CHAPTER XXII.

SONPUR STATE.

Physical Aspects. The State of Sonpur is situated in 20° 32' and 21° 11' N., and 83° 27' and 84° 16' E. It is bounded on the north by Sambalpur district and a portion of the State of Rairakhol; on the south and south-east by the State of Baud; on the east by the Rairakhol State; and on the west by the State of Patna. The area is 906 square miles, rather more than one-half of which is situated on the right bank of the Mahanadi and the remainder on the left bank. The aspect of the country is flat and slightly undulating; and isolated hills of no great altitude rise abruptly here and there. The soil is, as elsewhere in this part of the Mahanadi valley, poor; it is not alluvial, and contains a considerable proportion of sand. There are no forests of any great extent, and such as exist do not contain any valuable timber. The principal rivers are the Mahanadi which flows through the centre of the State, the Ang, which for part of its course forms the boundary between the States of Patna and Sonpur: the Suktel also crosses the southern portion of the State flowing into the Tel a few miles above the juncture of the Tel with the Mahanadi; the Jirā, an affluent of the Mahanadi, to the north, divides a portion of the State from Sambalpur. The Tel on the south forms the boundary with the State of Baud. The Jirā, the Ang and the Tel are all affluents of the Mahanadi on its right bank. Diamonds are occasionally found in the banks of the Mahanadi and deposits of mica occur in various parts of the State. The average rainfall for the six years from 1902-03 to 1907-08—was 50.53 inches. The climate is similar to that of the Sambalpur district. The headquarters of the State are at Sonpur, 54 miles from Sambalpur, with which it is connected by a good gravelled road.

History. Sonpur was formerly a chiefship subordinate to Patna, but was constituted a separate State by Raja Madhukar Sai of Sambalpur about the year A.D. 1560. Since then it has been counted among the cluster of Garhjat States. It is now attached to the Sambalpur district.

The family is Chauhan Rajput, being an offshoot from the family of the Raja of Sambalpur. Their lineage is traced back
to Madan Gopal, who obtained the State about 300 years ago. He was the son of Madhukar Sai, fourth Raja of Sambalpur. The succession has since continued regularly. The grandfather, Niladhar Singh Deva Bahadur, of the present Chief obtained the title of Raja Bahadur for services to the British Government in the field: Raja Pratap Rudra Singh Deva Bahadur, father of the present Chief, obtained the title of Raja Bahadur in 1898 and the present Chief was given the personal title of Maharaja in 1908. Extensive remains of old buildings in the neighbourhood of the Sonpur town show that in former times the town was more populous and important than at present. Sonpur was evidently colonised by the Hindus at an early period in its history as is shown by the copper-plate inscriptions in Sanskrit written in Kutila character found in the neighbourhood of the town and attributed to the later Gupta Kings of Orissa and the Ganga Kings of Kalinga. Many old fashioned tiled (nantā) wells constructed by Brahmans are found at Sonpur. The emblem of the State is a chakra (discus).

According to the census of 1866 the population numbered the 60,000 souls: in 1901 the population was 169,877 souls. There is one large town and one large village in the State, viz., Sonpur and Binkā, both on the right bank of the Mahanadi, with a population of 8,887 and 3,843 respectively, and 898 ordinary villages. The density of the population is 188 persons to the square mile. The population is classified as follows:—Hindus—males, 82,333, females, 86,648, total 168,981 or 99·17 per cent. of the total population: proportion of males in total Hindus is 48·7 per cent. Musalmans—males, 259, females, 250, total, 509 or 0·30 per cent. of the total population: proportion of males in total Musalmans is 49·1 per cent. Animists—males, 175, females, 208, total, 383 or 0·23 per cent. of the total population. Christians—4. Number of literate persons is 1,758 or 1·03 (males 1·00, females, 0·03) per cent. of the total population. Averages—Villages per square mile, 0·99; persons per village, 179; houses per village, 40·2; houses per square mile, 42·2; persons per house, 4. The remaining 898 villages may be classified as follows:—Village with from two thousand to five thousand inhabitants, 1; villages with from one thousand to two thousand inhabitants, 6; villages with from five hundred to one thousand inhabitants, 36; villages with less than five hundred inhabitants 855.

