

Part-III: Chapter 1
COLONIALISM AND THE COUNTRYSIDE: Exploring Official Archives
Revision Notes

Key concepts in nutshell

- Bengal - Establishment of colonial rule - New land revenue, Auction system under Warren Hastings - 1793, Permanent Revenue settlement in Bengal by Lord Cornwallis.
- Crises in village economy, revenue demand of the state was fixed.
- The rise of the **Jotedars** - their land was cultivated through share croppers.
- Resistance of **Zamindars** - their land was auctioned frequently.
- The fifth report submitted to British Parliament 1813.
- The Hoe and the Plough - Shifting agriculture, expensive of village economy.
- **Paharias** - hunters, shifting cultivators, food gatherers connected with forests, invaded settled farmers 1770.
- **Santhals** - Settled in Bengal - practiced cultivation land demarcated to them known as Daman-i-koh.
- Conflicts with unsettled paharias -1850 - they resisted the British - Santhal revolt.
- Revolt in the Bombay and Deccan - 1875.
- Burning of account book of moneylenders and shopkeepers.
- New revenue System - Ryotwari system in Bombay Deccan - direct settlement, land assessed for 30 years subject to periodic revision.

1. The problem of unpaid revenue

- I. In introducing the permanent settlement, the British hoped to resolve the problems they had been facing since the conquest of Bengal.
- II. The rural economy in Bengal was in crisis with recurrent famines and declining agricultural output.
- III. The problem lay in identifying individuals who could both improve agriculture and contract to pay the fixed revenue to the state.
- IV. The permanent settlement was made with the rajas and taluqdars of Bengal.
- V. They were classified as Zamindars and had to pay the revenue that was fixed.



- VI. The Zamindar was not the landowner in the village, but a revenue collector of the state.
- VII. The zamindar collected rent from different villages, paid the revenue to the company, and retained the differences as his income.
- VIII. He was expected to pay the Company regularly, failing which his estate could be auctioned.

2. Why zamindars defaulted on payments?

- i. **High initial demand:** The initial demand was very high. It was felt that if the demand was fixed for all time to come, the Company would never be able to claim a share of increased income from land when prices rose and cultivation expanded. To minimise this anticipated loss, the Company pegged the revenue demand high, arguing that the burden on zamindars would gradually decline as agricultural production expanded and prices rose.
- ii. **Imposition of high demand:** This high demand was imposed in the 1790s, a time when the prices of agricultural produce were depressed, making it difficult for the ryots (raiyyat, used to designate peasants) to pay their dues to the zamindar. If the zamindar could not collect the rent, how could he pay the Company?
- iii. **The revenue was invariable:** The revenue was invariable, regardless of the harvest, and had to be paid punctually. In fact, according to the Sunset Law, if payment did not come in by sunset of the specified date, the zamindari was liable to be auctioned.
- iv. **Powers of Zamindars limited:** The Permanent Settlement initially limited the power of the zamindar to collect rent from the ryot and manage his zamindari.

3. The rise of the jotedars

- I. A group of rich peasants consolidated their position in the villages.
- II. This class of rich peasant was known as jotedar.
- III. The jotedars had acquired vast areas of land.
- IV. They controlled local trade as well as money lending, exercising immense power over the poorer cultivators of the region.
- V. A large part of their land was cultivated through sharecroppers (adhiyars or bargadars).
- VI. When the estate of the zamindar was auctioned for failure to make revenue payment, jotedars were often amongst the purchasers.
- VII. The jotedars were the most powerful in North Bengal, in some places they were called



haoladars, gantidars or mandals.

4. The accounts of Buchanan

- I. Francis Buchanan was a physician and an employee of the British East India Company.
- II. He marched everywhere with a large army of people – draughtsmen, surveyors, palanquin bearers, coolies.
- III. The cost of the travels was borne by the East India Company.
- IV. He was perceived as an agent of the sarkar.
- V. He observed the stones and rocks and different strata and layers of soil.
- VI. He searched for minerals and stones that were commercially valuable, he recorded all signs of iron ore and mica, granite and saltpetre.
- VII. He carefully observed the local practices of salt –making and iron ore mining.
- VIII. Buchanan's journal were packed with observations.

5. A Revolt in the Countryside: The Bombay Deccan

Through the nineteenth century, peasants in various parts of India rose in revolt against moneylenders and grain dealers. One such revolt occurred in 1875 in the Deccan.

a. Account books were burnt

- i. The movement began at Supa, a large village in Poona (present-day Pune) district.
- ii. It was a market centre where many shopkeepers and moneylenders lived.
- iii. On 12 May 1875, ryots from surrounding rural areas gathered and attacked the shopkeepers, demanding their bahi khata (account books) and debt bonds.
- iv. They burnt the khata, looted grain shops, and in some cases set fire to the houses of sahukars.

b. A new revenue system

- i. As British rule expanded from Bengal to other parts of India, new systems of revenue were imposed.
- ii. Since the revenue demand was fixed under the Permanent Settlement, the colonial state could not claim any share of this enhanced income.
- iii. Keen on expanding its financial resources, the colonial government had to think of ways to maximise its land revenue.
- iv. The revenue system that was introduced in the Bombay Deccan came to be known as the ryotwari settlement.
- v. Unlike the Bengal system, the revenue was directly settled with the ryot. The



average income from different types of soil was estimated, the revenue-paying capacity of the ryot was assessed and a proportion of it fixed as the share of the state.

vi. The revenue demand was no longer permanent.

c. **Revenue demand and peasant debt**

- i. The first revenue settlement in the Bombay Deccan was made in the 1820s.
- ii. The revenue that was demanded was so high that in many places peasants deserted their villages and migrated to new regions. In areas of poor soil and fluctuating rainfall the problem was particularly acute. When rains failed and harvests were poor, peasants found it impossible to pay the revenue. However, the collectors in charge of revenue collection were keen on demonstrating their efficiency and pleasing their superiors. So they went about extracting payment with utmost severity. When someone failed to pay, his crops were seized and a fine was imposed on the whole village

6. **The Deccan Riots Commission**

- i. When the revolt spread in the Deccan, the Government of Bombay was initially unwilling to see it as anything serious.
- ii. But the Government of India, worried by the memory of 1857, pressurised the Government of Bombay to set up a commission of enquiry to investigate into the causes of the riots.
- iii. The commission produced a report that was presented to the British Parliament in 1878.
- iv. This report provides historians with a range of sources for the study of the riot.

Timeline:

Time Line	
1765	English East India Company acquire Diwani of Bengal
1773	Regulating act passed by the British Parliament to regulate the activities of the East Indian Company
1793	Permanent settlement in Bengal
1800s	Santhals begin to come to the Rajmahal hills and settle there

1818	First revenue prices begin to fall
1820s	A slow process of agrarian expansion in the Bombay deccan
1840s-50s	Santhal Rebellion
1861	Cotton boom begins
1875	Ryots in Deccan villages rebel