SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The three decades that intervened between the death of Aurangzeb and the invasion of Nadir Shah cover the period of political and administrative disintegration of the Mughal Empire. In 1707 it had reached the zenith of its territorial limits and with the defeat of the Marathas as a result of the relentless struggle against them by Aurangzeb the Empire seemed secure against internal revolts and foreign aggression. However, within a few years of Aurangzeb’s death the Mughal emperor had to face the revolts of the Sikhs, the Jats and the Rajputs. The Marathas recovered with an amazing and unexpected vigour and once again constituted a serious challenge to the Mughal Empire. The period was also marked by intense factional activities at the Mughal Court which tended to impair the military power and administrative stability of the State. In 1739 Nadir Shah appeared in the Panjab and the Persians won an easy victory against the Mughal forces. The Persian victory revealed the inner weakness of the Mughal power, encouraged centrifugal forces to assert themselves against the central authority and contributed still further to the rapid disintegration of the Mughal Empire.

The rot in the administrative institutions of the Empire had been sapping its vitality since the second half of the 17th century. As the first half of the 18th century wore on the agrarian and administrative crisis began to reflect itself in the form of local
revolts, religious antagonism, factionalism at the court and
degeneration of the ruling classes. Thus the crisis gradually tended
to become deeper and more complex and ultimately led to the political
disintegration of the Empire. A study of the land revenue administra­
tion clearly brings out the nature of the administrative crisis with
which the Mughal Empire was faced in the first half of the 18th
century, and indicates the relationship between the agrarian and
administrative crisis and political disintegration.

By the close of the 17th century the institution of jagirdari
had failed to adopt itself with the changed political and agrarian
conditions. The glaring contradiction in the assignment system re­
vealed itself in the form of an overwhelming increase in the number
and rank of the mansabdars and a corresponding decrease in the avail­
able jagirs for assignment. The inflated nature of jama and keen
competition among the descendents of old servants of the Empire and
the new claimants to mansabs and jagirs could be regarded as the
direct results of these developments. These tendencies in the jagirdari
system continued growing and were even accentuated in the years that
followed the death of Aurangzeb. However, the most important develop­
ment in the post-Aurangzeb period was the conversion of the bulk of
the khalsa lands into jagirs. Even this did not ease the situation
and the recruitment of emergency forces at intervals on cash basis
indicates that either the central government had ceased to exercise
control on the jagirdars or the highly inflated jama figures had
reduced the majority of mansabdars to such financial distress that
that they could not afford to maintain the contingents they were required to maintain against their mansabs and jagirs. On the other hand, there are indications that a number of mansabdars, who enjoyed a privileged position, had acquired high mansabs and lucrative jagirs, but they did not maintain the requisite number of horsemen and could not be usefully employed in the military service of the State. The total effect of these developments was that the jagirdari system failed to provide the State with a strong and efficient military service and at the same time it failed to provide adequate means of livelihood to a large number of mansabdars and horsemen who were employed in the service of the State.

The crisis in the jagirdari system also affected the efficiency of the administrative system at various levels because Thanedars, Faujdars and Subahdars were in great financial distress on account of the poor yields from their jagirs. Dissatisfied and frustrated jagirdars could not be expected to perform their executive or military duties efficiently as they could neither muster the required contingents nor could they upkeep the other essential staff adequately.

The crisis in the jagirdari system also led to exploitation of the peasantry. Highly inflated jama figures compelled the jagirdar to assess his jagir for a jama which could not be normally realised from zamindars. The zamindars in their own turn either refused to engage for the increased land revenue or transferred the burden on to the peasants. In case they refused to engage for the land revenue the necessary conditions for the appearance of the ijarahdar as an intermediary were created, which meant a more intensive exploitation
of the peasantry.

