

## CHAPTER I.

## THE DISTRICT.

The Hisar district is the central one of the three districts included in the Hisar division, and lies between north latitude  $28^{\circ} 36'$  and  $29^{\circ} 49'$ , and east longitude  $75^{\circ} 16'$  and  $76^{\circ} 22'$ . Lying on the confines of Rájputána, and forming a part of the great prairies which stretch between and include Bikáner on the one hand and Patiála on the other, it shares with Rohtak and Simla only among Punjab districts the peculiarity of having absolutely no river-frontage. It is bounded on the north and north-east by the Native State of Patiála, on the east by the Rohtak district, and the State of Jind, on the south and south-east by the Dádri territory of Jind and the State of Luháru, and on the west the prairies of Bikáner and the Sirsa district. It is thus completely surrounded by Native States; save where at its north-western and south-eastern corners it touches the Sirsa and Rohtak districts. It is divided into five *tahsils*, of which that of Barwála occupies the north-east, that of Fatchábád the north-west, that of Hánsi the east centre, that of Hisar the west centre, and that of Bhiwáni the south and south-west of the district. Some leading statistics regarding the district and the several *tahsils* into which it is divided are given in Table No. I on the opposite page. The district contains three towns of more than 10,000 souls, as follows:—

Bhiwáni	...	...	...	...	...	...	33,762
Hisar	...	...	...	...	...	...	14,167
Hánsi	...	...	...	...	...	...	12,656

The administrative head-quarters are situated at Hisar, which lies nearly in the centre of the district. Hisar stands 12th in order of area and 21st in order of population among the 32 districts of the province, comprising 3.32 per cent. of the total area, 2.68 per cent. of the total population, and 3.12 per cent. of the urban

Town.	North Latitude.	East Longitude.	Feet above sea-level.
Hisar	$29^{\circ} 10'$	$75^{\circ} 46'$	689
Hánsi	$29^{\circ} 6'$	$76^{\circ} 0'$	705
Bhiwani	$28^{\circ} 48'$	$76^{\circ} 11'$	870*
Barwala	$29^{\circ} 22'$	$75^{\circ} 57'$	730*
Fatchabad	$29^{\circ} 31'$	$75^{\circ} 30'$	720*

\* Approximate.

The tract under description consists of vast and, for the most part, sandy plains, scrubby towards the north, with rank grass and brushwood, which relieve the dreariness of the prospect by intervals of green. Stretching southwards, the plains become more and more sandy and more and more sterile, and the dead level is interrupted by undulating sand hills. Here coarse grasses and a stunted growth of desert trees and shrubs form the sole trace of spontaneous vegetation. The sands hills increase in height

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population of British territory. The latitude, longitude, and height in feet above the sea, of the principal places in the district are shown in the margin.

General features.

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towards the south, until at last, some 15 to 25 miles from the Luháru and Bikáner border, they give way to a series of bare rocky hills, which rise like islands out of a waste of sand; the highest of them, however, at the foot of which lies the town of Tushám, does not rise more than 800 feet above the surrounding plain. Such are the general features of the face of the country, as they would strike a passing traveller. It must not, however, be supposed that there are no variations of soil. Indeed, on the banks of the Western Jamna Canal, which passes through the district from east to west, close by the towns of Hánsi and Hisár, the soil is of more than ordinary productiveness, except in years when the canal water fails.

Chak Hariána.

The whole area of the district, is divisible into three tracts, each with its own characteristics. They are styled respectively *chak* Hariána, *chak* Bágár, and *chak* Náli.\* *Chak* Hariána is the largest of these tracts, containing 292 out of the 659 villages into which the district is divided. It occupies the heart of the district, and is traversed by the Western Jamna Canal, which, running through the district from east to west, separates this *chak* into two nearly equal portions. In this part of the district the soil is technically decribed as *dákar* and *rausli*. The former of these terms is applied to a strong clayey soil, breaking up into large clods, and requiring very abundant rain to saturate it sufficiently for seeding. The latter term implies a very similar soil, but less close and firm, having generally an admixture of sand. It does not require quite the same amount of saturation as the harder *dákar*. Even here, however, in the central portion of the district, the soil is freely interspersed with patches of sand, and towards the south it blends gradually with the sandy plains and hillocks already described. Though rich when sufficiently saturated, it produces almost nothing when there is a failure in the natural rains. Water is only touched in the wells at a depth varying from 107 to 133 feet below the surface; and the cost of constructing wells seldom falls below Rs. 1,500. Well irrigation is therefore not attempted, except in very bad seasons, when a few acres of land are irrigated for growing vegetables around the village site. Again, the hardness of the soil renders ploughing a matter of great labour. It is said among the peasants of the tract that that season only is favourable in which the soil becomes moist for 100 inches below the surface. In dry seasons not only is there no harvest, but hardly an ordinary grass crop. In order to make the most of the rain-fall, the farmers leave large tracts uncultivated, and, collecting the drainage from these by means of water-courses, conduct it on to their cultivated fields. Such uncultivated plots are styled *upráhan*, and the water-courses *ágam*. The canal irrigation is confined to 54 villages, lying immediately on either side of the canal. The soil of these is in all respects the same as that of the villages a little further removed from the canal, with the exception that the constant irrigation has rendered it softer and more rich. Even this, however, produces nothing unless irrigated.

