CHAPTER VI

AGRARIAN ECONOMY OF MUSLIM INDIA

In Moreland's own words the importance of the subject, namely, the agrarian system of the Muslim rulers in India, from thirteenth to eighteenth centuries was "impressed forcibly" on him much earlier at the time when he was collecting material for a sketch of the economic condition of India in the time of Akbar. A striking fact which then emerged before Moreland was, "that in the Mogul period the State disposed of from a third to a half of the gross produce of the land constituted... by far the most potent fact in the distribution of the national income; while its action in regard to distribution inevitably reacted on production, so much so that we are justified in concluding that, next only to the weather, the administration was the dominant fact in the economic life of the country".[1] This revelation sparked off Moreland's queries into the agrarian system of Muslim India. Accordingly, and to begin with, Moreland's two companion volumes, India at the Death of Akbar and From Akbar to Aurangzeb carried "condensed accounts" of the relations subsisting between the administration and peasants at the period. While the main lines of agrarian system were described by Moreland, some difficulties which appeared to be matters of detail were reserved for study later on. However, on returning to the subject, Moreland found that those apparent details, when subjected to closer scrutiny, magnified in importance. Also contrary to his earlier assumption, he discovered that the guides which he had accepted, namely "Blochmann, Jarrett, Dowson, and other writers of the last century, busied as they were, in exploring an entirely unknown field, had not fully mastered the terminology employed in the literature of the period, but had borrowed from modern practise in India, or sometimes from medieval practice in Europe, terms of art, or picturesque phrases, which

did not always give the precise meaning of the originals, and occasionally involved serious misrepresentation".[2] Therefore, it became imperative for Moreland to study the terminology afresh and offer a precise terminology. His technique involved working through the printed literature of the period, together with such relevant manuscripts as he "found in this country, extracting every passage in which an apparently technical term occurred, and then bringing the passages together, and inferring from them the meaning, or meanings, borne by each term at different periods, or in different parts of India".[3]

The results which Moreland obtained in the course of this study formed the basis of his third major work entitled, The Agrarian System of Moslem India (1929) in which he offered a chronological account, from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries, of the prevalent practices of land revenue administration. Moreland described it as 'An essay in institutional history' because, "During the main period of Moslem rule in India, lasting from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, a Kingdom had three essential constituents, the Sovereign who ruled it, the Army which supported the throne, and the Peasantry which paid for both; and the relation subsisting between these entities was aptly presented in an aphorism current in the early days, that "troops and peasants are the two arms of the kingdom".[4] However, while the dynastic and military history of the period was tolerably available to the students, it was impossible to obtain a general or a connected view of the position of peasants in their relations with the State from the existing literature. Hence, through this essay Moreland intended to fill a vital gap in medieval historical studies. It's main theme was to examine the methods by which the State's share of the peasant's produce was assessed and collected and the arrangements under which portions of it were alienated in favour of the classes, which Moreland described

[3] Ibid., iii.
[4] Ibid., xi.
collectively as Intermediaries.[5] A time-span of six centuries was encapsulated in this single 'essay' in which Moreland set out to study the agrarian system of Muslim India against the backdrop of the Hindu agrarian system. However, Moreland felt that the contents of his essay were likely to evoke surprise amongst the readers because, he wrote at a time when the readers were interested primarily in the current agrarian question which revolved around the rights enjoyed or claimed by the landholders and their tenants. However, he pointed out that the prominence of the question of rights was only a recent phenomena in Indian agrarian history, belonging to the British period, and which was found to be strikingly missing in both the Hindu and Muslim periods when, "the agrarian system was a matter of duties rather than rights. At its roots lay the conception that it was the duty of the peasants to till the soil, and pay a share of their produce to the State, so far as private rights or claims were recognised, they were subordinate to this fundamental obligation".[6]

However, in Moreland's opinion for a true and genuine appreciation of the conditions which prevailed in the period before the establishment of British rule in India, it was essential to bear in mind that factors such as "internal tranquility" leading to rapid growth of population and competition for land, which had scarcely existed in the Muslim period, except outside relatively small areas, secondly, the Rule of Law, superseding by degrees the personal rule of Muslim rulers and finally the idea of modern administrative philanthropy, were all modern developments belonging to the British period, and should therefore, be


eliminated while studying the preceding periods.[7]

Moreland drew his information from various heterogenous sources for the work which was laid out in eight Chapters and eight Appendices. Moreland indicated at the outset that he “tried to write in English and to get away from the polyglot, and often ambiguous jargon in which agrarian topics are commonly treated in India. In order to do this, I have had to frame a precise terminology, choosing those names which carry the fewest misleading connotations”. [8] However, Persian words and phrases were not altogether avoided by Moreland and were introduced in relevant passages. He found that the Persian language, as it was used in Muslim India possessed a wealth of synonyms, and so it happened that a particular thing appeared under various names, sometimes to avoid repetition of the word. The fluidity of terminology employed was a striking fact, having immense importance for a historian. This trend would well be exemplified in the use of the word MaL Generally the word denoted “property” or “possessions” or “wealth” but in the military department it meant “booty taken in war”, while in the jargon of the finance offices it signified “land-revenue”. [9] Thus, inferring the meaning of this word, or for that matter any word, denoted by several expressions, the meaning had to be inferred from the context. Moreland further indicated that because of the fluidity of terminology both time and place conditioned the interpretation of a particular passage or a term. [10]

Soon, however, Moreland discovered that to trace the development of the agrarian system of Muslim India was not a simple task, for the chief difficulty lay in the absence of a definite starting point. The observed continuity of institutions indicated clearly that

[8] Ibid., Preface, V.
[9] Ibid., xiv.
[10] Ibid., xiii. For another illustration of the fluidity of the terminology see the various and changing meanings of the word Diwan at different periods of history, xiv-xv.
the first Muslim conquerors did not impose an alien system on their newly acquired Indian subjects, rather they adopted portions, at least, of the system which they found in operation, and adapted it as time went on, to meet changing needs. In that case, "the ideal starting point would thus be a description of the Hindu System as it stood in theory, and worked in practise, during the twelfth century." However, since nothing of the kind was known to exist, therefore Moreland decided first to state, though tentatively, the fundamental features of the Hindu System and then to indicate their logical connection with the institutions under the early Muslim rulers. Turning to the Dharma or the Hindu Sacred Law for the fundamental features of the Hindu agrarian system Moreland observed that the Dharma contemplates an agrarian position similar in essentials to that which we find at the opening of the Muslim period, and not very different from that which persisted to its close. "There is the King in his capital, there is the Peasant in his village; and the relations between king and Peasant give us, at any rate, the skeleton of the system." Avoiding the use of such ambiguous terms like farmer, cultivator and ryot, Moreland chose the word 'Peasant' to denote the person, who, "whatever, the incidents of his tenure may be, cultivates a holding entirely or mainly by his family labour, for his own profit, and at his own risk. He must be distinguished on the one hand from the Intermediary, who claims a share

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of the produce, but does not himself take an active part in production, and on the other hand from the serf whom he feeds or the hired labourer to whom he pays wages". [14] In Moreland's conception, the fundamental Hindu system was the one where the occupation of land for production involved a liability on the part of the Peasant to pay a share of his produce by actual division, either by weighing or by measuring, to the King who determined within certain limits the amount of the share and also regulated the methods of assessment and collection. [15] According to Moreland this was precisely the ground work of the system which operated in Muslim India from the thirteenth century onwards, but subsequently several developments of practice also emerged which in fact furnished the origin of nearly all the tenures existing in Northern India at the present time. [16] Thus the indigenous method of realising the King's share by crop-division had survived in Northern India into the modern times, as between the landlord and tenant. Keeping in view the impediments manifest in this system, Moreland pointed out that "nearly all the variations in practice with which we are concerned may be attributed to endeavours to find a more satisfactory method". [17]

In order to indicate the logical relation of the various developments to the fundamental Hindu structure, Moreland first classified them into two groups (A) Individual Assessment in which the State maintained direct relations with the peasant, and (B) Assessment Through Intermediaries of various kinds. Next, he traced the nature and logical sequence of these developments from the primitive method of dividing the produce. Under Individual Assessment Moreland traced the operation of two methods: Estimation and Measurement in the

[14] W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India., p. 3. According to Moreland the term "Farmer" was too "ambiguous in a country like India, where farming of the revenue was for so long a prominent feature of the agrarian system.

[15] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[16] Ibid., p. 6.

[17] Ibid., p. 6.
Indo-Persian literature of the thirteenth century. In Estimation, which persisted into modern times as between landholder and tenant, the amount of the State's share was determined by inspecting the growing crop and the peasant's liability was fixed before the produce was ripe. Since Moreland found close alliance between the processes of Estimation and Division, he grouped them under "Sharing",[18] under which system, the grower's liability varied from season to season both with the area sown and with the yield harvested.[19] Measurement appeared "to be in essence an attempt to eliminate the risks attendant on Sharing by adhering to verifiable facts".[20] Under it, a fixed charge, either in cash or in produce, was made on each unit of area sown at each season. The grower took the entire risk, being in theory liable for full charge even when the crops failed, but in practise it was usually necessary to remit a portion of the State's claim in unfavourable seasons. These two methods of assessment - Sharing and Measurement, co-existed from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century. Later on, "at some uncertain epoch", a third method emerged, which Moreland described as Contract. Under it the individual peasant came to terms with the assessing officer or the headman, to pay a fixed sum of money for his holding annually, independent of the area he might sow or crop he might grow, so that his position was substantially that of a tenant at the present day.[21] Under the fourth method, the Plough-rent, which was practised in some parts of the country, a stated charge was made on each plough and team, the unit of productive power, and the owner of the team was free to

[21] Ibid., p. 8.
cultivate as much land as he could, and in whatever way he chose.[22]

Under each of these methods the demand on the peasant could be made either in cash or in kind, at the option of the State, the amount of produce due being valued at current prices when payment was required in cash.[23] In the Hindu period collection in kind was the practise, but throughout the Muslim period cash payment was the general rule, though in some backward areas, produce continued to be paid, while in two recorded instances, under Ala-ud-din Khalji and Ibrahim Lodi, cash payments were suspended to meet financial emergencies. However, the modern idea that state dues be collected by salaried officials directly from the payer was not generally applicable to India in the Muslim period.[24] The practise existed and at times was enforced over large areas by individual administrators, but generally the work of collection was delegated 'to one class or another of a heterogenous group', whom Moreland gave the appellation of Intermediaries, and who in practise determined the method of assessment in the areas under their charge. This class included Chiefs, Representative Assignees or Headmen, Farmers, Assignees and Grantees, who were authorised by the King to collect his share, and to retain a portion or the whole.[25] Under the

[22] W.H. Moreland, "The Revenue System of the Mughal Empire", Cambridge History of India, IV, 454. Irfan Habib points out in an article, "Agrarian Relations And Land Revenue", The Cambridge Economic History of India Volume I C.1200-C.1750, ed. by Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1982, 238, that over a large part of the Deccan the older system of levying land revenue on the basis of the number of ploughs was replaced in the later years of Shah Jahan's reign by Murshid Qulikhan, by a full fledged system of measurement.


Muslim rule large areas were left in the possession of Hindu Chiefs, who submitted to the new rulers but retained their internal jurisdiction, on terms which included punctual payment of the fixed tribute or personal service with his troops.

The most distinctive institution of the Muslim period and its agrarian system, according to Moreland, was the Assignment System. "Instead of paying cash, the State provided for future pecuniary claims by assigning to the claimant the King's share of the produce of a specified area, the assignment carrying with it the grant of executive authority sufficient at any rate, to enable the assignee to assess and collect the amount due,"[26] and if possible something more. Throughout the Muslim period the great bulk of the cultivated land was ordinarily in the hands of assignees who "stood to the peasants in the position of the State, and, subject to any restrictions imposed on him by authority, he had a free hand in the administration; he could assess and collect the revenue of each peasant through his servants, or he could deal with the headmen of the villages, or he could hand them over to farmers".[27] The area assigned might be a province or a single village, and the claim to be satisfied represented the cost of maintaining troops, or salaries for civil or military service. Similarly, the king might grant his share, due from a specified area, in lieu of pensions, rewards, literary or artistic achievement, for maintenance of deserving individual or as religious, educational or charitable endowments. The difference between grant and assignment was that while the latter was conditional on future service, the former was not. Both were however held during the King's

pleasure and could be terminated by the King's order.

