

Peasants, Zamindars and the State Agrarian Society and the Mughal Empire

NCERT TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

1. What are the problems in using the Ain as a source for reconstructing agrarian history?

How do historians deal with this situation?

- Ans.**(a) The Ain-i Akbari written by Abu'l Fazl in 1598 contains invaluable information for reconstructing the agrarian history of the Mughals. But it has its own limitations.
- (b) Numerous errors in totalling have been detected. These are, however, minors and do not detract from the overall quantitative accuracy of the manuals.
- (c) Another limitation is the skewed nature of the data. Data was not collected uniformly from all provinces. For example, Abu'l Fazl has not given any description regarding the caste composition of the zamindars of Bengal and Orissa (Odisha).
- (d) The fiscal data collected from various sources is in detail yet some important parameters such as, wages and prices have not been incorporated properly.
- (e) The detailed list of prices and wages found in the Ain-i Akbari have been acquired from data pertaining to the capital Agra and its surrounding regions. It is, therefore, of limited value for the rest of the empire.
- (f) Historians have dealt with the situation by supplementing the account of the Ain by information got from the provinces. These include detailed seventeenth- eighteenth centuries revenue records from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. These have been also supplemented by records of the East India Company.

2. To what extent is it possible to characterise agricultural production in the sixteenth- seventeenth centuries as subsistence agriculture? Give reasons for your answer.

- Ans.**(a) During Mughal, India was basically an agricultural country. In the Mughal state of India a different varieties of crops were produced. In Bengal two varieties of rices were produced. But the focus on the cultivation of basic crops does not mean that only subsistence

agriculture existed in medieval India.

(b) The Mughal state encouraged peasants to cultivate varieties of crops which brought in revenue especially cotton and sugarcane.

(c) Cotton was mainly grown in vast area which was spread over central India and the Deccan plateau, whereas in Bengal sugarcane was mainly produced.

(d) Many varieties of cash crops such as oilseeds including mustard and lentils.

(e) An average peasant of that time grew both commercial and subsistence crops.

3. Describe the role played by women in agricultural production.

Ans. (a) Women played an important role in agricultural production. They worked shoulder to shoulder with men in the fields. The men tilled and ploughed the lands while the women sowed, weeded and threshed the harvest. Agricultural production at the time was carried out with the labour and resources of the entire.

(b) The women performed important tasks such as spinning yarn, kneading clay for pottery and embroidery. Thus, the peasant women who were skilled artisans worked not only in the fields but even went to their employer's houses and even to the markets, if necessary.

(c) Among the landed gentry class women had the right to inherit property. Women, including widows participated in the rural land market. Selling property which they had inherited especially in Punjab.

(d) Both Hindu and Muslim women inherited zamindaris. They were free to sell or mortgage their zamindari rights. In eighteenth century, Bengal had many women-zamindars. In fact, the Rajshahi zamindari which was one of the most famous of the time was headed by a woman.

4. Discuss, with examples, the significance of monetary transactions during the period under consideration.

Ans. (i) The political stability provided by the Mughal helped in establishing hoarsening trade relation with Ming (China), Safavid (Iran) and Ottoman (Turkey) empires. It led to increase in outland trade from China to the Mediterranean Sea.

(ii) The Discovery of new lands and sea routes also gave an impetus to Asia's trade with Europe. As a result enormous amount of silver entered India as payment for goods bought from India.

(iii) Giovanni Karari, an Italian traveller, who passed through India in 1690 has written how the silver reached India from all parts of the world. From his description, we also came to know how there was an exchange of cash and goods in India in the 17th century.

(iv) This benefitted India as she did not have enough resources of silver. Therefore, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries there was sufficient reserves of silver in India and the silver rupyā was available readily.

(v) The mutual exchange in villages took place. As villagers established their links in the urban markets, there was a considerable increase in monetary transactions. In this way, villages became an important part of the monetary market.

(vi) It was due to the monetary transactions, became easier to pay daily wages to the labourers in cash and not in kind. This resulted in an unprecedented expansion in the minting of coins and circulation of money allowing the Mughal state to extract taxes and revenues in cash.

5. Examine the evidence that suggests that land revenue was important for the Mughal fiscal system.

Ans. (i) Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. Land Revenue collected was used to pay salaries and to meet different kinds of administrative expenses. So it was considered important to establish an administrative apparatus to ensure control over agricultural production.

(ii) Thus, before fixing land revenue, Mughal state first acquired specific information about the extent of agricultural lands and their produce.

(iii) Land revenue collection arrangements consisted of two stages of assessment. These were *Jama* and *hasil*. Cultivators were given the choice to pay land revenue either in cash or kind. The state preferred to collect land revenue as cash. Attempts were made to maximize profits from the land revenue collection.

(iv) Both cultivated and cultivable lands were measured in each province to fix land revenue. According to a decree of Akbar, it was the responsibility of *malguzar* to make cultivator pay land revenue in kind and it was also kept open. Thus, it is clear from the evidence that the monetary transactions were very important. To continue this policy efforts by subsequent emperors like Aurangzeb continued to measure land for collection of land revenue.

6. To what extent do you think caste was a factor in influencing social and economic relations in agrarian society?

Ans. (i) Cultivators were divided on the basis of their caste and other caste-like distinctions or caste-based distinctions. Thus, among the peasants were many who worked as agricultural labourers (*majurs*) or worked as *manacles*. Thus, they were not allowed to live in villages. They resided outside the village and were assigned to do menial tasks and lacked resources. Thus, they were poverty-stricken.

(ii) Caste distinctions had also begun to permeate other communities as well. In Muslim communities menials were like *halkhoron* (scavengers). A direct relation existed between caste poverty and social status.

