CHAPTER – IV

Condition of the Peasantry

Formulation of the Land policy in Oudh sidelined the interest of the cultivating classes. They were left at the mercy and will of the landlords, who left no opportunity to oppress them. The government neither had the intention nor the will to improve the condition of the peasantry. It had its own interest in safeguarding the dominant position of taluqdars in Oudh. Land settlements were made keeping in view the interest of the landlords. The high assessment of revenue demand from the government was passed over to the cultivators in the form of enhancement of rents. The landlords neither took any measures to increase the productivity of the land nor did they allowed the tenants to do so. The result was that the productivity of the soil fell sharply. It was reported that the crops failed frequently. It was this lack of enterprise in the character of the agrarian classes that stultified the growth of agricultural prospects, which ultimately added to the sufferings of the cultivators.

Decay of the Cultivating Classes:

It was evident from the revenue administration reports, settlement reports, etc that the condition of the cultivating classes was decaying alarmingly. They were heavily indebted. Due to their indebtedness they
were left in such a poor condition that it was not possible for them to meet their daily expenses. It was clear from the enquiry report of 1868-69 that the interest rates paid on loans were too heavy. They cut deep into the earnings of the indebted cultivators. The increase in the rents of the tenants-at-will further reduced the margin between what they earned and what they paid. Whatever agricultural capital the peasants created passed into the hands of the landlords due to higher rent. The enhancement of rent was causing an incalculable evil and it was “reducing to the lowest possible level, both the cultivator and the style of cultivation”.¹ The landlord’s object was not so much the “improvement of the village and tenants as the enrichment of himself”.² The Oudh Rent Act of 1868 (Section 35) had debarred the Oudh Courts from any interference regarding the adjustment of rents between the landlord and tenants. They had to arrange the rent according to their own understanding. The nature of Oudh rural society was not basically changed to any great extent in the recognition accorded to taluqdars.³

There was an immense competition for land among tenants and for higher rents among the landlords. The principle of demand and supply

¹ Note by Benett, W.C. 26th August, 1881, Oudh General File No. 1010 of 1881-82
² Butts, H.H. Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Lucknow District, Lucknow, 1873, Page 92
³ Siddiqi, M.H. Agrarian Unrest in North India, The United Provinces, 1918-22, New Delhi, 1978, Page 9
regulated the rent of land in Oudh. The courts being debarred from any interference, the tenants were entirely left on the mercy of landlord. They issued the notices of ejectment which forced the cultivators either to accept the higher rents, or to leave their fields and look to some other landlord for land to cultivate, or to join the increasing ranks of landless labourers. “The Pioneer” commented that the government has to face the discontented people even after the passing of the Rent Act of 1868 is in itself a great question. And it will have to “wait for the verdict of the people on the policy of simple injustice”.¹

The landlords were of the opinion that due to the revised revenue assessment the revenue demand was highly raised, thus they had to increase the rents of the peasants.² The immediate effect of reassessment and enhancement of revenue was to curtail the income of landlord, who in turn passed this burden to the cultivator by enhancing rents and by levying other additional cesses.³ The taluqdars pointed out that the

¹ The Pioneer, 19th August, 1874
² Secretary of the British Indian Association of the taluqdars, in a letter to the Chief Commissioner, acknowledged that the rents had been raised on the instructions of the Settlement Officers to meet the revenue demand. Secretary, British Indian Association to P.A. to the Chief Commissioner; No. 18 of 12th February, 1874, Oudh General File No. 1950, Part II
Settlement Officers assessed the revenue of the whole village, irrespective of any portion or kind of land. Thus the assessment of revenue was made over the village as a whole and they were instructed by the Settlement Officers to increase the "rent on all sorts of land in proportion to the demand of revenue".¹ Oudh officials were well aware of the co-relation between the enhancement in the demand of revenue and the enhancement of rent by the landlords.² The Chief Commissioner of Oudh Sir George Couper commented the enhancement of rents on part of the landlord was nothing but an attempt which enabled the landlord to pay the high revenue to the government and to keep some profit for himself. The Chief Commissioner agreed that the government’s demand for land revenue was very high and so the landlords cannot be blamed for the rise in rents of their holdings. "The Pioneer" commented that rack renting and evictions were chronic in Oudh and they were not the mere occasional result of rent arrangements after assessment.³

The fall in the productive capacity of the soil was also one of the reason for the enhancement of rents and competition for land. Had the

¹ Secretary, British Indian Association to P.A. to the Chief Commissioner; No. 18 of 12th February, 1874, Oudh General File No. 1950, Part II

² Commissioner, Lucknow Division to the Chief Commissioner, No. 65 of 9th January, 1873, Oudh Revenue Pro. No. 7 of February, 1873, Oudh General File No. 1719, 1862-74

³ The Pioneer, 7th March, 1873
productivity of the soil been made better or even remained the same the increase in the demand of revenue and the rise in prices of the commodities would not have affected the peasants so much. But in the case of Oudh the productivity of the soil was falling and the prices were increasing which marred the condition of the peasants in a very bad manner. The tenants admitted that “prices were higher and the crops were smaller” which on the whole disbalanced their livelihood and reduced them to the level of mere paupers. A.H. Harrington in his articles in “The Pioneer” established the fact that the productivity was falling in Oudh. The evidence in the revenue records clearly show that the landlords increased their rents but did nothing to improve the land by way of manuring or digging wells. The Settlement Reports of Unnao & Lucknow also provide the evidence of a decline in productivity. The Settlement Officers of these districts wrote about the exhausted and tired land getting no manure and being constantly “worked out without any rest”.