The decline of the jagirdari system can be traced back to the inherent contradictions which it contained from its very inception. The system, as we have noted, was essentially a mode of payment by assignment of salaries which were fixed in cash. Such practice necessitated the valuation of the estimated income of the Empire which was technically known as jama. Under the given agrarian conditions in the Mughal period the wide gap between the estimated income and the actual collections always remained a difficult problem. The nature of the problem was fully revealed as early as the 15th year of Akbar's reign. The Jama-i-Rekami Qalam indicated a highly inflated jama in which the gap between the jama and actual collection was very wide. But the creation of the inflated jama was a political and administrative necessity, because Akbar had to pay a large number of mansabdars in the form of assignments, but the available assignments were very few. Thus the real problem was to fight out the tendency of inflated jama and to maintain a workable relationship between the estimated income from the jazir and the actual collections therefrom and between the total number of mansabdars and horsemen employed in the imperial service.

It may be noted that earnest efforts were made to narrow down the gap between the jama and actual collections under Akbar and preparation of various jamae under Akbar indicates that the land revenue administration under Akbar did succeed in narrowing down the gap between the jama figures and actual collection. Under Jahangir, it
appears, the jama figures were highly inflated. When the situation in the jagirdari system, under Shahjahan became quite serious and he had to introduce some drastic reforms in the mansabdari and jagirdari system. He introduced the regulations which have been described as month-scales and month-proportions, which prescribed the claims and obligations of the mansabdars. The total effect of these regulations was reduction in the pay scales of the mansabdars and a corresponding decrease in the number of horsemen maintained by the mansabdars. An examination of the relevant evidence indicates that the attempt to root out the evil of inflated jama was direct and intricate. The myth of high mansabs and enormous jama figures was maintained and it was difficult, at any given time, to ascertain the exact income from the assigned lands. The figures given as actual collections were always a matter of dispute between the revenue ministry and the jagirdar. Aurangzeb could not give adequate attention to the details of administration especially during the second half of his reign when he devoted all his time and energies to his mission of rooting out the Marathas. The attempts at reforms under Bahadur Shah were half-hearted and even they were thwarted by the indifference of the Emperor and the machination of his court favourites. A similar fate awaited the belated attempt at reforms by Nizam-ul-Mulk. Consequently, the tendency towards inflated jama continued in the first half of the 18th century.

The well-established practice of the constant transfer of jagirs was another source of instability for the jagirdari system. It did not only lead to rack-renting of the peasants and ruin of the cultivation but also indirectly contributed to an increase in the number of
mansabdars. Generally a long period intervened between the resumption of a jagir and the assignment of an alternative jagir and in the meantime the resumed jagir was administered by the State officers dealing with the mahal-i-pai-baqi. At any given time a large number of mansabdars, who were on pay roll of the State, were not actually in possession of jagirs. It is true that in due course their claims were adjusted. But the inordinate delay in the process of audit and adjustment gave some more time to the State to withhold the salaries of the mansabdars. Thus the practice of the transfer of jagirs enabled the State to employ at a given time, a certain number of mansabdars for whom normally the necessary funds were not available but the State was under the obligation to adjust their claims against it within an unspecified period. Such an arrangement increased the burden on the exchequer of the State, created a sense of insecurity among the mansabdars and impaired the efficiency of the imperial army.

It may pertinently be asked why no efforts were made to employ only a fixed number of mansabdars and soldiers whose salaries could be fully paid from the available funds from the jagirs, and why no curb was put on the tendency of constant increase in the number of mansabdars. The answer to the question can be found in the constant inflow of immigrant from Iran and Turan, in the political conditions peculiar to Medieval India, and in the feudal tendencies that persisted in the mansabdari system. An examination of the political history of the Mughal period will reveal that with the exception of brief intervals the Mughals army had been constantly employed either in conquering new territories or in supressing powerful rebels within the Empire.
Under these conditions it was not possible to put a ceiling on the number of the mansabdars and their contingents. Another factor which contributed to the increase in the number of mansabdars was the semi-feudal character of the mansabdari system. Outwardly, the mansabdari system might appear to be a bureaucracy which was created by curbing the power and pretensions of the nobility. The rules and regulations laid down for the recruitment, claims and obligations of mansabdar, the law of escheat and the well established practice of frequent transfer of jagirs lend strong support to the presumption that the powers and pretensions of aristocracy were effectively curtailed and they were organised into an imperial military service. Theoretically even a mansab was not vested with any hereditary right. But beneath the appearance of a bureaucracy the feudal tendencies persisted. In actual practice, the hereditary claims were organised, and in a majority of cases the sons and descendants of a mansabdar were provided with mansabs. In fact, there are indications that for a long time the claims of the descendants of old mansabdara, known as khanah gadan, received special care and attention by the emperors and such persons started their career with considerably high mansabs. Again the landed aristocracy of the country, the Rajputs, the Afghans and the Deccani

