CH. II

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF PEASANT AGRICULTURE:

Crop-failure and famine are not synonymous. Rather, an extensive failure of crops merely aggravated the basic conflicts and entitlement problems within the peasant economy, as a result of which the crisis deepened into famine.

Institutional anomalies, as in credit, rent and trade relations, varied in intensity in different regions: (i) in the tribal tracts, as in Bhagalpur (especially the Santhal Parganas), Chotanagpur, parts of Birbhum, Bankura and the Jungle Mahals of Western Midnapur, the Terai region in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Angul-Khondmals in Orissa, it was most acute and sharply defined. Here the creditors, landlords and traders were generally alien intruders, who exploited the local people by taking full advantage of their backwardness and ignorance. (ii) In settled but poor districts as in north Bihar and parts of the Orissa, Burdwan and Presidency Divisions, the creditors and proprietors were local mahajans and big farmers whose grip on the cultivators, however, was equally rigorous and secure. (iii) In the relatively prosperous districts of the Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong Divisions the wealthier agriculturists mostly functioned as mahajans and retailers, while the average peasant was more of a force to reckon with, and not so hopelessly involved in debt.

I

The Credit Mechanism:

Penetration of alien credit into tribal areas:

The tribal situation is brought into sharp focus in the Santhal settlements in various parts of the Bhagalpur, Rajshahi and Burdwan Divisions. The Bhagalpur Division, i.e. Bhagalpur, Purnea, Malda, Monghyr and the Santhal Parganas, was inhabited by a great variety of aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes, such as the Dhangar, Kanjhar, Kherwar, Kol, Mal, Pahariya, Pujahar, Naiya, Nat, Batar, Bhuiya, Gangaonta, Kadar, Markande, Musahar and Santhal. By the close of the 19th century, the Santhals had spread to the north, east and south of the Santhal Parganas, i.e. to the quasi-laterite Barind tract in Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogra, to the tea-gardens in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri, and to Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura and Midnapur in West Bengal.

The rent and credit problems, with minor variations, were essentially the same in all these regions. Moulded by the simplistic customs and traditions of a tribal society, the Santhal, like the Pahariya, Bhumij, Munda or Bhuiya, had no aptitude for business deals and no knowledge of the technicalities of British law; hence, he was always at a distinct
disadvantage in his relations with the crafty Marwari and Bengali creditor-proprietor, or with the mahajan—adventurer from Bhojpur. In Chota Nagpur, the northern parts were to some extent a continuation of the rich alluvial tracts of South Bihar, inhabited by high-caste Hindus and Muslims, while the tribal population was less numerous. In the South, however, the hill-country was covered with bushwood and jungle, where the scheduled castes and tribes preponderated. At the end of the 19th century, the tribal belt in Chota Nagpur was undergoing a distinct phase in the transition to early capitalism. With the introduction of the Permanent Settlement in 1895, and the opening of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway, Chota Nagpur was integrated within the larger regional economy of Bengal, which already had a well-developed market for land. Simultaneously, there was a steady and secular rise in agricultural prices in the 1890's. The most obvious way in which capital could exploit these new opportunities in the agrarian sector, was through the credit mechanism.

The process was seen most clearly in three areas, viz:— the expropriation of land, labour and the grain-surplus. In the Kolhan in Singhbum, for example, so long as the country was virtually inaccessible and not worth exploiting, foreigners kept away. But, as land acquired value in exchange, money was increasingly lent on the security of the holdings. "Bargains are made on most unequal terms between astute and unscrupulous capitalists from the outer world on the one side, and on the other a simple, ... absolutely guileless and straight-forward race, hitherto sheltered from such contests by their distance from civilization, and knowing little of money or of the equitable price of their property or its produce". (1)

Except for a few Telis and Sunris, most of the money lenders in Lohardaga and Palamau, for instance, were Sahus or baniyas by caste, consisting of first or second-generation immigrants from Bihar, who settled in the relatively large villages. The petty sahus were mostly shopkeepers or grocers, carrying on small loan transactions ("ien den") with the villagers. The richer sahus dealt wholesale in all sorts of country produce, and gave out substantial loans. "A large portion of the landed property of the country has already passed into the hands of money-lenders, either by sale or mortgage. As landlords, they are proverbially grasping and avaricious, and their wealth enables them to make oppressive demands on the Raiyats with impunity ". In fact, wherever a new landlord, most frequently a money-lender, took over a village, the rent rates were increased and many were expelled or forced to give up portions of their holdings in order to enlarge the zamindar's own cultivation. The Hinduised tribes of Cheros and Kherwars

in Palamau, for instance, lost nearly all their landed property, and a major portion of their produce to the sahu in payment of his dues. (2) The expropriation of labour, based on debt-bondage or the notorious "Kamia" system so widely prevalent in Gaya, Manbhum and Palamau, followed in natural sequence. As described by Sudipto Mundle and, more recently by Gyan Prakash, the " plains Hindus ... used the nineteenth century instruments of land control and Kamiauti advances to make their intrusion more extensive and pervasive than ever before." In the absence of technical improvements, and with a deterioration in the existing irrigation facilities, the needs of agricultural growth and commercialisation were met only by the intensification of labour exploitation. (3)

In the north-eastern Terai regions, Marwari money-lenders economically exploited the Rajbansis and the Koch of Darjeeling, British Sikkim and Jalpaiguri. W.B. Oldham, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, noted in 1884 that when the Rajbansi jotedars of the Terai were sold up on default, the Marwari mahajans and traders of Darjeeling bought the jotes and settled them with the defaulters as sub-tenants, in every case at exactly double the settlement rate of the jote. (4) Similarly, the Santhals, Mechues and Garos were driven by the tea-planters from lands cultivated by them in the Duars. (5)

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the hillmen were hopelessly indebted to the plainsmen. Missionaries from Haluaghat, Susang etc. testify to the exploitation of the Hill Garos by money-lenders, causing many of them to lose their lands, so that Hindus and Muslims started coming "like the wave over the land of the Garos." (6) A large number of Garos who had settled at the foot of the Hills, as well as the Banuahs of Barisal and the Maghs in the Bakarganj Sunderbans, passed into the clutches of the mahajans. Nomads among the Garos, Koches, Manipuris, Tipperas and Rajbansis, who cleared small tracts in parts of the Bhowal, Kasimpur, Sasan, Boksa, Durgapur and Talipabad parganas in the Madhupur jungle of Dacca and moved to fresh patches every 3 or 4 years, were relatively immune to this problem, due mainly to the lack of credit. (7) The local Muslims, too, were at a distinct disadvantage in relation to the Hindu proprietors and mahajans. "There is a recklessness about the Muhammadans which places them, in respect to

5. Ibid, Aug. 1895, Branch : Land Revenue.
their patient and more capable Hindu neighbours, in something of the same position as the ignorant and improvident primitive races". (8)

Angul-Khondmals, like extensive parts of Bhagalpur, Chota Nagpur and Puri, belonged to the fringe of hill-country inhabited by aboriginal or semi-aboriginal tribes. In the Khondmals there were aborigines and Hindus such as Khonds, Savars, Taulas, Pans, Haris, Sudhas, Sundis and other Uriya castes. The Khonds preponderated, holding paddy lands and cultivating turmeric and oil-seeds to a considerable extent. The Pans were mostly weavers with a dwindling income, the Gowalas lived by grazing cattle, Sudhas cultivated land, while the Sundis had liquor shops and money-lending interests. (9)

It was a typically backward tract. In Saringia and Nuapada in Angul, the primitive forms of "jhum" and "toila" cultivation were followed to raise crops of ato dhan, konga, jhulunga and kolka, on which the Khonds lived. In Jehelingia, Patengia and Bakalmendi, large areas of jungle were never cleared for cultivation. This was an "index to the tracts liable to famine": Jehelingia and Patengia were locally known as the "Famine country" and the people there were never free from distress. For instance, in 1898, Gochapara passed through a crisis though the crops of 1897-98 were nearly 16 annas in the entire subdivision. (10) The problem was more acute due to defective communications, for it took 4 days for a letter to reach Angul from Khondmals, and 2 to reach Cuttack. (12) Private trade in grain could not grow in the absence of big or regular grain-dealers and mahajans. Those holding stocks were either Sarbarakars or well-to-do tenants. As jungle roots and herbs largely supplemented the daily diet of the local people, the effects of crop-failure were not felt till the crisis deepened into famine: then the cultivators panicked and stopped employing labour or selling grain, while the grain-holders withheld loans, which suddenly brought on distress. (13) There was no regular mahajani system. A large number of Khonds, however, lived as day-labourers, and were deeply indebted to the local Sundi money-lenders, to whom they mortgaged or sold their lands. (14) Often their crops too were pledged to the Mogulbandi

8. Ibid, para 17.
9. Ibid, Jan 1900, Branch Agriculture, p. 85.
11. Ibid, Feb 1900, Branch Agriculture, p. 233. No. 4 From F.A. Slacke, Offg. Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal.
dealers, who functioned all the year round, making advances to cultivators and taking away the crops as soon as reaped. (15)

The predominance of alien creditors and proprietors in the tribal areas may be attributed to some "exceptional circumstances" (16) The inability of the Santhal, Pahariya, or Kol agricultural settlements in waste lands to be self-sufficient, especially in view of the increase in land revenue and rentals, explained their growing dependence on outside forces able to cater to their needs. The hilly and barren lands, together with such primitive methods of cultivation as the jhum or toila of the Pahariyas and Khonds, or the Kol practice of draining the fields at Karma Puja irrespective of the nature of the rains, made the tribal areas poor and backward, easily infiltrated and controlled by alien capital.

Alien credit, however, was a feature peculiar to such backward tracts alone. Even in some of these, local money-lenders were not unknown. In the Santhal villages and neighbouring areas in the Rampur Hat and Suri subdivisions of Birbhum, for example, "the better-class raiyats combine with their cultivation the business of mahajani, and thereby constantly increase their holdings. Practically all the mahajans are resident within the villages under settlement, and belong to the cultivating classes". (17) The most prosperous of such raiyats were the Muslims, Sadgops, Suris and Telis, but many of the lower-caste peasants like the Lets, Mals, Bauris, Dhangars and even some Santhals possessed large holdings. Again, the rich Koeri peasants of south Bihar were most stringent in their terms of Kamiauti advances to the local Bhuiya population. Drawing a parallel in the Eastern Mahals of Gujarat, the resident Kanbi creditors were hated by the Bhils with greater intensity, than the alien Sahukars.

In non-tribal areas, the creditors and proprietors were almost always local men, whose intimate knowledge of the Khataks' economic background and assets enabled them to pressurise the latter with even greater effect. The Commissioner of Burdwan wrote in 1884 "... it is difficult to draw a distinction between a money-lender and an ordinary ryot. Any ryot who saves a little money ... lends it in small sums to his neighbours so that almost every well-to-do ryot is a money-lender". (18) In north Bihar during 1885-95, much of the lands of Koeris, Kurmis and lower cultivating classes were alienated, mostly by mortgage, to

15. Ibid, July 1897, Nos. 9-10, p. 41.
18. Report of the Govt. of Bengal on the Bengal Tenancy Bill 1884, V. II, 8th August 1884.
affluent raiyat-creditors to the extent of 83.9, 79.63, 79 and 55% in Saran, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and Champaran respectively. (19) In the relatively prosperous districts of the Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong Divisions, too, the wealthier agriculturists mostly functioned as mahajans and retailers. The Commissioner of Chittagong notes: "What is meant by mahajan? Is it not the case that in many, if not the most, cases the mahajan is also a person directly interested in agriculture? As soon as a ryot gets free from debt ... does he not immediately set up as a money lender on his own account?" (20)

The problem of rural indebtedness:

In fact, the entire peasant economy in Bengal was enmeshed in a complex web of credit-relations. The system was such that the peasant could seldom repay the principal: routine interest payments in cash or in a share of the produce often left him on the verge of starvation even in normal times. It was a perennial process. After paying off his rent and interest dues at harvest time, the peasant was soon obliged to borrow again to tide over the next season. Moreover, the accumulation of compound interest, the expense of social obligations, the demands of crisis years and the initial investment in case of commercial agriculture increased his debt, so that gradually his produce, land, and in the last resort, even his labour, were pledged and lost to the creditor. Thus the average peasant, especially in the tribal regions, could seldom sell his grain, implements, land or labour in the open market.

It was due to this fact that calculations of the peasant's "surplus" based on the "money value" of his aggregate production and the income, if any, from other sources, minus the cost of cultivation and the cost of living, were misleading. The concept of market value, familiar to capitalistic farming, was totally alien to an economy controlled by pre-existing credit relations. The peasant, after paying the rent and interest, consumed nearly all that was left of the produce, and borrowed on the security of the next crop. Hence, there was little basis for such statements of a fair profit-margin, as of 55% for "pure cultivators" and 39% for "cultivating labourers" as quoted in the Muzaffarpur Survey Reports, or for the Collector of Nadia's assertion that "if the prices are higher... the profit is large", since the second crop on the aus fields was "wholly a profit". (21)

The small number of mortgages and alienations of land in some parts of north Bihar and Bengal also led some district officials to conclude

20. Report on the Bengal Tenancy Bill, 10th July 1884.
that rural indebtedness was not extensive there at the end of the 19th century. This was an illusion, for there were many forms of credit in which the peasant borrowed on securities other than land; the debtor often retained possession of the mortgaged land; and only a small number of mortgages and alienations were officially recorded.

The existence of debt, for instance, was much less obvious in cases where the debtor was too poor to offer any tangible form of security, and entered into a debt-labour contract which was, however, far worse in effect, and often continued for generations. Thus in Dinajpur, where indebtedness was stated by some to be "very small", it was noted that "the labouring classes are frequently weighted by debt, and continue in many cases servants for life to their creditors". (22) Oldham, the Collector of Burdwan, noted in his Report on the "condition of the lower orders of the population" in Kaksa, a "typical" village in his district: "The disappearance of indebtedness, which was general in 1872... is a remarkable circumstance... Most of the people whom I questioned owed nothing at all; others owed a rupee or two to a fellow labourer or... to their permanent employers. These employers still retain their field labourers by lending grain to them in the slack season without interest. These transactions are not regarded as loans, still less as mahajani". The observation hardly fits in with his "confirmed" opinion that "nowhere in the district is there a lower rate of income, a lower standard of ease, a narrower margin for subsistence, or a greater prevalence of poverty among the agricultural and labouring classes than at Kaksa". (23) The people here were perhaps too poor to offer any other form of security but their physical labour: and the grain "lent without interest" during the slack season was probably no more than part of the employer's obligation to feed and clothe his bonded labourers throughout the year.

Except for such occasional misconceptions and contradictions, the wide range and extent of rural credit have been universally noted in district reports, monographs and official enquiries on the subject. Poverty and the lack of credit could not eliminate the problem, as is proved by the widespread prevalence of indebtedness even in the remotest tribal tracts. B. C. Basu notes in his Report on the District of Lohardaga: "The indebtedness of the raiyats of Lohardaga is a matter of proverb. Very few raiyats I did meet with, who did not owe, a few maunds of paddy to their Sahus". (24) The Kol peasant was "obliged to stint himself for a few months before the bhadoi harvest and to borrow, whatever his credit will allow, from his Sahu at enormous

22. Dufferin Enquiry Report, From P. Nolam, Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to the Secy. to the Govt. of India, Rev. and Agricultural Deptt. para 7, Dated Darjeeling, 30th June, 1888.
23. Ibid, Oldham's report to the Divisional Commissioner of Burdwan, 16th April 1888, paras 11 and 17.
interest.". In Palamau, too, indebtedness was equally widespread, Hinduised tribes like the Cheros and Kherwars being entirely in the clutches of the sahus. (25) The Collector of Bhagalpur writes in 1888: "figures were perhaps scarcely necessary to prove the melancholy fact.... that the majority of our ryots live in debt and pay off one year in order to begin borrowing for the next". (26) In north Bihar Tytler, the Sub-Deputy Opium agent at Siwan, Saran district, noted: '"95 percent of the raiyats live and die in debt..." (27) The Collector of Patna, studying the condition of petty cultivators and labourers in a selected area in the district, considered it as "one of extreme poverty and indebtedness, those only being free from debt whom the mahajan will not trust" (28). In Puri, indebtedness was "pretty general" (29). In Parikud, for instance, about 90% of the population were more or less permanently indebted to the mahajan, who was not usually a local man, but some affluent peasant from the Banpur side of the Khurda Khasmahal. In Jessore "more than 50 percent of them (the agriculturists) are said to be in a state of chronic indebtedness to their mahajans". (30) Similar observations are numerous with regard to nearly all the districts in the Province, including the relatively prosperous areas like Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong.

Though it is not possible to determine and quantify with precision the volume of rural indebtedness in different regions, some statistics may be gleaned from the various official enquiries on the subject. For instance, in the Report on the Condition of the Lower Orders of the Population called for by Lord Dufferin in 1888, it was found that in two selected villages in the 24 Parganas, 116 out of 158 families of cultivators, i.e. 73.4%, were stated to be indebted, their debts amounting on the average to Rs. 72/- per family, or "nearly the selling value of one year's crop". Of the 145 labouring families in the two villages, 95, i.e. 65.5% were in debt to the extent of Rs. 42/- per family, contracted on a yearly basis. Of the 37 families of artisans, 20 families i.e. more than 50% were indebted to the extent of Rs. 93/-

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25. Ibid., pt. II, Sec. 6, p. 10-11.
27. SR. Saran 1893-1901, para 556.
29. Ibid. Allen, Puri district, to C.F. Worsley, Commissioner Orissa Division, dated Puri, 3rd June, 1888.
30. LRP, Aug. 1898, Pt. II, p. 535. From L. F. Morshead, Collector Jessore, to the Commissioner Presidency Division, No. 2G 12th
------ , Jessore, ---- November, 1897, para 4.
2230 13th
each (31). According to the Collector, many of the remaining families were free of debt not by choice, but due to lack of sufficient credit; a large number of them probably entered into debt-labour contracts with the mahajan. In "a village of considerable prosperity" in Nadia, containing 44 families of cultivators and 58 families of labourers, all the cultivators... are said to be more or less indebted... Both cultivators and labourers are more or less the slaves of mahajans and the so-called bhodrolok". (32) Raiyats holding 25/20/15 bighas or less usually took loans from the mahajan. (33) Even cultivators who were relatively well-off were not free of debt for, "having been compelled to borrow in a bad year, or on account of a social ceremony or marriage, they find it difficult to extricate themselves from the debt of the mahajan with its heavy rate of interest".

Conditions were no better in Bihar. In all but one of 6 representative villages in Bhagalpur, the number of indebted peasants ranged between 76 and 86% (34). In Gaya district the Collector, Grierson, estimated the percentage of indebted peasants at 55 and 19 for Aurangabad and the Sadar subdivision, respectively. (35)The Kamias constituted 56% of the agricultural labourers, as estimated by C. J. Stevenson-Moore. In Chota Nagpur, a study of 9 villages in Manbhum showed 75.61 and 55% of the cultivators, artisans and labourers in debt to the extent of Rs. 54,13 and 10 per family respectively. (36) The degree of indebtedness thus appeared to be determined by the amount of security offered. In Dhalbhum, Singhbhum district, the Manager of the Estate wrote that despite the general belief that "about one-half of the agriculturists are in a chronic state of indebtedness to their mahajans... My own enquiries ... tend to show that this proportion is rather below the mark, and that about ten-sixteenth of their class are hopelessly indebted. It is a common saying in the pargunnah that the chashis (agriculturists) cultivate their lands for the mahajans". (37) In Lohardaga, 5 villages surveyed in Chota Nagpur Proper by Mr. Slack had 129 cultivators, and 76 labourers and artisans, of whom 50 and 25, i.e.

31. Dufferin Enquiry Report. No. 1MA, dated Cal., 17th May, 1888. From the Collector, 24 Parganas, as forwarded by A. Smith, Commissioner Presidency Division, to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., paras 13, 17, 21.
32. Ibid. From Collector, Nadia, as forwarded by Presidency Com. to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., paras 29, 33.
33. Ibid. paras 54-56.
34. Ibid. Collector Bhagalpur to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 7th April 1888, para 12.
36. Dufferin Enquiry Report. C. C. Stevens, Commissioner Chota Nagpur Division to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. No. 351 R, Ranchi, 31st May 1888, para. 11.
37. Ibid, para 18.
38.75 and 32.89 percent respectively, were in debt. (38) In 2 villages surveyed in Palamau, 74 and 6.67% of the families were indebted, the latter consisting entirely of cultivators. (39) On the basis of these data, the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur concluded that "probably at least half the cultivators are in debt", though "in their division it is peculiarly difficult to arrive at an accurate general conclusion from the consideration of a limited area". (40)

In Orissa, too, the problem of rural indebtedness, was remarkably extensive. In Sambalpur village, Balasore, for instance, 7 out of 16 raiyats were in debt, to the extent of Rs. 10/- to Rs. 50/-. Including the paddy loans, nearly 1/3 of the raiyats were indebted. (41)

Forms of credit

(i) Grain-loans

Grain-loans, both for seed and food (bij-khad) were the commonest form of credit transaction in rural society. The peasant's stock of rice was gleaned mainly from the aman crop in December. This stock, however, was largely depleted by the payment of the mahajan's interest and the largest installment (Kist) of rent which fell due in the reaping season, the lowness of post-harvest prices compelling him to part with a greater share of the produce. The remainder usually supported the peasant's family for about 3 to 4 months, supplies running out in mid March/April, which marked the beginning of the lean season, when grain prices rose high. It was during this time, i.e. from March (Chaitra) to July (Sravan), that the cultivator was obliged to borrow grain for food, seed and payments in kind for hired labour, often essential during the sowing (May-June) and transplantation (July-August) of the winter rice. In August-September the bhadoi harvest eased the strain, except when and where it was scanty or unimportant, in which case the period of stress continued till the reaping of the aman crop in December.

Tribals like the Garos, Meches, Rajbansis, etc. had little use for cash, and were indebted mainly for grain-loans. Even their rent had very often to be paid in kind. By the "tanka" system prevailing among the Garos in Busang, for instance, the rent was fixed at 10 maunds of paddy per acre per annum, a fine of 4 annas in the rupee being demanded in case of money payment. Hence, in lean seasons, when their entire crop of paddy fell considerably short of this proportion, the

38. Ibid, para 33.
39. Ibid, para 43.
40. Ibid, paras 53-54.
41. Ibid, From C. F. Worsley. Offg. Commissioner Orissa Division to the Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. No. 20 PT, Camp Pooree, 3rd June 1888, para 8 from Report of Deputy Collector, Balasore
Garos had to take substantial grain-loans first for their rent, and then for food and seed. (42)

Likewise, every Santhal had to borrow grain, usually no more than 5 maunds of paddy a year, when supplies from the previous harvest ran out. Compound interest was charged on these loans at exorbitant rates. Sometimes, grain could be borrowed in October on condition that for every 40 seers lent, 50 seers were repaid at the Aghani harvest. (43) Generally, however, foodgrains were repaid at 50% interest called "adhia" or "dera" at the time of harvest, while the loan of seed grains, which were expected to be of a finer quality, called for a 100% interest or "dubra". The unpaid amount of the year was carried on to the next year, until, at compound rates, even a petty loan was so inflated that the Santhal could hardly ever hope to repay it in full. In Raghunathpur in Bhagalpur, for example, the rate of interest rose by 150% if the payment due at the next harvest was postponed till the following year. If one maund was borrowed 1 1/2 maunds were repaid or, in default, 2 1/4 maunds next year. (44)

When the Santhal's accounts were made up at the end of the year, interest for the whole year was charged, irrespective of when he had taken the loan. The transactions were made by volume. As the Santhal repaid newly reaped paddy for dried paddy, the interest would work out to less than 50% due to the shrinkage in size. But there was every reason to believe that the mahajans used different sets of weight-measures for their receipts and disbursements. The Santals were not generally aware of the exact extent of their debt, and took the mahajans' word for it. "In no case does the money lender give a receipt to the Santhal for the amount paid". (45) The accounts of the mahajan were extremely unreliable. Very often, even debts which were cleared and interests which were paid, were not entered as such into the "mahajani khata". As the marketable produce had to be rushed out before the rains and nothing more could be brought in during the monsoon due to defective communication, the mahajan could make his own terms with the debtors for food and seed-grain. (46). If the creditor accepted the repayment of grain in instalments, the Santhal would have some chance of clearing his debt. Frequently, however, the grain loan was

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43. No. 7, Bhagalpur, 2nd May 1983. From J. Beams, Com. Bhagalpur Div. & S.Parganas, to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept.
44. E.W. Collin, Settlement Officer, Raj Banai and Srinagar Estate, to the Collector of Bhagalpur, 13th April 1888, para 12.
converted into a money value far in excess of the actual debt. The peasant was next induced to execute a registered mortgage deed in favour of the creditor, who could then file a suit and get a decree for possession of the Santhal's land on the basis of this document. (47) The report on the Nayabasan Estate in Midnapur recorded numerous case-histories of this type, while surveying the extent of transfers which occurred in the Santhal villages during the 20 years from 1889-1909.

