CHAPTER FIVE

HOW THE LANDHAURA RIYĀSAT WAS DISSECTED

This chapter tells the story of the kingdom, or riyāsat, of the Khubar Gujars of Landhaura, how it was dismembered and into whose hands the scrap fell. It occupied the extreme northeast of the Doab and included the pilgrimage centre of Haridwar. Before 1803, when the Company wrung the Doab from the Maratha Shindes, it was one of several large agrarian domains in the region. The term ‘estate’, later in common use with the colonial administrators, belongs to the idiom of property rather than to that of agrarian management, clan politics and fiscal rule, which is what was at stake here. In the Doab, during the last decades of the eighteenth century, several big men and one woman, persons of diverse origin and power, administered agrarian portfolios whose contents could be very different, but none of which was restricted to the mere receiving of rents. The revenue grants, or jāgirs, of these grandees were entrusted to them by the Mughal at Delhi. Some of the jāgirdārs were warlords or military employers whose grants were meant for the maintenance of their army contingents. Amongst them the Begam Samru at Sardhana near Merath is best known, but there were others: several Rohilla and islamicised Jat leaders, noblemen connected to the Mughal court at Delhi, and two Sikh sardārs by the names of Gurdat Singh of Ladwa and Bhanga Singh of Bidauli. Then, among the jāgirdārs, there were members of the long-established landed gentry, such as the Saiyid Pirzadas of Ambahta, whose inherited connections with local money dealers and village elites gave them an advantage over most of the Delhi appointees as collectors of rents. A different category of powerful men consisted of peasant clan leaders with even stronger local roots, agrarian managers such as Raja Ram Dayal Singh Gujar of Landhaura, Raja Nain Singh Gujar of Parichhatgarh, Rao Ajit Singh Gujar of Dadri, Rao Ram Dhan Singh Jat of Kachchesar, whose Mughal grants were a recognition of their

1 It is good to keep in mind Sudipta Sen’s warning not to see the regional riyāsats of eighteenth-century India “as states with mutually exclusive territorial jurisdictions.” See his Empire of Free Trade, 26.
nuisance value and their indispensable role in controlling the qazāk gangs of robbers that infested the roads of the Doab.

Though none of these jāgirdārs were just military or exclusively agrarian ‘entrepreneurs, they did not exercise total control of their territorial businesses. Unable to bring in the revenues assigned to them without alliances with locally-entrenched muqaddams or gentry and town-based bankers, they often delegated their fiscal rights to revenue farmers (ijāradārs). During the 1790s, however, the Maratha Shindes, rather than granting jāgirs, organised a system of fiscal management whereby they themselves farmed out the revenues of entire parganas and assigned the proceeds to the colonels of their regiments. The strategy they adopted, in other words, was a more tightly organised ‘military-fiscalist’ one. As a result, a local leader’s or banker’s fortune was to a large extent determined by whether he either succeeded in allying himself with powerful farmers or could operate the market for revenue farming himself. That in turn depended on how well-placed one was in terms of one’s grip on local markets and village muqaddams and how efficiently one made use of one’s own police troops. Here, Nahar Singh and his son Ram Dayal Singh of Landhaura, the foremost of Gujar clan leaders, were at an advantage. The latter, in addition to his inherited territory, as we shall see, took the farm (ijāra) of a number of parganas and integrated them in his riyāsat.2

In the Doab in general, the farming system can be said to have borne fruit. The impression the British had of the region at the time they conquered it was favourable. The Doab was anyway better off than Rohilkhand to the east, where sandy soils made the digging of wells more difficult. Sugar cane, tobacco and cotton, which depend on water, were more easily grown in the Doab. True, from the ruins of extensive buildings, now far into the jungles, it was evident that formerly much more land had been in cultivation and that this decline of agriculture was to be attributed to the oppression of rulers and to the repeated raids of the Sikhs. Many villages were depopulated. The com-

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