

ENCLOSURE NO. I.

*Rents, Wages and Prices.**

CASH RENTS.

Cash rents are almost universal, only 4 per cent of the holdings of settled and occupancy *ryots*, which account for nearly 85 per cent of the total number of holdings, paying produce rents. The average rate of rent is higher than in any other district in North Bihar, and is also higher than in the neighbouring districts of the United Provinces. Rents generally rule lower in the north of the district; and the southern part, where the pressure of population is greatest and cultivation most advanced, is mainly responsible for the high rates prevailing. The following table shows the average incidence of the rents recorded at the last settlement for different classes of *ryots* :—

Class of <i>ryots</i> .	Area in acres.	Rent in rupees.	Rate per acre.
<i>Ryots</i> at fixed rates ..	9,340	30,840	Rs. a. p. 3 4 9
Settled or occupancy <i>ryots</i> ..	11,02,382	47,76,731	4 5 4
Non-occupancy <i>ryots</i> ..	14,185	71,389	5 0 6
Total ..	11,25,907	48,78,960	4 5 4

It will be observed that nearly the whole of the rental of the district is paid by settled and occupancy *ryots*, only one lakh being payable by *ryots* at fixed rates and by non-occupancy *ryots*. The rents paid by settled and occupancy *ryots* are highest in Sonapur and Chapra thanas, where the average is Rs. 5-8-7 and Rs. 5-6-4 per acre, respectively; Sonapur being a densely populated thana, while the rate for Chapra is raised by the high rents paid for garden lands in the neighbourhood of the town. *Ryots* at fixed rates pay the lowest rents in Darauli and Manjhi thanas, which contain a large number of *bhekhbirits* or resumed rent-free grants, and the highest rents in Basantpur thana, mainly because it contains some villages with rich and fertile soil in which valuable crops are grown. The rent rate of non-occupancy *ryots* is considerably higher than that of occupancy *ryots*; and as might be expected under-*ryots* pay the highest rent rate of all, for though, in some villages, they have proved that they acquire occupancy rights by custom, the majority are merely tenants-at-will* and allow the superior *ryot* to exact what terms he pleases.

Enhancement of rent.

At the assessment made by the orders of Akbar at the end of the sixteenth century, an all-round rate of about Rs. 1-8-0 per acre

* Reprint of the text of Chapter VII in the *District Gazetteer of Saran*, 1908.

was imposed. For 220 years after Akbar's settlement no satisfactory evidence as to rent rates is forthcoming, but it appears that in the beginning of the nineteenth century the rate was over Re. 1 an acre in the northern part of the district, which was in an unsettled state, and between Rs. 2 and Rs. 4 in the rest of the district, though the rates for good lands capable of bearing special crops were three or four times as much as this. Forty years later a rent rate of Rs. 2-6-0 was paid in the villages subject to resumption, but there are good grounds for believing that the rate for the district, as a whole, was a good deal higher than this. Finally, in 1870 we find that a rate of Rs. 4-14-0 per acre prevailed in the area held by the Hathwa Raj, as a result of three enhancements made in the preceding 20 years; and it is certain that most of the other landlords must have raised their demands to an even greater extent. It is known that, in the estates of petty landlords, enhancements were going on up to the commencement of the recent settlement proceedings; and there can be no doubt that it has only been owing to the provisions of the Tenancy Act, enabling the Settlement Officers to disregard illegal enhancements, that the result of the recent settlement has been such a comparatively moderate rent rate as Rs. 4-5-0 per acre for the district as a whole.

As regards the methods of enhancement which have been usually resorted to by petty proprietors, the partition of estates under the old Partition Act has been a frequent cause of, or excuse for, enhancement. At the conclusion of the proceedings under that Act, the proprietor of each newly-formed estate found himself in possession of what were practically new holdings and had to write up entirely fresh rent-rolls, with little to guide him, even if he desired guidance, as to the previous rent rate or as to what would be a fair rental for the area comprised within the new estate. Small wonder then that he often cut the knot by levying an entirely new and enhanced rate, to which the *ryots* generally agreed in order to save themselves from trouble. Government sales for arrears of revenue have also been almost invariably followed by an enhancement of rent, and the *ryots* have seldom made any effort to resist this, the belief being universal that the purchaser starts with a *tabula rasa*, and can levy any rent he likes.