In the backward tracts of Chota Nagpur, grain loans were by far the most popular form of credit. The Manager of Dhalbhum in Singhbhum states: "The mainstay of the ryots is the winter rice crop of December. After payment of rents and cesses by the sale of a portion of the crop, and returning the loan of grain previously taken from the mahajan with the usual addition of one-half of the advance, the portion of the produce left for the maintenance of the ryots and their families enable them as a rule to live upon it for only four months, namely from Aghran to Falgoon (December to March). With Chyte commences the strain. The ryot again resorts to the mahajan for an advance of grain, and lives upon the advance, supplemented by mohua flowers and kenda fruits, till Bhadro, when the harvesting of the bhadi crops, viz. aush dhan or early rice, makoyi, maroora, etc. relieves the pressure, and enables him to hold out till the next Kartic. The interval between Chyte and Bhadro is usually the hardest time for the bulk of the ryots, and during this period they can seldom afford to eat two full meals of grain a day". (48)

In Lohardaga and Palamau, too, grain loans were taken between Chaitra and Sravan at dehra (50%) interest for foodgrain (Khyan) and dobar (100%) for seed (beejan). Cultivators were usually the largest borrowers. In a selected village in Lohardaga, for example, 50 out of 129 cultivators and 25 out of 76 labourers and artisans, owed an aggregate of 32 1/2 and 3 maunds of dhan, respectively. (49) In a village in Palamau, all the 20 cultivating families owed 122 maunds of grain, i.e. 6 maunds per family on an average. (50)

These grain-loans were sometimes part of the dadni transaction with the mahajan, i.e. advances on the security of the crop on the fields, both principal and interest being delivered at harvest-time. As the sahu's

47. LRP Dec. 1914, No. 201, 5th September 1913. From P. M. Robertson, Settlement Officer, Rampur Hat, Birbhum to Director of Land Records, Bengal.
49. Ibid. C. C. Stevens, Com. Chota Nagpur, to Sec, to Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. No. 351 R, Ranchi, 31st May 1888, para 33.
50. Ibid., para 43.
dues were measured out before the grain was taken into the peasant’s storehouse, the grain-income of the raiyats in a year of deficient harvest was remarkably low, nearly the whole of the paddy going over to the mahajan. As in the Santhal Parganas, the principal, if not repaid in time, increased at compound interest every year. “This is a source of the most grievous oppression for the raiyats. Instances like the following are very numerous. A raiyat had borrowed 1 maund of paddy from the sahu, and at the lapse of four years, during which he was somehow unable to liquidate the debt, he was called upon to deliver 16 maunds of paddy. This latter it was beyond his means to meet, and accordingly he was obliged to sell off his cattle; or if he had any korkar or bhuiharni land, to give it away zaripesghi to the sahu”. (51)

In Angul-Khondmals, the wandering, aboriginal tribes had by the 1890’s all taken to cultivation or labour in settled villages. But their methods of cultivation were backward and though largely supplementing their diet with jungle products, they could not do without paddy loans. The Pahi raiyats of Angul having holdings of 3 acres and under were particularly prone to this, as their income from land did not exceed Rs. 30/-, while the expenses of cultivation were seldom less than Rs. 10/-, thus forcing them to borrow rice for their subsistence. (52) This was supplied to some extent by the sarbarakars and the Mogulbandi dealers who advanced grain on the security of the next harvest; but there was no regular mahajani system, the wealthier agriculturists withholding stocks at the first signs of crop-failure. (53)

Grain-loans were by no means confined to backward, tribal tracts. In Nadia, for example, detailed surveys of a “typical” area showed that about 38% of the cultivators were in debt, some of them borrowing food for 1 month, some for 3 months, and a few for 5 months. Paddy was borrowed in May/June and repaid in August/September, with 37 1/2% interest in kind for the intervening period. In another such village, 50% of the cultivators borrowed paddy, 15 of them for 5 months’ consumption, 12 for 3 months, and 3 for a month or less. The latter area was obviously deeper in debt than the former, the interest rate varying between 25 and 37 1/2%, the poorer and the less punctual debtors having to pay the higher rate. (54) In Balasore, raiyats holding less than 7 acres of land generally had to borrow paddy from their mahajans towards the middle of the year. The paddy-lenders

52. Dufferin Report, From A. K. Roy, Joint Settl. Officer, to the Director of Land Records, Bengal, through the Superintendent, Tributary Mahals, Cuttack. No. 4T, Angul, 12th April 1888, para 25.
53. LRP Feb. 1900, P. 211. From the Superintendent Tributary Mahals of Orissa; ibid, July 1897, Nos. 9-10, p. 41.
54. Dufferin Report, P. Nolan, Sec. to Govt. of Bengal, to the Sec. to Govt. of India, Rev. & Agri Dept. No. 87T-R, Agri, Sec. 26.
generally took 25% of the quantity lent, as interest after each harvest. There were numerous raiyats indebted from generation to generation, the amount of their debt varying temporarily with the nature of the harvest. (55) In lean years, dependence on the mahajan naturally increased. For instance, Tytler, the Sub-Deputy Opium Agent of Siwan in Saran district, wrote on 28th November 1896: "Nearly all agriculturists (excepting wealthy men) will run out of home stores by the middle of January". The banias, however, held large stocks. "Nearly all raiyats are carried on by their mahajans, and ... 80 per cent will be so carried on with advances, if nothing goes wrong with the poppy or rabi". (56)

A most distinctive and widely prevalent form of grain-loan was that given by a cultivator to his labourer, which was repaid by physical labour or, as in case of a sharecropper, from his share of the produce. As peasant holdings were very often too small to be self-sufficient, the great majority of these peasants had to supplement their income from land by hiring out their labour to a greater or lesser extent. As the professional mahajan seldom lent grain on such an intangible form of security as physical labour, they depended upon their cultivator-employers to advance them their requirements for food and seed. In Birbhum, for example, the employment of field-hands was often based on such grain advances. "The cultivators take them on by the year to do the bulk of the work of cultivation under their own supervision... During the year before the crop ripens, these labourers live upon advances of grain given by the cultivators, which are deducted with 25% interest from the labourer's share... Few of the labourers are free from debt". In Gangmuri, Birbhum, unlike in other villages, 50% of the agricultural labourers held 2 1/2 acres of land on an average; yet 40% of them were indebted to the cultivators for advances of grain. The same phenomenon was noted in the Santhali villages in Rampur Hat, Birbhum, nearly three decades later. (57) In Dacca, the bargadar sometimes received "a portion of the necessary seeds" from his landlord. In Midnapur, seed grain to the bargadar "is often advanced in the first instance by the landlord, but simply owing to his being the most convenient person to borrow from and the advance is strictly a loan to be repaid at harvest time". (58)

58. SR Midnapur, 1911-17.
Cash loans were less frequent in the peasant economy, and were required mainly for social ceremonies and the payment of rent. If the rent installment was not fully paid up after the December harvest, the zamindar brought rent-suits against the peasants around March-April, i.e. precisely when their stocks were very low, so that they had no option but to borrow money from their mahajans in order to make good their rent arrears.

The Santhal, for example, usually took loans of Rs. 5/- to Rs. 15/- a year to pay his rent dues, or agricultural loans for which one of the kists for repayment fell in the lean summer months. The mahajan kept a running account of the loans. The rate of interest for money loans was generally 25%, called "sikki", and compound interest was charged. In Raghunathpur and Sitapur in Bhagalpur district, the rate for cash loans was 6 and 4 1/2 pice respectively in the rupee, per month. (59) Sometimes, the rates were even higher. The extortionate interest allowed on debts under the provisions of the Civil Procedure Code (Act VIII of 1859) increased the rigour of the mahajans' demands in the Santhal Parganas. A full enquiry into the grievances of the raiyats led to the passing of Regulation III of 1872, which limited the interest on debts to 24% per annum, and to a total amount not exceeding the principal. It also excluded compound interest. But, the laws had little effect in practice, and the money-lender's business continued to flourish. (60) At the turn of the century the rates were as follows: if the loan was taken in Magh, Falgun, Chait, Baisakh or Jeth, the rate charged for these months was 2 annas in the rupee (korali); but if it was not paid till later, 4 annas to the rupee were charged for the winter months, so that the total rate of interest worked out to 37.5% or 6 annas in the rupee. If the loan was taken in Asar, Sraban, Bhadra or Aswin, the rate was 4 annas per rupee (barsali). When cash loans were repaid in grain, the mahajan took care that the rate of valuation should be well in his favour; thus "he takes his interest and makes a second profit on the sale of grain at a good deal over the valuation on which he received it" (61)

Two such types of interest on cash loans, viz. chota and dhurta, prevailed along the fringe-settlements of Midnapur and Birbhum, as for example near Narainpur, Gariah and Habrapahari in the Rampurhat and Mayureswar thanas. Urgent "chota" loans of money in Aswin-Kartik had to be repaid in grain during harvest time in Aghrahayan or Pous at an

60. SR Santhal Parganas, 1898-1897, p. 40, paras 31-32; p. 45, para 37.

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arbitrary rate fixed by the mahajan, with one ari (10 seers) in the rupee as interest. Many Santhals, who had received loans at this rate in Aswin when paddy was selling at 2 1/2 aris per rupee, were required to pay in Pous 8 aris as fixed before hand, with one ari as interest per rupee. Thus, "practically the Santhal had to pay in four months 9 aris of paddy for every 2 1/2 aris got, or more than treble. It is said that such is the case every year. In Narainpur, some money lenders even deducted 4 annas per rupee while paying to the Santhal, who had to repay the full amount with interest. (62) The second form of interest (dhurta) was fixed on small loans taken in Kartik for sacrifices. It was repaid in paddy in Paus-Magh at the proper price, with one ari in the rupee as interest.

When the Santhal's debts passed beyond the stage of the current account and were converted into money, a document was executed and the interest rates were supposed to fall; in fact, however, they still remained between 4 and 6 annas in the rupee. (63) The case of the Santhals in Tappa Madhuban, South Bhagalpur, provided a typical example of the extent of fraud practised by alien mahajans even on petty cash loans. The Tappa was reclaimed chiefly by the exertions of Babhans and Rajputs attached as peons to the Colgong Indigo Concern. As peons they were paid only 2 or 3 rupees per month, but were soon able to start lending money to the Santhals. Once this began, the Santhals were doomed. A man borrowed 20 rupees, paid back 30 in the course of a couple of years in small sums of 1 or 2 rupees at a time, and was then informed that he still owed 25. Being unable to check the simplest calculation, the aborigines were absolutely at the mercy of the money lenders. In a few years they had executed deeds of sale transferring their entire holdings to the latter in order to extinguish the debt". (64)

The Garos and Meches, like the Santhals, sometimes contracted small cash loans, often with identical results. (65)

The Paharias on the Rajmahal Hills paid 25% interest for the whole year on money advanced only 4/5 months earlier. The Paharia was so much in the hands of the mahajans, that he would sign any document in order to secure a few rupees. The mahajans fully manipulated the situation, and produced bonds which were really isabi debts, but apparently records

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62. LRP Nov. 1908. From notes taken at a local inquiry in villages in West Rampur Hat regarding the alienation, etc. of lands by Santhals in Birbhum district, April 1908, p. 7 Report by Munshi Ekram-ud-din, Kanungo, 21st February 1908, Sec. II.
64. SR Bhagalpur, 1902-10, para 124.
of lump sum payments; in fact, no mahajan would advance without security such sums as Rs. 400/- or 500/- as noted in these bonds, in one instalment to a Paharia. (66)

Money loans on the security of their "jote" lands, likewise, enabled the tribals of Chota Nagpur "to pay their rents on time and carry on their agricultural operations .... " Enquiries in Govindpur subdivision, the Bhumij country of Barabhum and the Santhal settlements of Tundi in Manbhum district, show that the raiyat was sometimes compelled to borrow money on "bhukta bandha" or usufructuary mortgage, which imposed "more usurious terms than the ordinary 60 odd percent of the mahajans for a loan advanced on the security of a transferable 'jote' and is reduced during its currency to practical penury". (67)

In Palamau and Lohardaga, however, this form of mortgage was not common; here the usual means of raising money on landed property were "zaripeshgi" or usufructuary mortgage by which the land was pawned to the sahu till it was released by paying up the capital, or the "mokarrari" lease by which land was permanently leased out for an advance 20/25 times of its profit. These money loans, however, could only be resorted to by the landed classes and, among the peasants, by the buinhars and a few chatisa raiyats alone. Most raiyats took petty cash loans such as the karja, seri or chara. Karja could be taken at any time of the year at stipulated rates of interest varying from 1 or 1/2 an anna per rupee per month in case of small loans, to 12% per annum in case of larger ones. By the seri, a rupee borrowed in summer was repaid by 3 to 5 kats of paddy, including interest, at harvest time. A chara loan of 1 rupee borrowed in summer was repaid by 20 to 25 poilas of rice as interest in Agrahayan, and by the principal in Magh. Dadni advances in cash were occasionally made in the lean months, by which the peasant undertook to deliver for every rupee borrowed, a fixed amount of the produce of his labour, such as cotton, ghee, lac or tasar, which worked out to a rate 25 to 50% lower than the market price. Sometimes, the dadni advances were made at such "egregious rates of interest", that the actual cultivators got little more from the produce than the wages of their labour. (68)

Cash loans were more frequent in non-tribal areas. In Nadia, for instance, besides many debts for social ceremonies and lean seasons, many raiyats resorted to short-term cash loans for the payment of rent, at an interest rate of 24 to 30% per annum. These were often post-harvest loans, when the raiyat was eager to hold back part of his stocks till the grain prices were higher, and yet was compelled to meet

66. LRP Sep. 1909.
the pressing demands of the landlord. (69) In a "typical" area of Jawar Baluakandi, Tipperah, Rs. 20/- to Rs. 26/- was generally borrowed for marriages. (70) In Raghunathpur and Sitapur in the Raj Banaili and Srinagar Estate of Bhagalpur, there were 5 mahajans each, whose rate for cash loans were 6 and 4 1/2 pies in the rupee per month, respectively. (71) In Dholla in Birbhum, 18 of the 30 cultivator families had a total debt of Rs. 1,093/-, accounted for by the expense of social ceremonies and the bad harvest of 1884. In 4 selected villages in the area, 30% of the cultivators were in debt, the average debt being Rs. 150/-, or about 2 years' net income. (72)

(iii) Loan of cattle and agricultural implements:

Another distinctive form of credit besides grain and cash loans was the loan of agricultural implements, mostly of ploughs and cattle. Indeed, the plough featured crucially in the peasant economy. The Presidency Commissioner noted in 1888: "The distinction between small cultivators and labourers lies in this, that a man who has a plough and oxen is called a chasa or cultivator, and he that has no plough or oxen for tilling his small holding is known as a mojoor or labourer". (73) Each plough necessitated the possession of 2 yoke of oxen. Surveying a village of considerable prosperity in his district, the Collector of Nadia observed that of the 44 cultivating families 5 had no plough, one family had 5 ploughs, while 25 had one, 8 had 2, 2 had 3 and 3 had 4 ploughs each. In another such village, out of 77 cultivating families 63 had 1 plough, and 14 had 2 ploughs each. Considering the size of each family and the extent of land held by them, the Commissioner concluded: "It does not appear that the number of members in a family much affects its prosperity; the prosperity of a family appears to be regulated by the number of ploughs it can afford to keep in work". (74) Hence, cultivators without ploughs were obliged to borrow them from their richer neighbours or landlords. Sometimes a bargadar was provided with bullocks and implements by the landlord. This was, however,
strictly on a credit rather than capitalist basis. (75)

Such loans were widely prevalent in Nadia, Jessore and Khulna. They were also popular in the Santhal Parganas and other parts of Bhagalpur Division. E.W. Collin, Settlement Officer of the Raj Banaili and Srinagar Estate, wrote in 1888: "Generally the ploughs belong to a big raiyat who lends them to smaller raiyats in exchange for their services in driving them". (76) One day's use of the plough and bullock was allowed for 3 days' service as ploughman. (77) As always, the creditor had the upper hand, and the cost of labour put in by the debtor was much more than the amount spent by the former on cattle-feed and midday meals to the labourer. After the famine of 1896-97, this practice grew more frequent here as money-lenders in the Damin-i-Koh, Santhal Parganas, began to evade the exemption of plough cattle from attachment, by themselves becoming the owners and lending the cattle out. (78) In Jessore, the creditor and debtor often agreed to work the lands belonging to both, one lending the plough and the other his labour. By the arrangement known as adh-hali (half-plough), each one's land was ploughed for 15 days in a month. If the debtor borrowed any cash, usually 3 to 4 rupees for the season, in addition to the plough, he had to labour on the creditor's land for 20 days in the month, one meal a day being provided by the latter. It has been calculated that, on this basis, the creditor got about 5 bighas of land ploughed for Rs. 2 - 8 annas, which normally would have cost him Rs. 7 - 8 annas. (79)

Yet the plough could never really be the absolute criterion of a peasant's prosperity: it had to be considered in relation to the size of his holding, which may or may not be sufficient to support his entire family. In the 2 selected villages in Nadia, as mentioned above, 62.5 and 81.9% of the peasant families had one plough each. The family unit normally consisted of 4 to 10 members, and the size of its cultivation seldom exceeded 10 or 12 bighas; even this land was not their own, and was generally held on barga. In the first village under survey, even the families having 2 ploughs consisted of 6 to 12 members each and held 20 to 24 bighas, "chiefly on the barga system." Most of them had thus ceased to cultivate in their own right, and families of 6 persons and over with one plough and 10 to 12 bighas are generally

76. Dufferin Report, E. W. Collin to the Collector of Bhagalpur, 13 April 1888, p. 6, No. 233, Camp Buloah.
78. DCAR on Bhagulpur, 1897-98, p. 10, para 62. Comments by the Commissioner.
indebted and have to pay from 25 to 37.5 per cent interest for advances. In fact, "all the cultivators in this village are said to be more or less indebted". (80) In the final analysis, therefore, peasants without sufficient land had to depend on the more prosperous farmers in obtaining a loan of their land in return for their services, or for a share of their produce.

(iv) Loan of land

Due to the increasing pressure of population on the soil, resulting in uneconomic holdings and the extension of cultivation into marginal lands, such loans of land acquired greater significance. Regular systems like the bargadari drew on it. Often the new cultivation too was based on this form of credit, in which the rich entrepreneur, called the hawaladar, jotedar, gantidar or aymadar, financed the first work of reclamation and gave occasional loans to ensure its continuity. He settled some cultivators on the new land, and advanced money to build houses, buy ploughs and cattle, and obtain seed for sowing crops; the size and nature of the rent collected from these raiyats, was determined essentially by credit relations. Sometimes these lands were reclaimed and worked by immigrant tribal labour, as for example in the Barind region of Rajshahi and Malda, and in the jungle mahals of western Midnapur and Bankura. They rarely obtained any rights in the lands cultivated by them, and the entrepreneurs, on the plea of raising a return on their initial investment, almost entirely appropriated the profits of the new cultivation. The Collector of Noakhali notes: "The capital expended on the land is small, and on that capital an enormous interest is charged." (81) It is interesting to note the case of the Sahebganj traders and mahajans, who did not even reclaim waste lands, but merely financed the cultivation of sabai grass on the Rajmahal Hills, by converting the "kuraos" or food-crop lands of the Paharias into sabai lands. They arbitrarily fixed the price of the sabai at Rs. 8 to 10 per 100 loads, but kept back the greater part of the purchase money in settlement of their "old debts", i.e. the initial cost borne by the mahajan in clearing the sabai fields. The mahajans then sold this grass at a fair profit to large contracting firms like those of Ramgopal Sheo Dayal and Dina Nath Puri. Thus, while the sabai exports more than doubled between 1901-8, and the mahajans fast extended their godowns in Sahebganj, the Paharias' entitlement was sharply reduced by the ever-increasing burden of their "old debts". (82)

80. Presidency Commissioner to the Govt. of Bengal, Cal, 17th May 1888, paras 29-41.
Forms of appropriation by the creditor:

(i) Labour bondage

The loan, whether of grain, cash, agricultural implements or land, was repaid in various forms. The poorest peasants, in the absence of other assets, paid the creditor with their labour. The "kamia" system of debt bondage in Chota Nagpur rested on this basis. As noted above, in backward tracts like Kaksa in Burdwan and parts of Dinajpur, indebtedness was less apparent, the only form of repayment being the debtor's labour.

(ii) Share of the produce

The next and most obvious of the peasant's assets was the produce on his fields, a sizeable portion of which went to the mahajan in payment of interest, whether direct or in cash value. In Bhagalpur, for example, the Collector noted in 1888: "...the large majority of them live in debt, and have practically mortgaged most of their crop before it is harvested". In Banka, the Subdivisional Officer found a considerable number of the peasant population indebted to the extent of more than one year's yield of their land. (83) Extensive debt-sales of grain were also noted by Taylor, the Collector of Bankura, in 1888. In a typical village in the 24 Parganas, the indebted families owed nearly the selling value of one year's crop on an average. (84)

Since the amount payable in grain was determined by its current money value, compulsory payments with interest at harvest-time, when grain prices were lowest, inflated the mahajan's share. The creditors insisted on this condition of payment, and the lack of local markets and proper communication further forced the hands of the peasant. (85) Carstairs, the Deputy Commissioner of the Santhal Parganas, noted in this context: "The true power of the mahajan is, I think, his monopoly..." The Collector of Monghyr reports: "...crops are not sold to any extent...the mahajan takes payment in grain, taking care that the rate of valuation shall be well in his favour." Frequently, the liquor seller in Santhal villages was also a mahajan, and credited drinks on the security of crops. During the dhan-cutting season he reaped a rich harvest, 4 annas worth of paddy being paid for two pice.

84. Ibid. P. Nolan, Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to the Secy. to the Govt. of India, Rev. & Agri. Dept. para 26. Darjeeling, 30th June 1888.
85. Ibid. From R. Carstairs, Offg. Deputy Com., Santhal Parganas, to the Commissioner, Bhagalpur Div., and S. Parganas, Doomka, 6th April 1888, para 12.
worth of liquor. (86)

In Jessore, bawardars (guards) were sent to keep a watch on the ripening crop. In the Pichasa estate of Bihar, the mahajans sent their bullocks to the threshing floor. (87) In Midnapur, officials collecting the water-rate waited till the debtor-riayat returned after selling his rice, for even a day's delay would oblige him to give priority to the mahajan's demands. (88) In the Rajmahal Hills, the mahajans sent outside labourers to cut and carry away the produce, i.e. the sabai grass grown by the Paharias. In the process, they grossly under-estimated and undervalued the produce in their "chuki" bonds with the Paharias, and made further profits by enlarging the sabai bundles with foreign substances when selling them to the Sahebganj contractors. (89) In Angul-khondmals, the Mogulbandi dealers gave advances on the security of the crop, and carted it away immediately after reaping. In Parikud, one of the poorest tracts most liable to famines in the jagir Mahals of Puri, "the crops are generally forestalled. When they are harvested the creditors carry off the whole and the agriculturist has to begin again borrowing for his daily wants". (90) Where the creditor provided the land, the usual form of appropriation was a share of the produce or share-cropping, known as adhiyari, bhagchash or bhagjote. The creditor paid the rent and obtained generally a half share. In Birbhum, 2/3 of the produce was surrendered for the best lands. In this way, "a large amount of paddy comes into the mahajan's hand, nearly equivalent in value to the rental of the village". (91)

(iii) Distraint of movable property:

As the debt, accumulating with compound interest, began to exceed the peasant's meagre surplus, the form of appropriation changed. Besides the produce on his fields, the movable property of the peasant generally consisted of his agricultural implements, cattle and livestock, utensils and ornaments. For instance, in Raghunathpur and

90. SR Jagir Mahals, Puri, 1906-9, p. 8, para 33.
Sitapur in the Srinagar and Banaili Estate of Bhagalpur, the implements used by the raiyats for agriculture were: the plough (hal), harrow (chouki), mattock (kodali), sickle (kachya), smooth sickle (hassua), axe (basala) and kurpi for cutting grass. Generally the ploughs belonged to the big raiyats, which were lent to their poorer neighbours in exchange for their labour. In Raghunathpur, there were on an average 4 cows, 3 bullocks, 3 buffaloes, 2 goats, and 32 sheep per person among the respective owners of livestock. Nearly all the raiyats in these villages cooked their food in earthen vessels, though they usually possessed a brass lota and dish. The richer raiyats used brass utensils. Every family had some ornaments, the total value of these in Raghunathpur being Rs. 793/- among 22 raiyats, or Rs. 36/- per person. (92) These are typical case-studies: similar conditions prevailed elsewhere, with local variations in emphasis. The problem was most acute in the tribal areas. For instance, the Santhals of the Damin-i-Koh, "under the police on the one hand and the civil courts on the other, as manipulated by mahajan adventurers from Bhojpur in the Shahabad district, who systematically exploited them, were reduced to a condition of serfdom in which they could not call a bullock, a utensil, or even a grain of their produce their own." (93) The revised Civil Procedure Code of 1877, however, prohibited the attachment by creditors of the "implements of husbandry" and the "materials of an agriculturist's house or farm-building." Although the peasant could still be pressurised to sell or pawn the articles in order to pay his creditor, distraint of movable property as a measure towards the recovery of debts became illegal and hence, risky. This, along with the growing land-market and the rise in agricultural prices, shifted the focus to the debtor's land as the most valuable form of security.

(iv) Sale or mortgage of land

The insatiable land-hunger of the creditor, fostered by the ever-increasing debt obligations of the average peasant, led to a phenomenal increase in land sales at the end of the 19th century. It rose by about 500% between 1885-1913 and by 300% approximately between 1885-1904.

This upward trend in the sale and mortgage of raiyati holdings, whether at fixed rates or with occupancy rights, is reflected in the figures of the Registration Department, which show an increase of more than 50% in the quinquennial period 1890-91 to 1894-95: (94).

92. Ibid. E. W. Collin, Settlement Officer, Raj Banaillii and Srinagar Estate, to the Collector Bhagalpur, No. 233, Buloh, 13th April 1888.
94. Notes on the Administration of the Registration Dept. in Bengal for the year 1894-95.
TABLE : I

A) Mortgages of immovable property - Registered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value of Rs. 100/- or more</th>
<th>Value of less than Rs. 100/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891 - 92</td>
<td>93,402</td>
<td>154,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892 - 93</td>
<td>108,214</td>
<td>185,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893 - 94</td>
<td>118,067</td>
<td>202,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 - 95</td>
<td>122,137</td>
<td>211,628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B) Registered sales of Raiyati Holdings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>At Fixed Rates</th>
<th>With occupancy rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1889 - 90</td>
<td>35,342</td>
<td>77,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890 - 91</td>
<td>36,090</td>
<td>84,921</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891 - 92</td>
<td>37,519</td>
<td>103,777</td>
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<td>1892 - 93</td>
<td>43,749</td>
<td>125,250</td>
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<td>1893 - 94</td>
<td>47,474</td>
<td>138,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 - 95</td>
<td>49,398</td>
<td>145,805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** LRP Aug. 1898 pt. I, Nos. 56 -57, p. 18.

Statement 'A' shows a steady increase in mortgages, viz. 30.7% for lands valued at Rs. 100/- or more, and 36.6% for lands less than Rs.100/- in value. Thus, the increase was more remarkable in case of the latter, which must have consisted almost entirely of raiyati holdings. Statement 'B' shows an increase of 39.7% in the sale of fixed rate holdings and of 88.4% in those of occupancy holdings, though by Sec. 178 of the Tenancy Act, the latter were valid only if the local custom was in their favour. The average increase in the sale of raiyati lands, whether at fixed rates or with occupancy rights, was thus 64.05%. The total number of transfers in the province increased by 166.3% between 1883-93. It was least marked in the Presidency Division (41.8%), and most so in Patna (626%). (95) On the whole, the sale of raiyati holdings at fixed rates were nearly doubled, and those of ordinary occupancy holdings nearly trebled, in the 10 years preceding the famine of 1896-97. (96)

However, these and other statistics of the Registration Department regarding the sale and mortgage of peasant holdings in this period, are by no means precise. For instance, the number of sales, etc. do not

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reflect the exact proportion of the lands transferred, in the absence of accurate information as to their size or area. Moreover, only a very small percentage of sales and mortgages were actually registered. In the tribal areas the transfer of land to outsiders was illegal, and hence could not be registered. Even in the settled districts, as noted above, the transferability of land depended on 'local custom'. This was determined by the consent of the landlord - usually acquired by the payment of a considerable amount of purchase-money, or 'salami'. In cases where the landlord was particularly difficult and the demand for 'salami' exorbitant, the purchaser often preferred to hold the land in 'benami', instead of formally registering his name as the new owner. Registration was optional in case of transactions worth less than Rs. 100/- so that a large number of sales, specially of part-holdings, went unregistered. In case of remote villages, the expense and inconvenience of travelling to the Registration Office also acted as a deterrent. Hence, the statistics of the Registration Department reflect the increasing trend, but not the actual volume, of land sales and mortgages in Bengal in the closing years of the 19th century.

This trend, fostered as it was by secular forces such as the changes in the land-man ratio, the rising agricultural prices and the growing profitability of speculation in land, increased remarkably in years of scarcity and famine. For instance, though the number of registrations affecting immovable property went up successively throughout the 1890's, its rise was more pronounced (9,77,883 to 11,27,340) between 1895-96 and 1896-97 than in any previous year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Optional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891 - 92</td>
<td>6,59,026</td>
<td>1,73,701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892 - 93</td>
<td>7,32,259</td>
<td>2,07,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893 - 94</td>
<td>7,71,531</td>
<td>2,27,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 - 95</td>
<td>7,93,837</td>
<td>2,38,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895 - 96</td>
<td>7,62,304</td>
<td>2,15,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896 - 97</td>
<td>8,65,587</td>
<td>2,61,753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increase = 1,03,283 (13.5%) 46,174 (21.41%)
Decrease = x x

[ Source : Notes on the Administration of the Registration Dept., Bengal, 1896 - 97; No. 4122, 27th July, 1897 ]

The number of sales and mortgages rose from 2,91,581 and 3,04,821 in 1895 - 96 to 3,36,615 and 3,64,620 respectively, in 1896 - 97. The sale of raiyati holdings at fixed rates increased from 46,403 to 54,108, while those of occupancy holdings rose from 142,771 to 171,963. This remarkable increase in registration in 1896-97 is attributable to
a great extent to the prevalence of the famine, and "affords some indication of the pressure felt by the people in the districts chiefly affected". (97)

The problem of land alienation to the "non-agricultural classes":

This prolific increase in the transfer of raiyati holdings, most marked in years of scarcity and famine, opened up a very basic problem in agrarian relations regarding (a) the social composition of the new owners, and (b) the implications of the de-peasantisation process.

(a) The transferees: 'mahajan' or raiyat?

It was remarked that the power of alienation exercised by the raiyat was bringing in the money-lender or mahajan; for though the fixed-rate holdings were principally bought by the raiyats themselves, the mahajans also accounted for a considerable proportion of the purchasers, while they were second only to the raiyats in the purchase of occupancy holdings. (98)

The following statement underlines this fact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered sales of Raiyati Holdings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage purchased by Mahajans &amp; Raiyats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>At Fixed Rates</th>
<th>With Occupancy Rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahajan</td>
<td>Raiyat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-90</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-91</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-92</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893-94</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894-95</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus, between 1890-95, the number of mahajan purchasers went up by nearly 3% and 0.4% in the case of fixed rate and occupancy holdings.

