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UNDERSTANDING THE COLONIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE INDIGO REBELLION'S PEASANT

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Abstract

This study investigates some social factors that instigated Bengal's peasants to revolt against the British colonial raj repeatedly. The majority of peasant rebellions of Bengal have been examined from the view of political economy, where the general perspective is that peasants revolted because of economic exploitations by planters, landlords, and other classes. However, this study argues for extending beyond the political-economic view, and for the importance of also bringing in overall social conditions in examination of peasant rebellions. This study finds that colonial policy and institutional arrangement created conditions to exploit the peasants' labor and wealth. The first significant change brought in Bengal by colonial power was the change in land ownership. Because of the Permanent Settlement Act, land became a product of money-making in the colonial state. The second significant effect of colonial rule is the change of agricultural mode of production. The study also shows the commercialization of agriculture that transformed the traditional method of agriculture, shifted the entire 'production risk' on the peasants' shoulders, and created insecurity of peasants' subsistence. Thus, this study indicates that Bengal's peasants repeatedly revolted because of colonial institutional arrangements and extractive land, and socio-economic policies.

Keywords: Peasant rebellion, Colonialism, Imperialism, Commercialization of Agriculture, Indigo rebellion, Bengal Peasant rebellion, British Colonialism, Indian Peasant uprising.

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Introduction

“Not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained with human blood... and such a system carrying on indigo, I consider to be a system of bloodshed” _ E W L Tower¹

Few people of today's world are aware that indigo was once produced from plants. Thousands of peasants died in cultivation, and millions suffered to produce this color from plants. In the 16th to late 19th century, indigo dye was a global trade item. In Bengal in the 19th century, peasants were tortured, beaten, kidnapped, raped, flogged, and killed to feed the imperial appetite of indigo dye (Darrac & Schendel, 2006, p. 3). In 1859, Bengal's peasants refused to cultivate indigo and revolted against the indigo planters². The rebellion was so intense that the British colonial regime felt it would lose its grip on Bengal (Kling, 1966, p. 169).

Peasant rebellions were a regular phenomenon in the British Colonial rule of India. According to Gough, around 77 peasants' rebellions occurred in 190 years of colonial power (Gough, 1976, p. 1391). In the peasant rebellion, several theories are prevalent to explain the reasons behind the revolts focusing on exploitation, global capitalism, and trade, moral, economic factors, the role of education, and institutional perspectives. Various historians and political scientists have contributed to understanding the role of these factors (and others) for why indigo cultivating peasants revolted in Bengal. For Suprokash Roy, peasants revolted because of exploitation, coercive production system, and economic loss (Roy, 1966). Tirthankar Roy analyzed the rebellion from the commercial law and institutional perspectives. He argues that the weakness of the contract between planters and peasants resulted as an uprising (Roy, 2010). Van Schendel linked the indigo rebellion with global capitalism and trade. He also examines Indigo as a global trade item for what colonial powers were contesting to take control of the global market (Darrac & Schendel, 2006, p. 3). Sanjoy Ghildiyal examines the indigo rebellion with James Scott's moral economy theory. He proposed that peasants revolted because the planters threatened their subsistence security (Ghildiyal, 2010). Kling's who wrote details on the indigo rebellion, argues that land policy, labor exploitation, and coercive

¹ He was a district magistrate of Bengal, testified the quoted lines Infront of the Indigo Commission of 1860.

² Indigo factory owners introduced themselves as planters. Most of them are Europeans.

method of the production system instigated the peasants to revolt (Kling, 1966). In his seminal paper, Guha writes on the role of the educated class in the rebellion (Guha, 1974). There are significant quantities of writing on historical explanations and from a political economy approach to understanding the indigo rebellion (Gough, 1976, Gupta, 1974, Bhattacharya, 1977,1978). Several of these studies have in common that they emphasise the connection between colonial extractive policy and peasant rebellion. This is also the focus of this study, which is a case study of the indigo rebellion in Bengal that started in 1859.

Aim

The aim of the study is to analyse and understand what factors contributed to the indigo rebellion in Bengal during the period 1859-1860. To understand the indigo revolt broadly, this study seeks to find some social factors resulting from colonial policy and institutional arrangements which instigated the peasants to revolt. This study hypothesis is that colonial policy brought socio-economic and institutional changes in colonial Bengal. Therefore, peasants revolted one after another against the 'outsiders. This study thus departs from the dominant political economy approach of peasant rebellion. The following research questions are investigated:

1. What were the principal social conditions leading indigo peasants to revolt?
2. To what extent and how did colonial socio-economic policy and institutional arrangements induce peasants to revolt?

Theoretical perspectives

Twentieth Century is marked as the century of peasant rebellion by Eric R. Wolf (1999). At that time, many empires were falling by the roar of the peasantry. From Russia to Cuba, Algeria to India, we observed the uprising of the peasant society. Later scholars and academics attempted to understand why peasants revolted so vehemently at that period. On the ground of this, various theories and thoughts emerged from different schools of thought. It has created a scholarly contended situation and, in some cases, over generalization in the peasant theory. Wolf asserts that there is a risk in the overgeneralization of peasantry. One such example of

generalization in the theory of peasant rebellion is the lack of a precise definition of a peasant. Blaut et al. (1977) points out "The term 'peasant' itself is an important example of ambiguous usage. At times it may be restricted to the very narrow meaning of land-owning family farmers; at other times, it may comprehend all categories of rural workers, including plantation workers and migrant farm workers. The crucial point is the need for semantic clarity" (Blaut et al., 1977, p. 126). Therefore, in the first part of the theory section, I have presented several definitions of Peasant.

It is hard to understand peasant rebellion and the rebellious role of the peasants with a single theory. It is also difficult to apply a theory to a vast category of peasants as there is distinctiveness among peasant society in the world. However, for this study, commercialization of agriculture, peasant class conflict, and moral economy theories have been briefly discussed.

Definition of peasant

In general discussion, often, the rural population is regarded as a peasant. This definition includes people like fishermen, artisan, landowners, cultivators, and sharecroppers.

Peasant is a rural cultivator is another accepted definition of the peasantry. Considering this definition, Kurtz describes three major attributes of a peasant. According to him, a peasant is someone who,

- I. owns or manages a piece of land that they cultivate,
- II. is subordinate to a rural dominant class,
- III. belongs to a distinctive community cultural practice

Based on these characteristics of a peasant he identified five categories of definitions of the peasantry. According to him, the Weberian defines a peasant as a rural cultivator who has land, is ruled by another class in the society, and has a distinctive culture. The Marxian tradition consider land ownership and subordination as important elements of peasantry. The anthropological school emphasizes the cultural distinctiveness of the peasants. Moral economy theory acknowledges the peasant community's social subordination and subsistence ethics (Kurtz, 2000, P, 94).

According to definition of anthropologist Wolf: "Peasants as a population that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the processes of cultivation" (Wolf, 1999, p. xiii-xiv).

We can also look at some dictionary definitions of Peasant. For instance, according to the definition of the Cambridge dictionary, Peasant is,

"a person who owns or rents a small piece of land and grows crops, keeps animals, etc. on it, especially one who has a low income, very little education, and a low social position. This is usually used of someone who lived in the past or of someone in a poor country, a member of a low social class of farmworkers and owners of small farms." (Cambridge dictionary, 2021)

Oxford learner's dictionary defines Peasant as

- a) Especially in the past, or in poorer countries) a farmer who owns or rents a small piece of land.
 - b) (informal) (disapproving) a rude person, behaves badly, or has little education.
- (Oxford learner's dictionary, 2021)

In the definition of Shanin, a peasant is that person who, with the help of simple tools and family labors, produces mainly for his consumption and shares a part of his production with the landlord or the state. Shanin explored that in all over the world, there are some similarities in peasant society. He has especially identified four essential elements to define a peasant: farm, family, class, and community tradition. Firstly, a peasant will earn his livelihood and surplus production from his family farm. Secondly, family has an important role in the peasant society as it supports in the agricultural production, maintaining social network and status in the society. In addition, class is also an important element because peasants as a class are subordinate to the state or higher political and economic power. Finally, peasants live in the rural area by maintaining their community tradition.

At the end of this discussion, it is essential to note that peasants vary in class, social structure, places, land ownership, etc. Some dimensions and variations are very important when studying peasant society and culture (Alavi, 1965, p. 241). In the analysis section, and in the final discussion I will use these definitions of the peasantry to examine and discuss how the indigo planters have threatened the Peasant's common rights, tradition, and values.

