

Rural economy and society

Subject: History

Lesson: Rural economy and society

Course Developer :

**Agriculture: land revenue systems; famines
Forests and forest policy
Commercialization and indebtedness
Rural society: change and continuity**

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4.1: Agriculture; land revenue systems; famines

Redefining traditional agriculture

By the middle of the 19th century the English East Indian Company came to rule a varied and complex Indian rural society. In the 18th century Indian rural society had its own dynamism, showed evidence of capital accumulation and simultaneous technological advances. The most commonly cited example of dynamism of the pre-colonial Indian agriculture is what was said by the Central Asian traveller Al-Beruni:

The knowledge I have acquired of Bengal in two visits inclines me to believe that it is richer than Egypt. It exports, in abundance, cottons and silks, rice, sugar and butter. It produces amply — for its own consumption — wheat, vegetables, grains, fowls, ducks and geese.”

This perspective on the early medieval scenario of Indian agriculture holds true for the subsequent several centuries. Yet, many would argue, economic uncertainty was an essential feature of Indian agriculture in pre-colonial and early colonial periods. Indian peasants learnt to overcome these. Evidently as a precaution against total failure, in many places, they began innovative agricultural practices. Chief among these was the practice of mixing of different varieties and species of plants in the same crop. Though such pressure on the soil reduced productivity of the soil, it helped in averting frequency of **famines**. Over a period of time, the Indian farmers, by producing varieties of crops, ensured their better understanding of various soils and seasons. Such knowledge and expertise varied from region to region. An entire range of agricultural practice paid little attention to the relative advantage of various crops.

The frontiers of agriculture continued to expand. Investment in agriculture also grew, characterized by local deviations. Crops were produced for an extensive internal market as was the case for non-agricultural production. The agrarian economy of the 18th century was largely organized on mercantilist principles. There were signs, primarily in northern India, of growth of agricultural entrepreneurs. Fertile forested areas were quickly colonized with the help of both labour and capital. Agriculture saw important growth during the rule of both Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. They allowed flow of capital to irrigation and cultivation. In the flood plains of Assam, the Assamese rulers encouraged and re-organised extensive wet-rice cultivation. The method of wet-rice cultivation became meaningful for the region with the help of the transplantation method, plough, irrigation and choice of a productive paddy crop. It was followed by systematic measurement of land. Elsewhere, peasant brotherhoods, or sometimes individual families, were capable of expanding extensive cultivation of dry land. The maximum limit to such expansion was till economic opportunity allowed. That there were cases of flourishing commercial economy lead one to think about the importance of regional specialization in different crops and cultivation systems. The

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extensive networks of trade and credit also helped agriculture to thrive. Credit networks, supported by layers of operation, covered considerable distances. Agricultural production was determined by a complex mixture of ecological, customary and technological factors as well as by the military and political superstructure imposed by the new regional states of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Is it possible to explain what restrained this immense potentiality in Indian agriculture from transforming into a well-developed capitalist production system? A perceptive explanation is that of Irfan Habib. He shows how with the beginning of colonial rule and the subsequent absence of political support for the survival of merchant capital, which could not grow independently during the medieval period, Indian agriculture had no alternative but to disintegrate. In the following sections we study the basic transformation of Indian agriculture.

Peasant economy in the 19th century

In the 19th century once the Company could secure a strong foothold in India the peasant economy came to be rapidly reorganized. Commercialisation of agriculture and consolidation of networks between moneylenders and traders became important features of the new arrangement. Rapid commercialization emerged as the central and complex characteristic of the Indian agriculture. Peasant production of cash crops increased. Its impact on peasant society was enduring. This experience was different from that of increased food crop production. Suggestions have been made that peasants increased their share of food crop production to meet their needs as consumers, or to pay rent or revenue, or as a response to rising prices. However, inducement to increasing the volume of cash crop was decided by external factors. Repayment of advances taken from creditors or entrepreneurs of cash crop viz. tea-planters was used either to pay labourers or pay revenue/rent and debt. Expansion of area under cash crops was mostly determined by demands in the international market with the exception of sugarcane. Even the domestic market played a decisive role in determining the extent of sugarcane production. Another example of cash crop production was the case of opium. Production of opium was highly sensitive to a Chinese market and the British Indian government strongly regulated its production.

Agrarian production

Historians have for long debated whether Britain's domination of India brought an increase in agricultural productivity. These debates are mostly centred on the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. The general consensus about the second half of the 19th century is that there was a significant expansion in newly sown area. Cash crops showed remarkable expansion compared to food crops. Crops like cotton and wheat indicated rise in per acre yield. Controversy took off with the publication of George Blyn's *Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947: Output, Availability, and Productivity*. His was one of the most systematic works on changes in agricultural productivity in colonial India. Blyn showed that yearly production growth in food crops from 1891 to 1947 was no more than 0.11 percent. This means, compared to the previous period, a decline in per capita output. Blyn also argued that the growth rate was high in the first half of this period and low during the second half. Production of cash crops rose considerably. But this was marked by great variation among

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different types of cash crops. Blyn also estimated that between 1891 and 1946 average growth rate of all crop output was 0.37 percent. There were marked variations in production between food crops and non-food crops with food crops showing poor growth rate. Low output growth rate was conditioned primarily by low acreage growth.

These general trends suggested by Blyn, have been the centre of several layers of debates. Refuting the key propositions of Blyn, Alan W. Heston, based on his research in Bombay presidency, shows that there was no evidence to show that yield per acre fell in the period 1886 to 1947 or the opposite view that it rose. Heston argues that during this period the standard yield per acre in this region did not undergo revision. Changes in yield are the results of changes solely of seasonal conditions. Heston also claims that this seasonal condition was dependent on the revenue system. Heston asserted that the seasonal conditions, not necessarily correlated with precipitation trends, did not accurately indicate true output. Hence it did not reflect real overall output. Heston again points out that there is also a bias in the standard yield per acre. During 1886 to 1897 it was particularly set at a high level. The bureaucracy was not sufficiently knowledgeable about the true yield leading to repeated exaggeration of the crop yield. This also meant that the burden of taxation on the peasantry was apparently less.

Many would not agree with Heston. Sumit Guha suggests that per acre production of food crops declined in western India. Guha claims some degree of correlation between rainfall trends and seasonal conditions. He, however, suggests that rainfall was only one of several factors with an effect on a year's harvest. He also argues that seasonal conditions do reflect the true output. Another historian Haruka Yanagisawa, based on research in colonial Tamilnadu, shows that paddy output per acre, on the whole, rose in Tamilnadu from the 1870s through the 1910s. There was a break in this trend from the 1920s, with a drastic fall during the 1940s.

Irrigation and technological changes

We summarise here the results and debates related to the efforts of the colonial government to bring improvement to agriculture through technological intervention. A crucial area of such technological intervention was extensive irrigation. But what compelled the colonial state to seek a capital investment in the irrigation network? Irrigation would serve intensive cultivation as well as help in the increasing commercialization of agriculture. The Company hoped that irrigation would revive the productivity of land. Such works also placed the business of irrigation on a new scale. Capital investment needed for construction of these irrigation networks was often raised through loans.

The earliest governmental intervention towards improvement of irrigation, beginning with the early 19th century, was primarily confined to the northern and southern peninsula. Till the middle of the 19th century such works aimed at mostly conservation or reinforcement of existing canals or wells. In the second half of the century the ideological motivation for undertaking such works and their geographical scope began to expand. In north there was gradual expansion both towards west and east. Canal and well irrigation expanded in Madras, Punjab and western United Provinces from the last decades of the century. In 1885

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the percentage of irrigated area to cultivated area in Punjab, Madras and United Provinces was 29.3, 24.1 and 19.3 respectively. By 1938, the Punjab region had seen a 195 percent increase compared to marginal increases in the other two regions. At the same time, while in Punjab 95 percent of this increase was due to canal irrigation, in UP an approximately 37 percent increase was due to well irrigation. Yet, irrigation posed problems too. Not only did a majority of such irrigation systems require the peasants to pay taxes but preparation of land for irrigation also necessitated capital expenditure and considerable physical alteration of the land. Again, in the long run, the loss of irrigated land through increasing salination had become evident. Only a tiny fraction of such salinated land could be recovered. The canal system of irrigation was beleaguered by its inflexibility. Thus, the giant canal networks failed to support a changing crop regime- which could be the result of either ecological change or upheavals in the economic trend.

Value addition: did you know?
Irrigation
The first irrigation works undertaken during English East India Company's rule were begun in 1817.
Source: Original

Compared to some visible impact in irrigation there was limited rise in the use of the iron plough. Carts came to be popularly used to carry agricultural produce to distant markets. Use of improved varieties of wheat and cotton seeds led to limited increases in productivity.

Evolution of land tenure systems

The most noticeable impact of British rule on the Indian rural economy and agriculture was through the imposition of new systems of land revenue. It is a commonly accepted fact that agricultural taxation provided an important source of revenue for the ruling class in India, whether it belonged to the pre-colonial or the colonial regime. The importance of land revenue acquired critical importance in the colonial era as the colonial government had to pay a dividend by using its surplus to purchase Indian goods for sale in Britain. It would not be wrong to suggest that the land revenue provided the focal point for the state's relations with its subjects.

Variations in the land tenure system can to a large extent be attributed to two factors: first, the system of land use pattern in a particular region and the different ways in which the colonial rulers had adapted the native systems of land tenure, which they found on their arrival, to the requirements of a colonial economy and secondly, to their own ideas of what a proper tenure system ought to be. The recent historical experience of Western Europe - transforming the economic foundation of medieval Europe - was of much help. While the Indian experience in matters of existing land tenure systems and revenue management was highly complex, the European experiences also played an important role and turned out to be the classic model to be followed. The gradual development of more intensive agriculture,

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under the pressure of increasing population, was accompanied by the development of land tenure which was basically similar despite local variations in many points of detail. Various ideological groups -from the physiocrats to the classical economists in Britain based their ideas of the effects of population growth in agriculture upon the assumption that private property in land emerges when agricultural land becomes scarce under the pressure of growing numbers of people.

Virtually all systems of land tenure found to exist before the emergence of private property in land seem to have had this one feature in common; certain families are recognized as having cultivation rights within a given area of land while other families are excluded from such cultivation rights. 'Free' land disappears before the agricultural stage is reached. Under all systems of fallow, a family will retain the exclusive right to the plot it has cleared and cultivated until the harvest has been reaped but it seems to depend upon the pattern of land use in a particular territory for how long a time after the harvesting this exclusive right can still be claimed. Acquisition and expansion of territorial possessions meant, of course, increasing involvement of the Company in collecting taxes, particularly land revenue - which is the business of all governments. The objective of the Company was 'maximum revenue from minimum cost'. It soon became evident that they had to strive to understand the system of land tenure as taxation on the produce of the land represented the greatest part of the revenue of the state.