97. Notes on the Administration of the Registration Dept. in Bengal 1896-97. No. 497 P-D from C. W. Bolton, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal to the Secy./Govt. of India, Home Deptt., Darjeeling 24th Sept. 1897 - paras 3-6.
98. Ibid, 1894-95. Statement No. XIII.
respectively. In 1896 - 97, 50.5 and 71.8% of the purchasers of fixed rate and occupancy holdings respectively were raiyats, while 14.4 and 9.7% were mahajans or traders. (99) In 1897-98, the raiyats constituted 57.8% of the purchasers of fixed-rate holdings and 73.4% of those of occupancy holdings, while the mahajans accounted for 13.2 & 10.6% respectively. (100)

Divisional statistics on the registered sales of occupancy holdings for the years 1883-84 and 1892-93, covering almost a decade, show the outlines of a distinctive pattern in the class-composition of the new owners:

**TABLE 4 IV**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Number of transactions</th>
<th>Purchaser</th>
<th>Landlords</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Raiyats</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1883 - 1884</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mahajans</td>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>unspeci-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of hold-</td>
<td>fied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>transactions</td>
<td>trans-</td>
<td>lords</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ferred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>14229</td>
<td>.3204</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>8194</td>
<td>2415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidency</td>
<td>5042</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>2809</td>
<td>1287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajshahi</td>
<td>7613</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>6545</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacca</td>
<td>4736</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>3674</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittagong</td>
<td>6386</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>4984</td>
<td>865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patna</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagalpur</td>
<td>5705</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>4251</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chota Nagpur</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>47030</td>
<td>6745</td>
<td>1174</td>
<td>2268</td>
<td>31911</td>
<td>6504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1892 - 1893 |                        |           |            |       |         |        |
| Burdwan    | 28856                  | 6423      | 904        | 808   | 13739  | 3609   |
| Presidency | 7154                   | 1011      | 132        | 425   | 4025   | 1849   |
| Rajshahi   | 23806                  | 1455      | 1001       | 959   | 19405  | 1371   |
| Dacca      | 19159                  | 1372      | 315        | 1311  | 15829  | 1885   |


100. Report of the Registration Dept. 1897-98 No. 429 P-D from C. W. Bolton, Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal to the Secy. Govt. of India, Home Dept., Darjeeling 24th Sept. 1898.
### TABLE 8 IV (Contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Number of transactions</th>
<th>Purchaser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahajans</td>
<td>Landlords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of holdings</td>
<td>trans-ferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittagong</td>
<td>17716</td>
<td>1320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patna</td>
<td>14260</td>
<td>2151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagalpur</td>
<td>10099</td>
<td>1726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>2624</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chota Nagpur</td>
<td>1516</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>125280</td>
<td>16135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These figures too, like those of the registered land sales and mortgages, are by no means exact. In 1883-84, 6745 of the transferees, i.e. about 14% or 1 in 7 approx., are shown to be mahajans, while the landlords and raiyats together constituted a formidable 75%. "Of these so-called mahajans however, but a small proportion were probably other than substantial raiyats themselves, for these are the chief money-lenders in rural Bengal". (101)

The term "mahajan" itself is rather vague. There can be no clear line of distinction in effect between various social groups like the "mahajans", "landlords" and "rai�ats". As noted earlier, many landowners and even rai�ats with a small surplus lent grain or money to their tenants and neighbours, as the most profitable form of investment. "There is in such cases no sharp distinction between the rai�at who lends and the rai�at who borrows, and as a man's circumstances improve or deteriorate, he may pass year by year from the one class to the other". (102) The Collector of Noakhali notes the existence of resident rai�ats "possessed of capital, who are partly actual cultivators and partly the suppliers of capital to dependent cultivators." (103)

102. Ibid. From E. V. Westmacott, Com. Presidency Div. to the Sec. to the Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces No. 53 R. L. Calcutta 27th April, 1893, para 7.
These raiyat-mahajans found it much easier to conceal their purchases than the purely non-agricultural bania or trader, who would stand out more prominently in rural society, and was much less likely to be permitted to remain unregistered. (104) Hence, for the latter "we may accept the registered transfers as including nearly all their transactions". (105) Meanwhile, even when the wealthy raiyats registered their purchase of occupancy rights, the stigma often attached to the term 'mahajan' induced many of them who lent money or grain as a side business, or even as their main profession, to define themselves as raiyats or proprietors, as long as they held some land in their possession. Inclusion among the group of 'raiyats' rather than 'mahajans' would also give them a better legal status in relation to their land. In fact, the unhindered right of sub-letting granted to occupancy raiyats by the tenancy legislation of 1859, was condoned and extended by implication even to non-resident holders of occupancy rights by the Act of 1885. (106) Hence, a large proportion of the purchasers were wealthy raiyat-mahajans, rather than traders or money lenders belonging exclusively to the non-agricultural community. Even the statistics marginally reflect this trend, for between 1884 - 1893 the proportion of holdings transferred to mahajans proper fell from 14.2 to 12.8%, while the transfers to raiyats rose approximately from 68 to 70%. (107)

The process of de-peasantisation: eviction or social depression of the peasantry.

The debtor raiyats were sometimes physically evicted by the new owners, but more frequently they remained as bargadars (share-croppers) on their old lands. Often this practice was resorted to by the mahajan as a cover or a "protective measure against the zamindars attempting to oust him from the holdings". (108) This forced a distinct change in the social status of the peasant, and destroyed all incentives to expand or improve cultivation. His economic position naturally worsened, as the purchaser, having to pay the full former rent, made more stringent terms with his under-tenants than before. These terms were generally batai, bhaoli or barga, for while agricultural prices soared, such produce-payments, unlike cash rents, were not subjected to restraints

107. LRP 1894, Aug., p. 286.
and hence suited the interests of the purchaser, who had bought the land as an investment. It would also relieve the non-resident owners from the onus of direct cultivation, while ensuring a sizeable share of the crop. As the Collector of Dacca noted, the increasing volume of rural indebtedness and the bargadari system were the twin evils which gnawed at the basis of rural society in this period. (109)

This process of depeasantisation, i.e. the eviction or social depression of the average small peasant, was apparent in the different economic regions, as for example, (i) in tribal areas like the Chittagong Hills, Santhal Parganas, or the fringe settlements in Birbhum and Midnapur; (ii) in the settled but backward districts like Bhagalpur, Purnea or Champaran; (iii) and even in the relatively prosperous Divisions like Dacca-Chittagong.

(i) In tribal areas, it was most remarkable wherever the transactions were not inter-pares, as between the Marwaris and the Rajbansi or Koch of British Sikkim and Jalpaiguri; the Bhojpuris, bazar-traders and the Santhals; or the plainsmen and hillmen of Chittagong.

The Hindu proprietors and big farmers were fast usurping the lands of the tribals and Muhammadans of Chittagong, though never as actual cultivators. In March 1896, W.B. Oldham, Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, noted a case in which a well-known shopkeeper in Chittagong appealed to the Special Judge and acquired occupancy rights of some lands which he had never even seen. This process, as Oldham observed, "is in progress at an increasing pace". (110)

In the Santhal Parganas, land sales increased remarkably since Regulation III of 1872 recognised tenant rights, and guaranteed security of tenure and fixity of rent. Interest on debts was limited to 24% per annum, and compound interest was abolished. Yet, occupancy rights became negotiable assets, with the help of which the village usurer could easily circumvent the new usury laws. In effect, it was "of no avail to restrict interest to 24% if you allow a raiyat to part with his land in payment of his debts". (111)

Within 10 years of the settlement, 10,000 Court sales and 40,000 private sales of raiyati holdings are noted. Lands settled by Regulation III of 1872 with the Santhal headmen and cultivators were alienated to money-lenders from Bengal and Shahabad. In Pakour Sub Division, sales and mortgages increased five fold between 1874-79. (112) In 1882 the Deputy Commissioner, Oldham, observed that the

109. SR Dacca, 1910-17, p. 76.
110. LRP Aug. 1898, from W.B. Oldham, Com. Chittagong Div., to the Sec. to the Board of Revenue, Lower Provinces, No. 2 Camp Feni dt. 6th March 1896, para 17.
111. SR Santhal Parganas, 1898-1907, para 37.
bazar traders of Dumka had gradually absorbed all the Santhal settlements in the area. A large tract of about 450 sq. miles of raiyati land in Handwe, had also passed into the hands of their creditors. The "sale question" became one of grave political importance, especially in Deoghar Sub Division, between 1878-86. (113) In the Damin-i-Koh, the raiyats, in collusion with the headman, sold out or sublet large portions of their lands to "foreigners". (114) All this demoralised the raiyats, as noted in the annual reports on the administration of civil justice in the district since 1878.

Mr. Barlow's letter No. 1164 R of 28th June 1877, para 3, mentions a class of speculators who "take up villages solely to make money, and they have the ghatwals with them, as they pay large salaries". The raiyats were crushed and ground till they abandoned or relinquished their lands, which were then sold to speculators. The settlement-holder sometimes enriched himself, but was more often a mere instrument in the hands of some money-lender for squeezing the village. A typical case was that of Mahta Manjhi Santhal, headman of village Nowka Chibutia, Taluk Pathrol, Deoghar Sub Division, who sold 6 bighas of rice land, probably the pick of the whole village, along with 1 1/4 bighas of bari land, to a Mussalman outsider, Johardin Miya of Rampur, for Rs. 400/-, ignoring the interests of the 16 Santhal Raiyats and 1 Kamar who inhabited the village. According to the mul raiyat, "I offered land to the raiyats for sale, but they would not pay me for it. Therefore, I sold it to this Mussalman". But the raiyats were entitled to get settlement of the land sold, without cess or premium. The rental, Rs. 6 - 6 annas, at 15 years' purchase, was increased to four times the rate by the premium. (115)

Many of the mul raiyats, manjhis or pradhans claimed lands on the basis of early investments as pioneers. Actually, however, the original settlers were mostly Santhals, who were driven out by the claimants, nearly all of whom were zamindar Babhans, and many of them money lenders by trade. For instance, a large proportion of the lands registered at Deoghar were those of Tularam and Ananda Rai, who were very extensive money lenders. Any improvements made by them on the lands were no doubt effected by forced labour, rather than by pioneering zeal. (116)

113. SR Santhal Parganas, 1898-1907, p. 45, para 37.
Numerous cases of sale and rack-renting of village lands by the mulraiyat or headman, who held occupancy rights unlike the thikadars, have come to light during the enquiry on the subject after 1886. Government orders issued in Mr. Nolan's letter No. 86T-R, dated 6th October 1887, confirmed the ruling of the courts that occupancy rights were not saleable, unless specifically recorded at the settlement. Yet the orders of 1887 could not effectively check the mischief of transfer. The zamindars, who after the settlement were no more than rent receivers, were indifferent to the problem. It was also difficult to dislodge the mahajans with the help of the village headmen, who were bought over or held in debt bondage by them. The number of holdings transferred during the last 25 years, i.e. between the first settlement (1872) and the next (1898), was 212, 476. (117) Sales were disguised mostly as mortgages in which the use of the land paid for the interest alone, or as a form of sub-lease, the raiyat having little hope of ever clearing his debt. Both of these were as good to the mahajan as outright sales. It is significant that of the area covered by various forms of transfer, viz. sale, mortgage, re-settlement, relinquishment to headmen, sub-lease and new settlements, the percentage of eviction was 5, 100, 10, 25, 4 and 1, respectively. (118)

The Santhals numbered most in the districts bordering on Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas. In Midnapore, the Santhals and Kurmi Mahtos were the principal aboriginal and semi-aboriginal tribes. The Munda, Bhumij, and Koda were aborigines of lesser importance, while the semi-aborigines included the Bauris and Bhuiyas. Statistical charts and maps of Garhbeta, Binpur, Salboni and the Nayabasan and Rohini estates in Midnapore, as well as the Settlement Report of the Santhal villages in Rampur Hat, Birbhum, clearly show the land-transfer trends in these regions approximately during the 20 years between 1891-93 to 1911-13.

In Binpur in Midnapore, where there was the largest number of Santhals, the proportion of land held by them had decreased from 43 to 36%, and that of the aborigines and semi-aborigines from 76 to 66%, while that of "Dikkus" other than Sadgopes, had gone up from 20 to 30%. In other areas the loss was very slight. Though the statistics available can never be exact enough to show the full extent of lands lost, they definitely indicate a steady process of land transfers (7.55%) from the aborigine to the Dikku or Bengali element in Binpur, Garhbeta and Salboni during the 20 years from 1893-1913. (119)

About 15,465 bighas of land were transferred by the aborigines and semi-aborigines to the Bengalis in these three thanas, as compared with

117. SR Santhal Parganas, 1878-1907 p. 75, para 67.
118. Ibid, para 71.
119. LRP Dec. 1914, Unofficial note No. 5238, dated 27th June, 1914, para 12, Appendices D. E.
5,427 bighas transferred by them to members of their own class. This proves the steady loss of land by them to the Bengalis. Conversely, the Dikkus transferred 3,409 bighas only to the aborigine element, as against 24,636 bighas transferred by the Dikkus to themselves. It shows that the transfer to the aborigines is very small. The total transfers of 20,892 bighas by the aborigine population, minus the total transfers to them of 8,836 bighas, shows a net loss by them of 12,056 bighas, or 74.02% of the total area transferred since 1893. (120)

These facts highlight several interesting aspects of the problem of land-transfers in tribal areas. It is very difficult to gauge the enormity of land loss by the tribals, due to the simultaneous process of reclamation by them. Usually, the Santhal or other aborigines and semi-aborigines parted with the lands of superior quality, and retained the worst or marginal lands. In villages like Dharampur and Debattapur, where the proprietor was also a mahajan, the degree of dispossession was particularly large. The mahajan coveted such conveniently located lands, as they lay close to his home base, or to the nearest market town. The Santhal sold his land at a very low price, generally between Rs. 10 and 20 per bigha. He had little idea as to the value of his land, and the mahajan invariably dictated the terms. The very low percentage of usufructuary mortgages, by which the land reverted to the mortgagor after a fixed period, clearly reflects the greed of the mahajan, who was intent on permanently possessing the land.

In the villages around Rampur Hat, for example, it was noted in 1910 that for the last 20 years the raiyats lived as "landless serfs". In Mauza Lakargram, they sold or mortgaged 90% of their lands to mahajans; they often absconded, as in Mauza Santoshpur, where all the Santhal chaks were in the hands of one Ramdheni Singh; in Mouza Burwa Gopalpur, the Santhals were out of possession from 10 to 30 years. (121) The list could be prolonged infinitely.

The Paharias inhabiting the Rajmahal Hills in Pakour, Santhal Parganas, were even more ignorant and helpless in the face of outside intrusion. They were not conscious of their occupancy rights in the land, and considered them to be temporary holdings dependent on the will of the manjhi. The latter would appropriate their lands or sell them outright to alien mahajans and also to the Santhals, who had already reclaimed the foothills and were now fast encroaching on the lower slopes. In 1899 it was discovered, for instance, that about 35,000 acres planted with sabai grass were being worked by outside labour employed by the Sahebganj traders, to whom the hillmen had alienated their occupancy rights. No Paharia had ever reported or complained of this extensive

120. Ibid, Appendix F.
121. From P. M. Robertson, Settlement Officer, Rampur Hat, to the Director of Land Records, Bengal, No. 201, dated Suri, 5th Sep. 1913, para 8.
alienation, which, therefore, went unnoticed. Faced with the problem of encroachment by outsiders, and hedged in by the Forest Conservancy rules which expressly discouraged their wasteful methods of jhum or kurwa cultivation, the Paharias existed almost on a starvation-level entitlement. (122).

Like the Santhals and Paharias, the Meches and Garos too were being driven from lands cultivated by them, as more and more areas in the Duars region were being taken up for tea plantations. (123) In 1915, the Revd. L. Barber of the Baptist Mission, Susang, pointed out that the Mission had worked in many Garo villages 15 years ago, which no longer existed. The Hindus and Muslims coming from Dacca and beyond offered much higher prices for land than the Garos, and thus secured them. Meanwhile, the Garos, burdened by the high rates of interest charged by the money lenders and weighed down by the pressure of the "tanka" system of produce rent, were often obliged to "throw up" their lands. (124)

In the Terai region in Darjeeling, firms of Marwari mahajans and others acquired jotes from the Rajbansis not to cultivate the land, but to place "an agent in charge to screw as much rental as possible from their under-tenants." For example, Rajkishore Shahu and 3 others of Phansidewa in the Terai owned 23 jotes whole or in part; the Ganga Prasad estate held 15 jotes; 2 Muslim firms of Chandanbari in Jalpaiguri owned 7 and 9 jotes, while Enyetulla of Damragram held 7 jotes in Baragharia. Studying a selected area in the Terai, it was seen that approximately 1/8 of the tract was owned by non-residents - mostly Muslims and mahajans. (125) In 1885, Mr. Oldham observed that due to sale by public auctions, "the purchaser, who thereby gets an indefeasible title and easy possession, has been a member of the foreign money-lending class in every case, and the cases have been numerous." (126)

The opening up of Chota Nagpur by the land survey and settlement and the introduction of the Bengal Nagpur Railway, was also marked, as has been noted above, with the intrusion of alien capital and the growth of a land market. In the Kolhan, for instance, the number of non-Kols more than doubled in the 24 years between 1867-91. In 1867, Dr. Hayes found 93,968 or 80% Kols out of a total population of 118,281; in 1891, the

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123. Ibid, Aug. 1895, Branch 1 Land Revenue.
125. Ibid, Nov. 1894, p. 1202; note by Mr. Morsehead, para 64.
126. Ibid, Nov. 1894; extract from No. 1449 G of 14th Fe., 1885, from the Deputy Commissioner, W. B. Oldham, to the Commissioner.
census showed that of a population of 248,638, only 80,168 or 72.30% were Kols. (127)

Alien credit gradually expropriated the land, labour and produce of the tribals. The persistent rise in agricultural prices further fostered this trend. In Palamau the Cheros, Kherwars, Oraons and Bhuiyas, who had hardly any surplus left after rent and interest payments, invariably found themselves deeper in debt to the sahu or mahajan during lean seasons. The latter "will charge him high interest, will lend grain at one rate and will insist on repayment at a higher rate, irrespective of market prices; in fact, he will make as much profit as he can out of the transaction". (128) In many cases, the mahajan financed the tenant to fight the zamindar’s attempts in enhancing the rent by 5%, only to attach, sell and purchase his holding and sub-let it to him again at twice the rent. Thus, the problem of land alienation in its various forms, depressed the raiyats to the status of under-tenants or even kamias, while the percentage of non-occupancy raiyats was already high due to their habit of shifting cultivation. The practice of alienating land to the mahajan took root so deeply, that even service tenures like "baigai" lands held by the village priest passed into the hands of the moneylender. Transfers were in fact much more extensive than noted, for they were mostly made on stamp paper or by verbal arrangements, and were rarely registered. (129) Under the pressure of circumstances the raiyats, especially in the southern tappas, absconded in lean seasons to Assam, the Duars and other regions, forfeiting even their occupancy rights. If the debtor raiyat did not abscond, he might be sold up and forced to work as a kamia or bonded labourer. It was apprehended that this evil, if unchecked, would in a decade convert 50% of the tenants to sub-tenants in the deplorably unprotected condition of the shikmidars of North Bihar. (130)

(ii) In the longer settled but poor districts as in North Bihar and Orissa, the problem differed not in essence but only in emphasis, for here the raiyat-mahajans rather than alien credit played the crucial role.

In the Patna Division, North Bihar, the increase in transfers of occupancy holdings is apparent from the following, which include the figures for 1883-84 and 1892-93 for each district —

129. Ibid., pp. 27-28, paras 93,94,98.
The registration figures are low for the southern districts of the Division, in comparison with the north. In Muzaffarpur the landlords, especially those other than the landlords of the holdings sold, acquired more than 3 times the number of lands transferred to mahajans. In Champaran, on the other hand, the proportion of transfers to money lenders was remarkably high, going up from 16.8 to 23.5% within the decade.

The figures for Muzaffarpur may partly be explained by the existence of a large number of indigo planters in the district, who were interested in buying up the occupancy holdings. However, at least some of these "other landlords" and many of the "raiyat" purchasers must have belonged to the "large class of small village mahajans - well-to-do cultivators, who gradually absorb their poorer neighbours' occupancy rights ... " The enormous increase in the percentage of sales and mortgages of properties below Rs. 100/- (173 and 227% respectively) between the quinquennial period 1880-85 to 1887-92, further reflects the impoverishment and sinking entitlement-level of the lower class of cultivators. (131)

In Champaran, land-transfers to non-agricultural classes had reached a "serious extent". "The number of transfers grew twenty-five fold in the ten years following 1883-84". (132) Here, unlike in Muzaffarpur, the money lenders generally came from the non-resident trading community. (133) Even the so-called "raiyat" purchasers were, almost to a man, the "mahajan's land-grabbers, pure and simple". (134) It was noted in 1897 that out of 160,000 holdings attested, no less than 14,000 had within the past 10 years been affected wholly or partially by sales and mortgages. Of the 14,000 purchasers, no less than 40% belonged to the mahajan class, who did not directly cultivate the land, but made their living mainly by money lending and trading, and "let out any land they acquired to raiyats to cultivate for them". (135) They often operated through intermediaries who oppressed the peasants, and reduced the debtor raiyats to the condition of bonded or produce labourers. (136)

Saran had a smaller number of land transfers in general. Yet, even within these limits "it is evident that the tendency is for the land to pass from the hands of the purely agricultural classes, the Koeris and Kurmis and Ahirs, to the hands of the Brahmins and Rajputs and Banias, who, though agricultural, are more prone to carry on their work by hired labour or to underlet their holdings". (137) Most of the important mahajans at Mirganj had acquired a great deal of land in this way.

In Bhagalpur, sales exceeded mortgages by 30%, the area sold being double of the mortgaged lands. Significantly, 2/5 of the total area transferred (50,000 acres) lay in Supaul subdivision (21,153 acres). Within North Bhagalpur, Supaul contained 7/9 of the total area transferred, the percentage being 5 against 1%. The moneylenders

135. Ibid, Aug. 1898. Correspondence on Land Transfers from the Agricultural to the Non-Agricultural Classes, No. 58. From M. Finucane, Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., to the Sec. to the Govt. of India, Rev. & Agri. Dept. No. 2296 L. R., Calcutta, 30th July 1897. Sec. III, para 13.
137. Ibid, Aug. 1898. From the Settlement Officer, Saran, to the Director of the Land Records and Agriculture, Bengal No. 381, 16th dated Siwan, the ---- Sept., 1895.
17th
constituted 23% of the purchasers in Supaul and 16 1/2% in Madhipura, as against 13% in the other thanas. These statistics reflect a distinct tendency towards encroachment by the moneylenders during lean seasons, as in the years immediately preceding the survey in Bhagalpur. Significantly, the raiyats were most deeply indebted to the moneylenders in Supaul-Madhipura, the traditional famine zone of Bhagalpur. (138)

In Purnea, mortgages and part-sales fetched a higher price than sales of entire holdings, as in the former case the creditor or buyer could choose the best lands, the raiyat preferring to raise as much money as he could by parting with the smallest possible area. Of the transferees 9% were moneylenders and 87% raiyats though, as noted, these class divisions were not mutually exclusive.

The percentage of the total raiyati area transferred by sale or mortgage in several districts in North Bihar, are apparent from the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Sale</th>
<th>Mortgage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purnea</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saran</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champaran</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzaffarpur</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darbhanga</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Monghyr</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages of land are almost on the same level for Purnea, Darbhanga and North Monghyr, though everywhere except in Purnea mortgages are more popular than sales.

In Orissa, the problem of land sales was no less acute. In Puri district, it was seen that "many of the villages are bought up by large mahajans and by the land owners". (139) In the Jagir Mahals, only a few of the transfers of raiyati lands were registered at the settlement in 1906, most of which passed on to the local mahajans. In Parikud, the sale of occupancy rights increased with the rising value of land. (140) In the Kanika Ward's Estate, Cuttack, the area of raiyati holdings sold

139. DG Puri, 1908, p. 214.
140. SR Jagir Mahals in Puri, 1906-9, p. 16.
increased more than 2 1/2 times and 4 times in case of thani and pahi lands respectively between 1882-90. (141)

(iii) Even in the third economic zone, i.e. the most prosperous regions like Dacca and Chittagong, the sale of peasant holdings increased fast. For instance, in 1896-97 and 1897-98, Chittagong registered the second highest number of sales of fixed-rate holdings (6,834 and 6,628 respectively), among all the districts in the Province. Similarly, Tippera had the highest number of sales of occupancy holdings, while Mymensingh came third in sequence. The former showed the registration of 19,763 sales of lands with occupancy rights in 1896-97 and 21,383 in 1897-98, while the latter had 12,797 and 12,579 sales respectively. In fact, after the Presidency and Burdwan Divisions, the number of land registrations were highest in Dacca and Chittagong. (142)

The buyers were often professional mahajans and less regular moneylenders, mostly brahmins. Even more prominent were the rival landholders or talukdars who competed with each other in acquiring new properties and resettling them at enhanced rates. In Chittagong, Tippera and Noakhali the practice of such private creditors and landowners attaching and selling raiyati lands had become very common. (143) Transfers went on in many forms. In Backergunge, for example, a peculiar kind of transfer was noted in the Tushkhal Estate. Usury being a vice according to Islamic Law, the Muslim mahajans here would only lend money if the debtor raiyat made a fictitious transfer of the whole or a part of his holding and paid interest for the loan under the name of rent, which often exceeded the limits imposed by section 48 of the Bengal Tenancy Act. (144)

Need for socio-economic reform, rather than legislation, to resolve the problem of land transfers!

This problem of the increasing sales and transfers of raiyati holdings had several interesting facets. The prohibition or restriction of such transfers, except in the tribal areas, could be detrimental to the raiyat's interest, as it would impair his credit, both for loan and rent payments. The rate of interest would rise, for unsecured loans

141. SR Kanika Wards' Estate Cuttack, Seasons 1889-94, p. 57, para 150.
143. LRP Aug. 1898. From W. B. Oldham, Com., Chittagong Div., to the Sec. to the Board of Rev., L. P. No. 2, Camp Feni, 6th March, 1896.
naturally called for a much higher rate than loans on mortgage. Moreover, if land lost its resale or exchange value, its price might not be enough to cover rent arrears, so that the landlord would be less likely to allow remissions of rent in a crisis. In fact, the non-saleability of the tenant raiyat's holding was considered an infringement on the zamindar's rent security, so that he would be intent on evicting the tenant and reletting the land at an enhanced rate. Hence, without an adequate loan or remission of rent on the security of his land, the peasant would be driven towards mortgage or eviction in years of stress. The abolition of the right of land-transfer would thus deprive him of his credit both with the mahajan and the proprietor, on the basis of which he might otherwise have tided over the crisis.

If, however, his credit failed, the peasant in the last resort could either sell his land, or be evicted by the landlord. If sale was allowed it would better serve the raiyat's interest, for he would then be able to realise the full value of his land minus the salami, and pay his loan or rent arrears from it. Non-saleability, on the other hand, would much reduce the value of the land and force him to give up a larger proportion of it. By eviction, the landlord would realise his dues, but the peasant would be left a pauper. Moreover, in spite of the loss in the resale or exchange value of land in the event of non-saleability, its real value would continue to rise: the returns given in the Board of Revenue's letter No. 800A, dated the 20th June 1894, show that occupancy rights selling at 9.6 years' purchase in 1883-84, had risen to 13.5 years' purchase in 1892-93, and would go up to 15 years' purchase approximately by the end of the century. But this would be of no avail to the debtor peasant, and would only benefit the new tenant who had to pay nothing extra for this appreciated value, as well as the landlord, who could now demand a higher rent. A large number of occupancy holdings were actually being bought by the zamindars in this period, specifically for this purpose. If the raiyat lands became non-saleable, "what they now give a high price for, they will get for nothing by a right of lapse to be created by statute". (145)

Due to these reasons, attempts were made to restrict rather than totally prohibit the sale of peasant holdings. As noted, the sale of land was to be sanctioned by "local custom", in order to ensure that the practice was not introduced in areas where it was hitherto rare or unknown. In effect, however, this only deprived the raiyat of a considerable amount of the sale proceeds. This went to the zamindar in the form of a "salami", but for which the latter would withhold his sanction, and the land, without a clear title, would go down in value.