Commercialization of agriculture and capitalism

Expansion of capitalism and market economy are two significant factors behind twentieth-century peasants' rebellion, according to Wolf (1999, p. 276). He came to this conclusion based on the analysis of peasant rebellions of Mexico, Russia, China, Viet Nam, Algeria, and Cuba. To him, especially 'North Atlantic capitalism' is a new cultural phenomenon in the traditional peasant society. The expansion of capitalism destroyed the traditional system of agricultural production and traditional norms. Wolf further describes how the market redistributes the organization of the labor system in rural areas. The organization of labor is the foundation of peasantry life. In the traditional society, change in the labor system means also change in the organization of the society. The invasion of the market economy transforms the rural economy and threatens the economic security of the agrarian community. As 'land' is valued as a 'product' in the market, it is vital to destroy the traditional view of the land where land is not a commodity but part of nature and property of commoners. Capitalism uses force to evict the peasantry from their land rights and through the colonization of new land. Thus, as Wolf puts it, "Capitalism necessarily produces a revolution of its own" (Wolf, 1999, p. 278).

Predatory character is inherent in capitalism. Before the expansion of capitalism, a portion of Peasant's surplus production was transferred to the state or landlord. They did not revolt against this system until it was in an equilibrium relation. The state also provided minimum security to peasants, such as access to common land, plow land, grassland, and forest. This worked as economic security for the Peasant. However, capitalism changed this balanced relationship by taking away these rights and transforming the Peasant as an economic actor. In this regard, Wolf noted that "They had to learn how to maximize returns and minimize expenditures to buy cheap and sell dear, regardless of social obligations and social costs." Moreover, Wolf explains, "where previously market behavior had been subsidiary to the existential problems of subsistence, now existence and its problems became subsidiary to marketing behavior" (wolf, 1999, p. 279).

Thus, the market destroys the traditional natural way of life, and everything became a product in the market system. This massive commercialization of common property also created an ecological crisis and food insecurity. Wolf describes how this happened, and the

consequences, "Outright seizures of land by foreign colonists and enterprises drove the peasants back upon a land area no longer sufficient for their needs" (Wolf, 1999. p 281).

The market system changed the relation between production and producer. Wolf closely examines this phenomenon. Wolf asserts that capitalism 'liberated' men, but it depends on the accumulation of human suffering. With reference to Karl Marx's term, he describes this process as 'alienation'. He explains, "The alienation of men from the process of production which had previously guaranteed their existence, their alienation from the product of their work which disappeared into the market only to return to them in the form of money, their alienation from their fellow men who had become actual or potential competitors in the market, these are not only philosophical concepts; they depict real tendencies in the growth and spread of capitalism. They were most starkly in evidence at work everywhere in the new colonies, regarded by the colonists as outright supply depots for the metropolitan market. There the racial and cultural prejudices of the new conquerors allowed them latitude in treating the native population as 'pure' which they had not enjoyed in the home country" (Wolf, 1999, p. 280).

Another side effect of capitalism is the massive population growth. The peasants have to take the challenges of production for this growing population with limited resources. It was an imbalanced situation. Wolf opines that in such a situation, the risk of the peasants has multiplied, such imbalance and insecurity could not endure in the long run. In the end, peasants tried to demolish this imbalanced social condition (Wolf, 1999. p 281). He further argues that "Paradoxically, the very spread of the capitalist market principle also forced men to seek defenses against it" (Wolf, 1999. P. 282).

Wolf studied how capitalism changed the power structure of the rural area and created a new power structure in the society. He asserts, in this system, the peasant, tribal chief, landed nobleman lost their social respect, and new social groups gain respect. In the market system, the landlord's wealth depends on the market's fluctuations, which threatened their social status in the community. Wolf points out "many of their inherited titles end up on the auction block" (Wolf, 1999. P. 283). The invisible hand of the market cannot control the inner contradiction of capitalism. In such a situation, the actions of the economic mediator create a condition for conflict. Wolf describes

the role as "The economic mediators are bearers of the process of monetization and the agents of social dissolution; at the same time, their obedience to the market demands that they maximize returns, regardless of the immediate consequences of their actions" (Wolf, 1999, p. 286). The money collectors administrate the commercialization of agriculture; however, they have less control of their consequences. Wolf asserts, the expansion of the capitalist market has its own inner conflict. It forced men to fight against it. Though land and labor are an important factor in the life of peasants but not only a factor for rebellion. The market expansion tore up the social relationships of peasants.

Industrialization and new communication create a new social class and change the social structure where the peasant searches for his positions. In this scenario, peasants have two ways to deal with it. First, they can destroy their traditional social form and institution or search for a new social structure. Thus, the society became a hot pan of rebellion, so when peasants touched the uprising, the entire society put more fuel on the fire (wolf, 1999, p 293-295).

Scott is known for applying moral economy theory to understand peasant uprising with a market economy. Scott mentions that in the preindustrial society, the commercialization of agriculture instigated the peasant to revolt as it creates threats to the livelihood of the farmers (Scott, 1977, p 269). He notes that "the growth of the colonial state and the commercialization of agriculture exposed an ever-widening sector of the peasantry to new market-based insecurities which increased the variability of their income above and beyond the traditional risk in yield fluctuations." Later he comments that the expansion of the market and modernization of agriculture may increase the income of the peasantry, however, it destroys the food security and the morality of subsistence. This creates a situation of rebellion (Kurtz, 2000, P, 103).

Jerkins views the market and excessive exploitation of the landlord as essential factors behind the peasant uprising. Jerkins explains Stinchcombe's (1961) explanations of peasant rebellion. He writes, according to Stinchcombe, a commercial tenancy is an explosive system of land tenure. In this system, the conflict between landlords and the interest of peasants is visible. Landlords try to exploit peasants as much as possible to reduce their economic insecurity, while in the production system, their contribution is zero. In this

system, peasants gain nothing. The interest of the landlords is evident. The tenants view the landlords as their exploiters and eliminating them will increase their agricultural production share.

Moreover, the landlords are absent in the village. Therefore, they have weak control over the tenants, whereas tenants live in a homogeneous village with solidarity and a social network. In addition, Jenkins opines that "commercial tenancy tends to give rise to a class of independent smallholders who, despite being outside the tenancy system, view the landowners as an obstacle to their upward mobility and therefore serve as instigators of rebellion" (Jenkins, 1992, p 488).

Paige examines the relations between the commercialization of the market and its effect on agricultural society. In his perspective, agriculture commercialization is the only source of political change in rural areas. He said commercialization of agriculture expanded primarily in so-called underdeveloped countries based on some tropical products. The agricultural commodity market develops a new kind of agricultural production system, repeated in many parts of the world. In the plantation system, public land was owned by an entrepreneur who had substantial capital. The production system was based on industrial processing. The labor force is wage laborers and residents on the estate. Agriculture farming is labor-intensive work, a large number of people are generally involved in agriculture activity. Therefore, agricultural exports affect a large number of people. Paige distinguishes that commercial agriculture does not spread all over the rural population, only concentrated in distinct commercial enclaves. He analyzes this situation as, "The effects, however, are not spread evenly over the entire rural population, but instead tend to be concentrated in distinct commercial enclaves. These enclave economics are particularly likely if the export sector has been controlled by foreign corporations or colonial settlers" (Paige, 1978, P. 2).

Paige also analyzed how market economics changed the communal structure of the peasant society. He says agriculture exports bring significant social and economic change in rural areas as they connect the market with the rural population. The agriculture export economy qualitatively changes the traditional agricultural production system. In the agriculture export economy, labor, capital, technology is imported from outside of the community. The result is, as he

describes, "The new forms of export agriculture organization created new social classes and destroyed old ones and introduced new patterns of class conflict" (Paige, 1978, P. 3).

The growth of the market and the rise of industrialization threaten the peasant's economic security, Shanin claims. He argues that an analysis of economic surplus will help to understand this process. Furthermore, he opens that, though agriculture is the foundation of industrialization, the peasant remains outside the new social framework. Shanin describes three impacts of industrialization in the agricultural sector. The first one is the commercialization of agriculture. He writes, "The competition of large-scale, capital intensive, mechanized agriculture gradually destroys the small farms." Land ownerships concentrate in the hands of commercial producers in the second characteristic of commercial agriculture. The third characteristics are, agricultural production is ruled by the industrial mode of production, which he describes as 'merely a branch of industry' (Shanin, 1966, p.12-13).

Moral economy

Moral Economy theory is another well-recognized theory of Peasant rebellion. E. P Thompson and Scott are two great pioneer academicians of the moral economy theory of peasant rebellion. In the perspective of this theory, peasants produce mainly for their family and for 'part of larger society that makes claims upon him.' According to Scott, peasant always likes to secure their livings and do not like to take risk as they live at the merging of the economic security. One-season harvest loss can be devastating for them. Therefore, to find an opportunity to earn more, they have to take a risk. In such a situation, peasants avoid taking the risk, ensure secure income from their land production. This behavior of peasants Scott defines as subsistence ethic or safety-first principle. But for the industrialist and entrepreneurs, this behavior of peasants is backward. The market economy cannot expand in such conditions. On the other hand, peasant-like to keep their traditional norms and culture. This is a conflicting situation.

