

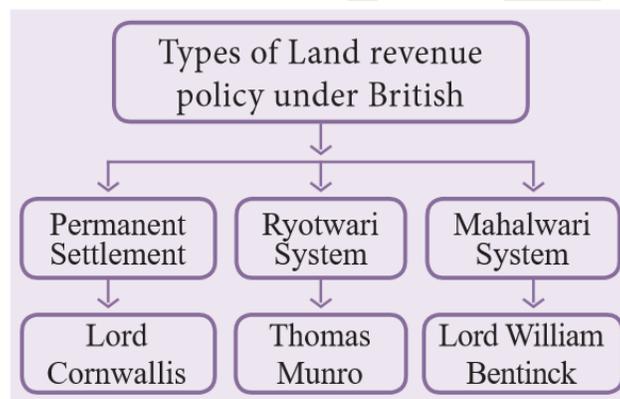
8th Social Science Lesson 3 Notes in English

3. Rural Life and Society

Introduction

- In the pre-colonial period, Indian economy was predominantly an agrarian economy.
- Agriculture was then the primary occupation of the people and even **industries like textiles, sugar, oil, etc.** were dependent on it.
- The British Government in India did not adopt a pro-Indian agriculture and land revenue policy.
- British Government introduced three major **land revenue and tenurial systems in India, namely, the Permanent Settlement, the Mahalwari system and the Ryotwari system.**
- The economic exploitation of the peasants led to the revolt in future.

The Land Revenue Policy under the British



Permanent Settlement

- When Robert Clive obtained **the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765**, there used to be an annual settlement (of land revenue).
- Warren Hastings changed it from annual to quinquennial (five-yearly) and back to annual again.
- During the time of Cornwallis, a ten years' (decennial) settlement was introduced in 1793 and it was known Permanent Settlement.
- Permanent settlement were made in **Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Varanasi division of U.P., and Northern Karnataka**, which roughly covered **19 percent** of the total area of British India.
- It was known by different names like **Zamindari, Jagirdari, Malguzari and Biswedari.**

Salient Features of the Permanent Settlement

- The Zamindars were recognised as the **owners of land as long as they paid the revenue to the East India Company regularly.**
- The Zamindars acted as the agent of the Government for the collection of revenue from the cultivators.
- The amount of revenue that the Zamindars had to pay to the Company was firmly fixed and would not be raised under any circumstances.
- They gave **10/11** of the revenue collected by them from the cultivator to the Government.
- The Zamindars would grant patta (**written agreements**) to the ryots.
- The ryots became tenants since they were considered the tillers of the soil.
- All judicial powers were taken away from the Zamindars.

Merits

- Under this system many of the waste lands and forests became cultivable lands.
- The Zamindars became the owner of the land.
- The Zamindars were made free from the responsibility of providing justice.
- The Zamindars remained faithful to the British Government.
- This system secured a fixed and stable income for the British Government.

Demerits

- The British Government had no direct contact with the cultivators.
- The rights of the **cultivators were ignored and they were left at the mercy of the Zamindars.**
- The peasants were almost treated as serfs.
- This system was made the **Zamindars lethargic and luxurious.**
- Many conflicts between the zamindars and the peasants arose in rural Bengal.

Ryotwari system

- Ryotwari system was introduced by **Thomas Munro and Captain Read in 1820.**
- Major areas of introduction of Ryotwari system included **Madras, Bombay, parts of Assam, and Coorg provinces of British India.**
- By Ryotwari system the rights of ownership was handed over to the peasants. British government collected taxes directly from the peasants.
- Initially, one-half of the estimated produce was fixed as rent. This assessment was reduced to one-third of the produce by Thomas Munro.
- The revenue was based on the basis of the soil and the nature of the crop. Rents would be periodically revised, generally after **20 to 30 years.**
- The position of the cultivators became more secure. In this system the settlement was made between the Government and the Ryots.
- Infact, the Government later claimed that the land revenue was rent and not a tax.

Salient Features of the Ryotwari system

- Revenue settlement was done directly with the ryots.
- Measurement of field and an estimate of produce was calculated.
- Government fixed the demand at **45 to 55 percent** of the produce.

Effects of the Ryotwari Settlement

- In most areas the land revenue fixed was excessive; the ryots were hardly left with bare maintenance even in the best of seasons.
- Under this system the **government exploited the farmers instead of zamindars**.