1. Feudal here refers to certain characteristics of the mansabdari system:

(a) The mansabdars, paid as they were in the form of assignments, held certain interest in land and lived on the appropriation of the surplus produce from it.

(b) In actual practice the system recognised the hereditary claims of the nobility and the landed aristocracy of the country to mansabs.
Mussalmans were somehow or other accommodated within the framework of the mansabdari system. Even an attempt was made to accommodate the Marathas but it did not completely succeed. With the passage of time the demand for mansabs and jagirs grew in number and intensity and the State failed to resist the pressure from the nobility. The political and administrative history of the last quarter of the 17th and first half of the 18th century clearly brings out the keen competition for acquiring mansabs and jagirs. The rise of the Marathas and the Jats, the unrest and periodical revolts in Bundelkhand and Rajputana and the factionalism at the court might have been partially ac­tuated by political, religious and personal motives but beneath them all lay the hunger for land and territory, which gave the holders a financial stability which was not otherwise possible. The State ultimately succumbed to the ever increasing demand of the ruling classes and even the bulk of khalsa lands was assigned as jagir. These developments resulted in the political disintegration of the Empire and with the decay of the Empire the class of jagirdars also met with its doom. However, some of the most powerful mansabdars either asserted their independence or carved out independent principalities for themselves. The Rajput chiefs who were reduced to the status of jagirdars threw away the yoke of subservience to the Mughal Empire and became independent. In Awadh, Bengal and in the Deccan powerful nobles carved out independent principalities for themselves.

The practice of ijarah, though an old one, reappeared during the reign of Jahangir and continued to gain ground during the course of the 17th century. While it was common in jagir lands, in khalsa lands it was rather limited, and was permitted only under special
circumstances. However, after the death of Bahadur Shah the practice became wide-spread in khalsa as well as in jagir lands. The development affected the working of the land revenue administration adversely and weakened its stability still further. While there appears to be little justification for the introduction of the practice in khalsa lands, in jagir lands it was the direct result of the inflated jama, which normally could not be realised. The jagirdar thought it wiser to content himself with a limited but a sure amount to be realised from the ijarahdar than to manage the jagirs himself and spend a considerable amount and time in doing so without any certainty of the full collections to be made from the jagirs. But effects of such an arrangement on zamindars and peasants were ruinous. The revenue-farming gave rise to a class of bankers and speculators who invested their money in revenue-farming and thus emerged as a class of intermediaries apart from the hereditary zamindars. The rise of the new class created artificial conditions for a keen competition to engage for land revenue demand which exceeded the normal jama. The hereditary zaminder was faced with a difficult position, whether he outbade the ijarahdar or withdrew from the contest he could not escape ruin. The total effect of the practice on a large scale was the ruin of a large number of ancient hereditary zamindars who were replaced either by powerful neighbouring zamindars who gradually carved out taluqadars at the cost of the old zamindars, or were ousted by the rich bankers from the towns and cities who emerged as absentee landlords.

1. A study of the British records lead to the inference that the majority of the taluqadars in Awadh were originally ijarahdars.
The practice of jizarah in regard to jagir lands, as noted above, was closely related with the crisis in the jagirdari system. The political and administrative conditions were such that no action against the jagirdars could be taken by the Revenue Ministry. But in khalsa lands the practice was adopted as a measure of expediency and as it served the vested interests of the bankers and those who patronised them for their personal ends. Attempts at abolishing the practice met with stiff opposition from the vested interests headed by the court favourites. The weak emperors succumbed to their pressure and the attempts at reform were abandoned.

