

Transport Business, Agrarian Structure and Government Intervention:
Meerut District and Division during the Great Depression (1929-35)

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Abstract

This paper looks at the development of the transport sector in Meerut district and division during the period of the Great Depression (1929-1935). In doing so, it pays particular attention to the origins and trajectories of new transport businesses and asks whether and to what extent they were a result of or influenced by the region's agrarian structure and specific policy interventions of local governments. It argues that....

1. Introduction

Meerut division including the districts of Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur was among the most prosperous agricultural regions in the United Provinces during the early 20th century. Contemporary settlement reports prepared by colonial administrators at certain intervals to assess land revenue due to government rehearsed this time and again. Compared with other regions of the province, they specifically pointed out advanced agricultural conditions such as fertile soil, large increases in irrigation, and good communications, as well as prosperous positions of both landholders and tenants such as a high share of petty peasant proprietors, large average size of holdings and moderate rents. The condition of proprietors in Saharanpur district around 1920 was “one of prosperity (...) particularly (...) amongst cultivating castes”, while Meerut was characterized in 1940 by “a large proportion of both zamindars and tenants in quite comfortable circumstances and (...) their general condition is now far more prosperous than it was 40 years ago.”¹ However, the reports also pointed out counter-movements to such general tendencies. At the top of the agrarian structure, this referred especially to inroads of Vaishya merchant capital into the countryside and substantial increases in landed property somewhat at the expense of but also supplementing other landholding groups such as Muslim, Rajput and Jat zamindars.² As non-cultivating proprietors, Vaish zamindars had a bad reputation not only for having hijacked tenancy laws

¹ Final Report on the Settlement Operations of the Saharanpur District, United Provinces, 1917-20. Allahabad, 1921, esp. Preface. Final Settlement Report of the Meerut District, 1939. Allahabad, 1940, esp. 18.

² Their share in the total area of Meerut increased from 10 to 15 per cent between 1900 and 1940. S.R. Meerut, 12. The increase in Saharanpur from 24 to 27 per cent of the total area held was more moderate, but also at a much higher level. S.R. Saharanpur, 1921, Appendix II. Also see District Gazetteers for this area, especially Meerut District Gazetteer, 1922, 82-6; Saharanpur, ...

and increasingly grabbing land from the large pool of heavily indebted peasants, but also for a supposedly limited and hobby-like interest in working and improving their holdings as compared to skilled and thrifty cultivating proprietors. For smaller and middle peasants, both as tenants and proprietors, the period was rather one of compression and losing out. A series of droughts and bad harvests during the mid-late 1920s and then the beginning of the great depression in 1929 had an adverse impact on food prices and other items of expenditure. Prices of agricultural produce fell sharply and rent payments remained high, while peasants' indebtedness to moneylenders skyrocketed together with evictions from land.³ An extensive body of literature on peasant deprivation and movement during the 1920s-1930s shows that protest, especially in the form of *kisan sabhas* and other local activities, was much stronger in Awadh than in the Agra province.⁴ But deprivation-based protest might also have had different faces. The heavy increase of court cases and appeals regarding records of rights and rents during the agricultural crisis (1928-32) in comparison to the later period (1936-39) is an indicator of this, but also shows that peasants became increasingly aware of possibilities for legal redress in courts. (Compare table 1 and 2) Worst off were non-occupancy tenants and agricultural labourers who became more and more indistinguishable from each other during the period under review. Large numbers of non-occupancy tenants could hardly live of their small incomes, having to supplement them with casual or seasonal labour such as carting work. This implied higher competition with landless labourers about wages in cash and kind that ultimately depressed the level of ordinary agricultural wages even further.

Successive historiography assesses some of these administrative perspectives and outlines a more detailed picture of the effects of such developments for diverse parts of the peasantry.⁵ Linking shifts in the regional agrarian structure first to institutional changes in the 19th century and then to economic changes shaping up later, Erik Stokes paints the most vivid and sophisticated picture of social processes at work. According to him, established landlords especially among the Muslim 'gentry' lost out heavily in land, but it is uncertain if merchant

³ Meerut saw the heaviest rent increases per acre during the slump and a declining money value of agricultural production as elsewhere, but its average cultivator was still left with a surplus unlike cultivators in other parts of the province. Agrarian Distress in the United Provinces. Being the Report of the Committee appointed by the Council of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee to enquire into the Agrarian Situation in the Province. Allahabad, 1931. Reprint by Prabhu Publications, Gurgaon, 1982, 17, 25, 35. Compare the statement by Raj Bahadur Gupta, Agricultural Prices in the United Provinces. Bureau of Statistics and Economic Research, U.P. Allahabad, 1937, 10 that "prices fell much lower in the western zone, where most of the rabi crops are grown, than in other parts of the Province."

⁴ There is an extensive body of work on peasant movements and Congress activity in UP during the 1920s and 1930s. The most important books for this are, Gyan Pandey, who else?

⁵ The effects of canal irrigation are assessed in Ian Stone, Canal Irrigation in British India. Perspectives on Technological Change in a Peasant Economy. Cambridge, 1984. The development of land rents are scrutinised in Jayati Ghosh, The Determination of Land Rent in a Non-Capitalist Agriculture: North India, 1860-1930. Modern Asian Studies, 1988, 22, 2, 355-382.

capital directly substituted for it. There was certainly a shift towards plutocracy, even more so in Saharanpur and Muzaffarnagar than in Meerut, in which the size of most upper level estates remained constant while the upper-middle to lower rank peasantry lost out land. But the new rent-receivers never actually filled the gap left by the gentry as a rural elite according to Stokes.⁶ However, this and other existing literature on Indian economic history point out a number of glaring gaps that would need further inquiry and research work. One such gap is a study of the economic and social effects of the great depression and the larger economic and social trajectory of India during the interwar period; another related gap is a study of the new capitalist classes entering the countryside together with drives towards rural industrialization and commercialisation of agriculture on a scale not seen before. Especially the works of Rajat Kanta Ray and Dietmar Rothermund have provided new insights into the macro-economic environment and micro-economic consequences of the great depression for India's economy and society, as well as of important changes in industrialization and private capital during the interwar period.⁷ One could argue that Ray's and Rothermund's measurement of such environments and effects has remained rather aloof and was based on material rather distant from their real targets, including peasants, townsmen and capitalists.⁸ But they did have important findings. Ray specifically points out the shifts and diversification of capital and economic activity in the interwar period in three respects:

1) away from earlier established commodities to new ones often connected with new agro-based industries in the countryside where cash crops turned into products of everyday use for local markets. Developments connected with the north Indian sugarcane and gur industry after 1930 stood most emblematically for this, as it was the most profitable product for a number of years.⁹ But other agro-based products such as vegetable oils and soaps also came up around this time.

2) away from large traditional business centres like Calcutta and Bombay to their respective hinterlands now being used for agro-industries. For the Meerut region, one has to point out the emergence of Delhi as a major market for produce and hub for financial transactions throughout North India, as well as the growing importance of middle-rank and mandi towns such as Hapur, Meerut etc. in connection with agro-industries

⁶ Eric Stokes, *The Structure of Landholding in Uttar Pradesh, 1860-1948*. IESHR, 1975, 12, esp. 120-1.

⁷ Rajat Kanta Ray, *The Bazaar: Changing structural characteristics of the indigenous section of the Indian economy before and after the Great Depression*. IESHR, 25, 3, 1988, 287. Dietmar Rothermund, *India in the Great Depression, 1929-39*. Manohar, 1992, esp. 54-7 and 79-123. Rajat Kanta Ray, *Industrialization in India. Growth and Conflict in the Private Sector 1914-47*. Delhi, 1979, Chapter 1-2.

⁸ This refers to Rothermund measuring the impact of the great depression by looking at distress gold sales and shipment lists towards Great Britain. Rothermund, *Depression*

⁹ Ray, *Industrialization in India*, pages 55, 138-44 on the sugar industry; pages 261, 279-80, 282-3 on specific sugar businessmen like Ramkrishna Dalmia, Shri Ram.