Permanent settlement of 1793

After gaining control of Bengal in 1757, the officials of the Company began their first set of experiments to set the course for transformation of the land revenue system. Initially they wanted to arrive at a convincing decision about the ownership of land. They could not find anybody or any institutions with strong claims to land but they could visualise in the traditional zamindars a category resembling the English landed gentry. In 1772, a 'farming system' was introduced, whereby the Company government gave out the collection of land revenue on a contract basis. Extortion and oppression were the obvious results, which rendered the system redundant. Large numbers of tax farmers absconded with as much revenue as they could. The devastating famine of 1770 exposed the underlying unviability of the system. Both within and outside Britain, intense debates spearheaded by people like Alexander Dow - the British philosopher and mercantilist, Philip Francis- British parliamentarian, took off on the future of the revenue system in India. Ideological uncertainties, over the next two decades, crystallized to pave the way for making of a land revenue regulation in 1793. The system envisaged property rights to landlords in the Bengal presidency. It was a careful blending of an ideological assumption that such investment of rights would turn the landed section into capitalists.

The 'Permanent Settlement' thus proclaimed that the land revenue to be given by the landlords to the state would now be permanently fixed and the landlords - zamindars - were declared as 'proprietors of the soil'. This arrangement, proponents of the system believed, would ensure security of revenue and also give landed property tremendous stimulus for growth. Incentives to zamindar were intended to encourage agrarian improvements of the

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land. A zamindar would help drainage, irrigation and the construction of roads and bridges; such infrastructure had deteriorated or declined through much of Bengal. With fixed land revenue, it was thought, a zamindar could securely invest in increasing his income without any fear of having the increase taxed away by the Company.

High hopes did not last long. The instantaneous outcome was both very rapid and dramatic. While land became a desirable commodity for the zamindars, at the same many also failed to retain it. The colonial revenue collectors often denied any allowances to zamindars at times of drought, flood or other natural disaster. This forced many zamindars immediately to fall into arrears. A land market developed and the new landlords did not necessarily belong to a class of landlords. They were mostly absentee landlords and far detached from land and agricultural practices in comparison with the previous owners. The worst sufferers were the cultivators. They became tenants of the zamindar and a range of intermediaries, without any tenurial security. The zamindar could seize the tenant's property if the rent had not been paid.

Challenges to permanent settlement: ryotwari and mahalwari

Under the **ryotwari** system every registered holder of land is recognized as its proprietor, and pays revenue directly to the government. He is at liberty to sublet his property, or to transfer it by gift, sale, or mortgage. He cannot be ejected by the government so long as he pays the fixed assessment, and has the option annually of increasing or diminishing his holding, or of entirely abandoning it.

This was how James Stuart Mill spoke of a new system which came into effect in the next century when the consequences of the Permanent settlement unfolded. Opponents of permanent settlement warned against its introduction in other parts of British India without a 'minute and detailed survey' of the land. This opposition began to unfold even before the Permanent system was put in place in 1793. Sir Thomas Munro, later appointed as Governor of Madras in 1820, was the most staunch critic of the system. He started a new experiment in the Baramahal area. Munro emphasised on the need for moderate taxation and for reducing the rate of taxation from one half to one third of the gross produce. The tax was based on an estimate of the quality of the soil, acreage and average productivity of individual plots.

B. B. Chaudhuri, however, outlines a grim picture of what happened in Madras. He argues that the new system 'only marginally affected the social fabric' and the ryot as a category was not clearly identified. His pre-eminence as cultivator disappeared and became only an agency of revenue collection. The system came to be implemented, over a period of time, in Bombay presidency apart from Assam and Coorg. The experience in Bombay was markedly different from that of Madras. Erstwhile dominant groups like desh mukhs or mamlatdars, who were intermediaries between the cultivators and the state, were eliminated. The cultivators themselves became responsible for payment of revenue. Over the years the revenue demand also increased.

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In northern India the idea of extension of permanent settlement or ryotwari met with several challenges. The ideological origin of the **mahalwari** system was entangled with both the failure of permanent settlement to effectively implement land revenue collection as well as an increasing crystallisation of the British idea of the Indian 'village republic'. It was also the time when utilitarianism became a powerful ideal of colonial governance. In Western Europe the idea of yeomen peasantry also emerged as an important constituent of economic changes. Along with this Indian village life came to be highly idealised and the idea gained rapid ground during Holt Mackenzie, Secretary to the Board of Commissioners, who in 1819, emphasized on the village communities in northern India. But it evolved slowly and often in fractured form. Initially Mackenzie argued for an arrangement where the survey of land, preparation of the records of rights in land, settlement of the land revenue demand in the Mahals, and the collection of the land revenue was to be mediated through the village headman. His principles were sanctioned in 1822. Apart from fixing revenue for the zamindars, in the new settlement, in estates held by the cultivators in common tenancy, the state demand was allowed to be fixed at 95 % of the rental. The high revenue demand ensured that the system was to break down soon.

Despite initial failure, the system still attracted the attention of Company officials. After a prolonged consultation the government passed another Regulation in 1833 which made the terms and conditions of the system a little flexible. Procedure for preparing estimates of produce and of rents was simplified. Fixation of the average rents for different classes of soil was also introduced. Use of field maps and the field registers was suggested. However, the fixation of rent continued to be a matter of discontent and by 1855 it was fixed at 50 percent of rental value. Such guidelines were hardly followed in practice. Malpractices created widespread discontent and finally the mahalwari system failed to create any extensive effect. Essentially the colonial experiments in land revenue tenures only aimed at collaborating with the powerful and affluent in the rural society. It failed to bring a dramatic change into the existing agrarian relations and rather they were further reinforced.

Famines in British India

The colonial era is also crucial to understand how famines emerge and linger to bring doom to peasant society. A careful study of that occurred during this period tells us how chronic and sudden, collective and individual, endogenous and exogenous factors combined to create crises. The devastating famines to which various parts of India were exposed, could, in all cases, to be traced directly to the occurrence of seasons of unusual drought, the failure of the customary rainfall leading to the failure of the food crops on which the subsistence of the population depended. However, famines are now widely understood not as natural crises, but as processes. That famine is triggered by the collapse of exchange entitlements rather than the decline of food availability is now a well-known postulation. Thus famine may occur even when there is no crop failure and there is plenty of food. Entitlements can also be eroded over time, often to the benefit of others. The former is crucially linked to the ideology of any political regime. Paul R. Greenough also argues that the situation further aggravates when rural patrons exhaust their resources leaving rural households to uncertainties. Essentially agrarian structures, production, general poverty, state policies and market practices at the local level affected the larger ambience leading to

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famine. A brief appraisal of few major famines in the previous three centuries would give us a picture of the ravages caused by famines.

Value addition: common misconceptions
Famines
Famines does not necessarily emanate from low production. It is also closely connected with the system of distribution of food and entitlements.
Source: Original

Famines in the Indian subcontinent, 1769-70

The Bengal famine of 1769-70, the government estimated, led to the loss of life of about one-third of the population and forced many others to emigrate. Cultivation was reduced by one-third and recovery from this disaster was a slow process. Many would disagree and would suggest that any such estimates were bound to be inconclusive. Deaths occurred primarily due to starvation. There was sharp decline in the agricultural production and food availability. The decline in the agricultural production has been estimated at one third of the total production. Three years later the government had to think seriously about the need for emigration into these parts. In fact, a decade later, evidence of new forms of agriculture was clearly available. Famines had a crucial impact in redefining the relations between the state and the agrarian society. For instance, the famine of 1770 reinforced the process of further exaction of peasant products. Thus as a consequence of the depopulation, and also because of limited cultivation, the state was forced to fix specific rent rates for specific and fixed holdings. The horror of 1770 never disappeared in the history of modern India. For instance, a decade later in 1783-84, another famine better known as the 'chalisa' famine, spread out to cover north and north-western India. Destruction of irrigation channels and agriculture was understood to be the major cause of this famine. Richard Grove suggests that an estimated eleven million people might have lost their lives during 1783-84 including the mortality caused in the preceding year.

Value addition: did you know?
The human cost of famine
An estimated 20 million people lost their lives during the famines of 1769-70 and 1783-84.
Source: Original

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Figure 4.1.1: Famine in Bengal

Source:

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/britishrule/famine/famine.html

Famine and colonial famine policy

In the 19th century the colonial state set an agenda for humanitarian relief during famine that had temporal, spatial, social, political and financial limits. This was particularly apparent after the famine of 1876-78 in south India. The institutional framework for such an agenda was set forth after the constitution of the 1880 Famine Commission which reviewed the causes and relief of the 1876-78 famine. The Famine Codes that emanated from it set an agenda that had an enduring impact within the state. Apparently the report made it clear that the famine problem was largely natural, impetuous and even easy to handle. Thus the state recognized the government's capacity to control economic forces which caused famine. The state wanted the provision of social safety mechanisms. Some centralized mechanism

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was put in place by Sir John Strachey, the Finance Member from 1873 to 1881 in the Government of India. Strachey sought a centralized decision-making mechanism and treated areas such as revenue demand as well as famine policy as pre-determined. Since then the task of fiscal and famine management was devolved downwards to presidencies and collectors. This no doubt constrained their freedom to manoeuvre according to local needs. Thus what became apparent was the fact that the enduring paternalist imperative was offset by a drive towards high modernist bureaucratic efficiency and classical political economy. Over the years the Indian famine policy came to be characterized by a variety of issues. It came to be believed that there was no viable choice to the free trade famine policy for the problem of distribution could be ensured in no other way than by the freedom of the market. Hardly surprising then that all suggested remedies for famine centred on measures to increase production, in other words, economic development.

Shifting cultivation and pastoral livelihood

Amongst the Indian peasant practices, one that came under serious scrutiny and state intervention was **shifting cultivation**. This type of cultivation, firmly entrenched in the cultural system, was generally characterised by the use of low level of technology and production of inferior grains. This also means that the volume of surplus was low. The dependence on the market was negligible. At the same time there was also a symbiotic relationship between the sedentary and shiftingcultivation. Apart from inferior grains, the shifting cultivators, by making use of complex terrain, technology and ecological systems, produce other crops. Also the shifting cultivators' contact with other villages was through the exchanges of forest products. On the other hand their aversion to plough cultivation was primarily due a larger cultural outlook rather than the difficulties of plough cultivation. State intervention against such practices consolidated towards the latter decades of the 19th century when the imperial forestry programme began to expand. The imperial state wanted to replace at a rapid pace the practice of shiftingcultivation with that of settled cultivation. The former came to be identified with wastefulness and ineffectiveness.

Colonial intervention also had a significant impact on **pastoral** communities. Like shiftingcultivation, pastoral practices came under strict scrutiny. Pastoralists, widely spread out in different parts of British India, made their living by the animal husbandry. Different types of pastoral practices- from complete dependence on grazing, often combined with trading, to secondary dependence on agriculture- could be noticed. In some places, like parts of Punjab and Western Himalayas, pastoralism was the primary form of livelihood. The Gujars reared buffaloes and cows whereas another pastoral community Gaddishad large flocks of sheep and goats. They also lived for some months of the year in tracts identified as permanently settled villages. However the tracts were also characterized by low agricultural productivity. Essentially pastoral practices were found in a climatic zone which could not support sustained agriculture but only produce seasonal pasture. Historically pastoralist and nomads are not completely interchangeable. Also nomadic pastoralists have maintained ties, both economic and political, with their sedentary peasant societies. However, access to pastureland was not always free. Grazing tax, however, did not interfere with the customary rights of the pastoral communities. With the introduction of colonial rule, and also with the beginning of a systematic assertion of the state's authority over forests and pasture land,

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pastoral communities were faced with increasing pressure of taxation. For instance, it has been estimated that the **Powinda** pastoralists, the migratory Pathan tribes engaged in long distance movement between Central Asia and Punjab, were charged with increasingly higher taxation between the 1870s and the 1920s. It has often been argued that grazing tax had now increasingly become an 'instrument of control and restriction' than a mechanism of improving the revenue to the state. Access to pasture land gradually got restricted. Agriculture was given preference over pastoral practices.

