Was there an Agrarian Crisis in Mughal North India during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries?

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The question of why empires decline and fall has attracted the attention of historians for centuries. In the case of the Mughal empire there is no event in its history more studied and debated than imperial decline. It riveted the attention of contemporaries and has fascinated historians ever since. From the mid-seventeenth century the Mughal empire began to face inextricable difficulties which ultimately led to its demise as a political entity. After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb the empire was gripped by a crisis defying remedy. As has been regarded by some scholars: 'Whenever we look at declining empires, we notice that their economies are generally faltering,'.[1] Since the economy of the Mughal empire was largely based on revenues from peasant agriculture, it is necessary to investigate whether the crisis of the empire had agrarian underpinnings. Accordingly, this paper is divided into three sections. In the first section we would discuss an outline of the key events that marked the disintegration of the Mughal empire. In the second section various interpretations of imperial decline are examined. In the last section we discuss the prevailing agrarian conditions as reflected in the revenue literature pertaining to the *subas* of Agra and Ajmer during the period of this study.[2]

I

Though Aurangzeb left behind an empire convulsed by social upheavals, the central institutions of Mughal governance were still intact. After his death, in 1707, the ensuing two decades of the eighteenth century witnessed a spate of wars of succession. These wars unleashed a power struggle among the Mughal dynasts and the ruling elites that ultimately proved fatal for the empire. As a result, the unity, cohesiveness and the strength of the Mughal nobility was undermined.[3]

After Aurangzeb's death his three surviving sons fought a war of succession in which Muazzam emerged victorious and began to rule under the name of Bahadur Shah. During his reign factional disputes in the imperial court were intensified. He was harsh towards the Rajput Rajas but was keen to conciliate the Marathas. Though he failed to crush the Sikh uprising, he managed to enlist Jat support in his struggle against the Rajput rulers of Amber and Jodhpur. Nevertheless, Bahadur Shah made cautious departure from the religious policies of Aurangzeb. Prohibitions on Hindus were gradually slackened. However, his regime

witnessed a speedy deterioration in the management of finances.[4] After his death in 1712, another war of succession was fought among Bahadur Shah's sons. Jahandar Shah emerged victorious and captured the throne of Delhi with the support of Zulfiqar Khan, the *mir bakshi* (minister of military contingents and posting of commanders). For the first time, nobles who had supported the defeated princes were punished.[5] Such an act was in violation of Mughal tradition of pardoning the nobles who had opposed the victorious prince. The execution of rival nobles inaugurated a divisive trend in imperial politics. Zulfiqar Khan who was made *wazir* (finance minister) of the empire began to exercise absolute power. In a marked departure from Bahadur Shah's reign, the *wazir* made efforts to bridge the gulf between the Empire, Rajputs and Marathas. As a gesture, *jizya* (poll tax on non-Muslims) was abolished to create a favourable Hindu opinion. We also come across a widespread resort to the practice of *ijara* (revenue-farming) under Jahandar Shah.[6]

However, Zulfiqar Khan's efforts to economise on the fiscal front made him unpopular with a large section of the nobility. Moreover, he began to face some opposition from the Emperor himself. Thus the overall situation within the empire was fraught with mounting difficulties. In these conditions, Farrukh Siyar who had himself crowned in Patna, forged an alliance with the Sayyids of Barah and succeeded in dethroning Jahandar Shah. Immediately Jahandar Shah and Zulfiqar Khan were executed.[7] Other potential rivals were imprisoned and blinded. Clearly, the execution of nobles belonging to the party of the fallen Emperor had become a part of the political culture of the later Mughals. Though Farrukh Siyar was the reigning monarch, power slipped into the hands of Abdullah Khan, the *wazir* and Hussain Ali, the *mir bakshi* of the empire. Though the Sayyid brothers had differences with Farrukh Siyar on many policies, they are accredited to have made efforts to revive the empire on a broad-based footing. In the considered opinion of Satish Chandra: "The Sayyids made a definite break with narrow exclusionist policies, and moved in the direction of establishing a state essentially secular in approach and national in character".[8] On the other hand Farrukh Siyar who was known for the canny veiling of double dealings, promoted two 'carpet knights' to curtail the power of the *wazir* and *mir bakshi*.[9] Soon an armed conflict flared-up between the Emperor and the *wazir*. The Sayyids took the unprecedented step of physically eliminating a Mughal monarch. Subsequently, two young princes were elevated as Emperors, only to die in quick succession.[10] Ultimately, the crown passed on to Muhammad Shah who reigned for more than three decades (1719-48).