3) the emergence of large-scale Indian business houses. Ray cites especially Marwari entrepreneurs and families such as Dalmia, Govan and Narang whose insertion into the Indian economy as well as into the countryside took place on the back of new commercial products such as cement, sugarcane etc. In western UP and in Meerut in particular, it was smaller businessmen of the time like Gujarmal Modi and other sugarbarons who pushed industrialization into the countryside with their commercial activities and by employing new production and supply methods. One example was the increasing interest of sugar factories to lay out their own roads in order to get cane delivered to the factory gate by carts, another was the use of motor vehicles in order to supply finished products to the Delhi market.¹⁰

The present paper is a first attempt to study these gaps with respect to developments in Meerut district and division. By doing so, it looks primarily at the road and motor transport sector and its differential impact on agrarian relations and structure. It is specifically interested in finding out about the origins and trajectory of those actors who employed motor transport to advance their position within the agricultural setting. Dietmar Rothermund has argued that it was with soaring land prices during the depression that large zamindars and capitalists instead of adding new land to their estates or factory operations sought out new ways to improve their agricultural and agro-commercial operations. This arguably implied large-scale capital investment not only in rice mills but also in motorbuses and trucks that were employed in the countryside.¹¹ This paper takes such ideas as a given and tries to develop and employ a typology along the lines suggested in earlier literature, but now looking at the investment and employment into motor vehicles of measuring the extent to which stratification happened and resulted in new forms of mode of production and circulation.¹² Who of the zamindars using motorbuses was an 'improving landlord', who of the businessmen were 'local magnates'?¹³

2. District Boards and the Management of Roads, 1920s-1930s

The new commercial and production arrangements above described also had a significant impact on the road transport sector. Meerut district and division did dispose of a number of unmetalled and metalled roads in the early 1920s, but especially the condition of

¹⁰ For an account on Modi, see P.P.S. Chauhan, *A Vision of Karmayogi Gujarmal Modi*. Modinagar, 1977. For more information on transport in the sugarcane belt, see Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*. New Delhi, 1984, Chap. on transport.

¹¹ Dietmar Rothermund, *An Economic History of India from Pre-Colonial Times to 1991*. Routledge, 1993, 112ff.

¹² Literature/references on technology investment during the interwar period: Rothermund, *An Economic History of India*, 112ff. Who else?

¹³ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*.

metalled roads had improved substantially by 1940.¹⁴ The condition and management of unmetalled roads, however, presented somewhat of a problem around this time. This was connected with a number of administrative changes around this time. District boards within the United Provinces became responsible for managing roads of local importance in connection with the implementation of local-self government initiatives following the 1923 elections and the 1924 District Boards Act. These initiatives included recommendations of several earlier committees on the organisation and management of public works such as the PWD Reorganization Committee of 1917 and the UP Public Works Committee, 1922.¹⁵ After this date, all road-building activities of local roads came into the purview of the district board, while the registration and control of motor vehicles remained with the district administration.¹⁶ Ever since the beginning of local self-government, responsible boards at the district level were troubled to keep roads under their administration in an order suitable for the constraints of modern day traffic.¹⁷ Road conditions in Meerut as elsewhere deteriorated significantly following the growth of motor transport after the First World War. In fact, roads became steadily worse. The road between Meerut and Mowana had been nearly impassable for three years and its condition did not improve by the establishment of a motorbus system.¹⁸ The local road committee established around this time on account of the transfer of metalled roads to the Board's charge had in fact so much work to do that its existence, separate from that of the Public Works Committee, was essential.¹⁹ ...

Even towards the end of the decade, the maintenance of roads continued to be the main difficulty for all boards in the division, while it was one of the most important duties they performed. Expenditures of both Saharanpur and Muzaffarnagar district boards on repairs of metalled and unmetalled roads decreased heavily in 1929 compared to preceding years. In Meerut and Bulandshahr districts, the boards maintained adequate expenditures on

¹⁴ M Zia-Ur-Rab, Meerut District. Report of the Industrial Survey of the United Provinces. Allahabad, 1922, ii, 1-2, 22 for the condition of roads and plans to extend the road system in Meerut in the early 1920s. S.R. Meerut, 1940, 4.

¹⁵ PWD Reorganization Committee, 1917; UP Public Works Committee 1922.

¹⁶ Proceedings Book of the Meerut District Board, -1923, Meerut District Board Record Room. My visit to the Meerut district board brought out that all relevant files and most proceedings were destroyed over the last decades, especially after the record room had been shifted to another room in the board's building. Hence, it is only in correspondence of administrative and police officials of the district that one finds certain information on the road transport sector for the period upto the 1940s, such as on road-building, registration and regulation of motor vehicles. Regional Transport Authorities (R.T.A.) were established only with the implementation of recommendations of the Indian Motor Vehicles Act, 1939 were brought into force at the time of the Second World War and often do not contain much useful information even after this point.

¹⁷ Hugh Tinker, *The Foundations of Local-Self Government in India, Pakistan and Burma*. London, 1968, esp. Chp. XIV “Highways, Health and Water Supply”, 279-306, also Chp. XV “Local Finance”, 307-332.

¹⁸ District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Supplementary Notes and Statistics. Volume IV, Meerut District. Allahabad, 1925, 2.

¹⁹ Chaudhri Mukhtar Singh Saheb, Chairman, District Board, Meerut to Commissioner, Meerut Division through District Magistrate, 6 June 1925.

repairs of metalled roads, but continued to neglect unmetalled roads. District Board Chairmen refused to accept lack of foresight and unbusinesslike management as root causes to this development, but instead pointed out the Government's indifference in enhancing the education grant. The provincial government planned a scheme to bring boards back onto their feet, but roads had become so deteriorated that their renovation was bound to be costly.²⁰ Given the deplorable situation of road communications, the provincial PWD in 1929 proposed to relieve district boards of any part of the cost of maintaining and to take back into its charge various roads, e.g. those connecting the provincial system with other provinces and states and those connecting divisional headquarters. This provincialization scheme affected some 423 miles of road (388 metalled and 85 unmetalled) altogether, against which the UP Government expected strong opposition by Nationalists and Swarajists in the UP Council as an "attack on the sacred principle of local self-government". The UP Government argued that the majority of district board's themselves strongly favoured such a scheme, so that it quickly decided to cash in on this local-level support and evade opposition by presenting a modified provincialization scheme as part of the general scheme to assist the district boards financially. The Government was willing to take into hand some Rs. 11 lakhs for the reconditioning of roads and some Rs. 3,2 lakhs for their annual maintenance, all to be financed from long-term loans. This in itself was a major step forward since the practice of road-building from loan-funds was reserved for provincial roads only.

It had become clear to the district administration by 1928 that there would be no improvement of the situation of unmetalled roads for any time soon. It must have been in the year 1929 that the Meerut district board thus decided to entrust to local entrepreneurs and zamindars with the task of maintaining and improving unmetalled roads in future. This was seen as an improvement to the current situation and save costs at the same time.²¹ For this task they were to receive an exclusive monopoly over using the road in order to ply motor vehicles of any sort. The Meerut district board had not been the first in taking such a decision. The district board in Saharanpur had taken the lead in this respect in 1924 when it agreed to experiment on the basis of successful experience "in Bundelkhand of making over the repairs of Kachcha roads to local zamindars, who can secure cheap labour and are interested in their effective repair".²² This development of out-contracting road building and maintenance in the countryside continued for a long time to come, also in other respects. For example, especially

²⁰ Review on the Working of the District Boards in the Meerut Division for the year ending 31st March 1929. M Keane, Commissioner, Meerut Division. English Record Room, Meerut (henceforth ERRM), XXI, 70/27, 9-10.

²¹ I have no exact evidence for this and it remains guesswork.

