



Ruling the Countryside: A Journey Through British Rule in India

- Introduction

- The British East India Company gained control over Indian territories.
- Changes were introduced in agricultural practices to maximize revenue.
- British policies impacted Indian peasants and landowners.

- The Company Becomes the Diwan

- Battle of Buxar: The British East India Company became the Diwan (chief financial administrator) of Bengal in 1765.
- Responsibilities:
 - The Company collected revenue from the land.
 - It became responsible for the administration of Bengal.
- Shift in Focus: The focus shifted from trade to revenue collection, leading to changes in agricultural practices.

- The Need for Reforms

- The Company needed revenue to finance wars and administrative costs.
- The traditional revenue collection system was inefficient and exploitative, prompting the need for reforms.

- Permanent Settlement (1793)

- Introduced by Lord Cornwallis in Bengal and Bihar.
- Key Feature: Fixed the revenue that landlords (zamindars) had to pay to the Company.
- Impact:



- Land revenue was fixed permanently.
- Zamindars often exploited peasants.
- Zamindars lost their lands if they failed to pay.

- The Problem with Permanent Settlement

- The fixed revenue did not account for fluctuations in agricultural production.
- Zamindars had little incentive to invest in land improvement since their revenue share was fixed.
- This led to the decline of agriculture and the impoverishment of peasants.

- The Mahalwari System (1822)

- Introduced by Holt Mackenzie in the North-Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency (now parts of Uttar Pradesh).
- Key Feature: Revenue was collected from a group of villages, known as a 'mahal'.
- The revenue demand was not fixed permanently but was revised periodically based on agricultural conditions.
- Aim: To provide flexibility and ensure better land revenue collection.

- The Ryotwari System (1820)

- Introduced by Thomas Munro in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies.
- Key Feature: Revenue was collected directly from the peasants (ryots).
- The revenue amount was based on the quality of the soil and the type of crops grown.
- Impact: While this system removed intermediaries (zamindars), it still placed a heavy burden on peasants, leading to debt and poverty.

- Crops for Europe



- The British introduced commercial crops like indigo, cotton, and tea to serve European markets.

- Indigo Cultivation

- Indigo became a significant cash crop in Bengal.
- Indigo Planters: British planters forced Indian peasants to grow indigo on a portion of their land.

- The Indigo Rebellion (1859-60)

- Peasants revolted against oppressive indigo cultivation practices.

- The Impact on Indian Agriculture

- British policies led to the commercialization of agriculture, focusing on cash crops instead of food grains.
- This shift led to famines, poverty, and the destruction of traditional agricultural practices.

- The Peasant's Struggle

- The exploitation of peasants under various revenue systems led to widespread dissatisfaction.
- Peasant revolts and rebellions became common, challenging British authority.

- Conclusion

- British revenue policies reshaped the Indian countryside, with long-term impacts on agriculture, land ownership, and rural society.
- While the British aimed to maximize revenue, their policies often led to the impoverishment of Indian peasants and the decline of traditional agricultural practices.



Keywords

- Diwan: A chief financial administrator.
- Zamindar: Landlords who collected revenue from peasants.
- Mahal: A group of villages.
- Ryot: Peasants who directly paid revenue to the British.
- Indigo: A cash crop that was in high demand in Europe.

Timeline

- 1765: The British East India Company becomes the Diwan of Bengal after the Battle of Buxar.
- 1793: Introduction of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Bihar.
- 1820: The Ryotwari System is introduced in Madras and Bombay Presidencies.
- 1822: The Mahalwari System is introduced in the North-Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency.
- 1859-60: The Indigo Rebellion breaks out against oppressive indigo cultivation practices.