

1. Peasants and Agricultural Production

- The initial unit of agricultural society was the village which was inhabited by peasants. They were engaged throughout the year in the agricultural production related activities which included—tilling the land, sowing seeds, harvesting the crop when it was ripe.
- They (peasants) also worked in the production of agro-based goods like sugar and oil.
- Different kinds of areas like vast tracts of dry land or hilly regions could not be cultivated in the same manner as in more fertile land. Forest areas made up a good proportion of the territory.

1.1 Looking for sources

- Farmers did not write about themselves. Major sources for the agricultural history of the 16th and early 17th centuries were chronicles and documents written under the supervision of Mughal Court.
- Ain-i-Akbari was the most important chronicle. It was written by Abul Fazl. This chronicle recorded the arrangements made by state for ensuring the cultivation, and collection of revenue by the state. It regulated the relationship between the state and the rural zamindars.
- The main aim of Ain-i-Akbari was to present the conditions of Akbar's empire. In Mughal empire social harmony was maintained by strong ruling class. According to Abul Fazl, any revolt or any attempt to set autonomous power against the Mughal state was bound to fail.
- What was known about the farmers from Ain-i-Akbari that was actually view of top officials of Mughal administration.
- Except Ain-i-Akbari, sources which were written away from the Mughal capital were revenue records which were included from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan dated to the 17th and 18th centuries.
- The major records of East India Company are also available that throw important light on the agricultural relations of Eastern India. These sources provide us very useful information about instances of conflicts between farmers and the state.

1.2 Peasants and Their lands

- Raiyat or Muzarian or kisan or asami was the term which Indo-Persian sources of the Mughal period usually used for the term peasant.
- The sources of 17th century mentions two types of peasants—khud-kashta, and pahi kashta. First farmers used to live in those villages where they had their land and later, those who cultivated them on contractual basis.
- An average farmer of north-India had more than a pair of bullocks and two ploughs. Most of them used to have possessed even less.
- In Gujarat, it was 10 acres of land and the upper limit of land for average peasant in Bengal was 5 acres. The farmers with the limit of 10 acres was considered as a rich asami.
- The cultivation was based on the principles of the individual ownership. Farmer's lands were bought and sold in the same way the lands of the other property owners.

1.3 Irrigation and Technology

- Plenty of land, availability of labourers and mobility of farmers were the main causes of regular expansion of agriculture. The primary aim of agriculture was to feed the people. The basic staples like rice, wheat or millet were the main cultivated crops.
- Monsoon was considered as backbone of the Indian agriculture. As of today some crops needed extra water and for that, artificial arrangements of irrigation were developed for them.
- State's help was given for the development of irrigation system. In north India digging of new canals and the repair work of old canals was done. The old ones like in the Punjab built during the reign of Shahjahan.
- The techniques that were used by farmers in agriculture that were mainly based on the animal force like light wooden plough. These ploughs were easily assembled with iron tip or coulter. They did not make deep furrows which evaporated moisture during the hot months.
- Seeds were planted using a drill that was pulled by a pair of oxen. The most prevalent method was pod casting of seeds. A narrow iron blade with a small wooden handle was used for hoeing and weeding the field.

1.4 An abundance of Crops

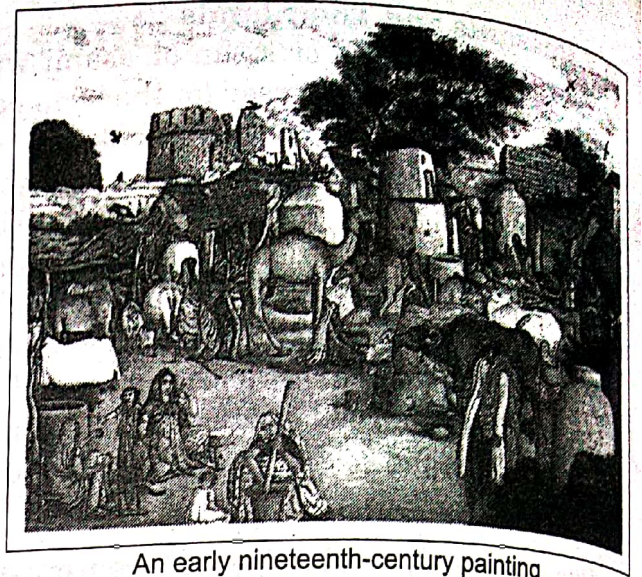
- Agriculture was managed in two crops cycle. First one was kharif and second was rabi. Except in the areas with the relief features that were the most arid or inhospitable lands. Minimum of two crops were grown in a year (cycle), they were known *do-fasla*.
- Three crops were grown in the areas where rainfall or irrigation was provided. Ain-e-Akbari described that Agra produced 39 varieties of crops and Delhi 43 over the two seasons. Bengal alone produced 50 kinds of rice.
- The term *jins-i-kamil* was mentioned, which means perfect crops. The Mughal state also encouraged the farmers to cultivate such crops to generate more revenue for the state.
- Crops like cotton and sugarcane were considered as *jins-i-kamil* (cash crops). Different sorts of oilseeds and lentil were included in the same.
- Many new crops from the various parts of the world arrived in the Indian subcontinent—Maize was introduced to India from Africa and Spain. By the 17th century it was one of the major crops of western India. Vegetables like tomatoes, potatoes and chillies were introduced from the New World. Fruits like pineapple and papaya were introduced.