²² Annual Report of the Saharanpur District Board, 1924-25. Rai Bahadur Bau Ram Saran Dass, District Officer, Saharanpur to Commissioner, Meerut Division, 18 Jun 1925. Department XXI, 53/24-25.

sugarcane producers were interested in extending their road network in order to ensure a constant supply of cane to their sugar factories.²³

But the specific arrangements of out-contracting roads and licensing lorry owners had to be negotiated between the district board and district magistrate first. This had to do with a clear-cut distinction between tasks transferred to district boards following the 1919 Government of India Act and the implementation of local self-government initiatives. While local roads were transferred into the preserve of local boards presided over by non-official, elected board members after the 1923 elections, registration and licensing of motor vehicles remained the exclusive responsibility of the local police and district administration. The newly elected district boards protested against this fact initially on the ground that it represented a bifurcation of tasks to the detriment of the board’s finances, and was also not coherent since municipal boards had the right to licence vehicles themselves.²⁴ The British administration at the local level was adamant, however, to keep control of this task in its preserve in order to follow a district-wide coherent policy that reflected arrangements between the central and provincial level.²⁵ Eventually, the practice of licensing motor vehicles for plying on local roads worked out to be a combined exercise of both sides of the administration with a bent towards the British district administration. This is clear from letters by the Collector of Meerut to the district board that favoured the application of one Gyan Chand, resident of Mohalla Bhatwara, Meerut for a monopoly of plying motor lorries on the Mowana-Phalauda road. The District Board pushed for its own candidates, Mohammad Ali Khan and Daud Khan who already held a monopoly on the Mowana-Kithore road, but finally conceded to the collector’s suggestions. At least three other applications favoured by the District Magistrate, i.e. those of Brij Mohan Lal Mehra, Syed Habib Shah and B. Jagdamba Pershad, were also sanctioned.²⁶ There were certain ideas and initiatives to support the finances of district boards in their endeavour to improve roads after around 1930.²⁷ But before these started, district boards were all the more left alone to devise ways to keep their roads in

²³ Account on Gujarmal Modi, who else?

²⁴ Note by Gokul Nath Kapur/E.R. Frank, 21 Dec 1927 on Meerut District Board resolution, Oct 1927 (letter by Commissioner, Meerut, 18 Oct 1927). UPSA, LSG, 1923, 172.

²⁵ D.B. Annual Report for the year 1926-27; D.B. Chairman to Meerut Commissioner, 13 Oct 1927; L.S.G. Dept. to Meerut Commissioner, 21 January 1928. Dept. XXII, 110/27, ERRM.

²⁶ Proceedings of an ordinary meeting of the Meerut District Board, 22 June 1929, 6-7. XXI, 1927, 15.

²⁷ “For some years past most district boards have emphasized the need felt by them for additional income to enable them to keep up the more important of their local roads which tend annually to suffer more and more from increased commercial traffic, especially in the form of lorries and buses carrying passengers.” Note on proposals to assist district boards in meeting the rising cost of road repair due to increased traffic, 10 Sept 1930. UPSA, without file reference. This included proposals to hand over licence fees under the Hackney Carriage Act to district boards, or to introduce some form of monopoly on a province-wide scale, either by a direct payment from the monopolist to the board for the right to run vehicles on a certain road, or by an arrangement with the monopolist to keep the road in reasonable repair.

order. All these aspects were the basis for the functioning of road monopolies that the Meerut District Board and District Administration jointly gave out to applicants from Meerut district after 1929 and for a number of years.

3. Monopolies for Roads and Motor Bus Transport

The following pages pay more attention to the question of who was able to acquire a road monopoly for plying motorbuses and how and under what circumstances such monopolies were used. The evidence used to answer this question is somewhat sketchy documentation from the archives of the Meerut District Magistrate, including administrative material as well as petitions from applicants, all of which present a number of problems to the researcher. Among them is the fact that the number of overall documents as well as information brought together in them was in fact very limited, something rather frustrating and unexpected from such local level documentation. None of the documents were neither nicely stored nor indexed or hand listed like material in National and State Archives usually is, but had to be excavated somewhat painfully from almirahs not used for several decades and without any chance of cross searching and/or cross-referencing.

However, I could find out that the Meerut District Magistrate licensed at least 13 local entrepreneurs and zamindars to monopolise in road building and for plying motor lorries for a period of 5 years during 1929-30.²⁸ Table 3 presents as much information as possible on these monopoly holders as was possible to collect from the overall documentation. In the following part of the paper I will try to answer a number of basic questions: who were the monopoly holders in Meerut district after 1929? What were their caste and family origins and what specifically did they use the monopoly how did they develop in the period thereafter? I will be trying to develop as concise a typology about such monopoly holders as possible and refer to terms such as “improving landlord”, “local magnate”, “professional classes” in this respect.

What general observations can we make from this list of monopoly holders? And furthermore, do we know more about the socio-economic background of monopoly holders? What exactly lead to their application or facilitated them in being chosen for the specific roads? The list contains the names of three Muslims (Daud Khan, Nawab Ahmad Khan and Syed Habib Shah) all of whom were big zamindars of the district. It also contains several names of Vaish Baniyas of the Agarwal sub-division (Bishambar Sahai, Murari Lal etc.) and other names who represented merchant capital. There are at least two persons, Yogendranath Dixit and Ram Sarup Kapoor, who are clearly identifiable as Brahmin. The list does not

²⁸ This granting of monopolies seems to have happened on the lines of earlier experiences in Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur to whose specific circumstances this paper will revert at a later stage.

include the names of any of the other farming communities such as Tyagi (Brahman), Jat, Gujar or others. There is also no Jain, who were also of the Agarwal sub-division and one of the most prominent merchants in the grain trade in Meerut district.

In the following pages I will use the list as well as specific socio-economic data and other information of several individuals from district records to closer scrutinize involved processes and to flash out the question of who moved into the transport business right at the beginning of the Great Depression. I will study the origins of monopoly holders and the link they established by way of their enterprise between agriculture, commercialisation and transport. What information can we obtain by looking at some of the specific cases and environments that led to the granting of monopoly?

a. New commercial actors in the countryside

The very first road monopoly to ply motor lorries in Meerut district was granted to two businessmen, Bishambar Sahai and Murari Lal, for the Mawana-Ganeshpur-Bahsuma unmetalled road in early April 1929 after their first approach towards authorities in this respect more than half a year earlier.²⁹ With the recent experience in Muzaffarnagar district of a monopoly for L. Bhagwat Prashad of Meerut on the Muzaffarnagar-Budhana road, Meerut authorities could only see positive effects of such an agreement in their own district. They implied that any lorry proprietor was interested in maintaining a good surface, since lorries were damaged and became unserviceable after a while if one did not. Hence, the monopoly seemed to offer a way out of the problematic situation of kutcha roads, while a new transport facility afforded the public more convenience. Finally sanctioned for a period of 5 years in April 1929, the monopoly was to function on the basis of district authorities licensing no lorries except those of the two businessmen.³⁰

Who were these two businessmen and what did they do with buses? Information from available documents points out that they were Vaishyas with their primary residence in Bahsuma, a town some 23 miles from Meerut and 9 miles from Mawana. But they also had strong family connections in the district headquarter, which they at least visited quite frequently for official and business work, or even lived there more or less permanently in close proximity to the Tahsil office in the centre of Meerut city. They were the sons of Lala Ram Sarup and Lala Hira Lal respectively, about which we have little further information. It

²⁹ Application by Bishambar Sahai and Murari Lal to Collector, Meerut, undated. Ibid. They also applied for a normal license for their bus on the pacca road between Meerut and Bahsuma, but this could not be held as a monopoly and thus did not enter the district archives.