Muhammad Shah's rule witnessed a pervasive breakdown of the Mughal political order. He did not possess the necessary competence to restore imperial authority. He merely accomplished the replacement of one faction with another.

As their loyalty to the Emperor was abating, nobles became lukewarm to the

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Empire. Wittingly or unwittingly, he allowed powerful nobles to use imperial offices to fulfil their provincial ambitions.[11] This process ultimately culminated in the emergence of *nawabis* in some Mughal provinces. Between 1722 and 1739, Burhanulmulk and his successor Safdar Jang had carved out the independent *nawabi* of Awadh.[12] The overthrow of Mubaraq Khan from Hyderabad by Nizamulmulk in 1724, marked the rise of the *nizamat* of Hyderabad.[13] In yet another instance Shuja Khan (1727-38) seized power in Bengal from his father-in-law. By 1740 revenues from Bengal stopped coming to Delhi.[14]

These *nawabis* have been termed as 'successor-states'. When we look at the trajectory of the rise of these 'successor-states' a set pattern emerges. First, their founders who were Mughal *jagirdars*, began to disobey imperial *taghir* (transfer) orders. Thereafter, they tended to combine top provincial offices of *subedar* and *diwan*. The coalescence of top provincial offices into one person, paved the way for regional centralization. Having warded off all interference from the imperial capital in provincial administration, the payment of revenues to the Mughal centre was stopped. Progressively, they emerged sovereign in their respective domains. In their origin, none of the 'successor states' was the result of regional assertion.[15] On the contrary, these *nawabis* were the handiwork of those Mughal nobles who successfully manipulated central as well as local politics to their advantage. In a parallel process, the Rajput Rajas of Rajasthan also withdrew from imperial politics and begn to expand their *watan* (hereditary domain) as independent states.[16] It may, however, be emphasized here that despite their attainment of autonomy, the *nawabs* and the *rajas* retained their nominal functions in the Mughal court, if only to seek legitimacy for their newly acquired power.

Many states were also formed by groups of people who were opposed to the Mughal empire. Though resistance to Mughal domination was widespread even during the reign of Aurangzeb, the insurgents had been kept at bay. But during the reign of the later Mughals, revolts of the Sikhs, Jats and Marathas had assumed threatening proportions. By 1735, the Jats had succeeded in carving out the kingdom of Bharatpur near the capital cities of Agra and Delhi.[17] The Marathas who were the principal adversaries of the Mughals had weakened imperial control through 'slow conquest' of many provinces of the empire between 1720 and 1740.[18] After a century long struggle, the Sikhs had completely destroyed Mughal hold in the Punjab; thereby paving the way for the emergence of a Sikh State at Lahore in 1799.[19] Groups of Afghan migrants also established independent states in northern India during the eighteenth century.[20] Elsewhere, in the gaps left by the political fragmentation of the Mughal empire, a large number of lesser states emerged.[21] The emergence of these political entities during the eighteenth century clearly indicates that the Mughal empire was bottled-up. The defeat of the Mughal army at Karnal in 1739 by Nadirshah and the

subsequent plunder of Delhi by the invading army, completely sealed the fate of the empire. Though the empire had perished, the symbolic and legitimizing authority of the Mughal dynasty lingered on.[22]

II

The beginning of a systematic modern historiography of Mughal decline can be traced to the writings of William Irvin and Jadunath Sarkar. In their erudite works both Irvin and Sarkar put forward moral and religious explanations for imperial decline.[23] They attributed the decline of the Mughal empire to the religious policies of Aurangzeb. In their view Aurangzeb's orthodoxy provoked 'Hindu reaction' which weakened the empire. According to them an equal blame was to be shared by the later Mughals for their incompetence and lack of character. However, the decline of the empire cannot be understood in terms of 'Hindu reaction' against Aurangzeb or his successors because the political use of religious slogans was absent in eighteenth century power politics, except for the Sikhs. Neither the Marathas nor the Rajputs put forward the idea of 'Hindu royalty'.[24] The investiture of the Mughal emperor continued to be a major source of legitimacy for the Marathas, Rajputs, Jats and others.

