
UNIT 4 LAND AND AGRARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- outline the system of ownership of land as it prevailed during the Pre-British period;
- discuss the changes in the land revenue system, distinguishing them for inter-regional differences, as they prevailed during the period of British rule in India;
- explain the concept of ‘commercialisation of agriculture’ and the factors that contributed to its erosion during the period of 1900s; and
- describe the inter-relationship that existed between the agrarian and land-tenure structures with its consequences on agricultural growth in India during the British period.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Technological factors such as fertilizers, new varieties of seeds, controlled irrigation and scientific implements play an important role in agricultural development. But 'institutional factors' such as owner or tenant cultivation, absentee landlordism, burden of land revenue, indebtedness of the cultivators, etc. also play a significant role in stimulating or obstructing agricultural growth. In fact, application of technology in agriculture itself substantially depends upon the kind of institutions which exist in a particular region. Further, the more successful forms of peasant agriculture have emerged where owner-cultivation was dominant. Also, since the existing land and agrarian structure is the result of gradual process of evolution (influenced by social, political and economic factors), it is essential to get a historical perspective on the evolution of tenurial structure in India. It is in this perspective that the present unit is included in the beginning of second block so as to help appreciate the contents of the subsequent unit on the corresponding developments in the post-independence period.

4.2 OWNERSHIP OF LAND DURING THE PRE-BRITISH PERIOD

An important question discussed by the economic historians is on who owned the land in the earlier times: is it the peasant, or some intermediaries or the king? Most scholars today agree with the view that the king was not the owner. Numerous *mughal* government documents refer to private persons (called *maliks*) as owners. But the crux of the matter is whether in substance, i.e. not merely in name, the peasant's right was such as to deserve the application of the term 'proprietary' in its strict juridical sense. In fact, there was general recognition of the peasant's title to permanent and hereditary occupancy of the land he tilled. In cases where the peasant holding the title to the land was found incapable of cultivating land (or had abandoned it altogether), then the land was given to another peasant for cultivation. But if at any time, the original owner recovered his ability to cultivate it (or came back), the land was to be restored to him. On the other hand, there was no question of real free alienation (i.e. the peasant had no right to sell the land), which is an essential feature of modern proprietary right. The readiness with which authorities recognized the peasant's right of occupancy and the anxiety they showed to prevent him from leaving the land were both natural in an age when land was abundant and peasants scarce. Sale of land was also not so much an issue because there was no scarcity of land. In fact, the rights which in essence constitute ownership, were not as a rule vested in one person, but were distributed among the various parties (like tenant, land owner, share cropper, etc.) connected with the land.

4.2.1 Land Revenue System

During the *mughal* period, the land revenue system mainly depended on the crops grown and its assessed value in quantified terms. The value of the production of each crop was estimated based on the 'yield per unit of land at the current harvest' multiplied by the 'quantity of area under that crop'. Land revenue was then calculated on the basis of a proportion fixed for the purpose. Since this method left some discretion with the officials, the system was modified to a method of notifying a standard schedule for different crops. As the major aim of the

Mughal administration was to take away the bulk of the peasant's surplus, the methods evolved were such as to ensure not only the highest revenue but also the binding loyalty of the peasant to the king.

4.2.2 Intermediaries and Land Rights

While theoretically, the king was the sole claimant to the land revenue, in practice, the assessment and collection of the revenue was made by the members of a small ruling class. These were intermediaries who were of two types viz. the *jagirdars* and the *zamindars*.

The Jagirdars

The *jagirdars* were the king's officers enjoying land-gifts. They held certain ranks (called *mansabs*) granted by the emperor. Each rank entitled its holder (*i.e.* *mansabdar*) to a particular amount of pay. The pay was to be realised by collecting the revenue from a certain amount of land given by the king (*as Jagir*). The land so given had an estimated value based on its potential to grow/yield agricultural crops. It was the responsibility of the *jagirdars* to collect the revenue from the peasants from out of the crops grown on the land. The surplus, over and above the amount of pay fixed by the king to the *jagirdars*, was to be turned over to the state i.e. the king. The ranks given to the *jagirdars* were not inheritable though in normal practice the kins of higher rank-holders were allowed to continue with their titles. The temporary character of *Jagir* strengthened the control of the emperor over the *jagirdars*.