³⁰ D.M. to Chairman, D.B., 20 Jan 1929; DB Chairman to Magistrate, 15 Feb 1929; Resolution passed at ordinary meeting of the District Board, 16 Mar 1929; monopoly agreement, 3 Apr 1929. Ibid.

is quite possible that they belonged to one of the two branches of one of the chief bania families of Meerut at the time, the Qanungos. The Qanungoyans were represented by Lala Murari Lal, Lala Banarsi Das and Lala Jainti Parshad all of who were members of the Meerut municipal board, while the Pattharwalas were represented by Lala Munna Lal, who owned 24 villages in Meerut tehsil and was assessed at Rs. 18,000 land revenue.³¹ Taken together, members of the Qanungo family not only combined their commercial activities in money lending and commerce with landholding interests, but they also moved into municipal politics to acquire certain leverage over local decisions. Most certainly, however, both businessmen were banias and belonged to the Agarwal sub-division. Apart from interests in money-lending and other commerce activity, this larger group of banias had become the fourth largest landholders in Meerut district by the early 1920s, most strongly in Meerut and Mawana, exactly the area in which Bishambar Sahai and Murari Lal began their operations.³²

As to the reasons for the application and for plying the bus, we find them to argue in their application that no railway connection for the area around Bahsuma existed and that most roads were in such a bad state that even tongas, tum-tums and other carts could not travel properly. A large number of people from the town and surrounding villages, on the other hand, went to Meerut and Mawana daily for court work and other necessities but often missed appointments or faced other inconveniences when village carts did not or could not ply. Such statements very probably reflected reality in a way and were a real concern to the applicants since there was money to be earned from such business. Evidence on the extent of road-railway competition suggests that indeed the number of travellers beginning to use road transport instead of railways increased heavily right with the onset of the Great depression.³³ The reasons and circumstances of this higher use are not at all clear though. Did road transport divert these passengers diverted from railways or was it all new traffic? Which village folk began to use the bus and for what purposes? Who was able to afford a bus trip and who could not? Was it the impoverishing middle peasant who under the combined effect of a higher rate of commercialisation and serious blows to his agricultural operations with the slump in prices after 1929 went to court on a bus? Or could only rich peasants and the upper strata of towns and villages avail themselves of bus services?

³¹ Meerut District Gazetteers, 1904 and 1922, 93-4. Both gazetteers contain the same information on the family and thus do not contain developments after the early 20th century. Lala Mahabir Prasad, the fifth largest landholder in Meerut district and assessed at 17.3 lakhs land revenue in 1940, was possibly the next incumbent of the family and a contemporary of Bishambar Sahai and Murari Lal. Settlement Report, Meerut, Appendix IX.

³² Ibid.

³³ Evidence about competition with Shahdara Light Railway? Or other smaller railway?

b. Traditional land-based gentry

When working on the application of Sahai and Lal, the District Magistrate found that two zamindars, Daud Khan and Muhammad Ali Khan of village Lalyana in Pargana Kithore, had in fact applied for a monopoly over the same route more recently.³⁴ With the monopoly on this road already in force, Daud Khan and his companion were left to choose and apply for a monopoly of another kutchra road. But both zamindars had rather little overall success in these other applications as well. District authorities declined many routes of interest to them since they had already been given to others or they could not be given out under this agreement.³⁵ No matter what, both zamindars were eager to get a monopoly and eventually managed to acquire one over the 16-mile long unmetalled road between Kithore and Mawana to ply their motorbus service. The business offered on this route seemed promising since Mawana was the centre of several courts of official and honorary Magistrates dealing with all sessions and revenue cases of parganas Kithore and Hastinapur and many people came daily to deposit their rent (*malguzari*) and get their deeds executed.³⁶ Obtaining a monopoly even for this road was actually a good business proposition and offered several opportunities, since it attracted the attention of many other applicants as well. Two other applicants, the Meerut-based Government contractor, grain dealer and commission agent Ram Chandra and the Mawana-based zamindar Mohammad Ismail had also applied for it, but were rejected.³⁷ A few months into the monopoly agreement, Daud Khan voiced the first discontent over peasants watering their fields and thus flooding adjacent roads so that it hindered his motorbus. He suggested the Magistrate give orders for a drum alarm in every nearer village on his own expense so that no tenant would interfere with and spoil the road.³⁸ On application, Daud Khan received yet another 15 days extension to bring his service into existence since his motorbus had broken down due to the floods and needed to be repaired.³⁹ The monopoly was cancelled again in...⁴⁰

³⁴ Note, District Magistrate, 4 May 1929. Ibid.

³⁵ They applied for a monopoly over the kutchra road between Phalauda and Mawana that was already given to Gyan Chandra of Bhatwara. In addition, they requested a monopoly on the Phalauda-Meerut pakka road to secure their supply of petrol and mobil oil from Meerut. Daud Khan/Muhammad Ali Khan to Collector, Meerut, 14 May 1929. Ibid.

³⁶ Mohammad Ali Khan/Daud Khan, Laliana to Magistrate, Meerut, 12 Apr 1929; D.B. Chairman to Magistrate, 3 May 1929 forwarding resolution of meeting of the Meerut District Board, 29 Apr 1929; D.B., Chairman to Collector, Meerut, 27 May 1929; Agreement of Daud Khan and District Magistrate, 26 Aug 1929. Ibid.

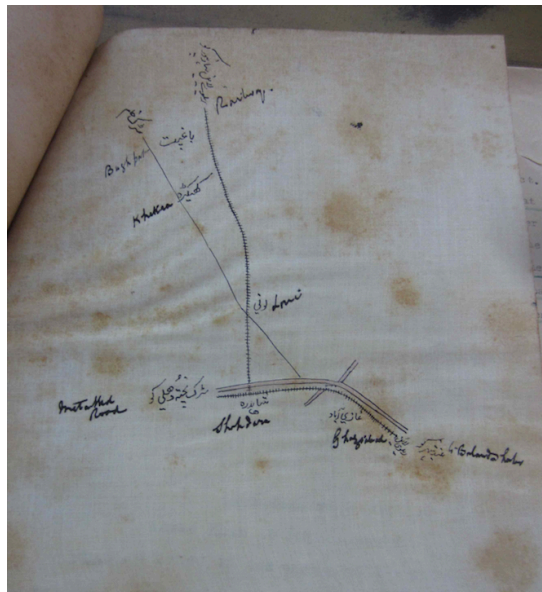
³⁷ M. Mohammad Ismail to District Magistrate, 24 Aug 1928; Mr. Ram Chandra, Durga Bhawan, Meerut Cantonment to District Magistrate, 9 Sept 1929. Ibid.

³⁸ Daud Khan to District Magistrate, 1 Nov 1929. The Magistrate endorsed Daud Khan's suggestion saying that “The practice of spilling water over the kachha roads is much too prevalent here.” Note, D.M., 4 Nov 1929.

³⁹ Daud Khan to District Magistrate, Note D.M., 4 Nov 1929. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Cancellation, District Magistrate to Tahsildar, Mawana, 27 Aug 1930

Possibly a near or slightly distant relative of the two zamindars from the Mawana side mentioned above, Nawab Ahmad Khan managed to acquire a monopoly for the kutcha road between Baghpat and Ghaziabad via Khekra and Loni in early 1930. At least two other parties had taken a specific interest in the same or the very similar Shahdara-Baghpat route from the middle of 1929, but their financial standing or backing by other upper classes of Meerut was not as good as that of Nawab Ahmad Khan.⁴¹



Sketch map of Baghpat-Ghaziabad Road

More than many of the examples mentioned above, however, Khan's trajectory and insertion into the transport sector seem more closely linked both to his zamindari in the Baghpat area as well as his immediate or more distant family relations' leverage over political institutions. The development of his zamindari was inevitably connected to Baghpat's larger story in the late 19th and early 20th century. It was the richest tahsil of Meerut district and probably the richest part of the province for a long time over the 19th century, cultivation of sugarcane and sale of gur products being most prominent in this place.⁴² The tahsil traditionally was and continued to be a stronghold of Jat and Muslim landlords, into which Vaish merchant capital did not and could not penetrate to the same extent as elsewhere in Meerut upto 1940.⁴³ During the early 20th century flourishing marts such as Chaprauli and Khekra and thriving business places further south, especially Ghaziabad, ousted Baghpat from

⁴¹ Resolution of the Meerut District Board, 30 Nov 1929; Agreement with Nawab Ahmad Khan, 29 Jan 1930; Nawab Ahmad Khan to Collector, 3 Feb 1930. Ibid. The other applications for this road included B.Z. Yusuf, 29 Jun 1929, for the Loni-Ghaziabad section, B. Jiwa Nand and Ram Sarup, 2 Aug 1928, and for the Shahdara-Baghpat-Baraut road, Banarsi Das/Loti Ram, Manager, Vaish Flour Mills, Budhana Gate, 10 Oct 1929. The latter was supported by Murari Lal supported Banarsi Das, 14 Oct 1929. Ibid.

