CHAPTER V

ZAMINDAR AND ZAMINDARI

The institution of zamindari under the Mughals has received scanty attention from the students of Mughal agrarian history. Moreland has devoted a few pages to the evolution of the class of intermediaries under Aurangzeb and his successors. But the study is brief and no attempt has been made to investigate the character and types of zamindaris and the functions, rights and privileges appertaining to them. Many questions about the institution have remained unanswered and the most important among them is the nature and position of the zamindar who paid land revenue (mal-wajib and malguari) and not fixed tribute or quit rent (pesh-kash). Moreland’s study suggests that the word ‘zamindar’ under the great Mughals signified a Hindu chief and that in the 18th century some Muslims had also acquired the same status and position and were called zamindars. According to Dr. Saran the word ‘zamindar’ signified a vassal chief and that the zamindars could be classified in different ranks and categories. Thus the studies so far made have paid no attention to the various questions relating to those zamindars who paid land revenue. However, the evidence contained in the Ain and in a number of other documents, covering the period from Akbar to Muhammad Shah, indicate the presence of such zamindars in almost all the mahals of the imperial territory.

1. The Moslem Agrarian System pp 150-155
2. Ibid p.153
An attempt is made in these pages to examine and correlate the relevant evidence and reconstruct the picture of the institution of zamindari under the Mughals.

Various types of zamindars:

In the chronicles the word zamindar is generally used for a raja or Hindu chief. These zamindars or rajas could be divided into more than one category. In the first place were the zamindars or rajas who recognised the overlordship of the Mughal emperor and this recognition generally took the form of putting the Mughal currency into circulation within their own territories. However it appears that they enjoyed a special status among the vassal chiefs as they were exempted from any military or financial obligation.¹ Secondly, were those zamindars who acknowledged the overlordship of the emperor and were allowed to retain their principalities provided they paid a fixed tribute.² But these zamindars did not hold any regular mansab.³ Lastly came those who held their territories in lieu of the salary against their mansab and were subject to regulations laid down for branding and verification.⁴ Under special circumstances a zamindar holding a mansab could be exempted from these regulations but he was required to join a provincial governor in an expedition with a fixed number of sawars.⁵

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1. The Provincial Government Of the Mughals pp.114,133,136
3. Ibid pp. 224,226,228, Mirat I p.229
4. Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri p.119
5. Mirat-i-Ahmad, I pp.174,224,235
Apart from these zamindars, described above, there was a class of people in almost every mahal of the imperial territory which had certain interests and rights in land and was entered into the revenue records as zaminder. These zamindars paid land revenue determined on the basis of the holdings of individual peasants or on the village as a whole. This class of zamindars was most numerous and owned land in hereditary right. Its interest in land was real and vital and it was this class of zamindars which occupied the pivotal position in the agrarian system of the country. To be more precise we would be referring to this class of zamindars as the village zaminder. Lastly, mention should be made of those zamindars who had no hereditary interest or claim in land but were appointed as zamindars by virtue of a royal order. They had to pay land revenue and thus were on a par with the village zaminder, with the difference that no right of inheritance attached to their zamindars.¹

The Village Zaminder under the Great Mughals:

The important and numerous class of the village zamindars appears to have been passed unnoticed by historians. This omission can be traced to a faulty rendering of the Ain in English and the misleading arrangement of the provincial statistics in the printed text. The translation and the printed text suggest that the castes mentioned in the schedules for each mahal refer to the population inhabiting that mahal. On the other hand an examination of the statistical account contained in a manuscript preserved in the Lytton Library, Muslim University, Aligarh,² reveals that the schedule giving the