4.2: Forests and forest policy

Forests as resource in colonial India

With the onset of the industrial revolution in England, dramatic changes took place in the way we look at natural resources. One offshoot of the industrial revolution was the huge transformation in the methods of resource use. One big example of this transformation was the use of wood. Wood, in the previous mode of subsistence economy, was primarily used for domestic consumption either as firewood or as building material. The volume of consumption would vary from region to region or from community to community. Now, in a new regime of resource use, wood could become a great source of fuel in steam engines to run trains or ships. This new regime of resource use was definitely related to a great increase in the volume of consumption. A classic book on imperial forestry in India, *This Fissured Land* describes this new rate of consumption: 'while there can be definite limit on the per capita demand for domestic fuel or agricultural implements, there can be no such limit on the consumption of paper, or on fuel for transport'.

Essentially, beginning with the industrial revolution, there was an undeniable shift in emphasis from resource gathering and subsistence production to the production of commodities for trade. To put it simply, there was a change from production for self-consumption to production for the market. There was a dramatic change in the way our social lives were organized. There was a breakdown of interrelated local communities. This happened along with the increasing importance of modern manufacture and commerce, and the markets came to receive the admiration that previous food-gatherers reserved for the spirits of the trees. The industrial revolution and associated developments in technology also meant that the importance of natural endowments like cultivated lands, non-cultivated lands or water bodies could be quantified. Forests and forest produce also emerged as a great potential for generation of wealth.

It was against this background that the East India Company saw enormous potentiality in forest wealth. Forests required extensive clearance, either for converting the felled trees into marketable wood or making room for zones of modern capitalistic agriculture. In the process, large-scale forest clearance was carried out across the country. Forests came to be cleared not only for mercantile profit but also for a major expansion of agriculture. By the middle of the 19th century forest boundaries at the fringes of human settlement began to retreat in a permanent way.

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Metamorphosis of forests into a capitalistic commodity was not the exclusive work of British capital. It was a unique European experience. Not only did forests become part of the larger economic order but this greatly changed the landscape of the natural order. This also contributed to the growth of an unique phenomenon of European *ecological imperialism*. By the middle of the 19th century the British had successfully deforested extensive forests in South Asia, Ireland, South America and North East USA.

Forests in the pre-colonial era

The forest margins across India moved back and forth for centuries. Agricultural expansion or wars pushed the forest frontiers, but the latter returned again to its original position. Before the advent of the European regime and capital the pre-colonial Indian society had cultural traditions of discretion to decide the balance between the conflicting agrarian and forest frontier. It is generally accepted that there was stability in the relations between agriculture and industry, and between the state and society. The Mughal rulers, despite their zeal for increasing agrarian production, did not bring about dramatic changes in existing forms of resource use and the social structures they were embedded in. The Mughal rulers encouraged extensive clearances of forests but their central focus was on expand their agricultural revenue. The total effect was also limited.

Forest clearance in the colonial era

With the advent of European capital, there was a forceful drive to clear forests for cultivation. This became more apparent with the push for cash crop production. This was also true for plantation crops. In Assam, tea expansion in the second half of the 19th century had alone cleared an estimated half a million acres of forest land during a period of sixty years. This land was mostly covered with dense forests.

In the next decades, more forests were cleared. One can identify complex layers of issues ranging from social practices to economic forces which played crucial roles in an effective clearance of forests. First, the colonial state expected to increase its revenue by an extension of agriculture which was a consistent source of revenue. Often initially land revenue demand was increased. This forced peasants to reclaim more land from forested areas and wastelands. This had a further negative impact. When revenue demands became too high then peasants avoided cultivation, often fleeing to hills and jungles. Belligerent forest dwellers, who refused to clear forest into cultivated areas, were often subdued by frequent military campaigns which were used to subdue anybody who resisted the clearance of forests. The best example of such use of military force was against the Pahariatribals of theRajmahal hills. They were subdued in 1772-78, and Santhals, considered efficient cultivators, replaced them in these large areas.

Secondly, the colonial state aimed at extracting the maximum economic benefits from trade in forest produces. Cleared forests meant settled agriculture. Such areas were easier to rule than forests and wastelands. Effective rule then meant greater political control. The forested tracts were also seen as restive ground of 'disorderly social groups and revenue fugitives'.

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Many within the East India Company strongly believed that Indian tribal population lived inside the forests. The tribal were not only primitive but they were also prone to violence. Forests also gave asylum to those peasants from the settled cultivated areas who could not pay or had no willingness to pay land revenue.

Apart from the nuances of governance and political control, another factor was the increasing need for timber. The 19th century Anglo-French naval rivalry greatly enhanced timber needs for Britain. There was a simultaneous scarcity of timber in Britain. Previous to this timber supply from the Baltic region had come to an end as Britain suffered strategic losses due to changing European politics during 1793 and 1815. Dockyards built in India also led to an increase in timber consumption. Moreover, the expansion of the Indian railways, apart from the expansion of military stations, greatly depleted timber resources in the region. Even trees felled for the making of railway sleepers were not used carefully. The best example of the railways working as key destroyer of Indian forests could be found in Madras presidency. In the 19th century, a British observer noted, on an average an estimated thirty five thousands trees were felled here to meet the needs of the railways.

Value addition: did you know?
Railway sleepers
Between 1869 and 1885 alone approximately 6, 50,000 deodar sleepers were supplied from Yamuna forests.
Source: Guha, Ramachandra and MadhavGadgil. 1992. <i>This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India</i>. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Soon it became apparent that the demand for timber was growing exponentially. The company realized that the existing intensity of deforestation would lead to an acute shortage of timber. To facilitate the sustained availability of wood and restrict the intervention of the government, the East India Company introduced regulation and management of forests as a practice of conservation. One of the earliest forest regulations came in 1806 in the Malabar forests with an ostensible aim of regulating the teak trade.

Origins of modern forestry

In Britain, by that time, forestry was still largely understood as management of large forested estates held by the aristocracy. Such forest conservation practices were mostly popular in Scotland. Forests here fulfilled the need of ornamental woods and, to a lesser extent, timber production for local needs. The people engaged as foresters had formal training. The British ruling class was not interested in increasing timber production through introduction of modern formalized forestry practices as were followed widely in neighbouring countries like France and Germany. This reluctance was greatly motivated by the fact that they had direct access to the huge timber reserves of their Empire. Overseas import of timber was much more profitable. They could bring timber from India, places like Scandinavia and even from the Baltic states. In the absence of the idea of forest

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conservation the British rulers had to import the idea of scientific forestry. For this they carefully relied on Continental Europe.

It did not take a long gestation period to implement the European forestry practices in Indian soil. The colonial state soon appointed German foresters to supervise the affairs of Indian forests. Subsequently both the French and German forestry traditions gave birth to new and hybrid forestry traditions in India. Indian political and economic forces, and sometimes regional topography and climate shaped distinctive traditions of scientific forestry. A sub-continental forestry programme ignored Indian ecological realities. It soon replaced a complex forest system by mono-plantation. The plants chosen for mono-plantation were decided not by their ecological importance but by the logic of economic importance.

Modern forestry in India and state regulation

The task of governance and control over the forests was organized through an institutional and legal framework. An Imperial Forest Department, formed in 1864, was the best candidate for imperial governance of Indian forests. Dietrich Brandis, a German botanist from Bonn University, was the first Inspector General of Forests. One of the first tasks undertaken by the newly-formed Forest Department was to survey and map the forests of India. Surveyed forests were demarcated and **working plans** were formulated for them. Working plans envisaged the mechanism and modes of exploitation of the forests. The Forest Department could rarely follow the advice of the imperial order literally. Departures followed, as would be the case in the implementation of the working plans, and in creating the framework of governance, as will be seen from the following discussion.

Forest regulation

The effective governance of forests rested on the empowerment of the Indian Forest Department with a legal framework. The latter would ensure a capability to handle regional challenges. One of the crucial questions that continue to haunt the Forest Department was the nature of ownership of forests. Trying to put at rest all speculation, several Acts and Regulations not only redefined the rights and privileges of the Forest Department but also gave it an absolute status in matters of forest resources. These Acts were important on various counts. First, they brought in the statutory rights of the Forest Department over the forest resources. Secondly, they triggered off debates about the state's right over the forest resources as well as encroachment into common property.

The 1865 Act, the first of its kind in the country, became the model for future legislations on forestry in India. The Act empowered the government to requisition any land covered with trees. The Act also ensured that the government's right could only be enforced if existing rights of individuals and communities were not impinged upon. The makers of the Act did not show any understanding of the Indian forest and its social dynamics. It was hurriedly drafted and passed. This was done to facilitate the acquisition of those forest areas that were earmarked for urgently required railway supplies. The Act sought to establish the

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claims of the state to the forests it immediately required, subject to the proviso that the existing rights were not curtailed.

Couple of years later there came to exist a vast network of forest establishments throughout British India. The new networks facilitated a critical review of the Act of 1865. It was soon realized that the Act would not be able to protect the interests of the forest department or the larger interests of the British Empire. There emerged three distinct viewpoints on the forest question. One group advocated the strong right of the Forest Department and the state on the vast mass of the forest, over that of the common people. The second group led by the Madras government had kept on arguing the prima-facie cause of the village communities while the third group led by the German conservator Dietrich Brandis, the first Inspector General of Forests of India, looked for a middle ground where both the state and the rural communities could co-exist. Brandis prepared a preliminary draft in 1869. The new Act was mostly concerned with removing the ambiguity about the 'absolute proprietary right of the state'. Resultant to this was the permanent withdrawal of the informal and centuries-old system of privileges that had existed between Indian rural communities and the government. Most importantly, the 1878 Forest Act, by emphasizing on the privilege of the state, also contributed to the growth of scientific forestry.

Demarcation and forest policy

With an Imperial Forest Department and Forest Acts in place, the forest tracts in India came to be divided into three types: reserved, protected, and village. **Reserved forests** were considered the most commercially valuable and amenable to sustained exploitation. In the reserved category, the responsibility of administration and control over the forest and its products was vested with the Imperial Forest Department. Exclusive state control of reserved forests was accomplished either through relinquishment, or rarely transfer of claims and rights. Rural communities could put legal challenge against such state domination but they could muster little courage to do this. In **protected forests**, the other category, the rights and privileges of the Forest Department were confined to specific reserved trees or specific rights. By creating two classes of forests, the colonial government recognized the complex character of Indian forests and their resources. It also widened the potentiality of accommodating, and thus to some extent reconciling, the plurality of interests in these forests. Forest reservation entailed forest settlement, a procedure that entrusted the legal title of the reserved forests to the state. As the Department learned the ground realities of forest management, the existing categories underwent intricate modification and paved the way for the entry of new categories.