The non-agricultural castes are Brahmans, Mahantis and Rajputs; and the agricultural castes are Chasās, Kaltaivas or Kolthas, Aghariās and Gonds. In most of the large villages are found
a sprinkling of the artisan classes, with a few weavers of coarse cloths—Telis, Mālis, etc. The population is for the most part agricultural. The principal castes are Gauras or Ahirs, Brahmans, Dumāls, Bhuliās and Kewats: the latter are the boatmen who follow a prosperous livelihood in transporting the surplus produce of the country to Cuttack and Sambalpur. The great-grandfather of the present Chief was a patron of Sanskrit learning and established large colonies of Brahmans.

The Gandās (22,203) constitute a large percentage of the population and as in the Sambalpur district compose the criminal element of the population: they are poor; a certain number of them earn regular employment as field labourers and weavers, but the majority dislike regular labour and eke out an existence by occasional labour and the proceeds of theft.

The Bhuliās (7,527) are the class who weave the tusser cloth for which Soupur is highly reputed; an account of the industry will be found under the head of occupations, manufactures and trade.

The climate of the Soupur State is not unhealthy and, as there are no forests, malarial fever is not rife; the town and large villages are, however, subject to visitations of cholera and occasionally of small-pox. There are dispensaries with accommodation for indoor patients both at Soupur and Binkā: the Medical Officer of the State possesses the qualifications of an Assistant Surgeon and there are two Civil Hospital Assistants in direct charge of the two dispensaries. The number of outdoor patients treated in 1907-08 was 16,433, number of indoor patients treated was 62. Vaccination is carefully attended to and supervised by a Vaccination Inspector and a considerable number of revaccinations are annually performed: in 1907-08 the number of primary vaccinations was 8,237 and number of revaccinations in the same year was 3,606.

The principal crop is rice; the lands are highly cultivated and in good years a considerable quantity of rice and oil-seeds is available for export: pulses, cotton and sugarcane are also largely cultivated. The villages are extensive and prosperous and carry a large agricultural population: excellent reservoirs for irrigation are found in most villages, the total number of tanks being 1,698. The greater area of the State in regard to its agricultural development closely resembles the well cultivated taluq of Bargah in the Sambalpur district.

The State is liable to scarcity, but has but rarely suffered from famine. The only famine of which there is record occurred in 1899-1900. The rainfall was very scanty, being only 36.05
inches and was badly distributed: the rainfall was insufficient to
fill the tanks and in consequence the fields could not be irrigated:
50 per cent. of the rice crop on the first class irrigated lands, 70 per
cent. on second class lands, 85 per cent. on third class and 30 per
cent. of the upland rice crop were lost: winter crops failed to
germinate owing to want of moisture in the soil. Wheat, how-
ever, was sown by about 30 per cent. of the cultivators and this
crop was of very great assistance. The price of rice stood at 20
seers per rupee at the beginning of 1899 but fell in 1900 to 8¾
seers. Relief works were undertaken and kitchens played a
prominent part in the relief given: they were opened at all the
important centres in the State and the zamindars also maintained
kitchens at their headquarters: 17 kitchens in all were opened,
gratuitous relief to respectable poor and taccavi loans to cultivators
and weavers were given: the total amount of loans thus given
was Rs. 27,628 to 8,239 recipients. Regular employment on
works was found for 2,979 persons and the expenditure, including
assistance to the dependents of the workers, amounted on this
account to Rs. 15,323: the number of persons fed at the 17
kitchens was 14,674 at a total cost of Rs. 13,549. The paupers
mostly came from members of the Gandā, Gaura, Sahārā, Dumāl,
Kewat and Khadāl castes.