According to Moreland, the practice of farming the revenue of a village, a province or a group of provinces was of old standing in India, under which the farmer engaged to pay a lump sum, hoping to collect more from the peasants, and in the process making a profit for himself.[28] However, in the Muslim period, the practice "tended to attract speculators, and administration suffered through their efforts to make a profit in their short term of office,"[29] ordinarily lasting one year. However, "in the eighteenth century the duration tended to become indefinite and in practice the position might even become hereditary."[30] A significant observation made by Moreland was that in certain circumstances various other tenures tended to assume the form of farming. Thus, "from the purely fiscal standpoint, a Chief was a Farmer, holding for an indefinite term; and from the same standpoint headmen engaging for a village or pargana were also technically Farmers. Salaried assessors and collectors, again, might easily become Farmers by arranging to pay a fixed sum instead of accounting for fluctuating collections; and thus various institutions, which must be distinguished for the purpose of analysis, might be blended in practice, so that at certain epochs the agrarian system presents a Kaleidoscopic aspect, with Chiefs and Farmers, headmen and collectors each assuming the appearance of the others".[31]

As regards the payments of Intermediaries, Moreland pointed out that these were ordinarily assessed and made in terms of cash right from the beginning of Muslim rule. Although Moreland was not aware of the data when the cash nexus between the peasant and the King (or his representative) first came into existence, but he rejected, as unhistorical the view that it was a modern phenomenon, which is confirmed by the fact that the peasants around Delhi normally paid their share in cash during at any rate, the later part of the thirteenth century.\[32\]

Moreland suspected that most, if not all the developments enumerated above, dated from before the Muslim conquest.\[33\] In any case, grantees, assignees, and probably also farmers, were certainly indigenous and could be found in the developed Hindu System. For instance, the existence of grant for religious and charitable endowments was established by surviving inscriptions. "Assignments in lieu of salary were recognised by the Sacred Law itself, for it is laid down in Manu,"\[34\] that the officer appointed to be in charge of 100 villages should enjoy the revenues of one village, and this provision seems to carry the Jagir, the great agrarian institution of Muslim times, back to quite on early period of Hindu culture."\[35\] Similarly, the practise of appointing provincial Governors on farming terms prevailed in the Hindu Empire of Vijaynagar also.\[36\] According to Moreland probably, "Farming had become established as the mainstay of the Hindu agrarian

\[32\] W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, p.11.
\[33\] Ibid.
\[35\] W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, pp. 11-12.
\[36\] Robert Sewell, A Forgotten Empire (Vijaynagar), Asia Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982, p. 373.
system in the South by the end of the thirteenth century, and that Alauddin Khilji took it over at the time when he acquired the territories which later became the kingdoms of the Deccan."[37] As regards Chiefs, the Arthasastra recognised the existence, or at least the possibility, of vassal kings and of payments by them of taxes or subsidies.[38] Arthasastra also mentioned the taxes levied from whole villages, thus indicating something like the Group assessment of Muslim times and finally the prevalence recurred in inscriptions from Southern India, dating from a period earlier than the Muslim conquest of the North.[39] Keeping these facts in view, Moreland pointed out that, "when we meet with an apparently new institution in the Muslim period it would be rash to accept it offhand as a Muslim innovation. The possibility must always be borne in mind that it may have been in existence for an indefinite time before it happened to secure mention in one of the chronicles".[40]

Notwithstanding the "observed continuity" of various institutions, Moreland pointed out that at the same time it must be remembered that the Muslim conquerors brought with them to India, their own ideas of an agrarian system also. Drawing upon the ideas of Abu Yusuf Yaqub, the Chief Qazi of Baghdad in eighth century, for furnishing the most authoritative account of the early Islamic System, Moreland indicated that the Islamic System, differentiated between the tithe-land

(ushri) and tribute-land (Kharaji).[41] Tithe-land was primarily the home-country in Arabia. However, a conqueror was authorised to dispossess the infidel occupants and distribute their land among his followers, but if he permitted the infidels to remain in possession as was usually done in India, the country was technically called Kharaji or tribute-land and the conqueror was entitled to claim from them the personal tax (jiziya) and tribute (Kharaj) from the land they cultivated, to be assessed and collected as he thought best. According to Moreland the word Kharaj, could safely be translated as land-revenue, which consisted of a share of the produce of the land, the amount of which was to be decided by the Ruler.[42] As regards assessment, the pages of Abu Yusuf indicated the methods of Sharing, Measurement and direct relations between the Governor (Wali) and the peasants. As observed by Moreland, the institutions of Farming, Group-Assessment, Grants and Assignments, were perfectly familiar to the founders of Delhi Sultanate.[43] Further, "the system which Muslim conquerors brought with them from Afghanistan to India was substantially identical with the system which they found in operation,... and there can have been no great obstacle to a fusion of two systems so nearly identical, when once

R.C. Jauhri, Firuz Tughluq (1351-1388), ABS publications, Jalandhar, 1990 edn., points out that "the word Kharaj literally means the revenue derived from a piece of land or a slave. Technologically it denotes the tax imposed on land", p. 95.


the Muslims had established their rule by force of arms." [44]

However, two differences are required to be noticed. Firstly, the Muslim claim to the full economic rent or the Producer's Surplus was at variance with the arithmetical limitation to one-sixth (or some other fraction) of the produce recognised by the Hindu Sacred Law. But, "the limitation was somewhat elastic, and it would present no very serious obstacle to conquerors sufficiently strong to enforce their demands". [45] Secondly, there was a difference in regard to the scale of the revenue-demand. As Moreland inferred, the scale laid down in the Sacred Law was uniform, under which the same proportion of the produce was claimed from all crops alike. But the Muslim scale was differential, making allowance for variations in the cropping and in the source of irrigation. The first record of the scales of Demand becomes available in 1300 A.D. when Alauddin Khalji followed the Hindu practise in demanding a uniform share of one-half in all cases, later on Sher Shah and Akbar also followed the Hindu practise and the earliest differential scale of which Moreland found clear evidence in Muslim India was that which was introduced in the Deccan by Murshid Quli Khan in the middle of the seventeenth century. [46]

Thus, the agrarian system which operated in the fourteenth century was in its main features, consistent with the Islamic Law as well as with the Sacred Law of Hinduism, "so that the conquerors had little more to do than given Arabic or Persian names to the institutions which they found in existence and even this process was not carried out consistently, for in some cases the Indian names were adopted at once, while in others they evidently ousted the imported designations." [47] Further, "the facts point to a fusion worked out by practical men and not by theoretical jurists, men whose immediate object was to get in the revenue, and who, we may suspect, were ready to follow the line of least...

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid. p. 17.
[47] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
resistance, rather than seek for guidance from the Qazis and other professed expounders of Islamic view. This view was clearly illustrated by attitude of the early Muslim rulers of Delhi, like, Balban, Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq.

As regards the position of the individual members of brotherhood, they could transmit their land to their heirs and could transfer it by sale or mortgage, but always subject to the fundamental conditions that the revenue due was paid. A peasant under the Hindu Law could be ejected for inefficiency or other reasons, while no similar provision could be found in the extant official documents of the Muslim period, but they clearly indicate that peasants could be flogged for failure to produce adequate crops, while sale of a peasant himself was a recognised method for recovering the arrears. Moreland traced the explanation of this position, which appeared so anomalous at the present day, in the fact that neither Hindu text-writers nor Muslim administrators were concerned primarily with peasant's rights. During the Muslim period the competition for productive land was not general; and in most regions, land was waiting for peasants with adequate material resources for its cultivation, so that an inefficient peasant might be better than none at all. "In such circumstances the essence of successful administration was to keep peasants on the land, not to turn them off it". The operation of these ideas in the Muslim period could be traced in documents issued by the Revenue Ministry, an organisation which, although controlled by the ruler of the time, appeared to have preserved its continuity during periods of violent political changes and to have maintained a permanent departmental tradition of its own. Its permanent ideals were to attract peasants to

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., pp. 452-453.
[52] Ibid., p. 453.
vacant land, to induce peasants to extend the area tilled, to secure improvement in the class of crops grown, though in practise they might often be masked by the need or greed of the moment.[53] An ordinary Indian peasant was necessarily unaffected by conquest, for he remained on the land and continued to cultivate, except that he would come under a new master, who might either increase his burdens, or more probably for the moment with the existing arrangements. In such a system both the State and peasant were concerned primarily with three questions - the amount of the revenue or share claimed by the State, the method of its assessment and arrangements for its collection.[54]

After outlining the essential features of the agrarian system in Hindu and Muslim periods, Moreland surveyed the agrarian system as it operated in practise from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries.

The first contact between the Hindu and Islamic agrarian systems, indicated Moreland, was established not when the Delhi Sultanate was founded in 1206, but much earlier when, apart from the episode of the Arab rule in Sind, the Afghan kings had maintained governors in North-West India for more than a century.[55] However, the details of this contact do not survive, so that the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries form a well-marked period in Indian history. For this period, there were three major contemporary authorities, Minhaj-ul-Siraj, who was the chief Qazi of Delhi in the middle of thirteenth century. Ziya Barni, a retired official who wrote in the fourteenth century, and Shams Afif, also an official who wrote soon after 1400. While Minhaj was little interested in agrarian topics, Barni

and Afif were connected personally with the Revenue Ministry and "furnished much relevant information", given albeit in the official jargon of the period, which though difficult to interpret at times, was 'undoubtedly authoritative' and moreover in Moreland's opinion, it was not "vitiated by prejudice or flattery, two characteristics which are in evidence occasionally in the accounts of political or dynastic affairs".[56]

From the beginning the Muslim Kingdom of Delhi was divided into provinces, placed in charge of Governors. Besides, two other regions constituting the heart of the kingdom were, the Delhi Country (havali-i-Delhi) placed directly under the Revenue Ministry and the River Country, the translation of which as "the Doab" by some, was found to be misleading by Moreland, "because in modern usage the Doab extends to Allahabad, while the region referred to by the chroniclers was much smaller; it lay between the Ganges and the Jumna, and on the North it extended to the submontane forest but on the South it did not reach much further than Aligarh.[57] For administrative purposes villages were grouped in parganas, and Moreland found no definite evidence indicating the presence of any intermediate administrative unit corresponding to the district of later times. A few passages contain reference to "divisions"(shiqq) in terms suggesting that these were in fact districts but Moreland's impression was that during the fourteenth century the wordShiqq was coming into use as a synonym for the term which Moreland translated as "province".[58]

Before 1300 A.D. when Alauddin Khalji effected radical reforms, no substantial change in the agrarian system of the Delhi Kingdom has been recorded. Moreland took the silence of the chroniclers in this respect to indicate that there was nothing significant to record and throughout this period the old agrarian system continued to function under the established Chiefs, and their methods were followed in the

[57] Ibid., p. 23.
[58] Ibid., p. 25.
areas where Muslims were in direct contact with peasants. In the areas managed by Muslim officials the position of headman was recognised by the Muslim administration. As remuneration for services to the King, the Chiefs and headmen enjoyed perquisites on a similar footing, for instance, they were allowed a portion of land free from assessment. This is also evident that, grants were freely given by the Kings and assignments or *iqtas* big and small, were also common. Thus, Iltutmish allotted small *iqtas* to 2000 troopers, which Balban tried to resume, of those unfit for service, but eventually had to give up "on a picturesque appeal ad misericordiam, and we are left to infer that, in these particular cases, the Assignments were allowed to develop into grants free from liability". The peasants were also "content to acquiesce in arrangements made over their heads, and pay the revenue to anyone who claimed it with authority." Moreland reflected that more information could be "added to this vague outline by arguing back from the reforms of Alauddin to the system which he changed". Thus, "at the end of the thirteenth century, the Hindu Chiefs were sufficiently numerous and important to dominate the political outlook, and consequently they must have been of great importance from the agrarian standpoint also". However, they were suspected of taking more from the peasants than they paid to the state, "so that the burden of the strong fell upon the weak".

