

CHANGING PATTERNS OF ZAMINDARI AND THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT IN MEDIEVAL MEWAT (16TH-18TH CENTURY CE)

Suraj Bhan Bhardwaj

Associate Professor

Department of History

Motilal Nehru College

University of Delhi (South Campus)

New Delhi, India

Abstract

This article traces the changes in the pattern of zamindari (landlordship) in Mewat (parts of eastern Rajasthan and southern Haryana) from 16th to 18th centuries. Using medieval Indo-Persian court chronicles and Rajasthani archival sources,¹ it focuses on the emergence of a new class of landed elite (zamindar), viz., the Rajput *bhomias* and the Jats, at the cost of old zamindars, viz., the Khanzadas and the Meos — a phenomenon that generated agrarian turmoil in the rural society at large. It also discusses how the oppression of peasantry resulting from conflicting claims staked by different sections of the ruling class, i.e., the Amber Raja, the Rajput *bhomias* and the Jats, over the surplus produce, as also the misery caused by the incidence of droughts and famines in the villages of Mewat at

¹ The Indo-Persian chronicles used in this essay are Minhaj Siraj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, Babur's *Tuzuk-i-Baburi*, and Abul-Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*. The Rajasthani archival records available from the second half of the 17th century and referred to in this essay are *arzdashats*, *arsattas*, *chithis* and *vakil's* reports. *Arzdashats* are petitions or memorials addressed to the Naruka Rajput chiefs of Amber written by *amilis* (revenue officers), *faujdaris* (chief police officers) and other officials of Amber, posted in various *parganas* which were held by the Amber rulers as *jagirs* (revenue-yielding land assignments) or whose *ijara* (revenue collection right) was obtained by them from Mughal *mansabdars* (Mughal officers holding military ranks). They contain details of political, social and economic conditions prevailing in various *parganas*. *Arsattas* are monthly treasury account of receipts and disbursements under different heads, maintained in Rajasthani by the Amber state. *Chithis* are letters written by the *diwan* of Amber to its officials, particularly *amilis* and *faujdaris*. Each *chithi* contains the substance of a complaint received by the *diwan* and his instructions for its redressal. The reports addressed to the Amber Raja by his *vakil* posted at the Mughal court are in the form of *arzdashats*, written in Hindi but incorporating Rajasthani and Persian vocabulary. These reports contain details of political developments at the Mughal court that the Amber Raja was regularly informed about. All are dated in Vikram Samvat (VS) which is ahead of the Common Era (CE) by 57 years.

regular intervals, ultimately provoked peasant protests in various forms in Mewat.

Keywords: *bhom*, *bhomia*, Rajputs, Jats, Meos, Khanzadas, Mughal empire, Mewat, Amber

Prior to 14th century, the earliest references to Mewat, rather its resident community Meos, appear in the Indo-Persian court chronicles of Delhi Sultanate, viz. Minhaj Siraj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* and Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*. Both describe the region as home to Meo tribes who were lawless plunderers and raiders, disrupting trade and travel and thereby causing great trouble for the people of Delhi and its vicinity, as well as a serious law-and-order problem for the Sultans of Delhi.² Thus, Delhi Sultans such as Balban and Firozshah Tughlaq undertook military campaigns to contain the depredations of Meos and establish administrative control over the region.³ However, it appears from their predatory lifestyle that the Meos had to struggle a lot to eke out their living. On the other hand, their geographical and social isolation enabled them to lead a life of relative socio-political freedom. Nevertheless, from the second half of the 14th century onwards, especially after Firozshah Tughlaq's death, the region underwent major social, political and economic transformations with the rise of new ruling elite, the Khanzadas.

The Khanzadas (1390-1527 CE) established their chiefdom in the vicinity of Tijara in Kotla.⁴ In order to strengthen the economic base of their chiefdom, the Khanzadas put considerable pressure on the Meos and other tribal communities to give up their plundering activities and take up cultivation. In this process, the conversion of forest land into agricultural land appears to have been their first major initiative. By a large-scale deforestation drive, more and more areas were brought under cultivation by the Khanzadas.⁵ Further, the Khanzadas

² Minhaj Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, in H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, eds, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol. 2, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, pp. 380-83; Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, in Elliot and Dowson, eds, *The History of India*, vol. 3, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990, pp. 104-05.

³ Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 380-83; Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, pp.104-05; Alexander Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in Eastern Rajputana in 1882-83, Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. 20, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1969[1885], p. 14.

⁴ The history of the Khanzadas of Mewat begins with Bahadur Nahar descended from Jadon Rajputs, who had ruled over Bayana and Thangir before the invasions of Muhammad Ghori. During the 14th century, Jadon Rajput Lakharpal was the chief of a small tract of Mewat around Tijara. Lakharpal had two sons, Sambharpal and Sanarpal. The former took the name of Bahadur Nahar and gained control over Sarehta situated four miles to the east of Tijara, while the latter took the name of Chhaju Khan and got possession of Jhirka. The two brothers embraced Islam in order to save their domains from annexation by Firozshah Tughlaq. The name of the town was also changed from Jhirka to Firozpur Jhirka (Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in Eastern Rajputana*, pp. 15-16). After embracing Islam, Bahadur Nahar was enrolled into nobility and given the title of Khanazad by Firozshah; there after he became a powerful and respectable chief of Mewat. Later, the word 'Khanazad' changed to 'Khanzada' (Makhdam, *Arzang-i-Tijara*, p. 3). The title 'Khanazad' or 'Khanzadun' was also given to those Firozi slaves who happened to be very close and loyal to the Sultan (A. M. Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty*, Calcutta: Thacker Spink, 1963, p. 336).

⁵ There is some evidence, folkloric and archival, that the Khanzadas exercised considerable pressure on the Meos to give up their predatory habits, relocate to plains and take up agriculture. For instance, in one Meo folktale, five Meo *pals*, viz., Chhiraklot, Duhlot, Pundlot, Daimrot and Nai, living in the Kala Pahad once used to harass people, but when the traders and citizens lodged several complaints against them with the king, he pressurized them to give up their old predatory habits and they settled down in the plains. Jagga records, genealogical records of the Meos and Khanzadas who settled several villages in Mewat, also maintain that by the end of 15th century these five Meo *pals*

constructed new forts and set up an administrative apparatus for land revenue collection. As a consequence, a major social change occurred among the Meo tribes: their gradual migration from hills to plains and their transformation into a sedentary peasantry. This process of peasantization that started in the 14th century continued well into the 19th century. As a result of their relocation to plains and peasantization, new villages and towns (*qasbas*) emerged in the region. Further territorial expansion of the Khanzada chiefdom in the Alwar region of eastern Rajasthan, where land was more fertile than their heavily forested and hilly ancestral land of Mewat also stimulated agrarianization and peasantization.

After the defeat and death of the last Khanzada chief, Hasan Khan Mewati at the hands of Babur in the battle of Khanwa (1527 CE), most parts of the region were annexed by Babur.⁶ The Khanzadas remained no longer a regional political entity of any significance, though the Mughal emperors tried to cultivate the Khanzadas by forging matrimonial relations or co-opting them into the administration. Though the Khanzadas failed to preserve their political autonomy, they continued to hold on to dominant positions in the rural society as zamindars of varying statures. According to Abul-Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*, by the end of the 16th century, the Khanzadas had acquired zamindari rights over 18 *parganas* out of a total of 61 *parganas* in the Alwar and Tijara *sarkars*. According to Fazl's *Akbarnama*, Akbar cultivated the Khanzadas of Mewat in his land revenue administration and army on account of their past military-administrative experience.⁷ During the reign of Akbar, the Mewat region became an integral part of the Mughal empire. It was brought under direct imperial administration: it was divided into four *sarkars*, viz. Alwar, Tijara, Sahar and Rewari, comprised of a total of 67 *parganas* and contained within two *subas* of Agra and Delhi.⁸

In the Mewat region, the overwhelming majority of zamindars were called *bhomias*. The term *bhomia* is derived from the Sanskrit word *bhumi* (the Persian term *bum* also means earth or land).⁹ In the late medieval Rajasthani documents, the term *bhumi* is used as a synonym of the term 'zamindari', and the holders of *bhumi* are called *bhomias*. The *bhomias* constituted a privileged class in the rural society enjoying hereditary superior rights in land as well as its produce. Being thus economically privileged, they, on the whole, commanded a high social status in the rural society. However, in the Rajasthani documents, the term *bhomia* has been used exclusively for the zamindars of Rajput clans, and not for zamindars of other castes like the Meos and Jats.

settled down in the plains of Nuh-Firozpur-Jhirka, Ramgarh and Lachhmangarh regions in the vicinity of Kala Pahad (Jagga Records, *pothi* no.1, in the personal possession of Jagdish, son of Shri Ghasi Ram Jagga, village Kuteta Kalan, *tehsil* Ramgarh, district Alwar, Rajasthan). There is another tale of Khanzada ruler Ahmad Khan Mewati sending his soldiers to arrest the Meos of Sonkh village, situated between Nuh and Palwal, on account of non-payment of land revenue by them (*bandhak* no. 12, *granthank* no. 13, Non-archival Records of Alwar State, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner).

⁶ Babur, *Tuzuk-i-Baburi*, in H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, eds, *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol. 4, Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1975, p. 274.

⁷ Abul-Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, trans. Blochmann; corr. and ann. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society, 1978, 3rd edn, pp. 203-06.

⁸ Abul-Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, pp. 202-06. The *sarkars* of Tijara and Narnaul were transferred from the province of Agra to Delhi just before the end of Shahjahan's reign (Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963, p. 8).

⁹ Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707*, 2nd rev. ed., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 139.

