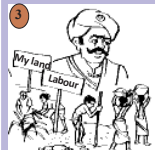




The King collects tax from Zamindar



Zamindar collects tax from people and gives to king



Zamindar owns land, has labourers



Peasant who owns land and pays tax

Zamindars and Peasants in Mughal Times

During the time of the Mughal emperors, on behalf of them the zamindars collected land revenue from the peasants. In return they received a share of the revenue collected and sometimes also had right to collect some small local taxes. They also had a small band of soldiers with horses and guns. Their houses were like small forts called *gadi* in Telangana. This enabled them to control the nearby villages. As revenue collectors, the zamindars often acted as the intermediaries between the government and the peasants. They often represented the problems faced by the peasants to the government and at the same time also tried to enforce the regulations imposed on the peasants by the government.

The zamindars also owned land on which the labourers worked. This was called their 'self-cultivated' land or *Khudkhasht* lands. They also gave their land to peasants either for a share of the produce or a fixed rent. We call such landowners as 'landlords'; and the peasants who cultivate their lands as 'tenant cultivators'. Thus the zamindars had two aspects – collection of land revenue from ordinary peasants and owning lands as landlords. There were two kinds of peasants: those who were independent landowning cultivators paying land revenue through the zamindar and those who were tenants of the landlords. Indian villages also had a large number of artisans and service castes who used to provide skilled and manual labour. Many of them were considered to be of low and untouchable status. Some of them had small plots of land but mainly got their livelihood from providing services to the farmers and landlords.

- Did the zamindar own all the lands of the villages in the Mughal times?
- What did the zamindars do for the Mughal government and what did they get in return?

- Why do you think the zamindars kept the soldiers and small forts?
- Do you think the zamindars would have helped the independent cultivators in any way? Give reasons for your answer.



Company collects tax from Zamindar



Zamindar gets more power can collect more money



Zamindar decides what the peasant cultivates and the tax to be paid

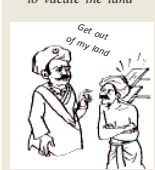
Permanent Settlement: Changes Introduced by the British

When the British gained control over India, they were keen to increase the land revenue as much as possible to finance trade and wars. This led to ruin of agriculture as farmers could not cultivate land under such conditions. There were great famines which killed thousands of people. The British realized that they needed to have a system of land revenue which would also encourage agriculture. They were also keen that peasants should till more and more land, and grow crops that were in demand in the market, especially cash crops that could be exported to England like cotton, indigo, sugarcane, wheat etc. East India Company officials began to feel that investment in land had to be encouraged and agriculture had to be improved. How was this to be done?

After two decades of debate on the question, the Company finally introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793 when Cornwallis was the Governor General. By the terms of the settlement, zamindars were given the powers to collect the revenues agreed upon in auctions. Therefore it was also called zamindari settlement. They have to pass on 90% of the amount to the Government retaining 10% as collection charges. The amount to be paid was fixed permanently, that is, it was not to be increased in future. It was felt that this would ensure a regular flow of revenue into the Company and at the same time encourage the zamindars to invest in improving the land. Since the revenue demand of the state would not be increased, the zamindar would benefit from increased production from the land. The Zamindars however collected more revenue than agreed upon through auction. They continuously increased the revenue and changed the cultivators who did not meet the demand. This settlement inadvertently converted all the peasants into the tenants, and the zamindars collected rent rather



Pay more tax, Land is not cared for. If I don't produce as much as the Zamindar demands I have to vacate the land



Over the years Zamindar occupies all the land

than revenue from them. Since rent collected was much higher than the revenue, the cultivators could not pay and sometimes deserted the lands. In the long run the zamindars also suffered and became defaulters.

- How the changes would have affected the position of the farmers who tilled the land for several generations?
- What is difference between revenue and rent?
- Who do you think gained most from the 'Permanent Settlement' – the British Government, the zamindars or the peasants? Give your reasons.

The result: The Company officials soon discovered that the zamindars were in fact not investing in the improvement of land. The revenue that had been fixed was so high that the zamindars found it difficult to pay. There were no remissions of revenue in times of crop failure and famine. Anyone who failed to pay the revenue lost his zamindari. Numerous zamindaris were sold off at auctions organised by the Company. This created much instability in the villages and the old zamindars were rapidly replaced by the new ones.

By 1820 the situation changed. The prices of grains in the market rose and cultivation slowly expanded. This meant an increase in the income of the zamindars but no gain for the Company as it could not increase the revenue demand that had been fixed permanently.

Even then the zamindars did not have an interest in improving the land. Some had lost their lands in the earlier years of the settlement; others now saw the possibility of earning without the trouble and risk of investment. As long as the zamindars could give out the land to tenants and get rent, they were not interested in improving the land.

