

Chapter – 03

Ruling the Country side

On 12 August 1765, the Mughal emperor appointed the East India Company as the Diwan of Bengal.

As Diwan, the company became the chief financial administrator of the territory under its control.

The company came to colonise the countryside, organize revenue resources, redefine the rights of people and produce the crops it wanted.

Revenue for the Company:

- i. The company got the diwani rights and started extracting more and more revenue out of it and used various measures to get it but still saw itself primarily as a trader.
- ii. Before 1865, the company purchased goods in India by importing gold and silver from Britain. Now the revenue collected in Bengal could finance the purchase of goods for exports.
- iii. Bengal economy was facing a deep crisis. Peasants and craftsmen were not getting the proper amount of their sell.
- iv. In 1770, a terrible famine killed ten million people in Bengal. but no one gave attention to the plight of affected people as revenue was under the control of British and they did not pay heed to any of the matter related to peasants as their main task was to make money by trade.

The Need to Improve Agriculture:

- i. The company introduced Permanent Settlement in 1793 under the reign of Lord Cornwallis.
- ii. Under Permanent Settlement, a fixed revenue was to be given to British and it would not increase in future.
- iii. Zamindars were recognised as the collectors of revenue and it was assumed that they would invest money to improve the crop production and fertility of soil.

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- iv. Zamindars did not pay attention to the condition of land and tried to keep more and more money left after collection.
 - v. The Rajas and taluqdars were recognized as Zamindars.
 - vi. As a result of greed for more revenue they blindly exploited the land resources.

The Problem:

- i. Numerous zamindaris were sold off at auctions organized by the company, as anyone who failed to pay the revenue lost his zamindari.
- ii. The zamindars were not interested in the improvement of land which led to reduced production of crop.
- iii. But with the rise in crop expansion and prices of crops in nineteenth century the income of britishers was not increasing. this concerned them alot.
- iv. Because of the less revenue collection,British tried some other new method of revenue generation such as Mahalwari system and Ryotwari system.

A New System is Devised:

- i. By the early nineteenth century many of the company officials were convinced that the system of revenue had to be changed again because to get maximum profit.
- ii. An Englishman, Holt Machenzie devised the new system which came into effect in 1822. This was introduced in North India and came to be known as Mahalwari settlement.
- iii. Mahalwari system gave the revenue collection work to the village headman (Mahal) instead of zamindar and revenue was not fixed permanantly.
- iv. Under this system the revenue was collected by Mahal and was given to British exchaquire.
- v. This system was initiated in central part of India.

The Munro System:

- i. In the British territories in the south, a new system was devised which was known as Ryotwar or Ryotwari.
- ii. Ryotwari was intiated by Captain Alexander Read and Thomas Munro. This system was extended all over the south India.
- iii. In this system, ryots were directly involved for the collectiion of revenue and it was fixed after the proper assement of individual land.

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- iv. British officials were appointed to collect the revenue and used coercive methods for revenue collection.

All was Not Well:

- i. As they desired to increase the income from land, revenue officials fixed the revenue rate very high.
- ii. As peasants were unable to pay, ryots fled the countryside and villages became deserted in many regions.
- iii. Peasants were forcefully evicted from their lands and had to leave their places and clashes happened at different places.

Crops for Europe:

- i. By the late eighteenth century the company was trying to expand the cultivation of opium and indigo, which was highly demanded in Europe.
- ii. The Britishers forced cultivators to produce jute, tea, sugarcane, wheat, cotton and rice in various parts of India.
- iii. Indigo was highly demanded in Europe. To get the Indigo cultivation, the tinkathia system was introduced. Under this system peasants had to cultivate indigo on 3/20th part of their land.
- iv. Because of the production of the cash crops and indigo which had to be grown on the most fertile land, the farmers were left with little fertile region to grow.
- v. These crops reduced the production of food crops.

Does Colour have a History:

- i. The rich blue colour was commonly called as Indigo and it was on a high demand in Europe as it was used for dyeing purpose.
- ii. India was the biggest supplier of indigo in the world in 19th century
- iii. Indigo cultivation was one of the reasons for poor condition of farmers and led ryots in various farmers.

Why the Demand for Indian Indigo:

- i. By the thirteenth century Indian Indigo was being used by cloth manufacturers in Italy, France and Britain to dye cloth.

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- ii. Indigo produce a rich blue colour whereas the dye from woad another plant was pale and dull.
 - iii. Indigo plantations came up in many parts of North America and Mexico, but during the wars in these regions and abolition of slavery in French colonies, British started depending on India for the cultivation expansion of Indigo.
 - iv. Increased demand of indigo also came because of the heavy industrialisation in Britain.
 - v. To fulfill the demand of Indigo British used their colonies in tropical region and mainly in Africa and India as the availability of land and cheap labour were available.

Britain turns to India:

- i. The company in India expanded the area under the indigo cultivation to meet the rising demand for indigo in Europe.
 - ii. As the indigo trade grew commercial agents and officials of the company began investing in indigo production.
- **How was Indigo Cultivated:**
- iii. There were two main system of Indigo cultivation: Nij and Ryoti.
 - iv. In Nij system, the planter produced indigo in lands that he directly controlled or rented from zamindars.

The Problem with Nij Cultivation:

- i. This cultivation needed fertile and big lands and it was difficult to get big areas as they were already highly populated. for this they had to evict population which led to conflicts.
- ii. Nij cultivation on a large scale required many ploughs and bullocks, investing on purchase and maintenance of ploughs was a big problem. At the same time of its cultivation the cultivation of rice also took place, that is why ploughs were not available on rent too.
- iii. Availability of labour was also a problem as peasants were engaged in rice cultivation at the same time.

Indigo on the Land of Ryots:

- i. In Ryoti system, the planters forced the ryots to sign a contract an agreement (satta).
- ii. Those who signed the contract got cash advances from planters at low rates of interest to

produce indigo.

- iii. The peasants got very low price for the indigo they produced and the cycle of loans never ended.
- iv. After an indigo harvest the land could not be sown with rice which the peasants preferred as Indigo production reduced the fertility of soil.

The 'Blue Rebellion' and after:

- i. In March 1859 thousands of ryots in Bengal refused to grow indigo.
- ii. As the rebellion spread, ryots refused to pay rents to the planters and attacked indigo factories.
- iii. Ryots swore they would no longer take advances to sow indigo nor be bullied by the planters' lathiyals.
- iv. The government set up the indigo commission to enquire into the system of indigo production.
- v. It declared that indigo cultivation was not profitable for ryots. Hence they could refuse to produce indigo in future.
- vi. After the revolt, indigo production collapsed in Bengal. The planters now shifted their operations to Bihar.
- vii. In Bihar, the Champaran movement led by Gandhi ji in 1917, ended the Indigo production through tinkathia system.