¹. Daftar-μl-Амъл Bailey pp. 88-99, Akbarat, 44/142
². Ain-i-Akbari, Abul Fazl, Lytton Library, Sulaiman, 636/14
statistical account of each pargana contains a number of columns with headings such as measured area, dami, siyurghal, bund and zamindar. The castes in various mahals have been entered under the head zamindar. The evidence is too self-evident to make necessary a detailed argument to prove that Abul Fazl is recording the various castes who held the position and title of zamindar in their respective mahals. To argue that the castes inhabiting the various mahals have been recorded will carry hardly any weight when we consider that the entire population of a mahal could not belong to one single community or in certain cases to two or three communities. Again the castes recorded in the schedules, with a few exceptions, usually belong to the high castes among the Hindus and the Muslims, who never formed the peasantry. In case we assume that a certain mahal was entirely inhabited by the Thakurs or Sayyids the question naturally arises as to who tilled the soil? We know for certain that usually the land was tilled by the low castes Hindus, untouchables or Muslims converts from the lower strata of the Hindu society, for their masters, Hindus or Muslims. Hence the inference that the castes entered into the schedules refer to the population of the mahal hardly fits it with the facts of agrarian life and those of the revenue history of the period. Thus we can conclude that the schedules record the castes of the zamindars in the various mahals of the imperial territory. The examination of the statistical account also show that the zamindars are not recorded only in the outlying provinces of the Empire but in the heart of it, namely the region from Lahore to Allahabad. These
mehala have not been described either as *cheel* small or *as qaron-i-naqadi*, which have been taken to indicate the presence of a chief in an area so described. Moreover *sirushal* lands are also generally given for these paragnas. These considerations rule out the possibility of identifying these *zamindars* with vassal chiefs. Again the revenue history— the period — the conversion of the bulk of the imperial territory into *khalsa*, the appointment of revenue officials at the pargana level, and the detailed instructions to the *amil* about the assessment and collection of land revenue— strongly vitiated the hypothesis that almost all the *mehala* of the imperial territory were under the vassal chiefs who paid tribute.

Thus the evidence in the *Ain* clearly suggests that the *zamindars* could be found in almost all the *mehala* of the imperial territory and that these *zamindars* were not vassal chiefs. We can also infer from the relevant evidence in the *Ain* and *Akbar Nama* that the lands under these *zamindars* whether in *khalsa* or in *jagar* were subject to detailed assessment and as such they paid land revenue. The one important difference between the ordinary vassal chief and an ordinary *zaminder* lay in the fact that the former paid fixed tribute or quit rent while the latter paid land revenue or *mal-i-wajib*.

The evidence in the *Ain* and the *Akbar Nama* does not help us to draw any further inferences and we will have to look elsewhere.

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to form a more comprehensive picture of the position and rights of these zamindars. Fortunately, a document of Akbar's reign, preserved in the U.P. States Records Office, Allahabad, throws considerable light on some of the questions under our examination. The document referred to is a sale-deed dated 994 A.H./1585 A.D. and affirms the transfer of the proprietary rights of the entire village Jarha, in Pargana Sendila, in Awadh, to Mian Amman, son of Adhan, against a sum of Rs.1,568/-. The sale-deed was executed on behalf of Narain, Asa, Nakkhu, Bhakkan and others who belonged to the Brahman caste. The proprietary rights in land have been referred to as satarhi and biswai.1 In another document of the same period the proprietary rights have been referred to as milk.2 These terms also occur in the documents of a later period and have been used as equivalent to milkiyat-i-zamindari. A document of Shahjahan's reign dated 1060 A.H./1649 A.D. records the agreement in a dispute over the proceeds from mucaddami and biswai commonly known as satarhi4 between the parties in the villages of Karnal, Chaura and Abdulpur.5 For the reign of Aurangzeb we learn from a document that village Patwaripur Maitun in Pargana Sanida, in Awadh, was held in zamindari right by Mohammad Sharif.6 We learn from another document dated 1110 A.H./1698 A.D., that the village Kadori, in pargana Sanidla, in Awad, was inherited in milkiyat or satarhi rights by a number of co-sharers and that the

1. Allahabad Documents No.317
2. Ibid, No.319
3. Ibid Nos.219,224,370,375,418,435
4. Biswai, satarhi and milkiyat were used as synonyms for zamindari rights.
5. Ibid No.295
6. Ibid No.375, dated 1072 A.H./1661 A.D.
village was sold against Rs. 800. The *semindari* of three villages including Calcutta was purchased for the East India Company who were designated as the *talasahdar* of the said villages and were required to pay the *malwajib* or land revenue of Rs. 1,194. The transaction was duly reported to the provincial Diwan and he approved of it by issuing a *parwana*. 2 Still later a document dated 1141 A.H./1728 A.D. records the sale of *biswaas* or shares in a number of villages by the co-sharers who are designated as *senseindari* 3. In a document of the late 18th century *milkivat-i-semindari* is used as equivalent to *satarhi*. 4 From a document most probably belonging to 1730's we learn that Sobah Singh the *Semindar* of Jhangar in Sarker Sambhal, had requested the *Amil* to assess his *talasah* on the basis of *samawas* *das salab* after making necessary deductions for his *nanker* and *das yak* rights. 5

An examination of the evidence given above brings out the following points:

1. *Biswaas* or *satarhi* rights, in essence constituted the proprietary rights in land and such rights were hereditary and could be sold.

