for the state, was allowed. For peasants, its advantage lay in the fact that risks of crop failure could be shared. Revenue rates under zabti

64 33% according to Dilbagh Singh and 1/3rd according to S.P. Gupta.
65 9% according to Dilbagh Singh, *The State.....*, p. 113) and 1/10th according to S.P. Gupta, “*The Agrarian......*, p. 155)
66 Dilbagh Singh, *The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century*, Delhi, Manohar, p. 113
were worked out on the basis of a number factors such as soil fertility, crop quality, irrigation etc. The zabti rates for a particular crop varied both within a village as well as between villages. Zabti was advantageous for peasants during price rise. So complex was the entire system of assessment and collection of revenue that we have evidence of collusions and collaborations to work loopholes to one’s maximum advantage. Peasants declared irrigated land as unirrigated, zabti crops were declared batai jinsi and gharuhala status was misused to get ordinary peasant’s land assessed at a concessional rate. We will discuss these in Chapter V.