Scott argues that the dense network of personal relations in the peasant community creates a format of rights, obligations, and norms that are outside the realm of written law and contract. It is not simply a matter of difference; it is a matter of resistance as well. Violation of these rights makes peasants unhappy (Scott, 1977, p. 274). Scott

examines the role of the landlord as the only tax collector. He noted that landlords play no managerial or marketing role in the production system, providing no or little cash; as a result, in the absence of landlords in the peasant society, the peasantry will be benefited by paying no tax or rent to the landlord (Scott, 1977, p. 276). Moreover, he adds that peasants had customary rights in the local common land, forest, pasture, and water and used these natural resources as a shared resource. According to him, taking off these rights from the peasantry in southeast Asia can turn them into a rebellious group (Scott, 1977, P. 278).

Moreover, Scott noted that tax increase aggravated many rebellions as peasantry viewed that as a threat to their subsistence. He argues that the resistant capacity of peasants is not only a class conflict; rather, it depends on the cultural and geographical distance from the hegemonic institution of the center. Peasantries have their social norms and social networks that help them develop as a distinctive class that creates a boundary from the organizational and cultural life of the center (Scott, 1977, p. 280-289).

Land ownership, political power, and intelligentsia

Many scholars also discussed several other reasons for peasant rebellion.

Wolf and Paige agreed that the aim of the peasant is simple. Peasants struggled to remove the yoke imposed on them by the planters in the form of exploitations. The relation between land and peasants is straightforward. Peasant lives on the land and does agricultural activities. Therefore, any change that creates insecurity in their livelihood makes them worry. Peasants never think of ruling the state, their demand is to free their land from tax collectors, landowners, and officials, and they never wish to lead the complex state machinery as they view it as a 'cold monster' (Wolf, 1999, P.294).

Hobsbawm thinks similarly and notes that peasants are quite aware of their local political map; however, it is hard for them to see the broader politics of the state (Hobsbawm, 1973, p. 13).

From the seminar of Clark University, it was accepted that the nature of land expropriating has a significant impact on the peasant societies, and agriculture export business has a similar effect on the peasantry (Blaut et al., 1977, p. 125).

Wolf asserts that in the process of industrialization of the society, a new intellectual class is born, and they are educated from the unique cultural system of the market economy. This new educated class observes the ill symptoms of the crisis and has empathy for the people's sufferings. But because of their social position, they cannot do much. Wolf puts it as, "In all of our six cases, we witness such a fusion between the 'rootless' intellectuals and their rural supporters" (Wolf, 1999, p.289).

Table 1. Summary of theories and factors of significance for understanding peasant rebellion to be used in the analysis

Author	Theory	Summary of arguments and factors
Wolf	Capitalism and commercialization of agriculture	Capitalism brings a significant change in the traditional peasants' society. It evicts peasants from land, land became a market commodity, agriculture production became market-oriented, new power structure and new social class emerged, market-oriented agriculture production. Thus, capitalism bears its own conflict. In this process traditional peasant society became rebellious in such a situation.
Jenkins	Class conflict	Conflict arises between landlords and the peasant class; landlords always try to exploit peasants, and market expansion worsens the situation.

Paige	Marxist	In the beginning commercialization of agriculture expanded mainly in tropical countries, class conflict between producer and non-producer in the market economy system, landholding peasants are less likely to revolt, wage labor and landless labor have the potential to revolt.
Shanin	Market and land tenure	Commercialization of agriculture destroy traditional small farming, land ownership transfer to the commercial producer, industrial mode of agriculture production.
Scott	Moral Economy	The traditional mode of production allows a certain level of surplus extraction, penetration of market or state changed the surplus extraction level, result in threaten their subsistence ethic. Peasant revolt is likely.

In the empirical analysis and the discussion, I will use this analytical framework. I will see how these theories and factors can explain my case of the indigo rebellion. Commercialization of agriculture and capitalism theory will be used to examine peasants' economic threats, exploitations, and change in the traditional society. The moral economy will guide how peasants' subsistence security had been threatened. Land tenure and class conflict will use as lenses to analyze planters and peasants' relations, production methods, and extraction of surplus labor.

Method

This study is a reflective qualitative study in nature. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), there are various definitions of 'reflexivity.' Some researchers acknowledge the researcher's

engagement with the study, how they influenced the projects, and how the researcher's perspectives, own experience, and knowledge impacted the study (Given, 2008, p. 748). Lewis et al. argue that the researcher is part of the social world; therefore, it is impossible to get a "view from nowhere" (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, P 934). This study implies qualitative case study research method to amass and analyze data. This study has attempted to deeply understand a single case which is 'Indigo revolt in Bengal'. In the case study research method, we investigate on single or multiple event/s, complex social phenomenon or a case with an in-depth understating. In this method, emphasis has been given on understanding the event deeply rather than broadly. Generally, in the case study research approach theory helped the research design to generate some perspectives. A theoretical proposition directs the case study method in its analysis and guides the research to find a relationship between the cause and effects. According to Yin, "the simple goal is to have a sufficient blueprint" for the study which helps to understand '...why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occur" (Yin, 2012, p. 38). For the theoretical proposition, I have read the texts against the theory of peasant rebellion, commercialization of agriculture, peasant class conflict, and moral economy of peasant rebellion.

Data sources

To find the answers to the research questions, this study has used colonial documents, different scholarly books, Indigo commission reports, various texts, songs, stories, newspaper reports, and archival data. The study has used both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the indigo commission report, newspapers, colonial office's documents, and archival data. These documents are very close to the event, and secondary data is mainly works of the historians and scholarly writings on the Indigo rebellion (Thies, 2002, p 356). The project is interdisciplinary in this scope and approach since it studies various texts, i.e., stories, poems, local history, Indigo commission reports, drama, advertisements, local newspapers, biography, etc.

Data analysis

The purpose of qualitative data analysis is to deeply understand different situations and different people's understanding of the world (Bold, 2012, p, 122). To analyze the data, I read the texts against the

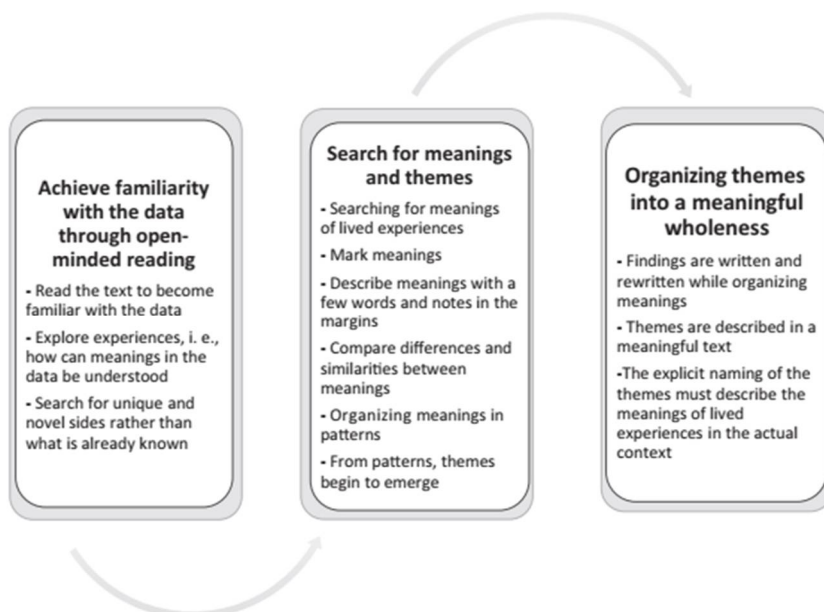


Figure 1. Process of thematic analysis. Source: Sundler et al., 2019, p. 736.

theories mentioned above and applied thematic narrative analysis. In the view of Yin, the theoretical proposition supports the entire analysis process of the research method and helps to find out the contextual explanation of the event (Yin, 2012, p, 136). Keeping this explanation in mind I have followed the aspects outlined in Figure 1.

Empirical analysis

Financial bleeding

Emirate professor Utsa Patanik' calculated that the British had plundered 45 trillion dollars from India between 1765 to 1938. This cumulative calculation is based on India's 24 % GDP of 1700 with a 6 % depreciation. Polya underlines that India's industrial output in the global market declined from 25 % in 1750 to 2 % in 1900 (Polya, 2019). Similarly, Shashi Tharoor, in his book 'Inglorious Empire' asserted that, under the British regime, the literacy rate was 16 percent, and the average life expectancy was 27 years. The

exploitation hindered domestic industries' development. When the British left India in 1947, 90 % of the people lived under the poverty line (ibid, 2019). This robbing of India's wealth had a significant impact on the peasant's society.