Despite the fact that the *bhomias* were a socially dominant class, they could claim a subordinate share in the peasants' surplus produce. The share of the *bhomias* in the *parganas* of Mewat varied between 2½ and 3 per cent of the produce. The other privilege extended to the *bhomias* was that the lands personally cultivated by them were considered *riyayati* or concessional holdings and assessed at considerably lower rates of revenue than were the lands of ordinary cultivators. The magnitude of the actual share of gross produce appropriated by the *bhomias* was considerable, and hence they were able to generate enough marketable surplus.¹⁰ Besides, they were exempted from a number of cesses and paid many of the cesses at highly concessional rates. The *bhomias* exercised their proprietary rights over land in various ways. In some cases, they rented out their lands to tenants and *pahi* cultivators on different terms and conditions and appropriated *malikana* or a special allowance from them.¹¹ In many cases, they employed full-time agricultural labourers known as *halis* (ploughmen) and *vasidars* (tenants) for the cultivation of their personal landholdings.¹²

In addition to collecting the *bhomi* tax or *dastur bhomi*, the *bhomias* were also entitled to many other customary cesses. For instance, the peasants of *pargana* Mandawar had to pay cesses like *dhol*, *nyota* and *kotri bhomi ki* to the *bhomias*.¹³ These customary rights enabled the *bhomias* to appropriate a substantial part of the produce. But they even attempted to increase their share in the surplus at the cost of the state as well as the peasants. They resorted to levying new imposts on the peasants, at times far beyond the customary limits, and at the same time tried to evade the payment of *hasil* (revenue) to the state. A variety of other customary privileges attached to the *bhom* right made it both socially and economically a highly valuable tenure for them. Perhaps, it was due to this fact that there was a growing tendency on the part of many members of the leading Rajput clans to extend their *bhom* rights either by way of usurpation or conversion of the *raiayati* area into *bhom*.¹⁴

The struggle for the acquisition, retention and expansion of the *bhom* right was a constant feature of the rural society in Mewat during the period under study. It had several implications for the rural society. First, it became a major factor in producing tensions between different groups. Second, it led to a significant alteration in the power structure within the rural society, the worst sufferers in the process being the Khanzadas and the Meos who eventually were reduced to the status of petty zamindars and *khudkashta* peasants.¹⁵

¹⁰ S. P. Gupta and Shireen Moosvi, 'Bhomi in the Territories of Amber c. 1650-1750', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 32nd session, Jabalpur, 1970, pp. 353-59.

¹¹ *Chithi* to the *amil*, *pargana* Piragpur Atela, *Mangsir Sudi* 10, VS 1792/1735 CE.

¹² *Chithi* to the *amil*, *pargana* Khohri, *Chait Sudi* 9, VS 1785/1728 CE; *Chait Vadi* 6, VS 1795/1735 CE. Kishan Singh Naruka had his own *vasi* in village Kaithwara of *pargana* Khohri, where *vasidars* belonging to the Ahir caste were employed. Rao Kaliyan Singh Naruka had his *vasi* in village Bhurpahari of *pargana* Pindayan where *vasidars* belonging to the other castes were employed (*Arzdasht*, *Vaishakh Vadi* 5, VS 1773/1716 CE; *Arsatta*, *pargana* Pindayan, VS 1722/1665 CE).

¹³ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Mandawar, VS 1787/1730, 1793/1736 CE. The amount of these cesses is not given in the *arsattas*, but it is clear from the documents whether they were regular cesses or not.

¹⁴ *Chithi* to the *amil*, *pargana* Alwar, *Asadh Sudi* 3, VS 1783/1726 CE.

¹⁵ *Khudkashta* peasants were peasants belonging to upper castes, i.e., Brahmins, Rajputs, *mahajans* and other members of the rural aristocracy (*patels*, *patwaris*, *qanungos* and *chaudharis*). They possessed their own ploughs, bullocks, seeds and other agricultural implements; and had to pay land revenue to the Mughal state at the rate of 25-33 per cent of their gross produce.

Those *bhomias* who felt assured of the stability and permanence of their tenure started playing a crucial role in the growth of agricultural production in their *bhom* villages. They, in many cases, became a dependable source of agricultural equipments and loans for the needy peasants. The growing economic dependence of a large section of the peasantry on the *bhomias* in the context of increasing monetization of rural economy was apparent. They also stood surety on behalf of the poor and needy peasants for contracting agricultural loans from the state and the moneylenders.¹⁶ This positive role enabled the *bhomias* to acquire a considerable hold over the countryside.

The pattern of distribution of zamindaris in the *parganas* of Mewat among various castes/clans as mentioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari* is given below:

Table 1: Zamindaris in Alwar sarkar (43 mahals)

Caste of the zamindars	Number of <i>parganas</i> held entirely under zamindari	Number of <i>parganas</i> held partially under zamindari	Total number of <i>parganas</i>
Khanzadas of Mewat	10	8(1/2)	18
Meo	5	7(1/2)	12
Kachhwahas	1	—	1
Baqqals	2	—	2
Bargujars	2	1(1/2)	3
Rajputs	1	1(1/2)	2
Chauhans	4	—	4
Amas and Duars	—	1(1/2)	1
Meenas	1	—	1
Sayyids	—	1(1/2)	1
Gujjars	—	1(1/2)	1
Mahats	1	—	1
Abbasis	1	—	1
Jats	1	—	1
Other castes	2	—	2

Source: Abul-Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, trans. Blochmann, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989[1873], pp. 202-03.

It is clear from Table 5.1 that by the end of the 16th century, most of the *parganas* of Alwar sarkar were under the possession of the Khanzada and Meo zamindars. The Rajput zamindars belonging to various clans had some pockets and enclaves in some *parganas* of Alwar sarkar. Other castes did not hold any substantial zamindaris in the Alwar sarkar.

Table 2: Zamindaris in Tijara sarkar (18 mahals)

Castes of the zamindars	Number of <i>parganas</i> held entirely under	Number of <i>parganas</i> held partially under	Total number of <i>parganas</i>
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¹⁶ Dillbagh Singh, 'The Role of the Mahajans in the Rural Economy in Eastern Rajasthan during the 18th century', *Social Scientist*, vol. 2, no. 10, 1974, pp. 20-31.

	zamindari	zamindari	
Khanzadas of Mewat	1	3(1/2)	4
Meos	12	2(1/2)	14
Thathars (Afghans)	1	2(1/2)	3
Gujjars	—	1(1/2)	1

Source: Abul-Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, pp. 203-04.

In Tijara *sarkar*, the Meo zamindars possessed the most extensive territories under their control. They were followed by the Khanzadas, Thathars and Gujjars in terms of the area under their zamindari jurisdiction. While the Khanzadas were the erstwhile ruling class of Mewat, as mentioned before, the origin of the zamindaris of the Thathars can be traced back to the time of Balban who assigned them military posts in Mewat.

Table 3: Zamindaris in Sahar *sarkar* (4 mahals)

Castes of the zamindars	Number of <i>parganas</i> entirely held under zamindari	Number of <i>parganas</i> partially held under zamindari	Total number of <i>parganas</i> held under zamindari
Meos	2(1/3)	2(1/2)	4
Jats	2(1/3)	—	2
Ahirs	2(1/3)	—	2
Thathars	—	1(1/3)	1

Source: Abul-Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, pp. 206.

The majority of *parganas* in Sahar *sarkar* were controlled by the Meo zamindars. The Jats and the Ahirs were the other dominant zamindari castes. The zamindars of the Thathars was insignificant.

The Meo and Khanzadas did not possess any zamindari rights in Narnol and Rewari *sarkars*. The historical roots of these zamindaris can clearly be traced to the movements and settlement patterns of various castes and clans. The zamindaris of members of the same clan were generally contiguous, lending credence to the tradition that the zamindari rights of a clan over an area originated from the dominance gained over that area by the ancestors of that particular clan.¹⁷ However, considerable reshuffling in the zamindari rights held by various castes and clans in the course of historical developments was a feature of the medieval Indian society.

During the 17th century, we find a significant change in the position of Meo and Khanzada zamindars: they gradually lost their pre-eminence to the Kachhwaha Rajputs with the creation of new zamindaris and enlargement of the existing ones by the various segments of the Kachhwaha clan. The Jats also gained zamindaris at the expense of the Meos and Khanzadas. Thus, around 1600, the Meos and Khanzadas who hitherto had more zamindaris in the Alwar,

¹⁷ Irfan Habib, 'The Social Distribution of Landed Property in the Pre-British India', *Enquiry*, old series, no. 12, 1965, pp. 21-75.

Tijara and Sahar *sarkars* were gradually replaced by the Rajput and Jat zamindars who were able to make successful encroachments upon their domains and reduce many of them to the rank of *khudkashtas* or ordinary peasant proprietors.

The emergence of the Kachhwaha zamindaris in Mewat was perhaps due to the influence gained by the Amber chiefs of the Kachhwaha clan at the Mughal court as a result of their alliance with Akbar. From the second half of the 17th century, the Kachhwahas systematically used their political leverage to expand their territorial possessions in Mewat by carving out new zamindaris in the *parganas* contiguous to their *watan jagir* and displacing the pre-existing Meo and Khanzada zamindars. The Mughal politico-administrative policies, too, were responsible for the loss of superior land rights of the Khanzadas and Meos, since the Mughals regarded the Rajputs as more reliable and worthy supporters than the Meos and the Khanzadas.¹⁸ The initial hostility of Hasan Khan Mewati towards the Mughals, perhaps, also led to the neglect of the Khanzada chiefs of Mewat.

In 1643, the Amber Raja was assigned *jagirs* in 14 *mahals* (*parganas*) of Mewat, most of which were, in turn, sub-assigned by him to his own clansmen,¹⁹ particularly the Naruka Rajputs. In 1650, Karat Singh (Amber chief Jai Singh's son) was appointed *faujdar* of Mewat by the emperor on the ground of political expediency and was specifically instructed to crush the Meo and Jat rebels of the region. Under his jurisdiction came 44 *parganas*; among them 37 *parganas* were in the Alwar, Tijara, Rewari and Narnol *sarkars*.²⁰

Thus, the upper echelons of the rural society in Mewat witnessed a considerable reshuffling in the superior land rights of different castes and clans. The Meos and the Khanzadas came out as the casualties of changes in the caste/clan composition of the zamindaris. This fact assumes further significance in that the Meos were also the dominant peasant castes and in terms of numerical strength constituted the largest single caste group among the peasantry. In the process, traditional caste links between the Meo zamindars and the peasants must have been eroded to a considerable extent. To what extent it affected the functioning of the rural society and the pattern of relationship between the new Rajput zamindars and the Meo peasants needs to be examined in depth.

The homogeneous character of the Meo peasants in the villages of Mewat was altered by the establishment of the zamindari rights of other castes and clans. The new zamindars encouraged the settlement of peasants belonging to other castes, particularly the Jats, Ahirs and Gujjars, in the hitherto Meo-dominated villages. This led to the growth of a heterogeneous and composite peasant population in the villages of Mewat. As a result of these developments in the rural society of Mewat, a tussle ensued between the Rajput zamindars and the vanquished Meo zamindars on the one hand, and between the Meo peasants and the Rajput zamindars on the other. The implications of this two-dimensional conflict in the rural society and its impact on the economy of the region form the subject matter of this chapter.