In many cases enhancements take place for no apparent reason, and are then generally resisted by the *ryots* at least for a time. There are two common methods of overcoming this resistance. One is for the landlord to prepare a set of false rent-rolls, extending over a number of years, showing the enhanced rents which he claims, and then to institute suits for arrears of rent against a few *ryots*. If these *ryots* can be induced to allow a collusive decree to be passed, so much the better; but if not, the *ryots* have generally no receipts or rebutting evidence, and the landlord wins his case. The rest of the village is then cowed into submission. If, on the other hand, the landlord is unwilling to incur the odium of raising rents, he lets out his estate

to a tenure-holder for a term of years, giving him an enhanced rent-roll to work on. The tenure-holder knows that his connection with the village is a temporary one, and is not too scrupulous as to the methods he adopts for bringing the *ryots* to terms. He is thus frequently able to hand the village back to the proprietor with a greatly enhanced rent-roll.

PRODUCE RENTS.

Produce rents are of three kinds,—*batai*, *bhaoli* and *mankhap*. Under the *batai* system the actual crop is divided either in the field or on the threshing floor. Under the *bhaoli* system, the value of the crop is appraised on the field before it is cut, and the *ryot* pays his share to the landlord either in kind or in cash after the harvest. Where the *mankhap* system prevails, the *ryot* has to pay a certain number of maunds per *bigha* to the landlord, irrespective of the outturn. This system is seldom met with in Saran, and is extremely unpopular among the *ryots*, for the rate is generally so high as to leave the *ryot* only a small margin of profit in ordinary years, while in bad years he often has to make over the whole produce to his landlord. These disadvantages are not counterbalanced by the fact that in an extremely good year the *ryot* may be able to retain more of the produce than he would if he paid a *batai* rent; and on the whole, it may be said that the system has nothing to recommend it from the *ryot's* point of view. The *batai* system is the most common in Saran, and is sedulously fostered by the *gumashta* class, to whom it offers unlimited opportunities for pilfering. Further description of produce rents is hardly necessary, for they are of little importance in Saran. There can be little doubt that their rarity is a sign of agricultural development.

WAGES.

Masons in Chapra earn daily wages ranging from 4 annas to 5 annas 4 pies, and carpenters from 5 to 6 annas; in the interior, they are paid 2 annas and given two meals per diem, viz., half a seer of *sattu* at midday, and half a seer of rice or barley flour in the evening, with perhaps an allowance of *dal*. Labourers are paid 2 annas a day in Chapra, and 6 Gorakhpuri pice with half a seer of *sattu* outside the town; women get $1\frac{1}{2}$ annas, and boys 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ anna in Chapra, and in the country 6 Gorakhpuri pice. A house-builder gets 3 to 4 annas in Chapra, blacksmiths from 4 to 6 annas and Nunias 4 annas, the corresponding wages in the interior being 2 annas in the first two cases and 8 Gorakhpuri pice in the last. Cooks and house servants get Re. 1 to Rs. 2, besides daily food and two pieces of cloth in a year. A cart-driver gets Rs. 1-8-0 to Rs. 2, in addition to his daily food and two cloths a year. A *sais* or groom gets Rs. 5 to Rs. 7 per mensem, and a sweeper from 8 annas to Rs. 2 per mensem; a barber receives one pice for shaving and a washerman 4 to 6 annas per score of clothes washed. In the villages, however, barbers

and washermen are paid annually at the rate of two *paseris* (10 seers) of grain per head, excluding unmarried boys and girls.

The wages both of village artisans and of field labourers are generally paid in kind. An ordinary full day's wage for digging is three local seers of grain and one seer of *sattu*; the grain and *sattu* are always the cheapest kind available, and in an ordinary year their money value would be rather less than 2 annas. The wages of the hired ploughman are the same as those of an ordinary labourer if he works the whole day, but, as a matter of fact, ploughing is almost entirely done in the forenoon. The ordinary rate in the case of hired ploughs appears to work out to about 3 annas per diem. As a rule, however, the cultivators lend their ploughs to one another and do not need to hire ploughmen and ploughs. For transplanting, which is necessary only in the case of rice and *marua*, the rates are slightly higher than for ordinary agricultural labour, but their money value hardly exceeds 2 annas per diem; while the rate for weeding and for carting manure comes to only $1\frac{1}{2}$ annas.