It was further suggested in bureaucratic circles that the right of land-transfer be restricted by prohibiting only mortgages and part-sales of raiyati holdings. "It is by this transfer of a portion of the holding that the mahajan most frequently gets possession of the whole holding". The indebted raiyat generally hands over to the mahajan the most fertile part of his holding, retaining only the inferior land, from the income of which he is unable to pay his rent and his interest, and is eventually sold up. (146) Yet such a restriction would, in fact, force the raiyat to resort to the extreme measure of selling all his land. To allow a raiyat to sell his entire holding but not to mortgage or sell part of it, would be to prevent him from tiding over a temporary need or calamity except by selling all he had, and thus ruining himself for ever. (147) The contention that part-sales led to an extreme splintering of land was also not entirely true: in fact, with the law of inheritance leading rapidly to the multiplication of shares in property, especially in case of the Muslim community, the right of the transfer of part-shares was "absolutely necessary to prevent the serious evil of a minute subdivision of holdings". (148)

Yet another suggestion was to limit all sales to the agricultural classes, so that there would be less scope for the ousting of peasants by money lenders and absentee speculators. W. Dunbar Blyth, Collector of Champaran, went so far as to propose that occupancy rights be extinguished as soon as a peasant holding passed into the hands of the "non-agricultural classes - the mahajan, the vakil, and the mukhtar". If such was the case, however, it would not be worthwhile for the moneylender to buy the land. (149) This would narrow the field of competition and deprive the peasant from getting the full value of his land, especially in lean seasons, when all agriculturists would be financially hard-pressed to a greater or lesser extent, and hence could not afford to buy land at its proper price. It was only fair that the occupancy raiyat should be allowed the money-value pertaining to his right, which he had paid for when buying the land, or had acquired by expending labour and capital in reclaiming it from the jungle.

In fact, the wealthy raiyats and landed proprietors often presented a greater threat to the small peasant, than the money lender or purely non-agricultural class. Their encroachments on occupancy lands may be studied from different angles. In the settled districts of North Bihar like Saran and Muzaffarpur, for instance, the "de-peasantisation" process during 1885-95 was caused "not by an invasion of non-agriculturists, but by the natural increase in the population of landlords, who gradually crowd out their poorer neighbours". (150) In Saran, many petty landholders preferred to buy up occupancy holdings in lieu of their interests in revenue-paying estates, for the latter, often being shares in joint properties, were threatened by the intrigues of their stronger partners. (151) E.V. Westmacott, Commissioner of the Presidency Division, noted in 1893: "I have found that raiyati holdings have been bought up by zamindars, especially by those who possess only a fractional share in zamindari estates ... " (152)

Rival landlords also vied for occupancy rights in order to spite each other. In Backergunge, for example, landlords grabbed the occupancy rights of holdings under neighbouring zamindars, under cover of the infamous "zimha" system peculiar to this district. By it, a landlord would win over some of his opponent's tenants, nominally buy their holdings, and resort to force in order to defend these tenants in refusing rent payments to their original zamindar, thereby hurting his prestige. (153)

The zamindar was frequently a keener purchaser than the mahajan for, unlike the latter, it was often worth his while to buy the occupancy rights in order to extinguish them. In Muzaffarpur, for instance, raiyati holdings sold in execution of money-decrees in the Munsifs' Courts went down from 59 to 25 between 1888-89 and 1891-92, while those sold out for rent decree increased from 153 to 384 in the same period. Landlords were frequent purchasers in the latter cases; in case of the former, however, they succeeded in preventing 95% of the auction-purchasers, usually moneylenders, from taking possession of the land on the ground that there was no local custom of transferring occupancy

151. B. B. Chaudhuri, 'The process of De-peasantization in Bengal and Bihar, 1885-1947,' I.H.R., ii, No. 1 (July 1975), Sec. 4d, p. 134.
rights. (154) In Burdwan Division, too, the returns for 1883-84 show that mahajans purchased no more than 1 in 7 holdings, and were in most cases cultivators themselves. (155) The Collector of Mymensingh noted: "... the mahajan is, in this district, driven into the background by the zamindar. The former consequently frequently appears in the form of a mortgagee like the zarpehsghidar of Bihar, but not often as a purchaser of a raiyat's holding". (156)

The abolition of land-transfers, especially to the non-agricultural classes, would further strengthen the landlords by removing the competition of the purely business interests. The risk would be particularly severe in certain areas, such as the indigo-planting districts of Bihar, or districts in which the big farmers were responsible for the reclamation of new lands. The indigo factories, being cultivators themselves, would be able to buy up the raiyats' interests at a far cheaper rate than in a competitive land-market. It stood to reason, therefore, that the Secretary to the Bihar Indigo Planters' Association was greatly in favour of giving all tenants a free right of transfer and of limiting the salami paid to the landlord. Significantly enough, the transfers to "other landlords" was more than 3 times as numerous as the sales to mahajans in a district like Muzaffarpur, where indigo-planters flourished. (157) The indigo concerns tried to encroach on peasant holdings in many different ways. Under-raiyats in Muzaffarpur had part-interests in 5.3% of the holdings, and held only about 4.1% of the total occupied area. The Settlement Officer remarks: "These figures are low enough, but if it is further remembered that a considerable proportion of even this small number of under-raiyats are indigo factories who have taken land from raiyats on kurtauli leases for the cultivation of indigo, the dangerous inaccuracy of those who believe that land in Tirhut is to a large

156. Ibid, 1894, No. 1828 G., dated Mymensingh, the 14th Aug., 1893, 12th
From A. Earle, Collector Mymensingh, to the Sec. to the Board of Rev., L. P.
extent being absorbed by mahajans and sublet to the real cultivators at rack rents, is clearly demonstrated". (158) Likewise, large landowners associated with the reclamation process reinforced their position as creditors with rights of occupancy in these lands. In Rangpur, for instance, "these big cultivators (chukanidars) are becoming worse than the ordinary middlemen. This new and growing class of big cultivators... is a greater menace to the agricultural community". (159) Similar tendencies are seen in Chittagong, especially in newly cultivated tracts like the Noabad taluks of Old Thana Ramu, where the itmamdars controlled large tracts of waste lands, requiring heavy initial investments in terracing, embankments and drainage. (160)

Thus, abolition or restriction of the transfer of raiyati holdings was too simplistic a solution for such a complex problem. Whether the sale of their lands was legitimised or not, the peasants could not escape eviction and exploitation by the richer classes, as long as they were economically backward. In fact, non-saleability of their lands would further reduce their exchange entitlement, by depriving them of the exchange value of their prime asset. Not arbitrary regulations, but only subtle reforms from within could improve their economic status and give them the staying-power necessary to retain their lands in years of stress.

II

Rent — relations
Subdivisions and fragmentation of land

The root of the problem went deep into the system of land-tenure and rent. In the late 19th century, sales and laws of inheritance, especially in case of the Muslim community, led rapidly to the splintering of estates and the multiplication of shares in land. (161) This trend was fostered by a growing spirit of individualism, as opposed to the old system of the joint control of property.

The following table for 13 selected districts in Bengal indicates that the number of estates on the revenue-roll was more than doubled in the 40 years between 1851-1891:

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158. DG Muzaffarpur, 1907, p. 118.
161. LRP Aug. 1894, No. 3855 L. R., dated Barisal, 31st March 1893; from H. Savage, Collector Backergunge, to the Sec. to the Board of Rev. L. P.
The situation in parts of North Bihar most effectively illustrates the minute subdivisions of property being effected in the province. In 1870, the average size of an estate in Tirhut was 303 acres, while during the settlement of 1907 it was only 93 acres in Muzaffarpur, which was smaller than in any other district in the Lower Provinces, except Cuttack and Balasore. "The minuteness of proprietary interests does not end here, for innumerable sub-divisions of even these petty estates are common, many of them being split up among different sets of sharers according to a private partition". Even apart from those with multiple interests in any one share of an estate, the average number of proprietors was 5 in a joint estate, and 17 in a privately partitioned one. In one case, it was found that a village of 179 acres contained 3 estates partitioned by their 159 proprietors into 114 sub-estates. (162) Such private partitions, again, led to the splitting of properties in Saran to the extremely low average of 14 acres per sharer. There was a regular scale to determine the minutest interests held - the smallest fragment, a Khanwa, was about 59-millionth part of the estate. Even smaller fractions, representing a ken or 1 of 16 annas, was

\[ 73,728,000,000,000 \]

162. DG Muzaffarpur, 1907, p. 118.
were noted during the attestation in 1896-97. (163) In Darbhanga, each village had an average varying from 204 acres in Phulparas Thana, to 8 acres in Samastipur, under a single proprietor. (164) In North Monghyr, the splitting of estates reached a point of absurdity. Each square mile contained 1,361 plots and 400 holdings in Teghra, and 1,066 plots and 291 holdings in Begusarai, the smallest fraction registered being 1 of an anna. In a 1/2 acre plot there were 1,582 co-sharers, each share thus amounting to .00036 of an acre, or 7 1/4 sq. feet. Comparing the above statistics, it appears that "in respect of the minute sub-division of proprietary interests, Teghra and Begusarai easily surpass the rest of North Bihar". (165)

Subdivisions of land led not only to fragmentation, but also to the complex and scattered nature of landed property in general. Shares of estates were bought or inherited piecemeal, little attempt being made to ensure compactness or cohesion in the process. The survey records of Bakarganj and Faridpur trace this problem in some detail. In Bakarganj, "it is rare for any village, however small, to be included in a single private estate, while many villages contain a portion of a large number of estates" (166) On the average, each village in Bakarganj and Faridpur contained land belonging to 7 estates, and each estate in these two districts had lands in 7 and 5 villages, respectively. The involved pattern, particularly of the permanently settled estates, is more apparent in tabular form:

Table VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With land in</th>
<th>Bakarganj</th>
<th>Faridpur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200 villages and more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 - 199 villages and more</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 99</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 49</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 24</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or 4</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>1,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>1,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 village</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>1,786</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


163. Ibid. Saran, P. 120.
164. Ibis. Darbhanga, p. 120.
165. SR Monghyr (North), 1899-1904. p. 24, para 73; p. 90, para 288.
Even the smaller properties were very scattered; for instance only 1572 of the total number of estates belonging to different categories in Bakarganj, were confined to a single mauza. Within each village, again, lands belonging to different estates were not "geographically compact"; they consisted, rather, of a collection of "detached parcels" at distant points. Moreover, only a few estates held all their lands in severality; some possessed only an undivided fractional interest in their entire area. (167)

Effect on the landed interests:

Such minute, ad hoc subdivisions of an estate adversely affected both the proprietor and the tenant.

It would place the owner of a very small share in the position of a mere cultivator. "His actual landed property is so small, that unless he draws from it the entire profit of the produce, without the intervention of a tenant, he cannot both pay his revenue and support his family". (168) As in most districts the extension of cultivation had reached the limit while subdivisions of property continued, the position of the petty proprietor became increasingly "serious". (169) They could neither afford any improvements on their land, nor withstand the effects of even a single crop-failure.

Threatened by these problems and by the intrigues of their stronger co-sharers they were often sold up, thus being reduced to the position of under-tenants, or migrating to towns in search of other professions. Sometimes, again, they disposed of their lands in favour of occupancy holdings, as seen most frequently in the districts of North Bihar. E.V. Westmacott, Commissioner of the Presidency Division, also remarked on this phenomenon in 1893. (170) In many districts, again, sharers of zamindaris or hereditary tenures tried to supplement their dwindling income from land by directly encroaching on raiyati holdings, or by raising their rents. The Collector of Monghyr writes: "Directly petty maliks are put in possession of their putties by partition proceedings, they try and convert it all into khud kasht or kamat, ejecting right and left. This minute subdivision is a positive curse to the tenantry". (171) In Orissa, it was found during the re-settlement of the Kotdesh Estate and adjoining villages, that the number of makadami sharers,

167. Ibid.
168. LRP April 1895, p. 1524. Note by Mr. Lane, Junior Sec. to the Board of Rev. paras 31 and 32, dated 4th May 1864.
169. DG Darbhanga, p. 121.
whose rights were in some respects superior to those of the zamindars, had increased from 106 to 261 since the last settlement. "The significance of these facts is sinister. In many parts the old race of mokadams is being ruined by the increase that is taking place in their numbers, whilst in others they have gradually ousted their raiyats from possession of the village lands... the growth of nijchash at the expense of pahi areas is the usual accompaniment to a large increase in the number of mokadami sharers". (172) In fact, these petty proprietors and tenure-holders were more often a greater threat to the small peasant than the trader or money-lender. This reminds one of the greater intensity with which the local Kand peasant, rather than the alien shahukar, was hated by the Bhil agriculturists in eastern Gujarat. The former had an eye on the peasants' land, while the latter was a "relatively distant figure" limiting his interest to credit transactions. (173) The Darbhanga Gazetteer notes: "...it is a proverb in the district that the small proprietor is the harshest landlord". (174) In south Bihar the resident Koeri maliks, being in greater need of kamia labour, used their local influence and proximity to practice the most systematic exploitation. (175)

Proprietors with a larger share and a slight surplus-margin most often let out their lands in barga, to maximise their income from land, while avoiding the responsibilities of direct cultivation. Significantly, the extension of the barga system coincided with the increase of the parasitical "bhadralok" class in villages. Thus in Bakarganj, where produce rent was an exceptional feature of land tenure, it thrived precisely in that portion of the Gournadi Thana where large colonies of bhadraloks – Kayasthas, Vaidyas and Brahmins, had settled. This class increased from 15,000 to 23,000 between 1872 – 1901. Meanwhile, raiyati holdings were also being split up by similar processes of partition and sale. In 1909 Mr. J. C. Jack, Settlement Officer of Faridpur and Bakarganj, calculated on the basis of these facts that: "It is apparent that there are now 28 men for every 18 in 1872, who are to be supported by produce rents, while the family who from 5 acres in 1872 might have had surplus rice with which to contribute to the support of 15,000 idle bhadralogs, have now only 3 acres to meet an increased burden of 23,000 drones". (176) Indeed, "the growth of this class (of petty sharers) has tended... to cause a general enhancement of rents. The old, well-to-do zamindar has in many villages been replaced by a number of petty proprietors who are always endeavouring to extort more rent from their tenants". (177)

174. DG, Darbhanga, P. 121.
175. Gyan Prakash, op. cit., p. 188.
177. LRP April 1895, p. 1628, para 6.
Meanwhile, a large section of the bigger landlords, i.e. the stronger partners in zamindari properties and the new owners or purchasers of land, migrated to the cities. They were attracted by the prospect of Western education, government jobs and the greater luxuries and amenities of urban life in general. The insanitary conditions, swamp and malaria in some backward districts of western Bengal reinforced this tendency, inducing "the well-to-do people to desert villages and live in town". (178)

The scattered nature of their lands further inconvenienced the owners, as each part of the property was split into multiple shares. "In fact, many of the new proprietors became absentee landlords, mainly because of the way in which they had acquired their property. Their estates, bought piecemeal, were located in different places, often far apart, and were not the result of a growth around a given nucleus over a period of time". (179) The problem was particularly acute in districts like Bakarganj, where reclamation was most extensive and difficult; in Chittagong, where small estates were continously being splintered into minute fragments, making direct management a definite ordeal; or in South Bihar, where the difficulties of joint control often led to violent disputes over water rights.

Of the total registered perpetual leases in Bengal in 1896 - 97, Chittagong accounted for no less than 21%. (180) In Bakarganj too, "the interests in land spread out like a fan, the holders in each grade dividing their tenancies amongst a more numerous body of sub-lessees, until the cultivators who are the ultimate sub-lessees form the most numerous body of all". (181) J. C. Jack, the Settlement Officer of Bakarganj, traces the reason for this to the "historical accident" of absenteeism among landowners during the process of reclamation. This, in turn, was caused by a "geographical circumstance" : the waste lands were covered so extensively by dense forests and a network of streams, that it was impossible for the owners to directly supervise the work of reclamation or rent collection over large areas. (182) The direct management of joint properties also led to distinct administrative problems whenever the need was felt for collective enterprise in agriculture. This was most clearly reflected in the neglect and decline of the ahar-pyne system of irrigation in South Bihar, particularly in Gaya district.

178. Ibid. April 1915, No. 2, Letter to the Collector, 16th July 1913, para 102.
180. SR Chittagong, 1888-98, paras 102, 258.
181. SR Bakarganj 1900-8, p. 43, para 126.
182. Ibid. p. 45, para 129.
Sub-infeudation of Tenures:

The co-sharers of zamindari estates considered their lands no longer as the ancestral base of power and responsibility, but merely as a lucrative form of investment. Likewise, the new owners or purchasers of land, often belonging to the non-resident trading community, were primarily interested in it as the source of a fixed rental income. This approach was nurtured, as noted, by the lure of urban life and the health hazards and administrative problems involved in the direct management of their joint properties. Hence, both these classes of big proprietors generally assigned their managers and tenure-holders with the task of rent-collection, and took little interest, active or otherwise, in works of reform and maintenance. The indigo-planters' need for tenurial jurisdiction furthered the process of sub-infeudation.

The Road Cess Valuation statistics show that in the 1870s, more than 60% of all tenures in Bengal were sub-infeudated, the proportion being as high as 85.97% in Burdwan, 73.28% in Bakarganj, 63.33% in Birbhum and 55.72% in Murshidabad. (183)

The process of sub-infeudation of land thus had its rationale in absentee ownership. The original tenures were held by the talukdars directly from the zamindar. They were of various types: the Kharija and bajeyatki taluks paid the revenue direct to the Collectorate, while dependent taluks like the samilat, mazkuri and Shikmi paid through the zamindars of their parent estates. The latter featured prominently in Rajshahi and the Jagir Mahals in Puri. (184) A most popular form of taluk was the "patni", created by the zamindar at a rent fixed in perpetuity by the lessee and his heirs. The patnidar could underlet on similar terms to the dar, daradar and se-patnidars, whose rights would lapse automatically with the termination of their superior tenures.

Below the talukdars were a class of tenure-holders known variously as jotedars in northern Jessore, gantidars in southern Jessore and West Khulna, and haoladars in eastern Khulna and Bagerhat. They probably had their origin in the haolas of Bakarganj. (185) Variations of similar tenures are seen in those of the makaddams and sarbarahakars of Orissa. Sub-infeudation went beyond the fourth level in Jessore and the 24 Parganas. The tenure system of Bakarganj illustrates the phenomenon of sub-infeudation in its extremest form, there being 8 to 20 grades of intermediate holders in every piece of land, between the revenue-paying proprietor at the top and the cultivator at the bottom. (186)

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183. Asok Sen, op. cit., p. 4.
184. DG, Puri, 1908, p. 215; DG Murshidabad, p. 158.
186. SR Bakarganj 1900-8 p. 43. paras 125-126.
estate had its original tenures like the Haolas, which were split into osat taluks, osat haolas and nim haolas. Further down were the hereditary, transferable tenures fixed at a low rent like the istimrari and maurasi mukarrari, which were under-let on dar-mukarrari, dar-maurasi and se-maurasi leases, without the right of transfer.

Financial pressure and absenteeism forced most of these tenure-holders to delegate some of their rights and responsibilities to ijaradars, thus creating several 'miras' and 'dar-miras' ijaras at every level. (187) The ijara or thikadari lease, prevailing widely in Bengal and Bihar, was a purely temporary one, different in essence from all other intermediate tenures. Ijaradars and their sub-lessees or dar-ijaradars held farming leases by which an annual rent was fixed for a specified term, on expiry of which they were not entitled to renewal. Zar-i-peshgi and katkina ijaras were leases of land on usufructuary mortgages. This system was most common in North Bihar, where the indigo concerns almost invariably held lands on "ijara" or "thika" from the local proprietors. As the thikadars had no permanent interest in the land, their system of land management "proved the veritable curse of the province and has been no less effective as a means of rack-renting, than as a method of keeping wages down to starvation level". It tied down the peasants to the unprofitable system of indigo cultivation, which yielded only a net gain of Rs. 3 to 7 per bigha, as against Rs. 10 for other country crops and Rs. 30 or more for poppy. (188) Indeed, "the cancer which has eaten into the vitals of Bihar is this thikadari system, especially in its combination with indigo planting". (189)

Special tenures appeared and changed with the distinctive needs of each region. The lakhiraj or rent-free grants, known as "tanki" in Orissa, and the chakran or service tenures prevailed widely, yet differed in emphasis from district to district. The "ghatwali" tenures in Burdwan, for instance, created originally as service tenures for the defence of the ghats or hill passes, later formed part of the rural police system and were finally terminated in 1894. (190) Again, the lack of facilities for the formal partition of tenures led to the creation of the "aliquat" tenures, based on private partitions in Bakarganj.

Fluidity of tenures in the tribal belts

The situation was most fluid in the tribal tracts, and was systematically exploited by the village headmen and interested outsiders. This is seen in several cases, as of the jotedars of the Terai region, the non-resident Hindus in the Garo and Susang Hills, the mul raiyats in the Santhal Parganas, and the "tikri manjhis" in the Paharia settlements of Damin-i-koh.

187. Ibid, p. 54, para 147.
188. LRP Nov. 1894; SR Muzaffarpur, p. 15, para 55.
189. Ibid Nov. 1894, p. 1250.
Though the Rajbansis of the Terai were Koches belonging to the same stock as in the Duars and Kuchbehar, the development and crystallisation of tenures was slowest in the Terai, as it was an outlying tract exposed to the disturbing influence of Nepali inroads. Thus in the late 19th century the under-tenures in the Terai "had not yet reached the stage of crystallisation", though they formed a definitive pattern in Kuchbehar. "And in the former tract it has since been to the obvious interest of the jotedars to use their influence to prevent further progress." (191)

Though the jotedar held a heritable and transferable tenure in most cases between the Government and the direct cultivator, he claimed occupancy rights, thus preventing those lower down like the ticcadar, dar-ticcadar and chukanidar from acquiring similar rights. The claim, however, was open to question, for the jotedars were originally hereditary owners of the land, having the status of zamindars. Besides, land rights in the Terai were developing along the lines laid down in Kuchbehar and the Duars, where "occupancy rights" could be acquired by every grade of cultivator, down to the adhiyar. Moreover, jotedars preferred the term "ticcadar" to "chukanidar" to denote their under tenants, as the former were constantly changed, and hence could not acquire occupancy rights in their land. Hence the chukanidars, by implication, had a claim to such rights. There was thus scope for confusion in this context, as "the raiyat of the rest of Bengal is an elusive body in the Terai", and the jotedars took full advantage of the situation. (192)

The terms of the following lease show how hard the jotedars of the Darjeeling Terai were on their chukanidars, and how systematically they curtailed any rights of occupancy that the latter might have claimed:

No. 138 for 1893

Meherunnisa, wife of Mehar Ali, of Birnakuri of Rajganj in Jalpaiguri:—

"I, Soharu, son of Galu Aron of Champasori, cultivator, Siliguri, Darjeeling, give this Kabulyat for my chukani land in Mauza Champasori, Pargana Patharghata in Terai for jote No. 517 Kollabari for which Government charges Rs. 40-8 jama. In that jote being necessary to take one hal of land as chukani, I being present agree to pay Rs. 16 for the said land and you have given me a patta for the chukaniland for Rs. 16. I voluntarily give the Kabulyat for the land of which boundaries are given below. The term being from 1300 B.S. to 1302 B.S. for three years, during which I will hold it. I will pay the rent to you and take receipt. In the absence of receipt I will get no credit for payment.

If any rent remain in arrear, you have full power to realise the rent by sale of my crops. If I make any objection, it will not be granted. I will pay asmani farmasi or cesses which may be demanded in addition to my rent. I will keep the boundaries of my chukani land correct. I will immediately obey all orders which may come from you or the Government, and will do nothing irregular. All the plantains and bamboos on the land remain as belonging to you and if within the term of this lease, Government makes any settlement I will pay what may be demanded. I will have no title to the chukani on expiration of the term of this lease and I therefore execute this Kabuliyat for the chukani holding." (193)

Thus for the chukanidars and those lower down, a record of rights was immaterial, like the "present of a patent safe to a pauper who has nothing to lock up". (194)

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as noted earlier, the hillmen were at a distinct disadvantage in relation to the plainsmen, both Hindu and Muslim, who encroached systematically on their lands. At the foot of the hills, the raiyats are seen to be unaware of their rights and entirely at the mercy of the itmamadars, found mostly in newly cultivated tracts like the Noabad taluks of Old Thana Ramu. The "itmam" is a tenure like the haola of Bakarganj and Noakhali, and the chukan of Jalpaiguri. But while the chukanidars were depressed to the level of tenants-at-will, the "itmam" was mostly held by capitalists who added new dimensions to it. They frequently changed tenants for higher rents, thus denying them rights of occupancy while forcing up the rent level. (193)

The Paharias in Damin-i-Koh were subjected to similar exploitation by their headmen or "tikri" manjhis. Of the Saoria or Malar Paharias occupying the higher ranges of hills in tappah Saourpal, and the Kuarbhags inhabiting the hills in Sultanabad, tappah Kuarpal, the latter were more backward. Portions of the hills in both tappahs were held by tikridars. "Tikri" was derived from the Hindu word "tukra", meaning "piece", and was equivalent to the word "chak". There may be several tikris on a hill, the man on whose tikri the hamlet existed being recognised as village headman. More than one tikri usually existed on the hills in Saourpal, while in Kuarpal it was just the reverse.

193. Ibid, p. 1215. Annexure to the letter of D. Sunder, Settlement Officer, Western Duars.
194. Ibid. Nov. 1894, Nos. 113-114; The Terai Settlement, pp. 1183-1184.
There were several "Kurnas" within each tikri cultivated by different tenants, each of whom paid rent to the tikridar. The size of the Kurna varied from 2 to 5 acres. For the bigger Kurnas the rent consisted of 10 seers maize, 5 seers millets, 1 seer rhar, 1 seer ghangra, 1 pot pachai, 1 fowl and 1 anna of pice. For the smaller kurnas half of the above was paid.

Besides taking rent, the tikridars in both tappahs often sold their tikris to Santhals for nominal sums. Such encroachments by the Santhals were more prominent in the Kuarpal tracts. For instance, in 1894 the Sub-Divisional officer of Pakour found that a large tikri called Peparra had been sold to and occupied by a Santhal, and with "utmost difficulty" managed to restore the land to the Paharias. In February 1894, he again found on a hill called Kerma in Kuarpal, that a Santhal headman of a village below the hill had taken possession of the entire hill consisting of a Paharia hamlet. The settlement records proved beyond doubt that the tikri manjhi had of late sold the land to the Santhals, though he initially denied it.

The tikridars not only exercised the right of sale, but in some hills of Rajmahal also changed the lands of their tenants periodically, to prevent them from acquiring occupancy rights. Thus the Paharias appeared to hold their lands not in freehold but as tenants, with the manjhis operating in effect as Lahirajdars.