2. *Milkivat-i-semindari* or *semindari* rights constituted the proprietary rights in land. They were hereditary and could be sold.

3. The shares in the proprietary rights of a village were known as *biswaas* and the persons who held these rights were known as *senseindari*.

1. Allahabad Document No. 435
2. Add. 6603 ff. 36ab, Add 24039 ff. 36ab, 39a and c
3. Allahabad Document No. 239
4. Ibid No. 325
5. *Dastur-ul-wal Raikas* ff. 51-52
4. Later documents suggest that satarhi and biswai were used in the sense of milkiyat zamindari or zamindari.  
5. The word zamindar has been used in a number of documents for those who held villages in zamindari rights and had to pay land revenue or mal-i-wajib to the government officer or the jagirdar.  

Thus the evidence clearly suggests that the persons who sold the village Jarha held the village in biswai or zamindari rights and could be designated as zamindars. These facts when read together with the evidence in the Ain of the presence, in almost every mahal of the imperial territory, of zamindars who were not vassal chiefs paying fixed tribute, lends strong support to the inference that these zamindars may be identified with those we meet in the documents belonging to the reigns of Akbar and Aurangzeb. These zamindars, in order to be more precise, can be designated as village zamindars. We can conclude by saying that the village zamindars could be found in almost all the mahals of the imperial territory, that they were not vassal chiefs but held proprietary rights in land and paid land revenue to the State. We will examine the position, rights and obligations of the village zamindars when we meet them in the 18th century.  

Village Zamindar in the 18th Century  

Our sources for the study of the institution of zamindari in the first half of the 18th century comprise a number of documents.  

1. Waqâ-i-Sarkar Ajmer pp. 88-89
preserved in the U.P. State Records Office Allahabad, and the relevant
evidence contained in the Mirat-ul-Istilah by Anand Ram Maclia and
in the Dastur-ul-Imam Baikas. The evidence contained in those sources
together with the relevant evidence in the works compiled in the last
quarter of the 18th century and early years of 19th century, help us
to construct a fairly intelligible picture of the institution in the
period under our study.

According to Anand Ram Maclia, who was attached to the court
of Mohammed Shah, the word semindar originally signified one who
possessed land but in his own day it denoted a person who owned land
in a village or town and carried on cultivation. In a work compiled
in the last quarter of the 18th century in an answer to a query
as to who was the owner of the land king or semindar, we are told
that in ancient times the owners of land, in every part of the coun-
try, were rajas and semindars. Since the reign of Timur Shah (perhaps
the author refers to the establishment of the Mughal empire) the
owner of the land had been the king and the power to appoint a semin-
der and deprive him of his semindari vested in the king. As to the
power and authority of the semindar, we are told, it owed its origin
to his semindari right over the cultivators, who tilled the land,
and that the semindari rights consisted of nanakar, he was granted
for his services rendered in connection with the cultivation of

1. Mirat-ul-Istilah f.122 b.
of land by the cultivators. Elsewhere in a work compiled in the 19th century for the benefit of the British officers, the zamindar has been defined as one who looked after the land (zamindar). With the advent of Islam, we are told in the same work, such persons were designated as zamindars. The land was divided into shares and each one of the zamindars was granted a sanad as well as nankar. A zamindar was entitled to sell his zamindari. In case he was found guilty of some offence the king was empowered to take away his zamindari and transfer it to some one else. However, this power could not be exercised by Subahdars and nobles. The zamindars were granted certain rights and perquisites known as nankar, sair chauth and malikanah.

A careful examination of the evidence just described will reveal that the zamindars referred to in our sources cannot be identified with vassal chiefs or rajas as they neither paid fixed tribute nor held mansabs. On the other hand they seem to have been actively engaged in the work of cultivation and had immediate contacts with peasants. For their endeavours in connection with the cultivation of land and their rights in land they were granted certain perquisites such as nankar and malikanah. These facts clearly establish that for the revenue authorities the word zamindar, in the 18th century, signified the village zamindar, whereas the chronicles still used it in the sense of vassal