For harvesting, payment is nearly always made by giving the labourer a share of the produce, varying from one-sixteenth to one-twentieth. In the case of threshing, the cultivators rarely have any need to employ outside labour, as they act on a system of mutual aid; one cultivator lends his bullocks one day to his neighbour and gets his neighbour's bullocks the next day, the one condition being that the bullocks shall not be muzzled, i.e., the man whose crop is being threshed feeds the bullocks so long as he uses them. For threshing the landlord's crops a tenant has to lend his bullocks, getting little in return except their feed, and possibly a meal for himself, if he assists personally at the threshing.

Supply of Labour.

The cultivation of the *bhadoi*, *aghani* and *rabi* crops affords almost continuous work to labourers from about the end of May, when *tamni* or the preparation of the land for the *bhadoi* crops begins, until the end of October. From the beginning of November to the middle of March is the slack season for labour. In November and December labourers subsist on the produce of their own *bhadoi* fields and on any earnings they can get by working in those of their masters; and during the next $2\frac{1}{2}$ months they live on what they earn from cutting paddy; even though they exchange the paddy they receive for yams and other cheap food, they often have difficulty in making both ends meet. At this time, however, there is a great exodus of labourers in search of employment, the coolies going in thousands to work in the fields, in the docks on the Hoogly, and on the railways, and returning for the agricultural operations which take place with the breaking of the monsoon. They usually borrow about Rs. 6 a head at 25 per cent to enable them to go to their work; if they get work, they generally send Rs. 6 or Rs. 8, or less, in January to their homes or to the money-lenders. If successful, they come

back by rail, bringing from Rs. 20 to Rs. 35 per man; those who fall sick and have no friends, walk back and may or may not reach their homes.

Regarding the general question of the supply of labour, the following extract is quoted from the Report on Labour in Bengal (1906), by Mr. Foley: "The pressure of the population on the soil is more felt in this district than in any other district of Bengal, and Saran is the first district in Bengal to come to the point where it cannot maintain its population. Hence, emigration is absolutely necessary, and, excluding certain districts from which tea gardens recruit, the numbers of emigrants are greater than from any other district in India. Saran supplies labour to all kinds of industries except the coal-mines, and the majority of the hands in the jute mills appear to come from this district. The chief exodus of labour from the district is in November and December, the coolies going by rail *via* Katihar to cut the crops in Eastern Bengal. They return in March, April, May, June or the beginning of July. During October and November a large amount of labour is available. There is some little difficulty in procuring labour in the district in July, August, and March, but for the rest of the year it is plentiful. I believe the rates and conditions of work in Calcutta industries are well known in the district. There is a constant flow to and from the mills, and one man will inform a whole village as to what his earnings and work have been. The people of Saran, I take it, are well aware of the benefits to be derived from employment in the industrial centres, and a larger number than from any other district seek employment in those centres spontaneously."

PRICES.

The rise (in seers and chittacks per rupee) of common rice, wheat, gram and salt during the last fortnight in March for the 15 years ending in 1905 is given below. The cheapening of salt during this period is attributed to the reduction of the salt tax:—

Years.	Common rice.	Wheat.	Gram.	Salt.
	S. ch.	S. ch.	S. ch.	S. ch.
1891—1895	13 12½	13 12	17 14	10 13½
1896—1900	13 9	13 0	16 14	11 7
1901—1905	13 13	13 14	16 10	12 7

As regards the prices of foodgrains at different times of the year, prices are easy at the beginning of October, when the *bhadoi* crop is well in the market, but they rise sharply by the end of the month, no doubt owing to exportation; by the end of November they are again easier with the incoming of the great *aghani* rice crop, and then rise with more or less regularity till the end of February. In the month of March relief comes with the ingathering of the *rabi* harvest and prices fall till about the end of April or the middle of

May, when a rise commences once more, which continues till the early *bhadoi* crops come in towards the end of July. These crops are so cheap and plentiful, that the general average then falls sharply till the end of September.

The harvesting of each of the three great crops naturally ushers in a distinct fluctuation in prices. Grain is, on the whole, cheapest in September, just after the *bhadoi* is in; not quite so cheap early in May, when the *rabi* has all been gathered home; and less cheap at the end of November, when the rice reaches the market. Conversely, grains are dearest just before each of these three harvests is reaped, i.e., in October, February and July. It might have been thought that as rice is the largest and most important crop in the district, its advent would have had the greatest effect on the prices of food, but it must be remembered that, owing to the demand for exportation, rice is never a very cheap grain. The same consideration holds good in a less and still lesser degree as regards the *rabi* and the *bhadoi*, for this latter crop (except maize) is but little exported; in other words, and speaking generally, the influence of each crop on prices varies inversely with the demand upon it for exportation.

