



**A STUDY OF SOURCE MATERIAL OF COLONIAL ASSESSMENT  
OF LAND REVENUE IN BUNDELKHAND REGION**

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**Abstract:**

Bundelkhand has a Glorious and turbulent past. it has been in the limelight of Indian history Since ancient times because of its Strategic geographical position. This region is a watershed between the northern and Southern half of the sub continent. Parts of Bundelkhand came under the British administration in the early 19th century. They included Jhansi, Jalaun, Banda and Hamirpur. The revenue Settlements made in these territories from 1804 to 1947, is the subject, under present study. The absence of Original source material makes it difficult to analyse the revenue Settlements in the earlier years. The difficulty was faced by early settlements officers who had to prepare fresh records after the establishment of peace and order in 1858. In order to have clear perspective of the subject it is essential to bear in mind the System prevalent in the state, prior to the advent of the British era. In the late 18th century, the political and economic Situation was made complex with the breaking down of the Mughal rule. The emergence of splinter states and the inability of the central authority to continue a strong administration had adverse effects on the agrarian economy of Bundelkhand.

**Key Words:** Settlements, *Khasra*, *Khatauni*, *Intekhab*, Bundelkhand

**Introduction:**

Under the Mughals, a systematic land revenue System had been evolved and the revenue demand varied according to the produce of the land. The peasant was not subjected to tyranny as far as revenue extraction was concerned. But with the decline of the Mughal administration, the 'zabti' system, that was the regular mode of assessment which had developed under Akbar) of assessment, gave way to a summary manner of assessment resulting in varying revenue demands. Agrarian disturbances gradually mounted. The 'contracts revenue System' was also being replaced. The amount of revenue from land

was declining, new zamindars and Proprietors of land were being created. Villages were depopulated and agriculture was in a pathetic condition. The Marathas who wielded authority in the region, displayed “incompetent indifference” and their only interest was to collect whatever revenue they could<sup>6</sup>. Interest in Promotion of agriculture was devoid in their attitude towards land.

The most important question was that, of the position of cultivators in the pre-British era, where the former contributed in the paying of revenue but this did not signify his right in the soil. The establishment of British rule brought significant changes in the region. In the initial years the main motive of the East India Company in dealing with territories that fell into its grasp was to exact large revenue as quickly as possible. Consequently, land revenue settlements were conducted with the landed aristocracy, but this did not prove economically beneficial. The English then turned to the peasant proprietors to achieve their goal of rapid revenue accumulation. In pursuance of this, they endeavoured to promote agriculture through law and administration, but the problem facing them in these initial years was the lack of an agricultural policy. The British then sought to evolve a policy which would harmonize existing tradition and customs with their own interests, for a smooth functioning of the revenue settlements. Factors such as vagaries of weather, the peculiarities of bhaichara tenure which caused friction among co-sharers, fall in agricultural prices and the question of legality of new owners were pertinent issues in these new revenue settlements. Following the imposition of these settlements, a crisis was created, which was grave in nature. The question is whether this crisis which occurred after the imposition of the settlements was a consequence of the over assessment pure and simple, or whether over assessment was only apparent and behind it lay concealed, certain economic and other factors which made the pressure of assessment upon the people an intolerable one<sup>7</sup>.

The early settlements of 1815-16 to 1819-20 considerably increased the revenue, but this pressure on land was further aggravated by the factors mentioned earlier. The high assessment of Waring, Erskine and later of Cadell created hardships for the people and brought severe strain upon agriculturists. All these found expression in unrealistic arrears and a declining 'Jama' The

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<sup>6</sup> Singh, Purushottam. “CHARACTERISTICS OF GAJĀNTAK SHIVA AND BHAIRAVI AT KĀLINJER FORT: A STUDY OF TANTRIC TRADITION OF CENTRAL INDIA.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 80, 2019, pp. 1070–76. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27192962>. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Jenkinson, E.G. Report on the Settlement of Jhansi. N.W.P. Allahabad: Govt. Press, 1871. P.6., Sarkar, J.N. Fall of the Hugal Empire. Vol. III. Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1952. 2nd ed. p.44.