1. Add 19504, f.100a.
2. Add 6603, f.65 a.
3. Add 6603, f.65 a.
4. A commission of 10% for services rendered in connection with cultivation of land (Add 19054, f.100 a.)
5. Zamindar's share of 1/4th in the collections made under the head sair or taxes other than land revenue (Add 6603 f.65 a.)
6. The fixed commission of 10% for zamindars' proprietary right in land, which was fixed either in cash or kind; also known do-biswai deh yak and do-bisti (Add 6603 f.65; 77 ab) cf. Selections from the Revenue Records, p.5.
chief or raja. These definitions of the word zamindar are confirmed by the relevant evidence in other documents and administrative manuals of the period. Sobah Singh, the Zamindar of Jhangar, in Sarkar Sambhal, appears to be a typical village zamindar. His villages were duly assessed by the Amin, on the basis of past records; he paid the land revenue and was entitled to nankar and daz yak.\(^1\) That the village zamindars were entitled to seal their land is confirmed by sale-deeds belonging to the reigns of Bahadur Shah and Mohammad Shah.\(^2\) Thus the relevant evidence in the chronicles and revenue literature of the period strongly suggests that the village zamindar could be found in almost all the mahals of the imperial territory right from the days of Akbar and his rights and interests in land and his functions and perquisite continued to remain more or less the same in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Now we can examine the rights and duties of the village zamindar in greater detail. This evaluation of the rights and duties of the village zamindar will be based on the sources belonging to 17th, 18th and 19th century. Our justification for utilisation of the earlier and later evidence lies in the fact that the village zamindar as indicated earlier, continued to occupy almost the same legal posi-

1. Dastur-ul-Amal-i-Baikas, ff. 51-52
2. Allahabad Documents Nos. 224, 225, 370, 418, 299
tion in revenue administration under the Mughals and I have not been able to trace any evidence which might be adduced to indicate a break in the continuity of the zamindar's legal position. It is true that the village zamindars in different regions at different periods passed through many vicissitudes of fortune and in particular the wide-spread practice of ijarah in the first half of the 18th century proved to be the ruin of many ancient families of the zamindars. However, as to their legal position as zamindars and their perquisites and obligations as such I have not been able to trace any important changes.

Position of the Village Zamindar.

The village zamindar formed the most numerous class among the subjects of the State who had some rights and interests in land and were designated as zamindars. Under the given conditions of time the village zamindar was regarded as indispensable for the smooth working of the revenue administration in the bulk of the imperial territory. The revenue administration dealt with him in his two-fold position of a subject having proprietary right in land and as an intermediary who collected the land revenue assessed by the government officers and saw to it that the village was cultivated to its utmost capacity. It appears that the law fully recognised the dual position, quite independently of each other and a village zamindar did not lose his perquisites arising from his proprietary zamindari rights in land if he chose not to engage for the assessed land revenue. 1 It was this

1. A village zamindar was entitled to malikana even if he did not engage for payment of land revenue.

Revenue Selections p. 5; Mirat-i- Ahsan I p. 268
peculiar position enjoyed by the *zaminder* that raised his status from a mere intermediary, such as that of the farmer, for collecting the assessed land revenue, and it was this element which gave a semblance of continuity to the institution of *zamindari*. However, the *zaminder* remained at the same time an intermediary as he engaged for collection and payment of the land revenue assessed on the cultivated land in his *zamindari*. Such an assessment was made on the basis of the individual holdings of the peasants and therefore the village *zamindars* were also known as the *zamindaran-i-rivayati* as opposed to the *zamindaran-i-zortalak*, who often defied the authority of the State and paid fixed tribute only under compulsion of being subdued by the State army. Lastly it is important to note that a village *zaminder* was also a peasant in as much as he hired labourers to till his fields and this gave him an abiding interest in and attachment to the soil and the village he lived in. The fact that he was also a peasant is to be given due consideration if one is to understand the rural economy and the relations it established between the various groups having some interest in land. It would be an error leading to much confusion if the village *zamindars* were identified with the absentee land-lords interested primarily in extorting the maximum from their *zamindaris*.