The assessment is light: the average rates prevailing for rice
lands per acre are first class Re. 1-4, second class Re. 1-2, and third
class Re. 0-12; uplands are assessed at an average rate of 5 annas
per acre. The average rate for sugarcane (barchhā) lands is
Re. 1-12-3 per acre, but first class land for sugarcane pays
in the case of bhogrā Rs. 3-2-2 per acre and rōti Rs. 2-10-0.
Average daily wage given to first, second and third class
mechanical labour is 8 annas, 6 annas and 5 annas or 4 annas
respectively: average wage given to ordinary cooly is 2 annas.
The field labourers in this State are divided as follows:—
(1) Gutis.—These receive from 2 khandis (1 maund) to 2 khandis
10 tambis (1 maund 10 seers) of dhān (unhusked rice) as a
monthly wage. After the harvest they receive from 2 puruṣa
(8 maunds) to 2 puruṣa 4 khandis (10 maunds) annually as
their nistār (yearly reward): in certain cases these are given
pieces of land yielding 2 puruṣa or 2 puruṣa 4 khandis of dhān
instead of the annual payment. They also receive 2 pieces of cloth
worth 8 annas each annually. (2) Khamarīs.—This is a supe-
rior class, and they act as head labourers; they receive 3 khandis
(1 maund 20 seers) as a monthly wage and a yearly nistār
(reward) of 3 puruṣa (12 maunds) of dhān or a piece of land
yielding 3 puruṣa yearly. Other field labourers who are employed
daily, get from 2 to 3 tambis (2 to 3 seers) daily. The average price during the ten years from 1897-98 to 1907-08 of rice, mūga, urid, gram, kulthū, arhar and salt has been 18\(\frac{1}{4}\) seers, 12\(\frac{3}{4}\) seers, 12\(\frac{1}{6}\) seers, 19\(\frac{1}{4}\) seers, 23\(\frac{1}{2}\) seers, 18\(\frac{1}{4}\) seers and 11\(\frac{3}{4}\) seers, respectively.

Of the total population nearly 24th, i.e., 72.7 per cent. live on agriculture: 18.6 per cent. maintain themselves on industry; 0.70 per cent. follow professions for their livelihood: 3.1 per cent. have accepted State, village and personal services and 0.39 per cent. follow commerce. There is a considerable export trade of rice and pulses via the Mahānadi to Cuttaek and Sambalpur. The town of Sonpur and the village of Binkā are important trade marts for the river export trade. At the village of Tarbhā on the Patnā border there is an important trade centre for cart and pack-bullock traffic: this village is the centre on which the export trade from Baud, the Khondmals, Patnā and Kalāhandi concentrates and from there finds its way either to Sonpur or Binkā for shipment on boats along the Mahānadi or travels on by road to Sambalpur. The principal manufacture of the State is the weaving by the Bhuliā caste of tusser cloth of excellent quality: the chief centres of this industry are at Sonpur and Binkā and the latter place is noted for the quality of the cloth turned out, which is only slightly inferior to the best qualities produced at Barpali in the Sambalpur district.

The cultivation of the tusser cocoons is largely carried on in the State, but the great centre for the manufacture of the tusser cloth is at Sonpur. A large population of the caste known as Bhuliās resides at Sonpur and its neighbourhood and carry on a considerable industry. The tusser cloth woven at Sonpur is held in high repute. The caterpillars or kosa feed on the sāhāj or āsan (Terminalia tomentosa) tree and spin their cocoons on the sāl (Shorea robusta) and sima or dhaurā (Lagerstroëmia parvisilera) trees. The cultivation of the caterpillars and the collection of the cocoons are carried on by the Pans or Gandas. The cocoons after collection are dried in the sun for two or three days to kill the chrysalis, but if this be not sufficient the cocoons are boiled in a pot with straw and water. To prepare the cocoons for the removal of the threads, a mixture of ashes and water is prepared and this with some straw is placed in an earthen pot together with cocoons and boiled, 4 pints of water being added for every 300 cocoons placed in the vessel. The cocoons are boiled until they obtain the softness of cotton and emit a peculiar smell: they are then washed in pure water and placed on a bed of wood ashes to absorb the moisture. To wind off the tusser thread to
make the woof yarn the cocoons are placed in an open dish and four or five threads are pulled out from a similar number of cocoons, interlaced in accordance with the thickness of the yarn it is desired to obtain.

