
Chapter – 03 History

Ruling the Countryside

- On 12 August 1765, the Mughal emperor appointed the East India Company as the Diwan of Bengal.
 - As Diwan, the company became the chief financial administrator of the territory under its control.
 - The company came to colonise the countryside, organize revenue resources, redefine the rights of people and produce the crops it wanted.
 - **Revenue for the Company:**
 - (i) The company had become the Diwan, but still saw itself primarily as a trader.
 - (ii) Before 1865, the company purchased goods in India by importing gold and silver from Britain. Now the revenue collected in Bengal could finance the purchase of goods for exports.
 - (iii) Bengal economy was facing a deep crisis.
 - (iv) In 1770, a terrible famine killed ten million people in Bengal.
 - **The Need to Improve Agriculture:**
 - (i) The company introduced Permanent Settlement in 1793.
 - (ii) The Rajas and taluqdars were recognized as Zamindars.
 - **The Problem:**
 - (i) Numerous zamindars were sold off at auctions organized by the company, as anyone who failed to pay the revenue lost his zamindari.
 - (ii) The zamindars were not interested in the improvement of land.
 - **A New System is Devised:**
 - (i) By the early nineteenth century many of the company officials were convinced that the system of revenue had to be changed again.
 - (ii) An Englishman, Holt Makenzie devised the new system which came into effect in 1822. This system was called as Mahalwari settlement.
 - **The Munro System:**
 - (i) In the British territories in the south, a new system was devised which was known as ryotwar or ryotwari.
 - (ii) Ryotwari was initiated by Captain Alexander Read and developed by Thomas Munro. This system was extended all over south India.
 - **All was Not Well:**
 - (i) As they desired to increase the income from land, revenue officials fixed too high a revenue demand.
 - (ii) As peasants were unable to pay, ryots fled the countryside, and villages became deserted in many regions.
 - **Crops for Europe:**
 - (i) By the late eighteenth century the company was trying to expand the cultivation of opium and indigo.
 - (ii) The Britishers forced cultivators to produce jute, tea, sugarcane, wheat, cotton and rice in various parts of India.
 - **Does Colour have a History:**
 - (i) The rich blue colour was commonly called as Indigo.
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- (ii) The blue dye used in the Morris prints in nineteenth-century Britain was manufactured from Indigo plants cultivated in India.
 - (iii) India was the biggest supplier of indigo in the world in 19th century.
 - **Why the Demand for Indian Indigo:**
 - (i) By the thirteenth century Indian Indigo was being used by cloth manufacturers in Italy, France and Britain to dye cloth.
 - (ii) Indigo produce a rich blue colour whereas the dye from woad another plant was pale and dull.
 - (iii) Indigo plantations came up in many parts of North America.
 - **Britain turns to India:**
 - (i) The company in India expanded the area under the indigo cultivation to meet the rising demand for indigo in Europe.
 - (ii) As the indigo trade grew commercial agents and officials of the company began investing in indigo production.
 - **How was Indigo Cultivated:**
 - (i) There were two main system of Indigo cultivation: Nij and Ryoti.
 - (ii) In Nij system, the planter produced indigo in lands that he directly controlled.
 - **The Problem with Nij Cultivation:**
 - (i) The planters found difficulty to expand the area under Nij cultivation.
 - (ii) Nij cultivation on a large scale required many ploughs and bullocks, investing on purchase and maintenance of ploughs was a big problem. The planters were reluctant to expand the area under Nij cultivation.
 - **Indigo on the Land of Ryots:**
 - (i) In Ryoti system, the planters forced the ryots to sign a contract an agreement (satta).
 - (ii) Those who signed the contract got cash advances from planters at low rates of interest to produce indigo.
 - (iii) The peasants got very low price for the indigo they produced and the cycle of loans never ended.
 - (iv) After an indigo harvest the land could not be sown with rice which the peasants preferred.
 - **The 'Blue Rebellion' and after:**
 - (i) In March 1859 thousands of ryots in Bengal refused to grow indigo.
 - (ii) As the rebellion spread, ryots refused to pay rents to the planters and attacked indigo factories.
 - (iii) Ryots swore they would no longer take advances to sow indigo nor be bullied by the planters' lathiyals.
 - (iv) The government set up the indigo commission to enquire into the system of indigo production.
 - (v) It declared that indigo cultivation was not profitable for ryots. Hence they could refuse to produce indigo in future.
 - (vi) Aft the revolt, indigo production collapsed in Bengal. The planters now shifted their operations to Bihar.
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