

Hazardous Impacts of the Mahalwari system on Village Community

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ABSTRACT: - There were three main land revenue settlements which were introduced in British India under the administration of East India Company (EIC). Mahalwari was main of them that was introduced in most areas of North Western Provinces and the Undivided Punjab. This land revenue settlement was to be made village by village or estate (mahal) by estate with head of the village or mahal. In mahalwari system the land revenue was not fixed permanently but revised time to time mostly after 30 years. But it was not suitable for circumstances of northern British India. One of the worst result of the operation of mahalwari system was the breakup of the institution of village community. The fee of land in this system was very high. The British govt accepted as tax in cash only. The villagers were unsecure, uncertain because the charges were very high and they were not able to pay. This system broke the institution of village community. It destroyed the old economical basis of the village economy in India. This paper attempts the hazards of the Mahalwari system on village community and the draw out the limitation of mahalwari system.

KEYWORDS: History, land revenue, destruction of village community, Holt Mackenzie, Karl Marx

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

As the changing life in Indian Village marked best the impact of the British land revenue policies, special mahalwari system on the Indian people. This study has been made to characterize the Indian villages in British period. It shows how the concern of mahalwari system by British transformed the basic land contact in the villages which were governed by traditional customs and procedure. It logically defines how the British tampered the basic stability of the villages through the introduction of the concept of mortgage, sale and transferability of land.

METHODOLOGY

This research methodology was used to investigate and interpret the hazards impact of mahalwari system by British rule on Indian villages from the nineteenth century. This research paper based on secondary data.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of mahalwari system was first under the regulation VII of 1822. It was an intermediary type of the land settlement, first implemented by Lord Wellesley between 1801 and 1802. Though the idea of this system was first presented in the minute of 1st July 1819 by Holt Mackenzie, then secretary of the Territorial Department Board of Revenue. The settlement attained maturity under the *Regulation IX of 1833* under the supervision of R. Martins Bird and completed by James Thomason in 1844. A survey was made by British Govt. in 1927-28; mahalwari system of land revenue settlement covered 30% area of the British total control. This land revenue system was first introduced in the Gangetic Doab considered as the heart land of British India and latter on it extended

up to the region of central Provinces and the British Punjab. This area still rated as the best region of India in terms of food grain production. It also covered some portion of present Maharashtra, Haryana and Rajasthan and also operated in present national capital region. It was village based system, in which village bodies that jointly owned the village were responsible for the land revenue. Village bodies could be in charge of varying areas, from part of a village to several villages. The composition of the village body varied from place to place: In some areas it was a single person or family and hence very much like the Bengal landlord system (*zamindari*), while in other areas, the village bodies were larger and each person was responsible for a fixed share of the revenue. This share was either determined by ancestry (the *pattidari* system), or based on actual possession of the land (the *bhaiachara* system), the latter being very much like the individual-based *raiayatwari* system.

Demolition of the Village Community

The mahalwari system destroyed the economical base of village economy carried out by the village community. This system forced the peasantry to grow commercial crops because the rental demand of the state realized in cash. The operation of mahalwari system created proprietary rights in land which made land a property of a private and personal. The concept of individualism gets the place of community assets. The introduction of propriety rights in land open the gate for the capitalistic mode of production. According to Marx the British rule in India destroyed and annihilated its most important basis of village economy carried out by the institution of village communities. Sir Charles Metcalfe, who succeeded William Bentinck as Governor- General and Lieutenant Governor of North Western Provinces from 1 June 1836 to June 1838 has opinion that the institution of village community was the heart and soul of the Indian village economy and so of land revenue administration. Carle Marx asserts that the introduction of railways and improved system of communication played a prominent role in the destruction of the village community. He pointed out that the village isolation produced the absence of roads in India, and the absence of roads perpetuated the village isolation. It affected the whole village as well as agrarian set- up of India and altered the inward- oriented peasant community into an outward- oriented community.

Back ground of this exploitation: - In the beginning of 19th century industrial revolution happened in the Great Britain. These historical events transformed the whole economic scenario of England. The need of raw materials for the industrial revolution .The manufacturing and trading community of Britain wanted a fresh market to sell their products. Therefore India then called “Golden Sparrow” could meet the demands and provided the market for the British products. So India became the agricultural farm of England.

Mode and methods which were adopted:-

The colonial administration of EIC created proprietary rights in land because they wanted to introduce the concept of private property in land, which helps them in the maximization process of land revenue and so optimum exploitation of Indian peasantry. The process of proprietary rights or claims distributed the fundamental rights of the zamindars. Under the proprietary rights exercise, the zamindars became an agency of exploitation and hardship and peasants were never rewarded for

the good yield. The increments in the productivity of agriculture had been taken by the proprietors and peasants were forced to live with bare only.

