



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the impact of British policies on Indian agriculture during the colonial period. (150 words)

30 Jan, 2023 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly discussing about British policies on Indian agriculture.
- Discuss their negative and positive impact.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

- The British colonial rule in India had a significant impact on the country's agriculture sector. The policies implemented by the British government had a lasting effect on the production, trade, and distribution of agricultural products. Some of the key impacts are discussed below.

Body

- **Impact of British Policies on Indian Agriculture:**
 - **Positive impacts:**
 - **Commercialization of agriculture:** British policies motivated the commercialization of agriculture in India by promoting cash crops and providing markets for their sale.
 - This led to increased production and more income for farmers. For example, the British introduced **Indigo cultivation in Bengal**, which became a major cash crop.
 - **Use of modern implements and technologies:** British policies incentivized the use of modern implements and technologies in agriculture. This led to increased efficiency and productivity in farming.
 - For instance, the British introduced new irrigation techniques such as drilling wells and canal irrigation, which greatly improved agricultural output.
 - **Freedom from exploitative zamindars:** In many cases, British policies freed poor farmers from the clutches of exploitative zamindars. The British implemented revenue policies that reduced the power of the zamindars and provided more security for the farmers.
 - For example, the **Permanent Settlement in Bengal**, which fixed revenue collection rights with zamindars, relieved the pressure on the farmers.
 - **Negative impacts:**
 - **Increased pressure on land:** British policies led to increased pressure on land as many artisans, faced with diminishing returns and repressive policies, abandoned their professions and took to agriculture.
 - This led to a decline in the artisan sector and overcrowding in agriculture, leading to decreased productivity and profitability.
 - **Overburdening of agriculture sector:** British policies overburdened the agriculture sector, leading to poverty during British rule.
 - The British implemented policies that increased the revenue demands on

the farmers, leading to decreased spending on inputs like seeds and fertilizer, leading to low yields and decreased income for farmers.

- **Impoverishment of the peasantry:** The British policies led to the impoverishment of the peasantry. The policies favored cash crops over food crops, which created food scarcity and increased food prices.
 - Additionally, the policies like **Ryotwari revenue system**, where the ownership rights of the land were handed over to the peasants and the revenue was collected directly from the peasants by the state.
 - The revenue rates in this system were 50% for dry lands and 60% for irrigated lands which resulted in **excessive taxes that impoverished the farmers**, who held the ownership of the land.
- **Destruction of self-sufficient village population:** British policies mandated the modification of Indian agriculture, leading to the destruction of the self-sufficient village population.
 - The British policies aimed to integrate Indian agriculture into the world market, which required changes in production methods and the **destruction of traditional systems**.
 - This led to a decline in the traditional, self-sufficient village economy and the rise of a monetized economy.

Conclusion

- The British colonial rule in India had a lasting impact on the country's agriculture sector, with both positive and negative effects. The British policies led to the commercialization of agriculture, the use of modern implements and technologies, and the freeing of farmers from exploitative zamindars.
- On the other hand, the policies also led to increased pressure on land, overburdening of the agriculture sector, impoverishment of the peasantry, and the destruction of the self-sufficient village population. These impacts continue to shape India's agriculture sector to this day.

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