The Rajasthani documents throw considerable light on the creation of new *bhom* rights during the late 17th and early 18th centuries in Mewat. The latter part of the reign of emperor

¹⁸ A. R. Khan, *Chieftains in the Mughal Empire during the Reign of Akbar*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), 1977, pp. 102-04.

¹⁹ *Arzdasht, Mah Vadi* 5 and 7, VS 1746/1689 CE; *Mangsir Sudi* 3, VS 1761/1704 CE.

²⁰ S. Nurul Hasan, 'Further Light on Zamindars under the Mughals: A Case Study of (Mirza) Raja Jai Singh under Shahjahan', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39th session, Hyderabad, 1978, pp. 497-502.

Aurangzeb witnessed a considerable alteration in the caste and clan composition of the zamindars in the region. This reshuffling of the zamindari rights was a two-way process: both from above and from below. First, the Amber Raja (who was a leading noble of the Mughal court) aspired to extend his *watan jagir* into Mewat by taking over many zamindaris of the region's *zortalab* (recalcitrant or rebellious) zamindars with the tacit support of the Mughal emperor. The emperor's support was motivated by the desire to establish law and order in the region which was infested by such rebel zamindars. It may be noted that it was a continuation of the traditional policy of the Mughals, vis-à-vis the zamindars whereby the recalcitrant zamindars in a particular region were ousted and replaced by loyal ones. Second, many new village-level zamindaris came into existence either through a settlement of new villages or rehabilitation of old, ruined villages.

Apart from the operation of these two forces, the *bhom* rights were also created by the members of dominant clans in the hitherto *raiya* villages through sheer use of force or usurpation of the *bhom* rights belonging to other clans. There are numerous references to the Amber Raja acquiring *bhom* rights over various *parganas* of Mewat during the latter half of the 17th century. However, this process passed through several stages. In the initial stage, he strengthened his administrative control by acquiring *thanedari* rights (by way of establishing police *chowkis*) over many *parganas* of Mewat that he obtained from the *faujdar* of Mewat on the pretext of restoring law and order. He used the *thanedari* rights as a means to further consolidate his position in the region. Upon the successful consolidation of his position in the region, he was able to further pressurize the Mughal authorities to transfer the zamindaris of these *parganas* to him. In 1702, he got the zamindari of *parganas* Jalalpur, Bharkol, Khilohra, Mojpur and Vadhera.²¹ Initially, he had been given the *thanedari* of these *parganas* and later the zamindari rights on the recommendation of the *faujdar* of Mewat.

Next, the Amber Raja managed to acquire the zamindari of 14 more *mahals*²² and later another seven *parganas*.²³ However, these *mahals* or *parganas* are not named in the documents. In 1712, he further secured the zamindari of *pargana* Khohri.²⁴ This move of his brought him in conflict not only with the Rajputs of his own clan, particularly the Naruka *bhomias*, but also with the Jat and Meo zamindars. The tussle between the Amber Raja and these zamindars found manifestation in the open defiance of his authority by the rebels. The Narukas, already a dominant clan in the Alwar *sarkar*, were the most powerful among the rebels. They not only succeeded in protecting their existing land rights but also eventually emerged as the potential *bhomias* in various *parganas* of Mewat by the latter part of Aurangzeb's reign.²⁵ Up to the mid-17th century, the Narukas had limited *bhom* rights which they had acquired by subjugating petty zamindars of erstwhile castes/tribes with the cooperation of the Amber Raja. In the process, however, some Naruka *bhomias* became so powerful as to threaten the Raja's authority and the latter was compelled to check their growing strength. They raised the banner of rebellion against all levels of authorities, i.e., their own clan chief (the Amber Raja), the imperial *khalisa* officials

²¹ Arzdasht, *Mangsir Sudi* 14 and 15, VS 1759/1702 CE.

²² Arzdasht, *Mangsir Sudi* 3, VS 1760/1703 CE.

²³ Arzdasht, *Jeth Vadi* 1, VS 1761/1704 CE.

²⁴ Arzdasht, *Vaishakh Sudi* 7, VS 1769/1712 CE.

²⁵ Arzdasht, *Mangsir Sudi* 14, VS 1759/1702 CE; *Vaishakh Vadi* 3, VS 1760/1703 CE; *Bhadva Vadi* 5, VS 1760/1703 CE.

and the imperial *jagirdars* or *mansabdars*. Towards the closing years of Aurangzeb's reign, they thus came to be reckoned as the most turbulent rebels.

A majority of the Naruka *bhomias* did not have any legitimate *bhom* rights. When the Amber Raja obtained the *parganas* of Mewat as part of his *tankhwah jagir* from the Mughal emperor, a number of Narukas gained employment as troopers of the Raja who had now turned into an imperial *mansabdar*. As remuneration, they were sub-assigned villages as *jagir* by the Raja. Thereafter, it became a constant endeavour of such Naruka Rajput *jagirdars* to convert their *jagirs*, irrespective of their size, into *bhoms* or zamindaris. Once these *parganas* were transferred from the *jagir* of the Amber Raja to other imperial *mansabdars*, the sub-assignees stood to lose the villages sub-assigned to them. But many Naruka sub-assignees, instead of giving up their sub-assignments, tried to establish their *bhom* rights in the villages that they been holding as sub-assignees. This brought them into conflict with the Amber Raja as well as the imperial *mansabdars* who were assigned *jagirs* in these *parganas* of Mewat. The state officials like *faujdar*s and *amils* repeatedly lodged complaints against the Narukas for forcibly establishing their *bhom* rights. For instance, in his report (*arzasht*) of 1702, the *faujdar* of *pargana* Bahatri complained to the Amber Raja that these Narukas were trying to justify their illegally acquired *bhom* rights in many *parganas* of Mewat. The genesis of the conflict is clearly illustrated in this report. It states that many villages of the *parganas* acquired by the Amber Raja as *jagir* in 1643 from the Mughal emperor were sub-assigned to the *thakurs* (the Kachhwaha Rajputs, particularly the Narukas) for settling their claims to remuneration. When the *jagirs* of these *parganas* were transferred from the Raja, some of the *thakurs* left, while others remained in the villages sub-assigned to them. Some of the Narukas even got the *ijara* of these villages from the new *jagirdars* and continued living there. When disturbances caused by the Jats gathered momentum in the villages of Mewat, these opportunist *thakurs* withheld the entire *hasil* (land revenue). The report further stressed that although they were behaving as de facto zamindars, their zamindari *amals* had yet to get the legal sanction from the requisite authority, and that the political turmoil in the region and the resultant laxity of the imperial administration only made them bolder. But the Narukas contested this official claim and argued that in 1689 they had got the zamindari of Jalalpur, Bharkol and other *parganas* of Mewat with the consent of village-level officials like *muqaddams*, *chaudharis* and *qanungos*, and on the recommendation of the imperial *faujdar* of Mewat. The Amber Raja's officials, in turn, dismissed these claims as spurious. They asserted that whenever the *faujdar* of Mewat was transferred, these *thakurs* (Narukas) created disturbances in their villages: they would send their men to every village with five coloured flags, establish their own *thanas* (police posts) there and start collecting *rahdari* (road tax) and other zamindari taxes from them.²⁶ In fact, following similar methods, the Narukas gradually extended their *bhom* rights over many *parganas* of Mewat during the period under study.

The *faujdar* of Bahatri and the author of the aforementioned *arzasht* reporter thus highlighted the circumstances in which new zamindari claims were made over a vast area in Mewat without any official sanction. The *thakurs*, as the *jagirdars* of the Amber Raja, converted the villages sub-assigned to other troopers into *bhom*. At the same time, they also refused to fulfil their obligations as soldiers of the Raja. The *arzasht* and other documents testify to the fact by

²⁶ *Arzasht, Mangsir Sudi 15, VS 1759/1702 CE.*

illegally carving out zamindaris, they gradually consolidated their position in the region. In order to protect and enforce their zamindari claims, the Naruka *bhomias* constructed *garhis* (fortresses) in the villages and then forced the *raiyyat* and traders to pay zamindari, *rahdari* and other taxes. For instance, according to the *amil's* report dated 1685, the Naruka *bhomias* constructed their *garhis* in the villages of 14 *mahals* that constituted the *jagirs* of imperial *mansabdars* in Mewat, and forcibly collected the *bhomi* cess from them villages.²⁷ This became a widespread phenomenon in the Mewat region during the period under study.

The Amber state took punitive actions against the recalcitrant Naruka *bhomias*, yet at times the combined resistance of the Naruka *bhomias* against the state was so strong that all efforts to subdue them proved abortive. There are numerous references to the demolition of Amber Raja's *thanas* and physical assaults on his officials and servants by the Naruka *bhomias*. The inability of the local authorities to successfully meet the challenge of *bhomias* is an index of the growing ineffectiveness of the administrative machinery. One Naruka chief, Rao Hathi Singh and his men declared their zamindari rights in all the villages of *parganas* Bharkol and Jalalpur and refused to surrender the zamindari *amal* of these villages to the Amber Raja.²⁸ Naruka *bhomias* like Kishan Singh, Karan Singh, Gaj Singh, Uday Singh, Devi Singh, Sawai Ram, Anand Ram, Fauju Singh, and Daulu Singh became so powerful that acting in unison, they moved freely in the villages of *parganas* Mojpur, Alwar, Bharkol, Hasanpur, Pindayan, Khilohra, Umarni, Todathek, Naharkhoh, Nanawar, Sonkhar-Sonkhari and Bahatri.²⁹ Strong attachment to hereditary territorial rights which was a characteristic feature of the Rajput polity prompted the leading members of Kachhwaha sub-clans to convert their temporary *jagir* assignments into *bhom*. The Narukas thus were bent upon fulfilling their ambitions to the detriment of the interest of their clan chief (the Amber Raja).

The Rajasthani documents are relatively silent on the activities of the Meos and Khanzada zamindars though, as mentioned before, there is some evidence to suggest that the number of Meo and Khanzada zamindars was declining and so was their influence, in the wake of a tremendous growth of new zamindaris of the Naruka Rajput *bhomias*. Though the Meos put up stiff resistance to this encroachment upon their traditional land rights, they appear to have been fighting a lost battle. For instance, in 1712, when the Amber Raja got the zamindari of *pargana* Khohri, the Meo zamindars revolted against this move,³⁰ but had to retreat and finally give up their claims in the face of the Raja's superior military strength. In many cases, the Meo zamindars were also removed on administrative grounds. For instance, in 1684, the Meo zamindars of *parganas* Mojpur, Bharkol and Punkhar of Alwar *sarkar* were expelled on the ground of non-payment of land revenue to the state.³¹ In 1740, the Meo zamindars in the villages of Neekatpura, Bhada, Todarpur, Pran Nath, Vaisachh, Jai Singh Pura and Ram Singh Pura of *pargana* Khohri were also deprived of their zamindaris on the ground of their that failure to deposit the land revenue to the *jagirdar*.³² Many Meo zamindars were ousted from their

²⁷ Arzdasht, *Asadh Vadi* 5, VS 1792/1685 CE.