After the battle of Plassey in 1757, the East India Company (EIC)¹ won the war and took control of Bengal. They set up their local collaborator in the Bengal throne as a puppet king. The puppet kings followed the orders of the EIC. The company granted all English men to do business without paying any tax. Consequently, this permission evicts the local businessman from their business. Mukerjee explains, "Bengal's towns began to empty, bankrupt local merchants moved to other Indian cities, and shopkeepers took to downing their shutters and running when British traders and their soldiers approached" (Mukerjee, 2010, p.11).

The following list presents a microscope picture of the plunder of India's wealth. Here is a list of the puppet kings' paid amounts to EIC from 1757 to 1765.

Mir Jafar 3.4 million pounds

Mir Qasim .2 million pounds

Mir Jafar .5 million pounds

Jafar's son 2.3 million pounds

Only the installed kings paid personally 6.4 million pounds to the EIC as donations in just eight years. Because of EIC's excessive draining of wealth to England, Bengal transformed from the most prosperous province to the poorest province of India. At that same time, the company tactfully took over Bengal's tax collection rights from the weak Mughal emperor. Later the tax money was used in war and trade expansion. Clive calculated that EIC would profit 1.5 million pounds per year.

In contrast, they have to pay only .272 million to the Mughal administration. In addition, Five years later, EIC had paid annually 400000 pounds to His majesty's government as their profit was so

¹ British East India Company had a royal charter to pursue business in many parts of the world. The company represented Britain in India and had the right to keep its own army.

high. Land tax was the primary source of revenue. Peasants were compelled to pay tax in silver or grains; even they failed a crop. The tax collection was so successful for the EIC that in Bihar, the amount of revenue collection increased from 200000 to 680000 pounds in a year. The heavy burden of taxation was on the shoulders of the farmers.

Farmers had to bear the indescribable hardships and pains of paying this over-tax. A cloth merchant of that time wrote, "necessitated to sell their children to pay their rents, or otherwise obliged to fly the country" (Mukerjee, 2010, p 12). Thus, EIC shipped the wealth of Bengal to England, which led to the boom of industrialization in England and the destruction of the local industries of Bengal. Moreover, the collected tax was again reinvested to buy silks, muslins, and cotton cloths. Mukerjee writes, "Between 1766 and 1768, Bengal imported £624,375 worth of goods and cash and exported £6,311,250—the amount going out ten times greater than what came in. Such an economic drain could not go on forever. By 1769, Bengal had no gold, silver, or other valuables left" (ibid, p 12). American historian Brooks Adams commented, 1760 can be defined as the beginning of the industrial revolution. The capital from India, which was a third of the total savings of England in the 18th century, ensured the smooth growth of industrial development in England. Though India supplied enormous raw materials, capital, and labor for England's industrial revolution, the new cotton machinery of England was banned in India. If machines were permitted, then a high tax was imposed on them. For instance, the British paid only 3.5 % tax on cotton goods in India, whereas the Indians have to pay more than 17.5 % tax. As a result, in 1813, Calcutta exported 2 million pounds of cotton goods to England, the same amount of goods India imported in 1830. Thus, Indian industries and economy were devastated by the British policy and act. Moreover, many cottage industries were shut down in rural areas as markets flooded with British cotton products (Ibid, P. 80-84).

The entire cotton industries of England were highly dependent on Indian agricultural raw materials. This is crucial as it had created massive pressure on the peasants to cultivate raw materials for British companies. Mukerjee underlines, "By the mid-nineteenth century, half of the United Kingdom's exports came from cotton manufactures and virtually all of India's from its field" (ibid, p. 81). As the local factories were closed, the agriculture sector had to take the

burden of the administration cost of the British colonial empire. Mukerjee explained, "The paucity of manufactures also meant that agricultural exports had to bear almost the entire burden of India's permanent financial obligation to the United Kingdom" (Ibid, p. 82). It means the agriculture sector and peasants had to take the burden of the salaries of the British Indian soldiers, their pension, administration cost, war expenses, rebellion charges, and infrastructure costs such as railway construction costs. Even at the end of the Victorian era per year, India had to pay 20 million pounds to Her Majesty's government. This mountain of wealth had been taken from rural India. Romesh Chunder Dutt asserted that to meet the demand of the British Indian government, India had to export tea, jute, cotton, rice, wheats, indigo, opium, and other agricultural products. He calculated that every year India exported grains for around 25 million people. This load of the big-budget was on the shoulder of the peasants. After paying tax, producing commercial products for the market, and sharing a significant portion of their staple grains with the landlords, there was nothing left on the plate of the poor peasants (Ibid, p. 82).

Amartya Sen writes, "while most of the loot from the financial bleeding accrued to British company officials in Bengal, there was widespread participation by the political and business leadership in Britain" (Sen, 2021). He said a fourth of the total members of the parliament had owned stocks in the EIC. Thus, the wealth of Bengal ended in the British establishment.

Famine and the death of 1.6 trillion

British economic exploitation of Indian society is visible in the dreadful death toll from famine. Emeritus professor Utsa Patnaik estimated under the British regime, about 1.6 trillion people had died. This estimation had taken account of the various social shocks caused by poverty, deprivation, and famine. Polya, in his analysis, writes, "Despite a very high birth rate, the Indian population did not increase between 1860 (292 million) and 1934 (292 million). This is indicative of massive avoidable deaths from imposed deprivation that can be estimated as 745 million (1860-1934) or an average of about 10 million Indian avoidable deaths from deprivation per year" (Polya, 2019).

Because of exploitative policy and administrative structure, famine became a regular phenomenon of India in the British regime. Great Historian S Roy wrote, in Bengal, the great gift of the British was 'Famine.' He continued, before the British raj famine was limited in some local regions. In addition, at the time of famine, local food banks and social security supported the peasants. However, the British destroyed the social security of Bengal. (Roy, 1966, p. 178-179)

In the famine year of 1770, due to drought, the peasants lost their entire crops. In such a bad condition of grain shortage, the British transported 5000 tons of rice from Bengal to Behar for soldiers' food storage. In addition, the British officers and their agents started a monopoly business on grains, as they oversaw the price of rice rise. In this famine, 10 million people, who were one-third population of Bengal, died. In the writings of Hunter, the horror description of this famine is vivid, he writes, "The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed-grain; they sold their sons and daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field" (Mukerjee, 2010, p 14). Capitalizing on famine, the British officials earned huge money. For example, a company clerk who could not save more than 200 pounds in a year, even so, in the famine year of 1770, he sent 60000 pounds in England. That year EIC 'generously' spent 9000 pounds for famine reliefs, though, the same year, they collected 1.8-million-pound revenue from Bengal and Behar (Mukerjee, 2010, p 14). In 1772 the Governor-General Warren Hastings, in a letter written to the directors of the company, "Withstanding the loss of at least one-third of the inhabitants of the province, and the consequent decrease of cultivation, the net collections of the year 1771 exceeded even those of 1768" (Hunter, 1868, p. 381). This clearly shows that even in acute famine, the company is happy to collect excessive revenue from the poor peasants.

S Roy asserted two reasons for famine: a) Railway Road construction and b) the destruction of the irrigation system. The statistics proved the claim is valid. From 1852 to 1854, there were 13 major famines where approximately 5 million people died. After the railroad construction in India, from 1860 to 1879, in just 20 years, there were 16 famines where 12 million people died (Roy, 1966, p.178-179). Because of the newly built railroad, it was easy to buy

grains from the local markets; moreover, often Europeans pressured the peasants to sell their grains to them. This monopoly business created a vacuum in the local market of Bengal. In 1869, after the opening of the Suez Canal and the expansion of the railroad in India, it was easy to transport goods from India to England. One year later, in the 1870 famine, millions of people died because of food shortage. Hence, that same year India exported seven times more grains than the previous three decades. India's wheat was exported at such a low rate that it determines the wheat's price of the overall global market (Mukerjee, 2010, p. 83).

Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen highlights that the British's incredible performance is not the end of the famine, nor they improved the health condition of Indians. Instead, when they left India, the average life expectancy was 32. The British started the regime with the 1770 famine, and they left India with the great famine of 1943 (Sen, 2021). In the 1943 famine of Bengal, the official records tell that 1.5 million people died, whereas other records estimated 3 million people. Surprisingly, after India's independence in 1947, there was no famine in India (Mukerjee, 2010, p. 13, Sen, 2021).

