



The Taluqdars of Awadh

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Abstract:*In Awadh the taluqdars were big landholders. In 1856 at the time of annexation of Awadh by Lord Dalhousie taluqdars were very powerful. They had big forts and their personal armies. They lived like Rajas. Soon after the annexation the British tried to reduce their economic power by taking away several villages from them. Therefore, in the revolt of 1857 taluqdars fought against the British. After 1857 the British realized that it would be impossible for them to rule in Awadh without taluqdars' support. Since 1859 the British started favouring the taluqdar in all kinds of ways. After that taluqdars lived as landlords who were responsible for collecting rent from tenants and paid revenue to the British.*

Key Words: Taluqdars, landholders, British, tenants, exploitation, rent-collectors, Zamindars.

This paper is divided into two parts. First part deals with the origin and historical survey of taluqdars in different states and in second part the status of taluqdars in Awadh during the colonial rule is discussed.

Taluqdar is a composit word. Taaluk or Tallukah or Taluk is derived from the Arabic word which means to hang or depend. The word is also used in Hindi as the Land. Dar is a Persian word which means the holder. The term taluqdar has different meanings in different parts of India. In North India a taluqdar is a great landholder. But in Bengal, the taluqdars were next to the Zamindars in matter of land control and social status; because they were required to pay their revenue to Government through the intermediary of the great Zamindars called Rajas and Maharajas. However, several old taluqdars paid land revenues to the government directly. Taluqdar was a term used for Indian landholders during the Mughal and colonial regime. The Taluqdars were aristocrats who formed the ruling class during the Delhi Sultanate, Bengal Sultanate, Mughal Empire and British times. They were owners of a vast amount of lands and were responsible for collecting land taxes. With the decay of the Mughal power, local Mughal subedars including Saadat Khan, the first Nawab of Awadh, became independent from the Mughal authority. He found a powerful class of taluqdars already well established. He collected his

revenue from them and from many villages which paid the revenue directly into his treasury. As the powers of the Nawabs declined those of the officials and like the chakledars and Nazims (governor, head of district with revenue, executive and judicial powers in pre-British days) and of the taluqdars increased. In course of time the main interest of the Nawabs came to be limited to securing an assured income from the contractors of revenue. The contract system produced a class of professional contractors who had hardly any sympathy with the tenants. They offered high bids for which they more than reimbursed themselves by extorting as much as possible from the cultivators. The chakledar's office, became more or less hereditary, these officers assumed the role of landed barons, because they were permitted to have troops and build forts. They used to force not only the small zamindars and cultivators but also resisted the authority of the Nawabs. The more unsettled conditions grew, because the large numbers of troops were engaged by them. They exacted more from the cultivators for the maintenance of their private armies. In these circumstances the cultivators had no security of tenure or fixity of rent and there were no records of their rights. The chakledars, the taluqdars, and officials of government carved out big estates for themselves. Among the class of taluqdars came to be included hereditary chieftains of clans, tax

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gatherers, moneylenders who purchased the lands of their debtors, court favourites and officers of the Nawabs. There was also a small number of purely zamindari villages which were not subordinate to any taluqdar. Many zamindars, however, had either been dispossessed or reduced to the position of tenants or had accepted subordinate position under a neighbouring taluqdar in exchange for protection. They were hereditary owners of a vast amount of lands. They were responsible for collecting land taxes. Asiya Siddiqi traces the origin of taluqdars to their role as revenue collectors of the Nawab. As she says: 1

... influential landlords were chosen to collect the revenue dues of lands adjacent to their Own estates. Such persons, known as ta'alluqdars or muqarraridars, generally held the position in perpetuity and were given an allowance, or nankar, for the service they performed.

