

9. Colonialism and the Countryside

1. Why was jotedar a powerful figure in many areas of rural Bengal?

Ans: Jotedars were rich peasants in Bengal. They owned big plots of land sometimes running into thousand of acres of land. They controlled local trade and commerce including the money lending business. They had great influence on the local village population. They were regarded more powerful than the Zamindars even. Following are the main reasons for the high status of Jotedars.

1. The Jotedars controlled trade and commerce including money lending business at the local level.
2. In order to weaken the Zamindars, Jotedars would mobilise ryots not to pay or delay payment towards land revenue.
3. The Jotedars opposed the moves of Zamindars to increase the Jama of a village.
4. The Jotedars lived in villages only. Hence they were in a better position to interact with and influence the peasants.
5. Jotedars were rich and owned big areas of land under cultivation. Many a time they would buy estates of Zamindar. That would be auctioned due to failure to pay up land revenue.

2. How did zamindars manage to retain control over their zamindaris?

Ans: The zamindars manage to retain control over their zamindaris in the following manners:

1. Fictitious sale: It involved series of maneuvers. For example, Raja of Burdwan, first transferred some of his zamindari to his mother because the company had decreed that property of women would not be taken over by the company. Secondly, his agents manipulated the auctions by buying the property, outbidding other purchasers. Subsequently, they refused to pay up the purchase money. As a result of it, the Estate was again resold at auction. But as the zamindar's agents used to purchase it again and again, and did not pay the purchase amount, the auctions were repeated endlessly. Ultimately, the estate was sold at a lower price

back to the zamindars, who never paid the full revenue demand. Such transactions took place on a large scale in Bengal including Burdwan.

2. Attack on outsiders: Whenever outsiders purchased an estate at an auction, they could not always take possession because their agents would be attacked by lathiyals of the former zamindar.

3. Sometimes even the riots resisted the outsiders due to their close relations with the zamindar. The riots considered themselves to be the proja (subjects) of the zamindar.

Thus, the zamindars could not be displaced. Thereafter the rules of revenue payment were made flexible. As a result of that, the zamindar's power over the villages were strengthened. It was only during the Great Depression of 1930s that their power collapsed and the jotedars consolidated their power in the countryside.

3. How did the Paharias respond to the coming of outsiders?

Ans: Paharias live in the hills of Rajmahal. The British people began to interact with them and later Santhals began to settle down there. The response of the Paharias was as follows:

1. Paharias resisted the settlement of Santhals initially but had to accommodate them in course of time.
2. The Paharias shifted to deeper areas into the hills.
3. They were confined to more barren and rocky areas of the hills in course of time.
4. The paharias did shifting cultivation. Now shifting cultivation was becoming more and more difficult as proper and stable settlements.
5. As forest began to be cleared, the paharis could not depend on it for livelihood. Thus, the lifestyle and living of Paharias underwent change due to coming of outsiders.

4. Why did the Santhals rebel against British rule?

Ans: By 1832 the Santhals had settled in Damin-i-Koh area. Their settlement

expanded rapidly. Forests were cleared to accommodate them. The Company also benefitted as it got more and more land revenue. However, the Santhals too got dissatisfied. They rebelled against the British rule. Following are the main causes for their rebellion.

1. Santhals were not happy with the tax regime of the company. They thought that the land revenue rates were high and exploitative.

2. The Zamindars began to exercise greater control on the areas brought under cultivation by Santhals, apparently it was a part of the British Policy. But Santhals resented that.

3. Moneylenders in the rural areas were seen as villain and agent of Company rule by the Santhals. Moneylenders could auction the land of Santhals in case of defaulter. All this was not liked by the Santhals.

The British took steps to placate the Santhals later on. A separate district of Santhal Pargana was carved out and law was enacted to protect the santhals.

5. What explains the anger of the Deccan ryots against the moneylenders?

Ans: During the civil war in USA, Indian merchants hoped to capture the world market in raw cotton, but that did not happen. On the other hand, the following events took place after the civil war:

- Cotton production in America revived and the Indian cotton exports to British steadily declined.
- Export merchants and sahuikars in Maharashtra refused to give long-term credit. They restricted the advances to peasants and demanded repayment of outstanding debts.
- At the same time as the term of first revenue settlement was over, the demand for revenue was increased from 50 to 100 per cent.

As a result of above, the ryots were not in position to pay the inflated demand because the prices were also falling. Thus, they had no option except to take a further loan from the moneylender who also refused to loans. This enraged the ryots. The moneylenders became insensitive to their plight. They were violating the customary norms of the countryside. For example, general norm was that the interest charged could not be more than the principal. They were not charging fair interest. In one of the cases, investigated by the Deccan Riots Commission, the

moneylender charged over ₹ 2000 as interest on a loan of ₹ 100. There were complaints of injustice of such extractions and the violation of custom. A new law – Limitation Law – was passed in 1859 where validity of loan bonds was fixed for three years but the

moneylenders manipulated new systems to exploit the ryots. Under these circumstances, the ryots' anger against the moneylenders increased.