Land reformation: Peasants lost their rights on land

In 1700, peasants owned the land. Even if their harvest was lost, they were not evicted from the land. Land revenue was used for public facilities, such as building schools or maintaining irrigation systems. Bengal seventh-century king Alivardi wrote, "The money in the hands of the people of the country is my wealth which I have consigned to their purses". Moreover, he advised his grandson, the last king of Bengal Siraj-ud-daula, not to exploit the commoners by saying, 'let them grow rich and the state will develop rich (Mukerjee, 2010, p. 9). In the Mughal era, the revenue was collected through Zamindars and Mughal officials. However, on land, peasants had rights. They have greater control over their land, pasturage, and forest (Umar, 2013, page 11). The scenario changed at the time of colonial administration.

Lord Cornwallis, in 1793 reformed the land revenue system of Bengal. The aim was to collect a steadfast amount of tax from Bengal. In this system, Zamindars and middlemen were responsible for managing revenue from several villages under their control (see Figure 2). The company fixed the amount of revenue from a

Zamindari state. Zamindars were expected to pay their rent regularly, at a pre-scheduled time of the year. If they failed to pay the rent at the pre-scheduled time, their estate was auctioned. This resulted, 75 % of zamindars changed their hands of their state. This new contract was named the 'Permanent settlement' act. The permanent settlement act changed the land tenure system entirely. Under this contract, Zamindar had absolute rights on the land. They became the owner of common land, pond, forest, grazing land, pastures, and water bodies. They can buy and sell land or distribute their lands to anyone they like. As a result, the peasantry had lost their generations of rights on the land. (Umar, 2013, p. 13-14, Mukerjee, 2010, p. 17 NCTR,2021).

In addition, this system increased the torture of the peasants. Even in a lean year peasants had to pay a high amount of tax. In the Mughal time, peasants were allowed to pay with the variation of yield. But in the British rule in the time of bad harvest years, sometimes peasants had to mortgage their future crops, later their land and thus they became landless and poor, turned into day labor. Mukerjee writes, "In the past, a peasant's land was secure even if he could not pay taxes. But British law in India invariably upheld the rights of creditors, who became critical cogs in the machinery of revenue extraction" (Mukerjee, 2010, p 14).

Destructive result of permanent settlement act

Administratively as zamindars were only responsible for collecting rent, they did not think of the peasants' welfare and irrigation system, and colonial rulers took no responsibility for developing the rural area.

Many Zamindars were oppressive. They punished peasants when collecting the revenue. Even in a lean year, they claimed tax as their wish. There were no regulations.

A certain amount of tax was imposed on Zamindar's estate without considering the quality of the soil, land, irrigation system, flood, drought, and rainfall. So, the Zamindars also pressured peasants for tax.

Politically, the British considered the Zamindars as their loyal collaborators. Most of the Zamindars were in support of colonial rule. This system created a new parasite middlemen class who collected rent on the Zamindars' behalf and oversaw the estate. In the name of collecting tax, they regularly inhumanly tortured peasants.

In 1772 the total Zamindars were around 100. However, in 1872 the number of Zamindary increased dramatically to 150,000! From this account, one can assume the Zamindars and intermediaries' torture of peasants increased (Bhattacharjee, 2020, Umar, 2013, p 16-21).

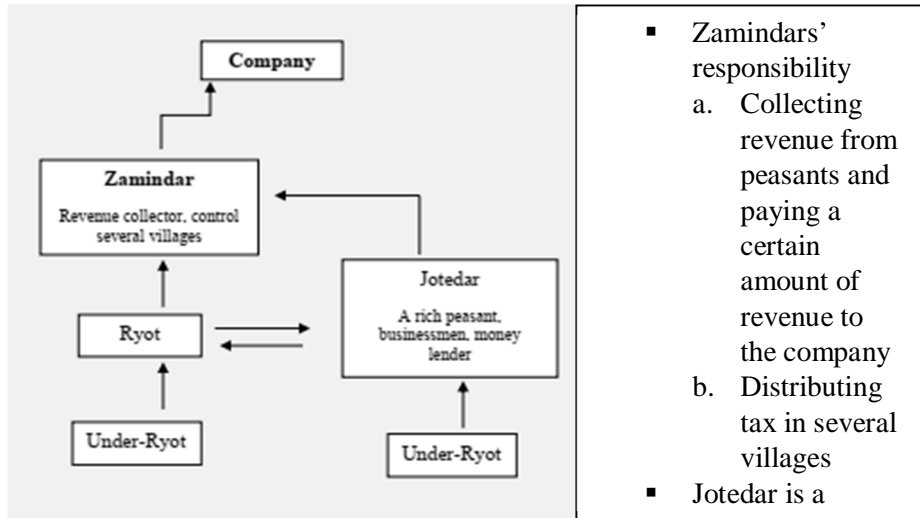


Figure 2. A general power structure of the indigo cultivation villages of Bengal

Land use in the production of Indigo

Understanding the production system of the Indigo is vital to understand the indigo rebellion. Indigo was generally cultivated under the Nij (own) and Ryoti (tenant) systems (Figure 3). In the nij system, the planters produce their Indigo with waged labor. In this system, planters bought the land or rented it from local Zamindars. In the nij system, the planters had to invest in bullocks, ploughs, labor, land, seed, processing, production, cutting the plants, fertilizers, and overall maintenance. In addition, planters had to take the risk of production loss because of bad weather.

Whereas in the Ryoti (tenant) system, the planters make a contract with the peasants. In this system, planters gave some advance money and indigo seeds to peasants. Nevertheless, the rest of the production work was on peasants. In the ryoti system, the peasants had to cultivate Indigo on their lands, with their family labor and

bullocks, plough the land, show the seed, weed clearing, irrigation, harvest it, and finally transport it to the factory. Moreover, all the risks and labor were on peasants. So, if the harvest was lost in a lean year, the peasant had to pay and retake a loan from the planters. Subsequently, he fell into the debt trap of the planters.

There are two categories of the ryoti system: be-ilaka and ilaka. In the be-ilaka system, planters lack land rights or any direct control over peasants. Peasants were under the supervision of a local zamindar. However, in the liaka system, planters had rights over the land and peasants were under his command. At the time of indigo rebellion, most of the cultivation was under liaka system. (Gupta, 1992, p 173-178, Punekar et al., 1988, p. 12-16, Kling, 1960, p. 52-53).

In 1837, the planter's position dramatically improved after passing the law that any crown subject can hold any amount of land for any length of time. This opens the gate for the planters to do more cultivation on the likha system. Hereafter, planters spent much of their resources in buying Zamindary. Kling writes, "by the time of the indigo disturbances, most of the cultivation in the large concerns of Lower Bengal was ilaka, in which the concern was the landlord" (Kling, 1966, p. 53). For example, the Bengal Indigo company holds 75000 bighas of land, whereas only 17000 were be-ilaka. In James Hill's concerns, out of 67000 bigahs, only 14000 bigahs were be-ilaka. (Ibid, p 54). When the holdings of planters increased on Likha land, the peasants couldn't escape from the grip of the planters. Finding no alternatives, they have to stay in the villages under the coercive system of indigo cultivation. The entire indigo production system rested based on oppression and intimidation.

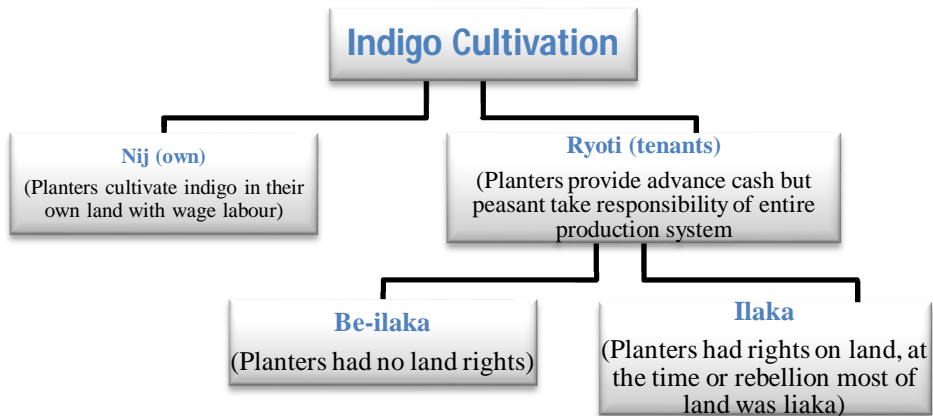


Figure 3. Land use system of Indigo cultivation

Demerits of the ryotei system

All risk of production was on the shoulder of the peasant.

Peasants were in the cycle of the debt trap of the planters.

The planters took the best fertile land, reduced the cultivation of rice and food grains.

It was not economically beneficial for the peasants.