As regards the attitude of the Ruler towards the peasants, only the views of Balban are on record for the thirteenth century. Balban was fully aware of the dangers of excessive demands on the peasants. He therefore advised his son, Bughra Khan, to follow a middle course with regard to assessment: over-assessment would result in the impoverishment of the country, but under-assessment would render the

[60] Ibid., p. 28.
[61] Ibid.
peasants lazy and insubordinate; it was essential that they should have
enough to live on in comfort but they should not have much more.
Apparently, "Balban had grasped the main principles of rural economy in
an Indian peasant-State, at a period when the environment afforded
little scope for individual advance; he aimed at a peaceful and
contented peasantry, raising ample produce and paying a reasonable
revenue; and he saw that it was the King's duty to direct the
administration with this object in view".[63].

Coming to the fourteenth century Moreland observed that the
changes made by Alauddin Khalji "in the agrarian system did not arise
from any economic, still less any philanthropic motive, but were
inspired solely by political and military consideration".[64] Alauddin
was a strong and absolutely ruthless ruler, whose sole concern was the
security of his throne and the extension of his dominions. Thus,
"Alauddin ordered by one stroke of the pen, the resumption of nearly all
the existing grants, which he had earlier confirmed at his accession.
The measure illustrated the fact that the Grants were "held merely at
the King's pleasure and were liable to resumption at any time."[65] In
consultation with his counsellors Alauddin introduced numerous changes
in the agrarian policy, which were aimed to strike at the power of the
Hindu Chiefs and Headmen and to deprive them of a large portion of their
resources. According to him the Hindu Chiefs and rural leaders would be
rebellious so long as they had the resources necessary for rebellion.
Barni has given a graphic description of the measures adopted to "ground
down" the "Hindus". Barni used the term "Hindus" in a narrow sense to
denote the upper class Hindus and not the peasants, for according to
Moreland, "the question really at issue was how to break the power of the
rural leaders, the Chiefs and the headmen of parganas and villages;
in point of fact, the regulation was favourable to the smaller peasants,
in so far as it insisted on the leaders bearing their fair share of the

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., p. 32.
burden the weak were not to pay for the strong."[66] Thus, the revenue-demand was fixed at one-half of the produce, without any allowances or deductions. It was to be paid alike "from Chief to Sweeper" (Az Khuta wa and balahar). The perquisites (huquq-i-Khutan) of the chiefs were abolished and the land occupied by them was also brought under assessment at full rate. The demand was to be assessed by measurement (Masahat) and calculated on the basis of standard yield. A grazing tax was also imposed in addition to the Demand.[67]

Barni's statement that these repressive measures were rigorously enforced and their object was also realised, is clearly exemplified by the impoverishment and subdued condition of the Chief and headmen. According to Baeni not a sign of gold or silver was to be found in the houses of the "Hindus", the chief were unable to procure horses or weapons and their wives were forced to work in Muslim houses. Despite the rhetorics of Barni, the success of Alauddin's policy was evidenced by the peace in his Kingdom for there is no record of any serious revolt for the rest of his reign and Alauddin was able to concentrate on his Deccan project. What was more, "for the time being the Chiefs were set aside and the Administration was brought into direct relation with the Peasants throughout a large part of the Kingdom,[68] a development which must have necessitated the recruitment of a large staff. In order to reduce the orgy of corruption and extortion, drastic measures were adopted for the audit of local official accounts, which in fact, rendered the Service so unpopular in Alauddin's time that"clerkship" was a great disgrace" and executive position" was accounted "worse than fever". However, a noteworthy element in these developments was the use of the records of village-accounts in the audit, which provide a rare

glimpse into the interior of a village at that period.[69] These regulations however, operated only in the centre of the Kingdom. To meet the Mongol menace, Ala-ud-din realised the necessity of a standing Army. In order to meet the problem posed by inflation Alauddin "determined on his famous policy of reduction and control of prices, so that the resources of the Kingdom might be able to bear the expenditure deemed to be necessary for its security".[70] Its main features were (1) Control of supplies, (2) Control of transport, with (3) rationing of consumption when necessary, the whole system resting on (4) a highly organised intelligence, and (5) drastic punishments of evasions. However, the effort to keep down prices was limited to Delhi alone, where the standing army was concentrated, "and the regulations extended only to a region sufficiently large to ensure the isolation of the Delhi market". The prices, in and near Delhi were in fact reduced and stabilized at the lower level for a period of about twelve or thirteen years. In these regulations, the supply of agricultural produce was of prime concern to Moreland. Delhi, River Country, and a part of North Rohilkhand, were Reserved (Khalisa), which were managed by the Revenue Ministry through its officials who were in direct relations with the peasants. The whole revenue due from the River country and half the revenue due from Delhi, was ordered to be paid in kind and the grain so collected was brought to the city; and stored for issue as needed. Peasants and country traders were forced to sell their surplus at fixed prices to the controlled merchants, with heavy penalties for holding up stocks. According to Moreland, this rule clearly brought about a change in practise, since in this region, collections had been ordinarily made in cash, and not in produce, during the thirteenth century.[71] These regulations, in Moreland's opinion dispelled the notion, "that Northern India was, at this period and even later, a country of Arcadian simplicity; the cash-nexus was well-established throughout the country,

[70] Ibid., p. 36. For a detailed account, See, K.S. Lal, History of the Khaljis (1290-1320), pp. 266-294.
there were grain-dealers in the villages as well as in the cities; and we may safely infer that prices were a matter of interest to the peasant at least as far back as the thirteenth century".[72] Alauddin's reign was characterised by vigorous and direct administration and not by such expedients as Assignment or Farming. As a rule, Alauddin was opposed to the alienation of revenue by way of Grant or Assignment, and though some Assignments were given or continued but apparently the practise had for the time-being fallen out of favour.[73] However, the revenue regulations of Alauddin Khalji operated only during his life time. Under his son and successor, Qutbuddin, these, "Minute regulations were allowed to lapse in their entirety", the revenue-demand was reduced, speculative farmers appeared, grants and assignments were made lavishly, and the work of the Revenue Ministry fell into disorder.

At this juncture Ghiyasuddin Tughluq managed to revitalise the revenue administration to some extent. First of all he discarded measurement in favour of sharing and thus, "he relieved the peasants from the innovations and apportionments of crop-failure". The amount of the produce demanded by Ghiyasuddin is uncertain. Moreland conjectured that the incidence of revenue demand was reduced to some figure below Alauddin's claim of half the produce. Next, rejecting Alauddin Khalji's view that the Chiefs and headmen should be reduced to the economic status of peasants, Ghiyasuddin restored the Chiefs and headmen, "to something like the position they had lost", and exempted them from assessment and grazing tax. This measure sprung from Ghiyasuddin's belief that their large responsibilities entitled them to corresponding remuneration. At the same time, "the Governors were to take measures to prevent them from levying any additional revenue from the peasants. In this way, it was hoped to enable the Chiefs to live in comfort, but not in such affluence as might lead to rebellion."[74]

[73] Ibid., p. 39.
[74] Ibid., p. 41. See also, Agha Mahdi Husain, Tughluq Dynasty, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 62-63.
Another important measure Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq took was to purge the Revenue Ministry of touts and pests, with which it was infested, as speculative Farming of the revenue was common.[75] Choosing his provincial Governors from the nobility, he further prohibited the application of torture for recovering the balances standing against them. However, any substantial misappropriations over and above the ordinary perquisites of the post were forbidden and were to be punished strictly. Thus, the Governors under Ghiyasuddin were to hold their posts on farming terms since the surplus-revenue, to be remitted to the treasury was to be a stated sum. This according to Moreland seemed to be the most reasonable interpretation of the orders that the Ministry should not make an increase of more than one-tenth or one-eleventh on the provinces and country by surmise and guess - work or on the reports of spies and the representation of enhancement mongers".[76] A big increase would lead the Governors to increase the burden on peasants which in turn would "hinder the development of the country, which was the King's great object".[77] Despite these measures, "the reign of Ghiyasuddin was too short to establish a new tradition, and its main interest lies rather in the formulation of policy than in the results achieved".[78]

[76] Ibid., p. 43. The passage in Barni's account (429) has led to different interpretations, i.e. like Ishwari Prasad's that "the State demand was fixed at one-tenth or one-eleventh of the gross produce". Most of the historians however agree with Moreland's interpretation - as understood in the light of the revenue organisation and policy of the period, Ghiyas-ud-din instructed the Diwan not to increase the land revenue beyond one-tenth or one-eleventh of the assessment at one go. See also, R.P. Tripathi, Some Aspects of Muslim Administration, pp. 270-271.
[77] W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, p. 44.
[78] Ibid., p. 45.
Yet, "a striking example of the danger of departing" from Ghiyasuddin's policy was furnished by his son Muhammad-bin-Tughulaq (1325-1351) who according to Barni "was one of the wonders of creation, in fact, a freak of nature" and, a brilliant but an unpractical man. In Moreland's assessment, he was a "complex character" whose "conduct was a mass of inconsistencies".[79] In the absence of any formal statement of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's agrarian policy or any direct indication of his ideals, Moreland constructed the account of the agrarian system under him from a series of episodes which fall into two groups, the treatment of the provinces generally, and the special measures taken in the 'River Country'. Muhammad bin Tughlaq's endeavour to centralise the administration led him to assimilate the administration of the outlying provinces to that of Delhi and the 'River Country'. However, after only a few years the arrangement broke down and Barni records show the detailed accounts were submitted from the most distant provinces and even the smallest penny in them was wrangled over by the audit staff at the Capital.[80] Consequently, two episodes relating to the farming of the revenue, in the provinces of Bidar and Karra, indicate that the speculative Farmer supervened in the provinces, who had no local ties with the province and whose claim to the Governorship rested merely on the offers of revenue accepted by the Ministry. Nothing is known about the nature of their relations with Chiefs and peasants.

The fate of the 'River Country', which suffered under the special measures adopted by Muhammad bin Tughlaq, has been remarkably described by Moreland as - "ruinous enhancement of revenue, loss of market, restriction of cultivation, rebellion, drastic punishment, attempts at restoration, defeated by the failure of the rains, and finally, a spectacular policy of reconstruction, ending in an almost complete fiasco."[81] This measure followed by the transfer of Capital from Delhi to Deogir in 1329, deprived the peasants in the 'River

[80] Ibid., p. 46.
[81] Ibid., p. 48.
Country' of Delhi which constituted, "the one large market for the surplus produce of the country, and when that market was summarily abolished, there would be no object in raising produce which could not be sold; in other words, cultivation must have been curtailed, and the revenue correspondingly reduced."[82]

Around 1332 Muhammad bin Tughlaq, "found that, as the result of excessive exactions, the River Country was in disorder; stores of grain had been burnt and the cattle had been removed from the villages".[83] Since the chief duty of peasants in those times was to cultivate and pay the revenue, such conduct constituted rebellion. Consequently, under the King's orders, the River Country was ravaged and rendered even more unproductive. When Delhi was restored as the Capital about 1337, the troops and city-population found that supplies were unavailable. Though advances were also given to reorganise production, but nothing could be done, as this time the rains failed. A fresh attempt to restore the 'River Country' to prosperity was made three years later, when "a special Ministry was constituted, the region was divided into circles, and officials were posted to them with instructions to extend cultivation and improve the standard of cropping".[84] The aim was that "not a span of land was to be left untilled" and "wheat was to replace barley, sugarcane to replace wheat, vines and dates to replace sugarcane". According to Moreland although "the underlying idea was obviously sound, and, as so often in this reign, it was the execution which broke down".[85] The officials chosen for the purpose proved to be "an incompetent and unsulent lot" and embezzled much of the money. Moreover, much of the waste land also

[83] Ibid., p. 49.
[84] Ibid., pp. 49-50. I.H. Qureshi, The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi, p. 128, refers to the establishment of a new department, Diwan-i-Amir-i-Kuhi, to bring under cultivation and to improve the existing crops.
[85] Ibid., p. 50.
proved to be unfit for cultivation.