**Rights and Perquisites:**

As we have noted above the most important functions of the village *zaminder* were two-fold, namely to ensure the cultivation of

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1. *Hidayat-ul-Gawanin* ff. 64-65
all cultivable land in his gazindari and the collection of assessed land revenue. In recognition for these services rendered to the State the gazindar was granted certain perquisites known as nankar or subsistence allowance. It denoted the land granted to the gazindar for cultivation and personal subsistence allowance. In fact it was a commission on the total collections and could be paid either in the form of land or in cash. Nankar elsewhere has been defined as a grant of two biwas in bigha for services rendered in connection with the cultivation of land and in certain provinces it consisted of a commission of 5% on the collections. Besides the nankar the gazindar received something (६/२) for his proprietary rights in land when it was brought under cultivation. The proceeds for his proprietary rights were known as malikansh. The form of payment and the percentage of proceeds differed from province to province. It was either a definite percentage of the area under cultivation or of the collections in cash or of the produce. Besides these perquisites the proprietary right in gazindari was hereditary and it was distributed among the rightful heirs of the deceased gazindar. Finally a village

1. Add 6603 f. 79 b
2. Add 19504 f.100a
3. The payment to the gazindar for his proprietary rights was also known as do-biwas and deh yak. It denoted a commission of 2 biwas in each bigha. In case the land was tilled by the gazindar he was entitled to nankar but not to malikana perquisites. See Add 6603 f 51a. In Dastur-ul-Anal Baikas gazindara rights and perquisites are referred as malikana and deh yak. See Dastur-ul-Anal Baikas f.52
4. Add 6603 f.51 a.
5. Add 6603 ff.79 ab
zaminder was entitled to sell his zamindari rights against a sum agreed upon between the vendor and the purchaser.¹

**Functions and Duties:**

The village zaminder occupied an important position in the local revenue administration and his functions were manifold. In the first place he was required to see that all cultivable land in his zamindari was brought under cultivation.²

He was in a position to persuade or coerce the peasants to engage in cultivation. Under the given conditions of the time it was not possible for the government official or any other person who had no intimate contacts of long duration with the peasants, to persuade them to till the soil as they would be disinclined to trust a stranger who was interested only in the realisation of the maximum of land revenue from the village. But a village zaminder, almost invariably a resident of village for generations, could not afford, under normal conditions, to ignore the interests of his fellow villagers who were associated with him in so many ways in the limited but compact life of a village. In fact his interest in land and prosperity of the village was real and vital. A prosperous village meant more money and comfort for him and in addition it secured for him the good will and loyal services of his tenants. Hence his services for the local administration were almost indispensable. In fact, the government realised the important role of the zaminder and he was constantly

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¹Allahabad Documents Nos. 317, 319, (Akbar's reign); 375, 435 (Aurangzeb's reign) 225 (Bahadur Shah's reign) Add 24039, ff. 36ab 39a & c.
²Buxul-i-Uman ff. 61 b, 62 a, Add 24039 ff. 36 ab 39 a & c.
reminded of his duty to bring more land under cultivation and secure the good will of the ryots. His next important function was that of an intermediary to collect the assessed land revenue and remit it into the treasury. His role as the collecting agency was difficult and delicate. It required a great deal of tact and resourcefulness to secure an assessment which would be just to the peasants and fair to the State and at the same time to gain something for himself in the bargain.

In addition to these duties he also performed an important function in the maintenance of law and order. For example he was required to furnish information about a thief or miscreant suspected to be taking refuge in his zamindari. He was also required to perform some military duty. He might be called upon to join a military expedition against a neighbouring zamindar who had been declared a rebel for non-payment of land revenue or for some other act of insubordination.

Conditions in the 18th century:

The condition of a village zamindar in the first half of the 18th century was far from secure or satisfactory. It might have been different for those of the village zamindars who possessed a large number of villages, commanded sufficient man power and were in a position of strength to successfully meet the acts of oppression on the part of the Amil, jagirdar or ijarahdar. The Central Government