Indigo cultivation was labor-intensive and needed constant monitoring, but it was not remunerative for peasants; moreover, it threatened their food security.

Cultivation needed high supervision; for instance, after the spring rain, the seed was required to sow immediately before the soil's moisture evaporated and directly transferred to the factories after harvesting.

Exploitative nature of the plantation

The second lieutenant General of Bengal wrote his observation on planters' exploitations. He said that the root of the whole question is "the struggle to make rayats grow the indigo plant, without paying them the price of it (Kling, 1966, p 142).

The planters earned 12 rupees per bigha land of indigo production whereas the ryot gets only 2 rupees 8 annas. King writes, "in 1860, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal calculated that the ryot lost 7 rupees per bigha when he cultivated indigo in place of another crop" (Kling, 1966, p 36). Ryot not only lost 7 rupees moreover he had to pay bribes to different officials of the factory.

As aforementioned in the ryoti system of indigo cultivation, the peasant entered a contract with the planters. Once the peasant entered the contract, there was no easy escape from the agreement. Generally, 1 to 20 years was the length of the contract. Sometimes planters pressured the peasant to take the advance. Moreover, 'under ryot' did not get the money of the contract if the contract was with the head ryot. Even if the peasant wishes to repay the money, the planters did not accept it. Kling underlines, "It matters little whether the ryot took his original advances with reluctance or cheerfulness, the result, in either case, is the same; he is never afterward a free man" (Kling, 1966, p 142). The giving advance intended to keep peasants in constant threats. Kling talks, "The planter's object in maintaining the debt was to use it as a threat to force the ryot to cultivate indigo" (Kling, 1966, p 37).

The indigo commission asked Ashley Eden if the ryots enter into a contract, then why it will be a problem? Eden replied that in six years of his experience, no ryots entered into a legal agreement without force (Commission, 1860, p. 16).

Here some of the clause that shows the evil motive of the contract:

Servants of the factory measure the land of the peasant.

Peasants will plough the ground that the planters had measured.

Peasants will buy the seeds from the planters.

They will cultivate, weeding the ground, cut the harvest and transfer it to the factory at their own cost (Kling, 1966, p. 127)

The indigo commission and Evidence of Violence

When the rebellion was on a high, to investigate the matter, the British raj established a commission to mitigate the anger of the peasant. The aim was to set up an image of a 'just' and 'neutral' government in the mind of the peasants. After examining the indigo commission members, Kling wisely commented, "To all appearances,

the Commission was dominated by men sympathetic to the planting interest (Kling, 1966, p.139). Before the indigo commission, British officials, planters, Zamindars, and peasants testified. The reports provide information on violence in indigo cultivation.

The report shows that regular violence was part of the strategy of indigo cultivation. The planters use exemplary violence to exhibit their power and control the peasant. Ashley Eden¹ Testified, "In the district of Rajshaye, in the concern of Messrs. J. and R. Watson and Co, in which three villages were gutted, three cultivators killed, and six wounded, would be enough to strike terror into the hearts of the ryots, ...and it is only when the ryots have forgotten such acts as these, that any fresh violence of this sort is necessary" (Commission, 1860, p. 10). The system is such that it requires coercive actions to produce Indigo. Using whiplash to torture peasants was also common among European planters. In the Commission, the following conversation provide evidence,

"Baboo C. M, Chatterjee (Bengali landlord and commission member): Do you know that a kind of leather strap is kept in the factories for beating ryots?"

Ashley Eden: I have heard from ryots that there is a stick with leather attached to it, called

"Sham Chand" or "Ram Kant²," but this I merely heard from the Kishnaghur ryots."

In addition, Eden said, "... without which (violence) in my opinion, the cultivation of Indigo could not be carried on for one day" (Ibid, p. 10). The peasant did not want to make any objection against the planters because they had to suffer consequences if they did so. Sometimes They file a case in another district to escape the torture of planters. Eden shared many horror stories of violence from his personal experience. He told the Commission that one peasant was kidnapped from Rajshahi district, confined in the godown, where he died in confinement, later his body was thrown in the water body. In another case, the servants of Hobra factory ploughed up about 125 beegahs of the ryot's land without his permission, though the peasant

¹ Ashley Eden was a district magistrate of the British raj. He worked in the Indigo district for some time

² Name of the whiplashes. * Shamchand and Ram kant are lashes made of leather. The Planters used those to beat the ryots.

did not commit any offense to the planter. In both cases, there was no serious ruling for the offenders (Ibid, p. 3). If any peasants file a lawsuit or go against the will of the planters, the typical punishment was to carry off their livestock which was vital for the cultivation. From one indigo factory Eden released two to three hundred cattle that belonged to the farmers. However, the peasants did not come to claim the cattle in fear of the planters for several days. (Ibid, p. 4).

The indigo planters compelled peasants to cultivate Indigo. Eden argued that peasants should make decisions about what they like to grow. According to him, "I can conceive no principle upon which it can be argued that it is justifiable for a third party to come in and insist upon a ryot sowing that to which he objects" (Commission, 1860. P. 15). Peasants had no free agency to farm whatever they liked in their land. He said that indigo cultivation was unprofitable for the peasants; therefore, no ryots willingly would take such personal loss. The planters used violence visible in the Criminal records of Bengal (Ibid, p 2). From the criminal record, Eden presented that, "I beg to hand in an abstract of forty-nine serious cases of murder, homicide, riot, arson, dacoity, blunder, and kidnapping, which have occurred from the year 1830 to 1859, some of which I have taken from records which came before me during my incumbency... and all from authenticated papers." (Ibid, p. 2-3). However, this record was only the tip of the iceberg. In the period, the number of cases recorded against the planters was very low. He mentioned to the Commission that he believed that "These cases do not in any way represent the total amount of such outrageous that have committed during the period embraced...My own opinion is that not one tithe of the offenses committed ever came before any court at all" (Ibid, p. 9). Even European conceals their offense, even the murder of the ryot. Mr. Parick Smith of Dulleemulla factory saves a servant of his factory who was alleged of two murders. (Ibid, p. 6). The figure 4 is a snapshot of the overall oppression what was imposed on the peasants.

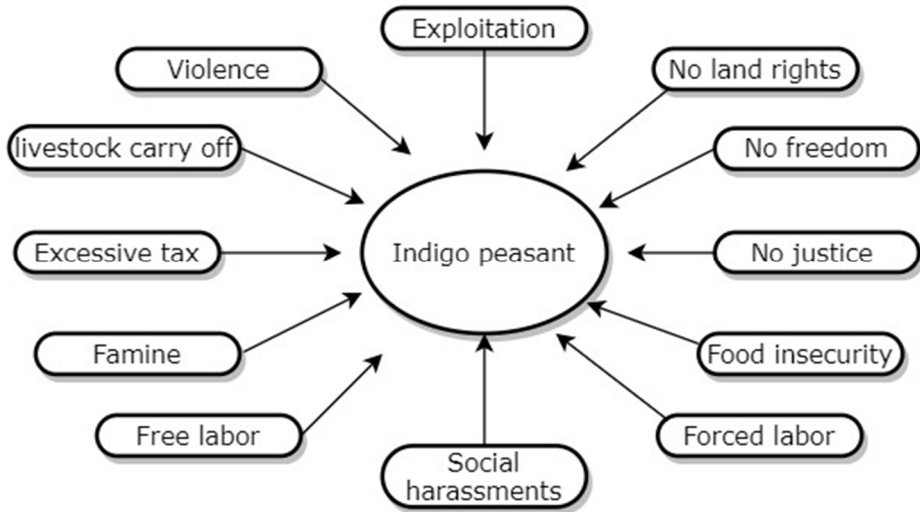


Figure 4. A snapshot of overall oppression on the peasants of Bengal

Various sources give an idea of the kind of oppression that was inflicted on the farmers. Kidnapping, carrying off cattle, destroying the farmland, torture by detaining peasants in the storage room, killing, sowing Indigo's seed in the head with mud, flogging, sexually harassing, dishonor, sexually harass peasant's women, beating with shoes are some of the common practices of the planters (Kling, 1966, p. 142).

The drama Neel Dorpon

The political drama Neel darpan (The indigo planting mirror) by Dinbondhu Mitra was published in Dhaka in 1860. The pages of the drama showcase the horror, exploitation, and violence of the planters. After the publication, the British raj immediately banned the drama and its stage performance. The colonial office filed litigation against the theater. The drama played a critical role in getting the support of the educated Bengaliee class of that time and created awareness among the Europeans on the oppression of indigo workers under British rule (Shapland, 2020).

