The present work aims at a detailed study of Mughal land revenue administration in the first half of the 18th century. It is the first systematic study of the working of land revenue administration based on the available material, especially the documentary evidence which has so far been sparingly utilised. The chapters on the jagirdari system, ijarahdari system, zamindar and zamindari, the medad maah grants and the interpretation of nasaq, in particular, may be regarded as an original contribution to the study of Mughal land revenue system.

The origin, nature and extent of the crisis in the jagirdari system has been examined and its repercussions on the political and administrative stability of the empire have been indicated. The crisis revealed itself in the form of an overwhelming increase in the number of mansabdars and a corresponding decrease in the available jagirs for assignment. This, in turn, led to an inordinate inflation of the jama and keen competition among the various classes which clamoured for mansab and jagir. These developments seriously impaired the political and administrative stability of the empire and served to aggravate the agrarian crisis.

The old practice of ijarah reappeared in the reign of Jahangir and continued to grow during the 17th century. While it was common in jagir lands, in khasa 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 khasa as well as in jagir lands. The development affected the working of the land
revenue administration adversely and impaired its stability still further. The effects of revenue-farming on zamindars and peasants were ruinous. This practice gave rise to a class of bankers and speculators who invested their money in revenue-farming and thus emerged a class of intermediaries which was distinct from the hereditary zamindars. The rise of this new class led to keen competition among its members to bid higher and higher for a land-revenue demand which exceeded the normal jama and ultimately resulted in an increased burden on the peasantry. The hereditary zamindar was faced with a difficult choice: he had to outbid the jilarahdar or withdraw from the contest. In either case, it was not easy for him to escape ruin. As the practice of jilarahdar became wide-spread, many old families of hereditary zamindars were forced to sell their zamindari rights to powerful neighbouring zamindars (who gradually carved out for themselves talugahdaras) or they were ousted by the rich bankers from the towns and cities who emerged as absentee landlords.

The position of the village zamindar has been examined on the basis of documentary evidence and it has been shown that the village zamindar was quite distinct from the vassal chief who paid a fixed tribute or held his zamindari as jagir in lieu of his salary as a mansabdar, and that the village zamindar as an intermediary paid land revenue or mal-i-walih. The village zamindar existed in almost all the mahals of the empire since the reign of Akbar. However, his presence was not incompatible with the direct relationship between the state and the peasants. It was the nasaq arrangement in the form of
group assessment which served to eliminate the direct relationship between the State and the peasant. In the first half of the 18th century the practice of nasaq on a large scale strengthened the position of the zamindar as an intermediary.

The institution of madad maash grants has been, for the first time, studied in detail and its impact on the political, social and economic life of rural Hindustan has been indicated. Politically, the institution served the purpose of creating pockets of local influence which could be depended upon for loyal support to the State. Economically, it created a class spread all over the country which, like the zamindars, depended for its livelihood on the surplus produce from the land. The madad maash grants were free from all taxes but the grants were generally small and, therefore, the majority of madad maash holders were not much better off than the village zamindars. They were not called zamindars but they practically enjoyed the same rights in land as the hereditary zamindars. Thus the institution ultimately merged, more or less, into the institution of zamindari and served to widen the class of intermediaries. Socially, the institution fostered and promoted a greater understanding between the religious communities living together in villages as well as a link between the culture of the court and the rural population.

The various methods of assessment such as zabt, konkut, nasaq and ghallah-bakhshi obtained side by side in different parts of the Empire. The assessing officers were enjoined to be generous in offering option to the peasants and the zamindars to choose one of the various methods of assessments. However nasaq in the form of group
assessment appears to have been the general practice.

An examination of documentary evidence suggests that Naasq was fundamentally a system of assessment based on previous records. Assessment could be made on individual holdings or on the village as a whole. It was not exclusively group assessment as suggested by Moreland. Under Akbar, in the areas under Naasq, the settlement was made with the individual peasant. However, in the last quarter of the 17th century and first half of the 18th century it was invariably group assessment.

The investigations made in the course of the present study clearly bring out the nature of the administrative crisis with which the Mughal Empire was faced in the first half of the 19th century, and indicate the relationship between the administrative crisis and political disintegration of the Empire. The present study reveals that the rot in the administrative institutions having set in since the second half of the 17th century, the vitality of the Empire was gradually sapped. During the first half of the 19th century 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. The crisis gradually tended to become deeper and more complex and ultimately led to the political disintegration of the Empire. The rise of the Marathas, and the Jats, the unrest and periodical revolts in Bundelkhand and Rajputana and factionalism at the court might have been actuated partially by political, religious and personal motives but beneath them all lay hunger for assignments and land.
The studies are mainly based on documentary evidence which has been supplemented by the evidence contained in the chronicles. The sources can be broadly classified into the following categories:

1. Administrative Documents
2. Collections of Letters and Documents
3. Legislative Documents
4. Some dealing with the technical terms of administrative practices
5. Maps
6. Illustrations
7. Published records

The administrative documents contain a large number of administrative, military, judicial, revenue, etc., and are available in the State records offices. Although they cover the period from the time of their issue to the present time, they are not purposefully arranged in different categories. The specific information they contain about the institutions of the past and their work.

The collection of letters and documents contains a large number of such documents as administrative, military, judicial, and revenue, etc., and is available in the State records offices. These documents are substantial in the administrative practices and problems and illustrate the nature of administration. These records are the only means of understanding the past and the future of the State. The administrative records and the letters of the past-for the understanding.
The Administrative Manuals give a systematic account of the Mughal administrative system and valuable documents have been inserted in the course of narrative to illustrate the nature of the documents maintained by various officials. Among these mention should be made of the Khalaat-us-Siyaq, the Farhang-i-Kardani, the Zawabit-i-Alemgiri and the Hidayat-ul-Qawain.

Valuable information is also available in such works as the Hirit-ul-Istilah, the Risalah-i-Ziraat and the Glossary of Revenue Terms by Khwaja Yasin of Delhi. These works explain and define the technical terms of land revenue administration.

Waqai or news letters are the most valuable and authentic source for studying the working of the land revenue system. Waqai-i-Sarkar Ajmer and Ranthambore and the Selected Waqai of the Deccan have been used in the course of the present studies.

The documentary evidence has been supplemented by the evidence contained in the chronicles such as the Ahwal-ul-Kuwcegin the Tazkirat-ul-Juluk, the Shah Nome-i-Unwarr-ul-Kalem, the Kuntakhab-ul-Lubab, the Hirat-i-Ahmadi, the Siyar-ul-Iutakkhirin, the Riyas-us-Salatin and other contemporary Persian chronicles. Some British records such as the Selections from the Revenue Records of the North Western Provinces, 1818-1821 and the reports contained in the Studies in the Land Revenue History of Bengal, 1769-1787, by R.B. Rambbotham, have also been utilised.