There was, however, no real basis for any such tenure in the hills. In paragraphs 32 and 33 of a Resolution on 17th July 1823 the Government clearly recorded the hill people as being its direct raiyats, there being no intervening tenures. Hence the tikri manjhis were not constituted as proprietors of the hills, but shared the freehold rights to the land equally with all. They could take a "dasturi" or allowance from the hillmen for the exercise of police duties, but the claim to rent was a gross abuse of power. Moreover, they could not evict the tenants at will, or sell their lands to outsiders. In fact, "the practice of buying and selling of tikris, even among their own community, is injurious to the interests of the tenants". (196)

Village headmen were almost always in a position of advantage in tribal societies. A distinction was made between ticcadars on the one hand, and "representative raiyats" such as the "mul raiyats" in the Santhal Parganas, or the prodhans, mankis and mundas in Chota Nagpur, on the other. The latter, unlike the ticcadar, had occupancy rights in their land, but were merely rent collectors and not tenure holders. The mul

raiyat was also known as mustajir, prodhan, mondal or manjhi. He often misused his rights and sold village land to outsiders at rack-rents, thus ignoring the interests of the Santhals in the village, who were entitled to get settlement of the land sold, without cess or premium. (197)

**Increasing complexity of tenures: Widening gap between the tenure-holders and actual cultivation:**

While the fluidity of tenures was thus deftly and rigorously exploited, especially in tribal societies, their complexity very often removed the tenure holder as far from the soil as the proprietor. For instance, the aliquot tenure in Bakarganj, by covering only an undivided share of the land, very much increased the prevailing confusion in land tenures. By it, the tenure holder paid and collected his share of the rent separately — seeing, selling and sub-letting without reference to the other partners in the undivided land; yet he could not claim any specific portion of the land solely as his own, but an undivided share in the entire land and in every field. The system was further complicated by the distinct bias in this district against the merger of subordinate tenures; hence, even in cases where 6 grades of undertenures were held by the same person, any attempt to merge the inferior 5 in the superior tenure would meet with strong resistance. In fact, "the buying and selling of tenures have become as common as the buying and selling of shares, and the purchaser has very often been content, as in the case of shares, to take his dividends in the shape of rent from the undertenants and forego all further knowledge of the land which produced them". (198)

This growing apathy of the proprietors and tenure-holders and the lack of resources among the sub-lessees led to a gross neglect of works of reform and maintenance. Link roads, tanks and dams consequently fell into disrepair. The problem was particularly apparent in years of famine and scarcity, when the need for such works was most acutely felt. The behaviour of the zamindars and tenure-holders in various parts of Jessore, Khulna, Nadia, South Bihar and the Chilka tract during the famine of 1896-97, "illustrates the evil of the tenure intermediate between a zamindar and the cultivators". (199) A typical case was that of Babu Girijanath Ray Chaudhuri, zamindar of Satkhira in Khulna, who in 1896 passed on the entire responsibility of supplying seed to cultivators, to the gantidars in his estates. He also refused to repair the dams and embankments so vital in protecting the rice crop in Satkhira from salt water incursions, particularly in such a season of

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198. SR Bakarganj, p. 55, para 148; p-57, para 152; p. 54, para 147.
drought when the rains were too scanty to sweeten the river water. As
the gantidars did not generally have the sort of resources needed for
such extensive repairs, they failed to relieve the raiyats in this
crisis. The Collector of Khulna proposed government advances to the
cultivators for such purposes through their respective zamindars; but
E.V. Westmacott, Commissioner of the Presidency Division, had grave
reservations about the success of such a plan "in view of the chain of
subinfeudation...." (200) Large and fertile areas in Nadia and Khulna
reverted to jungle, and tanks went dry in Kaliganj, Nakashipara,
Shyamnagore and Paikgacha due to the apathy of the owners, most of whom
resided in Calcutta.

The decay of the ahar-pyne system of irrigation in South Bihar,
especially in Gaya, illustrates in detail how joint control and
subinfeudation frustrated all attempts at collective enterprise in
agriculture. Due to its pronounced slope and clayey soil which failed
to retain moisture, agriculture in Gaya depended vitally on the "ahars"
or embankments to hold rain water in the uplands (tanr), and the
"pynes" or river channels in the lowlands. The working of this
complicated system of pynes, flowing through several villages under
different owners, depended on the local rules (parabandi) to regulate
water rights. Any one of the owners of the pyne could easily take more
than his share of the water, by enlarging the channel at the head,
which had no masonry sluice; by putting a bund in the pyne below his
own fields; by raising the height of the dam across the river; by
holding up the water longer than permitted; or by making a new pyne to
divert the supply of the owners further downstream. Hence, the
regulation of water rights was "a fertile source of dispute" between
proprietors and co-sharers of adjoining lands, leading frequently to
violence and litigation. (201)

Yet the system survived, for the owners had a share in the increased
crop returns under the prevailing system of produce rents. Gradually,
however, they began to neglect their duties in keeping the pynes clear
of silt and the ahars in proper repair. A major factor in this was the
continued partition of landlords' interests, which, by impoverishing
the co-sharers in the process, rendered the smaller zamindars less able
to perform their traditional role in maintaining these works.

A further implication of the endless partitions of estates was that "in
many cases what is wanted was not capital, as unity of control". (202).
Any one owner of several villages could easily get together the

200. Ibid. No. 40G-S.R. dated Calcutta, 26th May 1897, From E. V.
Westmacott, Commissioner Presidency Division, to the Sec. to the
Gouv. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. para 30.
202. B. B. Chaudhuri, 'Struggle over Produce Rent in Bihar, 1793-1930,'
paper presented at the Seminar of the A.N.S. Institute of Social
Studies, Patna, p. 6.

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task-force required for the repair of irrigation works; but when a host of co-sharers owning different villages and sometimes even lands within a single village depended on the same pyne for irrigation, they found it impossible to co-ordinate their efforts, or even to acquire a right of passage for the water-channel across the lands of different owners. Thus, "Owing to the sub-division of the land in recent years, and to the total want of any power of combination on the part of the land-owners, these simple but valuable irrigation works are falling year by year into disrepair". (203)

Lands let out on the "thika" system in Bihar suffered most acutely from such neglect. The thikadar or temporary farmer was intent on maximising his income from land by rack-renting his tenants, as a result of which they could not afford to undertake any works of reform or maintenance. He himself did not invest on improvements either, for his tenure was too short to reap the dividends. Hence, not only was there no development of new irrigation works, so vital for crop security in the region, but the existing tanks and ahars were also allowed to silt up.

Works of reform suffered further, as any improvement on the land by the tenant on his own initiative would immediately call for a higher rental or levies. The Tenancy Act of 1859 did not prevent the landlord from claiming a share of the "uneared increment." In Chota Nagpur, for instance, the proportion of irrigated lands was very low, especially in the tribal belts in the South. Here, ahars were formed by damming up the villages by a succession of bunds 8' to 10' high. But the bunds needed regular repair which the raiyats neglected, as any improvements of this kind on their lands would immediately raise them to a higher rent-level. F.A. Slacke, the Officiating Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, advised the Irrigation Commission in 1902 that unless the raiyats had better security against this, "no irrigation scheme would succeed ..." His predecessor, A. Forbes, expressed the same opinion. In fact, even rat holes and occasional breaches made for fishing were not properly patched up, so that they were gradually enlarged and the bunds collapsed during the rains. (204) Similarly, the Santhals, who were pioneers in extending cultivation to wastelands, "have now become resigned... as soon as the lands have become valuable, landlords and money lenders combined dispossess them of their holdings (by pressing high rent claims) and make them move on to some other jungly tract". (205) In Bakarganj, there were fines (nazar) on the excavation or re-excavation of tanks and ditches, as well as a cess calculated per acre covered by the tank. This was always very high, sometimes even more than the purchase money of the land, in addition to which the rent was

204. Ibid., p. 227. Answer to Q. 2 by F.A. Slacke, Officiating Commissioner of Chotanagpur, to the President of The Irrigation Commission, Purulia, 3rd Nov. 1902.
205. SR Bhagalpur, p. 65.
to be paid as before. The effect of this tax was to so reduce the size of tanks, that drinking water became unnecessarily scarce, especially in areas where the rivers were brackish or saline. (206)

Stratification of the peasantry:

Even the occupancy raiyats were gradually losing touch with the soil. The tenancy legislation of 1859 and 1883 underlined their position as a privileged class among the peasantry, holding their land directly from a landlord or substantial tenure-holder. At the highest level, this protected class held up to 100 bighas of land—the line of demarcation between the tenure holders and occupancy raiyats. The lower limit remained vague and undefined, consisting of the mass of under-raiyats, including "sharecroppers and tenants-at-will. They had no security or legal protection against rent increase, as the implementation of such a measure would overstrain the administrative machinery and deprive the favoured class of occupancy raiyats of a lucrative source of income. Thus, the occupancy right was not vested in the land, in which case it would automatically accrue to the actual cultivator, but in a tenant who acquired a protected status in relation to the landlord, and the right to sublet to unprotected peasants. The full implication of this was brought out by the development of the land market. Indeed, it was in this context that such "prescriptive rights" determined the pattern of rural stratification: the tenure-holder with more than 100 bighas (30 acres); occupancy raiyats holding not more than 30 and not less than 6 acres; non-occupancy tenants enjoying some protection but no hereditary rights; unprotected tenants-at-will, under-raiyats, etc. subsisting on 3 to 6 acres; sub-tenants and sharecroppers, who had to supplement their income from land by hiring out their labour. (207)

Rent increase: Background:

Partitions, sub-infeudation and subletting of lands thus raised rents rather than the level of administrative efficiency. There was a considerable increase in the gross rental in the last quarter of the 19th century, as indicated by the Road Cess Statistics. But these statistics were not very reliable, being liable to manipulation by the zamindars. Besides, the alleged gross rental represented the rent demand rather than actual collection, which was mostly hampered by price slumps and shortfalls in agricultural production. For instance, the percentage of collection to demand in the wards and attached estates varied between 44.9 to 58.7% during 1887-1897. Moreover, the

206. SR Bakarganj, p. 80, para 195.
gross rental should not be equated solely with rent payments made by the peasants. It had other components too, such as the zamindars' income from the expansion of the rural grain markets, exploitation of mining resources and revision of the rent demand on different grades of tenure holders. Due to insufficient data, however, the relative size of these variables in relation to the total rent cannot be determined with precision. (208)

The increase in rentals was not entirely arbitrary or unreasoned. It was often determined by (i) changes in the level of agricultural resources brought about by related developments like the increase in the extent and intensity of cultivation in many regions; (ii) the secular and steady rise in agricultural prices; and (iii) a rapid growth of population, which naturally forced up rents in a competitive land market.

(i) The percentage of cultivated area at the end of the 19th century was seldom less than 75 to 80, except in some districts like Nadia, Bankura and Champaran. In Champaran, where there was still scope for expansion, "the rent roll has mainly developed as the result of new assessment on extended cultivation". (209) In North Monghyr, about 77% of the increase in rent which occurred during the 1890s was allowed on the basis of "excess holding" (210). In North Bhagalpur at the turn of the century, "nearly 80% of the increase in rent was due to assessment of excess area". (211) In Shahabad, "the greatest extension of the cultivated area occurred after the introduction of canals". (212) Cultivation increased not only in extent, but also in intensity. It became more stable, particularly in areas like South Bihar, where the Sone Canal extended irrigation facilities and the pressure of population led to the shortening of the fallow periods. Again in districts like Bakarganj low lying lands were sometimes raised and enriched by "fluvial action".

(i)a. Rent enhancements, however, did not always correspond to the size of the increased cultivation. In Darbhanga, for instance, the Road Cess Returns show that "in the 17 years between 1876 and 1893 the rental... had increased by over 25%, though there could have been but little extension of cultivation during that period". In Chittagong, too, the new rates involved an increase of 19.5%, of which 3.5% only was due to assessment of new cultivation, 16% being "pure enhancement". (213) Besides, "the increased cost of cultivation and the diminished

209. DG, Champaran, p. 90.
210. SR North Monghyr (1899-1904), paras 156-158.
211. SR Bhagalpur (1902-10), paras 79, 152-155.
212. DG, Shahabad, pp-80-81
213. DG Darbhanga p. 82; LRP March 1894 : Note by W. C. Macpherson, Offg. Director of Land Records and Agriculture, Bengal.
fertility of the soil from constant croppings and from extended cultivation over inferior soils, is to be taken into account". (214) Indeed, the "new agriculture" had a distinct difference in quality. As cultivation reached its limits in most districts and shifted to single-crop, marginal lands, it became a "high-risk venture due to the heavy initial outlay and the extreme vulnerability of mono-culture to the vagaries of the weather and erratic rains". Many of these newly reclaimed lands initially enjoyed concessional rates of rent — yet the criterion was the demand for wastelands; rather than their level of productivity. In Bakarganj, for instance, heavy enhancements occurred in the last quarter of the 19th century, as the need was no longer felt to keep the rents particularly low in order to attract colonists to the forest and "char" lands. In North Bhagalpur large tracts were previously held at "Kamdar" or low rates of 4 to 8 annas per bigha. The reason why the very low rates lasted longer in North Bhagalpur than in the other North Bihar districts is probably due to the fact that a considerable portion of area consisted of wasteland and jungle. So long as this area remained available for cultivation, the landlords were unable to raise the rents to any considerable extent. Changes in the landsman ratio altered the situation: illegal enhancements were forced on nearly 40% of the villages and the "kamdar" were revised to "purdar" or full rates by 1885 (215). Similarly, the "chakband" tenures on low rents in parts of South Bhagalpur and Monghyr, under which the Santhals had reclaimed large areas of wasteland, gave way since the 1880s to the mustagiri or thikadari system at enhanced rates of rent.

(ii) It is further doubtful whether cultivation in the canal-irrigated lands, though intensive, was secure or valuable enough to merit the phenomenal rise in rent rates. Contrary to expectations, the Sone project could not force any distinct change in the quality and type of crops grown in South Bihar. Instead of replacing the cheap and inferior pulses of the rabi harvest by cash-crops like sugarcane and valuable rabi crops like oil seeds and barley, canal irrigation only led to a voluminous increase in the cultivation of winter rice. Though rice was a heavy-yielding, prolific crop, its cultivation fostered the growth of mono-culture and subsistence farming which, being most vulnerable to drought, increased insecurity in agriculture (216). Canal water, as noted earlier, was not an effective substitute for rainfall in dry seasons. Yet rents rose from Rs. 3 to Rs. 5 per bigha in Gaya, as much as threefold in some estates in Patna, and from a few annas to as many rupees in Buxar Division. (217) Produce rents went up naturally with the increase in crop returns on irrigated lands. Even cash rentals shot up in occupancy and non-occupancy lands despite Government legislation.

214. LRP Nov. 1894, p. 1044; SR Muzaffarpur, p. 20, para 71.
215. SR Bhagalpur, 1902-10, para 79.
the landlords claiming to "drive a carriage and pair through the
Tenancy Act". (218) This substantial increase in their income was
received gratis by the landowners, the sizeable burden of water-rates
being passed on entirely to the tenant-occupier. (219) In Orissa, much
of the opposition to the canal assessment was due to the "heavy rents
demanded by zamindars". (220) The rents were so greatly enhanced in
the irrigated tracts in Midnapur, that they neutralised the benefits
bestowed by canal water. In fact, no peasant applied for canal water in
lands under the oppressive "Sanja" rents, which would totally offset
the value of any increased returns resulting from canal irrigation.
(221)

(ii) One must next consider whether the effect of rising prices on the
peasant economy justified the rent enhancements in this period. The
rise in agricultural prices could not create a substantial profit-margin
for the peasant, as the subdivision of holdings simultaneously cut in
on the size of the crop per average peasant family. The price-rise
partly neutralised this effect by raising the exchange-value of the
reduced crop, and to that extent helped the peasant to maintain, rather
than enhance, the level of his income. For instance in Orissa, where
the population was almost wholly agricultural, the area required for
the support of one person decreased from 1.15 to 0.77 acres, i.e. by
about one-third. (222)

Even this limited gain should be determined in relative terms, i.e.
only in relation to the cost of living index. In the absence of precise
data, one might refer to the broad comparison of index numbers for
agricultural income and prices of necessities bought by the peasant,
as attempted by the Datta Committee for the period between 1895-1912 in
Bengal and Bihar. According to Datta, during 1894-1904 the farmer
increased his income by a mere 2% while the commodity prices went up by
10.5%, thus proving that "the rise in the cost of living has been all
along more than the rise in the agricultural income, showing that the
cultivators in these parts have been adversely affected by high
prices". (223)

This had special relevance to subsistence agriculture or foodgrain
production, which covered more than 85% of the total cropped area, as,
unlike in cash-crop sectors, a sizeable portion of the crop here was
consumed rather than marketed.

Patna Div. Appendix p. 95, para 4.
of Gaya, Bankipore, 24th Oct 1902.
220. Bengal Irrigation Progs. March 1891, No. 19, Dept. Supdt. of Canal
Revenue to the Collector of Cuttack, 5th March 1881.
221. Ibid, Jan 1873 No. 50. Collector of Midnapur to the Govt. of
Bengal, P.W.D. Irrigation Branch, 18th Oct 1872.
222. LRP April 1898, p. 1089.
Even the alleged "surplus", so reduced by the fragmentation of land units, the rise in the cost of living and the peasant's own food requirements, was not drawn to the market by a wholesome price-simulus: rather, it was extracted in the form of compulsory rent and interest payments to the zamindar and mahajan, who ultimately benefited from the price-rise. The landlords deftly exploited the situation and, in their keenness to profit from the rise in agricultural prices, exerted a steady pressure for the commutation of cash rentals. Produce rents like the "mankhap" in Bhagalpur and Monghyr and the "sanja" in Midnapur minimised the peasants' share in the price-rise, for he was to surrender not only a portion of the crop raised, but the market value of a fixed, bulk amount of grain at the time of harvest. Thus, the low harvest rates forced the peasant to yield a larger share of the produce, while the zamindar reaped the full benefit of rising prices by re-selling the grain as the season advanced. These rents were fixed irrespective of the crop outturn: hence, in lean years the effects of a poor yield were not mitigated by scarcity prices. Further, when the Kist payment was timed just before the harvest, the crop was hypothecated by the peasant and sold for a pittance, "as the disparity between the prices of hypothecated and free crops is large....". For instance, the price of 82 lbs of jute in a market near Calcutta was quoted as Rs. 5-8 as to Rs. 6 in case of a mortgaged crop, while a free crop fetched as much as Rs. 8-10 as to Rs. 9 . (224)

Thus, the rural power structure rather than open market conditions determined the flow of the peasants' meagre surplus. Even if the residue arrived at the village "hats", it fetched a much lower price than in the organised grain-centres of the nearest towns. But in these town-markets the primary producer or seller was always at a distinct disadvantage in relation to the brokers and agents of big buyers: he could not grasp the market mechanism or verify the prevailing prices in bargaining with them. The prevalence of different weights and measures in different localities and the practice of additional weights further reduced his sale proceeds. He also had to pay for the transport, octroi and levies, so that "the marketing cost is one of the most important hindrances to the cultivator's reaping the benefit of the price rise". (225)

Hence, "it appears that the increase in the price of staple crops is not sufficient to account for the ascertained increase in the average rates of rent. The increase of prices since 1840 has been at most 32% (gleaned from the jail statistics regarding the cost of rations per prisoner), whereas the average increase of rents has been over 110 per cent". (226) Only in exceptional cases - as for instance in the rich

225. Ibid p 64.
and fertile tracts of Bakarganj district, the rise in agricultural prices appreciably lightened the rent burden.

(iii) By far the most potent cause for rent enhancements was the growing pressure of population on the soil. This was used most effectively by the landlords as a lever for extensive rack-renting. "The circumstances which cause a rise in rents are those which increase the demand or limit the supply. Thus, increase in population brings about enhanced demand, and... produces increased competition". (227) Extensive sub-letting by occupancy raiyats in the face of this growing demand for land led to an over-burden of rent on the under-tenants, who had no protection under the law. As seen, the tenancy legislation of 1859 and 1885 " supported a particular status of landholding, and went by no clear definition of the same status in terms of their role in actual cultivation... there was no safeguard against the danger that an occupancy ryot might convert himself into a rent-receiver and an oppressor of the worst kind." (228)

Occasions for rent increase:

Rents were generally raised at specific points in time, as for instance (i) when the whole or part of an estate or holding changed hands through partition or sale, or during (ii) re-settlement, (iii) the reclamation of waste lands and (iv) pre-settlement surveys.

(i) "Rents are affected most materially by the partitions of estates". As soon as the division was complete, each share-holder tended to disregard all previous rates and proceeded to reassess his lands according to his own estimates of their productivity. The raiyat, whose lands often lay scattered in several estates, was unable to resist the pressure of these different proprietors and submitted to a new rent roll. In the villages of Buthna Dih and Mathurapur in Muzaffarpur, for instance, the rates were doubled after the butwara in Chowsewan, attempt was made to raise the rates from Rs. 2 and 3-12 to Rs. 5 and 7 per bigha after a partition in 1882; in Chak Abdul Wahid, rents went up from Rs. 3 to 5 per bigha, after the partition in 1878; in Balia, the rental rose from Rs. 125 to Rs. 451 after the two partitions in 1878 and 1881. Sometimes the lands were resumed after partition by the landlord, and subsequently let out at enhanced rates. In the village of Shahpur in Muzaffarpur, for instance, it was alleged that all the land remained as zerait or the proprietor's private land for one year after the partition, the rates being raised subsequently from Rs. 4-4 to Rs. 6-6 per bigha .(229) "Government sales for arrears of revenue have also been almost invariably followed by an enhancement of rent, and the

227. Ibid. April 1896, p. 1088 : Note by Mr. D. H. Kingsford on "Competition Rents".
ryots have seldom made any effort to resist this, the belief being universal that the purchaser starts with a 'tabula rasa' and can levy any rent he likes" (230)

(ii) When a new peasant replaced another, or when new land was available for cultivation, the proprietor demanded a considerable salami or entry fee, and sometimes in return granted perpetual leases, amounting in effect to a "freezing of rent". (231) Generally, however, any fresh settlement called for enhanced rentals. Mr. P. W. Murphy, Settlement Officer of Bihar, noted during the survey operations in Bhagalpur: "When new settlements of land are being made, or when purchased or abandoned holdings are being resettled, the rate of rent is generally increased and a salami is also taken". According to him, the average enhancement obtained in this way since 1885 amounted to 3 or 4 annas in the rupee in North Bhagalpur and between 2 to 3 annas in the south. (232) In Deoghar, numerous cases of sale and rack-renting were brought to notice since 1886. For instance, the headman of Nowka Chibutia in taluk Pathrol sold the best ricelands in the village to an outsider at 15 years' purchase, which increased the rent fourfold, though the Santhal inhabitants were entitled to get settlement of the land sold without cess or premium. (233) In Orissa, abandoned 'thani' holdings were let out at 'pahi' rates, which saw an increase of 40% between 1836-1896. Extension of the thikadari system or of the zirat or khas lands of the proprietor also called for settlement of peasant holdings at enhanced rates.

(iii) The reclamation of wastelands led to assessment for rent after the initial phase, and to resettlement at higher rates when cultivation was stabilised. Thus, the lands reclaimed by the Santhals in the Barind tracts of Dinajpur and Rajshahi were assessed at a rate beyond the means of the original settlers, who then moved on to fresh jungle tracts, while their holdings were resettled at higher rents. In Bhagalpur, reclaimed wastelands settled at low rents (Kamdara) were being changed extensively to 'purdara' lands paying full rents since 1885. (234) After 1875 rents were enhanced on the 'chars' and wastelands in Bakarganj. In Singhbhum, the 'gora' or unembanked uplands were assessed to a rent of 1 anna per local bigha for the first time in 1897. (235) By the settlement of 1896-97 in Palamau, the pariadari system of exempting uplands ('tanr' or 'bhita') from rent gave way to the uttakar system, by which all lands were assessed for rent. (236)

230. DG Saran, p. 84.
234. SR Bhagalpur, para 79.
235. DG Singhbhum, pp. 126-127.
236. LRP March 1897, p. 673
In some cases, where there was no wasteland for extending cultivation, the landlord increased his income by exacting rent for some fictitious land, commonly known as "Kaghazi zamin" or paper land. (237)

(iv) During the survey and settlement proceedings in the different districts, the persistent aim of the zamindars was to legalise all increases in rent effected by them since the time of the last settlement, and to press for a further rise on various grounds. During the assessment of the Terai jotes in 1894, for instance, it was noted that in 24 jotes selected for survey, there had been an average enhancement of 180% since the last settlement in 1879. In one jote it has increased from Rs. 30 to Rs. 330, the revenue being Rs. 88-7. In another the rent was raised from Rs. 40 to Rs. 350, the revenue being Rs. 137-1. Between the two settlements, the jotedars had thus "increased their profit so as to more than double the difference in their liability". (238) In Muzaffarpur, again, the average rent in 33 villages increased by 137% and that in 36 others by 116% since 1843 when the first survey began, the greater part of the increase occurring in 1874-1880, just before the second settlement was undertaken. Attempt was naturally made to incorporate these new rates into the survey papers in 1894.

**Grounds for further enhancements:**

Further enhancements were claimed either (i) by the assessment of excess holdings and increased cultivation, or (ii) by raising the rent rate on various grounds.

(i) **Assessment of excess areas:**

In the case of districts which still had land for reclamation, as in North Bihar and Bhagalpur, rents were enhanced by 77 to 80% by the assessment of excess areas. In 1892-99 in Muzaffarpur, "nearly the whole of the enhancement made during the settlement was due to the assessment of excess area to rent, and there was practically no enhancement of rent rates throughout the proceedings" (239). As noted, this increase in rent did not always correspond to the size and quality of the new cultivation, which extended mostly over marginal lands.

A distinction was clearly made between increases in the quantum of rent by the assessment of new lands or excess areas, and an increase effected by raising the rent rates. The Champaran raiyats, for example, were ready to pay for excess lands, but not for the old lands at enhanced rates. (240) The zamindars, however, persisted in their claims. It was noted during the settlement operations in Muzaffarpur, 237. DG Champaran, p. 129.
238. LRP Nov 1894, p. 1203 : Note on Terai region, p. 17, para 66.
239. DG Muzaffarpur, p. 119.
240. DG Champaran, p. 90.
that "though the increase of zamindari assets has been largely obtained by the reclamation of waste and the expansion of cultivation, there can be no doubt that enhancement of rent rates has been also an important factor leading to this result". (241)

(ii) Enhancement of rates:

Rates were raised on the basis of: (a) the rise in agricultural prices; (b) improvements effected on the land; and (c) higher rates allegedly prevailing in neighbouring lands of similar quality.

(a) It has been shown in some detail that any gains made by the peasant from the rise in foodgrain prices was more than offset by the percentage of increase effected in rent rates.

(b) Higher rates were also claimed on the basis of "improvements" made on the land, mainly in irrigation works, by the proprietor. In the produce-paying lands the proprietor's interest in repairing and maintaining irrigation works was stimulated to some extent by the prospect of better crop returns: but many cash-paying lands benefited from the pynes as well, and it was here that the problem came into sharp focus. Generally, however, the apathy of the proprietors and tenure-holders in undertaking works of reform has already been noted. Most of these alleged improvements amounted in effect to no more than the ordinary annual and decennial repairs, which were usually agreed upon as the landlord's responsibility at the time of fixing the rent, as proved by his "gilandazi" papers. Hence, enhancements on this basis were illegal, as the Bengal Tenancy Act allowed an enhancement of up to 2 as, in a rupee, only for improvements to which the raiyat was not originally entitled. (242)

(c) Most often, however, higher rates were obtained arbitrarily, and on no fixed principle. As noted by L.S.S. O'Malley in the Muzaffarpur District Gazetteer: "The other great cause of enhancement has been the way in which zamindars have been able to tamper with rent rates, enhancing them at their own pleasure and in a purely arbitrary way". (243) A favourite method was to demand higher rentals on the basis of the prevailing rates of rent (pargana nirik) in lands of similar quality in adjacent villages. Obviously, these had no relevance for the new cultivation. For other lands, too, rates were not easy to verify due to the variety and complexity of rent rates in different regions, there being no uniform criteria of assessment. In Bengal in particular, soil productivity had seldom been the standard for fixing rent-rates. (244) Reference to the old rates for comparison was almost impossible.