Mahalwari system

- Mahalwari system, a brain child of Holt Mackenzie was modified version of the Zamindari settlement introduced in the Ganga valley, the North-West Province, parts of the **Central India and Punjab in 1822**.
- Lord William Bentinck was to suggest radical changes in the Mahalwari system by the guidance of **Robert Martins Bird in 1833**.
- Assessment of revenue was to be made on the basis of the produce of a Mahal or village.
- All the proprietors of a Mahal were severally and jointly responsible for the payment of revenue. Initially the state share was fixed two-thirds of the gross produce.
- Bentinck, therefore, reduced to fifty percent. The village as a whole, through its headman or Lambardar, was required to pay the revenue.
- This system was first adopted in **Agra and Awadh**, and later extended to other parts of the United Provinces.
- The burden of all this heavy taxation finally fell on the cultivators.

Salient Features of the Mahalwari Settlement

- The Lambardar acted as intermediaries between the Government and the villagers.
- It was a **village-wise assessment**. One person could hold a number of villages.
- The village community was the owner of the village common land.
- The village land belonged to the village community.

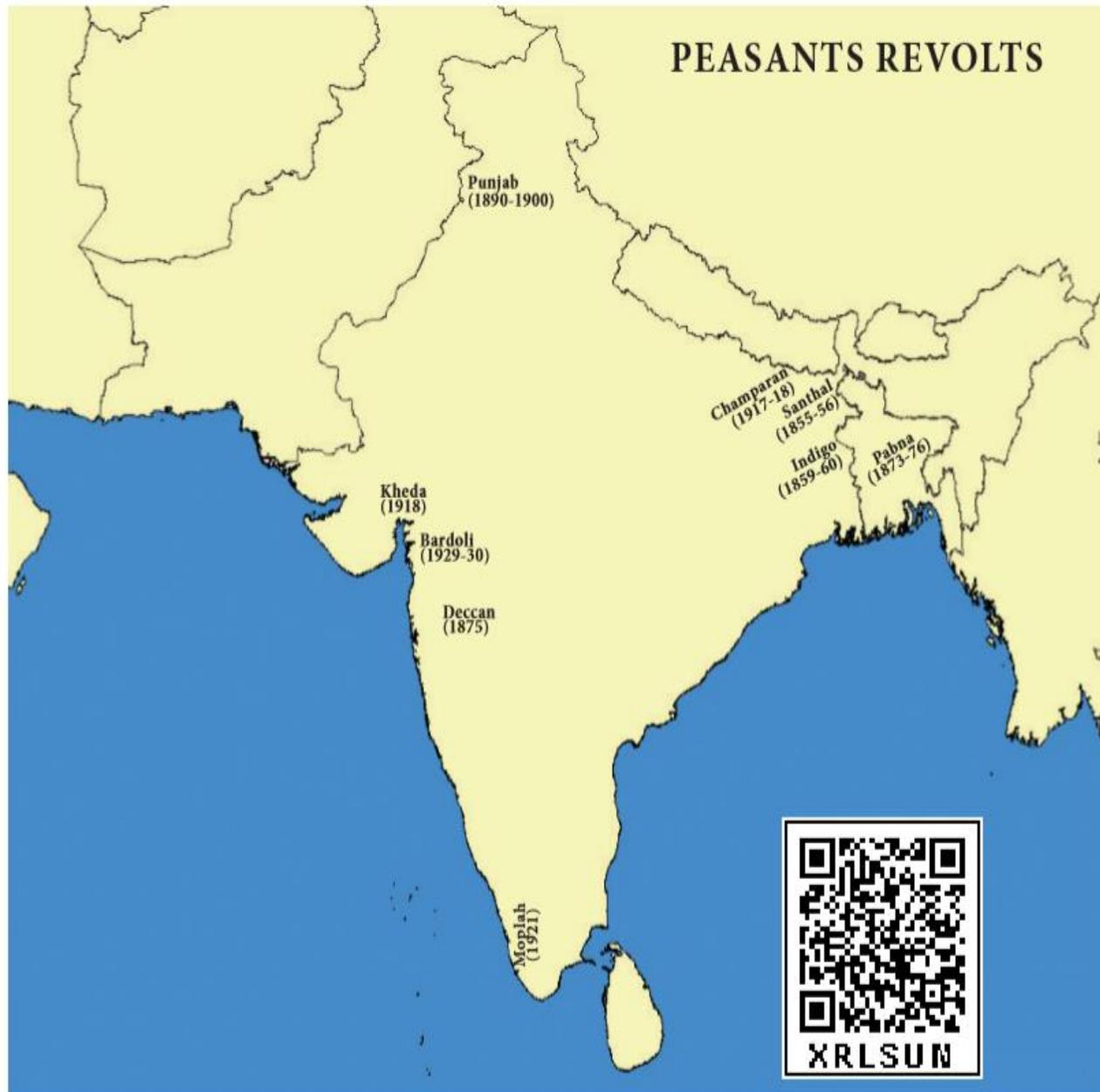
Effects of the Mahalwari Settlement

- The Lambardar enjoyed privileges which was misused for their self-interest.
- This system brought no benefit to the cultivators.
- It was a modified version of the **Zamindari system and benefited the upper class in villages**.

