

Key Notes

Chapter-08

Peasant Zamindars and State

- Peasants and agricultural production - Geographical Diversity
- Looking for sources - Historical Epic and Records, Important chronicles - Ain-i-Akbari, Records from Gujrat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
- Peasants and their lands - cultivation was based on the principle of individual ownership.
- Irrigation and Technology - Expansion of agriculture, monsoon remained the backbone of Indian agriculture, artificial system of irrigations had to be devised, agriculture often harnessed cattle energy.
- An abundance of crops - two major crops - the kharif and the rabi, new crops came from different parts of the world.
- The village community. Caste and the rural milieu - Rajputs are mentioned as peasants.
- Panchayats and headman - The panchayats was usually a heterogeneous body; the headman was chosen through the consensus of the village elders, functions of the panchayat. Village artisans the existence of substantial members of artisans. A little republic - deep inequities based on caste and gender distinctions.
- Women in agrarian Society - women's role in the production process, high mortality rates among women, women petitioned to the panchayat, Hindu and Muslim women inherited zamindaris.
- Forest and tribes -Beyond settled villages, livelihood came from the gathering of forest produce, hunting and shifting agriculture, jungles provided a good Defence. Inroads into forests - the state required elephants for the army, hunting expeditions by the Mughals, the spread of commercial agriculture.
- During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries about 85 percent of the population of India lived in its villages. Both peasants and landed elites were involved in agricultural production claimed rights to a share of the produce. This created relationships of cooperation, competition and conflict among them.
- The basic unit of agricultural society was the village, inhabited by peasants who performed the manifold seasonal tasks that made up agricultural production throughout the year tilling the soil, sowing seeds, harvesting the crop when it was ripe.
- The panchayat was headman known as muqaddam or mandal.
- Documents from Western India – Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra – Record petitions sent by women to the village panchayat, seeking redress and justice.
- The Zamindars held extensive personal lands termed milkiyat, meaning property. Milkiyat lands were cultivated for the private use of zamindars, often with the help of hired or servile labour.

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- Zamindars also derived their power from the fact that they could often collect revenue on behalf of the state, a service for which they were compensated financially.
- Both cultivated and cultivable lands were measured in each province. The Ain compiled the aggregates of such lands during Akbar's rule. Efforts to measure lands continued under subsequent emperors. For instance, in 1665, Aurangzeb expressly instructed his revenue officials to prepare annual records of the number of cultivators in each village.
- The testimony of an Italian traveler, Giovanni Careri, who passed through India c. 1690, provides a graphic account about the way silver traveled across the globe to reach India.
- The Ain is made up of five books (daftars) of which the first three books describe the administration.
- The Ain completely departed from this tradition as it recorded information about the empire and the people of India, and thus constitutes a benchmark for studying India at the turn of the seventeenth century.