
Condition of Peasants during British rule in India

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Abstract: Land before industrial revolution was the mainstay of the economy everywhere in the world and so was the case in India too. Land itself has no meaning until it is being cultivated by the peasants. It is therefore the peasant in any time in history were important. The importance of peasant should have resulted in a better lifestyle because they were the one who filled the stomachs of the whole population. Though it sounds obvious, we as a student of history need to check the actual status of the peasants. The present paper is an attempt to understand the condition of peasant under the British rule. The research shows that peasants faced an extremely tough time due to strict taxation system under the British rule. Rare infrastructural development for agriculture along with enforcing farmers to grow as per the British played additional burden to them. The findings is quite contrary to our assumption that because peasants were the main element in running the economy they should have lived a life with lesser problems and better facilities could have been provided to the peasants by the government. India as a big country adopted different system of administration in different parts of the country like mahalwari, Zamindari etc. But what we find from our study that all these systems failed to improve the condition of peasants. The peasants were oppressed to such an extent that were also on the brink of starvation.

Keywords: Peasant, British Rule, taxation system.

1. INTRODUCTION

Amid early nineteenth century, land was of real significance to practically every one of the general population of the India in light of the fact that the most of them relied upon agriculture for their subsistence. The principle reason, which prompted a profound established disappointment inside the peasants, was that they needed to pay a tribute as lease to the authorities for the crops they were growing. A significant component of the British time frame was that there was a greater amount of farming area than the quantity of cultivators to develop it. In the year 1833, the British Government had concluded that it would extract 66% of the financial rental estimation of the land with the assistance of settlement officials [1]. Accordingly, the land owners were made to give the land on lease to the non-owners at a similar rate of the income that they paid to the administration authorities. Also it tends to be said that amid the British rule the states of the peasants were such that they were driven away from their property and resultant was the uprising of another class known by the name moneylenders. In the meantime it may be said that it was amid the British guideline farming began getting to be popularized. Obstruction of the cash banks made the regressive rural areas marketed in nature. In the viewpoint of the several scholars, the emergence of the new cash loaning class was one among the many reasons for the 1857 revolt.

None of the peasants were willing to offer tax to the British governments and their hostility resulted in trouble for the British rule. For example, sixteen big Jat villages of the Naultha region challenged the British ways of collecting tax [2]. They forcefully thrown the administrative the administration authorities from the town. The individuals from the nearby areas had joined the unsettling influence of the Rohtak region and had visited Delhi. They had additionally stated that continuation of such a system will make them assault the Collectors Office. Nineteen different villages from the Bhalsi and the Korana area likewise revolted and assaulted the administration foundations. All these happened in light of the fact that the greater part peasants would not pay the lease. Indeed, even the Gujjars were not a long ways behind and they pillaged about in the nation. Dissatisfaction inside the peasantry class gradually took an enormous size and various uprisings occurred in different parts of the India. Peasants resisted to the British since they needed to challenge the estranged conditions to which they were exposed to by the British government. They needed to keep up the ownership for land and couldn't acknowledge the authority of the cash moneylenders.

2. PEASANT BEFORE BRITISH RULE

Before the British came to India, most of the people of India was dependent on agriculture. Even though the methods applied in agriculture was not advanced technology wise but was self-supporting and autonomous. The villagers either acquired or devoured the crude materials and articles directly. Hence, scenario like that of starvation or famines were uncommon. Obviously, farming practices stayed crude, yet the villages worked autonomously and were independent. The majority of this got changed when the British set feet on the Indian subcontinent.

3. PEASANT UNDER BRITISH RULE

The peasants were continuously devastated under British governance. Despite the fact that now they were not currently facing the problem of continuous threat of inward wars, but their financials stand constantly got disintegrated and they consistently became poorer. During the initial phase of British governance in Bengal, Clive and Warren Hastings adopted a system of separating the biggest conceivable land income. This further prompted such decimation that Cornwallis himself whined that 33% of Bengal populace had been changed into "a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts".

Similar situation prevailed in the years to come too. Whether it was permanently or temporarily settled Zamindari zones, the peasants remained unhappy and felt oppressed by the prevailing system [3]. No one ever heard the issues of peasants and Zamindars were the masters of the destiny of peasants. Zamindars kept increasing the taxes at their will, forced the peasants to pay the taxes and in case of not being able to pay taxes forced the peasants to work without payment will all the mistreatments. So was the condition of peasants under the Ryotwari and Mahalwari zones [4]. In these areas, British replaced the zamindars. The officials of British Empire collected the heavy taxes which was in the first place fixed as high as 33% of the production. Various scholars of that time noted the fact of that time. One among them was Bishop Heber who stated the case in the year of 1826[5]:

"Neither Native nor European agriculturist, I think, can thrive at the present rate of taxation. Half of the gross produce of the soil is demanded by government. ... In Hindustan [Northern India] I found a general feeling among the King's officers... that the peasantry in the Company's Provinces are on the whole worse off, poorer and more dispirited than the subjects of the Native Provinces; and here in Madras, where the soil is, generally speaking, poor, the difference is said to be still more marked. The fact is, no Native Prince demands the rent which we do".