241. DG Muzaffarpur, p. 81.
242. SR Bhagalpur, p. 68, para 128.
243. DG Muzaffarpur, p. 81.
as past records, even when available, were obsolete and liable to manipulation by the zamindars, who were no longer so familiar with the details of their tenant holdings. Sometimes the rate was left intact, the classification of the land being changed to obtain higher rents. (245)

**Reaction of the tenants: susceptibility of tribals to the increasing pressure of rent:**

The tenants did not accept such increases without resistance. In fact, higher castes like the Brahmans, Kayasthas, Babhans and Rajputs, who formed a large proportion of the cultivators in the north Bihar districts, "are not easily coerced into agreeing to enhancements". (246) In Champaran, the higher caste raiyats, who were most vocal in opposing the demand for free labour (beth-begar) and enhancement, generally held their lands at privileged rates. "The almost invariable reason for this is that they have been able to resist the landlord's efforts to enhance their rent, while the Kurmi or Koeri have consented to enhancements" (247) In Muzaffarpur, it was noted that the increase in rent for the higher castes was minute, while that for the others was considerable. The Settlement Officer of Muzaffarpur, thus brings the problem into focus: "The general impression is that the tenantry of Bihar are... in complete subservience to their landlords, who evict and enhance their rents at pleasure. The impression, however, is only partially true. Like most things in India, it is largely a question of caste. I believe this impression to convey a correct idea of the condition of low-caste ryots, such as Dusadhs, Kurmis, etc. but cultivators of higher caste, like Babhans, are usually quite prepared to fight their landlord if he attempts to oppress them". (248)

As implied above, the aborigines and lower castes were most susceptible to pressure by the landlords. Competitive rates and rackrenting are noted specifically in areas where there was an influx of tribal migrants. For instance, in Malda the average rate of Rs. 2 per acre went up to Rs. 3 and more in the northern thanas, due to the immigration of Santhals and Oraons. The Deputy Commissioner of the Santhal Parganas wrote in 1888: "The district (Santhal Parganas) has now been filled up, and is overflowing into Maldah. Symptoms of pressure are appearing as inferior land is being taken up..." (249) The Collector of Malda, comparing the details and abstract of the size of cultivation and the average rental in selected areas, noted that "the average rental here (Rs. 3-1-6 per acre) is higher than in the

245. DG Singhbhum, p. 129.
246. SR Bhagalpur, p. 37, para 79.
247. DG Champaran, p. 89.
248. DG Muzaffarpur, p. 120.
province as a whole". (250) Most cases of exaction by the zamindars in Malda occurred in the Barind tract, which was colonised by the Santhals and other tribes. Large areas similarly reclaimed in the Golghar Thana of North Monghyr fetched rates which could never have been realised 15/20 years ago. (251) Evictions and abandonment of land was not infrequent among the backward communities. The Sub-divisional Officer notes about the Paharia settlements in the Damin: "as soon as a tikridar has parted with his tikri, the Paharia tenants are expected to shift, especially if their Kurnas can be furrowed by the plough". (252) In the Susang hills, Garo villages began to disappear, as the pressure of debts and the "tanka" system of produce rent obliged many Garos to "throw up" their holdings. (253)

In the lands reclaimed by the Santhals in South Monghyr and Bhagalpur, the original tenures (chakband) at concessional rates systematically gave way to the mustagiri or thikadari system by which outsiders, usually monelenders and Hindu cultivators, replaced the tribal headmen (chakbanddars). Many of them were in the employment of the landlord, and undertook to collect much higher rates of rent than the chakbanddars, their business being to "pay to the landlord the rent agreed on, and to make as much profit as possible for themselves". Unlike the Chakbanddar, the thikadar or mustagir was a temporary lessee of the land. "When the lease is renewed the rent of the lessee is enhanced, and this is tacitly assumed by all concerned to be equivalent to enhancing the rent of the raiyats whom he represents". As cultivation reached its limits in these areas, leaving only the 'tanr' lands which yielded nothing but a crop of Kulthi once in 2 or 3 years, the Santhals found it difficult to pay higher rents and moved on to reclaim new jungles. The pattern was the same in all tribal area: "The Santhals (or other tribes) as a rule do not remain long in the village after it is handed over to these thikadars. The latter take their best lands, and settle them with outsiders, and demand high rents for the remaining lands ... when it reaches a certain pitch, the whole community often abandon their lands and set out for some other place to begin again their work of reclaiming the jungle". (254)

**Adverse effects of 'thika' or 'ijara' on the tenant and landlord**: In fact, the thikadari or ijara system "is in the hands of a grasping landlord a most effective means of procuring regular enhancements of..."
rent," not only in tribal settlements but in other areas as well. (255) For instance, in taluka Jagtagaon in Purnea, flagrant enhancements were imposed systematically on the expiry of mustagiri leases. It was found during the survey of 1901-8, that a rent of Rs. 26 for 18 acres had shot up to Rs. 77, while that of Rs. 48 for 20 acres rose to Rs. 71 at the new settlement. Though extreme cases, "they illustrate very clearly the inherent evils of the vicious system of short-term settlements with middlemen". (256) As a temporary lessee, the thikadar was not interested in works of reform or maintenance, which were unlikely to pay dividends within the short period of his lease. Hence, the purely farming system increased the pressure of rent on the peasant, while reducing the size and quality of his crop. The system was so unpopular with the peasants, especially in its combination with indigo-planting as in North Bihar, that the very threat of leasing out lands on "thika" was generally sufficient for the raiyats to submit to rent enhancements. During the survey in Muzaffarpur in 1894, it was found that at least three villages, viz., Balra Karamchand, Makhdumpur Kodaria and Muhammadpur Subey, had yielded to the imposition of a cess on the understanding that their lands should not be leased to an indigo factory. Yet it was precisely this that the proprietor did after 3 or 4 years, when it was too late to deny payment of the enhanced rental. (257)

In some districts as In Manbhum, "bemiadi" ijaradars who held the land indefinitely rather than on leases of fixed duration, posed a distinct threat to the zamindar. Here the ijaradar got the benefit of all newly assessed lands and settled them on his own terms, depriving the landlord of any share in the profits. If on detection the landlord pressed for enhancements, his claim, unsupported by relevant papers as to the area and pattern of the new holdings, would be held invalid. (258) In Purnea, the mustagir was "specially qualified not only to coerce his neighbours into paying rent, but also to turn the tables on his employer... by right of an imaginary milik or rent-free holding... civil suits, often collusively carried out between the mustajir as milikdar and the ryots whose lands he is transferring rent-free to himself, provide the unjust steward with documentary evidence of title, which it is difficult for the zamindar subsequently to upset". (259) In such cases, the malik could not collect his rent except through the middleman or ijaradar. Hence, he was obliged to settle amicably with the local middleman of influence, and even employ him as tahasildar for areas beyond the purview of his lease.

255. Ibid, pp 76-77.
256. SR Purnea p 56, para 181.
259. DG Purnea, p 153.
Thus, whether it be lease or tenure, 'the landlord loses and the tenant suffers while the middleman grows rich' (260). The following table of rent-rates for 39 villages of Thana Araria in Purnea district is an instance in point:

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<th>Average rent per acre payable by</th>
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<td>Raiyats to Patnidar</td>
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<td>Under-tenure holders</td>
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<td>Rs. 1.44</td>
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The rent commitments to the under tenure-holders were thus more than double of that to the patnidar; again, the net gain of the under-tenure-holders after payment of his dues to the patnidar was Rs. 2.17 per acre, i.e. Rs. 1.08 more than the gross amount received by the patnidar (261). Hence, the raiyats preferred to hold under patnidars than under petty, subordinate tenure-holders who, like the peasant proprietors of Muzaffarpur, were harsher in dealing with their tenants. J.C. Jack notes during the settlement in Bakarganj: "... the rent which they (the proprietors) take from the cultivator, is much more moderate than the rent which the tenure-holder takes" (262). In the Presidency Division, the so-called 'raiyats' who had ceased to cultivate their lands directly, extorted more than the zamindars (263). "It is unquestionable that the intermediate tenure-holders make large profits, only a small portion of which go to the landlords, since tenure-holders at fixed rates hold a very large proportion of the total area..." (264). In Bakarganj, for instance, the tenure-holders had six times the extent of land held by the cultivators, though each acre held by the raiyat was worth 57 annas in rent to the proprietor, as against 19 annas for each acre held on tenure. "Had they eschewed middlemen and dealt only with the cultivator, the owners would reap a profit of 50 lakhs from their estates, where they now reap a profit of only 16 lakhs" (265). In South Bhagalpur, the rise in agricultural prices caused a widening gap between produce and cash rentals; the produce rents settled under Section 40 of the Bengal Tenancy Act, though much lower than the estimated value of the crop, amounted to an average of Rs. 6-1-7 per acre, as against a cash rent of Rs. 2-10-6, the difference being appropriated mostly by the tenure-holders. As noted in

260. SR, Purnea, p 56 para 181.
262. SR Bakarganj, p. 63, para 164.
265. SR Bakarganj, p. 63, para 164.
the Survey Report of Bhagalpur, the strongest opposition to the commutation of produce rentals came from the "intermediary agents, who intercept a large proportion of the produce rent" (266).

Expansion of 'khas' lands by the landlord:

Hence, instead of letting out lands on thika, ijara or even ordinary tenures as a means of forcing up the rental, the landlord often preferred to extend his khas or demesne (known variously as 'nijchash' or 'nijjote' in Bengal and Orissa, 'bakasht', 'sir', 'khamar' or 'zirat' in North Bihar, and 'kamat' in Bhagalpur, Purnea and Monghyr), which could be resettled directly as produce tenancies at enhanced rates.

It has been remarked that except in case of the indigo interests as in Champaran and Muzaffarpur, the proprietor in general was not keen to add to his responsibilities by retaining the holdings of defaulting peasants which passed into his hands (267). Yet, the district survey reports have dealt exhaustively with the zamindars' intent to increase their demesne in every possible way and with the extent of this increase in the period under review.

Indeed, the process was not unreasoned. The Settlement Officer of Bihar noted during the survey operations in Monghyr in 1899-1904: "In specific areas the rent question was mixed up with that of 'kamat' or proprietors' private land, failure to enhance rents successfully having led to attempts, often successful, to oust raiyats from their holdings, and either hold them in khas cultivation or lease them out at higher rates to other tenants" (268). As direct cultivation would bring increased liabilities, produce tenancies were generally preferred. They fetched a good return on the proprietor's initial investment in purchasing raiyati lands, especially in case of valuable crops like tobacco and chillies, while preventing the acquisition by tenants of any right therein. This explains the unusually large percentage of lands held on produce rents in certain areas like Teghra and Begusserai in North Monghyr and Dalsingh Sarai and Bahera in Darbhanga. They were inhabited mostly by petty, resident proprietors, who were better able to supervise their interests in produce-paying lands. (269).

Hence, every effort was made by the proprietor to increase this area, and to get it sanctioned during the traverse surveys. Mr. Lyon, the

266. SR Bhagalpur, p. 5, para 16, in the forwarding letter by Mr. McPherson, Dir. of the Dept. of Land Records, Bengal, to the Sec. to the Board of Rev., L.P., dated Cal 15th Dec 1911.
268. SR Monghyr (North), 1899-1904, p. 32, para 98.
269. DG, Monghyr p. 125.
Settlement Officer of Muzaffarpur, graphically describes the process: "If a mukarrari lease is granted over a large area of land, the mukarraridar proceeds to carve his zirat out of the tenants' holdings, giving them lands in exchange elsewhere. If a partition is made in a village, the owner of each of the newly formed estates takes up a large area within his estate as zirat. All lands taken up in blocks by ticcadars for indigo or other cultivation are termed zirat, and most of the lands left by dying or absconding raiyats are held by the malik as his zirat until such time as he may see fit to settle it with someone else. .... And the anxiety of the zamindars to use the present survey as a means for increasing the area of the zirat lands has... been shown in a hundred cases" (270).

Generally, peasant holdings passed into the landlord's hand through relinquishments and distress-sales. Besides, attempts to absorb lands which had long been in the cultivating possession of raiyats and to enter them as 'zirat' in the survey records was most common in Bihar, especially in North Bhagalpur. In some cases, the landlords used their influence and pressurised the raiyats to understate the period of their occupation, and to declare falsely that they cultivated the land in partnership with the maliks, rather than as independent tenants (271). Cases were also noted in Sambalpur and Panjwara in South Bhagalpur, where, as soon as the traverse survey began in 1902, the landlords ousted the raiyats on their kamat lands which were rarely, if ever, cultivated by the proprietors themselves. These raiyats were ordered to deny having cultivated any land and were sometimes promised other lands in exchange. The promise was seldom fulfilled, and the landlord fully exploited the situation by further acquiring a considerable area beyond the purview of his old 'kamat' lands. The dispossessed raiyats acquiesced, having little faith in the efficacy of civil suits (272). In instances like that of the ijmali patti of Nadilmani in North Monghyr, the dispute was further complicated by a process of double eviction. The malik ousted many tenants, converted their lands into "bakasht", and resettled them with new tenants at higher rates. Just before attestation he evicted the second set of tenants as well, and showed the land to be in his direct cultivation by sowing a makai crop in it. In Bhurwar, Thana Beguserai, a large area covering the holdings of 70 tenants or more was entered as bakasht during Khanapuri. Recalcitrant tenants were frequently evicted in this manner. In Kaithawa, the malik, Janki Prasad, similarly "suppressed" the names of the cultivating tenants and recorded their lands as kamat (273). In Orissa, attempts by proprietors and tenure-holders, most notably the

272. SR Bhagalpur, p 64, para 123.
273. SR North Monghyr, pp. 34-36.
makaddams, to have raiyati lands recorded as 'nijjote' frequently caused tension.

Partitions of property were often the occasion for expansion of the 'zirat'. In such cases the raiyats on these lands were threatened with rent enhancements after the partition, unless they gave up further areas specified as 'kamat' by the landlord. In the village of Kaith in North Monghyr, for instance, the rent of the kamat lands was raised from Rs. 3-8/4-2 to Rs. 5/6 after the batwara of 1306, on the plea that in kamat lands occupancy rights could not be acquired (274). In fact, the Collector of Monghyr wrote: "Directly petty maliks are put in possession of their putties by partition proceedings, they try and convert it all into khudkasht or kamat, ejecting right and left" (275).

Of excess holdings and jungles, the pick of the land was frequently absorbed into the landlord's demesne. The thikadars, instead of maintaining tanks and ahars, preferred that they should silt up, so that they could annex the ahar beds to their bakasht, and grow excellent rabi crops of wheat and barley on them (276). Soon, the pretence of growing only rabi crops gave way to extensive rice cultivation. The silted-up tanks and embankments were rented out as valuable paddylands, and ceased to be of any further use as reservoirs.

In legitimising such extensions of their zirat, the zamindars fully exploited the elasticity and ambiguity of its definition as noted in Section 120 of the Bengal Tenancy Act. The landlords' definition of 'zirat' covered every piece of land cultivated by a zamindar, thikadar or rent-free tenure-holder within his estate or tenure. It was further extended to all lands which, previously held as khas, had been let out on produce rents without being officially entered into the jamabandi on the basis of a formal agreement with the tenant. Mr. Lyon, the Settlement Officer of Muzaffarpur, reports in May 1894: "The term zirat bears a meaning in Muzaffarpur which is wholly distinct from that given it in the Bengal Tenancy Act" (277). Babu Sosi Bhusan Chowdhuri, a Munsif of Chittagong, noted that "... the local definition of zirat lands seems to differ very widely from that which obtains under Section 120 of the Bengal Tenancy Act" (278). Mr. Macpherson, the Director of Land Records, agreed with the Settlement Officers in different districts, as to "the conflict on the one hand between popular usage in Bihar of the words sir, zirat, khamar, and the legal sense of these words as defined in Chapter XI of the Tenancy Act" (279).

274. Ibid., p 36, para 109.
276. DG Monghyr, p. 172.
277. LRP Nov 1894, No. 59, dated 9th May 1894, enclosure in letter No. 20305, of The Dir. of Land Records, dated 11th June, 1894.
278. Ibid., No. 929A, From Mr. M. Finucane, Offg. Sec. to the Board of Rev. L.P., to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept., dated Cal, 24th July 1894, para 8.
Indeed, the ambiguity of this definition in the Bengal Tenancy Act left enough scope for misrepresentation and wrangling on vital legal points. Under Section 120 of the Act, only two classes of land could be entered as zirat, viz. - lands in the continuous cultivating possession of the proprietor for 12 years or more; and lands recognised to be zirat by local village usage. The former was relatively well-defined and could be tangibly proved or disproved. But, the demarcation of village 'sir' lands was vague and imprecise. If they be taken to cover all lands loosely termed 'sir' or 'zirat' in each village, there would be an enormous increase in the proportion of such lands, with a corresponding shrinkage in that of raiyati holdings. Hence, the local usage of these lands would have to be ascertained precisely, by going far back in point of time. In the process, several problems arose. As to zirat lands subsequently occupied by peasants, it might be argued that the zamindars had neglected their duties as defined in Section 116, and forfeited their zirati rights in the land by allowing it to drift back into the common stock of village lands, thereby enabling the raiyats to acquire occupancy rights in them. Further, it was almost impossible to prove the exact status of these peasants in relation to the land, for it was seldom based on written leases or pattas, annual or otherwise, as required implicitly by the Act in case of zirati lands. Yet the assumption that the peasant had occupancy rights in the land in the absence of such specific leases, was actively opposed by the proprietor. This problem was particularly acute in Bihar where, unlike in Orissa, there were no previous settlement papers for reference, in verifying the areas claimed as zirat during the current survey.

The ignorance of the peasants and the dishonesty of the local amin and inspector were fully and effectively exploited by the proprietor in controversial cases. Mr. Colvin, the Settlement Officer of Champaran, wrote in 1894: "The tenant, being accustomed to hear the land called 'zirat' and unaware of the effect of the entry 'zirat' in the survey papers, would very possibly raise no dispute, and thus, in mere ignorance, contribute to the destruction of his own occupancy rights... If every inspector were honest there would still be numerous mistaken decisions, through ignorance, and if any inspector were dishonest there can be no doubt that the power of writing down lands as 'zirat malik' might be very seriously abused" (280). The nature of such abuses are described in some detail by Babu Sosi Bhushan Chowdhuri, Munsif of Chittagong. In disputed cases "an inspector's decisions are almost invariably based on an amin's enquiries. There is no guarantee for their being made openly and in the presence of the contending parties, and we have no security that entries said to be undisputed are not disputed, and that the decisions of this comparatively independent and irresponsible officer have not been bought" (281).

280. LRP, Nov 1894, No. 929A; No. 201C, dated 14th May 1894, enclosure in the letter of the Dir. of Land Records, dated 11th June 1894.
Methods of effecting increase in rent rates

Yet cases of eviction and settlements with new tenants were presumably limited in number, and "it was through increasing the rent rates of the old peasants that the zamindars derived the largest advantage from the increased demand for land" (282). This might have been achieved by (i) forced agreements, (ii) false suits for rent arrears, (iii) changed entries in the jamabandi, (iv) withholding of rent receipts, and (v) contraction of the local land measure during the assessment of peasant holdings. None of these methods being strictly legal, "the change is rarely effected in an open and undisguised manner" (283).

(i) "The commonest method of raising the rents is by inducing the raiyat to consent to the enhancement by the process of free contract" (284). Most often, however, such agreements (ikrarnamas) did not stand the test of scrutiny. For instance, on 9th June 1893 a body of raiyats from mauza Lachmipur in Champaran were produced before the Assistant Settlement Officer, as having "agreed to the claim of the landlord to the rents of excess lands found in their possession ...". During reattestation, however, none of them admitted to holding excess lands. In fact, the jamabandi did not register their names as holding any land at all in the village. A parallel case was noted in mauza Rindwala (285).

Mr. Collin noted in his report on the survey and record of rights in Muzaffarpur: "The principle of free contract ... is much abused... This consent must always have been obtained by concealment of facts, and by ignoring the rights of the raiyats, or by improper pressure upon them". In Paragraph 72 of the report, he cited the case of an occupancy raiyat who, lawfully holding his land at Rs. 3 per bigha, was said to have agreed in 1884-85 to hold it on a lease for 3 years at Rs. 6-14 per bigha. It was further noted in November 1893, that a certain zamindar was threatening the raiyats with criminal cases, which were dropped as soon as they signed the sharahnama (agreement). In another case in March 1894, a group of raiyats denied any knowledge of a sharahnama drawn up in their names, the patwari having signed in their absence. Mr. Collin wryly comments: "This is perhaps as good an instance as any that could be given of the option of free contract, by which the raiyat, in his generosity, voluntarily consents to forego part of the profits of his land... it is extremely dangerous to allow the exercise of free contract when the circumstances of the parties are so unequal" (286).

283. SR, Bhagalpur, p 79.
284. SR Muzaffarpur, para 72.
286. SR Muzaffarpur, paras 72, 74.
(ii) Direct suits for enhancement were rarely brought, only 25 such cases having come up in 5 years in the Munsif's court in Muzaffarpur. The usual method was to effect an increase indirectly, by suing for arrears of rent at enhanced rates, and filing fictitious rent-rolls in court, as was seen in the village of Sirśia, Muhammadpur, Moshtaq and Roshanpur in Muzaffarpur. Sometimes rents were inflated indirectly, by the addition of abwabs. The amount paid as rent was credited to abwabs, suits then being filed for the resulting rent arrears. In one instance in Muzaffarpur, fictitious rent rolls for 15 years were filed, in order to exclude mention of the abwabs (287).

(iii) Some cases of tampering of rent rolls, as by Udit Narain Singh of Charakhaira in Monghyr, were more complex and interesting. In order to keep settlement rates very low for his estate, he forced the raiyats to state their rents at the absurdly low rate of 8 annas per bigha. He deliberately neglected to repair the embankments in order to prove that the land was submerged and of poor quality, and so to account for the low rates claimed. Thus, while his lands would be lightly assessed, he could use his influence over the tenants to go on collecting rents at the old rate (Rs. 2-8 to Rs. 3 per bigha) inspite of the attestation (288). In Bakarganj, many estates like Marichbonia and Kakrabonia "adopted this fraudulent method of deflating their receipts from rent, while at the same time they swell their income from the tenantry". The original jamabandis were not produced for fear of detection of such illegal enhancements. The Settlement Officers in Bakarganj felt that "Kabuliyaats could be obtained with the greatest difficulty" (289). In Darbhanga, it was noted that "the canker which has mainly affected agricultural prosperity, is the constant tampering with rent rolls and consequent uncertainty as to rents" (290). In Bhagalpur, the landlords of Sabalpur and Panjwara avoided submitting their jamabandis during the attestation, on the plea of their having been destroyed by floods and fire respectively, in 1899. Even the imposition of fines under the Survey Act could not make them produce the documents (291). The Settlement Officers in Bhagalpur noted numerous cases "in which there is grave reason to suspect that documents produced in evidence before them are forged...the record of rents laboriously collected at first hand from landlords and tenants, is frequently set aside by the civil courts on compromises wrung from intimidated raiyats on forged papers and perjured evidence" (292).

(iv) The process was easy as rent receipts were seldom, if ever, granted to the raiyats, especially for produce rents. Sometimes, receipts (dakhilas) were withheld till the abwabs were paid in full.

287. Ibid, para 75.
288. SR Monghyr (North), pp. 38-39, paras 120-121
289. SR, Bakarganj Appdx VIII, p xciii.
290. DG, Darbhanga p. 83.
291. SR, Bhagalpur, p 73, para 136.
During the attestation of mauza Patuakhali in Bakarganj, it was found that for khatian numbers 24, 62 and 160 the dakhilas had been withheld. In number 18, 23, 29, 101 etc. only parkhais and not dakhilas were granted, even on full payment; in Khatians 7, 9, 12, 21, 29, 39 etc. no mention was made in the parkhais of the amount paid (293). When suits were filed for rent arrears after several years, "the raiyat cannot give any satisfactory documentary evidence of payment, while the landlord can very easily file some 'tuck' lists and 'hishab' prepared... to suit his own purpose..." (294). The zamindar often denied the validity of the parkhais granted by his own agent. As in many cases parkhais, and even rent receipts entered in forms available in the market were not acknowledged by the courts, tenants usually preferred to execute kistibandi bonds for any rent arrears claimed by the landlord, rather than to fight suits with him on the strength of such unreliable documents. The provisions for enforcing a standard form of rent receipt under the Tenancy Act were intended to minimise these evils and to impress upon the tenants the exact amount of their dues. Yet enquiries during the survey in Muzaffarpur showed that the aim had been largely frustrated. Few landlords used the new form. In these few cases too, the counterfoils were recently written up to suit the interests of the landlord, and the receipt was not given. In one estate the raiyats had been induced to accept a form of rent receipt somewhat similar to the legal forms, showing an increased rental which was enforced two years later. The raiyats most often did not know their rentals, and being only too glad to get any form of receipt, failed to scrutinise them carefully. (295).

(v) In certain regions like Bhagalpur and Monghyr, demands for higher rent were made by diminishing the local land measure known as the "laggi". The size, location and quality of the lands were recorded in detail in a khasra or "laggit" kept by the landlord. In effect, however, the initial measurements were made very roughly, the area being understated but over-assessed. After a while the land was accurately re-measured, the excess area thus discovered being made to pay the same high rates. When a fairly accurate area had been detailed in the laggit, the unit of measurement was diminished, the area again increased in theory, and the application of the previous rates further inflated the rental. Thus, an elaborate local system of survey and assessment was converted by the landlords into "a method of making illegal enhancements" (296).

The process was facilitated by the absence of a standard unit of measure, or "pargana laggi"; different lengths of the laggi were used.

293. SR, Bakarganj, Appdx XVIII, p cxii, Mauza Patuakhali (2925), Estate No. 4645, Settlement with Durga Prasanna Roy Chowdhury.
294. Ibid, Appdx XIX, p 1xiv.
295. LRP, Nov. 1894: Report on the Survey and Record of Rights in Muzaffarpur, p 21, paras 75-76.
296. DG, Monghyr, p. 124.
varying from village to village, and even from landlord to landlord within a single village. Different standards were used to measure rent-paying and brahmottar lands belonging to the same landlord. In Bakhtiyarpur in North Monghyr, every fraction of a laggi, however, small, was treated as a whole unit (297). In South Bhagalpur, the laggi question was further complicated by the "kamarband" system, by which a rope of 18 laggis in length was recorded as "20" laggis, when measuring the land. In the villages of Gandha, Parsahi and Laharnia in Bhagalpur, the laggi was reduced from 6 1/2 to 6 haths by the respective landlords (298). Sometimes the land was not initially measured at all, so that there were no previous records to go by (299). The case laws on the subject were imprecise and the settlement courts left the parties to contend among themselves, to the great disadvantage of the raiyats.

Produce - rents

The rent burden increased in real terms in case of produce payments, as they reduced the peasant's share in the benefits of the rising agricultural prices, while denying him the rights of occupancy in his land.

The produce rent system had its rationale in the maintenance and upkeep of the large-scale irrigation works required for subsistence cultivation like the ahars and pynes in South Bihar, as distinguished from wells and other small irrigation works financed by the peasants themselves for their more expensive cash crops. Rents in kind ensured the zamindar's participation, so essential for the smooth working of this system, by giving him a direct incentive in increasing production. In fact, in the early 19th century the zamindars insisted on cash payments in their superior lands, for they entailed no such obligations on their part and, as Buchanan found, were "much higher than the share which the landlord receives on the division of crops". Rents in kind fell easier on the raiyats than cash rents and related more closely to varying levels of cultivation; for instance, highlands and wastelands could not afford to pay cash rents and could only yield a share of whatever they produced, the latter paying at concessional rates in the early stages of reclamation. In some areas, as in parts of Shahabad, the proprietor's share diminished in proportion to the number of waterings given by the tenant, thus directly stimulating the peasant's interest in improving cultivation (300). The produce-rent system was more flexible on the whole in the first half of the 19th century, the tenants often being allowed to choose between payments in cash and kind, and in case of the latter, between divisions of the actual produce (batai) or of the estimated outturn (danabandi).

297. SR, North Monghyr, p. 39, para 123.
298. SR, Bhagalpur, p. 78-79, para 142.
300. SR, Shahabad, (1907-16), para 327.
With time the produce-rent system lost much of its relevance and dynamism. The endless partitions of estates depleted the resources of the zamindars, and minimised their involvement in works of reform or maintenance. Their attitudes hardened, and the system gradually underwent a deep, qualitative change in three distinct phases, viz. -

(i) the replacement of the principle of 'batai' or actual division of the crop by appraisement and fixed grain payments; (ii) the payment of produce rent in terms of money; (iii) and the commutation of cash paying lands into produce tenancies.

