

CC-12:HISTORY OF INDIA(1750s-1857)

IV. RURAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

(C). RURAL SOCIETY: CHANGES AND CONTINUITY

One of the major areas of economic impact of the British Raj was the breakdown of the system of traditional, autonomous, self-sufficient village economy in India. The isolation of the village came to be gradually broken because of developments in the field of transport and communication i.e., roads and railways. After the conquest of India in 1818, British authorities in India established high centralized administration. This new system of administration by taking charge of village administration and of functions previously performed by the village panchayats weakened the autonomy of village administration. Functions and duties of village officials came to be supervised by the taluq and district headquarters to which now the village officials became responsible. The Indian villages began to be gradually brought into contact with outside world. Also, the more enterprising among the village folk, when compelled by circumstances, moved away from their villages, seeking employment in newly developing factories, mines, plantations or railways construction.

The agrarian structure of the rural society in India has witnessed enormous changes in India during the colonial rule. When the British started ruling India they, in the rural areas they ruled through local zamindars, who were the landlord and had certain amount of political power in their hands. Under the British rule the zamindars were given even more powers and they were also granted property rights. The British government various new land revenue systems in the form of the Permanent Settlement, Ryotwari Settlement, Mahalwari Settlement. Thus by the middle of the nineteenth century the Company's administration had devised three systems of land revenue administration, creating private property in land and conferring that proprietary

right on three different groups-the Permanent Settlement was made with the zimindars, the Ryotwari Settlement with the ryots or peasant proprietors and the Mahalwari Settlement with the village community. As a result of these new system of revenue administration the landlords did not pay any attention to the development of agriculture. Rather they focused on extracting revenue as much as possible. Due to this attitude the condition of agriculture worsened. The condition of the peasants became even more worst as the oppression on them increased since they failed to pay the revenue amounts. To save themselves from the oppression the peasants fled from their lands. In some places the peasants started revolting and what more worsened the situation was the occurrence of famines. These changes and grievances generating from these new systems of revenue administration were amply reflected in the series of agrarian disturbances that marked the first century of British rule in India.

The British conquerors were entirely different from the Mughal ruling authorities, who ruled India till former came to India for trade and later started interfering with the politics and administration of the country. The British Government totally disrupted the traditional socio-economic structure of the Indian villages. The self-sufficient village economy broke down as the British Government centralized the system of revenue administration and also commercialized the agrarian products to enhance trading activities.

The British rule which was exploitative in both nature and functioning, played an important role in the emergence of the money lender class who in due time became very much influential and by the end of the 19th century they were nothing but curse for the poor rural people and also a major cause of the growing rural indebtedness. All these caused great resentment and the peasant class and also the people belonging to the rural society started to revolt against the existing system and this money lending class of people became quite a

target of attack. As a result of these turmoil and disturbances the village communities gradually witnessed disintegration and decay.

The impact of British rule led to the development of new structure of agrarian relation totally different from the previous system and as far as the social classes in the rural society is concerned the saw 19th century saw the rise of landlords, intermediaries and money lender class of people who exercised much power in the newly developed agrarian structure. Agricultural labourers and share-croppers belonging to lower ranks in order of social class were the most oppressed and deprived and sunken in poverty. The new agrarian system was neither entirely feudal nor did it had any elements of the Mughal era. It was combination of feudal and colonial elements.

The impact of the British Government on the Indian people was enormous and long-lasting but it was extensively somewhat much more on the rural people and rural society. In the pre-colonial times the Indian village communities enjoyed a proper system of agriculture, small scale village based industry and local trade all of which together contributed to economic stability and self sufficiency of the Indian villages. But with the coming of the British the existing systems changed which proved detrimental for both the agriculture based structure of the Indian villages and also the condition of the peasantry. The Indian Rural society had to deal with long lasting poverty, famines and stagnant situation of agriculture as a result of all the changes.
