

CHAPTER-10

COLONIALISM AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

Exploring Official Archives

Q. 01. What are the problems of using official sources in writing about the history of peasants.

Anns. Following are the problems in using official sources in working about the history of peasants :

- (i) There are official sources and reflect only British official concerns and interpretation of all events from the outlook and angles of the English. For example, the Deccan riots commission was specifically asked to judge whether the level of Government revenue demand of the cause of the revolt.
- (ii) Most of the events, revolts and happening have been presented in a biased manner. The colonial Government and official had their own political, economic, religious, cultural and social interest. They had always tried to present picture of Indian Society people tradition culture and even the achievements.
- (iii) The sources have been presented and recorded by such clever and naughty people who have intentionally presented things with false evidences also. For example, the Deccan Riot Commission after presenting all the findings with such evidences which was utilized to give authenticity to the report of the commission. The commission has presented this fabricated fact the Government demand was not the cause the peasants angles. It was the

moneylenders (again Indian) who were to blame. Such an argument is found very frequently in British colonial records. This shows that there was a persistence on the part of the colonial government to admit that popular discontent was ever on account of Government action.

- (iv) Official reports, thus are invaluable sources for the reconstruction of history. But they have to be always read the case and just opposed with evidence called from newspapers, unofficial accounts, legal records and, where possible, oral sources.

Q. 02. What steps taken by the British East India Company to control the Zamindars ?

Ans. The British East India Company took the following steps mainly to maintain its control over the Zamindars.

- (i) The zamindars' troops were disbanded, customs, duties abolished, and their cutcheries (Courts) brought under the supervision of collector appointed by the company.
- (ii) The power to deliver local judgement was also taken away from zamindars. In fact zamindars hold their control and leadership through local caste and other panchayats. They lost their power to organize local police. Over time the collectorate emerged as an alternative centre of authority, severely restricting what the zamindar could do.
- (iii) In case a Raja (powerful zamindars) failed to pay the land revenue, a Company official was speedily dispatched to his zamindari which explicit instruction "to take charge of the District and to use the most effectual means to destroy all the influence and the authority of the zamindar and his officers.

- (iv) Some of the scholars believe that some trouble creators were also used as tools to reduce the influence of Rajahs. For example, when the zamindar despatched their amlah (collector of revenue or representative of zamindar). Some naughty people use to create problem for zamindars. Some ryots deliberately delayed payment. Rich ryots and village headmen jotedars and mandals-were only too happy to see the Zamindar in trouble. The zamindar could therefore not easily arrest his power over them.

Q. 03. Why was the jotedars a powerful figure in many areas of rural Bengal?

Anns. The jotedars a power figure in many areas of rural Bengal become while several Zamindars were facing a crisis at the end of the 18th century, a group of rich peasants were consolidating their position in the villages. For example, in rural area of North Bengal we get reference about a rich class of peasant they were known as jotedars.

Causes :

- (i) by the early nineteenth century, jotedars had acquired vast areas of land-sometimes as much as several thousand areas.
- (ii) They controlled local trade as well as moneylending, exercising immense power over the poor cultivators of the region
- (iii) A large part of their land was cultivated through share croppers (adhiyars or bargadars) who brought their own plough, laboured in the field, and handed over half the produce to the jotedars after the harvest.