

Colonialism and the Countryside: Exploring Official Archives

NCERT TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

I Why was jotedar a powerful figure in many areas of rural Bengal ?

Ans. Jotedars were rich peasants in Bengal. They owned big plots of land sometimes running into thousand of acres of land. They controlled local trade and commerce including the money lending business. They had great influence on the local village population. They were regarded more powerful than the Zamindars even. Following are the main reasons for the high status of Jotedars.

- 1.The Jotedars controlled trade and commerce including money lending business at the local level.
- 2.In order to weaken the Zamindars, Jotedars would mobilise ryots not to pay or delay payment towards land revenue.
- 3.The Jotedars opposed the moves of Zamindars to increase the Jama of a village.
- 4.The Jotedars lived in villages only. Hence they were in a better position to interact with and influence the peasants.
- 5.Jotedars were rich and owned big areas of land under cultivation. Many a time they would buy estates of Zamindar. That would be auctioned due to failure to pay up land revenue.

2.How did Zamindars manage to retain control over their zamindaris?

Ans. When zamindars were in bad times, they often resorted to various tactics to maintain control over their zamindari. These were in fact their survival tactics. Following are the important ones.

- 1.Zamindars created fictitious sales during auction. Their own men would make highest bid and later refused to pay up. After repeating this exercise for couple of occasions, the government would be tired and sell it back to zamindar at lesser rate.
- 2.A part of Estate was often transferred to female members of the family, and that part of property could not be taken by the government any more.
- 3.Zamindars put hurdle in purchase and occupation of the estate by others by use of sheer muscle power.
- 4.Sometimes even peasants under the influence of zamindars opposed auction of estate.

3.How did the Paharias respond to the coming of outsiders?

Ans. Paharias live in the hills of Rajmahal. The British people began to interact with them and later Santhals began to settle down there. The response of the Paharias was as follows:

- 1.Paharias resisted the settlement of Santhals initially but had to accommodate them in course of time.
- 2.The Paharias shifted to deeper areas into the hills.
- 3.They were confined to more barren and rocky areas of the hills in course of time.
- 4.The paharias did shifting cultivation. Now shifting cultivation was becoming more and more difficult as proper and stable settlements.
- 5.As forest began to be cleared, the paharis could not depend on it for livelihood. Thus, the lifestyle and living of Paharias underwent change due to coming of outsiders.

4.Why did the Santhals rebel against British rule ?

Ans. By 1832 the Santhals had settled in Damin-i-Koh area. Their settlement expanded rapidly. Forests were cleared to accommodate them. The Company also benefitted as it got more and more land revenue. However, the Santhals too got dissatisfied. They rebelled against the British rule.

Following are the main causes for their rebellion.

1. Santhals were not happy with the tax regime of the company. They thought that the land revenue rates were high and exploitative.
 2. The Zamindars began to exercise greater control on the areas brought under cultivation by Santhals, apparently it was a part of the British Policy. But Santhals resented that.
 3. Moneylenders in the rural areas were seen as villain and agent of Company rule by the Santhals. Moneylenders could auction the land of Santhals in case of defaulter. All this was not liked by the Santhals.
- The British took steps to placate the Santhals later on. A separate district of Santhal Pargana was carved out and law was enacted to protect the santhals.

5. What explains the anger of Deccan ryots against the moneylenders?

Ans. The main reasons for the anger of Ryots against moneylenders are as follows:

1. In rural India it was traditional rule that the interest will always remain less than the principal amount. However, in many cases interest payable was more than the principal itself. In one case the interest was Rs 2000 against principal amount of Rs100.
2. No receipt was paid in case of payment of loan partly or fully. This opened the scope of manipulation by the moneylenders.
3. Ryots complained about forging of documents and other fraudulent activity by the moneylenders.
4. Ryots believed that moneylenders were insensitive to them and made an arrogant and exploitative lot.