⁴² Handbook of Tahsil Baghpat, 1900, 1. Land Revenue and Assessment Reports, ERRM.

⁴³ Meerut S.R., 12-16.

its earlier position and attracted more and more trade. But its products mostly continued to be sent south towards Delhi by unmetalled road.⁴⁴ It is hard to measure the real impact on the zamindari of the newly established motor service over the monopolised kutchra road towards Ghaziabad; but it must have strengthened its connection with the fast-growing capital city of Delhi in a time of transition and re-configuration of the traditional Baghpat market. It provided access to a growing market for the sale and purchase of products, but possibly also to new finance capital and its widespread operations in the rural hinterland.

It is quite possible that family relations played an important part in acquiring the monopoly. Khan belonged to the Kamboh Nawab family with branches at Meerut and Baghpat who historically held prominent positions during Lodhi and Mughal rule and continued to do so under the British.⁴⁵ His cousin and most prominent contemporary family member, the barrister Nawab Sir Mohammad Yamin Khan, continued the Kamboh Nawabs' earlier supremacy in municipal politics first as member and between 1929-31 as chairman of the Meerut Municipal Board.⁴⁶ From this elevated position, he also became member of the Indian Legislative Assembly in the 1930s as one of the senior most members of the All-India Muslim League,⁴⁷ while also Nawab Ahmad Khan had political aspirations and became member of the UP Legislative Council from 1940 at the latest.⁴⁸ The two cousins were again related to Captain Nawab Mohammed Jamshed Ali Khan of Baghpat, who headed the Meerut District Board during 1929-31 and 1935-37 when monopolies for kutchra roads were implemented and given to bus owners.⁴⁹ We can only speculate about whether such close family ties were a prerequisite to or actually helped in gaining leverage over political

⁴⁴ Meerut District Gazetteer, 1922, 61-2. The Meerut Settlement Report of 1940 still spoke of the necessity of “metalling the main kutchra road running north and south from Baraut through Baghpat to Delhi.” Meerut SR, 5.

⁴⁵ Current day members of the Meerut and Baghpat Nawabi families made both contradictory statements as to which side of the family Nawab Ahmad Khan exactly belonged to. See Interviews with the Kamboh incumbent, Nawab Mohammad Afzal Ahmad Khan, Khairnagar, Meerut, 20 April 2014; Nawab Kokab Hameed of Baghpat, Meerut Cantonment, 21 April 2014.

⁴⁶ Kamboh family members dominated Meerut municipal politics between 1876 and independence. S.N. Jha, *Leadership and Local Politics: A Study of Meerut District in Uttar Pradesh, 1923-1973*. 1979, 41, 43, 158.

⁴⁷ For this, see M.A. Hussain, *Urban Politics in India: A Study of Meerut City, 1876-1970*. Doctoral Dissertation, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1984, 103-4, 112-3, 218.

⁴⁸ This is clear from an arms license petition to the Meerut District Magistrate. Nawab Islam Ahmed Khan, M.L.C., Kothi Junnat Nishan, Meerut to the District Magistrate, Meerut, 19 Dec 1940, 13 Jan 1941. File No?

⁴⁹ M.A. Hussain, *Urban Politics in India: A Study of Meerut City, 1876-1970*. Doctoral Dissertation, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1984, 103-4, 112-3, 218 points out the family connection between Mohammad Yamin Khan and Jamshed Ali Khan. The latter was the seventh largest landholder in Meerut in 1940, a leader of the Nationalist Agriculturist's Party of Agra and one of the driving forces in United Provinces' zamindari politics together with his cousin, the Bulandshahr-based Nawab of Chattari, and other landlords. For landlords' activities and wider implications, see Peter Reeves, *Landlords and governments in Uttar Pradesh: a study of their relations until zamindari abolition*. Bombay, 1991. Also see Visalakshi Menon, *From movement to government: the Congress in the United Provinces, 1937 – 42*. New Delhi, 2003. For information on Nawab Jamshed Ali Khan, see Final Meerut S.R., Appendix Nawab Jamshed Ali Khan was in behind the Nationalist Agriculturists' Party of Agra one of the driving forces

decisions such as the granting of monopolies for road-building and motor lorries. Such a close-knit family connection might not have directly supported one applicant vis-à-vis someone else. However, the position of families with landed and/or commercial interests in the district had already made sure that any decision would be in favour of their members, because monopolies were explicitly granted with reference to the applicants' financial stability and position.

c. Brahmin Landlords and Merchants

The third category in our typology of actors in the Meerut countryside refers to upper-caste, especially Brahmin, entrepreneurs of whom some combined landed interests with merchant and other business activities in various proportions. They also either continued to follow this combination or easily moved into other enterprises and professions at later stages. One such entrepreneur was Yogendranath Dixit whose motorbus service began to ply on the Baghpat-Muradnagar road with a fare of not more than Re. 1 per passenger in February 1930.⁵⁰ Who was this person and how did road monopoly and bus service fit his professional and family background? He was born in 1900 and held contracts for a few articles of supply to the Meerut jail in his mid-late 20s. But income from this was rather small so that his brother, Rajendranath Dixit, supported him from his income as a Meerut lawyer and Honorary Assistant Collector. Together they also held a zamindari in Sardhana Tahsil and owned a house and a kothi in Nauchandi ground, whose value added up to some Rs. 50,000.⁵¹ Neither Dixit's nor his larger family's landed interests, if any still extant at that time, seem to have mattered much in his application for a road monopoly. Originally from Jind, his ancestors had at any rate left their zamindari in the village Barkali, 6 miles east of Sardhana, more or less for good a long time back. Having studied and watching out for a legal profession, their father, Ghasiram Dixit, had moved into Meerut city in order to live and work there. He had built the house we can see on the picture below in 1909 (with his initials inscribed) and used to work either in the Meerut kutchery or in the courtroom right next to his house (room behind grey door).

⁵⁰ Y.N. Dixit to D.M., Note, D.M. 19 Feb 1930; Agreement bond, 23 Feb 1930. Ibid.

