

Chapter 3: Ruling The Countryside

Activity: 1

Question: Why do you think Colebrook is concerned with the conditions of the under-ryots in Bengal? Read the preceding pages and suggest possible reasons.

Answer:

1. After the Company was given 'Diwani' of Bengal, the Company got an opportunity to obtain huge land revenues.
2. But, the policy of the Company was not appropriate. It followed a policy which left the tenants helpless.
3. Tenants were not in a condition to pay the rents increased by zamindars.
4. If they did not pay the rent, they had to lose the piece of land they had been tilling for generations. On the other hand, if they wanted to pay rent, they had to take loans.
5. They were not in a position to pay back their loans because after paying rent, they had not enough money even to run their household.
6. So, the tenants were being trapped in a cycle of indebtedness.
7. The Company or zamindars did not care about the improvement of land. This further worsened the situation.

So, Colebrook's concerns about the under-ryots are right. He could see that Company's policy was in favour of none. All the parties, i.e., the Company, zamindars and tenants were going to be adversely affected by this policy.

His description about the poor conditions of tenants in some of the villages of Bengal shows his concern towards these downtrodden people who were submerged under the heavy taxes that were extracted from them by the powerful ryots.

Activity: 2

Question: Imagine that you are a Company representative sending a report back to England about the conditions in rural areas under Company rule. What would you write?

Answer:

To
The Board of Directors,
EIC, London.
Sir,

In the light of the Company's policy in India, especially in the rural areas, I have to say the following :

(1)The Company has made a policy of permanent settlement with the zamindars. This will provide a definite and regular supply of revenue to the Company.

(2)The zamindars are asked to take care of their tenants. They have been directed to do enough for the improvement of land.

(3)People in the rural areas are leading a peaceful life. They are slowly becoming law-abiding people. The law and order situation is satisfactory.

(4)Farmers have been provided with the required irrigation facilities. They have been asked to focus on some crops which the Company needs for its trade.

(5)The farmers are being given payment in advance for the crops they grow for the Company. They are satisfied with their returns.

(6)Small scale industries have been amply supported by the Company. The weavers are being provided loans, both for machines and tools and for raw materials.

(7)The Company has made contracts with them that they will sell their clothes only to the Company at the price mentioned in the contract.

(8)The overall situation in the Company ruled areas is satisfactory. The conditions seem satisfactory and promising to me both for the common people and the Company.

R. Hudson

Company Representative in India

Activity:3

Question: Imagine you are a witness giving evidence before the Indigo Commission. W.S. Seton Karr asks you "On what condition will ryots grow indigo?" What will your answer be?

Answer:

Mr. Karr: On what conditions will ryots grow indigo?

My Answer : Sir, however, under the existing policy, I do not think that farmers would be willing to grow indigo, but if following terms are satisfied, they may grow indigo.

- They are given loans at lower rate for raw materials and tools.
- Once the crop is harvested, they are given reasonable price for their crops.
- They are not compelled to grow indigo on the whole piece of land they have. They should be permitted to grow food crops as well.
- If crop fails, they should be given relief loans and also the previous loan should be waived off.

Let's imagine

Question: Imagine a conversation between a planter and a peasant who is being forced to grow indigo. What reasons would the planter give to persuade the peasant? What problems would the peasant point out? Enact their conversation.

Answer:

Planter: Look, you are in trouble. We want to help you. We will give you loan in advance. You just grow indigo for us.

Peasant: No, sorry. I cannot do this. It leaves nothing for me to meet my family's needs.

Planter: We can provide you seed and drill. It costs you nothing.

Peasant: Why? I have to spend a long time in the field. You people do not allow me to grow some food crops for my family. Also, almost all my family members had to take care of Indigo plants. When it comes to the time of selling, you give us a low price.

Planter: No, the same is given every-where. We give you what actually your crops deserve.

Peasant: So, what? This is not enough to meet my needs. Also land becomes infertile. If I try to grow rice on such piece of land, I cannot. Sorry, in no way it is profitable for us.

Planter: O.K. This time we shall increase the price of your crops.

Peasant: No, sir. Even then we have to pay a large amount towards the loan. Also, we have to buy rice, wheat, etc. from the rest amount. This much you can't give.

Planter: We assure you a fair price of your crop.

Peasant: What about the next year? What if the crop fails? Sorry, in fact, indigo farming is not profitable for us. We can't do this.

Let's recall

Question 1: Match The Following:

1)ryot

a) village

2)mahal

b) peasant

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 1)ryot | a) village |
| 3)nij | c) cultivation on ryot's lands |
| 4)ryoti | d)cultivation on planter's own land |

Answer:

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 1)ryot | a)Peasant |
| 2)mahal | b)Village |
| 3)nij | c)cultivation on planter's own land |
| 4)ryoti | d)cultivation on ryot's lands |

Question 2: Fill in the blanks:

- (a)Growers of woad in Europe saw _____ as a crop which would provide competition to their earnings.
- (b)The demand for indigo increased in late eighteenth-century Britain because of_____.
- (c)The international demand for indigo was affected by the discovery Of_____.
- (d)The Champaran movement was against_____.

Answers:

- A. Indigo
- B. Expansion of cotton production that lead to an enormous demand for cloth dyes.
- C. Synthetic dyes
- D. Indigo planters.