Protected forests were also under state control. Nevertheless some concessions were granted here. However, whenever such trees were notified as reserved trees, such concessions were withdrawn. Such areas were also converted into grazing land or fuel wood tracts whenever it was deemed necessary to do so. There were regional variations in terms of demand for reserved or protected forests. The third category of forests identified as village forests remained largely unimplemented. The sheer dimension of demarcation can be appreciated if we look at the area of forest respectively appropriated by the Imperial Forest Department. Thus the total area under forest conservation in 1878 was 14,000 square

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miles. In 1900 this had increased to 81,400 and 3300 square miles, for reserved and protected forests respectively.

Science and forests

Modern western science, which had already become a partner of imperial rule, was also a presence in forest conservation. The core of imperial forestry was sustained yield from the forested tracts. This required application of science in the management of the forested tracts as well as an infusion of technology. Intricate scientific experiments were carried out inside the forests from the last quarter of the 19th century. The continental European forestry paradigm ensured both sustained yield as well as improvement in the commercial capacity of the forested tracts.

With regional variations, the application of science became identical with varieties of experiments with forest plantations, silviculture, taungya, or regulation of forest fires or insects etc. Plantation, for example, was an important episode of the scientific aspect of forest management. The plantation programme was designed to derive the maximum benefit from natural resources. The forests acquired both a new landscape and a uniform character in forest types. The commercial interests of the imperial government overshadowed the scientific temperament of the foresters and the management of the forests, both complementing each other.

A general consensus within the Forest Department was that in spite of the reliance on natural regeneration, the average cash revenue per acre was too insignificant. It was assessed that if the expenditure on each acre of forest land went up, the return also would be higher. But there was a severe scarcity of trained staff to take care of such sensitive issues. The practice of natural regeneration did not entirely convince the foresters and they were looking for scientific intervention. At the same time, regeneration of plantation was considered very expensive. Most of the funds were utilized for the improvement of natural forests and, where necessary, for sowing indigenous species as against exotic species. Apprehension of wrong investment in forest plantations was particularly high amongst the colonial bureaucracy. Some of these anxieties came to be resolved within the next few years through a careful application of the silvicultural practices which was a key feature of colonial forestry. The science of silviculture rested heavily on the manipulation of the microclimate of a site, but its effects on the macroclimate were limited to those caused by a photosynthetic removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. At the same time, control of fire inside the forests was also seen as one important method of forest conservation. Fire control methods were seen as important for both regulation of damage to the forest wealth as well as forest regeneration.

Impact of colonial forestry

Colonial forestry had wide ranging consequences. It caused irreparable environmental damage. It altered the livelihood of communities which we discuss a little detail below.

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Imperial revenue and production forestry

Forestry emerged as a means to provide the Imperial Forest Department with a continuous financial profit. Forests were codified into standard products. The Department began an extensive valuation survey of the forests of the country. Forest products were divided into two categories of '**major forest produce**' and '**minor forest produce**'. The first category incorporated logs and direct timber produce. It included those that got better care in the hands of the foresters, and scientific inputs for making them more productive. The second category was born out of nature's own system with limited intervention of science. By the close of the 19th century, there was a fool proof mechanism to extract timber from the forests and to take it to the markets. Elaborate arrangements were made to work the forest. Such arrangements came to be known as 'working plans'.

With the assertion of control over Indian forested tracts, the Forest Department's revenues had increased manifold. A careful review of the Indian Forest Department statistics reveals that revenue had increased from Rs.5.6 million in the five years between 1869-1874 to Rs.56.7 million in the two years between 1924-25. The surplus rose from Rs.1.7 million in the five years between 1869 and 1874 to Rs.21.3 million in the two years between 1924 and 1925.

Forest policies and rural communities

The colonial forest policy then brought about revolutionary changes in the notions of common property rights. Rural communities across the country, who were dependent on the forest and forest produce for their livelihood, now faced enormous restrictions. The former, in many places, had to render obligatory labour services. At the same time, absence of complex legal notions of property right, as developed in India with the arrival of colonial rule, amongst the tribal and peasant populations led them into further trouble. The result was increased state control over forests areas, restriction on practicing shifting cultivation, ban on hunting, restriction in the taking of forest produce along with grazing. Increasing forest trade also resulted in the inflow of traders and moneylenders to the forested areas. Within a short period, the affirmation of state dominance over natural resources deprived the tribal communities of their key means of subsistence. This led to a series of tribal and peasant movements. In the 19th century the Santhal rebellion of Chhotanagpur (1855), Gudem-Rampa rebellion in Madras Presidency (1879-80), BirsaMunda led rebellion (1899-1900) in extensive areas of the Bengal Presidency would draw large crowds to resist colonial forest policies. A large number of such movements drew support from their own notions of environment and natural well-being.

Wildlife in India

Colonial forest policies also brought radical changes in the relationship between wildlife and nature. With the beginning of an era of forest regulation a series of restrictions was put in place. Wildlife was also seen as destructive to the progress of agriculture. Before such restrictions came in, extensive hunting was practiced at different levels. Rural communities,

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mostly tribal populations, resorted to hunting to gather their food. The princely rulers, zamindars continued to practice hunting, characterized by pomp and glory, like the rulers and aristocracy in Mughal India. Royal hunting was a part of statecraft in India. Such hunting displayed power, and had a vast network of intelligence gathering. This also led to the killing of many tigers, lions, antelope, and birds. The practice became more popular with the arrival of British. Hunting became associated with social status.

Value addition: did you know?
Royal hunting in colonial India
Maharaja Sardul Singh of Bikaner alone hunted 50,000 wild animals and another 46,000 game birds. Among these animals, he later recounted, there were 33 tigers, 30 great Indian bustards and over 21,000 sand grouse.
Source: Rangarajan, Mahesh. 2001. <i>India's Wildlife History: An Introduction</i>. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Video clip: tiger hunting in 1939 - two Americans travelled to India to experience the hunting practices of Indian princes. The video gives an idea of what they saw <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NevenDIp95A>.

With the gradual depletion of animals from the forested tracts they began to demand asylums for some animals, important from the perspective of hunting. Privileged hunting led to the growth of the idea of game reserves. A sense of conservation was rarely part of this hunt, though in some places, at some times, hunting areas were established to limit off-take. The nomenclature of these game reserves changed till they acquired the title of National Parks only in 1972. These changes represented changing notions of wildlife, its importance to eco-system as well as national pride setting the agenda for ongoing controversies concerning wildlife conservation.

4.3: Commercialization and indebtedness

Commercialization of Indian agriculture

The most significant transformation that occurred in Indian agriculture, and in the lives of Indian peasants, was through the growth of commercial agriculture. The latter process, to put it simply, meant a primary but complex shift of agriculture from food-crops to **cash crops**. We will see later that the process was more complex than it appears. The impact was felt across different crops and regions but with varied results. The total geographical area which came under the aggressive agenda of such practices was limited.

Defining the growth of commercial agriculture

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The colonial intervention fundamentally redefined the existing agrarian relations and institutions in India. Such a change was often attended by disastrous consequences in terms of agricultural productivity. The primary change occurred when peasants began to convert their food crop producing areas into cashcrop producing areas and this has been identified as commercialization. But a mere diversion from food crop to cashcrop does not create the conditions for commercialization. Usual food crops could also become cashcrops. We need some qualification and some answers. For instance, we need to know whether the Indian peasants sold their food crops earlier i.e. before the arrival of British rulers. Historians generally agree that before the British intervention food-crops occupied the largest cultivated areas. Something new occurred after the political and economic control of British rule was firmly established. Slowly food crop production became a low priority in different pockets of agricultural production. Two new crops, indigo and opium, came to replace the food crop producing areas. However, the impact and intensity of such diversion was also highly fluctuating.

One should also keep in mind that food crops were also often channelized into various market networks. It is in this context that we must discuss out what causes certain crops to be solely identified with this phenomenon of commercial agriculture. Thus we know that not only the purpose of selected food crops being routed to the market was different under the new regime but also in the new context the mechanism of marketing was radically different. While traditionally peasants had sold their food crops from a position of strength, in the wake of commercialization the peasants' role as sellers became more complex. In many cases, mostly involving the poor amongst the peasants, the motives for sale became quite different. These peasants would often take 'advances' from merchants, who would buy their grains later, before the sowing season began. The peasants needed and accepted cash loans for a variety of reasons. While they received such advances they agreed to sell at a pre-determined rate to the usurers.

In the 18th century such channelization of food crops, mostly rice, to markets, however, did not have enduring impact. Neither could it develop into a classical stage of commercial agriculture. In the next century there was extensive market demand for various crops. Both rice and wheat witnessed a major boom in production. An increased share of these staple crops' acreage could often be noticed with peasants looking for an extra profit. Other crops, which were not subsistence crops, became closely associated with this process. Essentially, this process can be largely defined as that process in which peasants produced primarily for distant markets rather than mostly for local markets as well as for their own need or as food. They began to produce for the needs of distant markets or industry. Those who came to invest in agricultural production also required a new kind of organization of production.

Colonial foundations of commercial agriculture

It was not an isolated development in the second half of the 19th century which compelled the Indian peasants to produce for distant markets. It coincided with certain crucial developments in the industrial part of Europe and the close connection that India had with this development. India emerged as a leading supplier of raw materials to Europe. Easier transportation, changing export tariff policy and fall in freight rates all combined to give a

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new direction to Indian foreign trade. Further, this also coincided with rapid development in India's internal trade and commerce supported by the introduction and expansion of a railway network. The latter extensively connected the Indian hinterland, agricultural regions and trade centres to the ports and other market areas. Expansion of the railway network was also supported by the growth of feeder roads. Railways also came to largely replace river transport. All this had a significant impact in infusing capital into Indian agriculture and the resultant experience was historically different from a similar infusion of capital into European agriculture.

Two broad phases

Historians have broadly defined the commercialization of Indian agriculture into two broad phases. The first phase ending roughly with the middle of the 19th century was characterized by the production of indigo, opium, silk and sugarcane. The second phase has been identified with the extensive production of cotton, sugarcane, wheat and jute. Before we move to the specific features of these crops let us briefly examine the larger forces which initiated some major changes into the Indian agriculture.

The first phase: opium, indigo and sugarcane

The production of commercial crops, unlike that of plantation crops such as tea, was largely organized by the small peasants. Part of the working capital was provided by merchant-traders. The classic example of such production organization was the case of opium. Opium cultivation was negligible in size before British rule and mostly confined to Patna and its neighbourhood. It was associated with a set of complex trade relations. Towards the end of the 18th century opium production was critically associated with a particular phase in the development of trade relations between Great Britain, China and India. The central role was played by the question of financing the essential purchases by Britain of two Chinese commodities, silk and tea, the latter in particular. The subject acquired greater importance in the context of a limited demand for British goods in China, and also of the increasing concentration of the English East India Company on the tea imports into Britain because of the sharply declining profits from its trade in Indian textiles.

