THE REVENUE SYSTEM OF THE
NAWABS OF OUDH

BY

JAGDISH RAJ

On 6th February 1856 the Province of Oudh passed into the hands of the British Government. The province, now a part of Uttar Pradesh, was situated in the centre of the great sub-Himalayan Valley, drained by the river Ganges and its tributaries. Under the Nawabs, this country "inclusive of the metropolitan pargana of Lucknow, was divided into eleven Chaklas or districts, viz; Sultanpur, Auldmau, Peratgarh, Pachhimrat, Bainswara, Salon, Ahdganj, Gonda-Bahraich, Sarkar-Khairabad, Sandi and Rasulabad".1)

The greater part of the revenues of the rulers of Oudh was derived from the tax upon land. The Nawab, who since 1819 was recognized by the East India Company as an independent sovereign, claimed a share of the produce of the soil. Those from whom he claimed his share were taluqdaris, community brotherhoods, and individual proprietors. The taluqdaris were intermediaries between the cultivators and the Nawab, and in some cases between the Nawab and a brotherhood or an individual proprietor. But by no means all of the brotherhoods and proprietors came under a taluqdar, and in many cases they paid their revenue direct to the treasury.2)

Where the proprietors or community brotherhoods came under a taluqdar, they as his feudal inferiors had agreed to his claims upon them in order to be secured in the possession of their lands and privileges. In return for protection by their taluqdar they paid him rent and offered military services at call in their own persons and those of their cultiva-

tors. But in spite of this loss of independence to the taluqdar, the village proprietors still retained many old established rights. Far from being mere tenants-at-will with no rights in the soil, these original proprietors of the land held their villages as firmly and enjoyed their privileges as securely as the sovereign who ruled over them all. The rights of these proprietors were protected by Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, appointed Subhadar (Governor) of Oudh in 1720, even though he found a class of powerful taluqdars already established, ever seeking an opportunity to infringe the rights of the cultivators. Saadat Ali Khan’s policy in Oudh was to cherish the peasantry, and to keep in check the encroachments of the larger landholders.

As the control of the Mughal Empire relaxed, the successors of Saadat Ali Khan, once secured in the possession of the province, became indolent, leaving to others the task of revenue collection. When the central Government of the Mughals was strong, the Subhadars of Oudh supervised the work of their subordinates with care. But with the growing weakness of the Mughal Empire, they took less care of the administration of the province. The collectors (chakledars) took full advantage of this and, in return for large bribes, made over the villages of independent holders to neighbouring taluqdars. This increased the hold of the taluqdar, gave him more izzat, and increased his military power. When villages were thus made over to the taluqdars and the revenue was thenceforth collected through them, the internal proprietary rights of the cultivators often remained undisturbed. That is to say, the taluqdar took no more from the proprietors than they had formerly paid to the state.

But once the independence of the proprietors had been taken away, their status was liable to decline stage by stage. Slowly the demand of the taluqdar was raised, leaving only a small portion of the gross rental

1) Ibid.
5) Prestige.