Satish Chandra, an eminent authority on medieval Indian history has argued that the non-functionality of the *jagirdari* system was central to imperial decline.[25] In his view the increasing inability of the Mughal *jagirdars* to resist the growing assertiveness of the *zamindars* and to protect the peasantry, gave an impetus to a crisis which was essentially an interplay of social and administrative factors. The increasing imbalance in the tripartite relationship between the *jagirdars, zamindars* and the peasantry, tended to upset the working of the Mughal *jagir* system at all levels. Chandra's explanation is largely premised upon the growing non-working of the system of 'checks and balances' in the Mughal administration.[26] M.N. Pearson and J.F. Richards in their appraisal of the existing historiography of imperial decline hold a slow loss of orientation in the Mughal army as it wandered deeper into the Dakhin, shadowed by the callow Marathas, as a key factor behind the crisis of the empire. Pearson traces the decline of the Mughal empire to what he calls the Shivaji factor.[27] In a series of military encounters, Shivaji had caused irreparable damage to the moral of the Mughal armies. However, Pearson appears to have over-privileged Shivaji's victories over Afzal Khan and Shaista Khan, as factors behind Mughal decline. Subsequent events do not indicate that the Mughal army was daunted by these encounters. J.F. Richards is of the opinion that political and *jagir* mismanagement by Emperor Aurangzeb led to the creation of an artificial *jagir* crisis and squandering of fiscal resources in the Dakhin.[28] However, Richards' views that there was no *jagirdari* crisis in the Dakhin has been questioned on the basis of more empirical evidence to the contrary.[29] Karen Leonard suggested that

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the 'Great-Firms' played a crucial role in determining the fortunes of the Mughal empire between 1650 and 1750. As soon as the bankers shifted their financial support from the Mughal empire to the post-Mughal states, imperial decline became inevitable.[30] Since the bankers did not play a pivotal role in the politics of the empire, Leonard appears to have overrated their influence in determining the course of events leading to Mughal decline.

Some scholars while giving a comparative account of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal crises, have traced the decline of these empires to societal failure. Hodgson has suggested that after a period of overall efflorescence, the Islamic world was gripped by "social and cultural stalemate"[31] as compared to the burgeoning dynamism of Europe. M. Athar Ali holds "cultural failure" to be the root cause underlying the technological stagnation in the Islamic societies. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards Europe forged ahead while Islamic societies lagged behind in terms of the modernization of warfare and productive forces.[32] However, the comparative stasis of the Islamic world remains a puzzle and still baffles historians. While commenting on the crisis of the Mughal empire, C.A. Bayly has argued that the empire became a "victim of its own success in promoting agricultural and commercial growth".[33] Recently, J.F. Richards has also suggested that the empire fell prey to the prosperity of certain social classes patronized by the Mughals in the heyday of their rule.[34] Both Bayly and Richards have provided an explanation of Mughal decline in sharp opposition to the one propounded by Irfan Habib.

Having unraveled the nuanced working of the Mughal revenue administration, agricultural economy and village society, Habib came to the conclusion that the Mughal empire was struck by an agrarian crisis from mid-seventeenth century onwards. Habib says that the military power of the Mughals was premised on a smooth flow of revenues from the countryside. The flow of taxes was achieved through the system of *jagirs* (territorial assignments) which were divorced from any permanent rights to the land.[35] The peasantry was guaranteed permanent and hereditary occupation of their plots. However, there existed great economic inequality in the villages and the burden of taxes was unevenly shared by the peasants. The state or its assignees always appropriated more than half of peasant output as revenues.[36] The massive fiscal pressure of the Mughal state on the peasantry led to increasing indebtedness in the villages, causing peasant flights.[37] Though the tendency to demand more from the peasant was inherent in the *jagir* system, there was a conflict between the long-term interest of imperial administration and the short-term calculation of *jagirdars*. The imperial policy was to set the revenue demand to approximate to the surplus. But individual *jagirdar*, being aware of his impending transfer after 3 to 4 years was less interested in the development of his *jagir* and more concerned to maximize tax collections from the peasants. Thus "the system of

jagir transfers led inexorably to a reckless exploitation of the peasantry".[38] The increasing burden on the peasantry began to "encroach upon their means of survival".[39] As oppression increased, the number of absconding peasants grew, cultivation declined and peasants took to arms giving birth to rural uprisings of varying intensity. Consequently the empire fell prey to the wrath of an impoverished peasantry.[40]

In an interesting essay Shireen Moosvi has traced the making of an agrarian crisis during the cusp period of 1658-70. In her view a bunch of contributory factors such as climatic, monetory and scarcities were responsible for the making of this crisis.[41] Thus the constitutive elements of an agrarian crisis are located in the periodic transfer of *jagirs* and the sequel of rising level of revenue demand; increasing impoverishment of the peasantry; land desertion and set-back to agriculture.

In the next section we examine the available archival evidence around these issues.