That the village zamindars existed in almost all the mahal of the Mughal Empire has been discussed elsewhere. The land under the zamindars, whether in the khalsa or in the jagir lands, were subject to the detailed assessment in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Revenue Ministry. They acted as intermediaries for the collection and payment of land revenue. These zamindars were quite distinct from the vassal chiefs, referred to in the Mughal chronicles as zamindars, who paid a fixed tribute or were assigned their zamindaris in lieu of their salary against their mansabs. Such a village zaminder enjoyed proprietary rights in land rights which were transferrable. The village zaminder continued to occupy the same position in the agricultural community of a village in the 17th and 18th century. However, the practice of nasaq in the form of group assessment strengthened his position as an intermediary. He did not only engage for the collection and payment of land revenue but the distribution of jama over the individual holdings of the peasants.
was also left in his hands, a practice which he could utilise in his own interest at the cost of the peasants. But the widespread practice of revenue-farming robbed him of much of the advantages that would have accrued on account of the nasaq arrangement. The practice of revenue-farming, it appears, adversely affected the interests of the village zamindars and there are indications that the competition between the ijarahdars and the zamindars for engaging for land revenue which exceeded the normal jama, led to the ruination of many old families of the hereditary zamindars. A large number of sale-deeds of zamindari rights preserved in the U.P. States Records Office, Allahabad, indicate that in the first half of the 18th century, zamindari rights, were sold on a considerably large scale which seem to confirm the inference that practice of ijarah proved to be the ruin of the small zamindars. The case was, however, different with the big and powerful zamindars. The local officers, with the inadequate means for maintaining efficient and strong local police and soldiers employed in connection with the collection of land revenue, were not in a position even to collect the normal jama, in case a powerful zamindar chose to defy the local officer. Under the given political and administrative conditions no help from the centre could be expected and the local officer was left to meet the situation with the resources at his immediate command. Under such circumstances, prudence tended to counsel the local officer to respect rather than coerce a powerful zamindar. Neither an ijarahdar from city nor a neighbouring zamindar could dare to obtain his zamindari in revenue farming. On the other hand, a powerful zamindar could obtain the
villages owned by small zamindars in farm and if possible contrive
to purchase these villages for amounts much less than their actual
value.

The institution of madad maash land had important bearing on
the political, economic and social life of rural Hindustan. The prac­
tice of granting rent-free lands to the Muslim, especially the Shaikh
and Sayyids, was actuated by the motives of creating pockets of local
influence which could be always depended upon for loyal service to the
State. The Muslim grantees of revenue free lands settled down in the
remote villages and on account of their tact and intelligence won a
place of respect among the alien Hindu population. On the one hand,
it appears, they exercised their influence with the local officers
to protect the local Hindus against the unjust exactions or other
forms of oppression, on the other hand they were required to furnish
the government officers with reliable information about the political
and administrative condition of the locality. Economically, it created
a class, spread all over the the country, which like the zamindars
depended for its livelihood on the surplus produce from the land.
Generally, the madad maash holders enjoyed economic immunity in so far
that their lands were free from all taxes. But the grants were generally
small and, therefore, they were, in most cases, not much better off
than the village zamindars. They were not called zamindars but for all
practical purposes they enjoyed the same rights and interests in land
as the zamindars. There are indications that in the first half of the
18th century holders of madad maash land enjoyed the right to sell
or transfer land as gift in the same way as the zamindars did. The
rights in *madad maash* land gradually tended to be hereditary, subject to formal renewal and confirmation. In the first half of the 18th century, however, it appears that certain types of *madad maash* lands had acquired more or less the same character as the *zamindari* land and were subject to revenue assessment. Thus the institution ultimately more or less merged into the institution of *zamindari* and served to widen the class of intermediaries. The present writer does not want to suggest that the Muslim *zamindars* of the 18th century were invariably the grant holders or their descendants. Muslims, of course, acquired *zamindari* rights by purchase and sometimes converted *ijarah* rights into *zamindari*. But it is important to note that in the middle of the 18th century the *madad maash* grants were quite freely treated in transactions as *zamindari* lands and hardly any distinction was made between the *zamindar* and one who held the *madad maash* grant.

