INTRODUCTION

The British made an extensive and intensive study of Indian economy especially of agrarian structure after acquiring the Diwani rights of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in 1765. They felt that later Mughals’ hold on agrarian institution was loose and those areas needed a drastic changes to make them viable. Finally, they decided to revise the existing agrarian system of India, which did not guarantee fixed income owing to its nature to levy tax on produce. Though, English East India Company needed a fixed, maximum, and regular income from the land, they introduced various land settlements on the experiment basis in India. The Mahalwari system was one of them which introduced as the last land settlement by the British and expected to be an improvement over the previously existing Zamindari and Royatwari system.

The Mahalwari system was a land settlement for estates of proprietary bodies which introduced in most areas of North Western Provinces, the Central Provinces, and the undivided British Punjab. It was a modified version of Zamindari Settlement. The settlement was directly made with the village or Mahal by the Settlement Officers, who fixed the rent with the consultation of Lambardar and the rent to be paid by the cultivating tenants. The system was known as Mauzawari in United Provinces, Malguzari in the
Central Provinces, and village or Mahali settlement in pre-independent Punjab. In all Mahalwari operated regions, the land revenue tax was not fixed permanently but revised periodically.

*Mahal* simply means a fiscal unit was a local area coincides with a large or forms a part of village or includes several parts of villages. The foundation of all revenue assessment in this system was based on *Shijra* and *Khasra* records. Initially, the Mahalwari system covered the most fertile tract of British India including *Ganga-Jamuna Doab*, major areas of Agra and Awadh Provinces, North Western Provinces, old Banares, the Ceded and Conquered districts and Later on it was extended to Central Provinces and the British Punjab. Till 1857, the operation of the Mahalwari system was more or less confined upto the regions of the North Western Provinces.

North Western Provinces with *Oudh* (added to the North Western Provinces administration after T. C Robertson’s recommendation) under the Company administration was slightly more than the present day area of Uttar Pradesh. In terms of area, the present day Uttar Pradesh is the fourth largest state of independent India. This state is of boot shaped size divided into three natural tracts, i.e., (i) Himalayan, (ii) Central Indian plateau, and (iii) the Gangetic basin. During the entire course of Company administration, the whole region of the state was categorized into six different parts, with
divisional heads, viz., Benaras division, Ceded and Conquered districts, Oudh, Regions acquired after Nepal wars in 1816, and Princely States during the British rule. The tract of the provinces to the north includes some of the highest mountains of the world, and separated by a series of valleys from a lower range which bounds the alluvial plains.

It was the final outcome of the integration and consolidation process of different parts of the Himalayas foot-hills region under Company rule. The whole region of North Western Provinces & Oudh were enclosed with the districts of Jaunpur, Basti, Azamgarh under Gorakhpur division to the east and Shahjehanpur, Farrukhabad, Aligarh and Kanpur etc. to the west. This is a country of veritable garden for British India, with a soil of unrivalled fertility, most part protected from the dangers of famines by a magnificent series of irrigation works especially of canals, tanks and ponds.

The idea of Mahalwari system was first presented in the Minute of 1st July 1819 by Holt Mackenzie, then Secretary to the Territorial Department, Board of Revenue, who declared Permanent Zamindari Settlement a “Loose Bargain” for the British Empire. Mackenzie’s recommendation incorporated in the Regulation VII of 1822 and settlement was made on the basis of almost 90% of the rental value, payable by the Cultivators. The settlement attained maturity by the Regulation IX of 1833 under the supervision of R.
Marttins Bird and completed by James Thomason in 1844. The state demand was fixed at 66% of the rental value and the system was made for 20 or 30 years. The 66% state demand was reduced to 50% of the rental value under Saharanpur rules of 1855 by then Governor-General Lord Dalhousie.

The study of Mahalwari system is very important in the context to analyze the agrarian structure and relations of Indian society during the British rule. Its study acquired greater significance to analyze the existing condition of the nineteenth century agrarian society of India. Although, many British historians like B. H. Baden Powell in his work Land System of British India, and R. E Frykenberg in Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History, E. Whitecombe in Agrarian Condition in Northern India: The United Provinces under British Rule, 1860-1900, and W. H Moreland in The Revenue Administration of the United Provinces have already touched aspects of the Mahalwari system.

Powell’s Land System of British India dealt the existing land tenurial system operated in different regions of British India in depth. He dealt each and every aspect of the British land revenue administration working in India. He had given a good description about the mechanism of officials and their designation. The work of Walter C. Neale entitled ‘Economic Changes in Rural India: Land Tenures and Reforms in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955’ and
C. J. Connell’s book entitled *Land Revenue Policy: Northern India* giving good information about the working of *Mahalwari* system with critical approach. The book of W. Crooke entitled *A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life* giving good description about the different landholding patterns. *The English Utilitarians and India* written by Eric Stokes had given a detailed knowledge about the ideology and philosophy behind the introduction of different land tenures and land revenue system.