\* The word *chak* applies to any portion of land divided off, a sub-division.

*Chak Bāgar* lies to the south, and includes the towns of Tushām and Bhiwāni. Here nothing interferes with the universal reign of sand. The name is borrowed from the tract of country just beyond the border in Bikāner, which has from time immemorial been called Bāgar, and has given its name to the tribe of Bāgri Jāts, of whom more hereafter. Cultivation in *chak Bāgar* is carried on with no ordinary difficulty. If there is no rain, there is no crop at all, not even a blade of grass. If rain is too heavy, the sand is washed down from the sand hillocks upon the cultivated fields and chokes the seed, so that cultivators have not unfrequently to sow three or four times for each harvest. Dust-storms often change the appearance of the country, and hills appear where yesterday was a cultivated field; and the farmer, if he wishes for a harvest, must set to work again and plough up the ground which before had underlain a sand hill. But against all these disadvantages, there are compensating benefits; the labour of ploughing is next to nothing, owing to the lightness of the soil, and camels being used for this work, as much as 40 acres are ploughed up at a time. Again, a very slight fall of rain is sufficient to produce a harvest; and if it rains at any time between March and August, the farmers can raise a crop of *bājra* here, while the same amount of rain may be quite inadequate to affect the richer soil of the country further north; so that the latter will lie barren while the sandy soil of *chak Bāgar* will produce a crop, scanty it is true, but sufficient for the wants of its inhabitants. There is neither stream nor canal in this part of the district, nor is well irrigation possible to any great extent. In a few villages the people have *kachcha* (unlined) wells on the banks of the village tanks, by which they irrigate a few fields for vegetables. Masonry wells are not constructed, because the water is liable to become brackish, and it would be a waste of money to build wells, which, a few years afterwards, might become absolutely useless. Cases have been known where village sites have been abandoned owing to deterioration of the wells, the water becoming so salt as to be unfit for use by man or beast.

*Chak Nāli* owes its name to the fact that during the rains it is traversed by two streams, or *nālas*. It lies to the north of the district, and includes the towns of Barwāla and Fatehābād. The two streams are the Ghaggar and a smaller branch of the same. The latter separates from the parent stream to the east of the border in Patiāla territory, and runs, to the north of it, at a distance of a few miles, through the northern corner of this district, and on into the Sirsa district, rejoining the parent stream not far beyond the town of that name. The soil is classed for the most part as *rausli*. But the population is very scanty, and only a small proportion of the country had been brought under cultivation at the time of Settlement (1864). The uncultivated portion is thickly covered with low brushwood, useful only for fuel; and even where cultivated, the produce is, at best, indifferent. The villages upon the main stream of the Ghaggar are known by the name of *Dīban*, on account of the abundance of a kind of grass (locally known as *dāb*) which grows upon its banks. The villages

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*Chak Bāgar:*

*Chak Nāli:*

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on the northern branch are called collectively *Sotar*. In all these villages, no crop at all is grown except on land which has been irrigated from one or the other of the branches of the Ghaggar. And as the flow of water in these is most variable and uncertain, the harvests too, if for this reason only, would be highly precarious. But the river irrigation, available at the best for not more than a month or six weeks in the year, is not alone sufficient to ensure the ripening of a crop; and the ultimate result of the harvest is almost as dependent upon timely rains as in the more sterile parts of the district. In the *Dában* villages there is one harvest, that of the spring (*rabi*), which, though sown after irrigation from the river, is entirely dependent for coming to perfection upon rain in December or January. If no rain falls, the out-turn is reduced by one-half. In the *Sotar* villages two harvests are secured in good years; that of the autumn being rice. Well irrigation is carried on to a considerable extent to supplement irrigation from the river, but the farmers never trust to this alone for their crops. Water, however, is plentiful and good, nor is the cost of constructing wells excessive. In *Ját* villages the wells are of masonry (*pakka*), but the ambition of the *Pachhadás*, who occupy the greater part of the *chak*, does not soar so high, and they are content to leave their wells unlined (*kachcha*).

The Ghaggar.

The Ghaggar, already alluded to, rises in the Himalayas bordering upon the Ambála district, and, passing through Ambála and the Native State of Patiala, enters the district in two branches a few miles to the south-west of Akálgarh, a town in Patiala, and traversing the district, passes on into Sirsa. The flow of water is most uncertain, the stream being entirely dependent for its supply upon the fall of rain in the lower Himalayas. Moreover, a large portion of the water is carried off for purposes of irrigation before the stream enters this district.\*

Western Jamna Canal.