III

The *taghir* or transfer of *jagirs* after short periods was a common administrative practice under the Mughals. Evidence from the region and period of this study proves the prevalence of this practice. For example in pargana Dausa, there were 7 *jagirdars* in succession between 1675 and 1700.[42] Each *jagirdar* had his *jagir* for about 3 years. Similarly, in pargana Malarna as many as 10 successive *jagirdars* are mentioned between 1675 and 1705.[43] On an averge each *jagirdar* had his assignment for about 3 years. In pargana Chatsu about 7 *jagirdars* had their assignments during 1673-1793[44] one after another. Each *jagirdar* appears to have held his *jagir* for nearly 3 years. Between 1681 and 1712 pargana Udai had 4 *jagirdars* in succession; giving an average tenure of 3 years to each.[45] There are other indicators supporting the frequency of *jagir* transfers. Under Aurangzeb, it was a general practice to grant *faujdari* within an assignee's *jagir*.[46] Thus the frequency of a *faujdar*'s transfer would also imply a simultaneous duration of his *jagir*. The time span of a *faujdar*'s appointment was also 3 to 4 years in some key *faujdaris* in the region. For instance between 1685 and 1712 the average span of a *faujdar's* term was 4 years in *chakla* Mewat.[47] During the years 1685-1712, Mathura had 7 *faujdars* each having an approximate term of 4 years.[48] Between 1685 and 1704, the *faujdari* of Chatsu was given to 6 *faujdars* in quick succession.[49] Only a few illustrative cases have been discussed here. In fact, there is much more evidence indicating frequent transfers of *jagirdars* and *faujdars* during the reign of Aurangzeb. Given such a short and unpredictable tenure of their *jagirs*, the assignees might have developed a penchant for making unauthorized fiscal collections from the peasants. The unpopularity of *jagirdars* among peasants usually manifested at the time of *jagir* transfers. The peasants invariably ventilated their hostility

towards the *gumashtas* or revenue collectors of *jagirdars* during the course of *taghir* or transfer. The interregnum between the end of a *jagirdar*'s tenure and the beginning of his successor's term was a breathing period for the peasants. The peasants' attitude towards the revenue collectors of *jagirdars* suddenly changed during this period. A few examples, from among many, are given here. When, in 1666, the *jagir* of parganas Sohna and Kotla was transferred from Mirza Raja Jai Singh to Nawab Zafar Khan, the peasants not only refused to pay revenue arrears to the outgoing *jagirdar* but also pelted stones at his agents.[50] Similarly, when the *jagir* of parganas Ismailpur and Lahsana was transferred to Nawab Zafar Khan, the outgoing *jagirdar* could not sell his grain (collected as revenue) due to peasant hostility.[51] It was reported in 1665 that the migrant peasants of pargana Maujabad were willing to re-settle in the *khalisa* but not in the *jagir* villages.[52] Again it was reported in 1666, that the *sehnas* (watchmen) of *jagirdars* posted in the villages of parganas Khohri, Hasanpur and Kama were making unauthorised collections from the peasants.[53] Meanwhile the news about the transfer of the incumbent *jagirdars* arrived. Peasants began to attack the *sehnas.* In 1695-96 prince Muizuddin had his *jagir* in parganas Tapal and Nuh. When his agent Mirza Sayyid Muhammad went to the villages, the peasants attacked him.[54] Peasants of about 40 villages in pargana Bayana were rebellious (*zortalab*) against Nawab Amir Khan, the incumbent *jagirdar.*[55] When the *jagir* of Sayyid Abdullah Khan was transferred from parganas Rewasa and Kasali, his agents were unable to collect arrears worth Rs 60,000 from the villages.[56] In 1716, the peasants of 22 out of 72 villages of paragna Kuthumbar were rebellious against their *jagirdar.*[57] From these instances it can safely be concluded that *jagir* transfers were frequent and the oppression of the peasantry was directly linked with short and insecure *jagir* tenures.

As the rising level of revenue demand was an important factor in the making of the agrarian crisis, it is pertinent to examine the relevant evidence on this aspect. The revenue literature of the period shows that there was no uniformity of revenue demand from the different strata of the peasantry. The *dastur amals* (revenue schedules) clearly indicate that cultivators with superior rights in land had to part with 25 to 33 per cent of their total produce as land revenue under the *batai* (crop sharing) system.[58] The vast majority of the peasants called *gaveti-palti* had to pay 50 percent as land revenue from their total output.[59] Under the *zabt* (cash) system the *gaveti-paltis* had to pay 40 per cent of their gross produce as land revenue.[60] The holdings (*gharujot*) of the rural gentry were subjected to lower revenue rates even under the *zabt* system.[61] Interestingly, all kinds of cultivators residing in the *qasbas* (towns) were less taxed as compared to the villagers.[62] As the rural gentry and the *qasba* dwellers enjoyed considerable tax shelters, they were well-off and wealthy. If we merely focus our attention on cultivators who enjoyed considerable tax immunities, a picture of prosperity

would emerge. But such an approach would obscure the reality of poverty amidst relative plenty. As the bulk of the revenues were extracted from the *gaveti-paltis*, their existence had become quite precarious.