Moreland significantly pointed out, that the desolation of the River Country has sometimes been attributed merely to a long series of bad seasons, but according to him "it was essentially administrative in its origin", because "the failure to produce arose, not merely from the want of rain, but from the dispersal of peasants, and that dispersal must be attributed solely to a series of administrative blunders".[86] In any case, it was under Muhammad bin Tughlaq, that the idea that improvement in cropping should be one of the objects of administrative action, comes to the forefront for the first time, and thence forwards, it became "a recognised element in agrarian policy".[87]

Under Muhammad bin Tughlaq Farming and Assignment were the most prominent agrarian institutions. Moreland observed that "the Assignment of this period differed from that of the Mogul Empire in that it represented only personal salary, and not the cost of maintaining troops; the pay of the provincial troops was separately provided, and had to be accounted for, as the orders of Ghiyasuddin show: and Alauddin's decision to pay his troops in cash still represented the working rule at this period".[88] The statement that the Assignments "bring in much more than their estimated value" was of particular interest to Moreland because it was the first reference in the literature to the Valuation of the Kingdom, a topic which came into prominence under Firuz Shah.[89]

When Firuz Shah (1351-1388) ascended the throne he found the revenue administration in disorder. The 'River Country' was still depopulated and the provinces had fallen into the hands of speculators, who were more concerned to make an immediate profit. Thus one of the first tasks of Firuz Shah's Minister was to re-organise the revenue administration. The amount of the revenue demanded is not on record, but

[87] Ibid., p. 51
[88] Ibid., pp. 51-52.
[89] Ibid., p. 52..
the mode of assessment was Sharing, and it is said that "apportionments and excess - demands, and crop - failures, and conjectural assessments" were entirely abolished. Thus the peasants were to pay only a share of their produce and nothing more.[90] The revenue administration was once again purged of touts and pests at the beginning of Firuz's reign and provincial Governors were also chosen for their personal character, and not for speculative offers of revenue. Simultaneously, "the severity of the Audit and Recovery was relaxed; while, by an altogether exceptional order the value of the Governor's annual presents to the King was set off against the revenue due from their provinces.[91] The position of the Governor was therefore such as to make for fair treatment of the revenue - payers, and the evidence of rural prosperity during the reign suggests that on the whole the peasants had a reasonable chance".[92]

According to Moreland, under Firuz Shah, the Assignee must have been of more importance to the peasants than the Governor. Since Firuz relied largely on the Assignment System, bulk of the revenue was assigned and the reign witnessed a wide extension of the practise. The salaries of officers were fixed in cash on an exceedingly liberal scale, and the corresponding amount of revenue was assigned to them. The practise of assigning villages to individual troopers was also revived by Firuz.[93].

Moreland traced the first actual record of a general Valuation in the chronicles of Firuz's time. He pointed out that "wherever the Assignment System prevailed, there must have been some sort of

[91] Afiif, Tarikh-i-Firuz-Shahi, in Elliot & Dowson, History of India as Told by its Own Historians, Vol. III, 268. In this reign the Governors came every year to pay their respects to the King; the presents (Khidmat) offered on the occasion consisted of slaves, a commodity which Firuz valued highly and which he is said to have accumulated (p. 270) to the number of 180,000.
[93] Ibid., p. 55.
calculation and record of the standard, or average income which villages and paraganas could be expected to yield, one year with another, to the assignee; the future income, in fact had to be valued in order that claims upon the State might be met; and it is this process, together with the record of it", which Moreland denoted by the term Valuation. Under Muhammad Tughlaq under-valuation was general, thus at the beginning of his reign, Firuz ordered a new Valuation to be prepared, a task which was completed in six years and was estimated to be 5½ krores of tankas. Firuz retained this Valuation throughout his reign, and since cultivation extended greatly under Firuz, the officers also benefitted progressively as the actual income mounted above the accepted figure. Moreover, the main effects of inflation had also disappeared. Moreland, thus observed that all assignees enjoyed a fair share of the prosperity of the Kingdom and were in fact, under less temptation than usual to exploit the peasants under their charge.

Grants were also made liberally by Firuz, and not only restored the Grants resumed by his predecessors, but at the outset of his reign made fresh Grants" every day".

Hindu Chief are little heard of under Firuz. Firuz Shah extended further the policy of Ghiyasuddin which aimed at the extension of cultivation and improvement in cropping and to treat the people equitably. Indeed the policy resulted in extension of cultivation and increase in rural prosperity, "but Firuz also made a specific contribution to the tradition of agricultural development by undertaking

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[97] Ibid., p. 58, See Also, Barni, 558, Futuhat, as in Elliot & Dowson, History of India as told by its own Historians, Vol. III, 386, and Or. 2039, f. 304 r. vide W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, p. 58.
the construction of irrigation works, which gave a great stimulus to agriculture, so that even in Hissar, where earlier only Kharif crops were grown, now both Kharif and rabi crops could be matured. Besides the canals brought in an annual income of two lakhs of tankas. In consultation with the jurists, Firuz charged "one-tenth", presumably of the produce, as water-right) (Haqq-i-Shirb), in return for his outlay. In charging it, according to Moreland, distinction was apparently drawn between the existing villages, and the new "colonies" which were founded in the country previously uncultivated. Further, in order to relieve the villages as well as the cities from the various imposts, Firuz abolished those imposts which were un-Islamic. Thus Firuz endeavoured to limit the burdens on the peasants to the regular revenue-Demand. However, "the death of Firuz marked the end of an epoch", as within a few years the kingdom broke up, "and for the time being there was no opportunity for the revenue administrator to make his mark on the institutions of the country as a whole".

Moreland pointed out that the records pertaining to fourteenth century indicate no sign of either the institution or the conception of, private ownership of land in the sense which the term "ownership" bears today. Thus, all forms of tenure were liable to summary resumption at the King's pleasure. The records of the period throw no light whether the peasants actually enjoyed the security of tenure "which is nowadays regarded as a primary condition of successful agriculture". However, fertile land was available and was waiting for men with the resources to

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[99] For a detailed list of non-sharia taxes See, R.C. Jauhri, Firuz Tughluq, pp. 92-94. However, according to Moreland, this action had no permanent effect, as similar cesses were later abolished by Akbar and Aurangzeb, but were still in existence at the opening of the British period. See W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, p. 61.
[101] Ibid., p. 62.
bring it under the plough. "The facts on record are too scanty for a precise description of the position of the peasantry as a whole, but what facts there are, are consistent with the existence of a fairly stable condition in normal times, the peasants of a village cultivating more or less land according to their needs and resources, and treating their tenants, if there were any, well enough to keep them at work. Given reasonably good weather, and a reasonable administration, a village would continue to function; failure of crops, or oppressive administration, might send the inhabitants elsewhere; later on, the village might be repopulated, either by its former inhabitants, or by new settlers, as the case might be; and another cycle in its history would then begin."[102]

Within the reduced limits of the Sayyid Kingdom the royal authority was weak, so that the Hindu Chiefs tended to become independent and Muslim Governors were also likely to be insubordinate. According to Moreland, the Tarikh-i-Mubarakshahi records the annual expeditions the King undertook with the object of collecting revenue, and punishing rebels and defaulters. A striking fact in these expeditions was that both Governors and Chiefs were treated on a much similar footing.[103] The circumstances of the time, were however, not conclusive to the formulation of any agrarian measures, still less enforced, and thus each individual dealt with the peasants very much as he chose. However, under the Sayyids also Assignments were given.

With the coming into power of the Lodi Afghans in 1451, Assignment became the most prominent agrarian institution, and assumed the form familiar in the Mughal period, under which an assignee was bound not merely to loyalty and personal service, but also to the maintenance of troops, out of the assigned income, of a body of troops available for the King's need.[104] The great bulk of the Kingdom was held in assignment by the Afghan leaders who constituted its effective

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[103] Ibid., p. 66.
[104] Ibid., p. 67.
strength, rather than by salaried officials. The Afghan assignees had practically a free hand in the management of their assignments, with regard to assessment, and the treatment of peasants and minor Chiefs whose lands lay within their charge. The only record of interference by the King occurs when Ibrahim Lodi ordered the assignees to make collections in grain, "an order which appears to have been justified by the prevailing scarcity of silver currency".[105] Like Assignments, Grants were also made commonly under the Lodis. Thus "the real master of the peasants were the assignees".[106] That the assignees had practically a free hand in assessment is exemplified in the active measures taken by Farid Khan, later Sher Shah, while carrying out the management of the two parganas assigned to his father under the Lodis. This "period was one of experiment".[107] "He found the land held partly by peasants and partly by Chiefs; the former he regarded as the true source of prosperity, the latter as dangerous nuisances".[108] First of all he let the peasants choose the system of assessment, and it is significant to note that even in the limited area of two parganas, some chose sharing, while others opted for measurement. Secondly, in order to protect the peasants from extortions and oppressions by Chaudhri or pargana - headmen, and the Muqaddam, the fees chargeable under each system were fixed, and the headmen were strictly warned not to exceed the prescribed scale. Thus, it is evident that Farid Khan, "believed in maintaining direct relations with the individual peasants, he distrusted the village headmen, and he regarded equitable assessment and strict collection as the two essentials of revenue administration".[109]

According to Moreland, "the only apparent novelty in his arrangements is the execution of written documents" like "patta given by authority, and the gabuliyat, or acknowledgement of the peasant's liability".\[110\] As a result of these measures and close personal supervision, these parganas quickly became prosperous.

In 1541 Sher Shah ascended the throne. One of the outstanding administrators of Muslim India, he was also the only ruler in Northern India, who is known to have acquired "practical experience in managing a small body of peasants before rising to the throne of a peasant Kingdom".\[111\] In the light of his past experience Sher Shah reorganised the revenue administration. However, while earlier he had allowed the peasants to choose between Sharing and measurement, he now imposed measurement on practically his entire dominion, with the exception of Multan, "the acquisition of which gave peculiar pleasure to the King" and which thus received exceptional treatment. Except Multan, where only a fourth share of the produce was charged as revenue,\[112\] Sher Shah claimed one-third of the gross produce as the King's share, but there is nothing to indicate whether the Demand was collected in cash or in kind though the former was more probable. "The distinctive feature of the new arrangements was the way in which the demand on the peasants was calculated. Standard yields of each staple crop were calculated or


\[112\] The exceptional treatment of Multan was due to the fact that it had suffered greatly from disorder and Abbas Khan Sarwani, Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi, Tr. by Elliot & Dowson, The History of India as told by its own Historians, indicates that Sher Shah wrote to Haibat Khan to repeople Multan and to observe the customs of the langahe, and not to measure the land, but take a share of the produce i.e. only a fourth of the produce of grain as government share.
estimated - how this was done is not recorded - separately for three classes of land, described as "good", "middling" and "inferior"; the average of these figures was struck, and one third of the average was claimed as revenue from each unit of area, whatever its actual yield might be".[113] Consequently, the bad land was overcharged and the good land was undercharged. But Moreland pointed out that, "The inequality would, however, naturally adjust itself by variations in the crops grown, so that excessive charges would tend to be eliminated".[114]. Further, the authorities do not indicate clearly whether these standard yields were calculated separately for each agricultural tract, whether single standards were adopted for the Kingdom as a whole".[115]


[114] Ibid. See also Shireen Moosvi, The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c.1595. A difficult question according to her was as to how far the simple average of the three yields taken by Sher Shah's officials could be held to represent the average overall yield of each crop. She assumes that the 'low' yield was that of unirrigated land, while the 'high' and 'middling' were those of the irrigated land and the area with each level of yield (good, middling, bad) under each crop was exactly one-third of the total land under that crop. "Some crops require more irrigation than others and are raised to a larger extent in irrigated lands, while other crops are almost exclusively grown on unirrigated lands". Thus, "it follows that the average yield calculated by Sher Shah's officials must have exceeded the real average yield quite considerably in the case of inferior crops raised on indifferently watered lands, while it was possibly lower than the real average in that of high-grade crops, normally requiring much artificial irrigation". pp. 73-74.

collection of revenue, Sher Shah also granted assignments like his predecessors and his successors continued this system. Moreland presumed that under Babar and Humayun also these arrangements persisted, for there is no record of a change.

