

ENCLOSURE NO. III.

RENTS, WAGES AND PRICES.*

CASH RENTS.

Cash rents are almost universal, only 3.5 per cent of the holdings of settled and occupancy *raiyats* 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 of North Bihar and is also higher than in the neighbouring districts of the United Provinces. Rents generally run lower in the north of the district; 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 (1915-1921) for different classes of *raiyats* :—

Class of <i>raiyats</i> .	Area in acres.	Rent in rupees.	Rate per acre.
			Rs. a. p.
<i>Raiyats</i> at fixed rates ..	9,398	* 31,488	3 5 8
Settled or occupancy <i>raiyats</i> ..	11,43,538	50,86,928	4 7 0
Non-occupancy <i>raiyats</i> ..	3,854	14,604	3 12 8
Total ..	11,56,790	51,33,020	4 7 0

It will be observed that nearly the whole of the rental of the district is paid by settled and occupancy *raiyats*, less than half a lakh being payable by *raiyats* holding at fixed rates and by non-occupancy *raiyats*. As in the earlier settlement the rents paid by settled and occupancy *raiyats* are highest in Sonapur and Chapra thanas where the average is Rs. 5-14-10 and Rs. 5-7-5, 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. Fixed rents are low in Darauli and Manjhi thanas where there is a large number of *bhekkbirits* or resumed rent-free grants, and also in Mirganj and Masrakh; these rents are highest 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 *raiyats* is considerably higher than that of occupancy *raiyats*, and as might be expected, under-*raiyats* pay the highest rents of all. In some villages they acquire occupancy rights by custom, but most are

* Reprint of the text of Chapter VII in the *District Gazetteer of Saran*, 1930.

mere tenants-at-will and allow the superior *raiyat* to exact what terms he pleases. The number on non-occupancy *raiyats* decreased largely between the Cadastral and Revisional Settlement, presumably because they acquire a higher status by lapse of time.

Enhancement of Rents.

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 was imposed. For 220 years after Akbar's settlement no satisfactory evidence of 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 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 twenty years; and it is certain that most other landlords must have raised their demands to an even greater extent. At the time of the Cadastral Survey it was found that in the estates of petty landlords enhancements were going on up to the commencement of the settlement proceedings. From that time the *raiyats* seem to have had a clearer idea of their rights and the number of illegal enhancements which came to light during the revisional proceedings was not unduly high.

One of the commonest occasions for obtaining an illegal enhancement was when an estate was partitioned under the old Partition Act. The proprietor of each newly-formed estate found himself in possession of what were practically new holdings and had to write up a new rent-roll with very little to guide him. He often therefore levied entirely new rates to which the *raiyats* agreed to save themselves from trouble. Enhancements also very often follow sales for arrears of land revenue owing to a common belief that the new proprietor starts with a *tabula rasa*. At the last settlement cases were found enhancements by compromise in the civil court in contravention of the Bengal Tenancy Act; others had been effected during partitions made either amicably or under the Batwara Act; in cases of this nature the enhancements were disallowed. It was also found in many villages that enhancement had been made on the pretext of excess areas having been discovered by measurement but the alleged excess was generally fictitious.

There are two other methods of raising rents which were formerly common and are probably not yet entirely obsolete. The landlord may prepare a false set of rent-rolls and institute rent suits against a few *raiyats* who either allow a collusive decree to be passed or fail on contest as they have no rebutting evidence. The other method

is to let out some village to a tenure-holder for a term of years; the *thikadar* is not too scrupulous in the means he adopts to bring the tenants to terms and is frequently able to hand the villages back with a much 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 *raiyat* pays his share to the landlord either in kind or in cash after the harvest. Where the *mankhap* system prevails, the *raiyat* 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 with the *raiyats*, for the rate is generally so high as to leave the cultivator only a small margin of profit in ordinary years while in bad years he often has to make over the whole produce to the landlord. These disadvantages are not counterbalanced by the fact that in an extremely good year the *raiyat* may be able to retain more of the produce than he would if he paid a *batai* rent; on the whole it may be said that the system has nothing to recommend it from the *raiyat's* point of view. The *batai* system is the most common in Saran and is fostered by the *gomashta* class to whom it offers opportunities for pilfering. Further description of produce rents is not necessary as they are of little importance in Saran; their rarity is a sign of agricultural development. At the last settlement only 53,366 acres of land were recorded as held on produce rent and of this total more than 10,000 acres was held by under-*raiyats*.

WAGES.