The Zamindars

The *zamindar* is a Persian term which means holder of land (*zamin*). The basic right of *zamindar* was his claim to impose certain levies on the peasants over and above the land-revenue assessment like house tax, forest produce tax, water tax, etc. These were specified in the sale deeds among the rights transferred to the *zamindars*. The *zamindars*, like the *jagirdars*, were supposed to collect the tax from the primary cultivators, in return for an allowance of one-tenth of the collections, given either in cash or by way of allotment of revenue-free land. The *zamindari* right was like a property inherited according to the laws and customs governing the inheritance of other properties.

Thus, during the *mughal* period two groups of revenue extractors viz. *jagirdars* and *zamindars*, whose involvement in direct agricultural production was almost nil, were of enormous importance. While what the producer was supposed to pay was fixed in law, what was actually taken depended on the powers and inclinations of *jagirdars* and *zamindars*. During the declining days of the *Mughal* empire, this system became quite oppressive.

4.3 THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

A notable feature of village life in pre-British period was the combination of agricultural work with manufacturing. Production was mainly for direct use and the surplus after payment of revenue was marketed. Relationship of the village with town was largely one way i.e. it hardly received anything in return (except salt and kerosene) and provided for almost all of its needs from within the village. Normally, the peasants of the village claimed the same ancestry and so belonged to the same

brotherhood (*bhaichara*). This fraternity feeling, deep rooted to the social system of the village by blood- ties, bound the peasants in unity in a far stronger manner than could be expected from mere neighbours. Authority in the village was exercised by a group of elders, traditionally a council of five persons, called the *panchayat*.

Contrary to the view that peasants had common ownership in land, many scholars have opined that the individual families had their separate holdings and only the forest and grazing grounds were commonly held. Views also differ over the homogeneous nature of peasantry as economic differentiation within the peasantry had reportedly emerged during the *mughal* period. It is pointed out that in northern India, as also in other parts of the *mughal* empire, there were some large cultivators raising crops for the market and there were many small peasants who could barely produce food-grains for their own subsistence. Also, beyond this differentiation among the peasantry, there were sharper divisions on the basis of upper and lower castes. Depending on their resources in seed, cattle and money, peasants could cultivate larger or smaller plots. Larger land holdings were linked to, and often resulted from, superior position or status secured either as headmen or as members belonging to dominant elements of the village.

Check Your Progress 1 (Answer in 50 words in the space given below)

- 1) Do you think that, during the pre-British period, the peasants who were actually tilling the land enjoyed the 'ownership rights' in the strict juridical sense?

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- 2) How was the value of production of crops estimated during the pre-British period?

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- 3) Name the two types of intermediaries who collected the land revenue during the pre-British period? What was the major difference between the two?

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- 4) What were the major factors that kept 'the village community' unified as one 'single self-contained entity' during the pre-British period in India?

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4.4 ADVENT AND IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE

As we noted above, before the Britisher's invaded India, the village community was a self-contained place with a mix of agriculture and manufacturing activities. During the British rule there was widespread destruction of village industries leading to shifting of artisans to agriculture mostly to work as agricultural labourers. Some of its immediate consequences were: (i) formation of land market, (ii) rising rents, (iii) indebtedness, (iv) formation of layers of intermediaries, (v) frequent famines, (vi) impoverishment of a section of the population, etc. We shall, in this section, take a look at the major impact of British rule on some selected areas of economic importance to the agricultural development of India.

