

Zamindari

Zamindars were usually hereditary landholders. The “Zamindari” right of the state practically enabled the assignees or " Zamindars” to "enlarge their pretensions” (Powell 1896: 42). The civil administrative machinery was in charge of the collection and assessment of revenues. Zamindars were assigned to devise effective methods of collecting the revenues and depositing the same to the State. (Ray n.d.: 263)

The changes in the existing Zamindari system were noticed when the English East India Company came to power. Land revenue experiments were carried out in order to maximise land revenues. (Bandopadhyay 2015: 82) The introduction of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 by Lord Cornwallis in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa curbed the ruinous conditions like the dearth in surplus production, decline in agriculture which affected the handicraft production. The practical solution lay in fixing the rate of land tax permanently. Alexander Dow, Henri Patullo, Philip Francis and Thomas Law were strong advocates in devising a noble method of fixing the rate of land tax in a permanent module.

The notable features of the Permanent Settlement were: - the zamindars were formally recognised as hereditary landlords, owned the lands within their zamindaris. They would simultaneously act as the foremost ‘agents’ of the Government. The cultivators were reduced to being merely the tenants and were deprived of their ownership of lands rights.(Chandra n.d.: 75) The failure of payment of the fixed amount of revenues at a designated time as per the Sunset laws would strongly argue for confiscation of estates.

The further regulation of 1799 and 1812 proved to be quite disastrous for the peasants who were overburdened with the payment of taxes , illegal cesses as the zamindars were entrusted with the right of seizing property of the tenants in case of non payment. The Cornwallis model of revenue collection was extended to other parts of India as we do get a glimpse of the working of the Ryotwari settlement in Madras Presidency and Mahalwari Settlement in Madhya Pradesh and in other states.