²⁸ Arzdasht, *Mangsir Sudi* 15, VS 1759/1702 CE.

²⁹ Arzdasht, *Mangsir Sudi* 15, VS 1759/1702 CE; *Jeth Vadi* 1, VS 1761/1704 CE; *Chait Vadi* 4, VS 1761/1704 CE; *Mangsir Sudi* 3, VS 1760/1703 CE; *Mangsir Vadi* 10, VS 1760/1703 CE.

³⁰ Arzdasht, *Vaishakh Sudi* 7, VS 1769/1712 CE.

³¹ Arzdasht, *Bhadva Vadi* 3, VS 1741/1684 CE.

³² *Chithi* to the *amil*, *pargana* Khohri, *Asadh Vadi* 4, VS 1797/1740 CE.

zamindari on account of seditious activities. For instance, the Pahat Meo zamindars of *parganas* Kama and Pahari were expelled for their alliance with Jats. The *amil*, in his report to the Amber Raja, alleged that Dura Meo, zamindar of the Pahat Meo *pal*, and other Pahat Meos joined hands with the Churaman Jat, the Raja's enemy.³³ Coercive measures were, however, not the only means to weaken the Meo zamindars. It appears that a systematic campaign was launched by the Amber Raja to destroy their socio-economic base so that they could not offer any effective resistance to the growing ambitions of the Kachhwaha Rajputs in the region.

We do not have much information about the zamindari rights of the Khanzadas in the region during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. However, the Khanzadas as Mughal allies were in a slightly better position than were the Meos, as regards their zamindari rights. Many Khanzadas had been associated with the land revenue assessment and management at *pargana* level during emperor Akbar's reign. According to the *arsattas* of early 18th century, prominent Khanzadas like Firoz Khan, Vazid Khan and Azmat Khan enjoyed both *bhomi* and *jagirdari* rights for a long time in the region.³⁴

The Meo zamindars, on the other hand, could not muster sufficient political support either from the Mughal court or from other rebel zamindars (like the Jats) to meet the onslaught of Rajput *bhomias*. Economically too, the lack of material resources weakened their hold on the rural society. The growing heterogeneous composition of the zamindar class in Mewat further eroded the social base of the Meo zamindars. Though there are occasional references in the Rajasthani records to their seditious activities against the tyrannical attitude of the Amber Raja and other imperial *jagirdars*, they could not mobilize requisite support from local peasants, as the Jat rebels were able to do.³⁵ Unlike the Jats and Naruka Rajputs, the small Meo zamindars had meagre resources and, therefore, could not induce a large number of peasants to support their cause against the state. Their other weakness was that they did not possess *garhis* in their villages to organize better defence. Without the requisite political, socio-economic and military might, they failed to withstand the onslaught of Rajput *bhomias*, who were, in all these respects, far more powerful. Further, they could not even match the Jat rebels in manpower and material resources.

According to the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the Jats held zamindaris in the *parganas* of Alwar, Sahar and Tijara *sarkars*.³⁶ Numerically, they were not as significant as the Meos and Khanzadas. But by the mid-17th century, they managed to carve out new zamindaris in many more *parganas* in Alwar, Sahar and Tijara *sarkars*. The rising power of Jat zamindars in this region indicates that the Mughal administration and the Amber Raja were either indifferent to or unable to restrict the expansion of Jat zamindaris as well as their social base. The rise of Jats as a political force began with their revolt in the Mathura region in 1669 under the leadership of Gokula and Raja Ram Jat during the reign of Aurangzeb.³⁷ Raja Ram fought many battles against the Amber Raja as well as the Mughals. After the death of Raja Ram, the leadership of the Jats passed on to Churaman Jat, the son of Bhajja, zamindar of Sinsini (Bharatpur district, Rajasthan).

³³ Arzdasht, *Asadh Sudi* 5, VS 1766/1709 CE; *Asadh Vadi* 14, VS 1766/1709 CE.

³⁴ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Pahari, VS 1783/1726 CE; *pargana* Khohri, VS 1769/1712 CE.

³⁵ R. P. Rana, 'Agrarian Revolts in North India during Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, nos 3-4, 1981, pp. 281-326.

³⁶ Abul-Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 2, pp. 202-06.

³⁷ Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 340-41.

Being a shrewd leader, Churaman knew that a direct confrontation with the Mughal state would mean meeting the fate of Fateh Singh and Jorawar Singh, the two sons of Raja Ram who died fighting the Mughals,³⁸ and would only cause harm to the rising Jat power. So, apparently, Churaman did not involve himself in any confrontation with the Mughals, barring a few skirmishes, till Aurangzeb's death (1707) and rather followed a policy of conciliation. In fact, even during Aurangzeb's reign, Churaman tried to impress upon the emperor that he was different from (i.e., more trustworthy than) his predecessor Raja Ram and, if given a chance, would fulfil his responsibilities like a loyal Mughal soldier. But Aurangzeb never trusted Churaman and his loyalty towards the Mughal state. After Aurangzeb's death, Churaman sided with Bahadur Shah in the war of succession.³⁹ After the decisive battle of Jajau in 1707 against his rival Azam Shah and upon becoming the emperor, Bahadur Shah rewarded Churaman by making him a *mansabdar* with the rank of 1500/500 *zat* and *sawar*⁴⁰ and giving him the responsibility for the security (*rahdari*) of Agra–Delhi route. Subsequently, he took part in Bahadur Shah's campaigns against the Sikhs, notably the sieges of Sadhaura and Lohgarh.⁴¹ At the same time, he continued his plundering activities whenever such an opportunity rose. Under Churaman's leadership, the Jat power increased considerably, as he succeeded in uniting the Jat zamindars under his leadership. A major and long-awaited diplomatic success came when Churaman's plea to the emperor for the grant of the *faujdar* of Mathura was accepted.⁴² All this brought about a change in Churaman's image from one of a plunderer to that of an imperial *mansabdar*. This elevation in status, in turn, enabled him to establish cordial relations with other imperial *mansabdars* at the Mughal court. Further, Churaman also improved his relations with Munim Khan, *diwan* of the Mughal state, who helped him in getting the *ijara* and zamindari rights from the other imperial *mansabdars* in the Agra and Mewat regions. Moreover, he himself tried to persuade the imperial *mansabdars* to assign him the *ijara* and zamindari rights, in the place of the Amber Raja, for the collection of land revenue (*hasil*) from their *jagirs*. Consequently, he secured the *ijara* of a number of *parganas* in the Agra and Mewat regions between 1707 and 1720.

On the other hand, the political atmosphere of the Mughal court, from 1707 to 1720, i.e., from the beginning of emperor Bahadur Shah's reign till the end of the Sayyid brothers' dominance, was not quite favourable to the Amber Raja. Churaman, on the other hand, received open support of the Sayyid brothers and Nawab Khan-i-Daura in consolidating his position vis-à-vis the Amber Raja in the Agra and Mewat regions. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the latter as an imperial *mansabdar*, too, secured, from other imperial *mansabdars*, the *ijaradari*, *thanedari* and zamindari rights of many *parganas* in Mewat that constituted their *jagirs* but were contiguous to his own *watan jagir*. This he did on the pretext of maintaining law and order in the region, since the collection of land revenue from the *jagirs* was heavily disrupted by agrarian revolts. For instance, in 1702, the Amber Raja secured the zamindari and *thanedari* of 14

³⁸ G. C. Dwivedi, *The Jats: Their Role in the Mughal Empire*, Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1989, pp. 48-49.

³⁹ After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the war of succession started between prince Muazzam (Bahadur Shah) and prince Azam. The rivals faced each other in the battlefield of Jajau. In this battle, Churaman helped Bahadur Shah with 2000–3000 *sawars* (horsemen) (Dwivedi, *The Jats*, p. 54).

⁴⁰ Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*, Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University Press, 1959, p. 123.

⁴¹ Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 124.

⁴² *Vakil's Report, Bhadva Vadi 2*, VS 1764/1707 CE.

parganas of Mewat from the Mughal authority. Next year, he got six more *parganas*⁴³ even as his position at the Mughal court was turning shaky. Underlying these moves of the Amber Raja were crucial politico-economic calculations. For one, taking the *ijara* of the *parganas* in the vicinity of his *watan jagir* was motivated by his desire to expand his *watan* areas. Second, the Kachhwaha Rajputs were speedily growing in strength during the 17th century and organized themselves into 12 *khaps* (septs) by the end of the century. But the Amber Raja's income from his *watan jagir* was not sufficient to serve their economic interests. Thus, taking the zamindari, *thanedari* and *ijaradari* rights of the imperial *jagirs* was meant to provide the Kachhwaha Rajput *khaps* and their *sardars* (chiefs) with a larger and stable source of income (by way of sub-assignment of these rights) and thereby secure their loyalty to him. But this move of the Amber Raja came into direct conflict with the politico-economic interests of the Jats in Agra and Delhi *subas* who had emerged as a formidable force to reckon with during the latter part of Aurangzeb's reign. Further, as mentioned before, the rising influence of Churaman at the Mughal court impaired the economic interests and political status of the Amber Raja. A fierce competition between the duo over the possession of the *parganas* of Mewat that formed the imperial *jagirs* was inevitable. Churaman's patience dried up when Amber Raja took the zamindari and *thanedari* rights of *parganas* Khohri and Mojpur in 1712.⁴⁴ Khohri, a *pargana* with 342 villages,⁴⁵ formed more than half of the land in Alwar *sarkar* and was more fertile than other *parganas*. Besides, the two *parganas* were contiguous to the Jat territories. So, Churaman, in order to buttress his claim over Khohri and Mojpur removed all the *thanas* of the Amber Raja in the villages of these *parganas* and set up his own *thanas*.⁴⁶ By 1714, he had established his control over a number of villages in the two *parganas*. The *amil* of the Amber state complained of physical assaults on the Amber's land revenue officials by Churaman's men.⁴⁷ The *vakil* (the agent of Amber Raja at the Mughal court), too, reported that Churaman had collected the entire land revenue of these two *parganas* by force.⁴⁸ By 1718, Churaman established his control over many *parganas* of Mewat, such as Devati-Sachari, Baroda Meo, Sonkhar-Sonkhari, Harsauli, Naharkhoh, Todathek, Hodal, Kot-Qasim, Sogar Pahari, Khohri and Mojpur.⁴⁹ These acts of Churaman threw an open challenge to the Amber Raja. The challenge can be understood from a letter written by the *vakil* to the Amber Raja. In his letter, the *vakil* professed that he kept his master well informed of Churaman's activities at the Mughal court and that he was extremely careful about protecting their interests at the Mughal court. He further informed the Raja that Churaman had sent a request to Nawab Khan-i-Daura for assigning him the zamindari of *pargana* Khohri, and Khan-i-Daura, being his supporter, had recommended Churaman's letter of request and sent it to Rairaya Gujjar Mal. The *vakil* claimed to have reasoned with Gujjarmal that the *pargana* demanded by Churaman had been part of the Amber Raja's *watan jagir* and thus its zamindari could never be given to anybody, especially Churaman, who was a *mufsid* (rebel).⁵⁰

⁴³ Arzdasht, *Mangsir Sudi* 3, VS 1760/1703 CE; *Jeth Vadi* 1, VS 1761/1704 CE.