Famine Prices.

The maximum price of paddy during the famine of 1866 was Rs. 5-10-0 per standard maund and of rice Rs. 8 per maund; the highest price that rice reached in 1874 was 9 seers per rupee. In the famine of 1897 the price of rice rose to 9 seers in October, 1896, was as high as 8 seers a rupee in the second fortnight of May, and reached the maximum of $7\frac{1}{2}$ seers per rupee during the second half of June. Maize started at 12 seers at the beginning of December, 1896, rose to $10\frac{1}{2}$ seers in the first three months of 1897, and reached the highest price of $6\frac{1}{2}$ seers at the end of June. The cheapest articles of food throughout the famine were *marua*, which, however, was only obtainable in small quantities, and barley. The former sold at 13 seers to $13\frac{1}{2}$ seers till March, and then disappeared from the market. The latter began to sell at 14 seers at the end of February, and then rose steadily to 13 seers at the end of May and to 10 seers 10 chittacks at the end of July.

It is of some interest to compare the high prices now prevailing with those of 30 years ago. In 1907 the price of common rice has been consistently above 10 seers a rupee, even after the breaking of the monsoon, without relief measures being necessary; whereas in Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal* (published in 1877) it was stated that the rise of the price of rice to 12 seers per rupee and of maize to 15 seers per rupee would, in the opinion of the Collector, necessitate the opening of relief works.

MATERIAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE.

From the enquiries made at the last settlement it appears that an average family in Saran consists of five members, and that an

ordinary cultivator has to spend Rs. 15 a year to maintain each person in his family. It may be therefore inferred that an ordinary agricultural family in Saran will require Rs. 75 a year to maintain itself in moderate comfort. The average profits of cultivation have been, on careful calculation, estimated at Rs. 25-10-0 per acre, so that an ordinary family of five members will be able to manage with a holding of 3 acres. If they carry on the work of cultivation themselves, and spend nothing on it except the cost of seed, the profits would amount to Rs. 30 per acre, and a holding of $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres would consequently suffice for their maintenance in an ordinary year, while a family with 3 acres would be fairly comfortable, if not in debt. It is satisfactory, therefore, to find that the average size of the holding of a family of pure cultivators (who form more than three-fifths of the total population of the district) is 3.8 acres, i.e., it exceeds the subsistence holding ($2\frac{1}{2}$ acres) by more than an acre. Consequently the pure cultivators, as a body, if they are not in debt, should be in fairly comfortable circumstances. Of the labourers, about 2,40,000, or one-tenth of the total population, have holdings so small that they cannot maintain themselves on them in moderate comfort, and a similar proportion have no land at all, but must live entirely on the wages they earn. These cultivating and landless labourers, forming altogether 20 per cent of the total population, are probably unable to save anything even in the best of years and it is this class which must perforce turn to Government for relief in a year of scarcity. But it is noticeable that, even in the great famine of 1896-97, they displayed considerable staying powers and must have managed to maintain themselves without the assistance of Government, for the largest number of persons relieved on any one day was 58,173, or only 6 per cent of the population of the affected area.

Indebtedness.

Regarding indebtedness, Mr. Kerr writes:—"The ordinary cultivator should be able to save sufficient in good and ordinary years to tide him over an occasional season of short crops. There seems to be no reason why he should fall into debt. But, as a matter of fact, a very large proportion of the cultivators is in debt. Mr. Tytler goes so far as to say that 95 per cent of the *ryots* live and die in debt; and that they die in debt follows, as a matter of course, in the great majority of cases from the fact that they are born in debt and make no effort during their life-time to pay off their debt. Our statistics of mortgages do not disclose such a degree of indebtedness as was estimated by Mr. Tytler. They show that only $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the total *ryoti* area is mortgaged, and that only 15 per cent of the total number of holdings are affected either in whole or in part by mortgages on the land. The total indebtedness of the *ryots*, as recorded by us, is just under Rs. 50,00,000, or little more than one-tenth of the value of the gross outturn in an ordinary year. Amounts lent on security other than the land are of course not included, but the land is the *ryot's* chief source of credit, and only petty loans are

granted on other security. Our statistics also do not include mortgages in which the land is given as security, but possession is retained by the borrower. But the lender is generally too much afraid of a previous mortgage to advance money without obtaining possession; and loans of this kind are, as a rule, made only to persons whose credit is otherwise good, and do not represent any serious or permanent addition to the indebtedness of the agricultural classes.