“The Pioneer” commented, “few, very few of them expend anything in the improvement of their estates. Their sole object is to grind

---

1 Benett, W.C.(ed.), The Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh, 1877, Page 238
2 The Pioneer, 28th June, 1876
3 Butts, H.H. Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Lucknow District, Lucknow, 1873, Page 92
as much rent as they can out of their unhappy tenants.”¹ Thus without any proper manuring and irrigation, the quality of the soil perished which resulted in fall of the productivity. The conditions were becoming worse and worse for the peasants as a whole. The incidence of land revenue demand per acre as compared to the average rent that was being charged per acre of tenancy was three times of the revenue demand.² Thus the overall picture was very grim as there was no will to enrich the land on the one hand and the demand excessive rent rates on the other hand which left very little scope for the peasants’ welfare.

**Small Holdings – Subdivision and Fragmentation:**

There were certain reasons which attributed to the decline in the productive capacity of the land. The fall in the productivity level was more marked after the 1850s. One of the main causes was the increase in demand for land, which led to a keen competition for the already cultivated areas of land. After the annexation of Oudh the pressure of population depending upon the agriculture increased remarkably. The result was the fragmentation of holdings into smaller sub-divisions. The competition for land among the cultivators led to many other problems like rack renting, evictions, litigations etc. The inferior quality of land was also brought under cultivation. But it could not solve the problem of

---

¹ The Pioneer, 11th April, 1873

² Siddiqi, M.H. Agrarian Unrest in North India, The United Provinces, 1918-22, New Delhi, 1978, Page 22
pressure on land at the time. Thus while the rents and pressure over land rose there was no increase in the cultivable area, because the taluqdar’s tendency prevented them from making improvements in the land or to bring uncultivated area under cultivation.¹

Another factor which led to the sudden pressure on the land was the disbandment of the army of the Nawab of Oudh after annexation. It was estimated that some 2,00,000 soldiers were discharged from the Nawab of Oudh’s army.² A very small number of troops were retained for the Nawab’s army. Thus the soldiers who were relieved of their charges from the army had no choice but to return to their villages and depend on the agriculture for their livelihood. Another class which was severely hit by the disbandment of the Nawab’s army was of the manufacturers of arms. A large number of ‘lohars’ and workmen were thrown out of their age old profession.³ “Swords, sword handles, shields, shield handles and armour were manufactured in Oudh. There were cannon factories at Lucknow, Khairabad and Faizabad.”⁴ The trade in arms was further ruined when after the mutiny, peace returned to Oudh, but people were not allowed to wear arms.⁵ The effect of these measures

² The Pioneer, 13th June 1873
³ The Pioneer, 4th June 1873
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
affected about 12,000 people engaged in the manufacturing and trade of arms. Moreover in 1858 the taluqdars were refrained from keeping retainers. Their unemployment further led to the pressure on land. These were some of the political decisions that led to the increased dependency on land of the rural society in Oudh. The soldiers, the arms’ manufacturers were serving in their respective capacity through the years. Instead of depending on the agricultural resources of their ancestral villages they even send their savings to their respective families. By these political decisions they were not only deprived of their employment but also of their pride and status, which also led to the social imbalances.

Apart from the political decisions certain economic factors also aggravated the problem. With the annexation of Oudh the monopoly of salt manufacturing and trade (which was with the East India Company) led to the immediate suppression of the manufacture of salt and salt-petre. According to the Census Report of Oudh\(^2\) 1,07,732 ‘loniyas’ were salt-makers or the salt-petre makers under the Nawab’s government. They suffered a severe set back as suddenly their profession was made illegal and they were left absolutely without employment.

Another class of workers which was hit by the decision of the British Government was that of the wood cutters and timber traders. About 50,000 ‘lodhs’ or wood cutters were engaged in the timber trade in the Oudh in Terai Region. These Terai forests were either ceded to

---

1 The Pioneer, 4th June 1873
2 Williams, J.C.Census of Oudh, 1869, Page 107
affected about 12,000 people engaged in the manufacturing and trade of arms. Moreover in 1858 the taluqdars were refrained from keeping retainers. Their unemployment further led to the pressure on land. These were some of the political decisions that led to the increased dependency on land of the rural society in Oudh. The soldiers, the arms’ manufacturers were serving in their respective capacity through the years. Instead of depending on the agricultural resources of their ancestral villages they even send their savings to their respective families. By these political decisions they were not only deprived of their employment but also of their pride and status, which also led to the social imbalances.

Apart from the political decisions certain economic factors also aggravated the problem. With the annexation of Oudh the monopoly of salt manufacturing and trade (which was with the East India Company) led to the immediate suppression of the manufacture of salt and salt-petre. According to the Census Report of Oudh\(^2\) 1,07,732 ‘loniyas’ were salt makers or the salt-petre makers under the Nawab’s government. They suffered a severe set back as suddenly their profession was made illegal and they were left absolutely without employment.

Another class of workers which was hit by the decision of the British Government was that of the wood cutters and timber traders. About 50,000 ‘lodhs’ or wood cutters were engaged in the timber trade in the Oudh in Terai Region. These Terai forests were either ceded to

---

1. The Pioneer, 4\(^{th}\) June 1873
2. Williams, J.C.Census of Oudh, 1869, Page 107
agriculture.' The cloth weaving and trading business also affected many allied trades negatively. Number of cotton combers, the cleaners, cloth dyers and cloth printers lost their livelihood. They had no option left than to fall back on land. 'The Pioneer' estimated since annexation about one million people had been converted "from traders and manufacturers into agriculturists as cultivators or farm labourers." Thus the different categories of professionals who were happily employed in their respective professions were left nowhere. Earlier with their earnings they helped their kith and kin in improving and supporting agriculture. They were now forced to live on it 'as a dead burden' where they were formerly an active support. 

All these situations created a keen competition for land. There was a great demand for agricultural land. There were attempts to bring more land under cultivation after the annexation of Oudh. During the Nawab's rule there was no such problem of unemployment thus much of the land had been left uncultivated. But now the situation was altogether different. It was estimated that some three million acres of land had been brought

---


2 Ibid.

3 The Revenue Administration Report of Oudh ending 30th September, 1873, Page 46
afresh under cultivation since annexation. But the ratio of the unemployment was so high as compared with the availability of the cultivable land that the competition continued without any restriction.