4.4.1 Land Revenue System

A number of modifications were introduced in the land revenue system during the British Period. For instance, the East India Company took over the financial rights of Bengal, Bihar and parts of Orissa in the year 1765. The company's sole interest was to collect maximum revenue to: (i) finance its trade and commerce, and (ii) maintain the army for strengthening and expansion of its rule in the country. To realize higher land revenue, the *zamindaris* were auctioned to the highest bidders. This policy greatly altered the composition of landed society as many old *zamindars* could not compete in the new system. The highest bidders at the auction were invariably people having association with the new administration through participation in trade and commerce. The peasants were thus kept totally out of this change and were also literally robbed by the unscrupulous *zamindars*. This reckless process, which continued till the *permanent settlement in 1793*, resulted in frequent famines and loss of human life. Large areas of land were rendered waste.

4.4.2 Eastern India: Permanent Settlement of 1793

The Permanent Settlement of 1793 in Bengal and Bihar declared the *zamindars* 'proprietors of the land' and fixed their dues to the state. This move was considered to ensure not only the security of revenue but also the prosperity of the company's commerce. The time period coincided with the time of Industrial Revolution in Britain for which a thriving commerce from India, with agriculture in particular providing a variety of goods for export, was considered important. The creation of private property in land was expected to establish the right conditions for investment in agriculture by the rich natives with ownership of large stretches of land. An associated objective was the creation of a class of loyal supporters (i.e. *zamindars*) to provide greater stability to the British rule.

However, the expectations were only partially fulfilled. As far as the creation of a class of loyal supporters was concerned, the British substantially succeeded. But

the *zamindars*, new (i.e. those who became *zamindars* to get the benefit of British patronage) as well as old (i.e. who were already functioning as such and continued to do so), failed to become agrarian capitalists but turned into feudal landlords. Thus, capital was invested not for agricultural development but for purchasing land. Further, in course of time a long chain of intermediaries came into existence between the state and the tiller. The *zamindars* were expected to pay a fixed sum as revenue (i.e. the permanent settlement) to the government which in 1793 amounted to 90 percent of the revenue collected by the *zamindars*. With increase in prices, the value of the income of *zamindars* got further eroded. The state also lost as its revenues in money terms were fixed. As rents were not regulated, the peasants were the worst hit and any increased value of agricultural produce was appropriated by the *zamindars*. The Bengal model was, therefore, not replicated in Orissa and Assam as the British realized that freezing the land revenue by a permanent settlement affects them the most with revenue from land being the most important of all its sources of income. In view of this, in Orissa and Assam settlements, the revenue demand from land was not kept fixed but increased from time to time.

4.4.3 Northern and Central India: Zamindari/Mahalwari Systems

The revenue system followed in Northern India was a mix of both the *zamindari* and *mahalwari* systems. While the basic unit for revenue assessment in the *zamindari* system was the 'primary cultivator', in the *mahalwari* system the unit of revenue assessment was the 'village'. Initially, the Bengal type of permanent settlement was followed in the Northern region. After 1811, considerations of enhancement of revenue led to the abandonment of fixed revenue system. However, the *mahalwari* system was experimented in some parts of Punjab and 'united provinces' making the payment of revenue the joint responsibility of both the individual cultivator and the village proprietary body (i.e. the *gram sabha*). In the central parts of India, in the early decades of British rule, a policy of 'excessive assessment' was adopted. Under this, the lands were assessed so high that payment of revenue became impossible. This rendered many people impoverished. Following strong protests and condemnation, in 1834, a longer settlement for twenty years was made which continued till the early 1860s. Later, under a new settlement in 1864 in the Central Provinces, revenue-payers were recognized as the proprietors of the land with a right to sell or mortgage their property. Tenancy rights were also conferred on the cultivators. Further, a system of land revenue, limited to one-half of the rental of estates in principle, was implemented. However, in practice, it was rarely adhered to at the time of assessment/collection.

4.4.4 Western and Southern India: Ryotwari System

The system of revenue collection adopted in the western province was the '*ryotwari system*'. Under this, the settlement was normally for a fixed period of 30 years. Under the *ryotwari* settlement, the '*ryoti cultivator*' was recognized as proprietor and the land revenue was fixed permanently based on the estimated value of the gross produce. The cultivator was allowed to sub-let, mortgage or transfer the land either by gift or by sale deed. Further, a '*ryot*' (i.e. the tiller-cultivator) could not be evicted as long as she/he paid the revenue. Likewise, even in the Madras Presidency (excluding coastal Andhra where permanent *zamindari* system was

introduced) the *ryotwari* system was instituted. All uncultivated lands were deemed to be under the control of the state which could let them out to be cultivated at freshly assessed rates. Though the system favoured peasant proprietorship, it also accommodated large land owners, as was the case in the Malabar region of Kerala.