⁴⁴ Arzdasht, *Vaisakh Sudi* 7, VS 1769/1712 CE.

⁴⁵ *Arsatta, pargana* Khohri, VS 1769/1712 CE.

⁴⁶ Arzdasht, *Asadh Sudi* 3, VS 1769/1712 CE.

⁴⁷ Arzdasht, *Bhadva Vadi* 1, VS 1771/1714 CE.

⁴⁸ *Vakil's Report, Asadh Vadi* 7, VS 1771/1714 CE.

⁴⁹ *Vakil's Report, Jeth Sudi* 11, VS 1771/1714 CE.

⁵⁰ Arzdasht, *Sawan Sudi* 15, VS 1775/1718 CE.

The *vakil* of the Amber Raja tried his best to prevent the grant of zamindari and *ijara* of *pargana* Khohri to Churaman, but the latter enjoyed the patronage of Khan-i-Daura and the Sayyid brothers and tried to convince the imperial *mansabdars* at the Mughal court that he could manage the land revenue collection better than the Amber Raja. Such an open support to Churaman at the Mughal court infuriated the Amber Raja and he complained against Churaman to the Mughal emperor. At the same time, the emperor also received complaints of those imperial *mansabdars* whose *jagirs* Churaman's men had plundered since he had not got their *ijara* or zamindari rights.⁵¹ In spite of these complaints, there was no change in Churaman's behaviour and his armed struggle with the Amber Raja continued. The Rajput army suffered defeats at hands of the Jat army in many battles.⁵²

The power of Churaman can be gauged from the fact that in 1714 he forcibly collected the land revenue of the entire *pargana* of Khohri over which the Amber Raja had zamindari rights.⁵³ The *diwan* of Amber Ramchander expressed his anxiety at the growing audacity and might of the Jats in his letter to the Raja:

The Jats have become very powerful in the entire region. They have demolished our *thanas* in the villages of *parganas* Khohri, Sahar, Harsana, Sonkhar-Sonkhari and Aau and set up their own *thanas* in these *parganas*. The Jats are also constructing their *garhis* in these areas. In every fortress, they keep *sawars* [horsemen] and *masala* [ammunition]. The fortress of Mojpur alone has 1000 men and ammunition: 600 *topchis* [gunners], 2 *rahakallas* [small cannons], 400 *pala-nafars* [foot soldiers], 40 *ramchangis* [muskets] and 200 *sawars*. Thus, every fortress has men and ammunition and every village of the *parganas* is occupied by their *thanas*. And our men have been shunted out from the villages and at many places beaten up.⁵⁴

The *diwan* further wrote: 'Whenever we fight against the Jats, their army increases in numerical strength. At times when we are about to score a victory over the Jats, suddenly their ranks swell, which enables the Jats to win over us. In many instances they have taken away our flag, emblem and drum from us'.⁵⁵ The *diwan* chiefly blamed the weaknesses of Rajput chieftains and the lack of resources for such reverses:

The fault lies with the Rajput *sardars* who, as has been the case previously, do not perform their military duties and many Rajputs do not go to their *kotaris* [fortresses]. Earlier, they performed their duties well, but these days they do not go out of their homes. All of them have become greedy and selfish. Everyone considers himself a Rao [*bhomia*]. All this provides enough time to the Jats to fortify themselves. The second cause is that they are in trouble due to non-payment [of remuneration]. Sometimes

⁵¹ *Vakil's Report, Asadh Vadi 7, VS 1771/1714 CE; Vakil's Report, Jeth Sudi 11, VS 1771/1714 CE.*

⁵² *Arzdasht, Bhadva Vadi 1, VS 1771/1714 CE; Sawan Vadi 6, VS 1772/1715 CE.*

⁵³ *Vakil's Report, Jeth Sudi 11, VS 1771/1714 CE; Arsatta, pargana Khohri, VS 1772/1715 CE.*

⁵⁴ *Arzdasht, Sawan Vadi 6, VS 1772/1716 CE.*

⁵⁵ *Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 4, VS 1766/1709 CE; Sawan Vadi 3, VS 1772/1715 CE; Asadh Vadi 15, VS 1766/1709 CE.*

there is no money for salary. We need a big army and weapons to defeat the Jats and all this requires lot of money.⁵⁶

Time and again, the *diwan* pressed on the Amber Raja to teach a lesson to Churaman: Churaman Jat is our enemy . . . [He] is a rascal . . . totally unrealistic and unreliable. Acquiring land is his main target . . . he requires a severe punishment . . . I do not consider it a small matter . . . It is a serious problem for us. If you do not take action against him in time then we have to make more efforts to control his wicked activities because [he] is becoming more and more aggressive.⁵⁷

The *diwan* was particularly troubled by the fact that the revenue officials of Amber were often beaten up by Churaman's men in the presence of peasants and put to flight. While this ignominy of state officials dented the image of Amber, these acts of Jats increased Churaman's popularity as a valiant man. Referring to Churaman as a lion, the *diwan* complained that, inspired by the valour of Jat rebels like Churaman, ordinary peasants had also turned 'treacherous and refused to pay the land revenue to our officials'.⁵⁸ Therefore, to punish the peasants of *pargana* Khohri, Mukand Ram Vakawat and Raj Singh Kilanot and others were sent with an army to the disaffected villages, but they found the villages deserted because the peasants had run away to the *thoon* (fortress) of Churaman.⁵⁹ However, they managed to capture and imprison some peasants of Rampur Khurd, Jainadipur and Sithadheri villages. The Amber troops also attacked the villages of *pargana* Mojpur where the peasants were instigated by the Jats and Kishan Naruka's men not to pay land revenue to the officials.⁶⁰

Upon receiving the news that the Jats were fortifying their villages in *parganas* Mojpur and Bharkol, the *diwan* immediately ordered Shyam Singh Khangrot and Jodha Singh Kilanot to march with an army to the Jat villages. The army occupied most of the Jat villages where Churaman was building his fortresses. In Vanahni village, the army destroyed the Jat fortifications; removed the *thanas* of Jats and set up the *thanas* of Amber; and arrested many peasants. The peasants of seven villages of *pargana* Mojpur, contiguous to the territories of Jats, ran away to the *thoon* fearing assault by the Amber army.⁶¹ However, in *pargana* Sahar (Braj region) and in many villages of *pargana* Hodal, Bhikho Jat, Churaman's nephew, and Jait Singh, zamindar of Kama, joined hands to construct fortresses. They even replaced the *thana* of Amber in Vichhor village with their own *thana*.⁶² In *pargana* Pahari too, the Jats removed the Rajput *thanas* even as the *faujdar* of Amber expressed his inability to protect the *thana* against the Jats residing in the vicinity of Kama.⁶³ The Jat villages in *parganas* Hodal and Palwal joined hands with the Jats of Sansanwal *gotra*, and by the time the *faujdar* of Mathura reached these villages with his army, the peasants had already fled to Sinsini.⁶⁴ The Jat peasants of Deswal and

⁵⁶ Arzdasht, *Sawan Vadi* 6, VS 1772/1715 CE; *Chet Sudi* 4, VS 1769/1712 CE.

⁵⁷ Arzdasht, *Kartik Vadi* 4, VS 1766/1709 CE; *Posh Sudi* 13, VS 1766/1709 CE; *Asadh Sudi* 3, VS 1769/1772 CE; *Sawan Vadi* 6, VS 1772/1715 CE.

⁵⁸ Arzdasht, *Asadh Sudi* 3, VS 1769/1712 CE.

⁵⁹ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1773/1716 CE.

⁶⁰ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1773/1716 CE.

⁶¹ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Mojpur, VS 1774/1717 CE; Arzdasht, *Asadh Vadi* 6, VS 1772/1715 CE.

⁶² Arzdasht, *Asadh Vadi* 15, VS 1766/1709 CE.

⁶³ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Mojpur, VS 1773/1716 CE.

⁶⁴ Arzdasht, *Sawan Sudi* 15, VS 1775/1718 CE.

Sansanwal *gotras* as well as the Meena peasants belonging to *pargana* Kathumber also joined the army of Jats.⁶⁵

In this context, it is to be noted that caste-based unity between the Jat zamindars and Jat peasants was found not only in Braj, Bharatpur and Mewat regions, but also in *pargana* Kol (Aligarh), where 183 out of 442½ villages were under the control of the Jats. Bhopat Ram, the *amil* of *pargana* Kol, informed the Amber raja that the peasants of these 183 villages had not paid their land revenue to the Amber state, since they were under total control of Nanda Jat. They could only be taken to task by a large army.⁶⁶ The Jats kept blacksmiths (*lohars*) in their fortresses to manufacture weapons. For instance, in one report, the Amber Raja was informed that Churaman had captured some blacksmiths and taken them to his *thoon* to make *ramchangis* and *rahkallas*.⁶⁷ In response, the Amber state issued an order that if any blacksmith was found helping the Jats, strict action would be taken against him.⁶⁸

From the foregoing account of Jat–Rajput conflict centred on the appropriation of agrarian surplus, it is evident that the Jat revolts, in fact, were essentially an agrarian revolts against the state — revolts that drew not only peasants, zamindars and artisans (i.e., blacksmiths), but also castes other than Jats, such as the Meos and Meenas. In the course of these protracted revolts, many Jat peasants turned into zamindars who provided a strong social base for the rise of the Bharatpur state.