Akbar's accession marked the beginning of a new epoch and Moreland traced the basis of Akbar's distinctive system in the reorganisation effected by Sher Shah. In fact, "the historical importance of Sher Shah's methods lies in the fact that they formed the starting point of the series of experiments, in administration which marked the first half of Akbar's reign".[116] Thus, "upto the 24th regnal year (1579-80) the revenue administration may be described as a series of experiments, while thenceforward the 'authorities' indicate that stability of system had been attained, though adjustment of details was still required".[117] For Akbar reign Moreland drew his information mainly from the Akbarnama, Ain-i-Akbari, which are the official 'sources', and also from the unofficial chronicles of Nizamuddin Ahmad and Badauni.

While discussing the methods of assessment in the heart of the Empire, from Panjab to Allahabad, Moreland indicated that "the story which has to be told is one of three sets of assessment rates, which may be called respectively "Sher Shah's", "the qanungo", and "the ten-year"; all three come under the general type which I have described as Measurement, ... and the transition from one set of rates to another represents a gradual approximation to a workable system".[118]

In the beginning of Akbar's reign, Sher Shah's schedule of assessment - rates was adopted, which was framed on the basis of demanding for the State, one - third of the average produce, stated in grain, with rates fixed in cash for a few crops only. Under Akbar, the demand was made in cash, and grain-rates were commuted on the basis of

[118] Ibid., p. 82.
current prices fixed by the Emperor's order. However, the schedule could not be made to work satisfactorily since, "abundant distress used to occur". First of all, from the 6th to the 9th year, a single set of commutation rates, probably based on the rates prevailing in the Imperial Camp were adopted for all five provinces, with only a few local variations. But these uniform rates, and over-assessment of pulses rendered the assessments unworkable.\[119\] Therefore, in the tenth year, a beginning towards a progressive change was made when the uniform scale was substituted by the varying local prices, "in that the staple crops were valued at local prices, a practise which naturally reduced the overcharge on the pulses. The evidence of this change is found in the appearance of maximum and minimum rates in place of a single figure".\[120\] However, although an improvement, this measure did not suffice to remove the difficulties. Thus in the 13th year Shihabuddin Ahmad Khan, in charge of the Reserved land, discontinued the use of Sher Shah's schedule in reserved areas and in its place established nasaq, which Moreland interpreted as Group-assessment (or possibly Farming), of a village, or a pargana, as a whole. This was also a temporary measure, and in the 15th year (1570-71) qanungo - rates came into force. These new schedules of assessment rates were applied to both the reserved and assigned lands. However, neither the method of calculating these rates nor the rates themselves are on record. The information available indicates "that each qanungo was required to prepare for his pargana a schedule of crop-yields in the same form as that which had previously been in use, showing the Demand on each crops stated in grain, as one-third of the average produce".\[121\] Thus the basic rule of assessment was unchanged, the difference lay in the fact that the average produce was now estimated separately for each pargana, and not for the Empire as a whole, thus eliminating the difficulties which had resulted from ignoring local differences in productivity. The Demand was

\[120\] Ibid.
\[121\] Ibid., p. 86.
still made in cash on the basis of local price, and the figures for these still required the Emperor's sanction in each season. The real author of the qanungo-rates was Raja Todar Mai. According to Moreland, "Todar Mai was not responsible for the introduction of the next change in assessment, so that when his rates are spoken of by later writers, the reference ought to be to those which are now under discussion".[122] The qanungo-rates remained in force for ten years. So far as the grain-demand was concerned the rates were on the whole equitable, for it is indicated clearly that their supersession was due to the breakdown of the seasonal commutations of the prices which required Imperial sanction. With the expansion of the Empire, the fixation of the prices to be used in calculating the Demand was frequently delayed and this led to constant complaints from both the peasants and assignees, since the Emperor was always on the move and the distances to be covered increased as the empire expanded. Thus the issue or orders was delayed, and the entire work of assessment and collection was hindered. With the invention of the final or "Ten-year" schedules of rates which was the Emperor's own idea and not that of his officials, a solution was found. [123]

The distinctive feature of these schedules was that the Demand-rates on all crops were fixed in cash not in grain, so that the need for seasonal commutation as well as recurring references to the Court were removed. According to Moreland, "the rates adopted were the average of these which had been fixed for the previous ten years, the period during which the 'qanungo-rates' had been in force".[124] For this purpose, the parqanas were grouped into assessment circles on the basis of agricultural homogeneity. Each circle had a schedule, showing the amount of money to be demanded on each bigha.

No other changes in the methods of assessment are recorded for the rest of Akbar's reign. Thus "Akbar's invention" on the one hand,

[123] Ibid.p. 88.
[124] Ibid.
once for all put an end to the vexatious business of seasonal commutation, thereby enabling the local authorities to assess the Demand in each season in time for prompt collection. On the other hand, it transferred from the State to the peasantry, the benefit and the burden of fluctuations in prices resulting from seasonal variations or other causes. However, Moreland found "that in practice the State continued to take some share in the benefits and the burdens which in theory had been entirely shifted to the peasant".[125] The ten-year rates like the earlier ganungo-rates were equally binding on assignees and on official collectors. Thus, "the sanctioned assessment-rates set the standard of Demand throughout the whole country".[126] An important fact which emerges is "that peasants under an assignee would ordinarily pay as much as, but not much more than peasants in the Reserved areas".[127]

Throughout the Mughal period the great bulk of the Empire, sometimes even seven-eights of the whole, was held by assignees, thus the study of the system was essential. Till the end of the seventeenth century, with the exception of one short period, payment of the salaries to the officers of the Imperial Service, by way of assignment was the general rule of the Mughal Empire, while payment from the treasury was exceptional. Ordinarily the allocation was the work of the Revenue Ministry after the Emperor issued orders, which was indeed an arduous task.[128] In order to provide an Assignment, existing arrangement might have to be disturbed, and every one concerned, not only the new assignee, but also existing assignees, who wanted either a change or to

[126] Ibid., p. 92.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., pp. 93-94. The significance of the frequency of appointments, promotions and allocation of land assignments with transfer referred to by Moreland was worked on in greater details and implications by M. Athar Ali, Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb.
be left alone, would be busy making interest and sometimes even offering bribes, to secure their objects. For such cases, "the essential record was an estimate of the Income which an assignee would reasonably expect to obtain from a district or pargana",[129] which Moreland denoted by the term Valuation.

The first Valuation described as raqami, "a term of doubtful significance", which was in use in the early years of Akbar's reign was discredited in the 11th regnal year. Moreland gathered from the official records "that at first, under the regency of Bairam Khan, Assignments were made too lavishly, and the small empire could not provide the necessary Income; the Revenue Ministry met the difficulty by writing up the Valuation arbitrarily, so that the assignee of, say, a Kror of dams would get a district stated on paper to yield that sum; but in fact yielding less".[130] This resulted in dissatisfaction throughout the staff of the Empire and corruption inside the Revenue Ministry.

In 1566 another Valuation was prepared which was based on a calculation of the actual yield, "but it went the way of the first, being corruptly falsified". [131] Apparently Akbar seriously viewed the situation, for he decided, with the concurrence of or probably at the suggestion of Raja Todar Mal upon a drastic action. In the 19th year, he put the bulk of his service on cash salaries, and brought the Northern provinces including Multan and Lahore, Delhi and Agra, Awadh and Allahabad and also Ajmer and Malwa under direct administration. A large staff of collections was appointed and posted to circles formed for the purpose. This large administrative enterprise lasted for five years after which it was abandoned. The chronicles contain only three references to the existence of Assignments during this five-year period. Thus from the 19th to the 24th regnal year, Assignments were not made in the Northern provinces in the ordinary course and consequently there

[130] Ibid, p. 95.
was no need for a Valuation.\[132\]

In the 24th year a new Valuation was prepared, which was based on the facts of recent experience. Moreland gathered from "the obscure passages in the authorities" that "an average was struck of the Demand for ten years, the period during which the qanungo-rates had been in force, and the figures were then raised to make improvements in cropping which had been established during the period....\[133\] Thus by the 24th year it had been decided to revert to the Assignment System, a fact which is further substantiated by references in the Akbarnama to Assignments in these provinces in the next decade, Assignments again became common in all the provinces where the system had been abandoned. By the time of Jahangir's accession much of the Empire was held by the assignees. Moreland admitted that earlier some writer on this subject including himself had interpreted Akbar's decision taken in the 18th year as indicating his dislike for Assignment System, and determined to do without it. However, the facts stated above render this interpretation improbable. According to Moreland, it was "more probable that his action amounted only to a suspension of the system until adequate data could be collected for a really serviceable Valuation, and that he restored it as soon as the necessary experience had been gained".\[134\] Thus from the 24th year onward, the Assignment again became a regular feature of the agrarian system.

Revenue was further alienated substantially in grants made by way of charity or favour. Grants and endowments during Akbar's time were officially described by the Turki word Suyurghal.\[135\] The tenure of

\[133\] Ibid., p. 97.
\[134\] Ibid., p. 98.
\[135\] Suyurghal was also termed as Aima and Madad-i-Mash. See, N.A. Siddiqi, Land Administration Under The Mughals 1700-1750. p. 123; and Rafat M. Bilgrami Religious and Quasi - Religious Departments of the Mughal period, 1556-1707, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1984, p. 59.
such Grants was insecure and lasted only "during pleasure". Many of them were intended to last a lifetime or for more lives than one, while a change in policy, or even of personnel, might result in their annulment or drastic reduction. "On the other hand, influence and bribing might secure undisturbed possession, or the retention of land in excess of what had been granted; and such accounts as have survived of the working of the department indicate a thoroughly inefficient and corrupt administration".[136]

Moreland has also drawn attention to a peculiar feature of Suyurghal. While Assignments were made in terms of income, Grants of land were made commonly in terms of area. A series of documents preserved in a Parsi family in Gujarat are useful to study the procedure in force at this period. Besides, Akbar made it a rule that one-half of the grant should be waste-land, so that while the grantee could collect the revenue from the land under cultivation he had also to make efforts to bring the remainder of the land under the plough.[137]

According to Moreland, the official version contained in the Akbarnama relating to direct administration and appointment of collectors, though correct was incomplete in certain respects. Moreland thus brought into discussion the account given in the unofficial chronicle of Abdul Qadir Badauni, "which at first sight conflicts seriously with Abul Fazl's story".[138] However, simultaneously it was also to be remembered that Badauni belonged to the opposition side. In fact, Moreland himself was inclined to describe Badauni's chronicle "as reminiscences, or even journalism, rather than history... he presented the facts he selected, as coloured by his personal feelings or prejudices, in bitter epigrammatic language which presumably gave him satisfaction but which must not be taken too literally".[139]

[137] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., pp.101-102.
indicated that according to Badauni the object of direct administration was to extend cultivation, benefit the peasants, and increase the revenue. On the other hand, the purpose as indicated in official version was to remove the causes of the dissatisfaction which was ruining the morale of the Imperial Service. Thus in case of the two conflicting versions which emerge from the chronicles; Moreland the official, albeit less creditable version suggested that, "while Akbar had his own motive, the Revenue Ministry, possibly with his concurrence, introduced another".[140] Akbar was determined to put the remuneration of the Imperial Service on a more satisfactory basis. Badauni has also referred to the subsequent misconduct of collectors and Todar Mal's drastic measures of dealing with them over which the official record is silent. According to Moreland, however, Badauni's version is amply albeit indirectly confirmed in two documents preserved in the Akbarnama. "These documents are difficult, as well as important", for the first discloses the gross oppression by the collectors and the second reveals a ferocity in audit which was followed by the practical supersession of Raja Todar Mal.[141] Between the 19th and 26th regnal years Todar Mal was employed largely on military campaigns, hence his association with the Revenue Ministry was brief. Shah Mansur was the Revenue Ministry from 21st to the 25th year and if we follow Badauni's version, the breakdown of the direct administration was attributable to Shah Mansur's tenure. "A period of corruption and extortion ensured, which brought the revenue administration into disrepute, and operated to restrict cultivation, and thereby reduce the financial resources of the empire, which it had been hoped to increase".[142] In 1581 Shah Mansur was executed for treason.