(i) Initially, the most significant change was the gradual replacement of the batai or aghorebatai, i.e., a simple division of the actual crop, by the danabandi system of dividing the estimated outturn. It suited the zamindar's interest, for unlike the former, it ruled out the possibility of pilferings by the peasant from the crop on the field. Besides, under this system the rent could be inflated by overestimating the crop outturn with the connivance of village officials like the patwari, jeth or paik, who were often in the pay of the zamindar. "Danabandi is the system which is most in favour with the landlords, who, by means of various abwabs or cesses and over-appraisal, manage to secure a very large proportion of the outturn - as much as 27 seers in the maund in some cases ". Instances are noted where the danabandi estimate was further inflated by the amalgamation of amlas' dues (bhaoli nausat), though the latter continued to claim their share separately from the raiyats. In the Jamui subdivision of Monghyr, where the landlord was normally entitled to a half-share of the produce, he took 9 annas and in some cases even 10 annas, as nausatta or cesses wherever the system of appraisement prevailed. (301) Such estimates gradually became a most effective lever against recalcitrant raiyats, who were prevented from harvesting the crops until they agreed to the zamindar's demand. As land prices rose in the later years of the 19th century, distraint was often made on the strength of false rent-suits based on over-appraisal of the crop. The batai, varying between 1/3rd, 2/5 and 1/2 of the produce in different regions, was known as adhiyar, bhag or barga in Bengal, and as dhulibhag in Orissa. A variation of the dhulibhag based on appraisement corresponded to the danabandi system.

The gradual change from batai to danabandi was noted in the Bisthazar estate as early as in 1835, during the survey proceedings in South Monghyr. The change became widespread during the next three decades. In 1849 P. Taylor, Collector of Gaya, found that the "just and simple system which formerly prevailed all over has now given way almost universally to that of danabandi". (302) In 1851 Hodgson, another Collector of the district, noted that the danabandi system prevailed in

302. Bengal Board of Rev. Progs, 10th July 1849, No. 21, Taylor's letter to the Commissioner, Patna Div, 19th May 1849, para 5.
303. Ibid, 26th March 1852, No. 28.
26 out of 28 parganas in the zillah (303). Even allowing for exaggeration, the trend was distinct. In 1862, the Collector of Shahabad observed that "the old system almost universally in vogue..." had been "gradually superseded by the danabunday system" (304). During the settlement in South Monghyr, it was found that "determined efforts have of late years been made by landlords to substitute danabandi for batai, often with success" (305).

An even more oppressive form of produce rent consisted of fixed grain payments irrespective of the crop size, such as the sanja in Midnapur and Orissa, the dhankarari in Faridpur and Bakarganj, and the manhunda in Bhagalpur and Monghyr. It required the peasant to surrender a specific quantity of grain whether the season was favourable or otherwise, and laid the greatest pressure upon him in lean years, when he was least able to bear it. For instance, in Nij Khurda, Banpur and other parts of the Puri district, the sanja rent usually amounted to about 6 maunds per acre, which would fetch Rs. 6 in a good year and Rs. 9 during a lean season (306). The landlord thus profited from scarcity prices, to the acute distress of the peasant. Instances are known of raiyats starving, yet buying grain at exorbitant rates during famine years, in order to pay their rents under this system (307). The situation was comparable to Ireland, where the small peasant could not consume his grain, which was to be sold for rent. "If the people are forced to consume their oats and other grain, where is the rent to come from?" wrote the Commissariat Officer at Westport in 1846. (308). Significantly, peasants on sanja lands did not apply for canal water in Midnapur, as the rigours of the system would more than neutralise the benefits of canal irrigation. In Faridpur, dhankarari was common in certain regions like Kotwalipara and Gopalganj, where "the rent is much severer than the prevailing cash rents" (309). It was of very recent origin in Gaurnadi and Mehendiganj in Bakarganj district, where, "owing to difficulties in measuring the crop and to the fluctuations in its amount with the varying seasons, the landlords subsequently devised a new system,— the dhankarari ..." It maximised the share of the growing class of bhadraloks in the rising foodgrain prices, while minimising the expenses of cultivation: they neither bought the seed nor supplied the plough and cattle, so that "both the burden and the hazard of cultivation were taken by the tenant". Hence, if the barga tenancies were disliked by the raiyats, the dhankarari was detested by them (310). In Bhagalpur and Monghyr raiyats paying in such fixed, bulk

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305. DG, Monghyr p. 126.
307. DG, Darbhanga, p. 81.
309. SR, Faridpur 1904-14, p. 32, para 75.
310. SR, Bakarganj, p. 168, para 332.
amounts of grain (manhunda or mankuta) were deepest in debt to their landlords, the arrears of each year being carried forward in their names, irrespective of famine or scarcity. (311).

(ii) Having thus secured a sizeable proportion of the produce whether by appraisal or fixed payments in place of a simple division of the actual crop, the landlords next tried to make their own terms in determining the form of this payment. In fact, a further change in the danabandi or manhunda systems occurred in the form of "mankhap" rents, by which the zamindars began to insist on the payment either of their share of the produce in terms of cash, or of the money value of this share. The former was a further means of increasing their share, for it would fetch a larger amount of the grain in money terms at the time of the kist payment, when low harvest prices prevailed. The latter, i.e. payment in cash at a price-level higher than the harvest rate, was favoured by the smaller, resident zamindars in remote areas, where the problems and cost of carriage made them all the more eager to avoid the trouble of directly selling their share of the produce. The lowness of post-harvest prices often forced the peasant to hypothecate his crops, which went at far cheaper rates than free crops (312). In some districts like Bakarganj, four kists were fixed instead of the two recognised by Government. If the tenant failed to clear his dues in any of these kists, a "kist-khelapi" interest on the arrears was realised at 25 to 50 and sometimes to the extent of 60% (313). From the peasant's viewpoint, it thus "embodies all the vices of the cash rent system without any of its advantages". (314) This system, resorted to temporarily by the zamindars in the late 18th century only to dispose of their grain during short spells of low agricultural prices, became widely accepted by the mid-19th century. Taylor, Collector of Gaya, went to the extent of stating that "rent is hardly ever, if ever, paid in kind in Bihar", the danabandi system being "in fact a nuggee one of an arbitrary and fluctuating nature, only ostensibly based upon division of crops" (315).

Indeed, the arbitrariness of fixing a price-level higher than the one prevailing, was heightened in cases where the zamindar specified not only the amount but also the type of crop to be given in rent. For instance, it was found during the survey proceedings in North Monghyr in 1899-1904, that in the village of Rani in Teghra thana, the tenants holding an area of 677 bighas on batai for 6 years were forced to execute kabuliyats agreeing to pay mankhap rents @ 5 or 6 maunds per

311. DG, Monghyr, p. 127.
313. SR, Bakarganj Appdx XVIII, p. cx
314. DG, Bhagalpur, p. III.
bigha according to the paseri of the malik's cutcherry, in terms of special crops like chillies, tobacco, wheat and maize. Even if the peasant did not grow these crops, payment was still to be made in their market value, subject to a maximum of Rs. 50 per bigha. The peasant's choice of crops was thus restricted by the landlord. The mankhap kabuliyat of one Daho Paswan, a Dosadh tenant of Rani, clearly illustrates this: "...without written permission of the said maliks, I shall have no power to grow in these lands any other crops than mirchai, wheat, rahar and makai, ... the said maliks shall receive from me 2 maunds mirchai, 1 maund 10 seers wheat, 6 paseris rahar and 1 maund makai year by year. If I fail to deliver these crops at the appointed times, then I shall pay their value at the market rate..." (316)

(iii) The third and most radical change attempted by the landlords was the outright conversion of cash to produce rents in many areas. The move was not unreasoned, for it enabled them to share in the benefits of the rising agricultural prices. It became a distinct feature in the 1890s, when a steady and secular rise in foodgrain prices also became apparent. The produce-rent system further helped them to avoid the various restraints imposed on the enhancement of cash rents, by Act X of 1859 and the Tenancy Act of 1885. Indeed, produce tenancies seldom enjoyed a fixity of rent or security of tenure. In most districts, the idea is prevalent that occupancy rights do not accrue in lands held on produce rents" (317). This belief might have originated in a confusion between two groups of peasants paying rents in kind: the sharecroppers and a section of occupancy raiyats. The fact that the former had no legal or customary rights of occupancy in their land might have encouraged the notion that no peasant paying his rent in produce was entitled to such rights. J.C. Jack, Settlement Officer of Bakarganj, noted during the survey operations in the district between 1900-1908: "Whatever their legal incidents, barga tenancies are locally regarded as tenants-at-will or, in the most advanced areas, as mere agricultural labourers" (318). In fact, the produce-rent under systems like the jaedadi and halhansali in the Kishanganj and Supaul thanas and the "bhushan 'and patwan' rates' in Colgong thana in Bhagalpur, the birahwari in South-east Purnea and the utbandi in Nadia, varied from year to year according to the area or type of crops sown. In these districts, where the sown area was liable to change every year due to floods and fluvial action, 12 years' continuous possession of the same lands was impossible. Hence there was neither any fixity of rents, nor occupancy rights of any kind in these lands, while the annual measurements of the sown area provided an excellent source of threats and bribery for the landlord's amla. Moreover, discriminatory rates on

316. SR, Monghyr (North), 1899-1904, by H. Coupland, Settl. Officer, Bihar, p. 36-37, paras 113-114.
317. DG, Monghyr, p. 125.
the basis of the crops grown, such as the 'patwan' in Bhagalpur, went against section 23 of the Tenancy Act, in curbing the peasant's right to use and cultivate his land as he chose. Systems like the utbandi sharply reduced the value of even 'lakhiraj' lands in Nadia; they would fetch only Rs. 3 or 4 per bigha as against Rs. 50/100 elsewhere, so that the peasant in these regions had little to fall back on, in years of stress (319).

Produce tenancies thus gave the landlords several advantages over the tenants. Hence they tried to convert cash lands into produce tenancies in various ways, as by purchasing occupancy holdings at distress sales and settling them on rents in kind at higher rates; by extending their khas lands in every conceivable way, only to let them out on produce rents; sometimes the nagdi lands were converted to bhaoli and reconverted wholly or partly to nagdi, the second rate of cash rent far exceeding the first.

*Nagdi - bhaoli* disputes

In 1886, the Collector of Patna received complaints about such arbitrary conversions from the raiyats at Kurnowti, the landlords carrying their suits to the High Court. In 1888, serious riots occurred in Barh over nagdi-bhaoli disputes (320). Throughout the whole of South Bhagalpur it was found that conversion of nagdi or cash rents to bhaoli or produce rents was a common occurrence, leading to frequent disputes (321). In 1895-96, there was friction between landlords and tenants in Balasore, "owing to landlords demanding enhanced rent, or substituting rent in kind for money-rent..." (322) In Lohardaga, the issue at stake was the payment of produce rents for upland cultivation (323). In the Gaurnadi and Mehendiganj thanas of Bakarganj, where the bhadraloks predominated, the produce-rent system originated with the increase in the price of rice, since 1870. The bhadralok landlord looked to his tenants to supply rice for his household, and sometimes even set up a trade in paddy. Not only were new lands settled at produce rents, but "in many cases existing money rents were converted arbitrarily into produce rents — thus, if a tenant was in arrears or owed money to his landlord, the debt was not collected by suit, but the tenant was told to pay henceforth in kind..." (324). In Faridpur, it was proved conclusively that "many of the tenants who now held at a rent-in-kind had previously held the same land at a cash rent and were settled raiyats in respect of it". A special enquiry in the thanas of

321. SR, Bhagalpur p 71, para 130.
324. SR, Bakarganj p. 168, para 332.
Pangsa and Baliakandi showed that most of the raiyats had been compelled by their landlords, usually small middlemen, to agree to a conversion to produce rent under threats of eviction, rather than by any process of law. "From the point of view of the cultivator there is no problem in the district so urgent or important as that of produce rent, as the land under produce rent is continually increasing and the dimensions of the problem are continually growing". (325)

The peasants' reaction to the problem came in sporadic acts of resistance and in an increasingly vocal demand for the commutation of produce to cash rents, since the 1890s. The process was stimulated by Section 40 of the Bengal Tenancy Act (1885), which for the first time permitted commutation on applications by the peasants. The zamindars made every effort to frustrate such moves, often with success. For instance, in the Gaurnadi thana of Bakarganj, false suits for 3 years' rent arrears were brought against the peasants who applied for commutation. This move, amounting to the confiscation of their entire crop for 2 successive years, was a direct threat to deter further acts of conversion. Most of the suits were decided in favour of the landlords, and the commutations granted were annulled on the ground that the attestation officers were authorised only to record and not to settle rents. (326) Gradually however, such technical confusions were cleared, and the raiyats began to overcome their initial fear and hesitation. The number of applications increased rapidly, and the Settlement Officer of Patna found that commutation under Section 40 of the Tenancy Act was the "heaviest item" in the case work.

Abwabs

In 1886, the Collector of Gaya notes: "At present the struggle is centred round the bhooli sections (of the Tenancy Act) and what are abwabs, and till these points are definitely settled, a certain amount of friction between landlord and tenant is inevitable" (327). Indeed, the abwabs or cesses cannot be ignored when considering the actual rent burden on the raiyat. In some districts like Purnea they more than doubled the nominal rates, while in Bakarganj they covered 25% of the entire rental. Though the imposition of fresh abwabs was forbidden at the time of the Permanent Settlement, the zamindar persisted in collecting them as he valued the abwab as an assertion of sovereignty over his tenants. Being thus extra-legal in nature, they were not subject to constraints, and hence had an unlimited potential for increase. For this reason the zamindar's agents, too, had a direct interest in realising the abwabs, in which they shared. Yet, though formidable in their total impact, each of these impositions was too small in itself to provoke any organised resistance as in case of a
direct enhancement of rent. Besides, the peasant did not object as strongly to the imposition of an abwab as to a rent enhancement, for the former, unlike the latter, was not formally recognised or legally recoverable, and hence was not considered a permanent addition to his burdens.

Annual levies for the payment of the landlord's collecting staff were universal under the names of tahuri, mamuli, rashami, tahsilans, rajdhuti, pyadgan, etc. Levies for special purposes, as for roads, embankments (khal bandi), bridges (pol khārach), post (dak kharach), markets (bhandari kharach), rent receipts (dakhila kharach), and marriage (sadiana) were realised, besides annual charges such as punya or nazarana, bhet or gifts in kind, and begar or forced labour for a fixed number of days.

The "begar" usually required the peasant to tend the orchards and clear the jungles on the malik's land, to plough his fields, to supply fish and fuel, and to dig or repair tanks and drains. It was very unpopular with the tenants, as it interfered with the work on their own fields during the peak season. Indeed, the "beth-begar" or predial services connected with the land, which prevailed extensively to the south of Hazaribagh in the Chotanagpur Division, became a focal point of dispute between landlords and tenants in the 1890s. As the raiyats pointed out, the custom of 15 days' labour on the landlord's "manjhihas" was levied per family or holding. But, while the landlord's manjhi has gradually expanded with the addition of rajhas, the peasant's holding was being continuously split up into smaller fragments. Hence, the pressure on each unit increased with time, till it became oppressive. The zamindars refused to accept the tenants' demand for commutation of the beth-begar or rakumat into a cash payment, amounting to about Rs. 1-8 annas for 13 days' labour (328). In some areas, however, where the begar was less oppressive, as in the kar mahals of Dhalbhum in Singbhum, such services were commuted to Rs. 2 per hal of land as "betherkshati" (329). In Manbhum, too, bethbegar on the khas lands was gradually reduced.

The abwabs differed in implication from district to district. In Faridpur, Tippera, Pabna, Dacca and Rajshahi they were confined mainly to the annual levies, which even when high were at least certain and calculable, while "the peculiar vice of the chanda, fine and salami is that they are arbitrary, incalculable and an infringement on the liberty of the subject" (330). In Bakarganj, for instance, the chanda or subscription was raised on the flimsiest of pretenses, as for any

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function in the family of the zamindar, his naibs or amlas, for his pilgrimages, pleasure trips and visits to the tahlil cutcherry. (331).

In Purnea, all subscriptions were incorporated into one demand called "babat", i.e. "concerning" or "regarding". It was noted during the attestation in Surjapur: The word 'babat' - (on account of) - by itself is suggestive of untold imposts. The tenant is content to pay babat and what the babat is for, he does not often care to philosophise over... it is babat and simply babat, leaving the unfortunate tenant... to devise the rest" (332). Another lucrative source for raising money was the "salami" amounting in effect to a bribe. The zamindar demanded a salami as the price for his recognition of land sales and transfers. Often the legal heirs of a deceased person were deprived of his land, which was let out to another on receipt of salami. The zamindar's agents, as well as priests and mollahs were chosen from the highest bidders of salami. In addition to these, fines were often collected on the pretext of dispensing justice. For instance, the papers for Mauza Girakhal in Bakarganj show that a certain Nadoo, son of Intoo of Pakshya, was fined Rs. 25 for quarrelling with his step-mother: again, Asakali of Girakhal was fined Rs. 10 for failing to invite the pedas and mridhaas on the occasion of his sister's marriage (333). J. C. Jack, in his Survey Report on Bakarganj, quotes thus from the diary of a landlord on a tour of his estate: "2nd Feb - from 4.10 p.m. the tenants began to come and paid nazar... Retired for the night. God save me from all troubles in the night and bless me for the next morning, so that I may realize money in abundance as miscellaneous receipt" (334).

The abwabs were in effect incorporated into the rent, so that often the peasant, in his ignorance, failed to distinguish between the two. This was specially true of North Bihar, where the peasants had little idea as to the extent of their rights and liabilities in the land. Landlords urged that the tenants having consented to the cesses, which in many cases were recovered with arrears of rent, these should properly be considered part of the rental. But a contract to pay them was obviously void, as the law did not recognise them (335). In Bakarganj, there were numerous instances of the rent being inflated by the addition of various "kharchas". Thus, a peasant holding Khatian number 81 in mauza Patuakhali at an annual rent with cess, of Rs. 43-13-3, signed a kharkhalashi mortgage-deed noting the annual amount payable to the landlord at Rs. 51. Even the Kabuliyyats contained stipulations regarding the payment of sadiana and other dues ("Shadiana subhalabhya gram sharaha diba") (336). Payments of sadiana, chandas, fines etc. were forced by first crediting the money paid for rent

331. Ibid, Appdx VII, p. 1xxxix ; Appdx XVII, p. ciii
332. SR, Purnea p 122, para 376.
333. SR, Bakarganj Appdx XVII, p. cvii.
334. Ibid, p 81, para 197.
335. LRP Nov. 1894 ; Muzaffapur, p. 23, para 79.
against those heads, and later suing the peasant for rent arrears. The dakhila or rent receipt was withheld, till both rents and abwabs were paid up in full. The zamindar could also enforce such payments by social ostracism (samaj-bandh), or by coercion through his agents like the paik, peada, mridha, etc.

**Falling entitlement - level of the average small peasant:**

The pressure of rent was felt more acutely with the fragmentation of peasant holdings into small uneconomic units by the law of succession, the diminishing land : man ratio, the distress-sales of occupancy rights, and the extensive sub-letting of occupancy holdings as ratified by the tenancy legislation of 1859 and 1885. Sub-letting was not explicitly banned even at the level of non-occupancy raiyats and under-raiyats. The increase in subsistence cultivation fostered this trend, for rice, being a heavy-yielding staple like the potato crop in Ireland, required very little in land or outlay. The conditions of Irish culture, i.e. "...the whole of this structure, the minute subdivisions, the closely-packed population existing at the lowest level, the high rents, the frantic competition for land, had been produced by the potato" (337). Similarly, rice-cultivation determined the size and pattern of peasant holdings in Bengal. Due to the high yield of rice, the tendency of the peasant was to eke out a living, however meagre, from a holding which could not otherwise support his family. For instance, in 1888 40% of the peasants in selected areas of Patna, and 60% in Darbhanga were seen to hold less than 4 bighas of land, while the minimum size of a subsistence holding was 7 bighas for an average peasant family of 5 members (338). In Gaya, 48% of the peasants had holdings of 5 bighas, which could not support a cultivator and his family (339). In Dholla in Birbhum, only 1 out of 30 peasant households had lands which could support a family of 3 by local standards (340). The result was a starvation-level entitlement even in normal times, consisting largely of Khesari dal and only one meal a day. (341) Such uneconomic holdings obliged many of the small peasants to supplement their income from land, by working as agricultural labourers.

337. Cecil Woodham-Smith, op. cit., p. 35.
338. Dufferin Report, Com. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. 2nd June 1888, paras 15, 18.
341. Ibid, Com Patna Div. to Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. 2nd June 1888, para 17.
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De-industrialisation and the decline in traditional rural crafts

The growing labour surplus in agriculture could not be absorbed in the rural trades or crafts, as the economics of colonial exploitation checked industrialisation, urbanisation, and capitalist development. Even the linkage effects of jute-production, plantations, and extractive industries were not locally felt. The growth of the jute economy, for instance, fitted neatly with the commercial needs of the British Empire, and "worked against the interests of the bulk of the peasantry through a market mechanism subject to gross imperfections." (342) The limited demand for labour in these new fields could not absorb even a fraction of those displaced by the decline of traditional handicrafts. For instance, in 1892 the total number of workers probably employed in the organised sectors and plantations came to no more than 500,000, which was less than those previously supported by indigenous salt-production alone. (343)

The decline of certain indigenous industries was a most persistent feature in this period. The rudiments of the problem did not go unnoticed in contemporary journals and newspapers. The Statesman noted in its editorial on August 22, 1888: "The weavers can neither employ machinery, nor have they probably the ability to learn its use, or to betake themselves to other fields of labour... The same story is being repeated all over the country... let no one imagine we pay a small price in India for the unquestioned advantages of free trade, since it costs us the exasperation, the despair, and finally the ruin of a large section of the industrial population..."

Decline of cotton-weaving

(i) Indeed, the indigenous cotton industry was almost ruined by the intrusion of machine-made piece-goods from Lancashire and Manchester, which were finer and cheaper than the local manufactures, and had greater variety and range of colour. The lowest price of a locally made dhoti or sari was between Rs. 2 to Rs. 3, while a mill-manufactured dhoti or sari cost only 10 to 12 annas. Cotton weaving also faced the rivalry of the silk industry. Many cotton growers took to mulberry cultivation and cocoon-rearing, and a large number of the Jolas and Jugis were employed in the manufacture of silk and tussar fabrics (344). There was still a local demand for coarse cotton cloth like the gamcha (towel), masari than (cloth for mosquito nets), or pagri cloth for making turbans, etc. among the poorer classes of the population.

342. Asok Sen, op. cit., p. 60.
343. Ibid., p. 72.
especially in tribal tracts like the Santhal Parganas, Chotanagpur, Angul Khondmals or the Garo Hills, where they were preferred to the more finished, but less durable, products of foreign mills. But there was no organised trade in these coarser manufactures, which were limited to those areas where they were in demand. Sometimes they were made on contract as in case of the Santhals, who supplied the weaver with kapas cotton grown in their fields and paid him the wages for his labour annually in grain (345). As many Santhals emigrated to Malda and the jungles of Dinajpur, a demand for coarse cloth developed in these regions (346). Similarly, in Paharpur in the Raj Banaili and Srinagar Estate, the villagers supplied the thread to the weavers, who were paid at a contract rate of 1 pice per yard for a particular type of cloth, 3 to 7 yards of which could be woven in a day by one man (347). However, this limited local demand for coarse cloths, and even the silk industry thriving in certain areas, could not sustain the class of weavers, due to the purely seasonal demand for coarse cloths, the growing attraction of the fine but flimsy imported fabrics sold by the Marwaris in the local bazaars even in backward districts like the Santhal Parganas, the rising cost of production, and the failure to develop subsidiary occupations like spinning or dyeing.

(ii) Some hill races like the Tipperas and Manipuris increased their scope for employment by dyeing homespun yarns of the hill cotton. Sometimes the dyes of the Manipuris were so brilliant as to excite the envy even of leading British dyers like Messrs. Wardle, etc. This, however, was an exception rather than the rule. In Angul and Singhbhum, for instance, there were no professional dyers, the weavers buying dyed yarns. In Singhbhum, the Kols spun two kinds of thread, which were used by the Pan tants in manufacturing coarse cloth; all the other weavers generally used imported thread numbers 10, 12 and 16 for weaving coarse cloth, and number 20 for fine cloth (348). In Hazaribagh, though cotton was grown and collected locally, imported yarn was used for the manufacture of cotton fabrics. "The use in handlooms of home-spun twist is exceedingly rare, for cotton-spinning — .. does not exist in this district". No oil was pressed from the

345. Ibid, April 1898, No. 4, Note on Cotton Industries of Bengal, by Rowland Nogendra Lal Chandra.
348. LRP April 1898, Nos. 5-6, No. 967R, dated Chaibassa, 20th Jan 1897. From the Dept. Com. Singhbhum, to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal. "Note on Cotton Fabrics in the district of Singhbhum", para 3.
cotton seeds, nor was the seed crushed for cake. In Patna, 25 years ago women of small means spun thread from the local cotton, but this industry was "almost extinguished by the importation of cheap thread made by machines". Hence, weaving was the only form of employment relating to the indigenous cotton industry.

(iii) The weaver found work mainly during the four months of the cold weather, when thick, handwoven cloth was much in demand. This coincided with the harvesting season, so that the slack period for the weaver was also that of a minimum demand for field labour, except during the rabi harvest or transplantation of the aman rice. The average monthly earnings of a fully employed weaver could be around Rs. 6 as estimated in Burdwan, and between Rs. 4-8 to Rs. 5 in Singhbhum. Yet, due to such under-utilisation "few weavers are in full work", and it was difficult to estimate their actual earnings.

(iv) Even these few months' work proved unremunerative, for the cost of production had gone up appreciably for the weaver, while the price of cloth could not keep pace with it. In fact the demand and price of cotton fabrics fell, a 5-hath dhoti which cost 5 to 5 1/2 annas 40 years ago in Murshidabad, selling for only 4 annas in 1888. In Angul, the price of an ordinary handloom used by the Pans was about Rs. 5-8, the depreciation on which, along with the cost of repairs and interest on capital, would be about Rs. 1-8 per annum. As the market price of a 16-hath piece of cloth which took about 4 days to weave was Rs. 1-8, minus Rs. 1-2 as the value of the cotton to be exchanged for thread, a weaver's earnings were not much more than 1 anna and 6 pice per day. In Bhagalpur, their earnings were about 2 annas a day. Weavers engaged in the manufacture of silk and tussar fabrics, though better off, were not free from these problems. The tussar weavers of Hasimpur in Midnapur, for instance, formerly turned out one tussar piece for Rs. 5, minus 4 annas for selling the refuse tussar, i.e. Rs. 4-12 net. In 1888, a piece of tussar cloth cost Rs. 6-11, the net cost after deducting 5 annas for the shaddy being Rs. 6-6. But the price of finished tussar, which was also affected by the market for European piece-goods, did not go up in proportion. It sold at Rs. 8 at most, as against Rs. 7 per piece in former times. Considering the

349. Ibid., Nos. 18-19, No. 1474 R, dated Hazaribagh, 1st Feb 1897, From J. L. Herald to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept. Report on Cotton Fabrics, paras 8-12.
350. Ibid., Nos. 68-69, No. 541R, dated Bankipore, 18th June 1897.
352. Ibid., No. I M.A. dated Calcutta, 17th May 1888, From A. Smith, Com. Presi. Div., to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept.
353. Ibid., No. 4T, dated Angul, 12th April 1888, para 19.
354. Ibid., No. 8, dated Bhagalpur, 5th May 1888.
rising cost of production, the net profit of the weaver went down from Rs. 2-4 to Rs. 1-10 per piece, while the cost of living had doubled in the last two decades. Moreover, malarial fever had considerably reduced their working capacity in these areas. Hence, "the weavers cannot save anything; .... Having no capital, they borrow Rs. 20 or Rs. 25 at a time from their mahajans, and by selling cloths repay them gradually" (355).