1. Waqar-i-Sarker Ajmer p.66
2. Dastur-ul- Amal Saikas ff. 55-58
had been gradually weakening and was too much occupied with other important affairs at the court, in Rajputana, or in the Panjab, to keep the various parties, who had some interest of permanent or temporary nature in land, within the limits laid down by the imperial regulations. In fact it often failed to suppress the unruly and defiant zamindars in the vicinity of the capital. Consequently it was not possible for the central government to give any serious attention to innumerable violation of the imperial regulations at the pargana level. Thus it was generally left to the local authorities, the Amil, the Faujdar or the jagirdar to act at their own discretion and meet the situation with the resources at their immediate command. Normally no help from the centre could be expected to deal with a local situation and at the same time a local officer, in actual practice, was hardly accountable for his acts of oppression. Under such circumstances a powerful village zamindar was less liable to acts of oppression by the Amil or the Faujdar. If driven to extremity the zamindar could successfully defy the local authority. In fact, prudence tended to counsel the local officers to respect rather than coerce a powerful village zamindar. But the case was different for his less fortunate brothers who happened to be small zamindars, and who constituted the majority within the class. An unjust Amil or a hard-pressed jagirdar could hardly resist the temptation to over-assess the land owned by a zamindar. The village zamindar naturally resisted any unjust increase in the land revenue. His just stand in refusing to engage for a land revenue more than the actual rent roll created the necessary conditions for the appearance of the rapacious ijaraahdar on the
agrarian stage of the village. The village zamindar was thus driven to an untenable position whether he engaged for an increased jama or vacated the village for the extortion of the ijarahdar. Under these conditions, hardly left with any alternative to save himself from ruin. If he engaged for the increased land revenue he was bound to transfer the burden of the revenue demand to the peasants who faced the alternatives either of being ruined or leaving the village. In a short time, the zamindar's village would be deserted. On the other hand vacating the village for the ijarahdar meant for the zamindar immediate loss of his livelihood except the meagre proceeds from the malikanah right. In this case too the peasant would ultimately be ruined and the village deserted. This was more or less the situation in which the majority of the village zamindars found themselves in the first half of the 19th century. This evaluation of the condition of the village zamindars based on the general evidence as to political and administrative conditions of the period is confirmed by evidence contained in the Dastur-ul-Amal Beikas. In the Dastur we find two letters exchanged between a government officer and Sobah Singh, the Zamindar of Jhangar, in Sarkar Sambhal. The revenue officer in his parwanah charges Sobah Singh with failure to pay land revenue and attributes the failure to his unruly conduct and hostile attitude towards the government. He threatens the zamindar with
military action. In the *arzdaشت* the *zeminder* refutes the charges leveled against him and reviewing the agrarian conditions in his *taluqah* in the preceding years, criticises the role of the *ijarahdars* and lays down the proposal for a fair assessment of land revenue. The points made out in the *arzdaشت* corroborate our analysis and therefore it deserves a detailed examination.

Sobha Singh asserts in the *arzdaشت* that his forefathers always rendered necessary services to the former *hakims* and were regular in the payment of the land revenue. They presented themselves whenever they were summoned by the officers and helped them to suppress the unruly and the mischievous. At the same time they protected the ryots from oppression and created among them a sense of security. The *Amils*, on their own part gave due recognition to the service rendered to them and appreciated the regular payment of land revenue. In these days the district was well governed and enjoyed peace and prosperity. For the last four or five years the moneyed farmers, inexperienced and indifferent to the prosperity of the country and the ryots, had reached the district from the *parzana* headquarters. They were primarily interested in exacting the maximum of land revenue and aimed at ruining the country, and the ryots. For these reasons, it appears, Sobha Singh made up his mind to compete with the farmers and engaged for the oppressing revenue demand. He tried to face the situation to the limits of his resources. It appears that the revenue demand

1. *Dastur-ul-amal Beikas* ff. 51-52
continued to increase and driven to extreme helplessness he gave way and withdrew from the contest. The arzdaat suggests that after some-
time the farmers left the district and the Amil personally visited the villages of the district for a satisfactory reorganisation of
the revenue arrangements. Now the Amil continues the arzdaat, had tak
the trouble to visit the country personally and had earned a reputa-
tion for being just and well-disposed towards the ryots. Sobha Singh was encouraged to come out and make contacts with the peasants of his taluqah and induced them to engage in cultivation and that inspite of
scarcity conditions in the district he had succeeded in collecting the land revenue. However, the Amil had given, the arzdaat points out, no consideration to the fact that the zamindar was willing to
pay the land revenue. On the other hand influenced by the manipulation of the interested persons, he had made up his mind to declare war upon the zamindar. Concluding his arzdaat the zamindar, requested the Amil to assess the jama for the taluqah on the basis of mawazah deh
saleh after making the necessary deductions for nankar and deh vak. 1

If his request met with favour he would be prepared to pay a visit to the Amil. However, if the Amil, under the influence of the selfish and the mischief mongers, had made up his mind otherwise the zamindar
would be compelled to face the situation as it would develop. A zamindar, as might have been well known to the Amils could not leave his ancestral home, without giving a fight, as such a course of action would

1. Deh vak seems to be another name for malikanah or de hiswai or or 1/10th. See Add 5003 f. 51 a.
compromise his honour. He hoped that justice would be done to him as he had explained the position faithfully.