Another factor that was supposed to be responsible for the economic backwardness in Oudh was the rapid rise in population, but the various census reports show that the population was not growing at an exceptionally fast rate in Oudh. It seems as there were not much opportunities left for employment, the unemployed population of Oudh concentrated on agriculture as the only avenue for their livelihood.

**Table-1** shows the annual percentage increase in population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
<th>Density Per sq. mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>11,220,232</td>
<td></td>
<td>474.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>11,381,471</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>469.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>12,650,831</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>522.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Edmund White, who compiled the 1881 Census Report, was of the opinion that the Census of 1869 had overstated the population of Oudh. But the author of 1891 Census, D.C. Baillie, blamed Edmund White for understating the figures of 1881. The figures in the Census of 1881 have

---

1. The Revenue Administration Report of Oudh ending 30th September, 1873, Page 46
shown the growth of population. This was mainly due to the famine of 1877-78 and the drought of 1879. The decrease in the population was recorded lowest in Lucknow with 11.1 per cent, in Rae Bareli 5.5 per cent, in Unnao 4.6 percent. The increase in the population between 1881 and 1891 was attributed to mainly fair agricultural seasons. The period of 1869 and 1881 was crucial because of the rise in rents and rise in ejectment notices as well. These points will be discussed later in this Chapter.

The main reason which led to the competition for land was the concentration of the population in rural areas. According to the Census report of 1869, only 58 per cent of the Oudh population depended upon agriculture. But the figure does not represent the true dependence on agriculture due to certain discrepancies. In one village hundreds of tanners were entered as tanners, but the reality would be in all probability that the majority of them would be ‘agricultural labourers’. Only a few of them would have been tanners. The number of cotton weavers and cleaners mentioned in the list amounted to more than 640,000, but they

---

1 Baillie, D.C. Census of India, Vol. XVI. The N.W.P. & Oudh, 1891, Page 148
2 White, Edmund, Report on the Census of the N.W.P. & Oudh, 1881, Page 20
3 Baillie, D.C. Census of India, Vol. XVI. The N.W.P. & Oudh, 1891, Page 155
4 Williams, J.C. Census of Oudh, 1869, Page 129
all were not following the profession they were listed against. Most of them worked as day labourers or small cultivators on borrowed amount.¹ These anomalies were due to the reason that before entering the names no proper enquiry was made into the profession of the people whose caste names indicated as non-agricultural class.² Thousands of people were listed as soldiers but they were either the members of their cultivating families or they helped the taluqdar in the collection of rents from the cultivators.³ The weavers were mentioned as manufacturers of textile fabrics and dress, but they were so “only in the virtue of the name of their caste; in reality they were either serfs or day labourers engaged on the soil.”⁴ Benett estimated that 92 per cent of the Oudh population was rural.⁵ McMinn mention 92.4 per cent population as agriculturists.⁶ These two estimates are confirmed by the census of 1891 which estimated the

¹ McMinn, W.C. Introduction to the Oudh Gazetteer, 1875, Page 104-105
³ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ McMinn, W.C. Introduction to the Oudh Gazetteer, 1875, Page 104-105
1891 which estimated the rural population at 92.4 per cent of the total Oudh population.¹

It is evident from the high percentage of rural population, that the agricultural land was overburdened. People were dependent on land for their existence which resulted in intense competition for land. The competition for land was high can be ascertained from the fact that in 1891 the density of population on cultivated area was as high as 753 persons per square mile. Table-2 shows the density of the population in the following districts.

### Table - 2

Density by districts (per sq. mile)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>1869 *²</th>
<th>1881 *³</th>
<th>1891 *⁴</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucknow</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>704.1</td>
<td>800.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitapur</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>425.6</td>
<td>476.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardoi</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>427.7</td>
<td>478.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnao</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>514.7</td>
<td>536.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae Bareli</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>547.6</td>
<td>591.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kheri</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>278.0</td>
<td>304.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Baillei, D. C. Census of India, Vol. XVI, 1891, Page 90
² Williams, J. C. The Census of Oudh, Page 27-28
⁴ Baillei, D.C. Census of India, Vol. XVI, 1891, Page 87
Population was very dense especially in the agricultural areas. The census of 1869 pointed out that it was the rural and not the urban areas that kept the general average of the density at a very high rate.\(^1\) The areas where the soil was rich, with good irrigation facilities were more dense. Table-3 shows the extent of pressure on the cultivable area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Density of Agricultural Population Per square mile of cultivated area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rae Bareli</td>
<td>894.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucknow</td>
<td>799.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnao</td>
<td>794.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardoi</td>
<td>637.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kheri</td>
<td>600.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitapur</td>
<td>550.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Oudh</td>
<td>753.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the Table-3 that the density of population was very high. This resulted in the competition for land. The landlords were placed in a beneficial position as they had every chance to enhance their

---


\(^2\) Baillei, D.C. Census of India, Vol. XVI, The N.W.P. & Oudh, Chapter XIV, 1891, Page 331
rent excessively. The only way to reduce the pressure on the heavily dense areas was to increase the cultivable area and thus encourage the migration of the cultivators to the areas which were less populated. The cultivators had social and emotional bindings with the place they were born. The idea of migrating to other places did not appeal to them. It was very difficult to make them understand that their poor state of affairs have no end in such a grim situation. The attempts to encourage them to shift to less populated area also failed because of the condition of life and food habits. “Where men eat rice instead of wheat; where for months the inundations from the great rivers cover the country, where the villagers have to awake whole night to guard his fields from Samber” the cultivators were not willing to migrate to such areas.\(^1\) They were willing to bear the difficulties at home rather than the prospects of better opportunities at a distant place. In Rae Bareli, during the Settlement period, it was found that the cultivators had no intention to move to new areas.\(^2\) The tenants do not have the “will to leave the home of their fathers”. They were perhaps prejudiced against leaving their homes. However there are indications that people migrated to take up the military services in princely states or in railway companies in western India. But their number was too small to make any significant change in the situation.

