

-- Ruling the Countryside: How British Policies Changed India

Introduction

This chapter tells the story of how the British East India Company took control of parts of India and changed how farmers worked the land. We'll see how these changes affected Indian peasants and landowners.

The Company Becomes the Diwan

* **The Battle of Buxar (1764):** The British won this important battle, giving them control of Bengal.

* **Becoming the Diwan (1765):** After the battle, the British East India Company became the Diwan of Bengal. This meant they were in charge of collecting taxes from the land and managing the area.

* **From Trade to Taxes:** The British Company's focus shifted from trading goods to collecting as much money as possible from the land. This led to changes in farming practices.

The Need for Reforms

* **Paying for Wars and Government:** The British Company needed lots of money to fight wars and pay for its government.

* **The Old System Was Unfair:** The traditional way of collecting taxes was not very efficient and often took advantage of farmers. This made the British Company look for new ways to collect money.

The Permanent Settlement (1793)

* **Lord Cornwallis's Plan:** Lord Cornwallis introduced a new system called the Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Bihar.

* **Fixed Taxes for Landlords (Zamindars):** This system set a fixed amount of tax that the landlords had to pay to the British Company.

* **Consequences:**

* **Landlords' Power:** This meant the landlords had a lot of power and could often exploit the peasants who worked their land.

* **Land Loss:** If landlords couldn't pay the taxes, they lost their land.

Problems with the Permanent Settlement

* **Ignoring Changes:** The fixed tax didn't take into account changes in how much food the land produced each year.

* **No Incentive to Improve:** The landlords had no reason to improve the land because their tax was fixed.

* **Bad Effects:** This led to less food being grown, and many peasants became poor.

****The Mahalwari System (1822)****

* **Introduced by Holt Mackenzie:** This system was introduced in the North-Western Provinces (now parts of Uttar Pradesh).

* **Group of Villages (Mahal):** Taxes were collected from a group of villages, called a "mahal."

* **Flexible Taxes:** The amount of tax wasn't fixed forever but changed based on how well the land was producing food.

****The Ryotwari System (1820)****

* **Introduced by Thomas Munro:** This system was used in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies.

* **Direct Taxes from Farmers (Ryots):** Taxes were collected directly from the peasants who worked the land.

* **Tax Based on Land Quality:** The amount of tax was based on how good the soil was and what types of crops were grown.

* **Heavy Burden on Peasants:** Even though this system removed the landlords, it still put a lot of pressure on the peasants. Many ended up in debt and became poor.

****Crops for Europe****

* **Cash Crops for British Markets:** The British started growing crops like indigo, cotton, and tea to sell in Europe.

* **Indigo in Bengal:** Indigo became a very important crop in Bengal.

* **Forced Indigo Production:** British planters forced Indian peasants to grow indigo on part of their land, even if it meant they couldn't grow enough food for themselves.

* **Indigo Rebellion (1859-60):** The peasants finally revolted against the unfair way they were forced to grow indigo.

****The Impact on Indian Agriculture****

* **Commercialization of Farming:** The British focused on growing cash crops instead of food crops, which changed farming in India.

* **Famine, Poverty, and Loss of Tradition:** This shift led to food shortages (famines), poverty, and the destruction of traditional farming practices.

****The Peasant's Struggle****

* **Unfair Taxes and Exploitation:** The peasants were treated unfairly by the different tax systems, which led to widespread anger and frustration.

* **Rebellions:** Peasants started revolting and rebelling against the British, challenging their rule.

****Conclusion****

* **Changing the Countryside:** The British tax policies completely changed the Indian countryside, affecting agriculture, land ownership, and rural life for a long time.

* **Profit at the Cost of Peasants:** The British wanted to make as much money as possible, but their policies often made the peasants poorer and destroyed traditional farming.