The threads are interlaced by twirling them on the left thigh with the flat of the left hand adding a little wood ash to strengthen the strands; the right hand at the same time revolves the reeling machine or natai; this portion of the work is generally done by small girls. When a sufficient quantity of thread has thus been reeled off, it is removed from the reeling machine and kept ready for use as a skein (latā) after being first washed in water. If still stronger yarn is required then the skeins on two reeling machines are spun off on to a larger machine twisting the yarns and uniting them into one in the process. For actual weaving purposes the yarn is wound from the skein on to bobbins by means of a spinning wheel (rahonta) and the bobbins are then placed in the shuttle.

For the preparation of the warp yarn the threads are spun off from seven cocoons: the threads are interlaced in the same manner as in the case of the woof yarn; the yarn thus spun is removed from the reeling machine (natai) and stretched on a frame (jantar) consisting of two flat parallel pieces of wood with pegs along the top of each and the yarn is laced across from opposite pegs: the two blocks of wood are connected below and kept firm by two bars. The warp yarn is then immersed in a pulp made of boiled paddy (i.e., the husks of the rice are not removed before boiling) and covered with ashes and is thus kept for one night: the yarn is finally polished by means of an instrument known as a weaver's key or kunchi. The warp yarn is then ready for use and is set up in the ordinary hand-loom of the country and the woof yarn is passed through it by the shuttle worked by hand.

Brass and bell-metal utensils and idols are also manufactured in this State. There is a small and special trade at Sonpur in the manufacture of cards for a game peculiar to these parts: the cards are small circular discs somewhat larger than a rupee made of tusser lacquered over: the figures on the cards are artistically executed and very finely coloured. The principal exported articles are rice and other food grains, oil-seeds, tusser cloth, cotton, molasses and ghi (clarified butter); and the principal imported articles are mill-made thread piece-goods, salt, brass utensils, kerosene oil, spices, stone and glass wares.

The greater part of the export trade of the State is carried by the Mahanadi and a considerable export of rice and pulses carried on with Cuttack and Sambalpur.
The Tel is comparatively free from obstruction; and during the monsoon months there is some boat traffic from Patna and timber is also floated down from the upper reaches of this river in the Kâlâhandi State.

In the Mahânâdi just opposite Sonepur there are dangerous rapids, which render the navigation difficult. There is a good road, the Cuttack-Sonepur-Sambalpur road on the right bank of the Mahânâdi connecting with Dhamâ in the Sambalpur district and passing through the important village of Binkâ; there are bungalows every ten miles, from Cuttack up to the Baud-Sonepur border: there are also bungalows at Sonepur and Binkâ in the Sonepur State and at Dhamâ. A new road is under construction from Dhamâ on the northern bank of the Mahânâdi, in Sambalpur district, to the border of the State on the northern bank of the river and from there a State road is being constructed to a place opposite to Binkâ and in future the traffic between the State and the Sambalpur district will cross the Mahânâdi at Binkâ, a far easier crossing than at Dhamâ. There is an excellent road on the western border of the State forming the connecting link between Sambalpur, Bargarh and Barpâli in the Sambalpur district and Salebhattâ on the main road to the Patnâ and Kâlâhandi States. There is a rest-house on this road at Dungripâli, in the Sonepur State 12 miles from Barpâli. There is a surface road from Sonepur to Tarbhâ, an important mart on the borders of the Patnâ State. The imperial post runs from Sambalpur to Sonepur and on to Baud: there is a sub-post office at Sonepur and letter-boxes at important villages in the State.

The current land revenue demand in 1907-08, was Rs. 54,837. There are three kists—(1) January, 8 annas, (2) March, 4 annas and (3) June, 4 annas.

The villages are leased out with (1) thikâdârs or gaonîdâs (farmers), (2) garhatiâs, and (3) birtiâs.

Previously to 1887 the villages were put up to auction as regards the bhogrâ lands—service lands of the lessee of the village; the amount bid for the bhogrâ lands gave a right to hold the lease of the village for five years; the amount was paid down in a lump sum. Since 1887, the thikâdârs (farmers or lessees) make annual payments for these bhogrâ lands, the amount assessed previously to 1887 having been divided by five, which is now taken as the annual demand for the bhogrâ lands. The thikâdâr obtains the benefit of all new lands brought under cultivation by the tenants until there is a new settlement. A new settlement is in progress and it is intended to have only two kists; the June kist being unsuitable. In the case of lands which
are abandoned and a new tenant takes them up the thikādār receives a nazārāna (bonus) from the new occupier. The thikādār is not allowed to mortgage or sell his village or his bhogrā lands. All thikādāri villages pay kar (payment in kind) in March, consisting of chāul (rice) and urid.

