

IMPORTANT QUESTION CLASS – 12 PEASANTS, ZAMINDARS AND THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

Question 1.

Describe the Land Revenue System of the Mughal empire during the reign of Akbar.

Answer:

Akbar was a great and able ruler. He laid special emphasis on the land revenue system. For this purpose, he followed the policy initiated by Sher Shah Suri. But this policy had certain defects in it. That is why Akbar began works from the start. Main features of his land revenue system are given below:

1. Following policy initiated by Sher Shah: In the beginning, Akbar followed the policy of land revenue initiated by Sher Shah. During the reign of Sher Shah, the average value was determined by measuring agricultural land. It was determined on the average production of produce. Later on, Akbar felt that it needed a lot of time to fix the market price. It was also a cause of worry for the peasants. Hence, Akbar again started the policy of yearly assumption.

2. Determination of Tax: Akbar followed the following policies for fixing land revenue :

(a) Zabti System: This policy was the creation of Raja Todar Mai. Under this system of revenue, the tax was fixed by measuring the land. This system was implemented in Gujarat, Lahore, Malwa, Allahabad, etc.

(b) Ten Years System: This system was a developed form of Zabti system. According to this, an average of the last ten years of production of crops and their value was taken out. One-third of that average produce was taken as revenue. This revenue could have been taken in the form of cash or produce.

(c) Batai or Galla Bakshi System: In this system, the whole of the total produce was divided in definite proportion among peasant and the State. Honest officials were required for the success of this system.

(d) Nasik or Kanqoot System: Record of agricultural tax was kept in this system.

3. Measurement of Land: During the reign of Akbar, the land was measured with a proper method. With this, state and the peasant came to know about how much peasants will have to pay and how much revenue will be collected for the state.

4. Keeping in mind the fertility of the soil: Fertility of the soil was always kept in mind while determining land revenue. That land was called as 'Polaj' which was cultivated every year and that land was called as Tarauti' which was not cultivated every year. All in all, a tax was fixed on the basis of fertility and the produce.

5. Facilities to Peasants: Special facilities were also given to peasants in case of famine or drought. They were given certain facilities in paying taxes in case of natural calamity. They were also given loans for tools, implements and animals.

Actually, land revenue system of Akbar was prepared while keeping in mind the interests of the people.

Question 2.

While explaining the contribution of women in labour based agrarian society, clarify that what was their position in society? Also, give a proper example.

Answer:

Men and women both performed certain specific roles in the production process. Women had to work shoulder to shoulder with men in the fields. Men used to till and plough the land whereas women sowed, weeded, threshed and winnowed the harvest. With the development of small rural units and individual agriculture of peasants, labour and resources of the entire household became the basis of production. Naturally, gendered segregation was not possible between home (for women) and the world (for men).

Artisanal works like sifting and kneading clay for pottery, spinning yarn and embroidery were some of the works which depended upon female labour. The more commercialised the product, the greater the demand on women's labour to produce it. Actually peasant, artisan women not only worked in the fields but also went to houses of their employers and even to markets if required. Females were seen as an important source in agrarian society because they were child-bearers in a society which was dependent on labour.

Status of women in society: The position of the women in society was of mixed nature.

1. There was a high mortality rate among women. That is why married women were less in number. It helped in the emergence of social customs in artisan and peasant society which were different from the customs of elite groups. In many rural communities, the male had to pay bride price instead of dowry to the bride's family. Remarriage was legally sanctioned for both divorced and widowed women.

2. According to popular traditions, the male was head of the family. In this way, females remained under the control of males and the family. If any female was coming under the scanner of misconduct then she was strictly punished by society.

3. Amongst the landed gentry, women had the right to inherit property. We have found certain examples from Punjab which show that women (including widows) actively participated in the rural land market as sellers of property inherited by them. They were free to sell or mortgage their land.

Question 3.

What aspects of the Mughal period are highlighted by Abul Fazl's 'Ain-i-Akbari'?

Answer:

'Ain-i-Akbari' was written by Abul Fazl in the year 1598 C.E. It was a part of the project of the writing of history under the orders of Akbar. That is why it is also known as Akbar-Nama. It is a compendium of imperial regulations and a gazette of the Mughal Empire.

This book gives detailed information about various facts of life during the Mughal period :

1. It is a comprehensive analysis of the court, administration and army.
2. It depicts the literary, cultural and religious traditions of the people.
3. It gives a physical layout of the provinces of Akbar's empire.
4. It enumerates the sources of revenue.
5. It tells us about various customs and practices of the Mughal period.
6. It also gives a short biographical sketch of imperial officials such as mansabdars.

