

8th Standard- Social Science

History-Ruling the Countryside

Britain turns to India: As the demand for Indigo grew in Europe, East India Company turned to India for its supply by extending the cultivated area under it. Many of the company officials found it so profitable that they left their jobs.

Demand of Indian Indigo: India had better weather conditions for the growth of the Indigo plant and the French and Italian manufacturers used Indian Indigo for dyeing the cloth. The cloth manufacturers favoured Indigo against the Wood plant.

Cultivation of Indigo: There were two popular systems in practice—Nij and Ryoti. In the Nij system, cultivators grew Indigo on their own land. In the Ryoti system, it was grown on rented land by hired labourers.

Problem with Nij cultivation: The problem with Nij was that the expansion of area was not possible. Scattered small plots were available. Mobility of labour was low. Growing season of Indigo clashed with that of rice cultivation season.

Indigo on the land of Ryotis: Planters extended loans and pressurized peasants or headmen to produce Indigo. The planters provided seeds and drill. These contracts never came to an end and the vicious cycle continued.

The Blue Rebellion: In March 1859, crippled by the circumstances and suffering, cultivators rose in revolt against indigo planters and their Indian agents. They were supported by zamindars and headmen.

Collapse of Indigo production: The rebellion left the government worried. It set up the Indigo Commission to inquire into the system of Indigo production. The Commission held the planters guilty and criticised them for their coercive methods. It declared that Indigo production was not profitable for Ryots.

After the assumption of Diwani in 1765, the Company began to use the vast revenue resources of Bengal. Now the revenues from India could finance company's expenses. These revenues could be used to purchase cotton and silk textiles in India.

This caused a huge loss of revenue for Bengal. The Bengal economy fell into deep crisis. Artisans began to desert villages because they were being forced to sell their goods to the Company at low prices. Peasants were also worried. Agriculture cultivation showed signs of collapse. Then in 1770 a terrible famine killed ten million people in Bengal.

Now the Company felt the need of improvement in the field of agriculture because only then its revenue income was sure.

Finally, the Company introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793. The rajas and talukdars were asked to collect rent from the peasants and pay revenue to the Company. The amount to be paid was fixed permanently.

It was felt that this would ensure a regular flow of revenue into the Company's treasury and at the same time encourage the zamindars to invest in improving the land.

But the zamindars were not capable of investing in the improvement of land. The revenue that had been fixed was so high that they found it difficult to pay.

By the first decade of the 19th century, the prices in the market rose and cultivation slowly expanded. This meant an increase in the income of the zamindars but no gain for the Company since it could not increase a revenue demand that had been fixed permanently.

The Permanent Settlement was oppressive for the cultivators. The rent they paid to the zamindars was high and their right on the land was insecure.

Finding the Permanent settlement a failure, Holt Mackenzie, an Englishman, devised a new system called Mahalwari Settlement which came into effect in 1822. The collectors were asked to visit villages, inspect the land, measure the fields and record the customs and right of different groups. The estimated revenue of each plot within a village was added up to calculate the revenue that each village or mahal had to pay. This demand was to be revised periodically.

In the British territories in the south ryotwar (or ryotwari) system was devised. It was initiated by Captain Alexander Read and developed by Shomas Munro. This system was gradually extended all over South India.

The Ryotwari Settlement was made directly with the cultivators (ryots).

All the new systems proved to be failure. The Company had imposed these systems in order to increase the income from land, but its purpose was not solved because the revenue demand was very high.

By the late 18th century the Company was trying to expand the cultivation of opium and indigo.

Indian indigo was in great demand in Europe. Hence, the Company in India looked for ways to expand the area under indigo cultivation.

From the last decades of the 18th century Bengal indigo came to dominate the world market. In 1788 only about 30% of the indigo imported into Britain was from India. By 1810 the proportion had gone up to 95%.

As the indigo trade grew, commercial agents and officials of the Company began investing in indigo production.

Indigo cultivation was done under two systems known as nij and ryoti. Within the system of nij cultivation, the planter produced indigo in lands that he directly controlled.

But it was difficult for planters to expand the area under nij cultivation.

Indigo could be cultivated only on fertile lands and these were all already densely populated.

Labour was also not easily available.

Nij cultivation on a large scale also required several ploughs and bullocks. Investing on purchase and maintenance of ploughs was a big problem. Therefore, planters showed reluctance towards expanding the area under nij cultivation.

Under the ryoti system, planters forced the ryots to sign a contract, an agreement, also known as satta. Those who signed the contract got cash advances from the planters at low rates of interest to produce indigo. But this system was not in favour of the cultivators because they were not given fair prices after the harvest was ready. Thus, indigo cultivators were highly dissatisfied.

Several ryots in Bengal refused to grow indigo. Soon they became violent. They got support of the local zamindars and village headmen in their rebellion against the planters.

This worried the government. It brought in the military to protect the planters and set up the Indigo Commission to enquire into the system of indigo production.

The Commission held the planters guilty.

It declared that indigo production was not profitable for ryots. Hence, they were not needed to produce indigo in future.

Ultimately indigo production collapsed in Bengal. The planters then shifted their operation to Bihar.

Countryside: Rural areas.

Permanent Settlement: Under this settlement it was decided that the rates of revenues once fixed would not be changed.

Mahal: In British revenue records Mahal is a revenue estate which may be a village or a group of villages.

Mahalwari Settlement: Under this system, the rates of revenues were to be revised periodically, not permanently fixed.

Ryobi: Cultivator.

Indigo: A plant that produces a rich blue colour.

Plantations: A large farm operated by a planter employing various forms of forced labour. Plantations are associated with the production of coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, tea and cotton.

Woad: A plant that produces violet and blue dyes.

Slave: A person who is owned by someone else, i.e., the slave owner. A slave enjoys no freedom and is compelled to work for the master.

Bigha: A unit of measurement of land.