and when Todar Mai resumed effective charge of the Ministry, he wrote the first document incorporating a set of proposals for removing defects in the local revenue administration, which duly received the "Emperor's sanction. While "Todar Mai issued orders for preventing future malpractises, he also adopted drastic measures against the officials suspected of misconduct, calling them to account for the sums they had embezzled or extorted and according to Badauni, Todar Mai revived the old and ferocious process of audit called Muhasaba. Thus the suspected collectors were flogged and tortured in the old style and these proceedings dragged on for years till Akbar decided to bring the matter to a close. In Moreland's perception the appointment of Fathulla Shirazi as the Imperial Commissioner (Amin-ul-Mulk) indicated that Akbar thought the Raja had gone too far.[143] For the time being the Raja was practically superseded and directed to work "in consultation with", Fathulla Shirazi, who was ordered to wind up the pending cases. The second document was produced by Fathulla Shirazi which was designed to make the collector's position tolerable. His proposals for reforming the procedure of the Ministry in its relations with the local staff were sanctioned by Akbar. Thus in Moreland's viewpoint, Badauni's account could safely be accepted as supplementing the official record in this matter.[144]

With the completion of Fathulla Shirazi's work, a period of apparent stability in the revenue administration ensued, which if the silence of the chronicles could be relied upon, prevailed till the end of Akbar's reign. The only important change recorded in the 40th (1596) year was the decision to bring the provincial revenue officer, now designated Diwan, directly under the Revenue Minister's orders, who till then had been an officer of the Viceroy's staff. According to Moreland, this measure marked the beginning of "administrative dyarchy, which persisted until the collapse of the Empire, with revenue business (diwani) conducted independently on the general administration

[144] Ibid., p. 108.
A knowledge of the working of Akbar's revenue system in its final form, described as the Regulation System, indicated Moreland, could be gathered from those chapters of the Ain-i-Akbari, which prescribe the duties of the collector and his clerk. It is evident that the complete application of the Regulation System extended only to the areas Reserved for direct administration. However, by this time Assignment system had been restored in the North and, "while the sanctioned schedules of assessment-rates was binding on assignees, there is nothing to suggest that any attempt was made to enforce on them uniformity of procedure in detail"[146]. In the Reserved areas, divided into circles, each was placed in charge of a Karori or Collector, who was under the orders of the provincial diwan, himself responsible, first to the Viceroy, but afterwards directly to the Revenue Ministry. The Collector was required to deal with the established cultivation strictly in accordance with the regulation system.[147] Since the traditional policy of development was given a prominent place, it was the collector's duty to secure extension of cultivation and improvement in cropping. He was to be the peasants' friend, and to be accessible to them without intermediaries. For this he was required to acquaint himself with agriculture in its local aspects. When the village headmen exerted themselves in extending cultivation, the Collector could allow them a substantial commission by way of reward. However, he was prohibited from coming to terms with them for Group-assessment of the village, as a whole "a course which was condemned as leading to inefficiency and oppression".[148] It could however be sanctioned in the special case of land newly brought under cultivation. Moreland found it

"somewhat remarkable that there is no specific reference to sinking of wells".\[149\]

While talking of measurement Moreland observed that, "the most important feature of this part of the rules was the treatment of crop failure. Areas of failure were to be noted during Measurement, and deducted from the total area of the plot before the Demand on it was calculated; while injuries to crops detected after the assessment had been made were to be reported, with details of the area affected, to the authority to whom the assessment statement had been transmitted".\[150\]

According to Moreland, these provisions apparently constituted an essential part of the system for, considering the high pitch of assessment, crop failure must also have been a very serious matter.\[151\]

However, the establishment of direct relations between the Collector and individual peasant was the most distinctive feature of the Regulation System. Since the peasant knew beforehand the amount of his share of revenue he could plan his season's cropping accordingly, "but he was necessarily ignorant of the prices at which he would be able to sell his produce. So far as the revenue - Demand was concerned, he was not exposed to the tyranny of a village oligarchy, but, on the other hand, he would have to reckon with the exactions of the measurement - party and the subordinates employed in collection".\[152\].

According to Moreland, the success and failure of the Regulation System must have depended entirely on the manner of its administration. No evidence is available to indicate whether it was helpful or intolerably vexatious. In Moreland's opinion neither alternative was universally true and the balance was determined by the Emperor's personal qualifications. Thus, we could believe "that the system worked reasonably well in the reserved districts under Akbar's rule, and yet it went to pieces under Jahangir, but we know only that it

\[149\] W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, p. 112.
\[150\] Ibid., pp. 113-114.
\[151\] Ibid., p. 114.
\[152\] Ibid., p. 115.
had disappeared before the accession of Aurangzeb'.[153]

The Regulation System extended mainly, but not entirely, to the six older provinces, namely Multan and Lahore, Delhi (excluding the Kumaon hills) and Agra, Awadh and Allahabad, excluding the areas under the Hindu Chiefs. The bulk of Bihar was also under the Regulation System. Tatta or Lower Sind was assessed by Sharing and the State claimed one-third of the produce. The system operated in those parts of Ajmer which were not left to the Chiefs and it is said to have been introduced in Malwa also, but records regarding this province are obscure. In the outlying provinces local practises were ordinarily continued. Regarding Gujarat "records are conflicting but can be interpreted on the hypothesis that measurement was practised for a time, and then superseded by assessment on the village as a unit made with the headmen, or possibly with farmers".[154] Such village assessments were the rule in Berar and (probably) Khandesh also. The statement was applicable to Bengal also, including Orissa. In Bengal Akbar maintained the method of assessment, namely, nasaq which was in operation at the time when the province was annexed. The contemporary evidence does not support the eighteenth century legend that Todar Mal made a detailed assessment on the individual peasants of Bengal.[155]

In the absence of precise information regarding the fiscal relations between Akbar and those Chiefs who retained jurisdiction over their domains, Moreland pointed out that probably they paid revenue in the form of a stipulated annual tribute or the Emperor claimed nothing.

beyond loyal service, including of course the periodical presents. [156]

Passing on to study the agrarian system under Jahangir and Shah Jahan (1605-1658) Moreland found 'scanty' and 'incomplete' information in contemporary 'authorities' including the official document, which record no important changes in the first half of the seventeenth century. Moreland indicated that if the silence of chronicles in this matter could be relied upon, then the inference could be drawn that Akbar's methods of assessment "remained in operation in their integrity". However, this inference is decisively negative by orders issued in 1665 by Aurangzeb which indicate that by that time Akbar's method had become almost entirely obsolete and in Moreland's opinion Akbar's institutions had gradually decayed. Aurangzeb's orders reveal that, "while Sharing was authorised in certain, unspecified backward tracts, the general rule of the Empire was Group-assessment, with the alternatives of Measurement and Sharing held in reserve, to be used only in cases where the headmen would not agree to a reasonable revenue-Demand for the year".[157] While Moreland could find no trace of orders authorising such a change, he based his hypothesis, that the change probably about of itself, on, firstly, if formal orders were issued they would have been mentioned in chronicles, and secondly, gradual decay was to be expected in the circumstances of the time. Seasonal Measurement which was costly and cumbersome was effective "under a strong administration, but probably unworkable, and almost certainly oppressive, when the Ministry was weak or was unsupported by the energy of the Emperor, while the cheaper and simpler alternative of Group assessment lay ready to hand, prohibited indeed by Akbar in the Reserved areas, but quite familiar to the Revenue Ministry, and actually in


operation in important sections of the Empire".[158] Further, with the removal of Akbar's personal influence, "the gradual extension of Group-assessment would be the line of least resistance, as the administrative difficulties of Measurement recurred".[159]

Moreland pointed out that the general slackness and inefficiency which characterised the greater part of Jahangir's reign "may safely be assumed to have left their mark on a department which, depended for success entirely on the quality of administration".[160] This inference is borne out by the fact recorded by the Maasir-ul-Umra that Jahangir neglected the administration, fraud became rife, and consequently income from the Reserved area fell to 50 lakhs of rupees, while the annual expenditure was 150 lakhs, and accumulated treasure was drawn on for large sums to meet the current expenditure. According to Moreland the most probable view is that during Jahangir's reign, the regulation system of Akbar was discarded, and replaced by village assessments, made with the headmen or with farmers as circumstances might permit.[161]

Jahangir's Memoirs, reflect but a meagre record of his personal activities in connection with the agrarian system. His detachment towards the later part of his reign from financial questions is apparent in the silence of his Memoirs as to what was happening in the Revenue Ministry. However, on his accession to the throne he issued a regulation to the effect that official and assignees should not take peasants' land into their own cultivation forcibly,[162] which indicates that such cases had occurred and had given rise to scandal.

In fact, the only definite innovation recorded by Jahangir was

[159] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
the institution of the Grants - under - seal (altamgha), having its origin in Central Asia, "which is of interest as constituting the nearest approach to land-ownership, in the modern sense, which appears during the Mogul period".[163] Under it, a deserving officer could receive a grant of the village or pargana in which he was born, which was not to be altered or resumed, so that, by contrast with the other tenures of the period, it may be regarded as permanent, though naturally an absolute Emperor could not be prevented from annulling it".[164] However, such grants were made very rarely during the seventeenth century.

That the great bulk of the revenue continued to be assigned during this period is evident from the fact that in the year 1647, the annual income from the Reserved area was taken as 3 Krors of rupees, while the aggregate for the Empire was 22 Krors, so that the great majority of the peasants were under the assignees. Farming was also familiar to the peasants at this period. Sometimes, even assignees farmed their income.[165] "There are some indications that in practise assignees now enjoyed a free hand to the management of their holdings, so long at least as complaints did not attract the Emperor's personal attention".[166]

A noteworthy fact during Jahangir's reign was the agrarian instability which resulted from the frequency of changes in Assignments. William Hawkins, the first Englishman to hold a Mughal assignment,

[164] Ibid., p. 127.
[165] Pelsaert, The Remonstrantie, tr. by W.H. Moreland and P. Geyl, Delhi, 1972, p. 54, recorded that an assignee who was in attendance on the King either sent his employees to manage his assignment, or else handed it over to a collector on farming terms.
and also Terry and Pelsaert attributed the prevailing lawlessness to the oppression of peasants by the assignees.

The lack of contemporary information regarding Jahangir's revenue system persists during Shah Jahan's reign also. Maasir-ul Umra indicates that on his accession, Shah Jahan reorganised the finances on a sound basis. He reserved the tracts calculated to yield an income of 150 lakhs. The fact that finance received the Emperor's attention can be gathered from the increase in revenue during his reign. The documents issued in the early years of Aurangzeb's reign indicate that under Shah Jahan, "The general rule was to assess the village through the headman at a sum calculated to yield the equivalent of from one-third to one-half of the produce, and that this rule applied, at least formally, to assigned as well as reserved areas".[167] Assignments continued to be made under Shah Jahan. However, an important feature of Shah Jahan's reign was the construction of some canals for irrigation, though it is not known whether water rates were charged or not. Moreland pointed out that in the absence of any other recorded changes, Shah Jahan's reign might be regarded as a period of agrarian tranquility. However it was also impossible to disregard the observations of Bernier, made in the opening years of Aurangzeb's reign, that by this time the pressure on the peasants had become excessive, that agriculture was suffering, and that the land was going out of cultivation.[168]

While surveying the revenue system under Aurangzeb, Moreland indicated that the availability of two farmans or general orders, issued from the Revenue Ministry under the Emperor's authority[169] enabled us to


[169] The text of these Farmans with translation was published by Jadunath Sarkar in J.A.S.B., June, 1906, p. 223 F.F. These documents were discussed by Moreland, in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, January, 1922, but he had not at that time detected the relation which the latter bears to the Fatawa-i-Alamgiri.
form with some exactitude, an idea of the agrarian system in the early years of Aurangzeb's reign. The first of these addressed to Rasik Das, came into force in the 8th regnal year, 1665-6, while the second addressed to Muhammad Hashim was issued in the 11th regnal year, 1668-9. After analysing their contents Moreland found that the two, taken together covered a large part of the revenue system and hence could "be used to indicate the changes which had taken place upto the years, 1665-8".[170] The first order was intended to serve as an "administrative manual" (dastur-ul-amal) Its Preamble contains a description of the current methods of assessment in the Reserved areas, and point out certain defects. The second order was issued "With the specific object of ensuring that, throughout the whole Empire, the revenue should be assessed and collected in accordance with the principles of Islamic Law; it deals mainly with the action to be taken, and the attitude to be adopted, towards individual peasants, constituting in effect a forerunner of the revenue and tenancy legislation of the British period".[171]