\(^1\) The Pioneer, 18\(^{th}\) July 1872

\(^2\) MacAndrew, J.F. Report on the Settlement Operations in Rae Bareli District, Lucknow, 1872, Page 26
Thus the density of population in the agricultural areas could not be effectively mitigated by the efforts regarding migration of the tenants to the less populated area. Their social and emotional binding with the land of their forefathers did not allow them to leave it whatever the consequences. They were uneducated lot for whom it was very unthoughtful to leave their home in search of better prospects abroad. Their economic conditions were very hard. They held their fields from year to year, liable to eviction at the close of the year. The government was aware of the problem and believed that this pressure on land will lead to an exorbitant increase in rent and will deteriorate the condition of the peasants further.

**Enhancement of Rents and Ejectments:**

The rents were enhanced exorbitantly by the landlords in Oudh. The tenants had no choice but to surrender at the will and whim of the landlords. The government was aware of the plight of the poor tenants, but nothing substantial was done to improve their condition. The Financial Commissioner of Oudh drew the attention of the Chief Commissioner to the fact that enhancement of rent was taking place and that the landlords were serving the notices for very high rents. The Chief Commissioner was of the opinion that the illegal enhancement of rent will come to an end with the passing of the Oudh Rent Act of 1868. But Oudh Rent Act of 1868 did little to help the peasants. Very soon it was clear that there were many loop holes in the Oudh Rent Act of 1868. The
landlords used their powers to enhance the rents or to evict the tenant. There was no check on the landlords. The government was not willing to interfere in the effective manner due to its own vested interest. "The Poineer" published an article criticising the working of the Oudh Rent Act of 1868. It drew the attention of the Oudh officers to the notices of enhancement of rents. It was affecting the peasants adversely who were working "at the simple pleasure of the landlord".¹ "The Pioneer" commented that about 50,000 tenants had been "evicted in a single year from their forefather’s fields for refusing to consent to further enhancement".² The competition for land was "fierce and unremitting especially in the areas where the population was dense. The overall effect of the circumstances was very bad for the agrarian prospects in Oudh and more so for the economic and social condition of the peasants. It seemed that if the conditions would prevail in the same manner the peasantry would gradually sink "further and deeper into the slough of object poverty and sullen discontent."³ ‘The Pioneer’ quoted that the number of notices of ejectment was rapidly rising, with 25,444 notices issued in 1869; 52,151 in 1870; and 59,353 in 1871. The rapid increase in the number of notices of ejectment was quite alarming. But the government refuted the charges made by ‘The Pioneer’. The Chief Commissioner pointed out that the "notices of ejectment" were ordinary notices of

¹ The Pioneer, 18th July 1872
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
landlords used their powers to enhance the rents or to evict the tenant. There was no check on the landlords. The government was not willing to interfere in the effective manner due to its own vested interest. "The Poineer" published an article criticising the working of the Oudh Rent Act of 1868. It drew the attention of the Oudh officers to the notices of enhancement of rents. It was affecting the peasants adversely who were working "at the simple pleasure of the landlord".¹ "The Pioneer" commented that about 50,000 tenants had been "evicted in a single year from their forefather's fields for refusing to consent to further enhancement".² The competition for land was "fierce and unremitting especially in the areas where the population was dense. The overall effect of the circumstances was very bad for the agrarian prospects in Oudh and more so for the economic and social condition of the peasants. It seemed that if the conditions would prevail in the same manner the peasantry would gradually sink "further and deeper into the slough of object poverty and sullen discontent."³ 'The Pioneer' quoted that the number of notices of ejectment was rapidly rising, with 25,444 notices issued in 1869; 52,151 in 1870; and 59,353 in 1871. The rapid increase in the number of notices of ejectment was quite alarming. But the government refuted the charges made by 'The Pioneer'. The Chief Commissioner pointed out that the "notices of ejectment" were ordinary notices of

¹ The Pioneer, 18th July 1872
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
The results of the enquiry into the rise in rent also pointed out the excessive rise in rents. The report pointed out that the landlords issued notices of ejectment because they wanted to share in the increased value of land "which arises from the increasing value of its produce." The result of these notices was that 7,466 tenants were entirely and 1,334 were partially evicted from their holdings. 3,710 tenants held their field on enhanced rents, whereas 9,517 tenants remained in possession of their field on their old rents. The reports of the district officers revealed that the motive behind the notices of ejectment was not always so. They pointed out that about 40 per cent of the notices were served with the real intention to evict the tenant, where as the intention of the rest 60 per cent was merely to enhance the rent. In serving the notice for ejectment the landlords were activated by the greed for larger profits.