Board of Revenue offered explanations of the Situation in Bundelkhand by Stating that if the situation in Bundelkhand had: been otherwise, the region would have been in four position to pay the full assessment. Arguments they put forth to justify their course of actions, were that, towards the end of a settlement, zamindars had a tendency to encourage the decline of cultivation in order to obtain a reduction of the jama in a new settlement. But the question is that, if that was So, then why did innumerable Zamindars have to see that their 'estates' were managed or handed over to revenue farmers? In fact the Board did not recognise the economic reasons combined with factors such as the peculiarity of tenure, weather etc., as responsible for the crisis in Bundelkhand. After consideration of local reports so was acknowledged that the high pressure of Jama was detrimental for agricultural interests and subsequently, accommodations were made for its reduction.

In the post 1857 period when regular settlements were introduced, the district fared no better. Revision at Settlements became imminent and no settlements could run its full duration. Consequently, the Government introduced the fluctuating Settlements in the light of the conditions which emerged. Under the new administration, the position of cultivators Changed. Only persons whose names were in the records were declared owners of the land, thereby the cultivators who had been cultivating from generations were thrown out, as new proprietors came into existence as they had acquired Proprietary . rights by purchasing land in the auction and sales. Hence, the actual peasants were deprived of cultivating rights and subjected to abject poverty and misery which led to mass migrations. What was the nature and character of the revenue settlements ? What was their impact and effect? To what extent did the new system alter the position of zamindars and cultivators ? How did the tenure system change in Bundelkhand and the most complex question of Proprietary rights will be discussed in the following chapters. The revenue settlements of Bundelkhand were unique in themselves in that they were different from the revenue settlements Bengal and Madras.

#### **A Critical Examination of the Source Material**

The most important difficulty confronted in attempting the revenue history of the early years of the British period is the paucity of original records which were destroyed in the disturbances of 1857. Muslim and foreign writers were prejudiced with this region as the people of Bundelkhand were freedom loving and constantly tried to throw out Bey foreign domination. They always fought the British and Mughals. Hence these writers were not kindly disposed towards the people of Bundelkhand. The settlement reports in the post 1857 period are an important source of information. These give us a varied and detailed account of the revenue settlements conducted by the officers designated by the administration to conduct the revenue Survey in the districts of Jhansi, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Hamirpur and Banda of Bundelkhand Province. The first settlement report on Jhansi was compiled by E.G. Jenkinson (1871); the second by W.H.L. Impey and J.S. Meston exclusive of Lalitpur sub-division (1892); see of Jhansi settlement inclusive of Lalitpur by A.W.Pim (1903) and

the final settlement report of Jhansi district by H.T. Lane (1947), The first report on the settlement of zilla Hamirpur was compiled by C. Allen and W. Muir (1842). The second Settlement by W.E. Neale (1880) and the final report on the revision of settlement of Hamirpur district was done by W. Raw (1908), Jalaun's first settlement report Was Written by A. 4H, Ternan (1870); the Second was the revision of Settlement of uncertain portion by P. White (1889) and the final settlement report by H.C.R. Hailey (1906). Report on the settlement of halitpur was compiled by J. Davidson (1859) and the final report on the revision of Settlement and Lalitpur by H.s. Hoare (1899) has Lalitpur was incorporated into Jhansi in 1891. The epic settlement report on Banda was by Alan Cadell (1881) and the final report was edited by BE. de Humphries (1909). The settlement reports were written by British officers who had not much knowledge of the local economic climate. They Mainly based their survey on the facts and figures supplied to them by the Patwaris and Amils who were entrusted with the task of vane 'the information to the settlement officers. enews some of the material contained in the reports might not be wholly authentic. Moreover, the reports have not been impartially written. They have tried to exonerate themselves from the shortcomings of their policies which were responsible for the retardation of economic prosperity in the region and instead blamed the local population for the failings. However, inspite of these shortcomings these reports provide us with details of rent, rates, revenue, agricultural prices and economic conditions prevailing at that time. The District Gazeteers are a secondary source of information. They contain factual information of British affairs in India, based on official statistics received from the district authorities. The earliest district gazeteer is the Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of north west provinces of India edited by E. Atkinson (1874). He based his gazeteer on the information received from the above authority. He did not Stay in Bundelkhand to have a first hand knowledge or insight into the region and here lies the limitation of his work.