Opium cultivation became entangled with commercialization and its distinctive feature can be summarised: the East India Company (EIC) exercised exclusive control over the production and sale of opium. This made the judgement of the government the crucial decisive factor in determining the acreage of opium cultivation. The chief concern of the EIC was to regulate the speculative opium market in Calcutta. The EIC understood that, till it could retain its monopoly, it would be able to extract substantial profits without actually expanding the opium acreage. However, this exclusive control came to an end as the British monopoly in the Chinese trade came under increasing competition. Soon the pressure for expanding opium acreage had increased. The growing importance of the opium trade of Bengal necessitated an increase in the opium cultivation. At the same time, there was increasing rise of opium consumption in China and high prices offered by EIC emerged as a major threat to the opium trade. This necessitated a forced increase in opium acreage: this

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would not lower the prices of opium but would keep the total volume of profit at a stable level. The result was very clear: within a period of only ten years i.e. 1828 and 1838 the area under opium cultivation increased by an estimated 122.3 percent. This increase witnessed a rapid fall in the next decades. The changing political condition played a critical role in the rapid fall in opium production. The Chinese government had already banned the opium trade and the Opium War broke out in 1840.

The arrangement of indigo production was critically different from that of opium. Its major consumer was the British textile industry and European planters had a direct role in it. The growing demand for indigo in England directed the attention of indigo planters to Indian soil when, since last quarter of the 18th century, the traditional sources of indigo supply failed to keep up with demand. The crop came to be newly introduced in the Bengal presidency. The production was chiefly controlled by the European planters. They would force the ryots to enter into a contract called satta. In return they would be given cash advances from the planters at low rates of interest to produce indigo. The ryot would also have to agree to cultivate indigo on at least one fourth of the area under his holding. He would be given the seed and the drill. He prepared the soil, sowed the seed and looked after the crop. This arrangement of production was very different from the familiar small-peasant method of production. Indigo production began to suffer a major blow in the 1820s when the managing agencies in Calcutta could not raise enough credit. Another blow came when a series of powerful peasant rebellions, famously known as the indigo rebellion, against the oppressive regime of European indigo cultivators during 1859-60, left a major impact on the organization of production. Indigo production began to decline in Bengal, but its cultivation saw a rapid increase in Bihar. This increase also coincided with the decline in sugarcane production in the region. The sugar entrepreneurs began to redirect their capital into indigo cultivation. The bright days of indigo began to fade away only towards the end of the century with the discovery of artificial dye.

Value addition: did you know?
Indigo
The indigo revolt of 1859-60 practically wiped out indigo cultivation in Bengal.
Source: Chaudhury, B. B. 2008. <i>Peasant history of late pre-colonial and colonial India</i>. Delhi: Pearson, 413.

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Figure 4.3.1: An indigo factory in Bihar

Source:

<http://ogimages.bl.uk/images/019/019WDZ000001017U00000000%5BSVC2%5D.jpg>

The production of sugarcane was organized primarily as small-peasant production. There was a traditional Asian market for Bengal sugar but in the middle of the 18th century it saw some steep fluctuations. Political uncertainties mixed with disruption in the traditional trade networks had pushed the Bengal sugar market into decline. However, sugarcane production increased in the Bengal presidency from the last decade of the 18th century due to the growth of the international market. The international market declined only after the 1860s with increasing international competition. Sugar exports from Bengal got a major boost when the French Revolution destabilized the sugar industry. This again coincided with a massive increase in sugar consumption with changing culinary practices in Europe. A temporary break in sugar export came with the Napoleonic Wars. But despite these temporary challenges, cultivation expanded only to be seriously challenged by the arrival of beet sugar which gave a competitive price.

The second phase: jute, sugarcane and cotton

Towards the end of the 19th century sugarcane production had increased many folds but the market was more internal than during the first phase. The highest concentration of sugar cultivation was in the districts of Bihar. The pace of expansion of sugarcane acreage can be understood from the fact that between 1884 and 1899 the area under sugarcane increased from 282,000 acres to 862,200 acres. Historians also agree that technological advances made in the extraction of juices and crushing of sugarcane also helped the

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popularization of sugarcane products within Indian traditional markets. From the early 20th century, the domestic market, which was previously more tilted towards unrefined raw sugar, also witnessed a steady growth in mill-made sugar. This resulted in the expansion of sugarcane acreage. The long belt in Punjab, UP, Bihar and Bengal accounted for half of the area under sugarcane.

Cotton production also witnessed rapid growth. There was already both an external and internal market for this raw material produced primarily in western India. However, Indian cotton did not supply a major part of the demand in Britain. While, till now, the external market constituted only a small portion of the cotton produced domestically, the Indian traditional textile industry at best ensured a stable market; it was not capable of massive expansions in production and hence demand for cotton. The situation saw rapid changes after the 'Cotton Famine of 1861' –a result of the American Civil War- which abruptly stopped the supply of American cotton to British cotton mills. Demand, speculation and rise in cotton prices led to a quick expansion of cotton cultivation in India. This prosperity in the cotton trade was short-lived. As cotton exports from America resumed towards the end of the century, the Indian exports fell. In the meanwhile the Indian textile mills also expanded and the internal markets emerged as a major consumer. The next spell of cotton exports increase took place when the Japanese textile industry expanded in the second decade of the 20th century.

This phase also saw the introduction and rapid expansion of jute cultivation with a strikingly high rate of growth which exceeded the comparable record of sugarcane, indigo or opium cultivation. An example of a high percentage of jute acreage was that of the districts of Rangpur, Mymensingh and Dacca in East Bengal where jute occupied 30, 18 and 13.5 percent respectively of the total acreage. In Assam, jute acreage expanded from a mere 442 acres in 1882 to 248,969 acres in 1947. In the latter example, however, jute cultivation was not at the cost of rice cultivation. Such massive expansion of jute acreage was primarily intended to cater to the needs of an increasing number of jute mills in Eastern India. These mills manufactured gunny bags and were involved with the export trade. The export trade also fluctuated towards the latter decades of the 19th century.

Value addition: did you know?
Jute
The first jute mill was established in Calcutta, near the river Hoogly in 1854.
Source: Chaudhury, B. B. 2008. <i>Peasant history of late pre-colonial and colonial India</i>. Delhi: Pearson.

Some general feature

In addition to these specific crops, identified as cashcrops, there were other non-food crops which showed changes in cultivation trends. For instance, mulberry which had constituted a sizeable share in farm production in Indian agriculture, declined. There is striking evidence from Bengal where mulberry production was hit by the application of superior skill to the

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process of rearing cocoons and reeling. At the same time there was an expansion of food crops like wheat and rice. The expansion of wheat production catered to the increasing domestic market. Its limited export market declined significantly after the First World War. Historian B.B. Chaudhury points out that in the case of wheat, weather conditions rather than market trends were a crucial determinant of acreage. There were some key differences amongst some crops. For instance, sugarcane growers did not face the international price instability, unlike the indigo and opium growers.

However, in general, a consideration of per capita and per acre productivity in food grains from 1898 to 1947 decidedly suggests a crisis in what was the 'normal' rate of agrarian production. Stagnation of agricultural technology, failure of investment to raise yield per acre, the drain of agricultural resources into the hands of revenue intermediaries and money lenders and dealers in agricultural commodities were undoubtedly important contributing factors. Food grain production did not improve as a whole. The statistics of agricultural production indicate a substantial increase in non-food grains output while food grain production shows an opposite trend. George Blyn shows how, compared to the per annum increase in population in 1891-1947 of 0.67%, the total food grain production increased by only 0.11% in this period. During this period the per-acre production of food-grains decreased by 0.18% per annum. The rising prices of highly commercialized non-food grain crops increased by 0.86% per annum and their total output by 1.31% per annum.

Implications of commercialization

To understand the impact of commercialisation we may focus on some important issues. First, did it have an impact on the existing form of peasant organization of production and secondly, did it have any impact on the productive efforts of the peasants? Small-peasant production constituted the dominant form of peasant organization though not the only one. New factors came to characterize small-peasant production. Peasant producers and their products came under increasing control of outsiders. This was because small peasant organization came to be determined- varying in degree and intensity- by the larger interests of merchant-trader groups. The latter determined the nature of the crops to be cultivated by the peasants. The former would also provide capital needed for new production. This was often supported by the introduction of new technology. The markets became different. With the strong integration of foreign merchants with the Indian markets, the foreign traders began to be heavily dependent on Indian merchant middlemen. The foreign merchants –the final purchasers of the peasant produce- also wanted this system to continue.

Simultaneous to these processes the growth of commercial agriculture on the whole introduced an element of dynamism in the peasant economy. The diversification of crops reduced the peasants' sole dependence on rice or a similar food crop. Similarly such cultivation was more remunerative than that of rice and provided the peasants with greater cash resources. Even where commercial agriculture thrived within the framework of the old peasant agriculture, it only marginally affected the latter, at least in some cases. This was partly because the European entrepreneurs, to whom this growth was largely owed, at least initially, did very little towards improving the efficiency of the traditional system of

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agriculture. The arrival of European capital and skill were mostly confined to the semi-manufacturing processes.

Indebtedness and commercial agriculture

Rural credit acquired a new dimension with the expansion and intensification of agricultural commercialization. The latter increased the need for advance working capital. The intensity of consumption loans also became integral with peasant households. Thus an increasing number of the rural population came under the control of rural credit. The social composition of the rural creditors also changed and new categories came to advance credit. Dependence on credit was conditioned by several factors. First, expansive acreage meant higher investments in agriculture which was not possible for the peasants alone. Secondly, some parts of the peasant society came to be wholly dependent on food crops for their subsistence. Thirdly, monetization of rent and tax, combined with the seasonal disjunction of tax collection and harvests required credit. Fourthly, cashcrops also required long distance and heavy investment of capital. In the absence of a formal and state-sponsored credit market, the growth and expansion of rural credit was inevitable. Creation of property rights in land enhanced the asset value of land. At times, there was a direct shift of enterprise towards credit as a result.

Consequences of indebtedness

Increased circulation of credit, without doubt necessitated by the increased commercialization of agriculture, had a far reaching impact in the Indian peasant economy. Debts increased inequality and influenced class relations. Debts enabled money lenders to expropriate peasants. There were several long-term processes that increased the importance of income from interest in colonial rural India. The trend was subject to disruptions caused by harvest fluctuations and by longer commercial cycles. Moreover, one dimension of increased credit activity seems to have been neglected- the mobility, migration settlement and enterprises of trader money lender castes.

Indebtedness hit the peasant economy most visibly during the World Economic Depression. During this period several key development took place: unsecured loans were destroyed, consumption reduced, capital shifted to urban investments, informal bankers organized themselves into more formal institutions, cooperative credit expanded to partially meet the rural credit crisis and peasants tended to displace the money lenders. In some regions, the rich peasants themselves became money lenders to the poorer peasants. This resulted in rapid differentiation within peasant society.

The peasants' dependence on the village bania for advance of credit, for the marketing of his crop, for loans during lean seasons for subsistence, had increased as commercialization made progress. The stratification process and the operation of money-trading capital resulted in an increasing number of peasants losing their land. These peasants were now 'footloose labourers'. It is not that there were no landless labourers in the pre-colonial

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period but it is the economic process of de-peasantization and the significantly larger number of landless agriculturists which emerge as the characteristic features of the colonial period.