The results of the report were an eye opener to some of the officers. They established the fact that the landlords were the real rulers of their estates. The government had no check over them. They showed that the power of eviction was very widely known to the Oudh landlords and they made free use of their powers. The Oudh officials also became aware of the magnitude of the problem. It seemed that earlier they were

---

1 Chief Commissioner to all Commissioners and Deputy Commissioner, letter No.7573 of 27th February 1873, Oudh Revenue Proceedings, Oudh General File No. 1719, 1862-74

2 For District Officers’ Report see Oudh Revenue Proceedings, 1st - 7th February, 1873, Oudh General File No. 1719, 1862-74
unaware of the extensivity of the power of eviction used by landlords.\textsuperscript{1} However the Chief Commissioner was not satisfied with the accuracy of the enquiry and ordered another enquiry to ascertain the “motives behind evictions, the classes of tenants which were subjected to eviction and their fate after eviction.”\textsuperscript{2} Charles McMinn commented that these enquiries did not provide accurate information because the tehsildars and patwaris “can be so easily influenced by the landlords”.\textsuperscript{3} The Census report of 1881 mentioned that till “1880 the village accountants were practically the private servants of the landlords”.\textsuperscript{4}

With the notices of ejectment the notices of relinquishment were also related. Just as the landlord issued a notice of enhancement to enhance his rent in the same manner the peasant resorted to notice of relinquishment when he thought that his rent was excessive. The enquiry did not mention any information regarding the notices of relinquishment. Revenue Administration Report of 1872 mentions that 14,378 notices of relinquishment were issued in Lucknow Division. Sometimes the rents

\begin{itemize}
  \item McMinn, W.C. The Introduction to the Oudh Gazetteer, 1875, Page 215-17
  \item Chief Commissioner to all Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners, letter No. 7573 of 27\textsuperscript{th} February, 1873, Oudh General File No. 1719, 1862-74
  \item McMinn’s, W.C. letter to “The Pioneer”, 7\textsuperscript{th} March, 1873
  The enquiry was to be conducted by D.C. with the help of tehsildars.
  \item Census of India, 1881, Page 131
\end{itemize}
were reduced. It showed that the greediness in the exaction of rents knew no bounds. In the same manner the tenants' hopelessness was quite evident from the notices of relinquishment.¹

"The Pioneer" criticised the results of the enquiry. It was quite evident from the results of the enquiry that there was a "widespread distress" due to the "screwing up of rent." The notices of relinquishment also proved the demand for high rents. The landlords did not justifiably use the powers bestowed on them by the British Government.² It was now for the government to decide whether the power of ejectment should continue in the hands of the landlords. For any action on the part of the government the results of the enquiry by Chief Commissioner were seriously awaited.³

The enquiry was made in 4,350 villages out of 4,708 where notices of ejectment were issued. They were visited by tehsil officials, peshkars and qanungoes. The reports were checked by the tehsildars personally. The Chief Commissioner believed that the information collected by these officials was correct and would provide a safe basis on which an opinion can be formed.⁴ The report enquired the number of notices issued in the

¹ Revenue Administration Report ending, 30th September 1872, Page 33
² The Pioneer, 11th April, 1873
³ Under Secretary, Government of India to the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, No.307 of 21st April 1873. Oudh General File No.1719, 1862-74
⁴ Note: McMinn's W.C. comment on the authenticity of these enquiries on page 14, Oudh General File No.1719, 1862-74
five years from 1869 to 1873. The enquiry revealed that in 7,181 cases, which formed 43½ per cent the tenants were evicted from the whole of his cultivated area, in 1,187 cases, which formed 7 per cent the tenants were evicted from a portion of his holding. In 2,382 cases, which formed about 14½ per cent the cultivators continued on the same fields but with an enhanced rent and in 5,726 cases which formed 35 per cent, the tenants were neither disturbed from his fields nor his rent was enhanced.¹ The figures show that about 50 per cent of the tenants were disturbed by the notices of ejectments. It is very difficult to ascertain as to what happened to the tenants who were evicted from their holdings completely. Some of the cultivators who got some land in neighbouring villages continued cultivation as their means of existence. Some of them shifted to other places with their families and managed to get some land for themselves, while some were forced to give up cultivation and seek some other means of livelihood. The Chief Commissioner was satisfied with the results of the enquiry. He quoted from the reports of the Deputy Commissioners of Hardoi and Lucknow to prove that the number of the tenants evicted from their fields was not very high and thus the problem was not as big as it was supposed to be. The report of the Deputy Commissioner also discussed the motives which led to the issue of notices of ejectment. The landlords who were the native rajas of their land were some how subdued by the British Government. They were now

¹ Revenue Administration Report ending 30th September, 1873, Page 34
the privileged section of the rural society under the British Government. It was noticed that their recusant nature and their will to govern accredited to some extent to the causes of the notices of ejectment. The power to evict the tenant satisfied their hunger for power, as well as greed for money. Another feature that led to the enhancement of rent and notices of eviction was due to the animosity resulting from court cases brought by the tenants against their landlords. But the main motive behind the notices of eviction was to get the competitive rent rates of their land.\(^1\) In 1874 it was reported that in "99 cases out of 100 the landlord had no desire to eject the tenant from his holding; his only object in issuing the notice is to get what he considers a full rent for the land occupied by the tenant."\(^2\)

The increase in the demand of rent was also the result of the increase in the demand of revenue by the Government. Here it is noteworthy that the demand for revenue was raised considering the future growth of the assets of an estate. When the settlement was made the Settlement Officers looked into each and every aspect of the village. They accounted the existing assets of the area, the rental, the quality of land, the irrigation facilities, the kind of crops grown, the season, and then fixed the revenue demand. The main aim of the long term settlement was to provide a chance to the cultivating classes to raise the assets of

---

\(^1\) Revenue Administration Report ending 30\(^{th}\) September, 1874, Page 32

\(^2\) Ibid.
their lands. As the assets could not be raised over night the revenue was
not assessed annually or after every two-three years. It was hoped that
long term settlements would provide better opportunities to the landlord
and the cultivator as a whole for receiving better yield in their fields.
Here an important fact to be considered is that the revenue demand was
assessed considering the future growth of cultivation and this resulted in
unduly high revenue demand. This high demand of revenue was in turn
passed on to the cultivators in the form of high rents.¹

The Chief Commissioner was of the opinion that the eviction
notices were generally served to bad tenants who neither cultivated their
land properly nor paid their rent regularly. He however refrained from
accepting the landlords fault in enhancing the rents or issuing the notices
of eviction. No figures were available as to ascertain the number of bad
tenants. The Oudh officials in their policy to safeguard the interest of the
landlords never hesitated to sacrifice that of the tenants who were leading
a life of want and hunger.