If a thikādār dies during the period of settlement his son succeeds paying for mutation (dākhil-khārij) according to the rental of the village; he also gives a salāmi (tīkā)—gift—to the Chief and receives a piece of cloth (lāt); if the son is not fit to carry on the village it remains in his name provided a suitable agent is forthcoming.

These people are on the same footing as the thikādārs—except Garhātiās—that the tenants in their villages only pay urid and ghi (clarified butter) as kar (payment in kind) and no chāul (rice). The people of these villages act as guards on the palace in the absence of the Chief; they render less bethī (free labour) in that they do not come into Sonpur to work. They render bethī (free labour) in repairing any thāna or school in their neighbourhood and looking after any road running through their villages; they do not however carry bundles for the Chief or provide transport. They are really the old feudal militia of the State and are known as sipāhi ryots or paiks (State militia); in some of these villages, however, there are two classes of tenants, viz., ordinary tenants and sipāhi tenants; in such cases the ordinary tenants are assessed in all respects in the same way as tenants in thikādāri villages. The garhātiās pay dākhil-khārij or mutation fees.

These tenure-holders are all Brāhmans who received their villages on special terms: in some cases they were, or their ancestors were, the original founder of the villages. At the recent settlement their rents have been slightly increased, except in the cases of those who had mukarrāri pattās—permanently fixed settlements—but these were very few. At the Shrāban Pūrṇimā (July-August) and Paush Pūrṇimā (December-January) these Brāhmans give coconuts and offer the thread to the Chief and at Dasharā come for sixteen days to celebrate the festival at the garh (headquarters). They pay the school-cess and kar (payment in kind) also on a reduced scale.

The tenures given as grants are the usual ones, e.g., bābudnā bābunā, grants to the Chief’s relatives; there are 18 villages held in this way. These grants are usually held rent-free and do not contribute kar (payment in kind), but pay the school-cess. Māfi (free) grants are of the usual kinds.—(1) Debottar (religious), (2) brahmottar (to Brāhmans) and (3) naukrān (service). grants.
No payments in kind (kar) are made by these rent-free villages and tenures, but all pay the school-cess.

Payments in kind are only made by the thikādāri and īgorkati villages and are paid into the Chief’s bhandār (store-house) on three occasions, viz. (1) Nuakhāia.—Small contribution of chaul (rice), mūga, gur (molasses), ghī (clarified butter), curds, and grass for making brooms. These are paid in on the day fixed for eating new rice in the month of September. (2) Dushārā.—On this occasion in the month of September-October ghī (clarified butter), til (sesamum), curds and a goat are given. (3) In Kārtikā (October-November) chaul (rice), mūga, ghī (clarified butter), tarkāri (vegetables) and gur (molasses), are given for the Gopalji temple for the Gobardhan Pūjā. These are paid into the bhandār (store-house) and the temple’s share is made over subsequently; a day is then fixed for feeding the idol and all the Brāhmans in the State.

In this State there are no large zamindāris; there are five small zamindāris, viz., Rāmpur, Kamsara, Barpāli, Sukhā and Panchāra; besides these there are six other zamindāris consisting of one or two villages each. The zamindārs are all Khonds and Binjhāls. The zamindāri of Panchāra was formerly part of the Baud State, but was mortgaged by the Chief of that State to the Sonpur Chief and eventually came into the possession of Sonpur: it lies across the Tel river. These zamindāris pay a takōh (tribute) to the State: this takōh is liable to revision at each settlement: in the two zamindāris, where small forests exist, the zamindārs have been allowed to collect the revenue from license-fees, but the income so derived is taken into account in assessing the takōh.