Check Your Progress 2 (Answer in about 50 words in the space given below)

- 1) What were the immediate consequences on ‘the village community’s’ cohesive character on account of the Britisher’s policy on village industries?

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- 2) What were the two basic motives behind the collection of land revenue from the agricultural class by the British? What was the approach adopted for the realisation of these objectives?

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- 3) Why was the Bengal model of ‘permanent settlement’ for revenue collection not followed in Orissa and Assam?

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- 4) What were the basic units of revenue assessment under the *zamindari* and the *mahalwari* systems? As compared to these two systems, under the *ryotwari* system, what were the basic rights conferred on the ‘ryot-tiller’?

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- 5) What were the two expectations of the British behind the creation of ‘private property’ in land? To what extent was this realised and why?

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4.5 COMMERCIALISATION OF AGRICULTURE

Commercialisation (see Key Words) of agriculture during the British rule was rendered possible with the coming of railways. Peasants were allowed to produce both for sale in distant markets and export. The period was also marked for major changes of both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Qualitative changes (besides the introduction of railways) included: (i) removal of constraints such as market imperfections in the form of multiplicity of weights and measures; (ii) improving the obsolete/risky transportation systems; and (iii) minimizing the extensive use of barter as a method of trade. These measures enabled closer integration of global, regional and local markets. India thus began specializing in agricultural exports. Quantitative changes, on the other hand, included: (i) increase in value of exports by nearly 500 percent between 1870 and 1914; (ii) non-manufactured goods accounting for 70-80 per cent of total exports from India; (iii) increase in the area cropped in most regions during the period 1870-1920; (iv) growth in marketable crops like wheat, cotton, oilseeds, sugarcane, and tobacco; etc. As a result of these, not only the agricultural prices rose but even the rent, both in nominal and real terms, increased. Thus, commercialization of agriculture not only led to increase in the scale of land transfers and land prices, it also increased the number of credit transactions.

The benefits of commercialisation of agriculture once again reached only to some influential segments of the society. In the process, it created a wider gulf between the poor peasants and the rich landlords. For instance, commercial expansion of agriculture during the later years of 20th century gave way to new crops, new transport networks and increased market activity. Developments in these required access to resources like credit, power, storage/transport facilities and markets. Owing to the protection that the *colonial government* gave to influential class of agriculturists and landlords, the control over these resources could be dominated by these groups enabling them to reap maximum benefits/profits. Tenancy legislation, such as the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, which gave occupancy rights to those who had held tenancies for twelve or more years, with the right to sublet, strengthened the position of this important stratum of rural society. Economic success thus became a privilege of those who could use their position in society to secure favoured access to credit, markets and infrastructure.

4.5.1 Impact of the Great Depression of 1930s

The benefits of commercialisation in agriculture began its decline during the period of Great Depression. Export prices fell more sharply than import prices turning the terms of trade against agriculture. This led to increased export of privately owned gold, most it as distress selling, to meet the demands for rent and land revenue. It was also influenced by the bankruptcy of traders and indigenous bankers whose business had suffered due to liquidity crisis. This led to a rise in the real cost of capital with even the rich farmers forced to cut down on capital intensive methods/practices. Labour cost also increased forcing the families having large land holdings to cut down on hired labour. Due to similar conditions elsewhere, employment opportunities outside agriculture also was lacking. Depression, thus strengthened the power of rich landlords even more. Thus, propertied class could gain from the consequences of depression whereas the poor peasants suffered badly.