Skilled carpenters earn Re. 1 a day and the less skilled about 14 annas. Masons get 12 annas and earth-digger 8 annas. Thatchers get from 8 to 12 annas and blacksmiths from 10 to 14 annas. Ploughmen and ordinary male labourers generally get 12 annas a day and women and children half that amount. A cart is hired for Rs. 2 a day. Domestic servants are usually paid about Rs. 4 a month with food and clothing besides. *Syces* (grooms) get Rs. 10 or Rs. 12 a month and sweepers Rs. 7, *dhobies* (washermen) are paid 8 annas for 20 articles, and a barber gets one anna a shave.

The above figures are considerably higher than those ascertained at the last wage-census in 1924; and the latter, again, were from 95 per cent (in the case of blacksmiths and carpenters) to 38 per cent (in the case of unskilled daily labour paid in cash) higher than the figures recorded at the wage-census of 1916.

The wages of village artisans and of field labourers are, however, generally paid in kind and at the time of harvesting and threshing, the labourers are given one bundle out of every 21 bundles cut

and one *paseri* out of every 21 *paseris* threshed. For threshing, as also often for ploughing, the cultivators adopt a system of mutual aid, one man lending his bullocks one day and getting his neighbour's the next. For threshing the landlord's crops a tenant has to lend his bullocks, getting little in return except their feed, and perhaps a meal for himself if he assists personally.

SUPPLY OF LABOUR.

The cultivation of the *bhadai*, *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 *bhadai* crops begins, until the end of October. From the beginning of November till the middle of March is the slack season for labour. In November and December labourers subsist on the produce of their own *bhadai* 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 cheaper 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 Hooghly and on the railways and returning for the agricultural operations which commence with the break of the monsoon. They usually borrow about Rs. 10 a head to enable them to go to their work but the interest is high, being sometimes as much as 75 per cent as money is much in demand at the time. Repayments are made monthly, quarterly or on return. The *mallahs* who go with their boats to engage in the carrying trade near Calcutta get loans on such occasions at a nominal rate of 24 per cent per annum but the *mahajan* deducts 5 per cent of the principal at the time of making the loan.

In 1906 an enquiry was held into the labour supply of Bengal and it was then ascertained that Saran was the first district in the then province of Bengal to reach the point where it could not maintain its population. The people of Saran appeared to be well aware of the benefits to be derived from employment in industrial centres and then, as now a larger number than from most other districts sought employment in those centres spontaneously.

PRICES.

Makai and rice are the staple food-crops of which the average retail prices are prepared under section 39 of the Bengal Tenancy Act. In 1928 rice sold at an average of $5\frac{1}{2}$ seers to the rupee at Chapra, of 6 seers 15 chittacks at Mirganj and of 4 seers 14 chittacks at Siwan; at the same places *makai* sold at 9 seers 9 chittacks, 10 seers 6 chittacks and $8\frac{1}{2}$ seers, respectively. In 1927 rice averaged 6 seers at Chapra, 6 seers 7 chittacks at Mirganj and $4\frac{3}{4}$ seers at Siwan, while *makai* sold on an average at $9\frac{1}{2}$ seers, 10 seers, 10 seers 11 chittacks and $8\frac{1}{4}$ seers respectively at the same centres.

As regards the prices of foodgrains at different times of the year, prices are easy at the beginning of October, when the *bhadai* is well on 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 *bhadai* 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 district fluctuation in prices. Grain is, on the whole, cheapest in September just after the *bhadai* 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, grain is dearest just before each of these 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 *bhadai*, for this latter crop (except maize) is but little exported; in other words and speaking generally, the influence of each crop varies inversely with the demand upon it for export.

Famine Prices.

The maximum price of paddy during the famine of 1866 was Rs. 5-10-0 per standard maund and that of rice Rs. 8 per maund; the highest price that rice reached in 1874 was 9 seers to the rupee. In the famine of 1897 the price of rice rose to 9 seers in October, 1896, was as high as 8 seers to the rupee in the second fortnight of May, 1897, and reached the maximum of $7\frac{1}{4}$ seers in 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 was only obtainable in small quantities and barley. The former sold at from 13 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 and 10 chittacks at the end of July.

The world-wide rise in prices is perhaps more noticeable in India than anywhere else; in Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal*, published in 1877, it is 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

Collector's opinion, necessitate the opening of relief works. Twenty years ago it was remarked that in 1907 the price of rice had been consistently above 10 seers per rupee without any relief measures being necessary. During the last two or three years rice has been on an average twice as expensive and there seems to be no prospect of any permanent fall. Prices prevailing more than ten years back are now of little more than historical interest and every allowance must be made when comparing present conditions with those prevailing even a few years ago.

MATERIAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE.