In the face of this crisis, the community of weavers gradually dwindled. This was most marked in specific areas, as in case of the tussar industry in Bhagalpur, where the number of looms in 1888 was only one half of what it was ten years ago (356). A study in selected areas of Hazaribagh showed that between 1860 to 1896, weaving as an industry ceased to exist in 234 out of 483, i.e. in 48.4% of the weaving villages. During this period, the number of handlooms had dwindled down from 3,340 to 1,013, i.e. by 30.3%. Assuming that the same number of men were employed at each hand-mill throughout the period, the number of weavers should have fallen from 8,650 to 2,920, though in fact only 1,298 were actually employed at the looms in 1896. If the numbers are approximately correct, the loom that supported 2 1/2 persons in 1860 could not support more than 1 1/4 persons in 1896, which amply reflects the miserable condition of the cotton industry at the close of the 19th century (357).

Some of the weavers clung tenaciously to their hereditary profession, while others sought new forms of employment. The process was not easy. As the editor of the Statesman noted on August 22nd, 1888: "The conditions of an almost wholly agricultural country and the force of caste render absolutely impossible any speedy shifting of skill from one employment to another". Yet, even their social standing began to change with the times. The Tanti usually stood higher than the Jugi in the social scale, while the Muslim Jola was placed very low even in his own community. "At the present day, however, the industrial position of all three classes is pretty nearly equal. It is very low, being nearly equivalent to that of a day labourer" (358).

As a sizeable proportion of the weavers took to agriculture and field labour, the resulting pressure on land was acutely felt in many districts. In Midnapur, the Settlement Officer of Bogri and Kesiari noted in April 1888: "The absence of grazing-grounds is due to weavers and other castes who used to follow other professions before, having now taken to agriculture for their subsistence. The margin of cultivation has thus been extended far into the Khas palit lands of the

355. Ibid., Midnapur, 13th April 1888.
356. Ibid., No. 3, 10th April 1888, para 16.
358. Ibid., paras 16-17.
village" (359). In Bhagalpur, the Collector observed about the weavers: "Imported cloth has ruined this industry and ... about half of this class have taken to field labour" (360). In Burdwan, "most of the weaver class supplement their earnings... by working as agriculturists or agricultural day-labourers." As Mr. Oldham, Collector of Burdwan, notes: "... few weavers are in full work; ... But the labour market, with its minimum rate of 10 pice a day all the year round, is open to them". (361).

Other trades and industries:

Of other artisans and small traders in the peasant economy, the potters suffered in many districts due to the replacement of earthenware vessels by brass and bell-metal to a considerable extent. In Nadia, the earthenware 'sanki' for eating rice gave way to brass and bell-metal thalis (362). In Angul, the grant of jagirs to potters declined in the 1880s, "the one great reason being the increased demand for brass vessels". Moreover, in the potter's trade the risk of fire was high, recurring every 5/6 years and causing damages of at least Rs. 20 (363). In Bhagalpur the potter earned only about 1 1/2 to 2 annas a day, which was no more than half of the income of an ordinary village carpenter. In this district the goldsmith was said to get less work than his father did, due to less spare cash among the raiyats (364). Salt manufacture, which was an important industry in the coastal regions of Orissa, as near the Chilka Lake and Devi river, was paralysed by government regulations. Cocoon-rearing and sericulture, which employed a large number of Pans and Haris in Angul, declined due to the extensive reclamation of jungle lands. The asan tree, upon which chiefly the silkworms were reared in this estate, were all but driven into the reserved forest and the silkworm rearers dwindled down to a very small number (365). In Murshidabad, too, the silk industry was passing through a depression during 1886-96, there being frequent silkworm epidemics. Carpenters and blacksmiths were better off, though they usually found difficulty in obtaining work during the 4 months.

359. Dufferin Report, Midnapur, 13th April 1888, From B. Banerjee, Settlement Officer, Bogra and Kesiari, to the Dir. of Land Records and Agriculture.
360. Ibid., No. 3, 10th April 1888, from A. A. Wace, Collector Bhagalpur, to the Com. Bhag. Div., dated Bhagalpur, 7th April 1888, para 16.
361. Ibid., No. 7RG dated Burdwan, 16th April 1888, paras 4, 21.
362. Ibid., No. IMA, dated Calcutta, 17th May 1888, para 64.
363. Ibid., No. 4T, dated Angul, 12th April 1888 from Baboo A. K. Roy, Joint Settlement Officer, to the Dir. of Land Records, Bengal, para 21.
364. Ibid., No. 3, 10th April 1888, from A. A. Wace to the Com., Bhag. Div., dated Bhagalpur, 7th April 1888.
365. Ibid., No. 4T, dated Angul, 12th April 1888, para 23.
from September to December (366). Iron manufacturers were often reduced to starvation, as in Angul, where they could earn no more than 6 pice a day. Naturally, they sought relief by working as day labourers.

IV

Depression in the Labour Market:

Indeed, the mounting pressure of the population on land, together with any fluctuation or depression in the various trades and services in a rural society, immediately caused a surplus in the agricultural labour market, which was open to all. "They (the agricultural labourers) constitute a large body, probably a fourth of the whole population, and their numbers are everywhere recruited from cultivators having holdings too small for their support" (367). Simultaneously, the decline in many industries such as weaving, ivory-carving and salt manufacture, and temporary setbacks in other trades as in those of the potter, goldsmith or cocoon-rearer in specific areas, put further pressure on the land. In fact, "the continual tendency of events has been to turn the people more and more towards agriculture, and less and less to manufacture". (368) In the agrarian sector, not all could acquire or inherit land; hence, they swelled the ranks of the agricultural labourers. Thus, the labour market absorbed and offset the pressure and strains in the peasant economy to a considerable extent. Due to this elasticity and the constantly changing size and pattern of field labour in rural society, agricultural labourers are not recognised as a distinct class in the census returns, and there is no definite information as to their numbers (369).

Factors affecting wage-rates:

(i) Size of surplus labour:

This constant and growing pressure on the agricultural labour market by the small peasants and artisans in distress made for a ready surplus and directly affected wage rates, in keeping with the principles of demand and supply. The enquiry on the lower orders of the population in Bengal, based on detailed district reports, concluded in 1888: "...the pressure of population on natural resources has a decisive influence on the rate at which labour is remunerated throughout the Lower Provinces generally." (370) Thus in the extreme east, where the

366. Ibid., No. 351 R, dated Ranchi, 31st May 1888, para 21. 367. Ibid., No. 87 T-R. From P. Nolan, Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, to the Sec. to the Govt. of India, Rev. + Agri. Dept., para 25.
368. Ibid., No. 109 M, dated Rampur Boaleah, 30th April 1888.
370. Ibid., No. 87 T-R, Darjeeling, 30th June 1888, From P. Nolan to the Sec. to the Govt. of India, Rev. and Agri Dept, para 14.
land was most fertile and labour relatively scarce, their demand was greater and wages were high. The daily wage of an agricultural labourer was about 4 annas in Chittagong, 4 to 6 annas in Bakarganj, and 4 annas and 2 meals (worth another 2 annas) in Khulna. As one moved westward, the pressure on the soil increased, while wage-rates dropped in inverse ratio. They varied between 3 and 4 annas in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Purnea and Malda, coming down to 2-3 annas in Murshidabad and 3 annas in Midnapur. In parts of the Rajshahi and Burdwan Divisions wage rates were stabilised to some extent by the unhealthy climate of the region, which did not permit the number of labourers to rise to a point where they would press too hard on the local resources. In the North Bihar districts of Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and Saran, as well as in Gaya and Patna, they were as low as 5 or 6 pice to 2 annas per day. Further west, in Chotonagpur, a study of selected areas showed an average daily income of no more than 6 pice (371). The comparative lowness of rates in Bihar was widely recognised. In the Commissioner's Report for the Patna Division (1874-75), the Deputy Magistrate of Bihar notes: "For what we pay 6 annas in Eastern Bengal, 8 annas in Calcutta, for that we pay 3 to 4 pice in Behar... The lower classes of labourers, as coolies ploughing in the fields, digging earth, carrying grain, are paid not more than 3 to 4 pice, or 2 1/2 seers of paddy or janara when they are paid in kind, which is generally done" (372). The reason for such low rates was that, except in parts of Champaran, the pressure of the population was excessive in Bihar, ranging between 500 to 750 persons per square mile.

(ii) Social composition of labourers

Yet as John Boxwell, Officiating Commissioner of the Patna Division, observed in 1888, "... we must not trust too much to the calculations from density" (373). The social composition of the population was as important as its volume. A study of selected areas in neighbouring districts like Nadia, Jessore and Khulna showed a considerable disparity in wage-rates, for in north-west Nadia about 1/5 to 1/3 of the population consisted of landless day labourers, while there were few of this class in Satkhira or eastern Jessore. The only day labourers in Jessore were recruited from among the "Bunas" of aboriginal descent, and some low castes like Bagdis and Kahars (374). Even within a single district like Murshidabad some regions like the Bagri and Kalantar in the east suffered more during lean seasons, for they had a labouring population of 30% against only 10 to 15% in the Rarh tract on the west (375). In Bihar, the population was almost wholly agricultural, with a large proportion of small peasants and labourers.

371. Ibid., para 21.
372. Ibid., para 12.
373. Ibid., No. 2&G, Bankipore, 2nd June 1888.
Low-wage pockets usually had a greater concentration of female labourers, unskilled workers or "general labour" without any fixed avocation, as well as tribals and depressed classes, many of whom were bonded labourers working for 1/3 the rate of a free labourer. These were, in fact, the "built-in pressures" in the agricultural labour market, which pulled down the general wage-level (376). The Commissioner of Chotanagpur observed: "In the parts most inhabited by aboriginals they (wage rates) are still very low, and often the wages of one or two members of the family are regarded merely as supplementing the general resources" (377). Like the bonded labourers, female workers were mostly of tribal origin. No women of the ordinary cultivator class in Bengal, including low castes like the Bauris, would work in the fields except under extreme pressure. But in districts like Midnapur and Bankura, where the people were of a semi-aboriginal origin, women were found to husk paddy or carry in the harvest. However, they did not work regularly in the fields as day labourers. These were recruited almost invariably from among migrant tribals like the Nagpur Kols, Dhangars and sometimes, the Santhals (378). Similarly, in the tribal tracts of Manbhum, a study of 157 labouring households showed that there was one female labourer for every two males (379). The tribals also worked as "general labour", who had no specific area of work; they laboured on the fields in the peak seasons and took to road repair, earthwork, construction work, etc., in the lean periods. This fluid nature of their work prevented them from asserting themselves in the labour market, and forced them to accept lower rates (380). In case of bonded labourers like the Kamia, musahar or jan employed by zamindars and affluent raiyats, "the credit basis of the labour was reinforced by caste coercion" (381). However, in Gaya land-control rather than casteism accounted for the maliks' power over the Kamias, who constituted 56% of the agricultural labourers, and 11% of the local rural population in 1898. (382) Even if the money value of the kamia's labour far exceeded the amount originally borrowed by him, the fiction of his debt was kept up and he was paid a meagre amount in coarsest grains, just enough for sustenance. The proportion of bonded labour was high in the tribal areas of Chotanagpur and Bhagalpur. In Palamau the bulk of the people belonged to the labouring classes — Ahars, Dosadhs, Chamars, Bhuiyas, Kahars, Gareris and others of the

377. Dufferin Report, No. 351R, Ranchi, 31st May 1888, para 54. From C. C. Stevens, Com, Chotanagpur Div, to the Sec to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept.
378. Ibid., No. 7RG, Burdwan, 16th April 1888, para 7.
379. Ibid., No. 351R, Ranchi, 31st May 1888, para 7, quoted from the Notes of Mr. Baker, Dept. Com. of Manbhum.
Kamia class (383). In Bhagalpur, an enquiry in 1888 showed that 50% of the labourers in Banka, 60% in Madhipura and 42% in Supaul always worked for one raiyat, presumably in this capacity (384). Debt-labour was widely practised in other regions as well, most notably in Dinajpur, Birbhum, Bankura, Midnapur and Orissa.

(ii) **Level of agricultural development:**

Besides the pressure of population on the soil and the distinctiveness of their social composition, wage-rates were also related to the level of agricultural development in different regions. Indeed, labour conditions varied with the locality, "as the rate of the agricultural labourer's wages is always an index to the degree of prosperity enjoyed by the working classes in a Bengal district" (385). The income level of the farmer determined the wage-rates of the farmhands. Hence, low productivity per acre due to the minuteness of holdings as in Bihar, or primitive methods of agriculture as among the Kols, Pahariyas, Garos and Meches, would basically limit the peasant's income to a very low level. Moreover, in drought-prone, monocrop regions like North Bihar, Bankura or the Chilka tract in Puri, the insecurity in agriculture was reflected in lower wage rates. Contemporary officials like Mr. D.' Oyl clearly recognised the relative instability in the rice-tracts of Bihar: "Seetamarhi appears to be worse off in all respects than the rest of Mozufferpore, just as Madhubani is worse off than the rest of Durbhanga" (386). The varying levels of agricultural prosperity and the disparity in wage rates in the different districts came into sharp focus in crisis years like 1896-97. In famine-prone regions like Nadia and the Chilka tract, people were used to Government relief, and more ready to work at the low famine rates than in well-off districts like Khulna, Jessore, Pabna or Rajshahi. Indeed, the frustration of accepting employment at the relief works on a daily wage of 1 1/4 annas would naturally be much greater in Pabna, where the usual wage was 4 annas, than in Bihar, where it seldom rose beyond 2 annas a day even in years of plenty (387).

(iv) **Seasonality in agricultural employment:**

The district rates as noted by local officials, however, cannot be taken to prevail uniformly during the whole year. Due to the purely seasonal nature of agricultural labour, employment could only be found.

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385. Ibid. No. 87 T-R, Darjeeling, 30th June 1888. From P. Nolan, Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, to the Sec. to the Govt. of India, Rev. and Agri. Dept., para 23.
386. Ibid. No. 286G, Bankipore, 2nd June 1888: quoted by John Boxwell, Offg. Com. Patna Div, to the Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, Rev. Dept.
for a maximum period of 6 to 8 months, so that the yearly average would be much lower. The labourers got almost daily employment during the three months of the rainy season, i.e. from mid-June to September. The bhadoi crop was weeded in July and cut in August and September. Fieldwork was most intensive during the 2 months of the aman harvest, in December and January. Cereals of the rabi harvest were cut within 1 month, in March-April. For the remaining 6 months they did not get daily, or even frequent, employment. Assuming that they could take up various other work during 2 months, the duration of their employment would be for a maximum period of 8 months in the year. At harvest time, however, they earned almost double their usual payments in grain (388).

Conditions differed from region to region. In indigo districts, workers found employment nearly all the year round. Indigo cultivation was labour-intensive, requiring 4 1/2 time as much labour as other crops, an acre under indigo giving employment to 172 labourers, as against 39 persons on an acre under ordinary cultivation. But indigo cultivation shrank greatly at the end of the 19th century. The decline of the industry seriously affected labour wages in districts like Muzaffarpur; for instance, while the number of workers in indigo factories increased from 1891-96 and then began to fall sharply, wages for agricultural labour rose correspondingly till 1896, falling since then from Rs. 4 to Rs. 3. Between 1901-1911, a decrease of more than 1,00,000 acres in indigo cultivation and the closure of indigo factories in South Bihar threw about 50,000 labourers out of employment during June to September (389). The problem of off-season unemployment was naturally more acute in mono-crop than in multi-crop regions having two or three harvests in the year. The plight of exclusively rice-growing tracts like the northern most parts of Bihar running along the Nepal border, the Barind lands in Rajshahi, the Kalantar in Nadia and Murshidabad or the Chilka region in Puri, was reflected in their growing volume of emigration. The labourers there were well off only during the first three months after the harvesting season, and felt the pinch curing the remaining nine months of the year (390). The Collector of Bankura observes: "At the seasons of sowing, transplanting and cutting paddy they are fully employed, but at other times they suffer much for want of employment and are reduced to one meal a day" (391). These busy months did not imply continuous employment, but "clusters of time when work was available." (392)

391. N. S. Alexander, Com. Burdwan Div., to the Sec. to the Bengal Govt., Rev. Dept. No. 7RG, Burdwan, 16th April 1888. From the Report of Mr. Tayler, Collector Bankura, para 31 (b).
Even during the peak seasons in agriculture there were intermittent periods of unemployment or under-utilisation of labour, depending on the vagaries of climate and rainfall, and the natural processes of agricultural production. Though not long in themselves, these gaps between the different field operations added up to a considerable proportion. Moreover, this intra-seasonal unemployment could not be relieved by alternative work, as the labourer would have to be ready at hand to take up the next operation at the most opportune moment.

Mitigating factors:

(i) Alternative employment:

There was no systematic solution to these problems of unemployment and under-employment of labour in agriculture. Sporadic attempts were made to earn from other sources during the lean months, as from fishing, lumbering, ferrying and cutting of leaves (golpatta) for thatching in the Sunderbans, weaving and bamboo-work in the Khondmals, collecting 'ber' fruit, honey and other jungle produce in tribal areas like Chotanagpur and parts of Bhagalpur, or manufacturing salt in Puri and Balasore. In fact, due to the abolition of salt production thousands of men in the coastal regions lost an employment opportunity for 3 to 4 months during the slack season (393). Women supplemented the family income by husking rice, spinning cotton yarn, or collecting and selling snails, shell and firewood.

(ii) Emigration:

Emigration, whether seasonal or permanent, relieved the pressure on land to some extent in many parts of Bihar, Chotanagpur and Orissa. Saran was "the first district in Bengal to come to the point where it cannot maintain its population", so that emigration became a necessity. (394). Both in Saran and Chotanagpur, the steady flow of money remitted by the emigrants helped greatly in sustaining the local population. Emigration exercised a "powerful influence" in the tribal tracts, especially among the Oraons and Mundas in Chotanagpur, who were mobile, industrious and highly valued as labourers in the tea-gardens of Assam, Jalpaiguri and the Dooras. Emigrations to Assam were of a more permanent nature, but from the Dooras about 40,000 people returned every year, bringing back a saving of approximately 1 lakh rupees (395). The Bengal-Nagpur Railway and the coal-mines of Jharia, Raniganj, etc. were also expected to attract a large number of workers. Emigration was practised on a wider range and with far greater effect to the eastern districts generally, where the transplantation and

394. DG. Saran, p. 87.
harvesting of winter-rice absorbed a large amount of immigrant labour. Upcountry men from North Bihar, Chotanagpur, and the Santhal Parganas, as well as labourers from Orissa and the western and central parts of Bengal caused an annual exodus from late November to January into the plush, aman-growing districts of the Dacca, Chittagong and Mymensingh Divisions. The volume of this emigration from west to east was reflected in the statements of the census of 1881, which showed that in Bengal Proper there were 47,548 persons from Saran, 40,536 from Patna, 38,220 from Shahabad, 36,235 from Gaya, 25,481 from Muzaffarpur, 18,167 from Monghyr and 12,758 from Bhagalpur (396). In neighbouring districts where the aus or boro rice predominated, as in Nadia and Satkhira (Khulna) respectively, the small peasants and labourers could reap the local harvest and later emigrate eastwards to participate in the harvesting of the aman rice. Intra-district migrations were also common. In Khulna, for instance, many of the farmers in the north of the district also had abads or large clearings in the Sunderbans in the south. Hence, many cultivators and labourers worked in their home fields during March to May, spent the next three months preparing the land in the Sunderbans, arrived in the north to reap the rice crop which matured earlier than in the south, and again went to the southern abads for a second harvesting season. Work was thus plentiful in Jessore-Khulna. The danger here lay in the fact that scanty rains paralysed all agricultural operations, for the crops not only withered, but were subjected to saline floods.

On the whole, emigration had a limited and temporary effect in relieving the pressure on the agricultural labour market. The migrations eastward would have assumed new dimensions of a more permanent nature with the work of jungle-clearing, which would provide enough employment for migrant labour in the Sunderbans, Chittagong and the extensive wastes of Assam and Burma. The Santhals in particular were renowned for their pioneering efforts in clearing forests and settling down as in Malda, Dinajpur, the barind lands in Rajshahi, or the jungles of Madhupur in Dacca, till the pressure of rent forced them to move to new jungle tracts. But the upcountrymen from the congested Bihar districts proved unsuitable for the work of reclamation, as they could not withstand exposure to swamps and malarial fever (397).

Long-term or permanent attachment of labour.

Labourers worked in the field on a daily, seasonal or yearly basis. The second group would thus be able to avoid intermittent unemployment during the agricultural season, while those working throughout the year, mainly bonded labourers, could hope for protection from off-season unemployment. In fact, the high seasonality of agriculture in south

396. Ibid., Darjeeling, 30th June 1888, para 19, From P. Nolan, to the Sec. to the Govt. of India, Rev. and Agri. Dept.
397. Ibid., para 19.
Bihar accounted largely for the growth of the local Kamia system. As Gyan Prakash notes — "... the land holders need for an assured labour supply during the peak periods of agricultural activity and the labourers' need for support during lean months were combined in the Kamia labor system." (398) The classification of 'day' and 'seasonal' labourers was confusing, in as much as all workers, including seasonal and even bonded labourers, received their wages daily in grain. The distinction lay, rather, in the fact that the duration of employment of a 'day' labourer, which might well be for the whole season, was casual, and not specified clearly by any agreement between the employer and the labourer.

(iv) Payments in grain:

As noted, payment in kind was almost universal, the money value of the grain paid being recorded in calculating wage-rates for the different localities. For instance, an adult male in 1888 received 5 cutcha or 4 pucca seers of unhusked rice in the Banaili and Srinagar Estate in the Santthal Parganas, 2 to 3 seers of rice or cheaper grain in Hazaribagh and Manbhum, 3 seers of dhan in the Kolhan and 4 in Porhat, 3 local seers of grain and 1 seer sattu in Saran, 2- 2 1/2 seers of the coarsest and cheapest grain in Patna, 4 seers of dhan or 5 seers of makai in Muzaffarpur and 5 seers of dhan and a meal in Burdwan. Thus, no direct comparison of rates could be made till the grain payments were converted to their money value according to the varying levels of foodgrain prices in different regions. Almost everywhere, there was a separate standard of rates for the harvesting season, when instead of daily wages, the labourers received a share of the quantity of crops reaped by them. In the Banaili and Srinagar estate, they were given 1/10 of the crop reaped, which came to "about double the amount of their ordinary daily wages". (399) In other parts of Bhagalpur, the rice harvest, 1/16 of the grain in the bhadoi harvest, and payments by the sheaf from the rabi crop, the rate being about double the general wage. Labourers engaged by the year got more liberal terms, receiving 1 out of every 8 or 10 sheafs during the rice harvest (400). In the Sunderbans, the rate was 1 for every 10 or 11 bundles reaped. In Burdwan the Collector, Mr. Oldham, noted in 1888: "... in the height of the field season (from August to December), labour is at a premium and special rates have to be given".

Grain payments benefited the labourer in several ways. The rise in foodgrain prices did not affect them to any great extent, as the quantity of grain paid remained the same, irrespective of prices or

400. A. A. Wace, Collector Bhagalpur, to the Com, Bhagalpur Div. 7th April 1888, para 14.
outturn. It thus served as an insurance against famines, especially for the kamiya, musahar, baramashiya and other bonded labourers, who were to be fed and clothed by their masters throughout the year, even in seasons of drought. Besides being thus protected from the effects of price rise and famine, they could even make a marginal profit from the secular rise in foodgrain prices, to the extent that the surplus grain after consumption could now be sold for a higher price, in order to buy other necessities of life.

Yet, grain payments disguised low wage rates, for they remained static while cash wages went up to some extent, though not in keeping with the rise in prices. In Bihar, wages did not rise for 20 years and more. As to Orissa, O'Mally noted in 1907: "Measured by the quantity of grain given, there does not appear to have been any increase in wages paid to agricultural labourers during the last 30 years". (401) True that the rise in foodgrain prices automatically raised the money value of the payments made in kind. Yet, it should be noted that prices did affect the quality, if not the quantity of the grain paid, for the cheapest and coarsest of grains began to replace those of better variety. Wage rates in the peasant economy were determined by the force of custom and habit, which sought to maintain the status quo, and checked any sharp fluctuations in the income-level of the agricultural labourer. Payments in kind reinforced this tendency, and made it difficult for the labourer to raise his standard of living. The grain given was in most cases hardly enough for consumption for the labourer's family, consisting of 4 to 5 members on an average, so that the question of selling the surplus did not arise at all. Even if there happened to be a surplus at any time, it was almost impossible, in the existing market conditions, for the rural labourer to sell this small amount at a profit. In fact "these grain payments, though they suit the rural economy of the country, are of course the real danger to the population" (402). By supplying ready food for the labourer in normal times, they made him oblivious to the price situation, or the need to provide for lean seasons. As soon as the crop showed signs of failure, the farmer tried to economise as far as possible and many of the labourers were undoubtedly underfed. Gradually, employment opportunities were minimised as agricultural operations shrank considerably: a large number of labourers thus found no work in the face of the impending crisis and rising food prices. The experience of 1896–97 showed that even the kamias were left to drift by their masters, in gross violation of the terms of their contract. In the famine tracts of Bihar, as the Lieutenant Governor notes, "... one can feed himself for an anna a day, but the usual agricultural labour by which landless classes earn wages is mostly at a standstill and they have to resort to relief works to earn that anna" (403).

401. DG, Balasore, 1907, p. 121.
402. A. A. Wace to the Com, Bhagalpur Div., 7th April 1888, para 15.
The agricultural labourer thus lived perpetually on the brink of starvation. Contrary to the conclusion of the Datta Committee Report, his wages did not keep pace with the rising level of prices. Datta dealt only with the rates in money wages, which prevailed in the more developed sectors covering no more than a fringe of the peasant economy in Bengal. He also failed to consider the pressures within the labour market, viz. the effect of lower wages for bonded, "general" and female labour, as well as the seasonal nature of agricultural operations, which naturally pulled down the average daily rates. Datta’s conclusion is thus vitiated by the limited representativeness of his data. Besides, even his table on agricultural real wage in Bengal shows a rise of only 6% between 1891-1901, while prices rose by 18% (404). The Labour Enquiry Commission understated the problem when it wrote in 1896: "... though the price of food has risen very much in recent years, the wages of the labourer have not always varied to the same extent" (405). The per capita availability of foodgrains declined by 9%, while the population rose by 7% in India between 1893-1915 (406). Due to the anomalies in the system of exchange entitlement, as noted above, the effect of this decline was felt most deeply by the agricultural labourer, who was thus least able to withstand any crisis in the peasant economy. "Spending what he earns from day to day, he has very little to pawn or sell in times of distress; he gets no credit from the mahajan; and he is the first to succumb if the crops fail and he cannot get labour" (407).

The peasant society in terms of proneness to famine:

The entitlement pattern in the different economic zones was thus determined by the complexities of credit, rent, trade and labour relations. It is evident that the sections of rural society most prone to famine were the under-raiylats, tenants-at-will, sharecroppers and labourers, especially in tribal regions. The vast and unspecified class of agricultural labourers, in particular, absorbed much of the strains and pressures of rural society, as it provided the main outlet for dispossessed peasants and dislocated craftsmen. The actual cultivator, often distinct from an occupancy raiyat, most keenly felt the real burden of the rent which, along with the decreasing size of his holding, pushed him towards eviction and a bleak future either as landless labourer, or as a bargadar on the land he once held. The rural craftsmen, most notably the weaver, faced with the decline in their

407. DG, Muzaffarour, p. 87.

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respective trades largely as a result of colonial exploitation, further swelled the ranks of the agricultural labourers. This growing surplus and other constraints depressed labour wages to a near-starvation level. Simultaneously, the web of credit-relations so enmeshed the small peasant, artisan and labourer, that they were unable to sell freely their land, assets, produce or labour, which were pledged and lost to the creditor.

The following chapters will show that the famine raged in its greatest intensity in areas with the highest concentration of under-raiyyats and rural labourers, especially in the tribal regions.