6. Why were so many Zamindaris auctioned after the Permanent settlement?

Ans: Many Zamindaris were auctioned as the Zamindars failed to pay up the agreed land revenue on time. The reason for the same:

1. Many believed that the land revenue settlement was on the higher side. Moreover soon after the permanent settlement the foodgrain prices declined. The ryots could not pay up the land revenue and hence Zamindars also defaulted.
2. The revenue was to be deposited on time irrespective of harvesting cycle. This was another reason for default by the Zamindars.
3. The power of Zamindars was curbed by the Company. They were no longer law and order enforcing agency at local level. Their musclemen were also weakened. As a result of this Zamindars could not effectively collect taxes at times.
4. Many a time Jotedars and peasants deliberately delayed the land revenue payment. This resulted in default by Zamindars and the auction thereafter.

7. In what way was the livelihood of Paharias different from that of Santhals?

Ans: Paharias were living in the foothills of Rajmahal. They lived a life that was different from Santhals. Most of the information on their lives is based on the report of Buchanan, the physician of the East India Company who wandered into the terrain of Rajmahal Hills.

1. The paharias were nomads. They lived a wandering life. They, however, sometimes did shifting cultivation.
2. Their another important source of livelihood of forest resources and animals.
3. They extracted mahua and used it. Colonialism and the countryside: Exploring official archives

4. Paharias used to look at outsiders with suspicion and even were hostile with them.
5. The Santhals were different from them on many counts.
6. The Santhals took to agriculture fast and soon got into settled life.
7. They had better relation with the outsiders including the East India Company.

8. How did the American Civil War affect the lives of ryots in India?

Ans: The American Civil War affected the lives of ryots in India in the following ways:

1. In the beginning, as a result of civil war, the imports of cotton from America fell from over 2,000,000 bales in 1861 to 55,000 bales in 1862. The Britain looked towards to fill the gap. Thus, export merchants in Bombay were keen to avail this opportunity to earn maximum. The advances to urban sahumars, moneylenders and ultimately to the ryots were provided. This led to increase in cotton production. The ryots were given ? 100 as advance for every acre they planted with cotton. The cotton export to Britain increased but this did not bring prosperity for all. Some rich peasants gained but for the majority of cotton producers including the ryots, cotton expansion led to heavier debt.
2. The end of war again affected the ryots badly because with the revival of cotton production in America, the Indian exports declined. The sahumars were no longer interested in extending long-term loans. The demand for cotton had reduced, cotton prices slid downwards. It hit the ryots badly.
3. At the same time, under the new settlement for revenue, the demand was increased from 50 to 100 per cent. Under the conditions of falling prices and reduction in the growth of cotton in the absences of loans, it was not possible for the ryots to make payment of the inflated demand. Once again they had no option except to take loan from the moneylender but they refused to extend loans. This made the condition of ryots miserable and ultimately led to riots.

9. What are the problems of using the official sources in writing about the history of peasants.

Ans: Official sources of the Company Raj are not regarded as reliable source of history when it came to the lot of Ryots. Following are the main problems associated with official source of history.

1. The official records reflect only the Company raj perspective. They did not look at events from different angles. For example when the Deccan Riot Commission was instituted, it was required to find out if the land revenue was just or not. Other issues of Riots were not taken into account.
2. The British people looked down upon the local people, their culture and tradition as lowly. They ended up giving a lowly picture of peasants even if without intention of the same.
3. The record of the Company Raj was created by the officials in such a manner that it suits their masters. Thus, evidences were tempered with. For example, the Deccan Ryot Commission concluded that Ryots were angered not by the high land revenue but by moneylenders.
4. Thus, official sources are to be read alongwith other sources and need to be weighed before we take them to our stride.

10. On an outline map of the subcontinent, mark out the areas described in this chapter. Find out whether there were other areas where the Permanent Settlement and the ryotwari system were prevalent and plot these on the map as well.

Ans: In the chapter the following areas have been mentioned of the subcontinent.

- (a) Bengal. (Bangladesh along with certain area of Bihar, Orissa and hilly areas of Assam).
- (b) Bombay Presidency and
- (c) Madras Presidency,
- (d) The Britishers introduced Mahalwari system of land revenue in eastern part of Punjab
- (e) Surat
- (f) Rajmahal hills (occupied by Paharias and Santhals).