⁵¹



House of the Dixit Family, close to Nauchandi
Ground, Meerut



Yogendranath Dixit, 1951

While Rajendranath Dixit followed the example of his father and became a lawyer, Yogendranath Dixit chose a different trajectory including a diverse set of professions as well as a high degree of mobility from one profession to the next. The motorbus service did not merely serve to support the zamindari or other business interests, as was the case with many other applicants, but seems to have been a promising opening at the time with some opportunity and possibility of earning a living. In his application to the District Magistrate, Y.N. Dixit referred in particular to the large number of litigants flocking to the munsif's court at Ghaziabad and to the court of the 1st Class Magistrate Mr. L.A. Peuch in the big village of Harchandpore as the basis for his motor service business.⁵² The idea might have been proposed first or come up in discussions with Dixit's brother, who was himself a lawyer and often held court at his house in Nauchandi ground so that the amount of court work was nothing new to them. After plying his bus for a few more years, Y.N. Dixit involved himself in the nationalist-independence movement and also joined the Indian army for service in Europe during the Second World War. On his return he joined Spencer's & Co. at Lahore and became a top official in the ensuing period. He never married and died of cancer in Bombay

⁵² Y.N. Dixit to District Collector, Meerut, 13 Sept 1929. Ibid.

in 1957.⁵³ What does his case show us? I would say it shows that urban-based Brahmins had left their agricultural professions much before any of the other groups in Meerut and also that they were much more likely to move into professions outside agriculture, such as urban professional jobs or in enterprise. Several other cases come into this category as well, e.g. Ram Sarup Kapoor, son of B. Chuttanlal, and owner of the UP Automobile Engineering Works. This company was Meerut's first motor vehicle selling company with a vehicle showroom and garage in Meerut Cantonment, on top of which a monopoly on the Patla-Philkuwa unmetalled road offered additional income.⁵⁴

d. The end of the system of road monopolies

The word about road monopolies and possibilities for employing motor vehicles in Meerut district spread fast. In fact, the number of overall applications from interested parties between 1929 and 1930 was so high that district authorities could not entertain them all. Some of the applicants were completely new entrants into the field and wanted to run buses on a rather small scale and within the locality they came from. Other applicants had been investing in motorbuses for some time and began to ply them on other provincial and local roads much before. But motor traffic on some of these roads saturated and competition existed, so that little income could be expected from adding another lorry to such a road. Instead, lorry owners aimed at using the new initiative of district authorities to spread their vehicles over larger territory and to tap new areas that offered a higher passenger supply and increased their income from transport. One such application was by zamindar Bhagwar Singh who had been in the motor business for some time and operated a number of taxis and cars on the Meerut-Bhagpat metalled road. This road, however, became too crowded to accommodate all his cars so that he sought permission from authorities to switch some of his vehicles to the kachha road from Baghpat to Kishan Pour Barel via Baraut, where passengers arguably faced great inconveniences for want of a motor transport service.⁵⁵ But the number of kachha roads was limited so that district authorities also had to decline many other applications for monopolies.

However much time and care had been taken to hand out those road monopolies, their actual working did not meet expectations of district authorities at all. Instead, the condition of many of these roads was even worse than before, especially because monopoly holders neither cared to improve roads themselves nor contributed money towards the board's

⁵³ Interviews with Deepak and Pradeep Dixit, direct descendants of Rajendranath Dixit, at their house in Nauchandi Ground, Lalkurthi, Meerut, 20 and 25 April 2014.

⁵⁴ Interviews with descendants of Ram Sarup, Saket Colony, Meerut, 18 April 2014.

⁵⁵ Application by Bhagwar Singh to District Magistrate, 26 Oct 1929. Ibid.

expenditure. This problem had started just a few months after the conclusion of agreements and was to continue for much longer. With most monopoly holders repairing their roads only in parts and even leaving the remaining part undressed, the District Board asked the Magistrate to take necessary steps towards the immediate repair of roads and to take adequate agreements from lorry owners for the proper maintenance of roads in their entirety.⁵⁶ This position continued in early 1930 when the District board engineer reported that lorry owners on the Baraut-Baghpat, Baraut-Chaprauli and Baraut-Binauli roads in particular had only filled the ruts, which was insufficient to keep roads in good condition.⁵⁷ Such complaints about the violation of agreements certainly made the district authority think over its own policy towards kutchra roads.

It was in this connection that the question arose on whether and how such monopolies were to continue. This was connected to a new element within administrative discussions about whether it was legal at all to out-contract public roads to entrepreneurs as was common and very popular practice in Meerut for roughly a year by now. In fact, it had become so popular that transporters in other adjacent districts confidently cited the Meerut arrangements in their applications to district authorities in the hope to get something out of it. But when Pilibhit district authorities inquired about specific working details of this arrangement, the Meerut Magistrate replied that the system was still in force, but that the provincial government did not approve of it anymore and accordingly no new monopolies for roads were given out.⁵⁸ The magistrate immediately enforced this new policy regarding several applications and wanted to continue to do so until the government decided the whole question.⁵⁹ Indeed, the provincial government had issued an order in 1930 that all monopolies granted so far were invalid and ultra vires and should be withdrawn at once. The major reason for this was that the District Magistrate never had the right to act upon such questions and in representation of the Secretary of State.⁶⁰ The District Magistrate was thus not only faced both with the deplorable condition of roads, but also with the government ordering an immediate stop of the practice based on supposed illegality of contracts. He therefore inquired from the legal councillor to the government about whether a termination of agreements would render the Secretary of State liable to any suits if he withdrew these monopolies now without

⁵⁶ Chairman, D.B. to Magistrate, 27 Sept 1929. Ibid.

⁵⁷ Chairman, D.B. to Magistrate, 21 Mar 1930. Ibid.

⁵⁸ Robkar from Chairman, District Board Pilibhit to District Magistrate, Meerut, 3 May 1930; Note, 10 June 1930. XX, 40/27, ERRM.

⁵⁹ He declined, among others, the application of an important Rais and Zamindar of Bahsuma in Tahsil Mowana for a monopoly on the road between Meerut and Forezepore. Zamindar of Bahsuma to District Magistrate, 1 June 1930; Note, 3 June 1930. Ibid. Any other application refused?

⁶⁰ G.O., 1930, which one exactly?

any reason. His reply was in the negative, pointing out that his own action was not and could not be on behalf of the Secretary of State. He also had no authority to grant monopolies since the district board was the owner of roads.⁶¹

Other discussions on how to change the upkeep of kutchra roads took place simultaneously. The District Board itself was adamant not to regain charge over monopolised roads, but favoured to charge every holder a certain amount for the wear and tear of roads.⁶² They especially debated a scheme of wear and tear charges practiced in Etah district and eventually decided in June of that year to have a similar procedure scheme in Meerut with the hope to raise some Rs. 16,000/- to spend on road improvements.⁶³ Between mid-1930 and early 1931, district authorities ordered monopoly holders to explain their inaction in this respect and also began to discuss ways and means to make them adhere to the contracts they had concluded.⁶⁴ But faced both with a continuing deterioration of concerned roads as well as public and governmental pressure, the Meerut authorities began to notify all monopoly holders about the cancellation of all applications so far granted by September of that year.⁶⁵ But this was more used as a pressure for monopoly holders to start paying for their roads, since many of them decided not to register with the police authorities and not to pay the amounts levied now by the district board.⁶⁶

I have no information on whether the system continued after late 1930/early 1931 or whether the district administration reverted to the older or even to a new system. I do know that local authorities introduced a new system of permits after 1935 following the implementation of new rules under the UP Motor Vehicles taxation Act, 1935 which largely represented interests of railway companies and the provincial government. This permit system introduced regional or district traffic committees who met regularly and decided over all concerned questions such as motor vehicles permits. Monopolies were not possible after this decision anymore, but this did not prevent merchants and zamindars from applying for motor vehicles and using them for their own purposes. Clear is however that districts surrounding Meerut had quite different approaches towards the road transport sector for a long time before and after the decision of authorities in Meerut.

⁶¹ Note, D.M., 3 Apr 1930, Opinion of Government Legal Council, 3 Apr 1930. Ibid.

⁶² Report of District Board Engineer, 26 Mar 1931; DB Chairman to DM Meerut, 1 Apr 1931

⁶³ Decision, District Board, Meerut, 10 June 1931. D.B. Chairman to Meerut Commissioner, 10 Jul 1931.

⁶⁴ Notice to all monopoly holders, District Magistrate, Meerut, 13 Apr 1931

⁶⁵ Letter of notification that cancelled monopolies, 14 Sep 1931. Note, 21 Apr 1932, File. Ibid.