4.5.2 Indebtedness and Land Transfers

Rural indebtedness was by itself also generally widespread under the British rule. Commercialisation increased the need for credit because of higher investment requirements. Other factors which contributed to increased indebtedness varied for different classes of people. These included: (i) buying food before harvests (particularly by the peasants growing non-food crops); (ii) paying rent and revenue in cash; (iii) meeting the marketing requirements of cash crops; (iv) financing the higher input costs of commercial crops like sugarcane, cotton and tobacco; etc. Amidst these developments, there were crop failures leading to cultivators, and sometimes even *zamindars*, finding themselves unable to repay loans. These led to distress sale of land holdings. Such sales increased in number over the years. Indebtedness thus forced the conversion of many peasants to become poor agricultural labourers.

4.6 AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND TENANCY

Land ownership and tenurial structure underwent important changes during the British period. Agrarian structure in different regions displayed considerable diversity. In Eastern India, landlords owned the bulk of land. In *Ryotwari* areas of Madras and Bombay presidencies, considerable peasant proprietorship existed. Elsewhere, conditions ranged between these two types of situations. The thrust of the British revenue settlements had often been to consolidate middlemen's claims into landlordship. Commercialisation reinforced this impulse. As agricultural prices rose, landlords and moneylenders bought peasant held lands. The peasants who thus lost land were not, necessarily, driven out of land. The old peasants cultivated their sold plots as tenants on a crop sharing basis.

During the later half of the nineteenth century, in South India, the area under cultivation increased faster than the population. Large irrigation works were completed on the *Godavari* and the *Krishna*. The cultivation of cash crops like cotton, groundnut and oilseeds increased. Between 1881-82 and 1915-16, prices of agricultural commodities increased faster than other prices and the terms of trade moved in favour of agriculture. The burden of land revenue fell. The cultivator was able to invest in land. Progress was rapid in some regions, notably in the *Krishna-Godavari* delta. This led to tremendous increase in prices of land. The rich peasants widened the sphere of their activities and invested in rice mills, mica and other industries. They extended their money lending business and went into banking.

In Western India, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was rise of the rich peasantry leading to increased stratification of the peasantry class. Here also, the cultivation of cash crops such as sugarcane, tobacco, groundnut and cotton expanded. The small section of the cultivators who had a surplus to market sale, made large profits and invested them back in agriculture. The investments were made in irrigation, buying carts and seeking better markets for their grains outside their local area. These rich farmers, who had been able to seize the new market opportunities, often replaced the traditional moneylenders as sources of credit in the village. They also purchased the land of small cultivators who were often in heavy debt.

In Eastern India, the *zamindars* committed such excesses that the government

was forced at times to intervene to stop a possible revolt. Two major tenancy acts were enacted in Bengal after the Permanent Settlement: the Rent Act of 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. Under the tenancy Act, occupancy rights were conferred on those *ryots* who had been in possession of any land for twelve consecutive years. Such ‘*occupancy ryots*’ did not necessarily cultivate their holdings on their own and many of them, especially some big *ryots*, further leased out their lands on share-cropping basis. This was mainly motivated by the difference in the rents paid by the occupancy-tenants and share-cropping tenants which yielded a huge profit to the former. This was possible as there was no legal protection against increase of rent by the non-occupancy tenants. The situation was so bad that in 1948, the *Zamindari Abolition Committee Report* stated that in the North-Western provinces greater part of land (i.e. more than half of total) was held by such a small group of large landholders amounting to just 1.3 percent of the total population.

4.6.1 Agricultural Labourers

Contrary to the view that in the traditional village economy of pre-British India, there was a much smaller segment of persons working solely as agricultural labourers on the lands of others, the census data suggested a significant increase in the proportion of ‘wage labourers’ in the agriculture. Two factors identified to have contributed to this were: (i) de-industrialisation; and (ii) dispossession of peasantry. Further, the landless labourers mostly came from the lower castes. Despite the increase in the number of agricultural labourers, the agricultural wages remained stable. Factors which contributed to this included: (i) increased area brought under market crops; (ii) work on railway construction/expansion; and (iii) canal excavation works. All these factors also contributed to an improvement in the social status of the depressed castes to which most of the agricultural labourers belonged. The element of compulsion and force in their employment became weaker and various forms of social oppression (such as enforced dress codes and codes of conduct with respect to upper castes) became weaker too. Migration within and outside agriculture (e.g. plantations, mines, urban services, public works, etc.) increased. The situation of agricultural labourers thus improved to a great extent.