In addition to the land revenue, the peasants had to pay sundry cesses as cost of assessment and collection of revenues. The remuneration and presentation paid to revenue officials were also collected from the peasants. The net amount of these miscellaneous cesses comes to 30 per cent of the *mal* (land revenue). Altogether, the peasants had to part with 65 per cent under *batai* and 52 per cent under the *zabt* system out of their gross produce.[63] This high plateau of revenue demand was customary and in accordance with the *dasturs* sanctioned by the imperial administration.

Apparently, the peasants began to be subjected to increasing fiscal demands from mid-seventeenth century onwards. In 1645, the peasants of pargana Chatsu were asked to pay a *patwara* cess at the rate of 10 *annas* per 100 rupees. The peasants resisted its payment on the ground that in the past they had never paid it. But the collection of this cess is recorded in the *arsatthas* of Chatsu from 1664 onwards.[64] Obliviously, the peasants had lost their case which was based on an appeal to custom. In 1646, the peasants of Kotla and Bawal were asked to pay an additional cess called *seri* at the rate of 4 *ser* per *man*.[65] The economic condition of the peasants of Malpura and Niwai was dismal owing to heavy taxes and the famine of 1663-64.[66] The entire peasantry of pargana Salawad was asked to pay two fresh taxes, namely, *nyota* and *bhomi* at the rate of one per cent and two per cent of the *mal* respectively. In the same pargana a new tax (*nava sire se lena kiya*) called *sadar-kharach* at the rate of two per cent of the *mal* was imposed in 1691.[67] In 1683, the peasants of Niwai were asked to pay twice the amount of existing *bhom* cess. In the *arsattha* of 1664 of this pargana, the *patwara* and *bhom* cess do not figure.[68] Obviously, both the cesses were fresh demands. The *sehnas* (watchmen) posted in the villages of different *parganas* conventionally used to get *ghughari* as a reward for their work. An additional cess, namely, *sehngi* at the rate of one *ser* per *man* began to be extorted from the peasants.[69] Meanwhile *jizya* at the rate of 4 per cent of the *mal* began to be collected from the cultivators of parganas of the region of this study.[70] In 1693, the peasants of some 40 villages when subjected to a lumpsum levy (*virar*) refused to pay it on the ground that there was no such custom in the pargana.[71] In 1693, the peasants of Toda Bhim complained that the revenue rates mentioned in the *dastur* of the pargana were in excess to the customary limit.[72] There are many more instances of fresh fiscal demands being made from the peasants. According to an *arzdasht*, the peasants of eight parganas under different *jagirdars*, complained about their bleak economic condition due to the heavy burden of revenue demand. They gave the example of village Akahera in pargana Rinsi in order to highlight their terrible plight. The peasants of this village produced 16,000 *mans* of grain in the *kharif*

season of 1665. Out of this gross produce, the peasants paid 8,000 *mans* to the *jagirdar* as land revenue (*mal*). From the remaining 8,000 *mans*, the peasants paid other cesses which totalled 4,500 *mans*. They were left with 3,500 *mans* only.[73] These parganas were Rinsi, Mundawar, Dadri and Behrore in the *jagir* of Raja Bishan Singh; Faridabad and Sohna in the *jagir* of Nawab Zafar Khan; Pilgawa in the *jagir* or Murtaza Khan and two parganas in the *jagir* of Raja Jaswant Singh. It may be noted that most of these parganas later became the centre of the Jat revolts. These figures clearly show that the peasants had paid 78 per cent out of their total output as revenues to the *jagirdar*. In the revenue literature of the period, there is a clear official recognition of the widening ambit of poverty among peasants. For example the *amil* of pargana Bahatri reported in 1698 about *sakimi* or financial weakness among peasants.[74] The *amil* of Ghazi-ka-Thana also reported about the presence of *nadar asami* i.e. indigent peasants, in his pargana.[75] Similarly, the *amil* of Pahari also recorded widespread *nadari* or indigence in large number of villages of the pargana, in 1724 and 1743.[76] There are many reports from other parganas, conveying the presence of *zabun gaon* or ruined villages and *dudali raiyat* or under-nourished peasants.[77] Altogether, a stark reality of increasing impoverishment of peasants emerges from a close perusal of the relevant documents. High taxation (*ghani habub)* was the root cause of peasant poverty. Surprisingly, there is a wholesale denial of the existence of poverty among peasants in the 'revisionist' historiography of imperial crisis in other *subas* of the empire.[78]