Population was increasing rapidly and the zamindars could keep evicting peasants and giving the land to new ones at higher rents. On the other hand, in the villages, the cultivators found the system extremely oppressive. The rent he paid to the zamindar was high and his right on the land was insecure. To pay the rent

he had to take loan often from the moneylender, and when he failed to pay the rent he was evicted from the land he had cultivated for generations.

- In what ways did the zamindari system fail in the objectives with which the British had introduced it?
- How do you think it was possible for the zamindars to keep increasing their incomes without increasing investment in the land?
- Do you think the zamindars would have supported the British rule or opposed it? Give your reasons.

The Ryotwari system

By the early nineteenth century many of the Company officials were convinced that the system of revenue collection had to be changed again. How could revenues be fixed permanently at a time when the Company needed more money to meet its expenses of administration and investments in trade?

The districts of Bellary, Anantapur, Kadapa and Kurnool were ceded to the British by the Nizam on account of debt in maintaining the British contingent. This area is known as Rayalaseema. Thomas Munro was appointed as the principal Collector of these districts in November 1800. At that time the Ceded districts were in a complete anarchy. There were eight *palegars* or petty chiefs in this area. They resisted the imposition of British rule and indulged in constant war and looting. Munro first subdued the *palegars* and disbanded their armed followers. After restoring law and order, Munro commenced his work of survey and revenue settlement. He realized that there were no zamindars in the south like in Northern India. Instead, there were close-knit peasant communities in Andhra and Tamil country who held the land, cultivated it and paid revenue. Recognising the importance of the peasants he devised the 'Ryotwari settlement' which was introduced in entire South India and later in Western India.

Ryot means a cultivator. The ryotwari means peasant tenure. It was decided to collect revenue from the actual cultivators/owners of the land who either worked on the land themselves or



Under Ryotwari system, I produced more crop.



Company collects fixed tax from farmers.



Zamindar rented land to the tenants.

got the lands cultivated by others. Under this settlement the peasants cultivating the land were identified, their field was identified and a survey number was given to every piece of land fixing the legal ownership. The yield, price situation, market conditions and the crop cultivated was taken into account to decide the tax per acre. But before the cultivation commenced in 1801-02, Munro made necessary advances to the ryots to purchase seeds, implements, bullocks and to repair old wells or dig new ones. He argued that the British government should act as a father figure protecting the ryots. This proved very effective and that year saw a bumper crop and very good revenue collection. This confirmed that Munro's approach was right.



Fig 10.1 : Prakasham barrage

only small regions. Most parts of the country still continued to depend upon rains and the expectation that the zamindars and prosperous ryots will invest in smaller irrigation projects like wells and tanks did not materialize.

Developmental Activities

Some British administrators believed that it is the duty of the government to invest in large scale irrigation works. This would enable farmers to cultivate lands and grow high value cash crops. Due to the untiring efforts of Sir Arthur Cotton an anicut across the Godavari river at Dhawaleshwaram was completed in 1849. It brought immediate prosperity to the district which had suffered acutely from severe famine in 1833. Similarly, an anicut was built over the Krishna river at Vijayawada in 1854 which brought prosperity to the delta areas. After 1857 the Kurnool-Kadapa canal was built to bring waters to the dry areas of Rayalaseema. These measures, even though significant had only a limited impact as they covered

- When the 'Permanent Settlement' was introduced there was no detailed land survey. Why do you think it was needed for the 'Ryotwari Settlement'?
- Why do you think it was necessary to defeat the *palegars* before the Ryotwari Settlement could be introduced?
- If you live in the 'Ceded Districts' find out about the *palegars* who fought with the British.
- In what ways did the government invest in agriculture during the early British rule? Do you think it could have been done by farmers themselves?

- Who do you think would have benefitted from the Ryotwari Settlement – the farmers, the landlords or the British? Give reasons.

The result: Even in the Ryotwari areas the land revenue was fixed at a very high level. Unlike in the Zamindari areas it was fixed for twenty to thirty years. After expiry of the tenure period the revenue was revised, taking the changed conditions into consideration. The land revenue was so high that in the beginning it had to be collected by force. Soon however as prices rose faster than the land revenue and the ryots found it more profitable to employ tenants to cultivate their lands and receive rent from them. Soon the ryotwari area too was full of landlords who rented out their lands to helpless tenants for very high rents. The tenants had to pay rent that was three to seven times more than the land revenue paid by the ryots to the government. (That is if a ryot paid Rs. 100/- as land revenue for a piece of land to the government, he was able to get Rs. 300/- to 700/- from the tenants for the same land.) As a result they too did not have any interest in investing in improving agriculture, but only in renting it out at higher and higher rates.