The canal enters the district about half-way down the eastern border, and runs through it from east to west passing the towns of Hánsi and Hisár. After crossing the western border, any water that remains is swallowed up in the sands of Bikáner. The canal was first constructed by the Emperor Fíroz Sháh to water his new town of Hisár Fíroza about A.D. 1360. It was found closed when the country passed under British rule, and was first reopened in the season of 1826-27, but the people for several years obstinately refused to avail themselves of its advantages, under the impression, not unusual at the time, that the use of its water would be followed by an immediate enhancement of the sum demanded as land revenue. A severe famine in 1832-33 first drove them to it, and since that period irrigation has been steadily progressing.†

Lines of drainage.

The surface drainage of the district, which is not utilized by water-courses for purposes of irrigation, finds its way through the district by the Western Jamna Canal and the Ghaggar. There are no other water-courses of any significance. The Ghaggar, precarious and uncertain as to flow of water, is the only stream that

\* For a more detailed description of the Ghaggar, see the Gazetteer of the Ambála district.

† See Ambála Gazetteer.

enters the district. The bed of the old Chautang *nála* is utilized for the Western Jamna Canal.\*

Near Fatehábád, and again at Mura Khera, a village near the Ghaggar, there are *jhíls*, or swampy lakes, caused by the overflow of the Ghaggar in time of heavy rain. The Fatehábád *jhíl* is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles in length by  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile broad, with an area, when full, of 15,960 acres, and a depth of from 8 to 9 feet in the deepest parts. The Mura Khera *jhíl* is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile long by  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile in breadth, having an area of 800 acres, and a depth of 7 or 8 feet. These, however, are not perennial, and do not deserve the name of lakes. They invariably dry up in the hot season. Crops of paddy are grown in the shallows, and, when dry, wheat, gram and barley are sown in their beds.

Table No. III shows in inches the total rainfall registered at each of the rain-gauge stations in the district for each year, from 1866-67 to 1882-83. The fall at head-quarters for the four preceding years is shown in the margin. The distribution of the rainfall throughout the year is shown in Tables Nos. IIIA and IIIB.

Year.	Inches.
1862-63 ...	21·9
1863-64 ...	24·8
1864-65 ...	14·3
1865-66 ...	23·1

Tables Nos. XI, XIA, XIB, and XLIV give annual and monthly statistics of birth and deaths for the district and for its towns during the last five years; while the birth and death-rates since 1868, so far as available, will be found at page 25 for the general population, and in Chapter VI under the heads of the several large towns of the district. Table No. XII shows the number of insane, blind, deaf-mutes, and lepers as ascertained at the Census of 1881; while Table No. XXXVIII shows the working of the dispensaries since 1877. In the District Census Report for 1881, the Civil Surgeon wrote as follows:—

“The villagers along the canal suffer from malarial fever, dyspepsia, enlargement of the spleen and liver. They look sallow and anæmic, whereas the inhabitants of our *baráni* tracts, Ranghars, Játs, Bishnois, Gújars and Kaim Khánís are strong, athletic, and healthy looking, with physical development and bodily vigour good. They suffer mostly from skin diseases, guinea worm, gravel, stone in the bladder, and tubercular foot and hand, called *veri nágra*, both red and black parasitic fungi. The level of the subsoil water varies very much. The superficial stratum in the district consists of clay more or less mixed with sand, extending to a depth of 10 to 20 feet, and then impervious clay, having little or no sand intermixed with it, which retains the rain water in tanks for drinking use. The supply of water is sometimes inadequate to the demand during the summer. The superficial stratum in some parts of the district is composed of grey and white *kankar*; tree cultivation has either not been sufficiently encouraged or has not thriven in this district, although in the neighbourhood of Hisár and Hánsi we have extensive forest *jungal*.”

The Civil Surgeon also states that the most prevalent diseases in the district are malarious fever, rheumatic affections, ophthalmia,

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*Jhíls* or swamps.

Rainfall, tempera-  
ture, and climate.

Disease.

\* For a detailed account of the canal and its history, see Ambála Gazetteer.

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respiratory affections, and skin diseases. Of fever cases by far the greatest number have occurred in the Bhiwáni and Hisár *tahsils*; respiratory affections are also chiefly confined to those portions of the district, and the same may be said of skin diseases and ophthalmia. Rheumatic affections are pretty evenly distributed.

Geology.

Our knowledge of Indian geology is as yet so general in its nature, and so little has been done in the Punjab in the way of detailed geological investigation, that it is impossible to discuss the local geology of separate districts. But a sketch of the geology of the province as a whole has been most kindly furnished by Mr. Medlicott, Superintendent of the Geological Survey of India, and is published *in extenso* in the provincial volume of the Gazetteer series, and also as a separate pamphlet.