Peasant migrations were a normal feature of the agrarian life in medieval India. However, the growing phenomena of land desertion by peasants during the period under study is quite striking. At times, famines initiated movements of population. But excessive revenue demand by the *jagirdars* and the peasants' inability to bear the fiscal pressure, appears to have been the main factor behind peasant mobility. Some instances of land desertion are discussed here in order to understand this aspect of agrarian life. Reports of large scale migration of peasants started pouring in from 1660s and continued up to 1730s without any let-up. In 1666 many villages were deserted in pargana Khohri.[79] Nearly 62 out of 321 villages of pargana Bahatri were totally deserted in 1697.[80] Malarna consisted of 132 villages of which the number of deserted villages in the pargana was 52 in 1695; 63 in 1697 and 50 in 1699.[81] This trend continued up to 1703 when only 50 villages of the pargana were left populated and the remaining villages were totally deserted.[82] Many villages of pargana Tonk remained deserted for about 10 years.[83] About 27 villages out of 342 of Khohri remained deserted each year between 1711 and 1735.[84] Between 1716 and 1743 nearly 30 per cent villages of Pahari remained deserted every year.[85] In the first three decades of the eighteenth century, 16 to 18 villages out 143 remained deserted each year in pargana Hindaun.[86] A similar picture of deserted villages emerges from the revenue

documents of pargana Udai.[87] From a close look at the entries made in the *arsatthas,* it becomes evident that the desertion of villages by peasants was the result of abysmal mass poverty.

An increasing number of fugitive peasants from land is itself suggestive of declining agriculture. Besides the phenomenon of village desertion, a variety of other area statistics also indicate growing signs of sluggishness in agriculture in the region. For example, the area figures of Antela Bhabra for the years 1649-1708 show that 65.05 per cent land of the pargana was arable. However, the extent of actually cultivated land remained 50 per cent of the total cultivable area. The average cultivated area during 1649-63 was 33.24 per cent of its arable.[88] Somehow, the size of the cultivated area contracted to 25.03 per cent of its arable during the last decade of Aurangzeb's reign.[89] Between 1704 and 1713, *tappa* (division of a pargana) Rini of pargana Bahatri also witnessed declining levels of agricultural production. The extent of cultivation in this *tappa* remained less than 50 per cent of its arable which was as large as 85.41 per cent of its total measured area.[90] Similarly, in pargana Punkhar, the extent of cultivation was 67.80 per cent of its cultivable area in 1730. After ten-years the extent of cultivation declined to 58.24 per cent of its arable land.[91] A similar decline of agriculture is observable in parganas Bhusawar and Sonkhar of *sarkar* Agra.[92] Despite the availability of an impressive size of cultivable area in different parganas, nearly 40 to 50 per cent of the arable land remained uncultivated. The fall in agricultural production was more marked in villages than in *qasbas* which enjoyed substantial tax protection.[93] Consequently, peasant unrest also remained confined to the countryside. The period witnessed peasant revolts of varying intensity leading to the erosion of Mughal hold in the region.[94]

To sum up, the structural basis of peasant poverty can be traced to the everyday working of imperial administration. Though the tangle of material forces at play was quite complex, a close look into the socio-economic structures clearly indicates that short *jagir* tenures and the sequel of high taxation, land desertion, agricultural decline and peasant unrest, were interrelated features. The 'apparatus of the empire' which was responsible for initiating an endless process of raising revenue demand, was the first to feel the tremor of its diminishing income.[95] Eventually, the empire was ruined. It can, therefore, be argued that a disturbed peasant economy was at the root of the political crisis of the Mughal empire.

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Notes

1 Carlo M. Cipolla (ed.), *The Economic Decline of Empires*, London, Mathuen & Co. Ltd., 1970, p. 1.

2 This paper is largely based on original village level revenue records and a variety of reportage of the period. These records are *arsatthas, dastur amals, arzdashts, taqsim dahsala* and Amber records. *Arsatthas* provide information about crucial aspects of the agrarian economy of each village. *Arzdashts* were supplications written by *amils, faujdars* etc. to the Amber ruler. Each mention the prevailing social, economic and political conditions of the place of its origin. *Dastur amals* are revenue schedules in which revenue rates are written. *Taqsim dahsalas* are documents where detailed area statistics are recorded. Amber records are regular reports about the socio-economic and political conditions in the parganas. All these documents have been classified and preserved in the Jaipur Historical Section of the Rajasthan State Archives at Bikaner.