The violence of the system was so severe that peasants had to leave the villages. The intrusion of the indigo planters in the village threatened the peasant's life security. Sadhu weeps in the drama,

“Sadhu: Master, I told you then we cannot live anymore in this country. You did not hear me. However, A poor man’s word bears fruit after the lapse of years (act 1, scene 1, Mitra, 1966, p. 5)

The peasants were losing their lands, property and leaving villages. Indigo cultivation is threatening their security to subsistence.

Sadhu. Now it is no more a place of happiness; your garden is already gone, and your holdings are well nigh gone. Ah ! it is not yet three years since the Saheb took a lease of this place, and he has already ruined the whole village (act 1, scene 1, Mitra, 1861, p. 3)

Peasants were even ready to work as labor only for food. Scott's moral economy suggested that peasants' first concern is to secure food for the family. But the planters did not allow this proposal.

Nobin. I said. “Saheb, as you engage all our men, our ploughs, and our kine, everything in the indigo field, only give us every year through, our food. We don’t want to hire. (act 1, scene 1, Mitra, 1861, p. 5)

As Shanin and Scott argue for the peasant’s protection of their family is very important. Women's honor and safety are vital for the peasant community. The planters had also destroyed this core moral value. Taking their tools and dishonor peasant family members was a common practice among planters.

Amin. (To himself, observing khetromany) this young woman is not bad looking; if our younger saheb can get her, he will, with his whole heart, take her.

Wood. I have scourged those wicked people, taken away their kine, and kept their wives in confinement which is a very severe punishment for them. (Act 1, scene2, Mitra, 1861, p. 10).

The Nil Darpan is a landmark political drama in the history of the Indigo rebellion. Though it upholds the peasants' poor conditions, it did not mention colonialism and imperial enterprises.

The political conditions

Contemporary political events and rebellions had impacted peasants' minds (Kling, 1966, p. 78, Roy, 1966). For instance, Barasat was a district close to Calcutta, was the center of the Farazi movement. Eden said the peasants of that district were politically sophisticated and organized. Jute production and railroad, Military station of Dum Dum enabled this district more turbulent than other indigo districts (Commission, 1860, P. 23).

Farazi movement started around 1830 to reform the Muslims' values. Later the movement shifted its focus to protect the poor peasant from the tyranny of the zamindars and landlords. The leader of this movement regarded the British as injurious to the Muslims and peasants. Farazi movements were popular in some indigo districts like Dhaka, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Chittagong, and Cumilla. The movement trained the peasants to organize and fight against oppressive landlords. This movement has a significant influence on the indigo rebellion (Banglapedia, 2021, Kling, 1966, p. 61))

From 1850-1857 the indigenous Santal group revolted against the oppression of the British, local money lenders and zamindars, and later indigo planters. Though the Santal indigenous community was peace-loving, they were highly organized at the time of the rebellion, and they fought against the British army with their traditional tools. The place of the Santal rebellion was just near the indigo districts. This incident stirred the minds of the peasants of Bengal (Islam, 2021).

The 1857 independence movement of India (known to the British as Mutiny) was also shaking the society's foundation. Though the rebellion was far from Bengal, many soldiers were from the peasant society; therefore, it also influenced the peasants' minds (Kling, 1966, p. 61).

It can be said that Bengal's political condition was hot. Peasants' societies were dissatisfied with colonial raj. They steadfastly struggled for a dignified life, also set up as the founding stone for India's independence movement. It is also noted that most of the educated classes were in favor of the colonial government.

Justice and favoritism

The Colonial ruler was always boasted of their law system. However, in colonial India, the entire justice system of the British raj was inclined to the planters, full of nepotism and in favor of colonial exploitation. European planters never received punishment for their vicious acts. Biasness and favoritism were standard practices in the colonial government.

Ashly Eden asserted that “There certainly was a failure of justice which, in my opinion, may, to a certain extent, be attributed to the strong bias which the Governor and many of the officers of government have always displayed in favor of those engaged in this particular cultivation” (Commission, 1960, p. 5).

Furthermore, in thirty years out of 49 cases (these cases were against planters), not a single European/British had been accused or put behind the bar. Even if the European were accused, they did not receive any punishment because of their connection in the court and with the local authority. (Commission, 1860, p. 5). Eden commented, “Supreme Court and to a great extent the bias in favor of the planters, which has been too frequently displayed by men in all positions from the highest officers of the Government down to the lowest” (Commission, 1860, p. 11). In addition, he commented that “I have frequently had to find fault with the police for displaying an unjustifiable bias in favor of the planter (Ibid, p. 17).

Mr. Furgusson, a commission member from the planters' association, asked Eden, “Then do you consider that the Government officials have sacrificed justice to favor the planters?

Ashley replied, “I consider that it has frequently been the case, and I have stated so in official reports. I will go further and say that as a young assistant, I confess I have favored my own countrymen in several instances” (Ibid, p.12)

The peasant did not believe in the justice system. From their experience, they learned that if they filed a case against planters, they faced more problems than solutions. The police harassed them in many ways.

Planters' influence over the justice system was immense. For instance, Moulvee Abdool Latief, a British official, had been removed from his duty as he tried to protect the rights of the peasants while

the planters forcefully tried to enter peasant's land (Commission, 1860, p. 14).

Even Ashley himself faced trouble from the planters when he told the ryots that cultivation of Indigo was not compulsory. The planters file a petition in the Calcutta court for his removal. He said, "I had considerable difficulty in defending my own position and upholding my independence as a magistrate" (Ibid, p. 14-15)

The planters compelled the peasants to cultivate Indigo instead of rice. As it was not beneficial or profitable, instead peasants lost a tremendous amount of money. It was labor-intensive. In addition, by the cultivation of the Indigo, the food security of peasants was under threat. The famine and death of millions showed that already the condition of the villages was in miserable conditions.

Land transformation and destroying the local industries closed the door of alternative income. Moreover, the local zamindars were not in favor of the peasant. The permanent settlement act stripped the land rights of the peasants. A new middlemen class, moneylenders were as oppressive as the planters.

In "1859, twenty-nine European planters and one Indian zamindar were appointed honorary magistrates" (Kling, 1966, p.66). The indigo planters generally use their power to abuse the peasant and poor villagers. Further, this appointment of the planters as magistrates destroyed the life of the peasants as hell. The oppressor became their protector! Peasants were utterly helpless at this incident, they expressed their helplessness by saying, "the man appointed out protector is our devourer". There was no place remain for them to seek justice. The only option open for them is to rebellion and break the evil chain of the British regime.

Colonial enterprises were destroying the lives of millions and plundering the wealth of Bengal at a sheer speed. Bengal. Indigo was a cash cow for the planters as well as the British raj. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1853 in the USA, the EIC saw the opportunity to promote similar exploitation of labor in the large labor force of Bengal. They used this opportunity to profit and fortune by stealing the natural resource, exploiting the peasants, plundering the raw materials, and extorting the peasant labor force.

In the indigo revolt, missionaries, government officials, Bengali merchants, intelligentsia, local zamindars have supported the event.

Discussion

Let me discuss and elaborate further on these results. Because of the colonial policy and administrative mechanism, the British

appropriated the economic surplus and wealth of Bengal, which this study makes clear directly lead to peasants suffering. Extraction of wealth from Bengal and India helped Europe to flourish and be industrialized. However, this also led to the deindustrialization of Bengal.

To my knowledge, this is one of the first attempts to understand indigo rebellion with the overall social conditions of the peasant society. This study finds, the indigo rebellion did not only arise from economic exploitation, but the entire peasant society was suffering from famine, loss of land rights, destruction of local industries, commercialization of agriculture, coercive production system, economic loss, food insecurity, and inhuman torture of the planters.

From the beginning of the colonial regime, the massive looting of Bengal's wealth emptied the villages. The peasants relentlessly supplied various raw materials in the mouth of the omnivorous hungriness of the British empire and its industries. The mammoth cost of war, industrial supply, production of foods, and pension of the officials was on the shoulders of the peasants. Because of excessive bleeding of wealth, the local industries were closed, which was an alternative source of income for the peasant community. Because of excessive draining of wealth, rural Bengal was empty. Therefore, at the time of the famine and oppression, peasants were helpless to defend themselves.