⁶⁶ This applied to the following monopolies: Messrs. Niader Mal Sharma of Mowana and Peare Lall Vaish of village Behsuma. Jamshed Ali Khan, DB Meerut to Collector, Meerut, 6 July 1931. Order of cancellation of monopoly by B. Bijai Singh s/o Ch. Ishri Pershad of Phalauda, on Phalauda-Mowana unmetalled road, DM Meerut, 17 Sept 1931

I am focussing here in particular on the story of the Marwari merchant, Seth Amba Prasad Maheshwari, who was Proprietor and Managing Agent of the Saharanpur Kutch Road Transport Co. He became sole monopolist for all unmetalled roads in Saharanpur district in 1929 and continued to in this respect for another 6 years or so.⁶⁷ Who was this Marwari merchant and what did his road transport operations consist of? Records in the Meerut District archives identify him as resident of both Sarafa Bazaar, Ahata Bohra, Meerut city and of Rasna Tahsil so that we can speculate whether his background was largely rural, urban or somewhere inbetween. He was the son of Seth Piarey Lal, arguably one of the richest Marwari traders in Meerut in the beginning of the 20th century.⁶⁸ He was arguably also in good personal relations with one of the biggest zamindars of Saharanpur district, Khub Chand Rai Bahadur, since this person testified to Amba Prasad’s credentials on inquiry by the district board authorities regarding his financial standing.⁶⁹

Briefly after the Saharanpur district authorities had granted the monopoly to Seth Amba Prasad, both rival lorry owners as well as local and provincial politicians voiced discontent over the fact that a single entrepreneur would get such a monopoly.⁷⁰ Some governmental authorities considered the agreement void since the Magistrate had no authority to make such an agreement on behalf of the Secretary of State and also because it was against public policy,⁷¹ but especially to the local district authorities this arrangement posed no problem and hence went on unchallenged. Despite continued pressure put on the district boards in local and provincial politics, the monopoly of Seth Amba Prasad was to continue for more than half a decade.⁷² He even seems to have been capable of increasing the number of monopolies under his name and to extent to areas outside Saharanpur district. He applied for at least three monopolies in Meerut district. One of the district officers working on the case remarked after one of his applications that they would need more information about his financial capacity, on which the District Magistrate drily commented “this was unnecessary.”⁷³ He became so popular at the local and provincial level that even important

⁶⁷ See Agreement bond with Seth Amba Prasad Maheshwari, Meerut District Archives. Appendix I.

⁶⁸ Interview with Gaurav, Anil Maheshwari and other members of the Marwari business community, Meerut, April 2014. Information on Khub Chand Rai Bahadur from Gazetteers, Settlement Reports etc.?

⁶⁹ Big zamindar from Saharanpur, Maheshwari family, lived in Khala Par, Panchayati Mandir, Saharanpur. Interview with Arun Maheshwari, Meerut, 21 April 2014.

⁷⁰ Commissioner, Meerut to J.E. Pedley, Meerut District Magistrate, 26 Mar 1930, ERRM, XX, 40/27; Questions by Pandit Shri Sadayatan Pande and Mr. Mukandi Lal. UP Legislative Council, 18 Mar 1930, Vol. XLVII, 78. Pande was also Chairman of the Mirzapur District Board; Mukandi Lal was barrister and represented Garhwal.

⁷¹ Police Department to the Commissioner, Meerut Division, 6 Mar 1930

⁷² See questions by Rai Sahib Lala Anand Sarup, UP Legislative Council, 6 Mar 1933, Vol. LVII, No. 2, 371-2. Lala Anand Sarup was Government Treasurer and Honorary Magistrate at Muzaffarnagar in 1928-29. Board of High School and Intermediate Education, Calendar for the Year 1928-29, Allahabad, 1929, 37.

⁷³ Evidence? Some in YN Dixit’s folder, others either in Nawab Ahmad Khan or Bishambar Sahai?

governmental inquiries could not or did not want to forego his opinions on the road transport sector.⁷⁴

But by this time, the public and certain parts within the administration of the United Provinces had begun to realize the problems with the monopolistic position upon which Seth Amba Prasad Maheshwari could build upon in the operation of his large fleet of vehicles. One of the first official recognitions of his markedly monopolistic position was recorded in the report of the United Provinces Road Traffic Taxation Committee of July 1932. Consisting of various official and non-official members from the provincial and district administration as well as commercial interests concerned, the committee had invited Seth Amba Prasad to assist with his experience in the discussions and preparation of the report. The major thrust of the inquiry was to find out whether and in what ways additional taxation could be levied from public motor and other vehicles in order to finance the maintenance and construction of roads. It favoured, among others, the introduction of a new province-wide tax on all kinds of vehicles including motors that would simultaneously eliminate all local taxation so far levied. This would affect, among others, owners of thelas, chaupayas and other carts drawn by bullocks, buffaloes or camels especially common in the districts of Agra and Meerut since the administration regarded them as the major force behind deteriorating road conditions for which they had to be tapped and taxed. It favoured a continuation of the already existing system of “controlled monopoly”, so that unrestricted competition would not develop and motorbus owners get reasonable returns on investments. Putting these and other suggestions forward, the committee anticipated that “a considerable number of public motor buses will be eliminated if our proposals are accepted”, thus openly pushing for a development in favour of the large vehicle fleet owner over smaller bus owners.⁷⁵ If overall competition was controlled and the fare fixed at 6 pies a mile, Seth Amba Prasad himself confidently expressed he could pay Rs. 1,000 a year tax on each bus, looking rather reluctantly at Meerut district bus owners whose unionisation arguably meant a trip only once in three or four days for everyone.⁷⁶ In his note of dissent, the committee member Captain A.M. Johnston, Branch Manager of the French Motor Car Company at Nainital, alluded to the fact that the committee should not have accepted the opinion of Seth Amba Prasad, since he was a large fleet owner who “operated

⁷⁴ The team around Kirkness/Mitchell interviewed him in the course of their report on road-rail competition in the United Provinces. See K.G. Mitchell/L.H. Kirkness, Report on the Present State of Road and Railway Competition and the Possibilities of their Future Coordination and Development, and Cognate Matters in Governors' Provinces. Delhi, 1933. Report on United Provinces, 2.

⁷⁵ Report of the United Provinces Road Traffic Taxation Committee, 1932. Nainital, 1932, 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.

one of the most ... [or] the most ... profitable route in this province” and would hence “naturally desire to eliminate the small capitalist.”⁷⁷

It was probably sometime in 1935 that Amba Prasad Maheshwari could not hold up his position any longer and his monopoly was abolished following the decision of Allahabad High Court Judge, J. Iqbal Ahmad in October 1935.⁷⁸

Table 1. – Case Work in Meerut Courts⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Positing the large profits of concerns like Amba Prasad’s against the meagre income of small owners, the Chairman of the Aligarh Municipal Board, Maulana Abdul Khaliq, gave a similar note of dissent. *Ibid.*, 13, 16.

⁷⁸ Amba Prasad Maheshwari vs Jugal Kishore, 25 Oct 1935. Allahabad High Court, AIR 1936 All 112, 159 Ind Cas 790. Accessed at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/739383>, 23rd May 2014.

Description	Class of Cases	Instituted	Disposed	Pending
1928-32 ⁸⁰	Record of Rights	22,158	22,130	8
	Rent Cases	2,051	129	1,922
	Misc.	2,211	2,211	...
	Total	26400	24,470	1930
1936-39	Record of rights	3,542	3,407	185
	Rent cases	18,025	16,367	1,658
	Misc	775	731	44
	Total	22,342	20,505	1,887
1928-39	Record of rights	25,680	25,587	148
	Rent cases	18,154	16,496	1,658
	Misc.	2,986	2,942	44
	Total	46,820	44,975	1,845

Table 2. Appeals in Meerut Courts

Time Period	Instituted	Decided					Balance
		Upheld	Reversed	Remanded	Modified	Total	
1928-32 ⁸¹	870	971	60	30	9	370	...
1936-39	237 ⁸²	125 ⁸³	15	17	80	238	...
1928-39 (Grand Total)	607	396	75	47	89	607	

⁷⁹ S.R. Meerut, 1940

⁸⁰ In this period, almost all cases were „Record of rights“, only 2 were miscellaneous.