Impact of the British land revenue system on the cultivators

- A common feature of all the settlements was the assessment and the maximize income from land. It resulted in increasing land sales and dispossession.
- The peasants were overburdened with taxation.
- Due to the tax burden and famines, in general, the people suffered in poverty and burdened with debts.
- They had to seek the moneylenders who became rich and acquired lands from the peasants.
- The Zamindars, money-lenders and lawyers exploited the poor peasants.
- The stability and continuity of the Indian villages was shaken.
- **Cottage industries disappeared on account of the import of British goods and the peasants had nothing to supplement their income.**
- The old body of custom was replaced by **new apparatus of law, courts, fees, lawyers and formal procedures.**
- The British policy proved advantageous only to the government of a privileged section of the society at the cost of the cultivators who were the rightful owners of their lands and claimants of the larger share of the produce.

Peasants Revolts



- The British rule in India brought about many changes in the agrarian system in the country.
- The old agrarian system collapsed and under **the new system, the ownership of land was conferred on the Zamindars.**
- They tried to extract as much as they could from the cultivators of land. The life of the peasants was extremely miserable.
- The various peasant movements and uprisings during the 19th and 20th centuries were in the nature of a protest against of the existing conditions under which their exploitation knew no limits.

The Santhal Rebellion (1855-56)

- The first revolt which can be regarded as peasants' revolt was **the Santhal Rebellion in 1855-56**.
- The land near the hills of **Rajmahal in Bihar** was cultivated by the Santhals.
- The landlords and money-lenders from the cities took advantage of their ignorance and began grabbing their lands.
- This created bitter resentment among them leading to their armed uprising in 1855.
- Consequently, under the belief of a divine order, around **10,000 Santals gathered under two Santhal brothers, Siddhu and Kanhu**, to free their country of the foreign oppressors and set up a government of their own.
- The rebellion assumed a formidable shape within a month.
- The houses of the European planters, British officers, railway engineers, zamindars and money-lenders were attacked.
- The rebellion continued till **February 1856**, when the rebel leaders were captured and the movement was put down with a heavy hand.
- The government declared the Parganas inhabited by them as Santhal Parganas so that their lands and identity could be safeguarded from external encroachments.

Indigo Revolt (1859-60)



Indigo Revolt

- The Bengal indigo cultivators strike was the most militant and widespread peasant uprisings.
- The European indigo planters compelled the tenant farmers to grow indigo at terms highly disadvantageous to the farmers.
- The tenant farmer was forced to sell it cheap to the planter and accepted advances from the planter that benefitted the latter. There were also cases of **kidnapping, looting, flogging and burning**.
- Led by **Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Charan Biswas**, the ryots of Nadia district gave up indigo cultivation in **September 1859**.
- Factories were burnt down and the revolt spread.

- To take control of the situation, the Government set up **an indigo commission in 1860 whose recommendations formed part of the Act VI of 1862.**
- The indigo planters of Bengal, however, moved on to settle in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The newspaper, Hindu Patriot brought to light the misery of the cultivators several times.
- **Dinabandhu Mitra wrote a drama, Nil-Darpan,** in Bengali with a view to draw the attention of the people and the government towards the misery of the indigo-cultivators.

Pabna Revolt (1873-76)

- Pabna Peasant Uprising was a resistance movement by the peasants against the oppression of the Zamindars.
- It originated in the **Yusufshahi pargana of Pabna** in Bengal. It was led by **Keshab Chandra Roy.**
- The zamindars routinely collected money from the peasants by the illegal means of forced levy, abwabs, enhanced rent and so on.
- Peasants were often evicted from land on the pretext of nonpayment of rent.
- Large crowds of peasants gathered and marched through villages frightening the zamindars and appealing to other peasants to join with them.
- Funds were raised from the ryots to meet the costs. The struggle gradually spread throughout Pabna and then to the other districts of East Bengal.
- Everywhere agrarian leagues were organized. The main form of struggle was that of legal resistance.
- There was very little violence. It occurred only when the zamindars tried to compel the ryots to submit to their terms by force.
- There were only **a few cases of looting of the houses of the zamindars.**
- A few attacks on police stations took place and the peasants also resisted attempts to execute court decrees.
- Hardly zamindars or zamindar's agent were killed or seriously injured. In the course of the movement, the ryots developed a strong awareness of the law and their legal rights and the ability to combine and form associations for peaceful agitation.