The first order reveals the administrative Dyarchy in operation. It indicates that revenue from the Reserved areas was spent by the Emperor, not the Viceroy; and it was assessed and collected by the Revenue Ministry, acting through the provincial Diwans.[172] Thus there is no mention of Viceroyos or Governors and all references are to the staff employed under the Diwan. The three prominent officials were, the Amins or assessors, the Kroris, who were concerned with collection of revenue and the treasurers, who handled the money when it was received. Akbar's regulations, on the other hand, give no details regarding the subdivisional officers, and the entire burden of the revenue administration under him was thrown on the Amil. Moreland


[172] Ibid., p. 133.
observed that Aurangzeb's farmans reflect that the Amil in the district
was being to some extent eclipsed by the provincial Diwan.[173]

The development policy of the Ministry is also reflected in
the order. "Increase of revenue was the great object of the
administration, and all the revenue documents of Mogul times which I
have seen place in the forefront the paramount necessity for maintaining
and extending cultivation, and improving the class of crops",[174] and
also the repair and construction of wells for irrigation. Peasants who
cooperaed in carrying out this policy were to be treated with
consideration, "but the idea of cultivation as a duty owed to the State
was till paramount, and flogging was specifically authorised in cases
where this duty was neglected".[175] The first firman indicates that in
some villages where the peasants were poor, Sharing was practised at
rates adapted to the local conditions varying from one-third to one-half
of the produce. But as a rule the assessment was made annually in cash
on the village as a unit. In case the headmen refused Group-assessment,
the revenue was then determined either by sharing or by measurement, on
the seasons's crops, apparently at the discretion of the local
officials, though in the circumstances of the period it may be inferred
that refusal was an exception.[176]

While comparing this system with that which prevailed under
Akbar, Moreland noticed three main differences. First, the standard of
revenue had been raised from one-third to upto one-half of the produce.
In fact one-third had become the minimum. Secondly, "the individual
peasant was relieved from the charges, and the possible exactions,
incidental, to the detailed measurements and assessments of Akbar's
time, and was left almost entirely in the hands of the village

[173] W.H. Moreland, "The Development of the Land-Revenue system of
the Mogul Empire", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1922,
p. 24.
[174] Ibid., p. 25.
[176] Ibid., p. 135
headmen".[177] Since the Demand on the individual peasants was left to be fixed by the headmen, in the official view, "the burden of the strong" tended to fall on the weak. Thus the provincial Diwan was instructed to examine the distribution (tafrig) of the Demand in every village which he had occasion to visit, and to rectify any unfairness on the part of headmen and accountants.[178] Thus, in ordinary seasons, "the Demand was assessed at the beginning of the year in a lump sum, which was distributed over the peasants by the headmen as the crops matured, and the latter satisfied the demands of the collector".[179] Thirdly, the pressure on the headman, and through them on the peasants, to pay the highest possible revenue had undoubtedly increased. According to Moreland, "The traditional veneration of the name of Todar Mal must be explained, not merely by the fact that his administration was in itself equitable, but also by the period of increased severity which followed it, so that the reign of Akbar, viewed through the hardships of later times, came to bear the aspect of a golden age".[180]

Moreland’s observations on the orders of Aurangzeb are significant clues to the fast deteriorating land-revenue affairs of the Empire, as obvious from the existence of serious abuses in the revenue system. Thus, "Apart from the ordinary incidents of unauthorised cesses, levies and other exactions by local officers, the chief abuses were two, one in the revenue offices, the other in the village. Under pressure to increase the revenue, the practise had grown up of making sanguine assessments, more than in fact could be realised".[181] However, as the year progressed reports would come in of injury to the crops from

[179] Ibid., p. 137.
[181] Ibid., p. 470.
drought, frost, hail and other calamities which tended to reduce the assessments originally made. Many of the calamities reported, were considered in the Revenue Ministry to be fictitious, "devised in order to get the local officials out of the difficulty caused by the original over-assessment". [182] Though both the farmans provide for remission on account of damage to crops between the periods of assessment and harvesting. According to Moreland, "The interest of these provisions arises from the amount of fraud which they suggest". [183] Thus the first farman directs the officials to scrutinise the facts of a calamity at first hand, and on no account to accept the report of injury prepared by the "local authorities", that is the headmen, ganungos or patwaris, so that it becomes evident that "calamities" might prove profitable to these authorities as well as to the officials. [184] The oppression of the weaker peasants by the village headmen was another abuse in the revenue system, for although village assessment was undoubtedly an equitable system where a village consisted of a homogenous body of peasants, but where cliques or faction existed, the weak sometimes had to pay for the strong. [185] These orders, however, applied primarily only to the Reserved areas, which formed a small fraction of the Empire, but their provisions were intended to set a standard of procedure in Assignments, for the officials employed by assignees were to be urged to act in accordance with them. How far these orders were effective cannot be guessed. But since Aurangzeb's local administration was characterised by inefficiency, probably the assignees enjoyed more freedom than in

[184] Ibid., p. 29.
Akbar's time.[186]

A distinctive feature of the second farman was the emphasis laid on compliance with the principles and traditions of Islamic Law. Its practical impact however was not great and it consists mainly of a digest of rulings on questions affecting individual peasants which might come before revenue officers for decision. According to Moreland, "their interest at the present day lies in the formal recognition of the fact that a peasant had a claim to retain his holding, and transmit it to his heirs, purchasers, or mortgages, subject always to the primary condition that the revenue due from the holding was paid".[187] Throughout the order, distinction is drawn between two forms of tenure, denoted by the words muqasama and Muwazzaf. The Fatwa reveals that under the former, land paid revenue only when cultivated, while under the latter it paid revenue whether it was cultivated or not. According to Moreland, Muwazzaf as it appears in the orders was what he described as Contract-holding, where a fixed sum is paid for the occupation of land, independent of cropping or produce, while the term muqassama was sufficiently wide to cover both Sharing and Measurement. Upto the year 1668-9 when this order was issued, Moreland found no evidence indicating the existence of Contract-holding as a tenure in Muslim India.[188] The silence of the farman regarding ejectment of an inefficient or defaulting peasant is noteworthy, but can be explained by the fact that at this time the administration was not in a position to pick and choose efficient cultivators, the urgent need of the period was to keep peasants on land. However, various sources reflect that the sale of a peasant's family for default, was in fact practised by local officials.[189] The orders indicate that in the opening years of Aurangzeb's reign the administration was seriously concerned about the

[189] Ibid., p. 142.
scarcity of peasants and their readiness to abscond, which do not appear in the literature of Akbar's time. Indeed the problem had assumed serious dimensions so that absconding, "was to be examined in the course of each annual assessment, and great efforts were to be made to secure the return of absconders, as well as to attract peasants from all quarters; while the detailed rules for dealing with the holdings of absconders suggest that cases for disposal must have been numerous. Judging from these orders alone, we should infer that at this period the limiting factor in cultivation was man-power rather than material resources...."[190] On this situation Moreland is confirmed by Francois Bernier, The French physician who spent eight years in the Mughal Empire. He attributed, the scarcity of peasants to the severity of the administration, decline in agriculture to the " execrable tyranny" to which the peasants were subjected by officials, farmers and assignees alike; which drove the peasants to abscond to other regions, especially the domains of the Chiefs, where conditions were more tolerable and some abandoned the land to seek other occupation or work as servants in the towns or in the army.[191] Thus, "by the early years of Aurangzeb's reign, administrative pressure had increased to a point where it was tending to defeat its object even in the Reserved areas; we must infer that the injurious effects were greater in Assignments, because of the short and precarious tenure on which they were usually held".[192] The provisions of the farmans further reflect the extension of Assignment system, which followed on the removal of Akbar's restraining influence.[193]

The farmans, therefore, clearly indicate that the distinctive

features of Akbar's assessment system had almost disappeared by the early decade of Aurangzeb's reign. Assessment was no longer made with the individual peasants, but with the headman, and the amount of revenue was no longer determined by measurement and precise valuation, but was the result of a kind of bargaining in which the officials had a whip-hand. Further Moreland pointed out that "the Mogul revenue-system in Aurangzeb's early years had infact, nearly reached the stage at which it passed under English control".[194] More so, because Moreland found no reference to any important change during the century and a half intervening between Aurangzeb's accession and the establishment of British rule in the North. The method of Group-assessment persisted up to the end of the Muslim period and in fact was initially adopted by the British also in Northern India. "The interest which the intervening years possess for us lies in the developments affecting Intermediaries, which resulted in the fusion of Assignees and Grantees, Chiefs, Headmen, and Farmers, into a body of landholders, which was to be recognised by British law as homogenous;..."[195] Decline in the practise of assignment, extension of farming system, and the strengthening of the position of the Chiefs were the prime factors in producing this change. In the middle of the seventeenth century, assignees were the most important class of intermediaries between the Emperor and the peasants. However, during the second half of the century, "a gradual change occurred, and shortly after the end of Aurangzeb's reign, Assignments taken as a whole had become unremunerative, and were naturally unpopular; they continued to be made but energetic men preferred a title resting on force to one which was based on paper, and in the course of the eighteenth century the Taluq or "Dependency" had come to take the place of the Assignment, as the most prominent agrarian


institution".[196] Moreland sought the reasons for the unpopularity of Assignments, "not in changes in administrative practise but in the conditions of the time, the decline in agricultural production and the weakening of the central authority".[197] The flight of peasants probably intensified during Aurangzeb's reign, and when peasants decreased the income of Assignees was also reduced. Moreover the grant of Chauth or one-fourth of the revenue to the Marathas in the Deccan provinces left very little with the assignees. Thus the decay of the Assignment system was inevitable. In the North "the Administration was gradually losing its hold on the country, officials were getting out of hand and strong men were beginning to assume an attitude of independence".[198] The Jat rebellion near Agra resulted in the establishment of the Bharatpur State. Thus, the eighteenth century was a period when de facto possession came to count for much more than title and it was characterised by the apparent assimilation among the different classes of the intermediaries which was reflected in the history of the word Taluq, which may be rendered as Dependency.[199] The period which followed Aurangzeb's death was regarded by Moreland as one in which men of the various classes of Intermediaries "were competing with one another in a struggle for territorial position, and the revenue which it brought. Rights to receive the revenue could still be granted by the Emperor but the power of the Empire could not enforce his orders and the right might often be given to whosoever had secured possession by force".[200] Two other developments in the contemporary and later history of Indian revenue economy as indicated by Moreland were, the re-adoption of the practise of farming out the Reserved Areas and the emergence of land holders or Zamindars. Though revenue was farmed out in some regions towards the close of Shah Jahan's reign, but

[197] Ibid., p. 151.
[198] Ibid., p. 153.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., p. 155.
its main development must be attributed to the reigns of Aurangzeb and his successors. Particularly in Bengal, farms of a type came into existence which had earlier been unknown in Northern India. "Assignments in this province were unpopular among the Northern officers, so that an unusually large proportion of it was reserved for the treasury; and a practise grew up under which the collectors in the reserved areas undertook to pay a definite sum of revenue for their circles instead of accounting for the money actually received from the peasants".[201] The collector-farmers retained their circles indefinitely, and could even transfer them to their heirs, so long as the revenue was duly paid. Thus, their position came to be indistinguishable from that of the existing Chiefs and eventually the two classes came to be described by a single term, of landholder (Zamindar), which in the precise official language of the north had been applied to the Chiefs only.[202]