- Compare these actual outcomes with what you had predicted. How similar or different was it?
- Why do you think the ryots did not invest in improving agriculture or extending agriculture?
- Imagine and describe the condition of the landless tenants of the ryots.

Commercialisation and Money lenders

Driven by the desire to increase the income from land, revenue officials fixed too high a revenue demand. Peasants were unable to pay and fled the countryside. Thus, villages became deserted in many regions. Optimistic officials had imagined that the new system would transform the peasants into rich enterprising farmers. But this did not happen due to the very high land revenue rates.

Peasants very often borrowed money from moneylenders in order to pay their land revenue. However, if they could not repay their loans on time, the moneylenders also went to court to get their land auctioned to recover the loan money. Due to this new British rule for collecting land revenue, many peasants fell into deep debt trap.

There was also another reason why their debts kept increasing. With an increase in the export of agricultural produce the agricultural prices were determined by international market. For example, in 1861, there was civil war in America and British factories turned to India for supply of cotton. As a result cotton prices soared high and farmers began taking loans to grow cotton in the hope of getting high prices. The civil war in the USA ended in 1865 and the demand for Indian cotton fell and so did its price. Cotton that fetched 12 annas per kilo in 1864 now fetched only 6 annas per kilo. The peasants suffered a lot as they could not earn enough to pay back the loans they had taken. The moneylenders became

richer and richer as more and more peasants came under their grip. The ryots of Ganjam who had pinned their hopes on reaping huge profits from cotton crop suddenly became paupers. Not only that, rice became scarce since cotton was grown on the fields where previously paddy was cultivated. The scarcity of rice hit all sections of the population. Thousands of people died of hunger in the famine known as Ganjam Famine. Many people migrated to south Africa, Mauritius, Fiji and other distant places as *coolies*.

- Why did the high revenue rates prevent zamindars and farmers from improving agriculture?
- How did the land revenue lead to peasants losing their lands to the moneylenders? What would the moneylenders have done with the land?
- Who ultimately profited from production for export market and why?
- Why did the war in America lead to increase in prices of cotton in India?
- Have you heard of any similar rapid rise or decline in prices of any agricultural produce in our own times? Find out about its impact on the farmers.

The Zamindars' Exploitation of the Peasants

During the colonial period the peasants were forced to do *vetti* (work without wages) on the personal land of the

landlords. If they refused, the soldiers used to force them to do *vetti*. The soldiers would even catch peasants walking on the road and force them to do *vetti* in the zamindar's fields.

The peasants were forced to work on the zamindars' fields and many peasants could not cultivate their own fields properly. They could not improve their fields. Their plight can be seen in a government report written in 1878. The report says that the peasants do not try to dig well on their lands or irrigate it, nor do they try to bund their fields or dig drains or use fertilisers. "They do nothing to improve their land because they fear they can be evicted from their land at any time. If they improve their farming, the zamindar immediately increases the share he takes from them. But the zamindars also prevent the peasants from improving their fields because they are afraid that the peasants would then start asserting their rights over the land."

Countless Collections, Cesses and Payments

The zamindars also tried to extract as much money as they could from the peasants under a variety of pretexts. The peasants also had to regularly supply *ghee*, milk, vegetables, *gur*, straw, cow dung cakes etc. free of cost to the zamindar's house. This was the situation in many provinces of India. Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh had many big and powerful zamindars. Each of them owned dozens or even hundreds of villages. The peasants kept trying to resist the excesses of these zamindars.

Doras and Peasants of Hyderabad State

In the Hyderabad State under the Nizam rule there were many forms of subordinate chieftaincies like Jagirdars, *Samsthanamdars* and *Inamdars* which ruled like independent chiefs. They collected revenue from the lands under them, and gave a small part to the Nizam as '*peshkash*' and kept the remaining with them. They were also responsible for the administration of their areas. In the Hyderabad state there were about 1500 Jagirs spread over 6535 villages and 14 *Samsthanams* over 497 villages. About 1400 villages were directly under the Nizam as his personal jagir (called *sarf-e-khas*). The rest of the kingdom was administered as described below.