Minerals.

*Kankar*, or argillaceous limetone in nodules, is found in many localities throughout the district. Soft *kankar*, fitted for making lime, is dug in villages Baráwa, Rawása, Chhapar Kalán, Katwár, Dhána Narsiyan, Kharkhari, Sindhar, and Ratiya. The annual produce is calculated to be 92,000 maunds. About 200,000 maunds of hard *kankar* for road-making are also quarried annually in about 15 different places in the district. Saltpetre is manufactured by evaporation in the villages of Talú, Muhammadpur, Mahamra, Shakárpur, Himmatpura and Bahúna. The annual out-turn is estimated to be 15,800 maunds. The number of evaporating pans in use is 17. There is no peculiarity in the mode of manufacture, which resembles that which is in vogue elsewhere. The saltpetre is not refined in the district, but exported in the rough, just as it leaves the pits.

Wild animals.  
Sport.

Leopards are occasionally met with, and hyænas and wolves, and also jackals, foxes, and porcupines, are common. *Nilgæe*, black buck, raving deer, and pig, abound throughout the district, especially in the Government *bír*. Hares are found everywhere. Bustard, floricán, partridges of both kinds, sandgrouse of both sizes, and quail abound; while the village tanks and the *jhils* on the Ghaggar contain duck and teal, and in winter the Ghaggar is visited by *kunj*, heron and by wild geese. Peafowl, half-domesticated, are common round the villages. Altogether Hisár is one of the best shooting districts in the province. During the last five years rewards to the amount of Rs. 1,031 have been given for the destruction of 253 wolves and 4,962 snakes.

Flora.

The trees most commonly found are the *kíkar* and *jand*. These seldom grow in clumps, but are scattered sparsely over the country, the former growing to a height of between 30 and 40 feet, and the latter, in favourable localities, to a height of 25 feet. *Pípal*, *ním*, *siras* and *shisham* are also to be met with here and there, but are not indigenous to the soil. The commonest shrubs in the brushwood which covers so great a portion of the district, are the *jál* and the *kair* or *karíl*. The fruit of these shrubs, called respectively *pílú* and *tend* berries, play an important part in the diet of the common people. The *pílú* berry begins to appear in the month of *Baisákh* (April), and ripens by the end of May, attaining the size of a pea. It has a sweetish, insipid taste, and

is generally swallowed in handfuls, skin, seeds, and all. It is eaten generally by the poorer classes, who consider the fruit a good alterative, although it is said to be somewhat heating. In times of scarcity it constitutes the principal food of the poorer classes, who camp out day and night in the *jangals* while the season lasts. The *kair* bush, from which the *tend* berry is produced, is a straggling shrub devoid of leaves. From the commencement of the month of *Chait* (March) to the end of *Jeth* (June), the bush is covered thickly with blossoms (called by the natives *bárwa*), of a dull red coral tint, and in this state it presents a very attractive appearance. The poorer classes, especially in times of scarcity, boil the blossoms, which are seasoned with salt and pepper, and eaten as a relish with coarse bread. While in a green and unripe state, the berry is called *tend* or *tent*, and is also boiled and eaten. Occasionally, like the blossom, it is made into a pickle. When the berry ripens, it assumes a red or sometimes a kind of purple tint, and in this stage it is called *pinjú*, and is eaten without boiling, but it is not considered very wholesome. In seasons of drought the bush is twice covered with berries, which is not the case in ordinary years; and the people look upon it as a special provision of providence for the succour of the poor. The second time of bearing is from *Sáwan* (August) to *Asauj* (October). The ripe fruit, however, of the second crop is not eaten, being full of worms. Another common and most useful shrub is the *jharberi*. In appearance it is no better than a small prickly bush. Its fruit, however, resembling a small plum, is collected and eaten; and as drought does not affect it, it forms in times of scarcity a valuable resource to the villagers. The leaves are threshed and collected for fodder under the name of *pála*: its briars form excellent hedges, and when no longer required, serve as fuel. It prefers a sandy soil, and is most common in the southern portion of the district.

There is no real forest in the district. In one portion only, near the town of Hisar, does the scrubby burshwood, described above, become thick enough in any way to deserve the name. Here there is a tract of 42,479 acres, which has been set aside for the use of the Hisar cattle farm, and is known as the *sarkári bír* (Government forest). Here and there, portions of this tract are cultivated with oats and lucerne for fodder; but the greater part is in a state of nature, and produces nothing but grass and brushwood, which abound with game, and afford excellent pasturage for the cattle belonging to the farm. There is another smaller, but somewhat similar, tract near Hási the area of which is only 2,068 acres. It is usually leased out for grazing purposes.