Debts and inequality

Rural credit is generally seen as an expression of power and dominance in the countryside. It also led to serious dislocations of agrarian economy and often stagnation. At the same time the debtor-creditor relationship, now firmly entangled with the Indian peasant economy, is generally seen as unequal. These were some general features: first, peasants as a class had inferior bargaining power, secondly, the peasant as an individual had to depend on a specific creditor. The lender could control the terms of credit. The degree of dependence was variable. Credit could indeed contribute to inequality in access to land. Despite an initial surge in money-lenders' investments in land, interventions and endogenous changes weakened the tendency. There were regional variations. This is marked by the distribution and intensity of various debt related peasant revolts. Limits to this tendency were set by the rich peasants beginning to finance, even starting up as full-fledged bankers. One can also notice a strong cyclical rhythm in moneylender investments. Based upon the transfer of ownership the creditor assessed the risk associated with cultivation. Debt dependency had its effects on the constitution of social relations among the peasantry.

Value addition: how they worked
Moneylenders
Moneylenders' usual practice in western India:
"He waited until the first rains before handing out the seed advances. This was to ensure that the seed was not lost if the monsoon failed. If there was no rain, there were no advances. On the other hand, when the monsoon appeared to be good, the seed given out for food grain crops was sometimes rationed in such away so as to ensure that the peasants sowed only a limited area. Bumper grain harvests lowered grain prices, and thus the value of the bania's hoard".
Source: Hardiman, D. 1996. <i>Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India</i>. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 132.

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4.4: Rural society: change and continuity

Indian rural society underwent several tangible and intangible changes amidst crucial economic transformations during colonial rule. At the same time these changes could not displace some elementary structures of rural society. There have been prolonged debates about the relative strength of the forces of changes and continuity. In these debates historians have been joined by anthropologists and sociologists. The following sections give a broad overview of these complex phenomena.

Understanding rural social change

The subject of the transformation of Indian rural society under British colonial rule is a widely debated one. The debate has largely centred on the question of to what extent Indian rural traditions were restructured and re-defined under colonial rule. Such scholarly engagement brought under its ambit the subject of transformation of the Indian village from ancient times to the contemporary situation. At a basic level scholars have disagreed on the very nature of Indian villages. One of the central questions which has drew the attention even of colonial scholars and continued to generate interest among later scholars of varying ideological attachments is, was the Indian village a self-contained entity or not? The other most important question centres around the level and intensity of interaction of British rule with the Indian villages or to put it differently, did the Indian rural society come under the influence of 'modernity'?

Strong views were expressed by a number of colonial administrators about the nature and possible impact of British rule in the Indian rural society. For the greater part they felt that this impact was very limited. Influential administrators like Charles Metcalfe and Henry Baden-Powell considered Indian villages as little unchanging 'republics'. They primarily tried to understand the attachment of the rural Indian to land. Charles Metcalfe summed up his views by saying, "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts". While Baden-Powell emphasized his predecessors' views he also laid emphasis on the importance of individual property and land ownership within a village. Their ideas had a deep impact in formulation of colonial policies and such ideas survived for several decades.

Scholars like Eric Stokes, Robert Frykenberg and Bernard Cohn emphasized the extreme caution with which the British rulers had approached indigenous Indian society and the extent to which the Raj had left large areas of this tradition 'untouched'. For Stokes, 'The first century of the British rule in India' wrought no major societal transformation. At the same time, while for Frykenberg the British state remained essentially a 'Hindu Raj', on the other hand for Bernard Cohn, rural society was subject to 'structural change'. The latter perspectives conceptualize the Indian village in terms of broad and complex systems of kinship, trade and settlement. Such debates have highlighted that the village was also endowed with dynamics and mobilizing forces of their own. Many would argue that the

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villages under the British rule regained new dynamism. Such examples are often cited from the experiences of southern India. The anthropologist Christopher Fuller shows that there was a dissolution under colonial rule, of many of these broader systems, which permitted the village community- or at least the image of the village community - to establish itself as the nucleus of 19th century society.

Colonial scholars, beginning with Sir Charles Metcalfe and B. H. Baden Powell, explored the distinctive character of village tenures. Their primary emphasis was on Northern India. They emphasized the notion that these communities formed little unchanging 'republics'. This static analysis of the character of the Indian villages came under close scrutiny. One can summarize two broad views about the Indian villages. One perspective spoke for a static, ageless society of village communities broken up during the 19th century. The other perspective advocates a view of a highly mobile and economically differentiated society rendered stationary during colonialism. Such a view also argues that the pre-colonial Indian rural society already showed a remarkable capacity for recovery and adaptation and was markedly stratified before the advent of the British rule. Essentially, interpretations of the history of the transition of the Indian rural social structures have changed.

First century of colonization: the defence of continuity

Many historians argue that the first century of colonization did not bring any remarkable changes into the rural social structure. The specific frame of reference was a schema of Indian rural society which included substantial minorities of landless peasants belonging to the menial castes. The latter could be untouchables. They might have found work as agricultural workers. They formed about one-fifth of the total peasant population. It has been argued that despite the initial harshness of the British taxation authorities, there was nothing to indicate that the size of this population underwent a spectacular rise. There was, thus, continuity from the point of view of the stratification of rural society, between the first colonial phase and the preceding era.

On the other hand some historians argue for a rapid and radical change of the Indian rural society under the influence of modern capitalism. According to them, this coincided with the institution of a modern law which had great power to break up village solidarities. This resulted in the establishment of 'bourgeoisie' dominance over rural society and economy. At the same time historians have emphasized the continuity of 'traditional' and 'feudal' elements in this new regime of law.

While speaking of the continuity of the previous traditions it was argued that many of the new cultural and societal relations evident in colonial India did not conform to ideal types as seen in the European experience. Thus, such arguments would point out, the new relationships largely conformed to the social relations which had existed in the pre-colonial era.

Scholars like Elizabeth Whitcombe and Jan Breman argue that colonial inputs like the extension of canal irrigation, transport network, new commercial crops, did not go down

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easily with the rural economy. Still, the new introductions realigned rural class relationships. They introduced changes which unfolded profound changes within rural society. Whitcombe thus argues how a permanent irrigation system extended cultivation of high-yielding commercial crops. This increased the peasants' dependence on markets and mechanisms of usury. For instance smaller peasants and tenants came to be heavily dependent upon credit provided by a network of credit suppliers. There emerged a perpetual cycle of furthering of both indebtedness and cash crop cultivation in this process. Breman shows how the new agrarian relations redefined the **hali** system - a form of bondage and supply of labour to the landlords- in Gujarat. Breman argues that a shift in cropping patterns led to a diminished demand for labour. At the same time, labourers failing to find jobs moved out of their village, availing the new communication networks. This weakened the control of the landlords over labour, leading to a gradual disintegration of the labour bondage system. Thus essentially, the imposition of 'modernity' into the historical rural structures unfolded sharp contradictions within the latter. For instance, rural income differences widened, or, some historians would argue, overall productivity of agriculture increased.

Colonial transformation of the Indian countryside

Those who oppose the continuity thesis believe that the fate of Indian rural society became largely market-driven in the colonial period. They argue that the physical landscape of rural India, the extent and forms of rural stratification, the extent of rural indebtedness, the pattern of tenancy rights, control over resources and the political economy of rural irrigation now came to be strongly determined by powerful networks of markets.

Yet, they would argue that peasant petty commodity production was carried on with limited inputs of investment. Most importantly, capital became near universalized among the work force. It displaced the higher value and more capital intensive forms of production. Others describe how the frontiers of peasant production pushed relentlessly forward. This push was well-ahead of levels of population increase. In the meanwhile erstwhile mobile groups of peripatetic warriors, herdsmen and pastoralists were 'sedentarized'. This was a deliberate policy of the colonial state. As those polities collapsed and as the value of the production controlled by their local allies declined, so the once distinct levels of local society became pressed together and homogenized. In the long run, everybody in rural society, in effect, became a peasant. Also this process displaced many social distinctions. In the previous period these social distinctions were articulated in terms of village officer status and dominant clan memberships. David Ludden has drawn our attention to another crucial dimension of rural change. He argues that the breakup of broader 'community' forms of land tenure and the definition of the village as the only legitimate source of private landholding rights was pressed from below. Ludden argues that in southern agrarian contexts this was pushed mostly by richer farmers. The latter were eager to get rid of the social responsibilities that were integral to community membership.

The idea of the static Indian village community also came under criticism from many scholars. Many began to argue that changes within the Indian villages pursued the path of a developmental cycle through growth and expansion of lineage groups. Eric Stokes argued

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that change was effected precisely through the constant interruption of the 'cycle'. Stokes argues that "ecological constraints" far more than state power, determined whether a developmental cycle would begin in a particular area and how far it would proceed. Fox saw the process of lineage growth as a "developmental cycle" which repeated itself over a period of centuries. He illustrated his argument by examining varying agrarian situations in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh. In the fertile, well-watered areas of the east, the rural social stratification developed rapidly. It came to have enduring impact on rural life.

Historians have highlighted the delineation of tenures as one of the crucial determinants of the rural transformation. Eric Stokes argues that it is the first step towards an understanding of the colonial transformation. He argues that throughout, Indian land tenure systems remained soft and malleable. The process of land transfer, far from being a British innovation, was integral to the internal processes of 'traditional politics'. At the same time British rule accelerated and intensified existing processes of expropriation. This was despite the fact that Indian rural society was always open to tenurial change. Yet, the increased pace of land transfers, together with the heavy assessments the British levied on their new territories, brought about a dramatic, though uneven upheaval in property rights. Anthropologist-historian Bernard Cohn asserts that despite the widespread sales and transfers of land that the British brought about there was no change in the distribution of power in the countryside.

Value addition: classic depictions

The transformation of the Indian countryside



For the role of the railways in the transformation of the Indian countryside see Satyajit Ray's *PatherPanchali*

One of the best illustrations of Indian rural transformation is the movie *Do Bigha Zamin*, produced in 1953. The film was directed by Bimal Ray.

Sources: <http://www.satyajitray.org/films/pather.htm>; www.veoh.com

The rise and fall of the rural classes

It has also been pointed out that as the rural society became 'traditionalized', so it became clearly more stratified. The most enduring beneficiaries of the structural and economic

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changes that did take place under colonial rule were the emerging rich peasants. Their rise was symbolically identified with the possession or 'ownership' of land. Much later, as a social group, they became easily visible as the pillars of the Congress movement in the countryside. The concept of rich peasant as a prospering rural magnate class provides a key to understanding much of 19th century Indian rural society. This is especially true in the case of the north Indian society.

The social identity of the rich peasants and their role in the rural transformation differed from region to region. In Bengal, Rajat and Ratnalekha Ray show how the rise of the **jotedars** who were actually controlling landholdings at the village level played a crucial role in the rural structure. The zamindars held only the revenue collecting rights. Yet, despite all the changes effected by the colonial policies, i.e. through the 'permanent settlement', the power of the zamindars as a class and their control over the rural society remained unaffected. Herein lay the basic continuity of the social structure in colonial Bengal.

There is also a strong argument which detects a secular decline of the Bengal zamindars. According to this line of argument, the latter were losing out to a class of rich peasants. The latter dominated the land market, rural credit and trading networks. Such a view also holds that there was more change than continuity in rural society after the arrival of the permanent settlement. These changes in particular adversely affected the poor peasants. They were perennially excluded from any control over landed power. The well-known symptom of the results of such exclusion was a series of peasant revolts.