“Allowing for all this, and for the fact that the original amount of the debt is generally swelled by the addition of the compound interest, we shall be safe in saying that the total indebtedness of the Saran *ryots* is well under a crore of rupees. As we shall see, the gross annual profits derived by the *ryots* from the area in their cultivation after payment of rent is usually over $3\frac{1}{2}$ crores. The indebtedness of the Saran peasantry, as a whole, cannot, therefore, be considered a very serious matter. But it must be remembered that the indebtedness is borne by not more than 20 per cent of the total number of holdings. The proportionate annual profits of these would be little over 60 lakhs, and as practically the whole of this must be required for subsistence purposes, there is little chance of the debt being paid off from the profits of cultivation alone. As a matter of fact, too many of the *ryots* take no trouble to pay off their debts. The profits of a good year are made the excuse for increased expenditure on marriages and other ceremonies. Under these circumstances, it is perhaps satisfactory to find the total amount of the cultivators' indebtedness no higher than it is. But though four-fifths of pure cultivators are probably not in debt at all, or at all events are not sufficiently involved to be compelled to part with their lands for the purpose of raising money, and though these can, taking one year with another, maintain themselves in moderate comfort by the profits of cultivation, it must not be supposed that the district could support any addition to the agricultural community without immediate deterioration of the condition of that community as a whole. Many members of the agricultural community must suffer severely in bad years, and, though the greater part of the cultivating classes can earn a comfortable livelihood at present, any considerable increase in their numbers under present conditions must be followed by substantial reduction of the standard of comfort.”

After pointing out that Saran, having reached the point at which it can no longer support an increase in its population in moderate comfort from the produce of the soil, is meeting this strain on its resources, not by further subdivision of holdings and a consequent reduction in the standard of comfort, but by emigration, Mr. Kerr goes on to summarize his conclusions as follows :—

- “ (1) Eighty-four per cent of the total population of Saran, or just over two million souls, are entirely dependent on agriculture as a means of livelihood. (2) A quarter of a million of these have no lands at all, or only

minute plots, and are practically dependent on the wages of labour. Rather more than half of this class had to turn to Government for relief during the last famine. (3) Another quarter of a million have small holdings not exceeding two acres on the average for each family. This is insufficient to support them, and they have to eke out their livelihood by working for other cultivators. (4) The remaining one-half million have holdings exceeding on the average $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres per family. These are pure cultivators, who only work in their own fields. As the smallest holding on which a family can be supported is $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres, this class as a body is in a moderate condition of comfort. Less than one-fifth of them are in debt to the extent that they have had to part with their holdings or portions of them in order to borrow money, and only one-twentieth of the *ryoti* area is mortgaged in this way. (5) The total amount of indebtedness of this kind is less than one-third of the share of the gross annual produce secured by the cultivating classes. On the other hand, the indebtedness is borne by less than one-fifth of the whole body of *ryots*, and on them it must press heavily. (6) Under the present conditions of agriculture, the district is incapable of supporting any considerable increase of population without a material reduction in the standard of comfort. (7) Even now the district produces barely sufficient food for its own requirements, but the excellence of its communications greatly lessens the gravity of this factor."

"The picture thus drawn," he adds, "contains both light and shade. Apart from the landless labourers, whose condition must always be precarious, the rest of the agricultural community, as a whole enjoy a moderate degree of comfort and can withstand a season of scarcity without turning to Government for relief. Their indebtedness is relatively small, and their lands are not passing into the hands of professional money-lenders to any appreciable extent. The census figures, and the conduct of the people in the last famine, show that they would rather emigrate than submit to a reduction of their standard of comfort or to further subdivision of their holdings. If this spirit prevails and spreads throughout the less enterprising classes, there should be no fear of any deterioration in the material condition of the Saran agricultural community".*

* J. H. Kerr, *Saran Survey and Settlement Report*, Calcutta, 1903.