Deccan Riots (1875)

- In 1875, the peasants revolted in the district of Poona, that event has been called the 'Deccan Riots'.
- The peasants revolted primarily **against the oppression of local moneylenders who were grabbing their lands systematically.**
- The uprising started from a village in Poona district when the village people forced out a local moneylender from the village and captured his property.
- Gradually, the uprising spread over **33 villages** and the peasants looted the property of **Marwari Sahukars.**

- The uprising turned into violent when the Sahukars took help of the police.
- It was suppressed only when the army was called to control it.
- However, it resulted in passing of the **Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act** which removed some of the most serious grievances of the peasants.

Punjab Peasant Movement (1890-1900)

- The peasants of the Punjab agitated to prevent the rapid alienation of their lands to the urban moneylenders for failure to pay debts.
- The Government of India did not want any revolt in that province which provided a large number of soldiers to the British army in India.
- In order to protect the peasants of the Punjab, the Punjab Land Alienation Act was passed in 1900 **"as an experimental measure"** to be extended to the rest of India if it worked successfully in the Punjab.
- The Act divided the population of the Punjab into three categories viz., the agricultural classes, the statutory agriculturist class and the rest of the population including the moneylenders.
- Restrictions were imposed on the sale and mortgage of the land from the first category to the other two categories.

Champran Satyagraha (1917-18)

- The European planters of **Champran in Bihar** resorted to illegal and inhuman methods of indigo cultivation at a cost which was wholly unjust.
- Under the **Tinkathia system in Champran**, the peasants were bound by law to grow indigo on **3/20 part** of their land and send the same to the British planters at prices fixed by them.
- They were liable to unlawful extortion and oppression by the planters. Mahatma Gandhi took up their cause.
- The Government appointed an enquiry commission of which Mahatma Gandhi was a member.
- The grievances of the peasants were enquired and ultimately the **Champran Agrarian Act was passed in May 1918.**

Kheda (Kaira) Satyagraha (1918)

- In the Kheda District of Gujarat, due to constant famines, **agriculture failed in 1918**, but the officers insisted on collection of full land revenue.
- The local peasants, therefore, started a **'no-tax' movement in Kheda district in 1918**. Gandhi accepted the leadership of this movement.
- Gandhiji organised the peasants to offer Satyagraha and opposed official insistence on full collection of oppressive land revenue despite the conditions of famine.
- He inspired the peasants to be fearless and face all consequences.

- The response to his call was unprecedented and the government had to bow to a settlement with the peasants.
- Sardar Vallabhai Patel emerged as an important leader of the Indian freedom struggle during this period.

Moplah Rebellion (1921)

- The **Muslim Moplah (or Moplah) peasants of Malabar (Kerala)** was suppressed and exploited by the Hindu zamindars (Jenmis) and British government.
- This was the main cause of this revolt. The Moplah peasants got momentum from the Malabar District Conference, held in **April 1920**.
- This conference supported the tenants' cause, and demanded legislations for regulating landlord-tenant relations.
- In **August 1921, the Moplah tenants** rebelled against the oppressive zamindars.
- In the initial phase of the rebellion, the Moplah peasants attacked the police stations, public offices, communications and houses of oppressive landlords and moneylenders.
- By **December 1921**, the government ruthlessly suppressed the Moplah rebellion.
- According to an official estimate, as a result of government intervention, **2337 Moplah rebels were killed, 1650 wounded and more than 45,000 captured as prisoners.**

Bardoli Satyagraha (1929-30)



Bardoli Satyagraha

- In **1928**, the peasants of Bardoli (Gujarat) started their agitation under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, in protest against the government's proposal to increase land revenue by **30 percent**.
- The peasants refused to pay tax at the enhanced rate and started no-tax campaign from **12 February 1928**.

- Many women also participated in this campaign. In 1930, the peasants of Bardoli rose to a man, refused to pay taxes, faced the auction sales and the eventual loss of almost all of their lands but refused to submit to the Government.
- However, all their lands were returned to them when the Congress came to power in 1937.