Karl Marx remarks rightly explored out the disintegrating factors of the village community in India. His first argument that some of the ancient institutions of the village community in India have continued down to this day which means that the rest of all have been disintegrated. Secondly, he claimed that land becomes a commodity for market which generates surplus for the state. Third notion of Marx's assumption refers to 'those of the simplest form' and the complex ones are not included; wherein a different state of production naturally prevailed. In fourth perception, Marx uses the phrase "unchangeableness of Asiatic Society" only in a relative sense.

When land became a commodity for market and transfer of land made easy by mortgage, purchase and buying, the British government introduced a full capitalistic conception of property in land. The transfer of land took place mainly on two basic results of forced sales of land because of land revenue arrears, and the frauds of the subordinate revenue servants. The landholding structure dominated by the institution of the village communities was nonetheless subjected to severe change through sale laws, private transfers of land and commercialization of crops. These all factors played a prominent role in the demolition of the institution of the village community. The creation of private property in wasteland also contributed greatly in the demolition of the institution of village community. The wasteland property under the possession ship of the village communities now made available for the new proprietor. It pressured the cultivators because they used it freely before this system was introduced.

The village community had originated with a distant ancestor, and had the same religion and caste. According to the custom of the community each member had the right to transfer his share wholly or partially by sale or in any other way, to persons belonging to any religion or caste. The exercise of these rights to a considerable extent lead to the sub-division or fragmentation of the actual joint holding into smaller ones called *thokes* or *behris*. The religion and caste of the joint owners of the *thokes* and *behris* differed far from the original community where transfer laid positive effects. This type of development naturally weakens the hold of joint ownership of village community. The new group of proprietors (zamindars, taluqdars, urban merchants and moneylenders) could exercise all economic pressure on the cultivating class and forced them to live with the bare subsistence. The new class of exploiter enjoyed all the surplus of agricultural productivity which was the property of peasants in real sense. In 1830s, the combination of commercial depression and continued harsh assessments drove the cultivating communities into debt and arrears on their land revenue payment. The new pattern of land settlement brought a more precise definition of landed rights. The result was a dramatic and altogether unforeseen increase in the enforced transfer of property through the agency of the civil courts. Ultimately, the beneficiaries from the operation of new settlement proved to be its victims too. The load of revenue debt, which had accumulated over the years, was the product of consistent heavy assessment. These mounting debt and arrears obviously contributed in the process of disintegration of village communities.

The centralized form of land revenue administration, the establishment of police and law courts and the extension of modern means of communication broke the isolation of villages. The isolation of

villages broke the mutual based barter economy which was the basis of Indian economy from the very beginning of ancient civilization. The new means of communication connected the villages to the other parts of the country in easy way and ended the domination of village organization.

High rents and increasing amount of agricultural rural indebtedness pushed the village top-guns to seek employment in urban areas. The above two causes together given rise to rural migration. Rural migration got pace by the destruction of village handicrafts which left no option of work in villages. The British government created a situation from where peasants were no longer in a position to raise their crops and lived on them. The villages were never be completely independent but entered into a condition where changes in the set-up seems compulsory and brought to an end of village organization. The new situation created by the British administration ended the self-sufficiency of village community which was nothing more than a traditional form of ancient agency of social control, social security and a bulwark against social change. The self-sufficiency of the villages had broken down when the village economy got connected with the world market due to the innovation of advanced means of communication.

Conclusion

The impact of British government land revenue policies especially mahalwari system on the people meant essentially the impact of government on the village. Accordingly, in pre-British era, the village communities represented an economic stability resting on a balanced system of agriculture, village industry and local trade. The laws of demand and supply operated in a natural manner and general happiness prevailed. However, the British rule unleashed far-reaching changes on agricultural based Indian village structure. Excessive land revenue demands proved counter-productive. Agriculture began to languish, large areas went out of cultivation and famines stared the people in the face. Right from the beginning of their relationship with India, the British, who had come as traders and had become rulers and administrators, had influenced the economic and political systems of the country. One result of the British rule was the sudden and quick collapse of the rural cottage industries caused by the competition with cheaper imported machine-made goods from Britain. The building of railways and the oppression practiced by East India Company together with the gradual disappearance of Indian rulers and courts served to accentuate and accelerate the process. The ruined artisans and craftsmen unable to find an alternative job began to come to villages and crowded agriculture. This broke the union of agriculture and self-sufficient rural economy. The peasant was also progressively impoverished under the British rule. The British policy of extracting the largest possible amount of land revenue ruined the peasant's condition. In the mahalwari land revenue settlement areas, the most of peasants remained unpleasant. They were left at the mercies of the zamindars and lumberdars (head of village or mahal) that ransacked them, compelled them to pay illegal dues and to perform forced labour. The high land revenue demand was accompanied by rigidity in collection, rise of new landed gentry, and intrusion of money lenders. All this resulted in the unprecedented poverty in Indian villages throughout the British regime.

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