An examination of the foregoing summary of the arzdasht reveals that the zamindar had withheld the payment of land revenue which established a clear case of insubordination or rebellion against him. The Amil wanted to treat the zamindar as a rebel if the latter failed to make immediate amendments for his conduct by paying off the land revenue and visiting the Amil. The zamindar admitted that the land revenue had not been paid but pointed out that the revenue demand made upon him was excessive and had been enormously increased during the last few years when his taluqah had come under the hold of ijarahdars. He was unable to outbid the latter and had withheld himself from engagement. He asserted that if a settlement was to be made with him the assessment of land revenue should be based upon the mawaznah-i-dah salah and he should be resorted to his zamindari rights. Incidentally one also learn that the farming out of villages had ruined the cultivation and the peasantry and that the farmers, for one reason or other, had disappeared from the scene. The Amil had decided to deal with the zamindar who had persuaded the cultivators to bring the land under cultivation. The brief revenue history of the taluqah, as given in the arzdasht, is extremely revealing and can help us to draw certain important conclusions about the conditions that obtained in the first half of the 18th century. In the first place it confirms the evidence in other sources that the evil practice of ijarah had become quite wide-spread in the period under our study and that it invariably led to the ruin of the zamindar and the
peasantry and to the desolation of the land. Secondly, the village zamindar constantly stood in terror of the ijarahdar who on the one hand directly threatened his right to collect the revenue and on the other his presence could be utilised to coerce the zamindar to engage for an increased jama, which brought him to the village. In order to rehabilitate the village either the old zamindar had to be restored with the assurance of a fair assessment or a new zamindar had to be appointed. This practice became recurring feature of the agrarian life in the first half of the eighteenth century. The root of the evil could be traced back to the crisis in the jagirdari system which had been deepening since the last years of Aurangzeb’s reign. The crisis in the jagirdari system was accompanied with the widespread practice of ijarah which was instrumental in the ruination of the zamindars and the peasantry, the two classes which had an abiding interest in the land. It must surely also have lowered the productivity of the country.

The above discussion of the condition of the village zamindar and the conclusions drawn on its basis are directly confirmed by an earlier writer who compiled his work on the existing administrative practices in the early 18th century. In his account of the zamindari system the author says that in former days the government officers were just and kept to their pledges. Consequently the zamindars took interest in bringing land under cultivation and paid the land revenue

1. Hidayat-ul-Qawanin ff. 64-66
without making any complaints. But in his own days the mansabdars holding small ranks were appointed to high and responsible posts and they were provided with a small number of soldiers to carry on the work of revenue administration. Such a small contingent was inadequate to suppress and control the powerful and unruly zamindars. The mansabdars in order to meet their expenditure wanted to increase the revenue demand every year and, therefore, they oppressed the small zamindars. The zamindars, in their own turn, oppressed the ryots. Driven to extremity they left the riaywati areas\(^1\) and settled down in the territories which were under the zamindars, who paid the fixed tribute when compelled to do so by force. The territories under the vassal chiefs \(\text{زیندرا ترکیبی} \) consequently were well populated and well-cultivated and the unruly zamindars day by day, increased in power and strength. The riaywati zamindars were weakened and were reduced to poverty. They could not pay land revenue and took recourse

\[\text{\underline{1. The passage summarised above refers to:}}\]

These phrases require some explanation. It appears that mulk-i-riaywati signifies the areas or villages which were directly under the local revenue administration and in which the assessment was done on the basis of individual holdings of the ryots. Mulk-i-zaminder-i-gortalab indicates the territories which were under the zamindars who paid the fixed tribute only when compelled to do so by force. In such areas the local revenue administration did not assess the individual holdings of the peasants. Such areas in certain provinces were described as chair small and we learn from Mirat-i-Ahmad\(\), that in the first half of the 18th century the vassal chiefs of the chair small areas paid the fixed tribute or nesh kash only when the Nazaim led an expedition against them. (See Mirat-i-Ahmad, Supplement, pp.224,225). The term zaminderan-i-riaywati signifies such of the zamindars who engaged for the land revenue assessed on the basis of individual holdings of the peasants. Such zamindars could be regarded as the village zamindar.
to false pretexts. The profession of the zaminderi, therefore, fell into disrepute.