2. The Village Community

- Farmers had their personal ownership on the lands. Peasants belonged to a collective village community. Community consisted of three main constituents: the cultivators, Panchayat and the headman of village. They were known as *muqaddam* or *mandal*.

2.1 Caste and the rural milieu

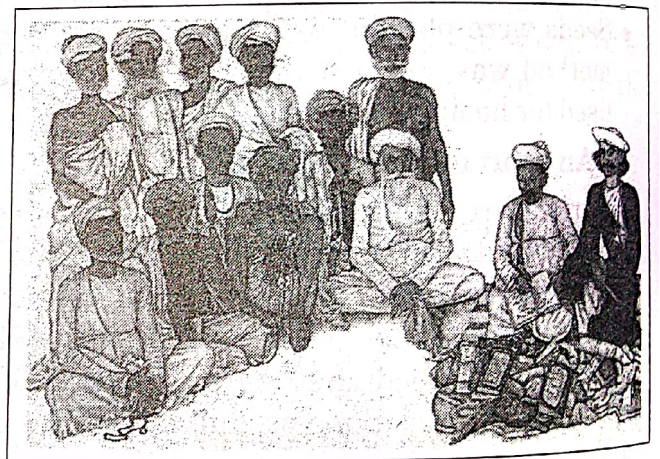
- On the basis of caste and other related distinctions, cultivators were divided into different groups. Tillers of the land and people who worked as agricultural labourers (majur).
- In spite of availability of plenty of cultivable land some caste groups were forced to live in the poverty throughout the life.
- Negligible data was there, as census was not in practice at that time. Such groups comprised a large section of the village population. They were not entitled to use resources as per their low status in the caste hierarchy.
- In Muslim communities menials like the halalkhoran were allowed to habitate outside the boundaries of the village.
- There was a direct relation between caste, poverty and social status at the lower level of the society.
- A written testament in Marwar from the 17th century described Rajputs as peasants. The same place was shared by Jats but they were not considered at the same status like Rajputs.
- Castes such as Ahirs, Gujjars and Malis rose in social hierarchy as they were in profitable in their respective occupations—cattle rearing, and horticulture. In the eastern parts of the country intermediate pastoral and fishing castes got the status of the peasants.



An early nineteenth-century painting depicting a village in the Punjab

2.2 Panchayats and Headmen

- The panchayat of the village was the assembly of elders. Generally, the important people of the village had some ancestral property.
- The panchayat was represented by different castes and communities of the village. The village menial cum agricultural workers was unlikely to be represented in these panchayats. The decisions passed by the panchayat were binding on the members.
- The head of the panchayat was known as the *Mandal* or *muqaddam*. He was chosen with the consensus of the elders who belonged to the same village.
- The headman of the panchayat could retain his post till he had the confidence and support of village elders. He could be removed from his office if he lost the confidence of the members. The main function of the headman was to supervise and prepare income-expenditure of the village. *Patwari* was there for his assistance.
- The panchayat got its funds from the contribution arranged by individuals. These funds were spent on the welfare activities of the community during natural calamities.
- The main function of the panchayat was to ensure that caste boundaries were upheld by different communities inhabited in the village. It kept a watch on the conduct of the members of the village community to prevent any offence against any caste.



An early nineteenth-century painting depicting a meeting of village elders and tax collectors

- Panchayats were the authority to impose the levy fines and expulsion of any one from the community; it was a very strict step taken for a limited period. If a person was compelled to leave the village had become an outcaste and lost his right to practise his profession.
- Each caste (Jati) of the village had their own panchayats. They managed considerable power in rural society.
- In Rajasthan, the Jati panchayat settled civil disputes between members of the various castes. They did as an intermediary in contented claims on land. In many cases, state admitted the decisions of Jati Panchayats except criminal cases.
- The decision of the panchayat in the disputes between the lower caste farmers and state officials or the local Zamindars varied case to case.

2.3 Village artisans

- The interesting aspect of the village was to describe relationship of exchange between various producers. Artisans lived in great number. 25% of households in the villages belonged to them.
- It was very difficult to distinguish between peasants of work. Cultivators and their family members were engaged in the production of different things as—dyeing, textile printing, making and repairing of agricultural implements, baking of pottery.
- Village artisans—potters, blacksmiths, carpenters, barbers, even goldsmiths, provided the unique services. For that, they were presented by the villages in different ways like giving them a share of the harvest or giving them land.
- Blacksmiths, goldsmiths and carpenters were remunerated by the Zamindars of Bengal for their work and paid them small daily allowance and diet money. This was known as *Jajmani* system.