In Awadh and the North West Frontier provinces, the **talukdars**, the aristocratic landholding class, came under intense pressure. The classic example was that of Awadh in 1856. The British government, by introducing the village settlement could easily displace the talukdars like it had done in the North Western provinces. This meant that in many places peasant rights were sought out and confirmed. The talukdars fought back through the revolt of 1857. Their influence and leading role in rural Awadh during the course of the revolt became a matter of concern for the British rulers. Moreover in Awadh the talukdars were joined by the peasantry in a protracted battle against the British. The British rulers, who considered the peasant uprisings as a betrayal of their own generosity, after the suppression of the revolt gradually helped revive a landlord orientated land settlement policy.

The social effects of the Ryotwari system, both in southern and western India, were perhaps less dramatic than in the areas covered under the permanent settlement. An effect of this arrangement was to consolidate the village community as the basic unit of rural society and polity. Such a revenue system progressively displaced the taxation and rental functions of clan-chiefs and zamindars. Allocation of the revenue demand between rural families remained very much an intra-village affair, brokered by village officials and notables. Ability to deflect or reduce the revenue burden determined the difference between wealth and poverty, sometimes between survival and starvation, and made the village arena, a central focus of 'indigenous' political economy and concern over property rights.

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Colonial rule and Indian rural society: The anthropologist's perspective

Like historians whose attention has been drawn to the processes of social transformation and continuity, anthropologists too have been interested in the nature of Indian rural society, its key characteristics, and the processes and forces of transformation. The engagement of colonial role and its associated institutions with Indian rural society takes on new dimensions in the works of anthropologists as we will see in the following sections.

Colonial rule and the case of Benares

Bernard Cohn's investigation of the Benaras region reveals the new indices of power and prestige, of collaboration and conflict that emerged with the new configurations of political, economic and social relationships following the establishment of the British administrative apparatus. Cohn shows how innovation in legal, revenue and administrative structures wrought new economic conditions and effected major transformations in the Indian political set-up. Cohn also shows how following the breakdown of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century, the hierarchical, class based structure that emerged was in turn abandoned in favour of a centralized super-structure. Each system had a characteristic structure and realm of activity as well as characteristic types of officials. In 1775, The British obtained sovereignty over the Benaras province, through a Resident initially, before it usurped ultimate power of political control. For Cohn, the Benaras region was witness to three layers of authority –at the local level in control of a particular lineage, that of the Rajputs; at the regional level by the Mughal administrative structure and the third of the British administrative structure, each with a different set of 'men' though Cohn is emphatic about the high degree of autonomy of the **taluk** which had absolute control of land revenue assessment, taxation, police and judicial functions. The immediate task of the British was to recruit a large number of clerks and employees in the lower rungs of the administration. A process of streamlining of administration, through employment of locals in the lower rung of the administration also eventually took place. With this, a new class of officials, the civil service emerged. Land revenue became a commodity and power came to be based on economic considerations. Income became the basis of social status.

'Sanskritization' and 'westernization'

Another way of understanding the fundamental transformation of the Indian rural society, not essentially limited to rural world, was the Sanskritization and westernization thesis of M. N. Srinivas. He explained Sanskritization as "a process by which a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a

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high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste." Srinavas also argued that such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy. He also argued that there could be varied, viz. Brahmanical, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, models of Sanskritization. On the other hand, Srinavas emphasized that the idea of westernization primarily explains the transformation that had taken place in the Indian society and culture as a result of contact with the British rule. His idea of westernization mainly encompasses the areas of technology, institutions, ideas and values. He argued that this process was an inclusive, complex and many-layered concept.

The concepts of Sanskritization and westernization have remained extremely influential concepts in understanding Indian rural transformation. Srinavas showed how the elements of power in the caste system are ritual, economic and political forces. The possession of power in any one sphere leads to the acquisition of power in the other two, the spread and dissemination of such cultural processes varying from one region to another and from one section of the population to another. Sanskritization is not only the adoption of new customs and habits but also exposure to new ideas and values which have found frequent expression in the vast body of Sanskrit literature. Karma, Dharma, papa, punya, maya, samsara and moksa are common examples of some of the most common Sanskritic theological ideas which have increased under British rule. Quicker means of transport and communication facilitated by the introduction of western technological innovations like the railways, press, and radio etc., the importation of western political institutions like parliamentary democracy have accelerated the process of Sanskritization. In a nutshell, westernization of India has helped Sanskritization.

Srinavas also explained how the interaction between Sanskritization and westernization has intertwined phases of both conflict and collaboration. The British conquest of India set free a number of forces-political, economic, social and technological, apart from the importation of a new set of values and world-view, profoundly affecting each and every aspect of the country's social and cultural life. Sanskritization is a two-way process, though the local cultures seem to have received more than they have given. It is an essential preliminary to westernization, although it is also possible that westernization may occur without an intermediary process of Sanskritization. The challenges that it has posed to different religions and cultures across the globe has spawned different modes of resistance although it has managed to thrive amidst challenges.

Change and continuity in India's villages

Several other anthropologists have also explored the myriad aspects of regionally diverse areas of India though with a thematic unity – peasants' life in the villages and adjustments of a tribal society. For instance, David Mandelbaum discovers patterns of social interaction through employing empirical tools and sociological theory of the functional structural type. He focuses on the structure of major social groupings recognized by Indians themselves - the family, lineage, caste group (jati) and the village community, and analyses their interaction within the theoretical perspective of 'system' or 'interchange-counterchange'; 'structure' or ordered arrangement of relations and a goal oriented normatively defined

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behaviour. He points out that continuity and change from such a theoretical perspective are like the two sides of the same coin. Mandelbaum also argues that the social history of India had been remarkably stable. The flux of political history has been matched by the capacity of the social structure to absorb change. However, some of the contemporary changes may ripen with systemic shifts, well beyond the boundaries of organizational change. He also offers a perspective of the adaptive nature of traditional institutions and cites the instance of how caste as a ritual hierarchy has been getting weaker in India while caste as a factor in politics has been becoming stronger.

Law and the transformation of rural authority

It is also important to consider how the process of dispute settlement marked an important aspect of Indian social structure, and what was the impact of British rule on indigenous dispute settlement. The dispute settlement process had come to be associated with assertion of power and pride by the Indian dominant castes. For instance, during pre-British times the 'dominant caste' of the Rajputs derived important status in their roles as settlers of disputes and judges, from their claims to be kings in a traditional social order, where warfare and famine had important consequences for the social structure of the village.

The relationship between the dominant castes of the 'thakurs' and that of the tenants markedly changed with the establishment of British rule in the 18th century. On the one hand the colonial state established several mechanisms which ensured stability in society and eliminated internal warfare. On the other hand new avenues of employment, education and business including the introduction of commercial agriculture strengthened the position of the dominant caste of the thakurs. These new sources of income were used by the thakurs to strengthen their traditional way of life, and their traditional position vis-à-vis low castes. Changes in land tenure and social solidarity and became advantageous for individuals to sever ties with the group, this led to increased feuding, and competition for position. The expanded role network made the thakur more aware of the possibilities of manipulation in the courts and what could be done through influence and the use of questionable practices.

Scholarship on rural India has also concerned itself with the character of agrarian social structure and power, which witnessed profound transformations, though subtle and non-revolutionary in character. Delicate changes in the attitude and behaviour of those at the very bottom of the hierarchy illustrate a developing cultural transformation and this is significant when evaluated in conjunction with a radical distribution of property and power reflecting basically economic changes. Oliver Mendelsohn's focus is the dispute settlement procedure, which he believes reveals underlying patterns of dominance. A very important aspect of the social structure during the 19th century was not just a great concern about the legal rights of those who owned lands but also the actual ownership of the land and the dominance derived therefrom. This is still evident now where the landowning and the most numerically strong caste is the principal political power, which reflects dominance.

Rural economy and society

4.1 Summary

- In the 18th century Indian rural society had its own dynamism, showed evidence of capital accumulation and simultaneous technological advances.
- The agrarian commercial economy of the 18th century was largely organized on mercantilist principles.
- 19th century saw rapid changes in the way peasant economy was organized. Commercialization of agriculture, consolidation of networks between moneylenders and traders became important features of the new arrangement.
- Historians generally agree that in the second half of the 19th century there was a significant expansion in newly sown area.
- The colonial government made efforts to bring improvement to agriculture through technological intervention.
- The most noticeable impact of British rule on the Indian rural economy and agriculture was through the imposition of new systems of land revenue.
- Famines became part of colonial agrarian economy. The devastating famines, to which various parts of India was exposed, could, in all cases, be traced directly to multiple layers of causes.

Rural economy and society

4.2 Summary

- Large-scale forest clearances beginning with the 18th century in India had resulted in a long term impact.
- Agrarian expansion, advent of European capital, railways, ship building all collectively contributed to the degradation of the Indian forest cover.
- Britain was ideologically oriented towards forest clearances. It was only in continental Europe that the idea of conservation first developed.
- To extract maximum revenue from forest produce, the latter was divided into two categories: major forest produce and minor forest produce.
- Working plans became a major device to regulate exploitation of the reserved forests.
- Science became an important tool for forest conservation.
- Radical changes occurred to the Indian wildlife. There was fragmentation of their habitat.



Rural economy and society

4.3 Summary

- A fundamental change in colonial Indian agriculture occurred when peasants began to convert their food crop producing areas into cashcrop producing areas.
- This process coincided with certain crucial developments in the industrial part of Europe and the close connection that India had with this development.
- Usual food crops could also become cashcrops.
- In competition with indigo and opium, food crops became a low priority in different pockets of agricultural production.
- Historians have broadly divided the commercialization of Indian agriculture into two broad phases.
- The first phase, ending roughly with the middle of the 19th century, was characterized by the production of indigo, opium, silk and sugarcane.
- The second phase is identified with the extensive production of cotton, sugarcane, wheat and jute.
- Rural credit acquired a new dimension with the expansion and intensification of agricultural commercialization.

Rural economy and society

4.4 Summary

- The subject of Indian rural transformation has been a matter of intense debates: both historians and anthropologists have their due share of views and perceptions.
- Historians primarily refer to changes that have taken place in the structure and form of the Indian villages.
- There are opposing views about the nature of Indian villages.
- When discussing Indian rural transformation, historians have often highlighted the impact of changes brought about in the land tenure systems.
- Historians have also identified the rise and fall of different classes within rural society.
- The anthropologists have also drawn our attention to the subject of caste hierarchy, rural authority and legal institutions which underwent key changes over time.



Rural economy and society

4.1: Exercises

Essay questions

- 1) Did British rule introduce any key changes in the field of agricultural technology which had great impact in agrarian production?
- 2) Discuss the salient features of colonial peasant economy in India.
- 3) Give a broad overview of famines in colonial India.
- 4) Discuss the famine policies of the colonial state in India.

Objective questions

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	True or False	1

Question

The impact of Bengal famine of 1769-70 was massive.