⁸¹ In this period, almost all cases were „Record of rights“, only 2 were miscellaneous.

⁸² 159 Record of rights, 70 rent appeals, 8 miscellaneous; again 24 Record of rights

⁸³ 64, 88, 7; again 16 record of rights

Table 3. Register of Monopoly of Unmetalled Roads for Plying Motor Lorries, Meerut District, 1929-30⁸⁴

Name of road	Length	Name and Residence of Person	Background	Fare per Passenger	Date of First Order	Date of Final Order	Period of Monopoly
Bahsuma-Mawana via Ganeshpur	8	Bishambar Sahai + Murari Lal, resident of Bahsuma, at present Meerut City, near Tehsil	Vaish	.4 Rs.	7.1.1929	3.4.1929	5 years, until 31 Dec 1933
Baghpat-Chaprauli via Baraut	20	L. Bhagwat Pershad, Honorary Magistrate + Ujagar Mal Jaini, Mohalla Chah Shore, Meerut City (later replaced by Lala Mukand Lal)	Vaish	1 Rs.	29.3.1929	8.5.1929	5 years, but then ended 1.5.1932
Phalauda-Mawana Kalan	9	B. Gyan Chandra + Brjai Singh		.8 Rs.	3.5.1929	2.7.1929	5 years
Parichhatgarh to Meerut via Jai	8	Brij Mohan Lal Mehra	Govt. Contractor and Banker	.12 Rs.	7.6.1929	9.9.1929	5 years, upto 30 Sept 1934
Meerut to Baraut	22	M. Jumna Pershad, Shahpir Gate, Meerut	Retired Reader		15.3.1929	18.7.1929	5 years, upto 31.7.1934
Kithore Mawana	16	Daud Khan, Laliana, Mawana Tahsil, Meerut		1 Rs.	23.5.1929	26.8.1929	5 years, 1 Dec 1934
Binauli to Sardhana + Parsi to Sardhana	11 8	Syed Habib Shah, Sardhana	Zamindar, Syed Muslims	.14 Rs. .10 Rs.	5.6.1929	27.9.1929	5 years, 30 Sept 1934
Meerut to Phalauda via Lawar	13	Jagdamba Pershad		.14 Rs.	17.7.1929	17.8.1929	5 years, 31 Aug 1934
Loni to Ghaziabad		B. Jivan Nand Ram Sarup, Meerut City		.8 Rs.	8.8.1929	-	-
Patla-Begumabad		Sita Ram Goel, Raizadgan Street, Meerut City		.12 Rs.	16.10.1929	20.1.1930	5 years, 1 Feb 1935
Patla to Pilkhuwa via Niwari and Faridnagar		Ram Sarup Kapoor s/o B Chuttanlal c/o UP Automobile Engineering Works, Meerut					
Bhagpat-Ghaziabad via Katha and Loni		Nawab Ahmad Khan c/o Mohd Yamin Khan, Kothi Jannat Nishan, Meerut		1 Rs.	14.8.1929	29.1.1930	5 years, 1 Feb 1935
Bhagpat-Muradnagar Road		Y.N. Dixit c/o P. Rajendranath Dixit, Honorary Assistant Collector, Meerut	Govt Contractor + Order Supplier	14 Rs.	17.9.1929		5 years
Dhasna to Ghulauti via Dhaulana till district jurisdiction		Ram Sarup Bhatwan, Meerut		14 Rs.	30.10.1929		5 years

⁸⁴ Register of Monopoly of unmetalled roads for plying motor lorries, 1929-30. Dept. XX (Police?), 40/27, ERRM. Sir Nawab Jamshed Ali Khan, UP Council, 1936 or 1937.

Appendix 1. Agreement Bond between Seth Amba Prasad Maheshwari and the District Magistrate, Saharanpur, 7th November 1929⁸⁵

Agreement Bond.

The lessee, Seth Amba Prasad Maheshri son of Seth Piarey Lal resident of Bazar Sarafa , Abhata Bohran, Meerut City, proprietor and managing agent of Saharanpur Kutch Road Transport Co. who has been licensed by the lessor, the District Magistrate, Saharanpur, sole representative for Saharanpur district of the Secretary of State for India, to maintain as many passenger lorries, goods lorries and Taxi cars as he wishes to ply for hire on the following Saharanpur District unmetalled roads:

1) Saharanpur to Chilkana, 2) Saharanpur to Gangoh via Phandpuri and Ambehta, 3) Saharanpur to Ambehta via Nakur, 4) Saharanpur to Gangoh via Nakur (no monopoly from Saharanpur to Nakur), 5) Chilkana to Nakur through Sarsawa, 6) Saharanpur to Deoband, 7) Roorkee to Hardwar through Piran Kaliyar and Jwalapur, 8) Titron to Saharanpur through Thana Bhawan-Nanauta and Rampur (only the portion lying within Saharanpur district), 9) Deoband to Landhaura through Manglore and Roorkee, 10) Deoband to Rampur and Nanauta,

and no one else excepting he or whom he permits or transfers with the approval of the Registering Authority will be so licensed for a period of 5 years from 1st of January 1930, do hereby agree and bind himself of the following conditions:

1. To maintain the unmetalled portion (12 feet broad) of the above mentioned roads in good order for the sake of my motor lorries, cars and private and official cars and tongas only

2. To ply lorries daily and regularly on every road

3. Not to charge more than -/1/- per mile per head in lorries and two anna per mile per head in cars

4. To construct Ferry bridges on the roads wherever necessary and not to charge more from passengers and conveyances passing on the Ferry bridges than the rates prescribed by the Government under Act 17 of 18789 for Ferry Bridges

5. To deposit ONE THOUSAND rupees as a cash deposit with the Chairman, District Board, to repair and upkeep the roads in case of failure to fulfill condition No. 1, and in such a case, the Chairman may have the repairs done and debit the charge to the lessee's deposit

6. A road will be excluded from the monopoly when that particular road will be metalled whole

7. The Chairman, District Board will inspect all the roads from time to time and will submit the report to the lessor about the condition of the roads

8. If the lessee will require the sue of the Tractor and Grader he will have to settle with the Chairman District Board regarding its hire

9. The lessee must inform the registering authority, that is, the Superintendent of Police and obtain his approval for any lorry other than he own to run on any particular road but in such a case the lessee will be responsible for the good work and the fulfillment of all the conditions

10. The lessee have to take the permission of the lessor in case of transferring any road to any body else and in such a case the transferee have to observe all the conditions just as the lessee

11. In the rainy season the lessee can stop the service on those roads on which he thinks the journey unsafe for the passengers

12. The lessor can cancel the monopoly if the roads are not really looked after

13. Nothing in the contract will nullify any of the provisions of the rules (1928) granted by the U.P. Government under the Motor Vehicle Act 1914

Entitled to have the following additional privileges

A. The monopoly is granted for Five years only from 1st of January 1930 to 31st December 1934, but if the lessor is satisfied with the work of the lessee the monopoly may be extended for another FIVE years.

B. The lessee shall have the privilege of having first chance in cases of such monopolies for other roads in future provided he works satisfactorily

In witness whereof I have affixed my signature to this, this 7th day of November 1929

Sd. Amba Prasad Maheshwari s/o Seth Piarely Lal, Resident of Bazar Sarafa, Ahata Bohra, Meerut City, Proprietor and Managing Agent, Saharanpur Kutch Road Transport Co.

1. Witness
Sd. Khub Chand
Rai Bahadur

2. Witness
Sd. New Sukh
Das (In Urdu)

⁸⁵ XX, 40/27, ERRM.