Let's discuss

Question 3: Describe the main features of the Permanent Settlement.:

Answer: Main features of the permanent settlements:

- Permanent Settlements benefited landlords more than the government. The Zamindars and revenue collectors were converted into numerous landlords.
- They were not only to act as agents of the Government in collecting land revenue from the ryot but also to become the owners of the entire land in their Zamindaris.
- Their right of ownership was made hereditary and transferable. On the other hand, the cultivators were reduced to the low status of mere tenants and were deprived of long-standing rights to the soil and other customary rights.
- The Zamindars were to give 10/11th of the rental they derived from the peasantry to the state, keeping the only 1/11th for themselves.
- If the rental of a Zamindar's estate increased he would keep the entire amount of the increase. The state would not make any further demand upon him. At the same time, the Zamindar had to pay his revenue rigidly on the due date even if the crop had failed for some reason; otherwise, his lands were to be sold.

Question 4: How was the mahalwari system different from the Permanent Settlement?

Answer: On the one hand, under the Permanent Settlement, the revenue was determined as per the landholdings of the individual peasant, on the other hand, in the Mahalwari system revenue was to be paid by a village called mahal.

In Permanent Settlement, the revenue was fixed and there was no provision of any revision in future, whereas in the Mahalwari system, the revenue was to be revised periodically.

In Permanent Settlement, the responsibility of revenue collection was in the hands of zamindars, whereas in the Mahalwari system, this responsibility was given to the village headman.

Question 5: Give two problems that arose with the New Munro System of Fixing Revenue.

Answer:

- The ryots were supposed to improve their lands, but they did not. The system supposed peasants to get changed into rich enterprising farmers, but this did not happen.
- The revenue officials fixed too high a revenue demand. Ryots were not able to pay this much revenue.

Question 6: Why were ryots reluctant to grow indigo?

Answer: The reluctance of Ryots to grow Indigo:

- Cash advances were given at low-interest rates but that loan committed the ryots to cultivate at least 25% of holding with indigo.
- The planter provided seed, drill, etc. and actual cultivation was done by the cultivator.
- After the delivery of the The planters generally forced the ryots to sign a contract.
- harvested crop to the planter, a new loan was given to the ryot.
- This way the ryot \yas trapped in a cycle of the loan. They realized that they were actually getting a low rate for their hard labour.
- Planters forced the ryots to grow indigo on the best soils.
- Whereas the cultivators wanted to use that for rice.

Question 7: What were the circumstances which led to the eventual collapse of indigo production in Bengal?

Answer:

- The indigo cultivators in Bengal were given loans but for that, they had to grow indigo on at least 25 percent of the area under their holdings.
- The planters provided only seed and drill. The rest of the works till the crop was harvested, was to be done by the ryots.
- The price the ryots got for their indigo, was very low. They had to take loans to repay their previous loans. Thus, the cycle of loans was never-ending.
- The planters usually insisted that indigo should be cultivated on the best soils in which peasants preferred to cultivate rice. The indigo crops exhausted the soil rapidly. After an indigo harvest, the land could not be sown with rice. These were certain circumstances which led to the eventual collapse of indigo production in Bengal

Let's do

Question 8: Find out more about the Champaran movement and Mahatma Gandhi's role in it.

Answer: The Champaran Satyagraha of 1917 was the first Satyagraha movement led by Gandhi in India and is considered a historically important revolt in the Indian Independence Movement. The main focus of the Champaran movement was to address the plight of the farmers of Champaran.

When the indigo production collapsed in Bengal, the European planters of Indigo shifted their operations to Bihar. The farmers of Champaran, a village in Bihar, were forced to grow indigo by the European planters instead of the food crops which were necessary for their survival. The European planters were destroying the productivity of the land which was the main reason for the protest. Mahatma Gandhi was invited by some of the peasants to look after their misery. Gandhiji accepted an invitation and started a mass movement after seeing the plight of the indigo cultivators.

Mahatma Gandhi's role in Champaran movement:

i) Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1917 marked the beginning of the Champaran movement against the indigo planters.

ii) The European planter oppressed the peasants. Gandhiji witnessed the miserable conditions of the peasants.

iii) Gandhiji established an ashram here and handpicked lawyers like Dr. Rajendra Prasad to work for the betterment of the villages.

iv) He started a peaceful and non-violent movement.

v) The district officials ordered him to leave Champaran but he refused to comply with the orders and started the Satyagraha movement.

vi) As a result, Gandhiji was arrested but he did not leave Champaran.

vii) Finally, a law was passed to protect the farmers from the indigo planters.

Question 9: Look into the history of either tea or coffee plantations in India. See how the life of workers in these plantations was similar to or different from that of workers in indigo plantations.

Answer:

- Accounts of earlier Indian history do not mention the use of tea or its cultivation. We get a mention by a Dutch sea-traveller in 1598 that tea is being eaten as well as drunk in India.
- In 1824, tea plants were discovered in the hills of the Indian state of Assam. The British introduced tea culture into India in 1836. India had been the top producer of tea for nearly a century.
- The workers in the tea plantations were oppressed. They were given low wages. There were poor housing and lack of social mobility. For making more profits, the tea planters reclaimed wastelands where the workers had to labour hard to develop plantation. For this, the planters introduced indentured labour system. The local as well as outside labourers were employed under contract.
- There were two types of indentured labour system- *Arkatti* and *Sardari*. Under *Arkatti* system, unlicensed recruitment was carried from Chotanagpur and other tribal areas of the sub-continent. Under the *Sardari* system new labourers were employed by those who were already employed in the plantation gardens.
- The labourers had to work hard. The outside labourers had to stay at the garden for a longer period. They were not permitted to meet their family, even on occasions. They were exploited in many ways. They were not allowed to leave the plantation garden during the contract period.
- The labourers in the tea plantations and indigo farming were similar in the way that they were exploited heavily. The profit was made by the owners and the labourers got almost nothing. They were different in the way that, however, there was a contract with the planters, but indigo workers were not under indentured labour system.