At the time of the Cadastral Survey elaborate enquiries were made into the condition of the people and the profits of agriculture. It was estimated that the average family consisted of five persons whom it cost in all Rs. 75 a year to maintain in moderate comfort, and that a holding of $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres was the minimum that would suffice for the maintenance. It was also found that the average size of the holding of the family of pure cultivators was 3.8 acres. Cultivators with less than this and landless labourers were always struggling and probably unable ever to save. But it was also noted that even in the great famine of 1896-97 this class displayed more staying power than might have been expected and, though they formed 20 per cent of the population, the largest number of persons relieved in any one day during that famine was only 6 per cent of the population of the affected areas.

The estimate of family expenditure given here can no longer be regarded as accurate but it is probable that the pure cultivator is better off now. He gets at least twice as much money for his surplus produce if he sells it; the general cost of living has, no doubt, increased but there has not been a proportionate increase in wages paid in kind and most of the services which a cultivator has to purchase are so paid.

INDEBTEDNESS.

The total indebtedness shown by mortgages with possession at the Cadastral Survey was a little under Rs. 50 lakhs. After allowing for mortgages without possession, for loans on security other than land and for the swelling of the original debts by compound interest, it was calculated that the total indebtedness of the Saran *raiyat* was well under a crore of rupees, while the gross annual profits from cultivation were estimated to be Rs. $3\frac{1}{2}$ crores. At the time of the Revisional Survey, the total amount advanced on mortgages with possession was Rs. 2,17,89,271, while a large number of enquiries and special crop-cutting experiments carried on throughout the operations gave an annual gross outturn from cultivation of a little over Rs. $4\frac{1}{2}$ crores and an annual net profit of a little under Rs. $2\frac{1}{4}$ crores.

It is notoriously difficult to generalize about the material condition of the inhabitants of an entire district. The Saran *raiyat* is improvident like the *raiyats* elsewhere in the sense that he is compelled by custom to borrow for unproductive purposes, such as weddings and funerals, and makes little or no attempt to reduce his indebtedness when he gets a good harvest. But it is probable that the cultivator with a holding of about 4 acres or more is not really in a hopeless position and could, if he would, free himself of debt; the fact that 71 per cent of the sales of occupancy holdings are to other *raiyats* and only 23 per cent to money-lenders supports this view. Labourers and cultivators of smaller holdings have been more severely affected by the general rise in prices but they have this compensation, that when they emigrate in search of employment—and it has already been noted how freely the Saran *raiyat* does emigrate—they get greatly increased cash wages and even with the present scale of prices have a surplus which they can remit or bring home. The co-operative movement will also, it is expected, in time improve the position of even the poorest.

CO-OPERATIVE CREDIT.

The Co-operative Credit Movement had not come into existence at all in Saran when the first edition of this Gazetteer was published.

The Movement started in Siwan subdivision where four societies were registered in May, 1913. By February, 1915, the number was 12 which by 1928 had risen to 228 with 5,247 individual members. Their working capital is over Rs. 10½ lakhs, paid-up capital over Rs. 5½ lakhs and reserve fund a little over a lakh. The rise of the Siwan Central Bank, which is reported to be one of the best in the province, is equally remarkable; it was started in 1915 with a working capital of Rs. 10,000 and 12 societies under it, it now has 236 village societies, a working capital of Rs. 9½ lakhs, a reserve fund of over Rs. 60,000, other reserves of over Rs. 20,000 and a building of its own which cost Rs. 24,000. Its paid-up capital has risen from Rs. 2,480 in 1915 to Rs. 1,01,240 in 1928.

In the Gopalganj subdivision a modest start was made in 1924 with one society. Another was registered in the next year and seven more in 1916. The number is now 158 with a total membership of 2,897. Their working capital is nearly Rs. 5 lakhs, paid-up capital half a lakh and reserve and other funds another half a lakh. A Central Bank for the subdivision was started in 1917 with a working capital of Rs. 20,000 which has now risen to Rs. 5 lakhs; in the same period the reserve fund has risen from Rs. 56 to Rs. 17,534 with other funds amounting to Rs. 30,000.

For various reasons the Sadar subdivision was slow in taking up the Movement and it was not till 1923 that a start was made and 15 societies registered. There are now a hundred societies with a

working capital of Rs. $3\frac{3}{4}$ lakhs, paid-up share capital of Rs. 45,000 and reserve and other funds of Rs. 17,000.

Apart from purely credit operations, the banks and societies have interested themselves in attempts to ameliorate the general conditions of life. Guarantee societies in the Siwan and Gopalganj subdivisions encourage arbitration in petty disputes, suggest sanitary improvements and propagate improved methods of agriculture. Similarly the Central Banks have made themselves responsible for about twenty village schools and have organized demonstrations of up-to-date agricultural implements and manures.

A unique society has recently been organized among the *Magahiya Doms* of the Mashrakh and Chainpur Settlements; its aim is not only to provide loans for cultivation and industry but also to create a desire for an honest way of life instead of a life of crime.