Information regarding the notices of relinquishment is given in the
Revenue Administration Report, but that is far from complete. It shows
the number of notices of relinquishment by tenants was 11,047. The
number of instances in which the tenants resigned the whole of their
cultivation was 4,170; who resigned a portion amounted to 1,844; and

¹ The Pioneer, 24th November, 1874. See also Revenue Administration
Report for the year ending 30th September, 1873, Page 32
those who remained in possession at an enhanced rent amounted to 980.\(^1\) In 4,053 cases the tenants continued to hold the same field irrespective of the fact that they had tendered notices of resignation. Very few cases were mentioned where the rents were reduced after the cultivator resigned. There is no information available regarding the tenants who relinquished their fields entirely. Rack-renting was supposed to be the main cause of the notices of relinquishments.

The enquiry also throws some light on the castes of the tenants who were evicted mostly. The largest number of tenants who were evicted belonged to the caste of Brahmans and Rajputs. They formed 59 per cent of the evicted tenants. The report also revealed that these two castes formed the category of tenants who were highly involved in debt. It is reported by the district officers the cultivators of these castes were very lazy and notorious. They were very bad cultivators and rent payers as well.\(^2\)

Considering the social religious need of the rural society the Brahmans and Rajputs formed the privileged class of tenants. Both the Brahmans and the Rajputs served the taluqdars in various capacities. The Rajputs were the retainers of taluqdars who helped them in safeguarding their life and property, and also in collecting rent from their fellow cultivators. Brahmans assisted their religious ceremonies as priests. They

---

\(^1\) Revenue Administration Report for the year ending 30\(^{th}\) September, 1873, Page 34

\(^2\) Ibid.
took care of the spiritual needs of the taluqdar. In Indian society no auspicious work was complete without the presence of Brahmins. They helped the taluqdar in social ceremonies, festival celebrations, births and deaths everywhere. So because of this relationship with the landlords they enjoyed the status of privileged tenants whose rent was lower than those of others. Another reason for the low rents was that these castes, specially Brahmins did not plough the field themselves. They had to keep ploughmen to get their fields cultivated. Thus it was an added expenditure for them. After the annexation of the province the Rajput tenants lost their status of privileged tenants to some extent. As the taluqdar were not allowed to keep retainers they lost their jobs. The landlords, therefore, saw no reason to let out land to them at lower rates than those charged from the tenants of low caste. The tenants of these two castes as mentioned earlier were also very bad cultivators, lacking in hard work, in enterprise, thus they were heavily involved in debt also.

Chief Commissioner of Oudh, Sir George Couper was satisfied with the results of the enquiry. He pointed out that there was no inclination of tension between the landlords and tenants. The government need not bother about the tenants as they do not have the warlike element among them, which may instigate them to turn to criminal activities and thus pose some threat to the British Government. However with the comments of the Chief Commissioner the Government of India did not find it necessary to interfere in the existing status of landlords and tenants. But by 1875 there were some incidents which forced the
government to reopen the enquiry into the enhancement of rents and ejectment notice.\(^1\)

Qanungoes and Peshkars were asked to visit the villages where the registers of notices of ejectment were opened during the 1873 enquiries. From these records the local officers had to ascertain the results of the ejectments. They were also instructed to check the result by visiting the village concerned. The tehsildars were to visit 5 per cent of the villages. The Deputy Commissioners were to review these results and send them to the Chief Commissioner.\(^2\)

The results of the enquiry revealed an increase in the notices of ejectment from 16,476 in 1873 to 29,610 in 1875. This increase in the number of notices of ejectment was attributed to the favourable seasons for cultivation. These years were marked with prosperous agricultural output and so the landlords wanted to reap the advantages by increasing the demand for rent. The direct result of this was higher number of notices of ejectment. The number of tenants who were evicted from the whole of their cultivation, in the villages was 11,259 (38 per cent), in 2,537 cases (8 per cent) tenants were evicted from part of their holdings in the village; in 5,265 cases (18 per cent) the tenants consented to an increase in their rents and continued to cultivate the same field and in 10,449 cases (36 per cent) notices were of no direct effect and the tenants

\(^1\) Circular No. 41/3073 of 30\(^{th}\) August 1875, Oudh General File No. 1942, Part II

\(^2\) Ibid.
held on their former rents.¹ Once again the Brahmans and Rajput tenants formed the majority of tenants evicted. The high percentage of eviction notices to Brahmans and Rajput tenants were also due to the fact that the landlords did not bothered to serve the notice of eviction to lower caste generally. The low caste tenants were simply forced to pay the enhanced rents, where as the rents of Brahman and Rajput tenants were raised by notices of enhanced demand.²

The Chief Commissioner was of the opinion that the tenants evicted from their entire holding were evicted only from the land mentioned in the notice. It did not mean that they were evicted from the entire land they held in the village. With the density of population, already discussed in the chapter it was not possible for the tenants to hold at different places. The Chief Commissioner pointed out that 2,302 families were forced to leave the position of cultivating tenant. Most of them became ploughmen or day labourers and some reverted to the principal professions.

The motives behind the eviction notices were same as were revealed in the enquiry of 1873. The sole purpose of the notices of ejectments was either to get rid of a bad tenant or to force the tenant to

¹ Revenue Administration Report ending 30th September, 1875, Page 62
² Crawford, J.T. Assistant Commissioner to Commissioner, Rae Bareli, Letter No.445 of 14th March, 1882, Oudh General File No.456, 1881-82
agree to the enhanced rates of rents.\textsuperscript{1} What ever the motive the object was only to increase the demand and reap maximum benefit out of the land. The Revenue Administration Report of 1875 did not mention any thing about the effects of these notices on the tenant. P. Carnegy the Commissioner of Rae Bareli division admitted that “the law of ejectment has in many instances been harshly put in action by the landlords”.\textsuperscript{2} “The Pioneer” commented that the Chief Commissioner “was seeking for information to harmonize with forgone conclusions” that the eviction notices were simply notices for the enhancement of rent and the landlords very rarely abused the power granted to them.\textsuperscript{3} The competition for land also led to some disputes here and there. There were some cases reported where the head of the family tried to convert himself as the sole owner of the village and turned the members of the brotherhood as tenants. Although there was no organized crime reported in the villages all these situations were aggravating the agrarian discontent in Oudh.