4.6.2 Agricultural Growth

The network of relationships among the various groups of persons depending for their livelihood from land was such that it was not providing incentives to invest in land. Substantial proportion of agricultural production was reserved for the parasitic right holders who received income without participation in agricultural work. No surplus/incentive was left with actual cultivator for investment. The cultivators also avoided risk and resisted change due to their poor economic status and lack of incentives. This complex network of legal, economic and social relations served to produce an effect, which Daniel Thorner termed as ‘*Built-in-Depressor*’.

The net result was that agricultural growth varied from low growth to near stagnation. During the period of 1891 to 1947, agricultural output rose by just 0.37 percent per annum significantly lower than the population growth rate of 0.67 percent per annum. In particular, growth rate of food grains output was a mere 0.11 percent. After 1921, population growth accelerated to over 1 percent per annum but food grains output could not grow fast enough. As a result, the per capita output fell markedly. Commercial crop output, however, increased rapidly - nearly doubling

its output over the period.

In general, the output growth was higher in *ryotwari* and *mahalwari* areas. Greater Bengal was the area where land tenure structure was most retrogressive. There were layers of parasitic intermediaries living on rental incomes. Though in Punjab also area under tenancy was quite high, tenants were mostly small owners who leased land from landowners and lived in the village supervising their cultivation. Tenancy in Punjab was basically a method of labour mobilisation by those owners whose holdings were bigger than what could be cultivated with family labour. An important source of agricultural growth in Punjab was the expansion of irrigation works and total area under agriculture. Though in India as a whole the British were neglecting irrigation works, yet in Punjab there was a tremendous investment in irrigation. More specifically, the area irrigated by government canals during 1901-02 to 1939-40 in Punjab increased from about 4.5 million acres to 12.5 million acres and the area in agriculture from 23 million acres to 31 million acres during this period.

In areas where agricultural growth was stagnant, two factors are identified as responsible for it. These are: (a) the structure of rights to land; and (b) resource endowments. In the *zamindari* areas, the benefits of commercialization weighed more heavily in favour of renters who did not cultivate land directly. In the *ryotwari* settlements, a section of the peasantry tended to benefit more. Thus, an adverse combination of superior rights and non-agricultural background was responsible for lower investment and lower increase in land productivity. The **resources** - water, land, and people - were unequally distributed across space, owing to both natural and manmade factors. The rice-growing regions like Bengal, Bihar, and eastern UP were having high population densities whereas southern rice regions like *Cauvery* delta and the *Godavari-Krishna* delta did well commercially. Both these areas of south shared two points of distinction viz. (a) good irrigation which made it possible to combine rice with dry-season crops, and (b) lower population densities.

Millet-growing dry regions had land in plenty. When canal irrigation made lands cultivable (as in Punjab and Western UP), the dry areas were better placed in terms of average land per peasant. These conditions enabled diversification into cash crops, such as wheat and cotton, in areas hitherto specialized in millets. Such manmade conditions of progress, however, became available only on a limited scale.

Check Your Progress 3 (answer in about 50 words in the space given)

- 1) What were the major qualitative changes that came to be introduced in the direction of 'commercialisation of agriculture' during the British period?

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- 2) What were the four major quantitative changes that was evidenced on account of policies to increase ‘commercialisation of Indian agriculture’?

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- 3) Which factors contributed to a decline in the progress of ‘commercialisation of agriculture’? How were the poor peasants affected by these?

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- 4) Which parts of India prospered least in agricultural development during the British period? What were the factors that contributed towards this?

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- 5) What major change in the demographic structure was noticed during the years of 1900s? Did this have any adverse effect on the average wage level? Why?

