**HISTORY MA 2ND SEMESTER HIS 201 UNIT III: LAND REVENUE SETTLEMENTS IN COLONIAL – A BRIEF SKETCH**

**The British mainly adopted three types of land tenure systems in India:**

**Permanent Settlement or the Zamindari System:** Roughly 19% of the total area under British rule – Bengal, Bihar, Banaras, NWFP divisions.

**Ryotwari System:** Covered about 51% of the total area under British Rule – Assam, Bombay, and Madras Presidencies.

**Mahalwari System:** Covered about 30% of the total area under British Rule – major parts of NWFP, the Central Provinces and Punjab.

**The Permanent Settlement:**

It was introduced in Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and districts of Benaras by Lord Cornwallis in 1793.

Under the Permanent Settlement, zamindars were recognised as the owners of the land.

The amount of revenue that the zamindar had to pay was fixed and it was decided that it would not be raised for the given period of time.

The zamindars had to pay 10/11th or 89% of the revenue collected to the East India Company while keeping the rest 1/11th or 11% to themselves.

The zamindars were free to fix the rent of their peasant-tenants.

The ryots (cultivators) were considered tenents/ tillers of soil.

Under the Permanent settlement, zamindars lost their administrative and judicial functions. They were to be performed by the Company now.

If a zamindar did not pay the fixed amount, his property would be seized and sold by auction. This led to the ruin of many zamindars.

**Effects of the Permanent Settlement:**

Absentee Landlordism: Since zamindars were assured of their ownership of lands, many of them stayed in towns. They entrusted rent collection to agents who even extracted illegal taxes besides the legal ones from the tenets.

After increase in prices, company suffered financial loss because land productivity was high while income from it was meagre.

**Ryotwari System**

It was introduced in Bombay, Madras, Assam and Berar. Sir Thomas Munro introduced it in Madras. It was during the term of Lord Hastings.

Since there were no zamindars in south India, the company recognized the peasant as the proprietor of land.

Under the Ryotwari system, a direct settlement was made between the government and the ryot / cultivator.

The revenue was fixed for a period from 20 to 40 years, whereby every peasant was individually responsible for payment of revenue.

The revenue was fixed on the basis of quality of the soil and the nature of crop. It was based on the scientific rent theory of economist Ricardo.

**Impact of Ryotwari system:**

Even though the position of cultivator became more secure, the rigid system of revenue collection forced ryots into the hands of moneylenders.

Since the government itself became a big zamindar, it had the right to enhance revenue at will. The cultivator was left at the mercy of the collecting officers.

**Mahalwari System**

In 1833, the Mahalwari System was introduced under Wlliam Bentinck. This was basically a modified form of the zamindari system/settlement introduced in the Gangetic plain, Punjab, North-west Frontier Province, parts of Central India.

Under this system, a basic unit of revenue settlement was ‘Mahal’ or ‘Village’.

The village land belonged jointly to the village community; the peasants were jointly responsible for payment of revenue.

The entire land of a ‘Mahal’ was measured at the time of revenue-fixation.

There were also known as Bhaichara, or Mahals, which were basically groups of villages.

**Impact of the Mahalwari System:**

Since the government revised the revenue periodically, the peasants had not much benefit of elimination of middlemen between the government and the village.

This brought about some improvement in irrigation facilities, though major benefits of the system were largely enjoyed by the government.

**Impact of Colonial Land Revenue System: Land Tenure System**

These land settlements introduced a market economy and removed customary rights. With cash payments of revenue, there was increased money-lending activity.

The land tenure system sharpened social differentiation. While the rich had access to the courts to defend their properties, the poor did not have this advantage.

The peasants were forced to grow commercial crops which led them to buy food grains at higher prices and sell the cash crops at low prices.

The land revenue system of British in India shook the stability of Indian villages where majority of the people depended on agriculture and related activities. They became miserable if crop failed in any given year.

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Questions (probable):

1. Compare the three major land revenue settlements in colonial India in terms of their socio-economic impact. (8 marks)
2. Why did the British introduce a “permanent settlement” in eastern India? (4 marks)

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