A singular inspirational force behind the mobilization of several peasant castes in these revolts was their perception of Churaman Jat’s activities. The ‘heroic’ exploits of Churaman and his men — beating up of Amber land revenue officials, removal of the Amber Raja’s *thanas* and establishment of their own *thanas* — fired the imagination of peasants who looked upon Churaman as their liberator from the oppressive rule of the Mughals and the Amber state. The number of peasants flocking to his *thoon* increased day by day. As mentioned earlier, impressed by Churaman’s image as a ‘manly’ warrior, fearless of the state power and lording over the region like a lion, they mustered the courage to refuse the payment of land revenue, steal grains or consume the standing crops. For the Amber state, however, Churaman was a cunning, crafty and unreliable rascal; a notorious freebooter, traitor, seasoned plunderer and robber-chief; and, most importantly, its chief enemy. Nobility at the Mughal court also considered Churaman a rogue and a crook, but reasoned that a courageous Jat zamindar, when required, could be used like a notorious *daroga*. So, the Sayyid brothers and Nawab Khan-i-Daura continued to support him against the Amber Raja. Even Churaman was well aware of the fact that he was being used as a weapon against the powerful Amber Raja and hence had been given the *ijara* of so many *parganas* in the Agra and Mewat region. But Churaman made most of this opportunity to create a strong socio-economic base for the Jat movement.

Here, Churaman’s strategy of dealing with enemy villages, i.e., those that opposed his authority, merits an explanation. The enemy villages were plundered and set on fire, the

⁶⁵ Arzdasht, *Kartik Vadi* 7, VS 1751/1694 CE.

⁶⁶ Dwivedi, *The Jats*, p. 47.

⁶⁷ Arzdasht, VS 1747/1690 CE.

⁶⁸ Arzdasht, *Chet Vadi* 7, VS 1751/1694 CE. The Amber *faujdar* Shyam Singh informed the Raja that the blacksmiths of *qasba* Shavri who had made 11 *rahakallas* and *ramchangis* for the Jats had been arrested and compelled to give a written undertaking that in future they would not supply arms to the Jats (*Arzdasht, Jeth Vadi* 1, VS 1761/1704 CE).

domestic animals were taken away, the *patels* were held captive and standing crops were destroyed. All these violent methods were aimed at intimidating the peasantry of the enemy villages and coercing them into submission. In the medieval society, loot and plunder during military campaigns were not considered unethical. Rather, they were regarded as a legitimate means of asserting a zamindar's or a ruler's politico-military authority over the recalcitrant subject-peasantry.⁶⁹ In fact, the *diwan* of Amber, in his letters, did not condemn Churaman's acts of loot and plunder, but rather expressed his anxiety at the growing strength of Churaman that posed a grave danger to the economic interests of the Amber state.

The Rajput–Jat conflict in the course of these revolts not only adversely affected the agricultural production, but also led to the over-exploitation of peasantry, as both Amber officials and the Jats forcibly collected land revenue from them. In 1712 when Churaman forcibly collected land revenue from the villages of *pargana* Khohri, the Amber state reacted sharply and many peasants were taken as prisoners because it was alleged that they had willingly paid land revenue to the Jats. In the words of the Amber *diwan*: 'The *raiya* of the villages contiguous to the Jat territory have fled to the *thoon*. [But] the *raiya* of many villages have been captured and put into prison as they had paid their dues to the Jats'. The *diwan*, however, admitted that the Meo peasantry had pleaded their helplessness, land revenue was being extracted from them by both the Jats and the Amber state. The Meo peasants had further argued that they could not pay land revenue twice on the same crop, since they had already paid land revenue to the Jats, and that they were being persecuted unnecessarily.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the Amber state claimed that the peasants should have paid the revenue to the Amber officials only, as the Amber state had the legitimate right to collect land revenue in the *parganas* of Mewat. For the Amber state, paying land revenue to the Jats meant supporting them and amounted to disloyalty for which the peasants deserved punishment. In desperation, the Meo peasants threatened that if they continued to be harassed for land revenue, they would be forced to leave the villages. Indeed, caught up in the bitter contention between the Amber state and Churaman, many peasants were forced to become deserters or rebels, i.e., many either left their villages or fled to the Jat *thoon*.

In 1716, the *amil* reported that the peasants of 127 villages out of 342 villages in in *pargana* Khohri had deserted their villages fearing an armed assault by the Amber state. The *amil* further complained that land revenue could not be collected from many villages because the entire harvest had been consumed up by the peasants in defiance of the state.⁷¹ Similar were the conditions in *pargana* Pahari comprising 209 villages. There, according to the *arzdasht* of 1716, the standing crops of 24 villages were destroyed by the peasants out of the fear of Amber army.⁷² The *amil*'s report of 1718 from *pargana* Sahar lamented the decrease in

⁶⁹ In *Tarikh-i-Ahmad-Shahi* (Dwivedi, *The Jats*, p. 89), a significant remark of the 18th-century Maratha *subedar* of Malwa, Malhar Rao Holkar reflects the general tendency of the soldiers after victorious campaigns. On the plunder carried out by the Maratha soldiers in 1754, Malhar reportedly said, 'These soldiers, they always do it'. Hence, Churaman's depredations in the course of military campaigns were in keeping with the general practice of the age. The examples of Mughal, Maratha and even Rajput troops indulging in plunder can easily be multiplied. Much of the criticism of Churaman by his contemporaries reflected the Amber state's point of view.

⁷⁰ *Arzdasht*, *Jeth Vadi* 3, VS 1761/1704 CE.

⁷¹ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1773/1716 CE.

⁷² *Arzdasht*, *Asadh Sudi* 3, VS 1769/1712 CE.

agricultural production of many villages of the *pargana* due to Jat revolts.⁷³ The *amil*'s detailed report of 1716 from *pargana* Khohri shows that in the wake of the Jat revolts, the peasants of 28 villages did not deposit the land revenue for various reasons: the Amber army destroyed the harvest of one village; the peasantry of three villages consumed their entire harvest before the arrival of the Amber army; the peasants of two villages, discontent with the Amber state, fled to the *thoon*; the peasantry of 20 villages, many of which were contiguous to the Jat territory, took away the share of produce payable as land revenue to the *thoon*; and two villages were completely deserted due to the highhandedness of the land revenue officials.⁷⁴

The Jat revolts also affected the agricultural production and revenue collection in *pargana* Kol (Aligarh), apart from Mewat and Braj regions. Bhopat Ram, the *amil* of *pargana* Kol, informed the Amber Raja that 183 out of 449½ villages were under the control of the turbulent Jats; that the state's revenue officials managed to collect a meagre 1300 rupees out of the total revenue of 97,729 rupees due from these villages; and that it would be difficult to collect the revenue from these villages until and unless the Jats were overpowered.⁷⁵

However, Churaman's influence at the Mughal court gradually declined, particularly after the fall of the Sayyid brothers. His plundering activities in the *parganas* of the imperial *jagirdars* also made him unpopular at the Mughal court which continued to receive complaints that he and his henchmen were collecting *rahdari* and secretly manufacturing arms.⁷⁶ The Jat power had reached its peak under the leadership of Churaman, but after his death in 1721, the Amber Raja seized the *thoon* and he razed it to ground. The Jat power ultimately suffered such a setback that Churaman's nephew Badan Singh Jat became a feudatory of the Amber Raja.⁷⁷ The process by which the Jats had acquired their zamindari rights in the Mewat region was different from the manner in which the Naruka Rajputs had carved out their zamindaris. However, it is evident from the Rajasthani documents that the Jats had built up their socio-political base in the region through the *ijara* system. They acquired the *ijara* of many *parganas* from the imperial *jagirdars* by intimidatory tactics. Gradually, the Jat peasants were encouraged to settle in these *parganas*. Ultimately the Jat zamindars constructed their *garhis* in the villages numerically dominated by the Jat peasants and stationed Armed guards to protect these *garhis*. To avoid confrontation with the Narukas who could have been their potential rivals, they aligned themselves with the Narukas who, too, were openly defying the authority of the Amber Raja. The confrontation between the Narukas and the Amber Raja provided the Jats enough ground to establish their zamindari rights over many *parganas* of Mewat. Like the Narukas, the Jats could also organize themselves in a better way than did the Meos. Economically too, the Jats were more prosperous than the Meos. The Jats and Narukas thus succeeded in consolidating their military strength and social base in many *parganas* of Mewat, thereby greatly undermining the position of the Meos.

The creation of new caste/clan zamindaris in the region had a threefold effect on the rural society. First, the new zamindars sought to extend their hereditary territorial rights and in the process depressed the position of the small zamindars, who happened to be mainly Meos. Second, this development eroded the traditional caste relationship between the peasants and the

⁷³ Arzdasht, *Sawan Sudi* 5, VS 1777/1716 CE.

⁷⁴ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1773/1716 CE.

⁷⁵ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Pahari, VS 1773/1716 CE.

⁷⁶ Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 178.

zamindars. The new zamindars in some villages encouraged the settlement of a composite rural population in order to deprive the Meos of their numerical advantage, since they had been in majority among the peasants. The third consequence of the creation of new zamindaris was the conversion of a large number of hitherto *raiya* villages into zamindari and the further imposition of new taxes and cesses on the peasantry. This increasingly oppressive tax burden on the peasantry reduced them to a state of bare subsistence.

The reshuffling in the territorial jurisdiction of the zamindars not only altered the caste/clan composition of the zamindar class, but also led to its growing heterogeneity. The stratification within the zamindars of Mewat was also governed by the customary forces of the caste and clan networks. On the one hand, in some *parganas*, the position of the Jats improved as many dominant Jat peasants became small zamindars and many Jat zamindars were able to expand their territorial jurisdiction by suppressing the petty zamindars belonging to other castes. On the other hand, the Narukas who had gained zamindaris in various pockets and enclaves of the region in the course of the 17th century, consolidated their position further by the early 18th century and eventually carved out an independent principality of Alwar by the end of the century. Nevertheless, the Amber Raja and his clansmen also managed to retain their *bhom* rights in parts of the region. Overall, the Kachhwaha Rajputs emerged as the most influential and powerful class of zamindars followed by the Jats. The worst sufferers at all levels were the Meos. The process of the contraction of Meo zamindaris reached its peak in the mid-18th century. By then, they were almost totally subjugated by the Kachhwaha Rajputs and Jats and thenceforth had to accept a subordinate status vis-a-vis the Jats and Kachhwaha Rajputs.