At a point when the more populace was there to get sustenance from the same land even the lesser tax in the later years burdened the workers as intensely as the higher income request of the prior long stretches of the Company's organization. Also, by the twentieth century, the economy which was mainly agriculture based had been demolished. The proprietors, moneylenders and shippers had made profound advances into the villages [6]. The malevolence of high income request was exacerbated in light of the fact that the laborer got minimal monetary benefit in lieu of all the hard work. British were not taking any initiative to improve the farming. Peasants were handing over all the earnings to address the requirements of the British-Indian organization.

The hurtful impacts of an unnecessary income through land tax request were additionally increased by the inflexible way of its gathering. Taxes on Land must be paid instantly on the fixed dates regardless of prevailing circumstances. When peasants failed to pay the taxes, the administration set up his territory at a bargain to gather the overdue debts of taxes. In due course of time it became a rule that the peasants himself made this stride and sold piece of his territory to fulfill the administration need.

By enacting the new rule that the land can be transferred in case peasants are not been able to pay taxes, the new taxation system empowered the moneylenders who further by different means grabbed the land. It is important to note that the new system developed by British indeed provided security by creating lawful framework but these were basically harvested by the moneylenders. They additionally utilized the influence of money to turn the costly procedure of case to support him and to make the police fill his needs. Besides, the proficient and insightful moneylender could without much of a stretch exploit the numbness and lack of education of the peasants to wind the confounded procedures of law to get positive legal choices. Step by step the peasants under Ryotwari and Mahalwari regions became poorer. They became more obliged in due course of time and this resulted into more

land going under the control of moneylenders, vendors, rich people and other well-to-do classes [7]. In the areas where zamindari system was getting followed there to the peasants lost their lands and became subtenants of the moneylenders. One estimation indicate that in the year of 1911 the total debt on peasants accounted to Rs 300 crore which increased to Rs.1800 by 1937 [8]. The whole procedure turned into an endless loop. The weight of tax assessment and developing neediness pushed the cultivators into obligation, which then expanded their destitution.

4. DECLINE OF PRODUCTIVITY OF AGRICULTURE

Because of congestion in agribusiness, exorbitant taxation system, development of landlordism, expanding obligation and the developing impoverishment of cultivators, Indian agriculture started to stagnate and even fall apart bringing about amazingly low yields per section of land. In general farming generation fell by 14 percent somewhere in the range of 1901 and 1939[9]. The congestion in farming and increment in subinfeudation prompted subdivision and discontinuity of land into little property a large portion of which couldn't keep up their cultivators. The outrageous destitution of the dominant part of laborers left them with no assets with which to improve agribusiness by utilizing better means, more excrement and composts, and improved systems of creation. Nor did the cultivator have any motivating force to do as such. In England and other European nations, the rich proprietors regularly put capital in their property to build its efficiency with the end goal of partaking in the expanded pay. Yet, in India the truant proprietors, both old and new, played out no helpful capacity. They were negligible lease beneficiaries who had regularly no roots in the land and who took no close to home enthusiasm for it past gathering rent. They thought that it was conceivable and in this way wanted to build their salary by further pressing their inhabitants as opposed to by making gainful interests in their properties. The administration could have helped in improving and modernizing agribusiness. In any case, the administration would not perceive any such duty. A normal for the money related arrangement of British India was that, while the fundamental weight of tax collection fell on the shoulders of the worker, the administration spent just an exceptionally little piece of it on him.

In the year of 1905, British rule spent excess of Rs.360 crores just on the railroads. This expenditure was done because it served the purpose of the British Empire. But during the same time frame not even Rs.50 crores was spent on agriculture which was the most revenue generator at that time [10]. All things considered, water system was the main field in which the administration stepped forward. When farming everywhere throughout the world was being modernized and upset, agriculture in India was lacking in innovations. The equipment that were in use were getting for last 100 years.

5. CONCLUSION

There can a number of argument for and against the impact of British on general economy, the net result in case of peasants and agriculture can be stated as the prevalence of total disgust and poverty among the peasants. While students of history are not unanimous about India getting more unfortunate or not under British empire, there is unanimity that under the British rule maximum part of Indian populace lived in a poor condition or to be said as nearly starvation condition. The outcome was stagnation of farming along with businesses in India , exploitation the farmers/peasants by big land lords also known as zamindaars, landowners, sovereigns, traders, industrialists and the government functioning from outside and its authorities, as well as the prevalence of destitution, ailment and near to starvation condition.

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