Peasants were working as slaves in the indigo plantation. They were paying land tax to the company. The tax was reinvested in trades like indigo plantations and other purposes. Peasants paid two ways to the company; direct tax and their labor plus productions for free (Patnaik, 2021). Though on the surface, it may be seen as two different actors are controlling the peasants, however Patnaik (2021) shows how these two different actors are same. The Figure 5 may make it clear:

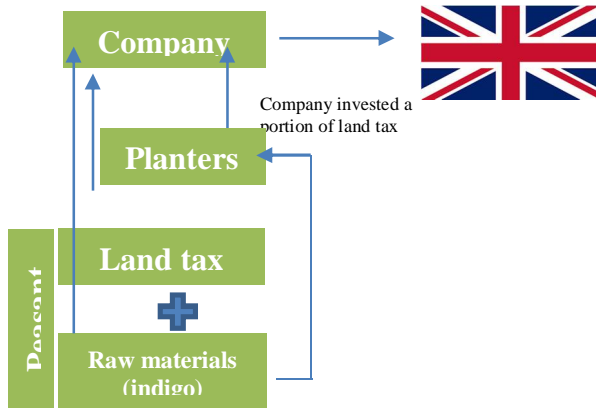


Figure 5. Tax and raw materials were gathering in the hand of company

According to Patnaik, “This direct linking of the fiscal system with the trading system is the essence of the drain in colonies where the producers were not slaves but nominally free petty producers, namely tax-paying peasants and artisans” (Ibid, 2021). A tropical country like Bengal, blessed with rivers and fertile land, was like a gold mine to the British. Bengal supplied an enormous amount of wealth in the industrial period. Patnaik writes, “...gold seams might eventually run out, but the surplus-producing and taxable capacity of the peasants and artisans would not, as long as they were not entirely annihilated through overexploitation” (Ibid, 2021).

Land tax was a significant source of income in the British colonial power. Land tax and agro-raw materials had been transferred to Britain. Colonial regimes always needed to establish a form of property rights over local communities. This is a necessary condition for surplus extraction (Ibid, 2021). In Bengal, it happened in the name of The Permanent Settlement Act. The permanent settlement act denied peasants’ rights on common land, meadows, ponds, pastures, and forests. These are essential for the peasant economy (Alavi, 1965, p 246).

The indigo plantations system destroyed the principles of the peasant society and violated the primary definition of peasants. Peasants had no right to decide on what to cultivate on their land, and food security was threatened. From Scott’s moral economy

theory, subsistence security was impossible in the plantation system (Scott, 1977). Shanin said peasants mainly produce for their families and share a portion with the state and community (Shanin, 1966). However, this study shows the entire production was only for the benefit of planters. Furthermore, peasants' family members were insecure. With the lens of any peasant definition, it is visible that Bengal's peasants lost their peasant agency in the indigo plantation system.

The most crucial factor is that the entire risk of production was on the shoulders of the peasants because of institutional arrangement of the production. Peasants invested capital, labor, land, bullocks, fertilizer, and other necessary elements in the production process. If the harvest was lost, peasants took the burden, but in return, they gained nothing. Moreover, the peasants had to pay excessive land tax. Contrary, the planters who were non-cultivator only supervise the production system and devour the entire profits of the indigo production.

More importantly, the commercialization of agriculture and production for the benefits of the industry was standing on peasants' exploitation. The commercial cultivation of indigo was a great success in Bengal. As we have seen, indigo cultivation was labor-intensive. Therefore, the only way to make a high profit was to exploit labor and produce high indigo. The more one enterprise used peasant labor; the more profit is gained. That is why it was highly profitable in Bengal as in the production, 10 million peasants were engaged. Millions of peasant life were devastated to meet the imperial appetite for indigo. Wolf describes this as an 'accumulation of human sufferings' by which capitalism thrives (Wolf 1999, Darrac & Schendel, 2006). Bengal peasant's thousands of years of knowledge of cultivation was also important to consider. Moreover, their skill to manage the entire farming in an organized way helped flourish the indigo production.

Europe being in the north, changes in the geopolitics, loss of colonies in other parts of the world, the demand of the European textile industries created conditions to search alternative place for indigo cultivation. Thus, the large peasant class, and best grade indigo of Bengal made Bengal the center of indigo production. The production system completely changed the traditional method of cultivation. The land became a tool for money-making instead of the production of

foods. Therefore, when millions of people were dying in Bengal in starvation, the production of indigo did not stop for a single day. Traditionally, Bengal farmers mainly produced rice, jute, and other crops that secured their food and were economically beneficial.

Scott claims that a section of the Intelligentsia support peasants' movement and play an active role. Indigo rebellion was able to gain support outside of the peasant community. In the indigo revolution, a good number of the local Intelligentsia showed their empathy to the peasants while not being against the colonial regime. This phenomenon is significant as it later influenced the national movement of India. Newspapers like *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, *Hindu Patriot*, playwright Dinbondhu Mitra, and others paid attention to peasants' rights. Scott moreover asserted that in most peasant rebellions, 'a handful of outsiders' led the movement, but in the case of the indigo rebellion, this was not the case (Scott, 1977). Peasants of all classes joined in the indigo rebellion. The leaders and organizers were from the peasants' society.

The local Zamindars were against the planters and were aligned with peasants' interests because of their personal interest. The Zamindars opposed the planters as their social power and respect were threatened by the increasing influence of planters. In the *ilka* system, planters were acquiring most of the lands of Bengal, which was a direct threat to Zamindars. Because of permanent settlement, many Zamindars were also losing their possession of the land, which also shifted in the power relations of villages.

The first independence movement of 1857 in India, the Santal rebellion of 1855, the Farazi rebellion of 1838-1857, and other contemporary uprisings significantly influenced the indigo rebellion. But indigo rebellion had one unique characteristic. The rebellious peasants did not want to take direct control of the state. Instead, their interest was mainly confined to get rid of the oppression of the planters.

Railroad construction road construction helped develop the trade routes, which had two significant implications in the peasant society. First, it was easy for the British traders to transport the raw materials from the villages. Second, it set up links with nearby villages, towns, and different parts of the Bengal. Therefore, peasants were able to receive others peasant uprising news as well. Eden testified that

Barashat district's peasants were more rebellious than other districts as the district was close to the centre (commission, 1860).

The peasant leads the path towards the independence movement. It was clear that great political power was laid in the peasant rebellion. In the freedom movement of India the peasants class played a glorious role and sacrificed the most.

Conclusion

Initially, this study sets out to understand what contributed to the indigo rebellion in Bengal, focusing on two research questions concerning the extent to which colonial socio-economic policy and institutional arrangements induced peasants to revolt and the principal social conditions leading peasants to revolt.

This study shows that the planters' economic exploitation of indigo farmers was not the single reason for indigo rebellion. Major socio-economic and institutional changes by the British raj made Bengal peasants rebellious. First, various colonial policies and institutional arrangements of the colonial raj made the lives of the peasants miserable. Peasants suffered from famine, oppression, the deindustrialization of cottage industries, food insecurity, violence, economic and labor exploitation. In indigo cultivation, peasants were like a slave. Second, colonial policy evicted peasants from the land, as it was necessary for colonial economic interest. This and the commercialization of agriculture changed the traditional mode of production, which threatened the subsistence security of the peasants. Third, all the risks of indigo production were on the shoulders of the farmers, and therefore in lean years, peasants had to take the extra burden. Forth, from the judiciary to market policy, land rights to land rent were designed to benefit colonial administrations and entrepreneurs. Together, all these factors instigated peasants to revolt. Therefore, to understand the peasant revolt in Bengal in detail, the overall social condition of peasants need to consider.

One of the latent effects of the colonial extractive policy was to create a new money lender intermediaries' class at the village level. These groups also exploited the peasant society and continued in post-colonial Bangladesh in various forms. This point is something I consider worth exploring in future research to investigate to what

extent and how this new class has a role in the exploitation of the peasantry in today's Bangladesh.

This brings me over to discuss these results and the implications of the indigo rebellion case for knowledge in general about understanding why peasants revolt. Most of the aforementioned theories discussed the commercialization of agriculture, class conflict, the market economy, colonialism, and capitalism as primary instigators for peasant rebellion. As noted above, results in this case emphasise the importance of including overall social conditions in examining peasant rebellions and not only their exploitation by farmers. Moreover, this study also adds the 'risk of the production' as an essential factor in peasant rebellion. This is a factor that could be important for understanding peasant rebellion also in other cases with similar conditions as in the Indigo rebellion case. At the time of the indigo rebellion, most of the land was in the control of the planters and the entire production risk, and most of the production investment was on the shoulder of the peasants. So, if the harvest was lost for any reason, peasants had to bear the entire loss. That means they have to take the cost of their labor, food, bullocks, land engagement, seeds, in a single word, everything. This method of working conditions and cultivation does not sustain for an extended period. In addition, they did not have any 'free agency' to choose what to cultivate in their land. This is also another vital factor for a peasant-entity which was violated in the indigo production system. I would finally like to end this study by returning to the huge impact the Peasant movement had in the political history of the Indian anti-colonial movement. The revolt awakened the national sentiment of the country. Peasants revolted against the colonial ruler one after another like sea waves. Their movements and tremendous sacrifices contributed to bringing independence to the Indian subcontinent.

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