There are other gazeteers with information about the aforesaid districts. written later. e.g. D. L. Brockman's District Gazetteer series which contain almost the same information as Atkinson's. The revenue section is not based on his independent study but on the material of the settlement reports. Therefore they are again a mere factual record of the statistics related to the district. The aim of these gazeteers was to provide information and data to the British administrative officials who used to visit the district from time to time. The Gazeteers are a good Source for socio-political information. Among the secondary works, Baden Powell's book on Land Systems of British India (1892) is a major work on the British revenue policy in N.W. provinces. For Purposes of general reading on land tenures and technical aspects of land revenue administration the 'book is of interest. Powell was an administrator and did not have time to analyse or go into research on this vast subject. The book does not deal Specifically with issues relating to Bundelkhand and makes only casual references, Dr. Sulekh Chand Gupta's book on Agrarian

Relations and Early British Rule published in 1963 covers the Ceded and Conquered Provinces (1801 - 1833). The book deals with the land revenue policy, its formation and growth in the early years. However, there is no special emphasis laid on the problems of this region. Reference to Bundelkhand comes under the purview of 'ceded' Province. Dr. Imtiaz Husain's book, British Land Revenue Policy in Northern India - the Ceded and Conquered Provinces (1801 - 1833) published (1967) is a milestone in the economic history of British India. The book deals with the evolution, formation and development of the British Land Revenue Policies in the territories mentioned. But again Bundelkhand is not the region under specific discussion. The material for study has been obtained mainly from the contemporary official Revenue Records; the Bundelkhand Agency English Files; Proceedings - Foreign Political; Political despatches from Court of Directors; Land Revenue Records, Crown Representative Records (microfilm); Settlement Records; Gazeteers and Historical Works.

Conclusion:

British administration was made for three years from (1809-1810 A.D.) to (1811-1812 A.D.) by Wauchope who Succeeded Erskine as collector in December 1808. His settlements were very hard and severe and consequently the farmers paid under duress. Revenue intake increased by nearly 40%. Though the eastern paraganas paid under constraint, the British felt that the settlement was fair and reported this to the Board of Commissioners. The regulation of 1809 was enacted, which declared that the jama assessed in the previous area of the existing settlement, that is to say the 3rd settlement which was the last for four years would be fixed in perpetuity pending the approval of the Court of Directors. Though the British government made endeavours to bring area cultivation under exigency, land holders Sold their. land and fled. Consequently, land changed hands Several times, especially in places like Bhaissunda, Chibun etc. The fifth Settlement was made by Waring, and it considerably enhanced the revenue, so that in the eastern paraganas there was increase of 46% and in the western part of region. The constant Shifts in the boundaries of the Bundelkhand territories and the destruction of the records during 1857 disturbances made it difficult to follow the details of fiscal history of Bundelkhand in the initial years of British occupation. The last summary settlement was made by Major Erskine. It would be relevant to mention that there was an Over assessment in Bundelkhand. Since there was no particular group of engagers with whom Settlements could Specifically be made, Settlements were made haphazardly with zamindars, taluqdars revenue farmers and headmen of Villages, need of collecting revenue was the main The immediate reason for accepting engagements from a variety of individuals. Also, this prevented the collectors from determining who were the right persons with whom the Settlements were to be made. In Bundelkhand as the Predominant tenure was 'Bhaichara' a form joint tenure, the Settlement was made with the representative of the community as Stated earlier.