The Nizams who ruled Hyderabad state were under the British and had to follow their policies. In the first half of 19th century they tried to collect maximum land revenue through *deshmukhs* and it resulted in desertion of lands by peasants and complete decline of agriculture. In view of this situation, the Nizam's government set up a new land revenue arrangement by which the government appointed district officials to collect land revenue directly. The old landlords were compensated with an annual payment called *rusum* and they were also given *patta* rights of full ownership over the land and adjoining waste lands and forests. As the landlords realized that there was a large export market for several agricultural products like castor groundnut etc. they brought more waste lands under cultivation to grow these crops. But who

will work on those lands? They expanded the scope of *vetti* or unpaid labour by forcing ordinary peasants and village artisan and service castes to work on landlord's lands. The large landlords were called '*Doras*'. The *Doras* lived in large fortified houses called '*gadi*' and had a large retinue of servants and soldiers. They had vast lands cultivated by tenants and also lands directly cultivated with forced labour. They acted as village moneylenders too. They also had judicial powers over the entire village. They settled all village disputes and were usually partisan towards the upper castes. Other village officials like *patwaris* and smaller landlords too had to abide by their orders. They forcibly ensured that the lower caste labourers worked for all the upper castes and especially the landlords. They enforced such rules like no lower caste person could wear shirts or slippers or wear a turban, and always remain bent before the *doras* and address them as their masters.

In the Telangana region in Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda districts there were 550 *Doras* who owned more than thousand acres of land. There were landlords who owned about one lakh acres like Visnuri Ramachandra Reddy and Jannareddy Pratapa Reddy.

- Why do you think the peasants were not willing to invest in their lands?
- In what forms did the zamindars take away the produce of the tenants?
- Discuss the changes in the lives of traditional crafts persons and village artists.

- How did the position of the revenue collectors change in the Nizam state?
- Among all forms of exploitation, the peasants hated 'vetti' the most. Can you explain why?
- How was a 'dora' different from an ordinary landlord?

Famines

Famines, or massive food shortages leading to acute distress, were a regular feature of the British rule. Due to high taxes and rents the peasants had little reserves to face difficult seasons or crop failures. Further, foodgrains were exported out of the country. This created scarce situation in the entire country. In addition, often the government refused to interfere when large traders tried to create artificial scarcity by hoarding foodgrains.

Andhra like the rest of the country, suffered from severe famines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most severe famine commonly known as the Ganjam famine occurred during the years 1865-66. You read about it above. Repeated famines occurred in the Rayalaseema districts due to lack of irrigational facilities. Not less than 11 famines occurred during the later half of the 19th century. Thousands of people died. Grain riots occurred in many Andhra districts and troops were sent to quell the violence.

The Peasant Movements

We saw above that the peasants were deeply troubled by high land revenue rates, the oppression of the landlords and moneylenders. During the colonial period the peasants in different parts of the country protested and fought against the landlords, merchants and state officials. The famous peasant movements were the Deccan riots of 1860s, Rampa *fiturias*, Moppila agitations which have taken organized forms. While in the 19th century the movements took the form of open revolts, the peasants joined the national movement in large numbers in the 20th century. In 1920-22, the peasants of Awadh in Uttar Pradesh took out huge processions to protest against the zamindars who were extracting money from them. Many zamindars were socially boycotted and driven from the villages. The peasants also refused to till the fields of the zamindars who tried to evict their tenants or claimed too much rent from them. The peasants formed '*kisan sabhas*' to carry their agitation forward and demanded abolition of landlordism, reduction of land revenue and control over moneylenders. The British government helped the zamindars to suppress the revolts. You will read about the struggle of the Telangana peasants in a later chapter.

Key words

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Landlords | 2. Moneylenders | 3. Jagirs |
| 4. <i>Samsthanam</i> | 5. Inamdars | 6. <i>Patta</i> |
| 7. Ryotwari | 8. Deshmukh | |

Improve your learning

1. Make simple questions based on each section of the chapter and ask one another. Check if the answers are correct.
2. Compare the condition of tenant farmers before freedom and farmers of today. What differences and similarities do you find?
3. During the freedom movement the zamindars normally supported the British. Can you explain why?
4. What role did the moneylenders play in the lives of the peasants? In what way do you think they were supported by the British government?
5. What were the similarities and differences between the *Doras* and the zamindars of Awadh?
6. What kind of measures did the British take to improve agriculture? Did it have the desired impact? Give your reasons.
7. How did the Ryotwari settlement also give rise to landlordism?
8. Why were famines caused under British rule? Do you think it was because of failure of rains or floods?
9. In what way can a government help to prevent famines even in times of crop failure?
10. Imagine that you are giving a representation to a British Government Enquiry committee. Write down the grievances of tenant farmers in the form of an appeal.
11. Locate the following in the India map:
 1. Ganjam
 2. Awadh
 3. Hyderabad
 4. River Godavari
12. Read the paragraph under the heading 'Countless Collections, Cesses and Payments' and answer the following:

How are we paying the taxes nowadays?

Projects

1. Make teams of five students and interview five elders of the village to know about how things were during the British days. At least two of them should be women, and at least one person should be from the artisans. Talk to them at length and prepare detailed reports about what they have to say.
2. Find out about famines in your area. What did people do in those times?
3. Find out about families that migrated to distant places like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia from your area.