The archival source material in English and Vernacular enriches our knowledge as primary sources in the form of official minutes, settlement reports, revenue records and proceedings, official letters, acts and regulations etc. about the British land revenue policies are available at
numerous places such as Allahabad and Lucknow (U.P State Archives), Patiala (Punjab state Archives), Bhopal and Sitamau (M.P State Archives), and the National Archives, New Delhi. In primary sources, the minutes and settlement reports of officials were exhausted at greater level. The minutes of July 1819 and October 1826 presented by Holt Mackenzie gives comprehensive and detailed information about the operation of Mahalwari system. Regulation VII of 1822 and IX of 1833 provide immense information about the states’ share in the total produce. The Directions for Settlement Officers issued by James Thomason in 1844 gives full information about the set-principles for their working. The Saharanpur Rules of 1855 issued under the Governorship of Lord Dalhousie provide information that how the British rule in India continuously tried to improve the condition of agricultural class by lowering the state’s share. However, they doubled the burden of peasantry because rental value of government was fixed in effective terms adjusted with the current prices.

Unfortunately till date we have not seen any substantial modern work exclusively dealing the Mahalwari system which highlighting the inherent problems existed in its operation. In view of huge material yet to be utilized it is felt that Mahalwari system which occupied very fertile tracts of plains
with rich natural resources, ample rains and canal irrigation need to be investigated afresh.

The present study is a modest attempt to examine the agrarian consequences (i.e., Direct & Indirect) of Mahalwari system and the apparatus of the British control over village economy. The aim of the project is also to see the Mahalwari system from the regional point of view which may enable us to understand the British land system in its totality. The project must needs attention to describe and analyze the situations regarding agrarian depression and how proprietary ownership or Malikanah rights in land have been created by the system.

The work tentatively seeks attention to analyze the following important aspects:-

1. How British land settlements was different from Mughal land revenue system and why they need new land settlement?

2. The Mahalwari system and its regulations, aspects and comparison to earlier settlements.

3. What was the prime intention behind the implementation of such regulations of Mahalwari system?

4. Agrarian system and the life of people in the area of study in pre-Mahalwari period in the context of agrarian relations.
5. How colonialism changed the pattern of land distribution, the basis of taxing the land and the role of Lambardar and the peasants.

6. What was the problem faced by the proprietor and cultivators in Mahalwari area and how they behaved during the course of the revolt of 1857.

7. What was the impact of Mahalwari system on agricultural productivity and prices of foodgrains?

The first chapter of the study deals with the evolution and implementation of the Mahalwari system of land revenue settlement. An attempt has been made to present the geographical areas and extent where the Mahalwari system was in operation. In this chapter, I have also dealt the mechanism or channel of working officials. What was the designation of different officials, how they supported to each other in the operation of the settlement. What type assistance the settlement officers got from the native officials in the settlement operation. How magnitude of the rent have been reduced up to 50\% by the Saharanpur rules of 1855. Though the rate of rent were continuously decreases on every new revision but the realized amount of rent always appeared greater than the previous collection. The land revenue amount increase in effective terms.
Chapter second discussed that how the *Mahalwari* system was operated. What was the pattern of landholding distribution in regions and how the holdings lots of land have been allotted to their holders? The mode and methods of the system has been presented. Not having a uniform and universal method of land revenue system in all *Mahalwari* regions doubled the tasks of settlement officers. What type of different methods had been used and inducted for the land revenue assessment according to different locality. How settlement officers got aware with the local situation and condition. The role of the institution of village community has been highlighted. What was the importance of this institution in the operation of the *Mahalwari* settlement?

In the third chapter an effort has been made to highlight the agrarian consequences of the operation. How the operation of *Mahalwari* system created proprietary rights in land which turned it into the private and personal property of an individual. How the operation of *Mahalwari* system destroyed the economical base of village economy carried out by the village community of joint proprietary bodies. How the introduction of proprietary rights in land open the gate for the capitalistic mode of production. How the rental demand of the state forced the peasantry to grow commercial crops. An attempt has also been made to highlight that how the heavy rental
demand of government raised the cases of female infanticide in the region. The peasants started the practice of female infanticide to reduce the strength of family member. In that process, they preferably killed girl child against the boy because they were considered as the sign of pride and strength in the society. Contrastly, the born of female child degraded their social status.

The fourth chapter tried to present an economic appraisal of the Mahalwari operation with ryotwari and zamindari in a comparative way. An attempt has been made to depict the regional variation and imbalances regarding rent rates on the basis of available statistical information. Here, I made an effort to show the marginal benefits and magnitudes of exploitation of the three respective settlements’ areas. I also tried to sketch out the social and economic results of all three settlements respectively.

The fifth and final chapter of the study deals with the Ghadar or revolt or rebellion of 1857 in the Mahalwari region. An attempt has been made to prove that the revolt of 1857 was itself a major consequence of the operation of Mahalwari system. Why the peasantry section with the taluqdars of class and zamindars stood up against the world mightiest empire? Was peasants reacted against the harsh and coerce method of land revenue collection and realization or they reacted against the foreign imperialism? Why the event of 1857 was so confined within the Mahalwari
operated regions. Why the magnitude of resistance of rebellion was so powerful in *Mahalwari* operated zone. Why the agricultural population of this region welcomes the event so enthusiastically and supported the rebel cause with full zeal. The *en masse* participation of peasants and taluqdars from this region drifted the mutiny of sepoys into the rebellion of people. It was the mass participation of peasants and taluqdars form this *Mahalwari* region which rationally and rightly supported the view of V. D Savarkar about the rebellion of 1857 who declared the event as the first war of India’s independence.

The system did not worked properly and found imperfect, inadequate and fell heavily on the agriculture classes and created widespread discontent among the peasants. It appears to be very unpopular agrarian system and failed because of excessive state demand.