In fact, the real purpose of the book was to facilitate Emperor Akbar in the governance of its empire. It was not a reproduction of official papers but an authentic attempt to present quantitative data at one place. It was an extraordinary document of its times and provides a fascinating peep into the glimpses of the structure and organisation of the Mughal Empire.

Question 4.

Make a critical evaluation of the- significance and limitations of Ain-i-Akbari.

Answer:

Penned by Abul Fazl, Ain-i-Akbari was written to facilitate Akbar in the governance of his empire. It was written in 1598 C.E. Abul Fazl was so cautious about this book that he revised it five times. He tried his best to leave no scope for any transcriptional error. It is an authentic mine of information about the Mughal Empire.

Abul Fazl did not believe oral testimonies. He verified and cross-checked them before their inclusion in the book. He wanted to make his book factual rather than informative. In the quantitative sections, he presented all the numerical data in words so as to minimise the chances of any subsequent transcriptional errors. In other words, the Ain is a record of information about the people and society during the Mughal regime.

In spite of the best efforts of Abul Fazl, the book is not without problems or limitations. There are many limitations which can be studied as follows:

1. There are many errors in total. It has been considered that these might be simple

arithmetic errors of transcription by Abul Fazl's assistants. Even then these errors were very simple which hardly reduces the authenticity of data at a wider level.

2. Another limitation of Ain is the skewed nature of the quantitative data. Uniform data was not collected from all provinces. Wide information was collected about the caste of zamindars from many provinces but these information are not available for Bengal and Orissa.

3. Fiscal data from the provinces is quite remarkable but equally important information like prices and wages from these areas are not as well documented.

Conclusion: Ain remained an extraordinary document of its times even after certain limitations. Abul Fazl achieved a major breakthrough in the tradition of medieval chroniclers who wrote mostly about wars, conquests, political machinations and dynastic turmoil. It was one of the greatest achievements of Abul Fazl.

Question 5.

How was agriculture organised around two major seasonal cycles's during the 16th and 17th centuries? Was it only for subsistence or otherwise? Explain.

Answer:

Seasonal cycles: During the 16th and 17th centuries, agriculture was organised mainly during two seasonal cycles-Kharif (autumn) and Rabi (spring). Minimum two crops were grown at most of the places except most arid or inhospitable land. Even three crops were also grown where rainfall or other means of irrigation were easily available.

Different types of Crops: There is a mention of word Jins-i-Kamil in historical sources available to us which means perfect crops. Mughal state also used to encourage farmers to grow those crops with which the State could earn more revenue. Cotton and sugarcane were such crops.

Cotton was mainly grown on large pieces of land spread over central India and the Deccan Plateau. Bengal was known for its sugar made from sugarcane. Different types of oilseeds (like mustard) and lentils were also included in cash crops. This shows that subsistence and commercial production were closely related with an average peasant's holding.

Objectives: Major objective of agriculture during the 16th and 17th centuries was only for subsistence. That is why mainly rice, wheat and barley were grown. But this agriculture was not alone for subsistence. Till then, the nature of agriculture was changed a bit.

- Agriculture was mainly organised for two seasons.
- The commercial production and subsistence were closely related to an average peasant holding.

Question 6.

How 'Ain' of Abul Fazl was different from the creations of early historians?

Answer:

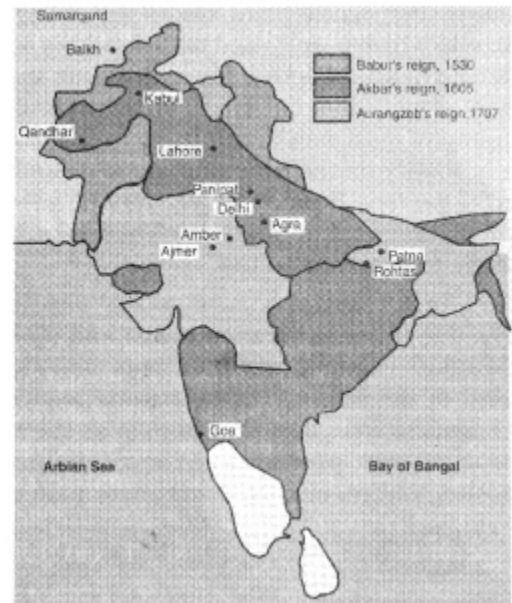
Creations of early historians, before Abul Fazl, only mention about wars, conquests, political machinations and dynastic turmoil. They hardly give any information about people and products of the country. If any mention was there, it was from a political point of view.

Question 7.