6. Why were so many Zamindaris auctioned after the Permanent settlement?

Ans. Many Zamindaris were auctioned as the Zamindars failed to pay up the agreed land revenue on time. The reason for the same:

1. Many believed that the land revenue settlement was on the higher side. Moreover soon after the permanent settlement the foodgrain prices declined. The ryots could not pay up the land revenue and hence Zamindars also defaulted.
2. The revenue was to be deposited on time irrespective of harvesting cycle. This was another reason for default by the Zamindars.
3. The power of Zamindars was curbed by the Company. They were no longer law and order enforcing agency at local level. Their musclemen were also weakened. As a result of this Zamindars could not effectively collect taxes at times.
4. Many a time Jotedars and peasants deliberately delayed the land revenue payment. This resulted in default by Zamindars and the auction thereafter.

7. In what way was the livelihood of Paharias different from that of Santhals?

Ans. Paharias were living in the foothills of Rajmahal. They lived a life that was different from Santhals. Most of the information on their lives is based on the report of Buchanan, the physician of the East India Company who wandered into the terrain of Rajmahal Hills.

1. The paharias were nomads. They lived a wandering life. They, however, sometimes did shifting cultivation.
2. Their another important source of livelihood of forest resources and animals.
3. They extracted mahua and used it. Colonialism and the countryside: Exploring official archives
4. Paharias used to look at outsiders with suspicion and even were hostile with them.
5. The Santhals were different from them on many counts.
6. The Santhals took to agriculture fast and soon got into settled life.
7. They had better relation with the outsiders including the East India Company.

8.How did the American Civil War affect the lives of the ryots in India ?

Ans. American Civil War that began in 1860 had a huge impact on the ryots of Deccan region in India. Following events explain how the impact took shape:

- 1.Britain was the country where large cotton mills were operational. These cotton mills depended on cotton imported from North America.
- 2.When the USA was reeling under civil war, it was naturally very difficult to import cotton from there.
- 3.The cotton mills were forced to look for alternative suppliers of cotton apart from US. India made a good option.
- 4.The farmers in Deccan were encouraged to grow cotton. One way was the easy access of credit. The moneylenders would give credit of Rs 100 for every acre of land under cotton cultivation.
- 5.The farmers benefitted out of this demand for cotton. But the real beneficiary were the big farmers and traders.
- 6.However, things changed as normalcy returned to US. Now the demand of cotton in India declined and so declined the easy availability of credit. The ryots fell back to old days of penury and rose in rebellion in many places.

9.What are the problems of using the official sources in writing about the history of peasants.

Ans. Official sources of the Company Raj are not regarded as reliable source of history when it came to the lot of Ryots.

Following are the main problems associated with official source of history.

- 1.The official records reflect only the Company raj perspective. They did not look at events from different angles. For example when the Deccan Riot Commission was instituted, it was required to find out if the land revenue was just or not. Other issues of Ryots were not taken into account.
- 2.The British people looked down upon the local people, their culture and tradition as lowly. They ended up giving a lowly picture of peasants even if without intention of the same.
- 3.The record of the Company Raj was created by the officials in such a manner that it suits their masters. Thus, evidences were tempered with. For example the Deccan Ryot Commission concluded that Ryots were angered not by the high land revenue but by moneylenders.
- 4.Thus, official sources are to be read alongwith other sources and need to be weighed before we take them to our stride.

10.On an outline map of the subcontinent, mark out the areas described in this chapter. Find out whether there were other areas where the Permanent Settlement and the ryotwari system were prevalent and plot these on the map as well.

Ans. In the chapter the following areas have been mentioned of the subcontinent.

- (a)Bengal. (Bangladesh along with certain area of Bihar, Orissa and hilly areas of Assam).
- (b)Bombay Presidency and
- (c)Madras Presidency,
- (d)The Britishers introduced Mahalwari system of land revenue in eastern part of Punjab
- (e)Surat
- (f)Rajmahal hills (occupied by Paharias and Santhals).