

CHAPTER X.

LAND REVENUE ADMINISTRATION.

THE land revenue system is a very simple one and is practically homogeneous throughout the States. Ownership in the land rests with the State, but the right of occupancy rests with the actual cultivator who, so long as he pays his rents, is left in undisturbed possession. There is little or no subinfeudation but there are a few large estates. Alienation by sale, gift or mortgage by a tenant of his holding is illegal, and subjects both the transferer and transferee to unconditional ejection. The influence of the Mughalbandi districts is, however, observable in the States neighbouring on the Cuttack, Balasore and Puri districts. Such alienation is strictly prohibited and disallowed in the five States transferred from the Central Provinces, the States of Bonai and Gāngpur and those States, such as Baud, Pāl Laharā and Athmallik which are more in touch with Sambalpur than Cuttack; in some of the States such transfers are allowed with the permission of the State authorities, but even in such cases the permission is sparingly given and only after close scrutiny. The Khonds, Binjhāls, Juāngs and Bhuiyās claim to be the real owners of the soil and when questioned "Who are you?" the answer invariably given, however humble in origin and position the member of these races may be, is "I am a zamīndār," or owner of the soil. The wild non-Hinduised Khond has never consented to pay a regular land revenue: this class of Khond is mostly found in Kalāhandī, where a nominal fee is paid for the *padā* or *jhūming* area, and it is paid more as an act of concession than as a rental: of late years the Khonds have been induced in Kalāhandī to pay an increased revenue, but this has been chiefly an amicable arrangement. The Bhuiyās similarly pay a house-tax. There are practically no intermediate rights in the soil, except in the case of service tenures and other beneficiary grants.

In those States which have come from time to time under the administration of Government, regular settlements have been made: in the States formerly known as the Tributary Mahāls of Orissa, settlements are made by means of a local standard pole known as the *dusti padikā* and a rough classification of the

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soil, or on an approximate estimate of the produce of the land. In these States the tenants are more advanced and are now accustomed to the methods of enumeration by *māns* (two-thirds of an acre), *gunths* and *biswās* of their land. In the five States transferred from the Central Provinces regular settlements have been made for many years past and the measurements recorded in acres: the tenants of these parts, however, and also of Gāngpur and Bonai, always denominate the area of their lands by the seed capacity. This system, too, is the common one even in the 17 States formerly known as the Tributary States of Orissa, and in those States the denomination in *māns*, etc., though well known and understood, is practically only used before the State officials or in presenting petitions. The periods of these settlements are generally for 10 to 15 years.

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The rents are now mostly paid in cash and additional contributions at fixed rates, usually of rice, grain, *ghī* (clarified butter) and goats, are levied on the occasions of certain festivals: these payments in kind have in certain States been commuted to cash payments and the tenants have the option of paying the value in cash if they so desire. In the case of villages held by *lākhirāj-dārs* the tenants usually cultivate on the *bhāg* principle, or half division of produce, but this custom is rapidly disappearing. In most of the States supplies (*rasad*) are given free to the Chief and his officials on tour, and this supply is to be regarded as part of the revenue: the system of providing *begāri* or free labour, in return for daily feeding, is also really a revenue asset.

Rates of
assessment.

The revenue paid is supposed to bear some relation to outturn, but the mode of calculation is often crude. The rate per acre for rice lands ranges from Re. 0-9-8 to Rs. 3-14-6 and for miscellaneous crops grown on uplands from Re. 0-2-6 to Re. 1-12-7. The assessments are light and pressure is rarely exercised in collection and the tenants readily obtain suspensions. In all the States the village headmen hold leases or *pattās* in which all payments due are noted and also the lands assigned in the village for village servants, who generally consist of the *chaukidār* (village policeman), water-bearer to supply water to visitors and the *jhānkar*, who is a village factotum, being the priest of the village sylvan gods, watcher and identifier of the boundaries and an assistant *chaukidār*, and a helper to the village headman in rent collection. The land revenue is collected by means of farmers termed variously *gaontias*, *gānjhus*, *sarbarāhkārs*, *pradhāns* and *thikādārs*. The villages are leased to these men for the period of settlement and in the case of villages which have not been regularly settled, the lease is usually for 5 years. These rent

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collectors receive either commission varying from 5 to 15 per cent., or in several of the States have certain service or *jāgīr* lands known as *bhogrā* which go with the office : these lands are nowhere supposed to exceed 20 to 25 per cent. of the total lands of the village and are generally not more than 20 per cent. and usually less. The total *jamā* of the village is taken and the lands held by the farmer are taken as lands paying a rental equivalent to one-fourth of the total *jamā* if the *jāgīr* is allowed at 25 per cent. and so on, in proportion. In large villages these *jāgīr* lands are a great attraction and well-to-do cultivators are eager to take up the *gaontīāhi* of such villages : these lands are known as *bhogrā* and in all the States except Gāngpur are assessed and the *gaontīā* pays for them, but is only too glad to do so, as they are naturally about the best lands in the village. A *salāmi* or bonus is sometimes levied when renewing leases ; there is no fixed rule as to the amount, but it usually does not exceed one year's rental or the arrears due on the village. In some of the States, however, these *bhogrā* lands have disappeared and the *gaontīā* only gets his commission : in such cases it is difficult to obtain good men and collections suffer.

The right of a *gaontīā* is in no wise hereditary ; it emanates entirely from the State and a *gaontīā* cannot transfer by sale, gift or mortgage, his village or his *bhogrā* lands ; if he does so he *ipso facto* loses his village : he may privately partition the *bhogrā* lands amongst members of his family or allow tenants to cultivate them, but all such encumbrances are immediately voided when he ceases to be the *gaontīā*. *Gaontīās* who have held their office for twenty years or have executed substantial improvements in their villages obtain a protected status : that is, they are not ousted if they properly conduct the affairs of the villages, duly collect the rents and perform the other duties they are bound to and do not alienate their *bhogrā* lands or their villages. In cases where the *gaontīā* is *bona-fide* unable to collect rents he receives assistance from the State, but he must first pay in the total demand and then the State takes action on his behalf. The land revenue is a first charge on the land.

In some instances these headmen are the original clearers of the soil, and this class is common in Gāngpur and Bonai, where they are specially identified by the name of *ganjhus* : they generally hold their leases for longer periods than the ordinary *gaontīā* and their villages generally have not been regularly settled and in consequence rentals are lighter.

The only States in which there are zamindāris are Bāmra, Gāngpur, Kalāhandī, Keonjhar, Patnā and Sonpur. In Kalāhandī

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DARIS.

the zamīndārs are members of the Rāj family and obtained their grants originally as maintenance grants. In Patnā and Sonpur the zamīndārs are members of the aboriginal races such as Gonds and Binjhāls: the incidences of their tenures are dealt with in the articles on these States.

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FREE
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Rāj
family
grants.
Other
grants.

Besides the zamīndāris, there are in all States grants to members of the Rāj families known as *khanjā*, *bābuānā* and *khorphoshdāri* grants: all such grants are liable to resumption and in some States regular rules exist whereby the grants gradually become absorbed and assessed to full rates: the other grants are the usual gifts to Brahmins in the shape of *lākhirāj* grants, *debottar* grants (religious), *brahmottar* and *māfi* (free) grants for various reasons: in some States these grants have been freely made to *paiks* (militia) who in former days were wounded or killed fighting for their Chief: such grants usually consist of isolated plots known as *phutkar* and the grants are styled *rakta-phutkar* (blood plots): *paiks* and others hold service lands (*jāgīrs*) for various reasons.