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- 6) What did Daniel Thorner mean when he termed the prevailing agrarian situation during the last years of British period as ‘*built-in-depressor*’? What was the net effect on the growth of Indian agriculture during the years of 1900-1940?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

The unit began with a brief overview of the situation that prevailed on the land ownership and tenancy structures during the *mughal* period. It subsequently dealt

with the issues and circumstances which shaped the Indian agriculture during the period of British rule. The contents bring forth the fact that development of agricultural sector was more directed to suit the interests of the imperial government and in its process created and left behind deep social divisions in the Indian polity. A significant evidence of this self-serving motive of the British is seen in the deliberate destroying of industries that co-existed in the pre-British times making the traditional village economy of those times a self-supported holistic economic entity. However, conferring the proprietary rights to the tiller-peasants, expansion of the non-farm sector like railways, marketing networks, etc. to make the agricultural sector commercially develop, supportive investment in irrigation made in some provinces, etc. are examples of positive steps taken to promote agricultural development in the pre-independent years. Nonetheless, poor peasants have had to endure suffering to the point of impoverishment, mainly due to the patronage extended to the rich landlords by the British, despite the significant profits generated from the agricultural sector. The *ryotwari* system, as an institutional alternative, have fared better than the *zamindari* system with the *mahalwari* system also appearing to have done reasonably well. Bengal as a region or province has had a relatively less progressive status which has been termed by some writers as retrogressive. The unit has served to provide the background needed to understand the nature of inheritance in respect of the large agricultural economy by the post-independence policy makers in the country.

4.8 KEY WORDS

- Mahalwari system** : A system of revenue assessment/collection in which the unit of assessment was ‘village’. Under this system, the payment of revenue was the joint responsibility of the primary cultivator and the village heads i.e. *gram sabha*.
- Ryotwari system** : This is a system in which the ‘*ryot*’ i.e. the cultivator is recognised as the proprietor of land. In this system, the land revenue was fixed permanently based on the estimated value of the gross produce. Though the system favoured peasant-proprietorship, it also accommodated large land owners.
- Jagirdars/Zamindars** : Two class of intermediaries who collected land revenue to the *mughal* kings by the cultivators.
- Commercialisation** : The word has acquired different meanings at different times and has evolved in response to different stimuli. Earlier, growing of cash crops like cotton, sugarcane, jute, tobacco, etc. (that were grown exclusively for the market i.e. outside of self-consumption) had been considered synonymous with commercialisation. Over time, even food grains were produced for the market due to cash needs of the farmers. This transition has been hastened by the green revolution which increased the marketable surplus. Favourable price policy for food grains has also contributed to this transition.

4.9 SUGGESTED REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING

- 1) Dharma Kumar and Meghand Desai (eds.) (1982), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2.
- 2) Irfan Habib (2006), *Indian Economy: 1858-1914*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, Chapter 3.
- 3) Tirthankar Roy (2006), *The Economic History of India 1857-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Chapter 4.
- 4) Tomlinson, B. R. (1993), *The Economy of Modern India 1860-1970*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, Chapter 2.

4.10 ANSWERS/HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 4.2, 1st para and answer.
- 2) See section 4.2.1 [yield per unit of land \times area under that crop].
- 3) See section 4.3 and answer.
- 4) See section 4.4 [same ancestry, brotherhood, fraternity feelings, blood-ties, etc.].

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See section 4.4, 1st para (i) to (vi) and answer.
- 2) See section 4.4.1 and answer.
- 3) See section 4.4.2 and answer [because with price increase, the fixed settlement yielded less revenue from land].
- 4) See section 4.4.3 [primary cultivator and village]
- 5) See section 4.4.2 and answer [establish the right conditions for investment in agriculture by the rich natives and creation of a class of loyal supporters].
- 6) See section 4.4.4 and answer [sub-letting/mortgaging/transferring by gift/sale deed].

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 4.5, 1st para, and answer.
- 2) See section 4.5, 1st para, and answer.
- 3) See section 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 and answer.
- 4) See section 4.4.3 [primary cultivator and village].
- 5) See section 4.5, last para and answer.
- 6) See section 4.6.2 and answer.