Socially, the institution became responsible for fostering and developing belief in and practice of religious toleration among the rural population. The Muslim settled down in the interior and came into direct contact with the Hindu rural population. These Muslims succeeded in retaining the essentials of their religious beliefs and customs. Nevertheless they were considerably influence by the local customs and began to participate in the local festivals, not as a matter of belief, but merely as an occasion which afforded them an opportunity to rejoice with those who, although professed a different religion, were nonetheless their life-long companions to face the common problems of rural life. Similarly, the simple minded Hindus
in the villages came to know and understand the Muslim culture and religion as practiced and observed by the Muslims in their daily life. Gradually, the realisation came to Hindus that the Muslims were not altogether unwholly as they were made to believe from the accounts handed down to them from their forefathers, who identified a Muslim with a Turk and a malich, a tyrant and a creature of extremely unwholly and unclean habits. Consequently, the rural Hindus and Muslims developed alike a deep rooted sense of religious toleration towards each other which was born of a realisation of common needs and problems of the limited but compact life of an Indian village. The legacy of religious toleration in rural India is still a cherished asset left by the institution of madad naaath grants.

We have noted that nasaq in the form of group assessment had become the general practice in assessing the revenue farming in the reign of Aurangzeb and continued to be so in the first half of the 18th century. The replacement of zabt by nasaq has been described as an administrative revolution in the methods of assessment. Whether the change over amounted to an administrative revolution or not the fact remains that it considerably affected the relative position of the peasants and the intermediaries. The nasaq arrangement in the form of group assessment implied that the unit of assessment was not the holdings of the individual peasants but the village or the pargana. The distribution of the assessed jama in such an arrangement was left in the hands of the intermediaries who also engaged for the collection and payment of land revenue. Such an arrangement provided the necessary power and opportunity to the zamindars and farmers to raise the revenue demand against the individual peasants. The peasant had consequently
to pay more than the amount which could be normally assessed on his holdings. In other words the arrangement eliminated the direct relationship between the State and the peasants and armed the intermediaries with the necessary power to exploit the peasantry more intensively.

The change over from zabt to nasaq as the most important method of assessment indicated a weakening of the administration machinery at various levels. The zabt arrangement entailed large expenditure in measurement operations and also required a large and efficient staff. In case men of integrity were not available the zabt arrangement admitted of much corruption, caused much inconvenience to all the parties concerned and was generally disliked. Whereas the nasaq arrangement, based as it was on the previous records, was simpler and entailed no extra expenditure. With the weakening of the administration, when the proper vigilance could not be exercised, nasaq naturally suggested itself as the most convenient of all the methods of assessment and was consequently adopted as the general practice, although it benefited the intermediaries at the cost of the State and the peasants. The intermediaries in their own interests as a class favoured nasaq as the best of all the methods of assessment and the officials partly because of their unwillingness to take up the arduous measurement operations and partly under the influence of the intermediaries gradually shifted over to nasaq.

Our investigations have revealed that in the first half of the 18th century the position of the peasant was considerably weakened. The practice of nasaq in the form of group assessment became quite
wide-spread and distribution of assessed land revenue over the holdings of the individual peasants was largely left in the hands of intermediaries. The peasants thus lost the direct relationship with the government and the arrangement gave ample opportunity to the intermediaries to exploit the peasantry. The effects of ijara fhari system aggravated the situation still further. It created artificial conditions for competition for a land revenue which exceeded the normal jama, which ultimately meant an increase in the burden on the peasantry.

The examination of the available evidence does not indicate any increase in the magnitude of land revenue demand sanctioned by the Revenue Ministry. It varied between 1/4th to 1/2 of the produce, as it had been in the 17th century. As to the collections made under the head of abwab or taxes over and above the land revenue no specific evidence is available. But the administrative practices of the period such as the nasaq in the form of group assessment and the revenue-farming coupled with the weakening of the administrative machinery at various levels tended to create the necessary condition for collection of such taxes. No idea, however, can be formed of their magnitude.