3 Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*, Delhi, Oxford University Press (OUP), 2002, pp. 49-60.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 70-99.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

6 Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India, Awadh and the Punjab*, 1707-48, Delhi, OUP, 1986, p. 39. Alam opines that *ijara* 'reduced the magnitude of the problems of the *jagirdar*'". However, the practice of *ijara* had become the 'source of great oppression' of the peasantry. For the latter view see Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, Second Revised Edition, Delhi, OUP, p. 328.

7 Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 136.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 150, Mir Jumla and Khan-i-Dauran were promoted to counter the Sayyids,

10 Rafi'ud Darjat and Rafi-ud-Daulah were Emperors for short periods.

11 Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, pp. 221-22 and Muzaffar Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 204 and 243-44.

12 Muzaffar Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 204-42.

13 Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 211.

14 M. Athar Ali, 'The Passing of Empire: The Mughal Case', *Modern Asian Studies (MAS)*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1975, pp. 386-96.

15 Regionalization of imperial administrative functionaries has been a topic of lively debate among scholars. See Chetan Singh, 'Centre and Periphery in the Mughal State: the Case of Seventeenth Century Punjab', *MAS*, 22 (2), 1998, pp. 299-318 and M. Athar Ali, 'The Mughal Polity: a Critique of 'revisionist' Approaches', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 52nd session, Delhi, 1992, pp. 309-10.

16 VS Bhatnagar, *Life and Times of Sawai Jai Singh*: 1688-1743 Delhi, Impex India,

1974; S.P. Gupta, *The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan* (c. 1650-1750), Delhi, Manohar, 1986 and Dilbagh Singh, *The State Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthn in the Eighteenth Century*, Delhi, Manohar, 1990.

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27 M.N. Pearson, 'Shivaji and the Decline of the Mughal Empire', *Journal of Asian Studies (JAS)*, Vol. XXXV (2), 1976, pp. 221-35.

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33 C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World* 1780-1830, London, Longman, 1989, p. 29.

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35 Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* 1556-1707, Second Revised Edition, (First published in 1963), Delhi, OUP, 1999, pp. 365-66.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 230-35.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 377.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 369.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 369.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 364-405.

41 Shireen Moosvi, 'Scarcities, Prices and Exploitation: The Agrarian Crisis 1658-70', *Studies in History*, I.I. n.s., 1985, pp. 45-55.

42 *Jagirdars'* names: Prince Kam Baksh, Prince Bedar Bakht, Nawab Bahadur Khan, Bishan Singh, Diwan Mir Khan. Both Kam Baksh and Bishan Singh held their *jagirs* twice.

43 *Jagirdars'* names: Prince Bedar Bakht, Bishan Singh, Sayyid Hussain Ali, Nawab Baharmad Khan, Prince Ajam, Mirza Khairach, Prince Shah Alam. Bishan Singh was assigned Malarna thrice at different intervals.

44 Mirza Laskari; Prince Shah Alam; Rohilla; Askari and many other unnamed imperial *mansabdars* are mentioned having *jagirs* in Chatsu. See Amber records dt. Asoj Vadi 7, VS 1751/1694, Asoj Sudi 8, VS 1754/1697, Savan Vadi 14, VS 1759/1702 and Kati Vadi 14, VS 1760/1703.

45 Dindar Khan, Noor Muhammad and the Kachhwaha Raja who had this *jagir* twice.

46 Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 339.

47 *Faujdars'* names: Nawab Shukrullah Khan, Sayyid Wajihuddin Khan, Baqi Khan, Safi Khan, Mukhtiar Khan, Itqad Khan and Sayyid Jaimal. Both Baqi Khan and Shukrullah Khan were twice *faujdars* at different intervals.

48 *Faujdars'* names: Mehrab Khan, Nawab Mukhtar Khan (twice), Nawab Mir Khan, Ahmad Said Khan, Mir Qasim, Kachhwaha Raja and brother of Azam Khan.

49 *Faujdars'* names: Rashid Khan, Sayyid Isaf, Mirza Sikandar Beg, Maqsud Beg, Rustam Khan and Abdul Rahim.

50 Amber record, dt. Asoj vadi 11, Vikram Samvat (VS), 1723/1666.

51 Amber record, dt. Asoj vadi 10, VS 1723/1666.

52 Amber record, dt. Fagun sudi 9, VS 1723/1666.

53 Amber record, dt Vaisakh vadi 14, VS 1723/1666.

54 *Arzdasht* of Ram Chand to Bishan Singh, dt. Chet sudi 10, VS 1752/1695.

55 *Arzdasht* of Todarmal to Bishan Singh, dt. Fagun vadi 13, VS 1752/1695.

56 *Arzdasht* of Ram Chand to Bishan Singh dt. Kati vadi 14, VS 1754/1697.