What is meant by 'Jangli' in the context of Mughal period? How forest was seen by the state?

Answer:

Jangli: The word 'Jangli' is used by contemporary texts for forest dwellers but it does not mean that they were uncivilised. Actually, during those days, this word was used for the people whose livelihood came from forest products, hunting and shifting cultivation. These occupations were based on seasons. For example, Bhils used to collect forest products during summer, catch fish during summer, do cultivation during monsoon months and used to go for hunting during autumn and winter. Moving from one place to another was one of the important features of tribes living in forests.



Forests in the eyes of the States: As far as for the State, the forest was a subversive place where troublemakers used to take refuge or shelter. Once Babur said about jungles which provided a good defence "behind which the people of the pagan become stubbornly, rebellious and pay no taxes".

Question 8.

Describe the functions and authority of the Village Panchayats during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.

Answer:

A major function of Panchayat was to ensure that caste boundaries could be upheld by different communities residing in the village. All the marriages in eastern India took place in the presence of Mandal. The major function of village headman was to keep a watch on the conduct of the members of the village community mainly to prevent any offence against their caste. Panchayats had the right to levy fines and expel anyone from the community.

Question 9.**Describe the main sources of agriculture history of the 16th and 17th centuries.****Answer:**

Peasants are the main actors of agrarian history. But peasants did not write about themselves which is why we hardly get information from them about activities of rural society. Our main sources of the agrarian history of 16th and 17th centuries are chronicles, historical texts and documents which were written under the supervision of the Mughal court.

Ain-i-Akbari: Ain-i-Akbari was one of the most important chronicles of its time. It was written by a court historian of Akbar, i.e., Abul Fazl. This chronicle describes very minutely about the arrangements made by the State to ensure cultivation, enable the collection of revenue by the agencies of state and regulate the relations between the State and the Zamindars.

The main objective of Ain or Ain-i-Akbari was to present a vision of Akbar's empire where a strong ruling class was providing social harmony. According to the author of Ain, any revolt against the State or assertion of autonomous power was predestined to fail. In other words, whatever information we got from Ain about peasants was a point of view of top officials of Mughal court.

Other Sources:

1. Besides Ain, we can also use other sources, which were written at far off places from Mughal kingdom. These include those documents of 17th and 18th centuries found in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan which provide detailed revenue records.
2. Except these, many documents of East India Company are also there which throw light on agrarian relations in eastern India. All these sources record instances of conflicts between the Zamindars, peasants and the State. These sources help us in understanding the peasants' perception and their expectations of fairness from the State.

Question 10.**Discuss mutual relations between rural artisans and peasants during the 16th and 17th centuries. Also, discuss the importance of rural communities.****Answer:**

One of the interesting aspects of the village was the elaborate relationship of exchange between different producers. Early surveys conducted in the village during the early years of British rule and Maratha documents conclude that artisans also lived in great number in villages. Sometimes, around 25% of total household in the villages belonged to artisans.

Sometimes it was very difficult to differentiate between peasants and artisans because they were groups who used to do both kinds of work. Cultivators and their family members were engaged in the production of many things. These included textile printing, dyeing, making

and preparing agricultural implements, baking of pottery, etc. It was so because agricultural work was not for the whole of the year and that is why they used to do work of artisans during the free months.

Services and Supply of Service: Potters, carpenters, blacksmiths, barbers and even goldsmiths provided their services to village men. They were compensated by villagers by the number of means. They were either given a share of the produce or a piece of land in the village. This method of compensation was probably decided by the Panchayat. Such lands, in Maharashtra, became the Miras or Watan of the artisans were:

This system also prevailed in another variant in which artisans and individual peasant households entered into a mutually negotiated settlement of remuneration, most of the time goods for services. For example, blacksmiths, carpenters and even goldsmiths were remunerated by the Zamindars of Bengal, for their work by paying them a small daily allowance and diet money. This system was known as the Jajmani system.

Importance of Rural Community: Rural community was of great importance. Some British officials in 19th century saw the Indian villages as 'a republic' in which people used to divide their resources and labour with a collective fraternity. But there was no sign of social equality in villages. Individual ownership of land was there. Deep inequalities were there in society on the basis of caste and gender. Few powerful persons decided on matters of the village and exploited the weaker sections. They also had the authority to dispense justice.

More importantly, a cash nexus developed in villages due to trade between towns and villages. In the Mughal regions, revenue was assessed and collected in the form of cash. Artisans producing for the export market were also paid in cash as their wages. In the same way, producers of commercial products, like cotton, indigo, silk, etc., were also paid in cash.