

Crops for Europe The British also realised that the countryside could not only yield revenue, it could also grow the crops that Europe required. By the late eighteenth century, the Company was trying its best to expand the cultivation of opium and indigo. In the century and a half that followed, the British persuaded or forced cultivators in various parts of India to produce other crops: jute in Bengal, tea in Assam, sugarcane in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), wheat in Punjab, cotton in Maharashtra and Punjab, rice in Madras. How was this done? The British used a variety of methods to expand the cultivation of crops that they needed. Let us take a closer look at the story of one such crop, one such method of production.

How was indigo cultivated? There were two main systems of indigo cultivation – nij and ryoti. Within the system of nij cultivation, the planter produced indigo in lands that he directly controlled. He either bought the land or rented it from other zamindars and produced indigo by directly employing hired labourers.