“The Pioneer Mail” analysed the problems in an editorial on “Peasant Rising”. It said that the never ending enhancement of rent, though approved by economical principles was harassing and irritating to all classes.” It commented that the increased value of land was marked by endless eviction and ejectments which subsequently embitter the relations

\textsuperscript{1} Revenue Administration Report ending 30\textsuperscript{th} September, 1875, Page 63

\textsuperscript{2} Carnegy, P. Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner No. 388 of 24 February 1876, Oudh General File No.1942, Part II, Page 68

\textsuperscript{3} The Pioneer, 3\textsuperscript{rd} March, 1875
of landlord and tenants.¹ The solution to problem was difficult to found as it needed will and determination on the part of the government to safeguard the interest of the peasants. A new and improved law was the answer to the tenancy problems. Any effort to make the taluqdars’ accountable for their actions was forcefully opposed by the taluqdars. “The Pioneer” was irritated by the taluqdars’ opposition and observed that the taluqdars would only be pleased with an Act which should make every taluqdar in Oudh, “a law unto himself”.²

Another enquiry into the ejectment notices was made in 1879-80. The enquiry revealed that the rents were unfairly raised and that the condition of the tenants was consequently “little removed from destitution.” J.W. Quinton Commissioner, Lucknow referring to the notices of ejectment reported that they reached at the highest peak in 1886 with 92,602 notices. These notices of ejectment and their associate, the notices of relinquishment, were proofs of the problem that existed through out the years in the roots of the Oudh land relations. J.W. Quinton appealed that the problems should be addressed effectively in order to protect the weak and to place the agrarian disorders in a better form.

The social position of the taluqdars was such that even after the Rent Act of 1886 was passed they managed to evict a tenant without paying him his dues. They acted as the rajas of their holdings who could

¹ The Pioneer Mail, 19th October, 1875
² The Pioneer, 27th September, 1873
manipulate any law in their favour. The peasants being illiterate and uneducated were not aware of the rights they were provided with the Rent Act of 1886. Economically also they were so weak that they could not even think of the wrath of the landholders, they may face in case of litigation. Such situations led them to the state of economic serfdom, and their conditions became even worse.

**Economic Serfdom of Tenants:**

As it is evident from the condition of the agrarian prospects in the village, the situation of the crops and subsequent yield was not very good. The political bent of attitude towards the agrarian problem did not allow solving the problem effectively. There were so many vested interest of the government on one hand and taluqdar on the other that the real problem of agriculture, its circumstances were always overshadowed by the other aspects of high handedness. The government did not have the will and determination to address the problem effectively and landlords left no chance to oppress the peasants in their greed to extract maximum amount of money as rent. This satisfied their hunger for money and power both. Between these two groups of power the class that was suffering a lot was that of peasants. Their very survival was at stake. Here another class which was playing an important role was that of 'mahajans' or moneylenders.

The moneylenders became the essential feature of the agrarian scene. They lend cash and grains to meet the needs of the local
peasants. Creditors came from all the sections of society. ‘Mahajans’ lent out a portion of their stocks as a regular part of their trade, where as the landlords used loans to tighten their control over subordinate cultivators and to enhance their local prestige, which was measured in number of dependants. The working of British revenue system created further incentives to borrow, but government provided no alternative agency of any significance to provide credit. On the contrary, the supply of loans from the treasury to the rural population, stopped under British rule. There were no advances as ‘Takavi’ advances to be heard of under British rule. Private creditors were therefore free to exploit the increased need for credit. The provision of loans became their most profitable business for the local mahajans in the rural set up. The reverse side of the coin was the problem of economic serfdom of the tenants.

It is difficult to ascertain the number of peasants who restored to borrowing as a regular source of supply. In the absence of detailed local data into the number of peasants who borrowed regularly the seriousness of the indebtedness cannot be estimated accurately. Such information

1 Takavi loans were indeed an “old system,” dating back to Pre-Mughal times. Revenue officials’ advances of cash from the treasury or their own resources to cultivators for the purchase of seed and plough cattle and the digging of wells were first recorded in fourteenth century. By Mughal times the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ‘takavi’ had become common place. Habib, Irfan. Agrarian System in Mughal India, London, 1963, Page 253-255
came from the observations of the district officers, incidentally in the course of settlement work.

R.H. Davies, the Chief Commissioner of Oudh summing up the results of the 1869 indebtedness enquiry commented that “except in masonry wells, little capital is permanently invested in the soil. Cultivators and their families, unlike the cultivators of Europe, provided their own farming stock, bullocks, ploughs, tools, manure.” They were mostly too poor to store seed for the better sorts of produce, or maintain themselves on poorer grains from harvest to harvest. Therefore they were generally dependent on extraneous aid.¹

Besides the common ‘Bikhad’ loans, peasants borrowed cash to buy cattle or to spend on festivals, weddings, funerals in order to fulfil their social obligations. A debt once borrowed, especially in circumstances of hardship owing to crop failures, was difficult to clear. The principle on which a creditor operated was not to recover his principal amount with interest but to secure a regular source of income from high charges on money or goods loaned. It was in his interest to keep his debtor in a state of dependence by means of heavy charges, so that he must continue to pay up indefinitely.