The relations between the State and the British Government are regulated by the sanad of 1867. The Sonpur Chief has under the sanad the same powers and is liable to the same obligations as the Chiefs of the other States transferred from the Central Provinces to Bengal. The State pays a tribute of Rs. 12,000 to the British Government: the tribute is liable to revision and was last revised in 1909 for a period of thirty years.

The administration of the State is conducted personally by the Chief assisted by a Diwān, Tahsīlādar and Naib Tahsīlādar. The Diwān is the chief executive officer of the State and exercises powers of a Sessions and District Judge, the Chief being the appellate Court: the Tahsīlādar and Naib Tahsīlādar exercise powers of first and second class Magistrates respectively and also exercise jurisdiction in civil suits. The Chief is also ably assisted by his
brothers who serve as Honorary Magistrates and try civil suits. There are two benches also of Honorary Magistrates sitting at Sonpur and Binkā.

The total income of the State in 1907-08 was Rs. 1,54,054.

There are practically no forests in the State, and an attempt has been made on a small scale to reserve and reafforest a few of the small hills. The forest revenue in 1907-08 yielded Rs. 26,251.

Opium is obtained from Sambalpur and gānja is obtained from Nimār: the State does not charge the licensed vendors anything for cost of carriage from Sambalpur. Excise yielded a revenue of Rs. 32,874 in 1907-08. The hide lease of the State is auctioned out, but does not bring in a large sum. On occasions of marriages in the Chief's family a contribution, known as haldi anpatti, is levied; the rate varies from one to four annas per purug of land: it is only levied on the occasion of the marriage of the Chief, the eldest son and eldest daughter and in the case of the deaths of the Rāja or Rāni. The school cess is levied at one anna per rupee: villages under every class of tenure-holder pay the cess, including the māf (rent-free) villages. The zamindārs also pay this school cess at the same rate.

Formerly the various cesses and abwābs on industrial classes were in force, but these have now all been abolished. Also the pichli was levied; this was a tax on bullocks taking goods from the State for sale; the charge was four annas per bullock. These abwābs of pātki and pichli have been abolished.

During the year 1907-08 the number of civil suits for disposal was 840, most of which were of a petty nature, only 16 suits exceeding Rs. 500 in value.

The number of cases reported to the police in the year 1907-08 was 591.

The police force is now entirely under the control of the Chief: formerly the zamindārs entertained and paid for their own police, but since 1904 the force has been made entirely a State force and the zamindārs pay a police takoli or contribution. The Chief's uncle is the Superintendent of Police and he was trained in Sambalpur, where he holds the rank of an Honorary Assistant District Superintendent of Police: the force is in the direct charge of a capable Inspector from the British police. The force consists of 5 Sub-Inspectors, 23 Head-Constables and 149 constables.

There is a good masonry jail at headquarters where the prisoners undergo regular labour and are taught to weave with the fly-shuttle loom. The present jail has accommodation for 83
prisoners. In the year 1907-08 the daily average population was 94.5.

The expenditure on public works, during the year 1907-08, amounted to Rs. 15,247.

There are two municipalities, viz., Sonpur and Binkā: the revenues are entirely raised by imposing an octroi fee similar to that in force in Sambalpur: the octroi collections are annually leased out by the Municipal Commissioners. These two municipalities out of their funds maintain the local dispensary and the roads and bear the expenditure on primary education within the municipal areas and the Sonpur municipality contributes annually Rs. 986 for the town police. The municipalities work well and are much appreciated. The population in 1901 of Sonpur was 8,887 and of Binkā 3,843.

The State takes great interest in education and there is a very fine Middle English school at Sonpur accommodated in a substantial building. In 1907-08 there were 33 schools in the State, of which two were Middle English schools, one Middle Vernacular school, three girls' schools, one Sanskrit tol and two special schools for low caste children. Of the 29 Primary schools, 25 are Upper Primary Schools and 4 Lower Primary Schools. In addition there were 10 chātsāhs (elementary schools) or private institutions with 220 scholars. In 1907-08 the number of children on the roll was 2,117 boys and 471 girls, or 2,588 pupils in all. The State employs a special officer to control and supervise the schools in the interior. In 1907-08 the State spent Rs. 5,810 on education. The great advance and improvement made in the cause of education during recent years is one of the most marked features in the administration of this State.