57 *Arsattha* pargana Kuthumbar, (*kharif*) VS 1773/1716.

58 *Dastur amals* pargana Khohri AH 1049-50/1642; pargana Chatsu VS 1769/1712; pargana Antela Bhabara VS 1784/1727; pargana Sonkhar VS 1773/1716 and pargana Gijgarh VS 1794/1737.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Arsattha* pargana Malarna, VS 1771/1714.

61 For instance the *zabt* rate on per *bigha* of cotton cultivation was Rs 2 and Rs 1.50 on the peasants and *qanungos* respectively. On sugarcane cultivation the peasants had to pay 4-14 rupees per *bigha* whereas the *qanungo* paid only Rs. 3-75 per *bigha*. See *Dastur amal* pargana Udai, *sarkar* and *suba* Akbarabad (Agra), VS 1771/1714.

62 R.P. Rana, *Rebels to Rulers*, pp. 77-78. The evidence of discriminatory imposition of taxes on the *qasbas* and villages and the peasants and gentry, is overwhelming.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.

64 *Arzdasht* dt. Vaisakh sudi 12, VS 1702/1645 and *arsattha* pargana Chatsu, VS 1721/1664.

65 *Arzdasht* dt. Jeth vadi 10, VS 1701/1646.

66 *Arzdasht*, dt. Asadh sudi 2, VS 1721/1664.

67 *Arsattha* pargana Salawad and Gudha, *sarkar*, Agra, VS 1768/1691.

68 *Arsattha* pargana Niwai, VS 1721/1664 and *Arzdasht* dt Jeth sudi 12, VS 1740/1683.

69 *Arzdasht*, dt. Sawan vadi 2, VS 1721/1664.

70 *Arzdasht*, dt. Jeth sudi 12, VS 1740/1683. The imposition of *jizya* on the non-Muslims by Aurangzeb in 1679 was 'an important increase in the magnitude of rural taxation'. See Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 285.

71 *Arzdasht*, dt. Chet sudi 4, VS 1750/1693.

72 *Arzdasht*, dt. Sawan vadi 13, VS 1750/1693.

73 *Arzdasht* dt. Vaisakh vadi 13, VS 1722/1665.

74 *Arzdasht* dt., Posh vadi 9, VS 1755/1698.

75 *Arzdasht* dt. Kati vadi 6, VS 1751/1694.

76 *Arsatthas* pargana Pahari, VS 1781 and 1800/1743.

77 *Arzdashts* dt., Asadh sudi 14, VS 1760/1703 and Posh vadi 9, VS 1755/1698.

78 See C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*, 1770-1870, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire* and 'Eastern India in the Early Eighteenth-century "Crisis": Some Evidence from Bihar', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* (IESHR), XXVIII, 1991, pp. 43-71.

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79 *Arsattha* pargana Khohri, VS 1723/1666.

80 *Arsattha* pargana Bahatri, VS 1754/1697.

81 *Arsatthas* pargana Malarna, VS 1752/1695; 1754/1695 and 1756/1699.

82 *Arzdasht* dt., Kati sudi 14, VS 1760/1703.

83 Amber record dt. Asadh sudi 13, VS 1740/1683.

84 See R.P. Rana, *Rebels to Rulers*, p. 35.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

86 *Ibid., p. 36.*

87 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

88 *Taqsim Pandrehsala*, pargana Antela Bhabhra; *sarkar* Alwar, VS 1706-1720/1649-63.

89 *Taqsim Dahsala*, pargana Antela Bhabhra, VS 1756-65/1699-1708.

90 *Taqsim Dahsala*, pargana Bahatri, VS 1761-70/1704-13.

91 *Taqsim Dahsala*, pargana Punkhar, VS 1787-98/1730-41.

92 *Haqiqati Gaon* Pali, pargana Sonkhar VS 1792-1802/1735-45 and *Haqiqati Gaon* Balupura, pargana Kuthumbar VS 1743-1802/1735-45.

93 R.P. Rana, *Rebels to Rulers*, pp. 77-78.

94 R.P. Rana, 'Agrarian Revolts in Northern India during the late 17th and early 18th centuries', *IESHR*, vol. 18, 3-4, 1981, pp. 287-326.

95 For example in 1694 Raja Bishan Singh failed to collect Rs 2,41,609 out of Rs 4,09,917 as revenues from his *jagir* in pargana Kol near Agra. Similarly, Nawab Mukhtar Khan was unable to collect Rs. 1,80,000 as revenues from his *jagir* in pargana Nagar. For more details about the declining income of *jagirdars*, see R.P. *Rebels to Rulers*, pp. 165-66.