The Village Zaminder and the peasants:

We know very little about the relations between the village zaminder and the peasants. Unfortunately the chronicles and most the administrative manuals furnish us with little information to reconstruct an intelligible picture of this relationship. However, a document contained in the contemporary administrative manual entitled Dastur-ul-Amal-i-Baike gives us some insight into the relationship that subsisted between the zaminder and the peasants. The manual reproduces the muchilke or undertaking given by the zamindars or the Muqaddams to the revenue officers. It may be summarised thus: 1

1. That they had engaged for the estimated jama of the said amount, assessed on the basis of standing crops for the entire year and that they would collect the assessed jama from the individual peasants in accordance with entries showing the area under crops against them.

2. That they would not collect anything per bigha or per plough from the peasants except the land revenue.

3. That they would not cause any peasant of the village to leave it.

4. If for one reason or another, a peasant left the village they would collect the proceeds from his holdings and remit it to the treasury. The balance, whatever it might be, would be equally distributed over all the peasants.

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1. Dastur-ul-Amal Baike, f.66
5. That they would conciliate the abscending peasant in the following year and resettle him in the village and persuade him to cultivate his holdings.

6. If the peasant did not settle in the village his holdings would be divided among the zamindars and they would bring them under cultivation.

7. That they would not demand free services in ploughing their own fields more than the customary quota (नियोजन). 

8. And that they would in no way cause ruin to the ryots.

An examination of the undertaking given by the zamindars or Muqaddams reveals that the zaminder had no right to assess the individual peasants in his zamindari. The assessment was made by the assessing officer of the jagirdar or that of the khalsa. He was entrusted with collection of the revenue demand as shown against the individual peasants. The evidence summarised above also suggests that the zaminder collected some customary dues over and above the assessed land revenue. The State, however did not recognise such collections as lawful and threw the weight of its authority against their realisation by the zaminder. How far did the State succeeded in protecting the ryots from such unlawful exactions is a matter of conjecture. It depended, in the first place, on the integrity and efficiency of the Amil or the jagirdar to enforce imperial regulations. The specific agrarian conditions such as pressure on land or scarcity of peasants obtaining in a particular locality, the position and the individual temperament of a zaminder, and the caste composition of the peasantry together with their numerical strength were other important factors.
which would affect the implementation the regulations of the revenue administration.

The evidence under reference also throws some light on the nature of the peasants right in the land. We learn that the holdings under crops were entered against the name of the individual peasant, and he was responsible for paying the land revenue assessed on them. We are not told under what conditions he could be evicted from his holdings or what would be done with his holdings if he failed to pay the land revenue to the zaminder. But it is suggested that the zaminder was required to do his utmost to persuade an absconding peasant to resettle in the village and bring his holdings under cultivation. If he failed to return, in spite of all attempts on the part of the zaminder his holdings lapsed to the zaminder or the co-sharer zamindars who were entitled to bring the holdings under their own cultivation. Thus because of the relative abundance of land and the scarcity of peasants eviction was not a living problem.

Lastly, the zaminder was entitled to certain services rendered by the peasants without payment of any wages. The peasant was required to plough zaminder’s holdings for a number of days with his own plough and for this no wages were paid. Such services without wages were recognised by law but a limit was laid for each of them.

Appointment of Zaminder:

We have noted that the zamindars who paid land revenue assessed on the basis of individual holdings of the peasants were hereditary zamindars. The hereditary zamindar rights could also be obtained by virtue of purchase. Apart from them there was another class of land revenue paying zamindars who were appointed by the State. Such an
appointment was generally necessitated by the unruly and tumultuous attitude of a hereditary zaminder who might refuse to pay the land revenue. A suitable person, a loyal zaminder punctual in payment of land revenue or an able officer of the State was appointed as the zaminder of the territory vacated by the rebel. Generally, such an appointment carried with it a fixed rank and entailed an offer of a suitable pesh kash on the part of the appointee. The zaminder appointed by the State and holding a rank seems to have been subject to dach and tashina regulations but in certain cases an exemption from these regulations was made. The zamindari thus acquired, however, differed from the ordinary zamindari in one important respect. It could not be obtained in hereditary rights and on the death of the appointed zaminder the application of a new candidate would be entertained and if a suitable peshkash was forthcoming the application was recommended and approved.

1. Daestur-ul-Anal Reikae ff. 88, 89, Mirt-i-Ahmadi I p. 230
2. Ibid ff. 88-89
3. Akhbarat 38/137
4. Ibid 44/142
5. Mirt-i-Ahmadi I pp 234, 235
6. Akhbarat 44/142, Akhbarat 38/137