This description is true about the origin of taluqdars but does not exhibit their real powers before annexation. Under the rule of the last Nawab the taluqdars of Awadh became very powerful. They started gaining powers just after the death of Shuja-ud-Daula in 1775. The Nawabs were weakened by both, the British and the taluqdars. The taluqdars were behaving like independent rajas. They had their fortifications, retainers, troops, etc. Referring to the position of taluqdars before annexation, Metcalf points out, "Their estates have been called 'little kingdom,' and the taluqdars as little 'kings' or rajas, were not owners of land but rulers of men."² The subjects in their area had to accept the order of taluqdars as the order given by the kings. After the formal annexation of Awadh, on February 7, 1856, a summary Settlement of revenue was ordered. Settlement officers were directed to settle land revenue with the parties in possession of the land, without any recognition, formal or indirect, of their proprietary rights. Under the first land settlement of 1856 the British tried to curb them economically by taking away nearly half of their villages by introducing a new gentry for these villages. Metcalf points out the reason why the British did what they did in the following words:³

In the eyes of the British these men were not Only potential competitors for dominance In the countryside, but a parasitic and Oppressive class.

The British were certainly not worried about the parasitic and oppressive character of the taluqdars, for they themselves later encouraged them to have these characters. The British wanted to cut them to size. The taluqdars' power was much reduced after annexation. But the real blow to their power came after the failure of the 1857 revolt. As Metcalf says:⁴

They had been decisively defeated in battle and Their homeland was now a conquered country ... taluqdars forts were leveled, and their armed Retainers permanently disbanded.

The British converted the taluqdars into mere agents for revenue collection by abolishing all their kingly powers. Perhaps they were converted to the position which they originally had when they were evolved by the Nawab. The taluqdars lost all their political power; the British were their overlords. Of course the British converted them into the real parasitic class with all kinds of weapons for oppressing the tenants.

The British were responsible for the oppression of tenants in Awadh by their taluqdars after the Revolt of 1857. The majority of tenants were given no rights over cultivated land under the First Oudh Rent Act of 1868 such tenants were called as tenants-at-will. It means a tenant-at-will could retain his land on the will of his taluqdar. Therefore, a large number of tenants -at-will could be evicted by the taluqdars at any time on any excuse. They were also charged high rent by their taluqdars. Other than the rent, tenants also paid several cesses to the taluqdars.⁶ Tenants were forced to pay several cesses, viz., Gorawan (Horse cess on the purchase of estate horses by the taluqdars), Hathiawan (elephant cess for the purchase of elephant by the taluqdars), motrawan (cess for purchasing a motor car by the taluqdars), Nazar Daura, (cess on taluqdars' tour to the villages to collect gifts). Oudh durbars (courts) were organized on the occasions of Dashera and Holi by the taluqdars to collect nazars from the tenants; tenants



had the choice to pay nazar at durbar or pay along with the rent. Neota (invitation cess) was also taken from the tenants. Taluqdars levied litigation charges also on their tenants. For the grazing of animals like cows, buffalos etc., tenants had to pay grazing dues to the taluqdars. On the sale and purchase of their cattles tenants were charged dues by the taluqdars. They also forced their tenants to do begar (unpaid work) for them.

To conclude, the British rulers in Awadh were very much aware of the exploitation of tenants by their taluqdars. But they did not defend tenants against the taluqdars. Therefore, the condition of tenants became acute miserable; it became difficult for them to fulfil their basic needs. Consequently, in the second decade of the twentieth century tenants started organizing themselves against the exploitation of taluqdars which resulted into the famous Awadh peasant movement of 1920-21. During the movement colonial rulers supported the taluqdars and succeeded in suppressing the movement through the imprisonment of tenant leaders. Some

tenants died in the police firing and many were wounded. Sometimes in 1922 most of the tenant leaders were released from jails; they again started organizing tenants against taluqdars and continued their struggle till 1939.

REFERENCES

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2. Metcalf, 'From Raja to Landlord,' p.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
5. Nurul Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals' in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, p. 18.
6. See Majid Hayat Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces - 1918-22*, New Delhi, 1978.
7. See Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt : Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886-1922*, Delhi, 1984.