Correct Answer / Option(s) a)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

According to government estimates, the Bengal famine of 1769-70 led to the loss of life of about one-third of the population.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
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Rural economy and society

2	True or False	1
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Question

The pastoralists never came under the colonial influence.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	b)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Most of the time, colonial land policies and forest policies had a severe negative impact on the livelihood patterns of this important section of society.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
3	True or False	1

Question

The ryotwari settlement was in force in parts of Bengal.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	b)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The Bengal province was under the permanent settlement.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Rural economy and society

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
4	Multiple choice question	2

Question

Name the author of the book *Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947: Output, Availability, and Productivity*.

- a) George Blyn
- b) Irfan Habib
- c) Henry Baden Powell

Correct Answer / Option(s)

a)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
5	Multiple choice question	2

Question

The Permanent Settlement came into force in Bengal in which year?

- a) 1947
- b) 1857
- c) 1793

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Correct Answer / Option(s)

c)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

- a) 1947 is the year of Indian independence
- b) 1857 is the year of the great revolt

Reviewer's Comment:



Rural economy and society

4.2: Exercises

Essay questions

- 5) Did the British Forest Policy in India represent an 'ecological watershed'?
- 6) What were the economic reasons behind the extensive clearance of forests in colonial India? Discuss the policies which were adopted to achieve this.
- 7) What were the motives behind the subsequent conservation of forests and the policies adopted to achieve this?
- 8) Briefly explain the nature of forest trade in colonial India.
- 9) Was there a significant change in the habitat of the wildlife in India with the introduction of colonial forest policies?

Objective questions

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	True or False	1

Question

The Mughal rulers never encouraged forest clearance.

Correct Answer / Option(s) b)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The Mughal rulers encouraged extensive clearance of forests but their central focus was to expand their agricultural revenue.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
2	True or False	1

Question

The British borrowed extensively from the French and German traditions while shaping India's forest conservation policy.

Correct Answer / Option(s) a)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Both the French and German forestry traditions contributed to the new and hybrid forestry traditions in India.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
3	True or False	1

Question

Rural communities had full control over natural resources inside the 'reserved forests'.

Correct Answer / Option(s) b)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The concept of 'reserved forest' implied that the government's forest department had exclusive rights within it. This drastically excluded the local communities' rights.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
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Rural economy and society

4	Multiple choice question	2
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Question

In which year was the first ever legislation on forestry in India introduced?

- a) 1865
- b) 1927
- c) 1972

Correct Answer / Option(s)	a)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

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Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

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Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
5	Multiple choice question	2

Question

What was the approximate size of the Reserved forests in 1900?

- a) 81,400 miles
- b) 3,300 miles
- c) 14,000 miles

Correct Answer / Option(s)	a)
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Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

- b) The extent of protected forests in 1900 was 3,300 miles.
- c) The total area under forest conservation in 1878 was 14,000 square miles.

Rural economy and society

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

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Reviewer's Comment:

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4.3: Exercises

Essay questions

- 1) Briefly define commercialization of agriculture.
- 2) Why did non-food crops play an important role in intensifying agricultural commercialization?
- 3) What are the basic differences in the two broad phases of commercialization of agriculture?
- 4) Why did sugarcane production not suffer despite a fall in the export market?
- 5) Why did peasants borrow?
- 6) What are the basic consequences of indebtedness?

Objective questions

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	True or False	1

Question

Indigo as an agricultural produce did not have an international market.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	b)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Indigo was widely used internationally as a dye and from the last quarter of the 18th century supply could not keep up with demand. Only in the end of the 19th century, with the development of artificial dye, the demand for indigo dwindled.
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Rural economy and society

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

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Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
2	True or False	1

Question

The acreage under opium did not increase in the first few decades of the 19th century.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	b)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Between 1828 and 1838 the area under opium cultivation increased by an estimated 122.3 percent.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

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Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
3	True or False	1

Rural economy and society

Question

There was no export market for Indian sugarcane before the 19th century.

Correct Answer / Option(s)

b)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

In the 19th century sugarcane production was mostly geared to internal consumption.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

There was an international market for Indian sugarcane but in the 18th century.

Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
4	Multiple choice question	2

Question

The Cotton Famine of 1861 was the result of:

- a) The American Civil war
- b) The indigo rebellion
- c) Anglo-French rivalry

Correct Answer / Option(s)

a)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The American Civil War disrupted supplies of American cotton.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

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Rural economy and society

Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
5	Multiple choice question	2

Question

When did the indigo rebellion occur?

- a)1859-60
- b)1857-58
- c)1863-64

Correct Answer / Option(s)	a)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

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Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

b)1857-58are the years of the great revolt.

Reviewer's Comment:

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Rural economy and society

4.4: Exercises

Essay questions

- 1) What are the different perceptions about Indian villages?
- 2) Did the change in the Indian land tenure system bring about any changes in the social structure of rural India?
- 3) What changes have affected the fate of the Indian rural classes?
- 4) Explain Sanskritization as a process of rural transformation of India during colonial times.
- 5) How did the structures of rural authority change during the colonial period?

Objective questions

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	True or False	1

Question

The early British administrators had no interest in the study of the Indian village system.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	False
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The British administrators' interest in securing and increasing agricultural revenues led them to try and understand the working of the village revenue system and society.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

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Reviewer's Comment:

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Rural economy and society

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
2	True or False	1

Question

Hali is an agricultural practice.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	False
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Resource/Hints/Feedback for the correct answer

Hali was a form of bondage and supply of labour to the landlords, and as such it was a part of agrarian relations but not an agricultural practice or process.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
3	True or False	1

Question

The jotedars were poor agricultural labourers.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	False
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

They were a powerful class of landholders.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Rural economy and society

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
4	Multiple choice question	2

Question

When was Awadh annexed?

- a) 1856
- b) 1857
- c) 1858

Correct Answer / Option(s)

a)

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the correct answer

The annexation of Awadh took place in the year 1856 and was an important reason for the revolt of 1857-58.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

b) and c): The annexation of Awadh was an important reason for the great revolt that took place in 1857-58, therefore it took place before these two years.

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
5	Multiple choice question	2

Question

When did the British obtain sovereignty over Benaras province?

- a) 1856
- b) 1775
- c) 1757

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Correct Answer / Option(s)

a)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

In 1775 the British East India Company obtained sovereignty over the Benaras province.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:



Rural economy and society

4.1 Glossary

Famine: Widespread scarcity of food

Mahalwari: Land revenue system in north and north-west India, where the village community had a central role to play

Pastoral: livelihood practices with primary emphasis on animal farming

Powinda: a pastoral community in Punjab

Ryotwari: another land revenue system where cultivators acquired primacy.

Shifting cultivation: a form of agricultural system in which plots of land are cultivated until the soil loses fertility. The system follows a cyclical pattern.

Zamindari: Land revenue system in which landlord was the intermediary between the state and cultivator

Precipitation: rainfall trend



Rural economy and society

4.2 Glossary

Major forest produce: forest produces mostly comprised of timber

Minor forest produce: forest produces like grass, sand, etc

Protected forest: forested tract, not directly under the forest department, but with limitations of rights

Reserved forest: forested tracts demarcated by the Forest Department as having exclusive rights of its own

Working plan: a plan which envisages the future exploitation of the forests

4.3 Glossary

Usury: credit

Cash crop: cultivated crops only intended for the market

4.4 Glossary

Hali: a form of bondage and supply of labour to the landlords in Gujarat

Jotedars: a class of land holders in Bengal who were below the zamindars and owned sizeable portions of land

Talukdars: large land holders in Mughal times and also the British period who were responsible for collecting taxes

Taluka: a hereditary estate or a subdivision of a revenue district, in charge of a talukdar

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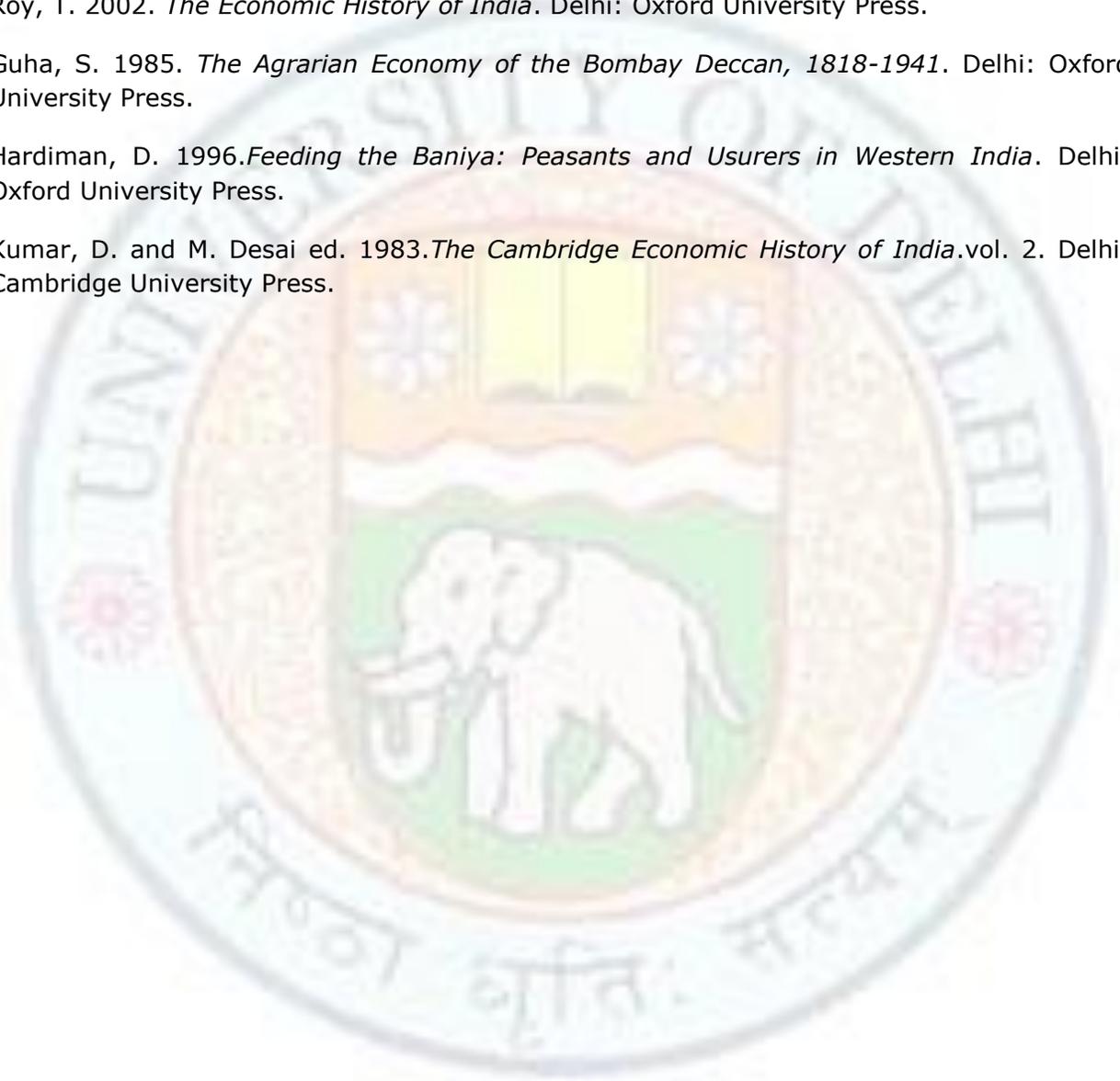
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