In the north, large farms held for an indefinite term appeared in the eighteenth century. Moreland indicated that since the revenue administration had ceased to be effective and assignments no longer held any attractions perhaps, no other arrangement was possible. As in Bengal these farms could be transmitted by inheritance and annual payments tended to be repeated year by year. In these circumstances the farmer looked for "a time he might be strong enough to refuse payment altogether and thereby establish himself as in fact an independent ruler".[203] Meanwhile other independent or practically independent rulers were also emerging, thus various classes - chiefs and farmers, adventurers and grantees, appeared - all following the same road "to establish so much authority over a local area that the peasants should be willing to pay revenue in return for some measure of that protection which the Empire could no longer provide. Authority could be established only with the aid of force, and successful force tended always to

[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid., p. 474.
enlarge the area of its operation".[204]

These tendencies operated to produce the conditions which prevailed, when at the opening of the nineteenth century the area which formed the bulk of the United Provinces came under British jurisdiction and was found to be parcelled out in taluqas claimed by various titles, all resting on the basis of possession maintained in the last resort by force. In the taluqas the sum paid by the peasants was usually fixed each year by what may be called a process of bargaining. Moreland pointed out, that "The holder of a dependency could enforce his views by the threat of detailed assessment", while the peasants could offer no opposition, they could however, "hope to mitigate the burden by concealing the facts of productivity", and avoid such detailed assessments which might disclose these facts.[205] There was no scope for any constructive policy of development. "The idea of an assessment fixed beforehand for a terms of year's was quite unfamiliar, and the arrangement was at first unpopular when it was introduced by British administrators".[206]

For studying the last phase of the Muslim agrarian system in Northern India Moreland turned to the initial proceedings of the administrations, which succeeded the Muslims, namely the British. The most suitable areas for the purpose was the region in the opening of eighteenth century, later described as United Provinces under British, excluding Oudh, Kumaun, and parts of Bundelkhand. The first task of the administration was to arrange for the collection of land-revenue. When the British administrators looked for landowners, it was usually these intermediaries who presented themselves.[207] A village consisted of peasants engaged in cultivation, and three classes of inhabitants, the landless labourers, village servants and recipients of charity. The bulk

[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid., pp. 474-475.
of the land was held by the peasants, who fell into three classes, the organised bodies which Moreland called Brotherhood, peasants living in the village but outside the Brotherhood, and peasants living in another village and coming in to work. The position of the non-resident peasants was purely contractual.[208] The agrarian system at the opening of the nineteenth century was by no means uniform. Though it was not possible to state quantitatively the area occupied under each of these classes of intermediaries, "but there is no doubt that in the region under examination the bulk of the villages were cultivated by mixed bodies of peasants, each of them being managed by a brotherhood but containing also other cultivators outside the circle".[209] While taking to intermediaries, Moreland pointed out that the "tradition of short-term farms and frequent changes had by now given way. Farms were commonly retained for life, and might in favourable conditions be renamed to the heir, so that in English eyes they appeared to be hereditary tenures; and at any rate it is reasonable to say that such Farmers were on the way to becoming Chiefs, or possibly even kings, on the assumption of a continuance of the period of anarchy".[210]

Before concluding the work Moreland in Chapter seven gave an account of specific agrarian developments in Deccan and Bengal during the Sultanate and Mughal periods. Deccan first came under Delhi when it was conquered by Ala-ud-din Khalji. The instances recorded indicate the existence of Farming. Farms of large areas, entire provinces or groups of provinces were given. During Muhammad Tughluq's reign they were sometimes held by speculators. In the Bahmani Kingdom Assignments were common, and Reserved areas also existed. But nothing is found to indicate the share of the produce claimed by the King, or how it was assessed and collected, nor are there any details of interest relating to the village organisation.[211]

[209] Ibid., 167-168.
[210] Ibid., p. 173.
[211] Ibid., p. 181.
The first definite landmark in the agrarian history of Deccan was the system of assessment introduced in Ahmadnagar, by Malik Ambar, at the time when he was struggling to maintain the independence of part of that Kingdom against Jahangir.\[212\] The evidence of traditions which survived into the British periods reveals that the changes made by Malik Ambar were important, but in the absence of any contemporary account, Moreland failed to determine their exact nature. Moreland observed that, "Malik Ambar's final method was then either a cash Demand, fixed annually on the basis of cultivation, or a Demand fixed once for all, either in cash or in grain, and independent of changes in cultivation",\[213\] though the former was more probable. The duration of this method is also uncertain and it is likely that Malik Ambar's methods died with him in 1626. The economic and financial condition as a whole, remained unsatisfactory for some years after Ahmadnagar was annexed by the Mughals. When Prince Aurangzeb was appointed as Viceroy of four provinces, a thorough reorganisation of the revenue system was undertaken around the year 1652, "which so far as it is possible to judge, appears to have been conceived and executed on statesmanlike lines".\[214\] The work was entrusted to an officer named Murshid Quli Khan, a native of Khorasan, who was appointed Diwan of the Deccan. According to Moreland "the novelty of Murshid Quli Khan's work lay in the methods of assessment". Upto this time neither Measurement nor sharing had been practised in the Deccan but Plough-rents prevailed in a large part of the Deccan. While Murshid Quli Khan did not abolish plough-rents, he also introduced Sharing and measurement as alternatives, so that three methods of assessment, applied doubtless in accordance with local traditions, emerged. The backward tracts were assessed on the plough, where the peasant paid a fixed annual sum for each plough and team, being free to cultivate as much land as he chose

\[212\] W.H. Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, p. 182.
\[213\] Ibid., p. 183.
\[214\] Ibid., p. 184.
in whatever manner he found convenient.[215] The more developed villages were assessed by one of the new alternatives, but with a definite preference for measurement. The system of Sharing introduced was "differential", well-known in other Islamic countries but hitherto unfamiliar in Muslim India.[216] Under it the share claimed was not uniform for all crops, but differed with circumstances. Thus for crops depending on rain half the produce was claimed, one-third for grain irrigated from wells, and from one-fourth to one-ninth for the various high-grade crops like poppy or sugarcane.[217] In measurement, on the other hand, the assessment rates, which were fixed in cash, were based on a uniform claim to one-fourth of the produce, a distinctly low figure when judged by the standard of the times. This lenient assessment was accompanied by active measures to repopulate and reorganise the ruined villages. Besides advances, when required were given. Consequently, for the time being prosperity was restored.

Golconda and Bijapur paid tributes and were still outside the Mughal Empire when Murshid Quli carried out his reorganisation. Early in the seventeenth century Golconda was entirely under the farming system in its worst form, the amount payable being settled annually by auction. Evidently the farming system was of old standing for it was practised in Golconda in the fourteenth century and it operated in full swing in the seventeenth century.[218]

As regards Bijapur only a few incidental remarks in Dutch records indicate that Farming existed in the seventeenth century and by the end of that century the bulk of the country passed under the Marathas.

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[217] Ibid., p. 185.
[218] Ibid., p. 187.
According to Moreland, the agrarian history of Bengal was of peculiar interest, because it was in Calcutta that the early British administrators acquired the terminology which they carried with them to the North and which differed from the one employed in the North.[219] The, only contemporary authority which Moreland found was a statement in the Account of the Twelve Subas', included in the Ain-i-Akbari, that Akbar maintained the methods of assessment which were in force at the time of annexation.

In an article, "Akbar's Land Revenue Arrangements in Bengal", (1926), Moreland discussed Akbar's arrangements in the newly acquired Province of Bengal from another angle also. According to him the assessment arrangements concerned not only the sixteenth century but eighteenth century as well, "for the controversies which marked the early years of British rule found common ground in the revenue roll attributed to the year 1582; it is (thus) desirable to know just what Todar Mal did".[220] Moreland insisted on the "statement that Akbar maintained the procedure of summary assessment (nasaq) which was found in existence at the time of annexation, for this is absolutely inconsistent with the eighteenth century legend that Todar Mal (who was dead when the Ain was written) made an elaborate and detailed assessment of the villages in Bengal".[221] "The most that Todar Mal or other Mogul officers did in connexion with the assessment of Bengal was to collect figures showing what the country had yielded, or had been expected to yield, under the nasaq system in force before the conquest".[222] This was the source of revenue statistics of Bengal preserved in the Ain-i-Akbari. According to Moreland, for students of economic history the practical result of the inquiry in the issue was, in fact, to be

[221] Ibid., p. 45.
[222] Ibid., p. 56.
taken as a warning against reliance on the Bengal statistics in the Ain-i-Akbari.

By way of summing up his account of the Agrarian System of Muslim India, Moreland gave an outline of the scenario in the revenue system from thirteenth to eighteenth century, that is, a period of six centuries. However, Moreland left the subject, with "a sense of the inequality with which evidence is distributed both in time and in space".[223] While much, if not everything, was known about those periods when the State entered into direct relations with some, or all, of the peasants recognising its authority, but, measured by time, these periods were merely episodes and very little was known about the rest of the story. While, "A few great names - Alauddin, Sher Shah, or Akbar, Todar Mal, or Murshid Quli Khan out like mountain tops rising clear - cut above a sea of mist; but for a just appreciation of their significance we need to obtain a view of the much wider country which the mist conceals."[224] While Moreland did not claim to have presented that view as a whole, but in places the mist allowed occasional glimpses of portions of it. It is on these glimpses that Moreland based "a hypothetical reconstruction, which was not fact established by evidence, but as tentative inference to be confirmed or modified in the light of further knowledge".[225]

When the period under study was viewed as a whole, Moreland detected that, two figures stood out normally as masters of the peasants destiny. They were not the King and the Minister, nor the assessor and collector, but the farmer and the assignee. Both these institutions formed the backbone of the entire agrarian system. The tenure of assignees was too short and always too uncertain to justify expenditure of capital or effort on a constructive policy of development. Thus, "the only prudent course was that which was in fact usually adopted to take whatever the peasants could be made to pay, and leave the future to look

[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
after itself".[226]

In response to the question asked by students that whether the agrarian system prevailing at one epoch or another should be classed as "Zamindari" or "ryotwari", Moreland's answer was that the Muslim system ordinarily comprised both elements and the students should "escape from the domination of theories and terminologies, and to get down to the facts".[227]

While discussing the economic significance of the facts surveyed, Moreland pointed out that, "the idea of agricultural development, progressing slowly but continuously, was already present in the fourteenth century, and probably was never entirely lost; but the political and social environment was usually unfavourable to its fruition".[228] The actual motive of the high pitch of the revenue Demand, approximating to the full economic rent which could be justified from Islamic texts, was to be traced in "the needs of successive administrations and their officers; and its influence was necessarily increased by the miscellaneous exactions, prohibited from time to time, but recurring regularly after each prohibition.[229] These factors resulted directly in the tendency to exact as much as possible from the peasant and thus to stereotype a low standard of living. It's impact on the peasant was that it led him to his resources. "Thus the normal position was a contest between the administration and the peasants, the former endeavouring to discover and appropriate what the latter endeavoured to retain and conceal, an environment in which agricultural development could not be expected to make much headway".[230] Had the land been fully occupied, such a situation would not have persisted, since competition among peasants would have led to an increase of their payments to a point where either life ceased to be worth living, or the

[227] Ibid., p. 207
[227] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
administration was forced to change its attitude, as was to happen in the nineteenth century. But throughout the Muslim rule, land could usually be spared, and the risk of losing peasants in fact, set some limit to administrative exactions. In two recorded instances this risk, in fact turned into a reality, first when the 'River Country' was desolated by Muhammad Tughlaq and secondly, the general economic collapse after the middle of the seventeenth century. "In both cases the administration strained the existing system to the breaking point, and the system in fact broke down; but during the longer periods when the system worked, its worst incidents were the repression of individual energy, and the concentration or a barren struggle to divide, rather than a concerted effort to increase, the annual produce of the country. This was the damnosa haereditas, the legacy of loss, which Moslem administrations left to their successors and which is still so far from final liquidation".[231]

In any case, Moreland through The Agrarian System of Moslem India, together with the articles related to land revenue, offered a chronological account from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries of the prevalent practices of land revenue administration. While Moreland, had called The Agrarian System of Moslem India 'an essay in institutional history', he had himself accepted that these 'glimpses' were 'tentative inferences' to be modified or confirmed in the light of further knowledge. Even after sixty-two years of its publication and the partial criticism the work still remains of the theme for five centuries of Muslim rule in India.