The zamindar as a class gained considerable political, economical and social dominance during the Mughal period. The Mughal empire was heavily dependent on their support and cooperation in the collection of the enormous surplus generated by the subject-peasantry. The imperial policy towards them was shaped by local conditions and the extent to which they could be roped in the task of revenue administration. The continuance or discontinuance of their customary superior rights in land largely depended on their attitude towards the imperial administration in a particular region. Those who cooperated with the administration were allowed to enjoy their customary privileges, whereas the hostile ones were punished, subdued or replaced by loyal ones. The Mughal emperor conferred zamindari rights (in some *parganas* of Mewat) on the Amber Raja and the Jats who were bitter rivals and entrusted them with the task of maintaining law and order and extracting land revenue from the recalcitrant sections of peasantry. In a way, the Mughals thus tried to cash in on the mutual rivalries of the zamindars belonging to different castes (Rajputs, Jats, Meos) with the objective of weakening their position vis-a-vis the imperial state. However, in practice, many zamindars took advantage of the imperial support extended to them, to enhance their territorial rights and appropriate for themselves a greater share of the land revenue. In periods of stress, they even sought to expand their hereditary territorial rights at the cost of the imperial authority. Most of the administrative difficulties that the Mughal emperor and other authorities (such as the Amber Raja) had to face were caused by a section of seditious zamindars. Despite the best efforts on the part of the imperial administration, neither all the zamindars could be conciliated nor could they be completely overawed.

The majority of Naruka Rajput and Jat zamindars refused to accept a subordinate status vis-a-vis the state, whether Mughal or Amber, and thus could not be integrated into the state administrative machinery. That many Jats and Naruka *bhomias* in the region became restive

and openly defied the imperial authority in the second half of the 17th century is amply attested by the Rajasthani documents, though the reasons for their discontent with and hostility towards the imperial authority are not mentioned. Their hostility and recalcitrance found an overt manifestation in the forcible misappropriation of land revenue that belonged to the imperial *jagirdars*. The latter's inability to collect revenue from their *jagirs* due to the acts of embezzlement and plunder resorted to by the Jat and Naruka zamindars is also well documented. For instance, the Naruka *taluqdars* of *parganas* Banawar, Sonkhar and Mandawar were charged with not sending the revenue arrears amounting to 1,80,000 rupees.⁷⁸ In another instance, the Naruka *bhomias* robbed four lakh rupees from 14 *parganas* of Alwar *sarkar*, while the imperial *jagirdar* could hardly collect 3000 *maunds* of foodgrains.⁷⁹ In yet another instance, the Naruka *bhomias* misappropriated the entire land revenue of 13 villages in *pargana* Hasanpur.⁸⁰ Rao Hathi Singh Naruka, *taluqdar* of *pargana* Jalalpur and Bharkol that were part of the *jagir* of imperial *jagirdar* Wakil Khan, embezzled the entire land revenue of two *parganas*.⁸¹ The Jat zamindars, too, were very active in plundering the peasants of Alwar, Sahar and Tijara *sarkars*. An imperial *jagirdar* sent a petition to the Mughal court complaining that the Jat zamindar Churaman and his allies had not deposited the land revenue of *pargana* Khohri.⁸² He further alleged that the Jat zamindars were involved in plundering activities in the entire region from Akbarabad (Agra) and Shahjahanabad (Delhi).⁸³ Interestingly, at about the same time, the growing encroachment upon their zamindari rights forced a number of Meo zamindars to embezzle land revenue from the villages of *parganas* Khohri and Pahari.⁸⁴

The helplessness of the imperial *jagirdars* in the face of such depredations is evident from their repeated complaints against the rebel zamindars, each one of whom was in possession of his own *garhi* and armed forces. In 1686, the *amil* reported to the Amber Raja that after the *jagirs* of nawab Shiphedar Khan and Bahadur Khan had been given to the Raja into *ijara*, the Chauhan and Panchnot Rajput *bhomias* removed all the *sahnas* of the Amber state from the villages, cut the standing crops and carried them to the villages of other *parganas*, where they prepared the grains in the fields and distributed them among themselves. The Chauhan *bhomias* took away the entire *rabi* harvest to their own *garhis* in the villages Bagri, Mundawari and Meharaware, etc. The Panchnot *bhomias* also carried the *rabi* harvest into their *garhis* in the villages Vachhochh, Phoolwara, Jharoda, etc. Further, the *bhomias* imprisoned the peasantry (*raiyyati*) and *patels* of some villages that did not support them in their *gharis*. They even killed Dayaram Patel. The *raiyyati* was terribly frightened of the oppression of the *bhomias*.⁸⁵ Other reports too mention that the *bhomias* had overrun the entire region of Mewat, forcibly collecting foodgrains, looting the merchants and collecting the *rahdari* tax from them, and charging *bhomi* and *faujdari* taxes from the peasants in contravention of the customary practices. Whenever the agents of the *jagirdars* asked the peasants to pay the land revenue, the latter submitted that the zamindar had already extracted it from them. The *jagirdars*, in turn, repeatedly pleaded at the

⁷⁸ Arzdasht, Asadh Sudi 14, VS 1760/1703 CE.

⁷⁹ Arzdasht, Asadh Vadi 5, VS 1742/1685 CE.

⁸⁰ Arsatta, *pargana* Hasanpur, VS 1747/1690 CE.

⁸¹ Arzdasht, Kartik Vadi 6, VS 1759/1703 CE.

⁸² Arsatta, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1772/1715 CE.

⁸³ Arzdasht, Mangsir Vadi 2, VS 1744/1687 CE.

⁸⁴ Arsatta, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1772/1715 CE; *pargana* Pahari, VS 1788/1731 CE.

⁸⁵ Arzdasht, Posh Vadi 7, VS 1743/1686 CE.

Mughal court that unless the defiant zamindars were overpowered, it would be impossible to collect revenue from their respective *jagirs*.⁸⁶ It was a general complaint at the Mughal court that whenever the imperial *faujdar* was transferred, disturbances caused by the rebel zamindars and peasants increased.⁸⁷

It seems that the imperial authority could not exert enough military pressure on the rebel zamindars after the death of emperor Aurangzeb, leading to a further deterioration in the situation. The growing conflict between the zamindars and the state weakened the administrative authority and military power of the Mughals. The rapid breakdown of law and order, in turn, rendered the peasants helpless and placed them entirely at the mercy of the rebel zamindars, tilting the balance of power more and more in favour of the latter. The peasant's response to these developments, however, was not uniform. In some areas, they joined hands with the rebel zamindars. Elsewhere, they merely surrendered to the diktats of the zamindars. The unstable conditions also forced many peasants to leave their villages and migrate to relatively peaceful areas.

It is also essential to examine the pattern of inter-relationships between the different sections of zamindars, in terms of their caste/clan affiliations, stratification within their ranks, the state of economy and the nature of administrative control in the region. First, as discussed earlier, the growing power of the Narukas and Jats in the region threatened the political and economic interests of the Amber Raja who wanted to increase his politico-economic base in Mewat by securing the *ijaradari*, zamindari or *thanedari* rights of as many *parganas* as possible. Hence, he tried his best to prevent the emergence of the Naruka and Jat zamindars as rival centres of power in Mewat. However, due to his clan ties with the Narukas he could not afford to be as harsh to them as he was to the Jats. Second, since the Rajputs considered themselves socially and militarily superior to the Jats, the Amber Raja was not prepared to tolerate the rise of Jat power in the very neighbourhood of his *watan jagir*. The growing antipathy of the imperial *jagirdars* against the Jats also tilted the balance of power in favour of the Amber Raja. Henceforth, the Mughals sided with the Amber Raja in his struggle for power with the Jats except during the period of the ascendancy of Sayyid brothers. He was also favoured by the other imperial *jagirdars* who found it more convenient to farm out their *jagirs* to him under the *ijara* system.

The more fundamental changes in the relationship between the Narukas and the Jats on the one hand and the Amber Raja on the other is discernible after the foundation of the Bharatpur state by Rao Badan Singh Jat in Deeg in 1724. Thereafter, the struggle of the Jats and Narukas against the Amber Raja and other *jagirdars* became negligible. It seems that the Amber Raja succeeded in controlling them, by either force or conciliatory tactics. However, he, as also the imperial *jagirdars*, did not give up their hostile attitude towards the Jats and the Meos, as is discernible from several instances. The Amber Raja issued an order (*parwana*) to the effect that the Jats and Meos should not be allowed to get the *ijara* of *jagirs* from the imperial *jagirdars*.⁸⁸ He also ordered his *faujdar* and *amil* to ensure that the Meo zamindars were not allowed to keep

⁸⁶ Arzdasht, *Chait Sudi* 7, VS 1751/1694 CE; *Asadh Sudi* 2, VS 1752/1695 CE; *Asadh Sudi*, VS 1739/1682 CE; *Vaishakh Sudi* 7, VS 1755/1698 CE; *Chait Vadi* 9, VS 1746/1689 CE.

⁸⁷ Arzdasht, *Asadh Vadi* 5, VS 1742/1685 CE.

⁸⁸ Arzdasht, *Asoj Sudi* 12, VS 1761/1704 CE.

horses in their possession. Those Meos who were already in possession of horses were ordered to surrender them immediately.⁸⁹

The Rajasthani sources clearly demonstrate that the Meos in particular, irrespective of their class status, were persecuted and downgraded in the village society more than the other middling castes. The Raja of Amber perhaps considered this as an appropriate step to put a permanent stop to the plundering activities of the rebel Meos and to reduce their capacity to resist.

Examining the relationship between the various groups of zamindars and the peasants is also important in order to understand the nature of agrarian relations in the region. The peasantry of the Mewat region was heterogeneous, comprised of castes, such as the Meos, Jats, Gujjars, Ahirs, Malis and Meenas. The social bases of the different groups of zamindars among the peasants of the region were quite variable. The Jat and Meo zamindars had their social base among the peasants of their castes. On the other hand, the Narukas who did not have caste links with the peasants were looked upon as more oppressive than the Jats. Unlike abundant references in the Rajasthani documents to oppressed peasants seeking refuge with the Jat zamindars, there are no instances of peasants ever fleeing to the Naruka zamindars for protection. It is evident that caste affinity was quite strong between the Jat peasants and zamindars. But it is striking to note that the Meo and Meena peasants also considered it worthy to take refuge with the Jat zamindars. For instance, in 1715, when the *faujdar* of Mewat sent his army to the villages of *pargana* Khohri to collect the land revenue, the Meo and Meena peasants of seven villages ran away to the Jat *thoon*.⁹⁰ In another instance, the *amil* reported to the Amber Raja that the Meo and Meena peasants of 16 villages in *pargana* Khohri had refused to pay revenue at the instigation of the Jat zamindars.⁹¹ In yet another instance, in 1690, the Jat zamindars raised a huge army basically comprised of Jat (of mainly Sansanwal and Deswal *gotras*), Gujjar and Meena peasants.⁹² In still another instance, the Amber Raja issued an order in 1727 to his *amils* in *parganas* Khohri and Pahari that the Meo and Jat peasants should not be allowed to settle in the newly founded villages as well as the old villages that were being rehabilitated. Those Jats and Meos who were already residing in these villages were asked by the administration to give an undertaking that they would not support the recalcitrant Jat and Meo zamindars.⁹³ It was in order to erode the social base of the Jat and Meo zamindars, who had strong ties with the peasantry of their respective castes in the region, that the Amber Raja encouraged the settlement of Ahir peasants in the villages of Mewat. Though the relationship between the Meo peasants and their zamindars was cordial, the Meos could no longer defend their zamindaris from encroachment by the Amber Raja. The weak resistance offered by them was crushed by the *faujdar* of Mewat through periodic expeditions against them. It is this failure of the Meo zamindars to emerge as powerful class of zamindars and shelter the oppressed peasantry of their caste that explains the flight of many Meo peasants to the Jat-dominated areas, as the Jats could provide them with the necessary protection.