(iii) In the seventeenth century Marwar Rajputs are described as peasants and equated with *jats*. They were given an inferior status in the caste hierarchy.

(iv) Castes like Ahirs, Gujjars and Malis reached an elevated status in the eastern regions.

(v) The pastoral and fishing castes like the *Sadgops* and *Kaivatas* acquired the status of peasants.

7. How were the lives of forest dwellers transformed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?(or)

Describe the lives of forest-dwellers in the 16-17th centuries.

Ans. Transformation in the lives of forest-dwellers (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries):

(i) Huge areas were covered with forests in the various parts of India in the 16th and 17th century. Forest-dwellers were called *Jangli*. The term '*Jungli*' was used to describe those whose occupations included activities such as hunting, gathering of forest produce, and shifting cultivation. These activities were performed according to a specific reason in the various regions. Consider the example of the *Bhils* who fished in summer and collected forest produce in spring. Such activities enabled the forest tribes to be mobile which was a characteristic feature of their life.

(ii) As the state required elephants for the consolidation of a mighty army, the *peskesh* levied on the forest people to supply of elephants.

(iii) The lives of the forest-dwellers led to the spread of commercial agriculture. Forest products like honey, beeswax, gum and lac were in huge demand. Gum and lac became major items of overseas exports in the seventeenth century, and earned valuable foreign exchange.

(iv) Elephants were also captured and sold.

(v) Tribes like the *Punjab Lohanis* engaged in overland trade with Afghanistan and internal trade in Punjab as well.

(vi) Social factors were also responsible for transforming the lives of the forest-dwellers.

(vii) Many tribal chiefs became *zamindars*, some even became kings. They recruit people from their own tribes in their army. For example in Assam, the *Ahom Kings* depended on people who rendered military services in exchange of land.

(viii) By the sixteenth century, the transition from a tribal to a monarchical system had taken place. In *Ain-i Akbari* description has been mentioned about the existence of tribal kingdoms in north-eastern India. Description is also made regarding the kings who fought and conquered a

number of tribes. New cultural influences also entered in the forested areas. Probably sufi saints played a remarkable role in spreading Islam in these areas.

8. Examine the role played by zamindars in Mughal India.

Ans. The zamindars were the people who did not directly participate in the processes of agricultural production, but they enjoyed high status in the society.

- (i) The zamindars considered their land as their property (milkiyat). They had control to sell, give and mortgage their property.
- (ii) They enjoyed many social and economic privileges because of their superior status in society.
- (iii) The zamindars belonged to the upper caste which added to their exalted status in society.
- (iv) The zamindars rendered certain services (khidmat) for the state. As a result of their service they received and attained higher position in the state.
- (v) The zamindars had the right to collect revenue on behalf of the state and also received financial compensation for this work.
- (vi) The zamindars had kept strict control over the military resources of the state. They kept a fortress and a well knit armed unit comprising cavalry, artillery and infantry.
- (vii) The zamindars also played significant role in developing the agricultural land. They helped in the settlements of farmers by lending them money and agricultural instruments. It resulted in an increase in agricultural produce and the sale and purchase of land by the zamindars. There are also evidences that the zamindars held bazaars. The farmers came to these bazaars to sell their crops.
- (viii) If we observe social relation of village of Mughal age as a pyramid then zamindars were at the top. They occupied the highest position in the society.
- (ix) No doubt the zamindars exploited the people but their relations with the farmers depended on their mutual togetherness and hereditary part on age. So, they were able to get peasants in case of the revolt against the state.

9. Discuss the ways in which panchayat and village headmen regulated rural society. (or)

Explain the role of Panchayats in the Mughal rural Indian society during 16th-17th centuries.

Ans. Regulation of rural society by panchayats and headmen:

- (i) Meaning of panchayat: The village panchayat consisted of an assembly of elders, they represent different castes and communities except the menial class. Usually important were people of the village with hereditary right over their property.
- (ii) General composition and function: In the mixed caste village, the panchayat was usually a heterogeneous body. The panchayat represented different castes and communities in the village.
The village panchayat was headed by Muqaddam also known as mandal. He was elected with consensus of the village elders and remained in the office till he enjoyed the confidence of village elders. His function was to prepare village account with the help of patwari.
- (i) The main function of panchayat was to ensure that caste boundaries among the various communities inhabiting the village were upheld.
- (ii) It had also the authority to levy fines and taxes.
- (iii) It can also give punishment like expulsion from the community.
- (iv) Each Jati in the village had its own Jati panchayat. Jati Panchayat wielded considerable power in the society. In Rajasthan, the Jati panchayats arbitrated civil disputes between members of the different castes. It also mediated in disputes claims on land, decided whether marriages had been performed according to that castes norm, etc. In most cases, the state respected the decisions taken by the Jati Panchayat.
- (v) The panchayats were also regarded as the court of appeal, that would ensure that the state carried out its moral responsibilities.
- (vi) For justice petitions were often made to the panchayat collectively by a group of caste or a

community protesting against what they considered to be morally illegitimate demands on the part of elites.

(vii) In cases of excessive revenue demands, the panchayat often suggested a compromise. If this failed, the peasants took recourse to more drastic forms of punishment such as deserting the village.

10. On an outline map of world, mark the areas which had economic links with the Mughal Empire, and trace out possible routes of communication.

Ans. Iran, Afghanistan, China, the countries of Central and Western Asia, Italy, Portugal, France, Britain, Holland, etc.

Possible Routes : Trade that linked to Mughal Empire in India.

(i) Sea route via Atlantic ocean to Cape of Good Hope (South Africa), Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean.

(ii) Red Sea, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal to China Sea.

(iii) Land Route from Central Asia to Afghanistan through modern Pakistan upto Kerala or Goa.