The timing of loans and their repayment also worked to the creditors’ advantage. Small amount of capital was given for short term of

¹ Davies, R.H. Memorandum on the Correspondence Relating to the Indebtedness of Cultivators in Oudh, November 10th, 1869, Selections from the records of Government, 1868-69, Page 71-72
repayment. A cultivator borrowed grain for sowing or to feed his family in the thin months of the year, when the stocks were lowest and prices were consequently at their highest level. At the harvest, when the creditor demanded repayment, the situation was reverse. Most cultivators had to pay off their dues as soon as their grain was threshed and local markets were therefore flooded with produce. Prices naturally fell, with the result that the cultivator may have to pay back two or three times the amount of grain loaned, in order to arrive at its cash value at the time of borrowing.¹

The comprehensiveness of the borrowing clientele, the wide variety of purposes for which they borrowed assured the business of the creditors. The creditors knew very well that the deficiencies in the agriculture system will keep their debtors under control. The custom by which sons were liable for debts incurred by their fathers “ensured the continuation of payments to the creditor in the event of the death of the original debtor.”²

The wide variety of borrowers, the majority of peasants who were unwilling or unable to accumulate reserves, matched by a wide range of creditors. R.H. Davies concluded from the 1868-69 enquiries that the suppliers of “extraneous aid” to the majority of Oudh cultivators were most frequently “petty moneylenders” whose numbers included not only professional village bankers and ‘banias’ but also many speculative and

¹ McMinn, W.C. Introduction to the Oudh Gazetteer, 1875, Page 184
thriving members of the agricultural classes.\textsuperscript{1} Report from Lucknow showed the range of creditors from whom the cultivators borrowed.

The provision of agricultural loans was the means “par excellence of earning a rapid and sizable return on capital, as compared to other pursuits. Raise in market prices did not benefit the cultivators as much as they benefited the ‘baniya’. They compelled the cultivator to bring his produce to their shops, which prevented the cultivator to get the full market value for his goods. The cultivator was therefore not only crippled by the heavy interest he had to pay, but also by the low prices he was compelled to take for his produce. More over with the raise in prices, indebtedness not only persisted but grew. The government was not in a position to implement changes in the conditions that existed. The Chief Commissioner of Oudh asked for the recommendations by district officers in course of the 1868 enquiry into indebtedness, regarding the ways in which the cultivator’s state of dependence on extraneous aid might be improved.\textsuperscript{2} In their replies the district officers were almost

\textsuperscript{1} Butts, H.H. Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of Lucknow District, Lucknow, 1873. Butts commented that the taluqdar’s relationship with his tenants was commonly that of a creditor to debtor. Page 56

\textsuperscript{2} Selections from the Records of the Government of the Province of Oudh, vol. I, 1869, Page 1-3
unanimous of the opinion that “no direct interference can advantageously be exercised by the administration”.¹

Mahajan’s advances were the vital source of supply to the cultivators needs. Since both the zamindar’s collection and realization of revenue were heavily dependent on the timely assistance of mahajan it was quite understandable that the government will not interfere in the matter willingly. The government did not want to disturb “the mahajan” “in his role of a “universal provider”. The official opinion favoured the moneylenders as the integral member of the agricultural community. Sir John Strachey observed that “Moneylenders are obviously as necessary to the Indian agriculturist as the seed which he sows, or as the rain which falls from heaven to water his fields.”²

In Sitapur as E. Thompson, Officiating Commissioner noted that the peasants preferred to take advance from ‘mahajan’ than the taluqdar, because they knew that landlord have much greater facilities for realizing the debt than the mahajan have. The “landlord would take everything due

² Quoted by Harington, A.H. “Economic Reform in Rural India,” Calcutta Review, LXXVI (1883)
to him before it left the field, but the ‘mahajan’ can be indefinitely put off.”

However deplorable the profiteering of creditors might seem, official opinion favoured their position as indispensable “with all his faults, the village banker has been and probably will continue to be a useful member of the agricultural community. He finds much of the capital with which the cultivating system of the country is worked and advances it on little better security than the agricultural labourer’s verbal promise, the fulfilment of which depends on the seasons.

Patrick Carnegy’s official statement in 1868 for the Oudh enquiry made the position and the dilemma, of government quite clear, “anything like official interference in the interests of the cultivators, would only lead to ill-will between him and the mahajan, who often stands between him and the starvation”. So whatever claims regarding the position of the cultivators, Carnegy was of the opinion that in the interest of British Government, “the less we interfere, the better”.

In the years of scarcity, when little or no rain fell, the threat of scarcity drove up the prices of all the essential commodities. Farmers

---

1 Selections from the records of Government of the Province of Oudh, Vol. I, 1869, Page 35-36
2 Ibid.
3 Selections from the Records of Government, “Correspondence relating to the indebtedness of cultivators in Oudh”, 1869, Page 48
4 Ibid.
were not benefited by this price rise as they had nothing to sell. On the contrary they had to borrow their seed and food at very high rates, when their stock was depleted. The threat of poor out turn led the creditors to refuse further loans as it was in their interest to withhold loans and thus drive the prices still higher.

Throughout, the government’s policy was to interfere as little as possible. The needs persisted but the control diminished even further, and the principle of non-interference triumphed. The peasantry was subjected to the most precarious conditions, which led them to the state of economic serfdom. They were never able to clear their debts. The interest on debts kept mounting and thus providing a regular source of income to the mahajan. Some times the conditions were so severe that even a lifetime of a cultivator fell short of clearing the debts, which was later passed on to the next generation.

It is evident from the notes of the British Officers that they were well aware of the conditions of the cultivating classes. But their political interests refrained them from taking any effective measure to prevent landlords. On the other hand the landlords left no stone unturned to maintain their dominant position in the society. This coalition between the landlord and the government was further strengthened by the land legislations which will be discussed in next chapter.