⁸⁹ Chithi to the *faujdar*, *Mangsir Vadi* 6, VS 1784/1727 CE.

⁹⁰ *Arsatta*, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1779/1722 CE

⁹¹ *Dehai-ferhashti*, *pargana* Khohri, VS 1779/1722 CE.

⁹² *Arzdasht*, VS 1747/1690 CE.

⁹³ *Parwana* to *amils*, *parganas* Khohri and Pahari, *Posh Vadi* 6, VS 1784/1727 CE.

The position of the Naruka *bhomias* in the rural society of Mewat was more complex and merits some explanation. Since they lacked caste ties with the peasants, they derived their strength mainly from their superior military and economic power, thereby emerging as the most powerful class of *bhomias* in the region. However, later on, they also tried to reconcile the peasants to their rule by adopting an altogether different method by which the interaction between them and the peasants could be increased. In the villages where they constructed their new *garhis*, they organized community feasts (*nangals*) to celebrate the completion of these *garhis*,⁹⁴ and asked the peasants to join them and eat together. This generated a feeling of brotherhood between them and the peasants and won them, to some extent, the support of the peasants belonging to the *parganas* Bharkol, Naharkhoh and Mojpur.⁹⁵ Even the blacksmiths of *pargana* Bahatri used to supply them guns and other weapons.⁹⁶ However, the social base of the Naruka *bhomias* among the peasants still remained weak, partly due to the lack of caste affinity and partly due to their highhandedness and harassment of the peasantry. This attitude of the Narukas was particularly manifest when they consolidated their position in their *bhom* territories.

The difficult relationship of the Naruka *bhomias* with the peasantry can be better understood in the larger context of the changing relationship between the Rajput *bhomias* of various clans (including Narukas) and the Amber state. The *mansab* of the Amber rulers fluctuated from time to time. The highest *mansab* was granted to them by Aurangzeb from 1658 to 1678. During this period, the Amber Raja got maximum number of *parganas* in Mewat as part of his *tankwah jagir* which he further sub-assigned to his soldiers and clansmen. It was during this period that the Rajput sub-assignees endeavoured to consolidate their strength on the basis of their clan ties with the Raja and began to claim hereditary rights to lands assigned to them. They even attempted to combine the *jagirdari* and *bhomi* rights into one.

But thereafter, the Amber Raja's *mansab* was progressively reduced, leading to shrinkage in the size of his *tankwah jagir*. Faced with the prospect of the loss of income from land, some of his sub-assignees, however, were not prepared to surrender their sub-assignments and instead tried to usurp the *bhomi* rights in the areas sub-assigned to them. Further, the Rajput troopers rendered unemployed by the reduction in the Raja's *mansab* took to plundering activities and openly defied the authority of the Amber Raja as well as that of the other imperial *jagirdars*. An *arzasht* of 1689 addressed to the Amber Raja vividly captures this conflictual relationship between the Amber Raja and his *chakars* (Rajput servants). Therein, he was informed that the Rajput *chakars* who had in the past served the Amber state as sub-assignees with sincerity were left without a source of income as a consequence of the shrinkage in the Raja's *tankwah jagir*. Hence, they became selfish, cunning, ungrateful and least concerned with the interests of the state. They were openly creating disturbances, claiming *bhomi* rights and agitating for the retention of the areas sub-assigned to them. These rebel Rajputs included the Rajawats, the Narukas, the Shekhawats, the Kilanots and the Chauhans. The author of the *arzasht* clearly stressed that it was the Raja who was the real zamindar of the whole area, not the sub-assignees. Finally, he appealed to the Raja to prevent his erstwhile sub-assignees from causing trouble and claiming any territorial rights.⁹⁷ This increasingly grim situation is further

⁹⁴ *Arzdasht, Jeth Vadi 1, VS 1761/1704 CE.*

⁹⁵ *Arzdashts Mangsir Sudi 15, VS 1759/1702 CE; Vaishakh Vadi 2, VS 1761/1704 CE.*

⁹⁶ *Arzdasht, Jeth Vadi 1, VS 1761/1704 CE.*

⁹⁷ *Arzdasht, Asadh Sudi 7, VS 1746/1689 CE.*

described in a long letter of 1712 from the *vakil* to the Amber Raja. Therein, he complained that the Rajputs who earlier used to perform their duties honestly had become selfish, unfaithful and cunning. They had begun to cause disturbances in the *jagirs* of the imperial *mansabdars* and force the peasants to pay them the *bhomi* tax. They had forsaken their moral duty, as servants (*chakars*) of the Amber state, to protect its economic interests. Instead, driven by the motive of making economic gains, they had begun to plunder the villages in the *jagirs* of the imperial *mansabdars* and prevent the peasants from complaining against them at the Mughal court. Nevertheless, according to the letter, the imperial *mansabdars* who held *jagirs* in Alwar *sarkar* had complained to the Mughal authorities that the Rajput *chakars* of the Amber Raja had forcefully collected the land revenue they were entitled to and had harassed the peasants in their *jagirs*. There were a total of 27 *parganas* that were part of the *jagirs* of the imperial *mansabdars* in which the Rajputs had been creating disturbances. The *vakil* concluded the letter stating that the Mughal court had issued a strong warning that if the Rajputs did not cease to trouble the imperial *mansabdars*, the latter would not assign the *ijara* of their *jagirs* to the Amber Raja.⁹⁸

The Amber Raja's fall from imperial favour, particularly during the period of Sayyid brothers' ascendancy (1707-20), is discernible from another letter of 1712, wherein the *vakil* informed the Raja that Sarfaraz Khan Badshahzada, the *jagirdar* of Firozpur Jhirka, had received a letter from the *diwan* of Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur conveying that the *ijara* of Firozpur Jhirka should not have been given to the Amber Raja, as he had not deposited the arrears of the previous year worth 12,000 rupees. The *vakil* further informed that the peasantry of Firozpur Jhirka had also pleaded at the Mughal court that their villages be freed from the *ijara* rights held over them by the Amber Raja, since they were being forced to pay various non-customary taxes to him and also plundered by his men. According to the *vakil*, the peasants had heightened their plea by reminding the Mughal emperor that they are his *raiyyati* (subjects), not that of the Amber Raja.⁹⁹ In another of his reports, the *vakil* informed the Raja that, despite his best efforts, he had not been able to impress upon the Mughal authorities the need to increase the Raja's *mansab* which had been substantially reduced in the last 30 years.¹⁰⁰ In the years following the reduction in their *mansab*, the Amber rulers were faced with a difficult situation wherein their military strength had to be maintained even as their financial resources were being considerably reduced.¹⁰¹ Having failed to secure an increase in the size of his *tankhwah jagir*, the Amber Raja and his *vakil* at the Mughal court endeavoured to regain some of the lost ground by securing the *thanedari*, *ijaradari* and *zamindari* rights in those *parganas* of Mewat that had formed part of his *tankhwah jagir* a few decades ago.¹⁰² The Amber Raja's efforts to increase his income from other sources in the face of his inability to expand his *tankhwah jagir* must be viewed in the context of increasing rivalries and factionalism among the Mughal nobles in the aftermath of the crisis of *jagirdari* system.

The Rajasthani documents suggest that the rural society of Mewat was in turmoil in the years following 1680 as a direct result of the growing power of the rebel Jat and Rajput zamindars which led to a tussle between them and the imperial *mansabdars* holding *jagirs* in this

⁹⁸ *Vakil's Report*, 19, VS 1769/1712 CE.

⁹⁹ *Vakil's Report*, *Bhadva Vadi Amavash*, VS 1769/1712 CE.

¹⁰⁰ *Vakil's Report*, *Fagun Vadi* 11, VS 1769/1712 CE.

¹⁰¹ *Vakil's Report*, *Fagun Vadi* 11, VS 1769/1712 CE.

¹⁰² *Vakil's Report*, *Fagun Vadi* 11, VS 1769/1712 CE.

region. In the process, two significant developments took place in the region: (a) the emergence of the Jats who strove to expand their zamindari in the Mewat region, and (b) the Amber Raja's continuous attempts to establish his zamindari over many *parganas* of Mewat along with *thanedari* and *ijaradari* rights which he acquired from the imperial *faujdar*s and *jagirdar*s of the region. These attempts on the part of the Amber Raja brought him into direct conflict with his own clansmen (the Narukas) as well as the Jats. These two developments together aggravated the conflicts within the rural society. These protracted conflicts raged not only among the Rajputs, Jats and Meos, but also among the various Rajput sub-clans.

The stage was set for a turbulent contention among multiple overlapping claims over the surplus produce of the peasantry. The situation had already been aggravated by the deepening crises of the *jagirdari* system. The worst weaknesses of the Mughal and Rajput *jagirdari* systems found manifestation in the multiple problems faced by the Amber chiefs and the other imperial *mansabdars*. The Amber Raja, who when compelled by the need to serve the economic interests of his own clansmen could not adhere to the imperial rules and regulations with regard to his *tankhwah jagir*, had to face the wrath of the Mughal state manifest in a reduction in his *mansab*. The depredations of the rebel Rajputs and Jats greatly diminished the revenue income from the affected *parganas* and consequently the other imperial *jagirdars* also suffered a loss in their income. The ensuing tussle between the imperial *jagirdars* and the rebel *bhomyas*, eventually, led to a decline in production and deterioration in the condition of the peasants.

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