2.4 A 'little republic'?

- A cash nexus was developed already with trade between villages and towns. In Mughal regions, revenue was assessed and collected in the form of cash. Artisans producing for export market were paid in cash as the wages. The producers of commercial products like cotton, indigo, silk were paid in cash.

3. Women in Agrarian Society

- Women participated with males in production work as men tilled and ploughed while women sowed, weeded, threshed and winnowed the harvest.
- Naturally, gendered isolations between the home and world was not possible in this regard. Here, home and world involved both women and men respectively.
- Menstruating women were not allowed to touch the plough or the potter's wheel in western India and in Bengal, where the betel-leaves were grown.
- Artisanal works like sifting and kneading clay for pottery, spinning yarn and embroidery were some of the works that depended on the women labour. More commercialised the product there was the greater demand of female labour to produce it. They were not only engaged on field, did the tasks at the employer's house or market if required.
- Females were counted as an important resource in the agricultural society as they were child bearers in a society which depended on labour. Shortage of wives were mentioned due to high mortality rate among women.



A woman spinning thread

- Marriages in various rural communities required the payment of bride price against dowry to the bride's family. Remarriage was supposed to be valid both among divorced and widowed women.
- According to popular traditions, male was the head of the family. Women remained under control of men and the family, women were strictly punished by the society if they suspected infidelity.
- Wives disapproved against the treachery of their husband or the refusal of the wife and children by the male especially head of the house. The state and superior castes could not interfere as it came to ensure as the family provided sufficiently.
- Amongst the landed gentry, women had the right to have ancestral property. In Punjab women actively participated in rural land market as sellers of property inherited by them.
- Both Hindu and Muslim women inherited Zamindaris where they were free to sell or mortgage the land.

4. Forest And Tribes

4.1 Beyond settled villages

- Apart from the intensively cultivated states in northern and north western India, very big layers of forests were there—dense forest, or scrubland which was present in large areas of India.
- Jungli word was used for forest dwellers, it did not mean that they were not civilised. It was for only who made their livelihood from the hunting, gathering of forest produce and Jhuming cultivation. The continuous mobility was the main quality of the tribes who lived in these forest.
- Forests were considered as the subversive place—a place of refuge (mawas) for problem makers.

4.2 Inroads into Forests

- External forces entered the forests in different ways as—elephants were required by the state for the army in this regard; the supply of elephants was included in the *peshkash* or gifts levied from forest people.
- The hunting expedition was the prevalent in Mughal Empire. The court historians mentioned, emperors used to travel from one part to another of the kingdom. In this way they personally attended the complaints of their subjects.
- The lives of people who inhabited in forests were influenced by the spread of commercial agriculture that was an external factor. Honey, beeswax, and gum lac were some of the forest products, that were in great demand. Gum lac was the major thing of export from India in 17th century.
- Social causes made changes in the lives of forest dwellers. As 'big men' of village community, there were chieftains among the tribes. They gradually became the zamindars. Some of them became kings. They maintained an army and developed a monarchical system and fully developed by the 16th century.
- New cultural influences also started to enter forested areas. Some historians opined that sufi saints played a main role in the slow acceptance of Islam among the agricultural communities.

5. The Zamindars

- A class of people in the countryside which lived away from agriculture. They do not take part directly in the processes of agricultural production.
- They were the owners of their land. They enjoyed many social and economic facilities according to their high status in rural society.
- There were two responsible factors for higher status of zamindars. The first—their caste and second—their certain services for the state.

- The zamindars had their extensive personal land that was known as *milkiyat*. It was cultivated for the personal use of zamindars.
- On the behalf of state, the zamindar collected the revenue. They had control over military resources and this was the source of their power. Most of the zamindars had their own parts and even armed contingents included-cavalary, artillery and infantry.
- If we view the social relationship in Mughal villages as a pyramid, Zamindars definitely made a narrow apex. Abul Fazl's described that an upper caste, Brahmana-Rajput combine had already established its strong control over rural society. It reflected a large number of Hindu Zamindars represented in it as well as a liberal sprinkling of Muslim zamindars.
- The conquest was the sources of the origin of some new zamindars. The dislodge of weaker people by a powerful chieftain was quite way of spreading a zamindari.
- There was the slow process of zamindari consolidation that could be possible through various sources—(a) colonisation of new lands; (b) by transfer of rights, (c) by order of the state (d) and by purchase. There were the process that permitted lower castes to be the zamindars.
- The consolidation of lineage-based zamindari was possible by some factors. Rajputs and Jats followed such policies in north India to retain their control over the vast layers of territory in the northern India. In the same way peasant-pastoralists established their zamindaris in the areas of control and South Western Bengal.
- Zamindars played important role in colonisation of agricultural land. They helped in settling cultivators by providing them means of cultivation and cash loans.
- The buying and selling of zamindaris increased the process of monetisation in the rural areas. They sold the produce from their milkiyat lands. There was evidence to show that zamindars set up markets where farmers used to come to sell their produce.
- There was no denying the fact that zamindars were an exploitative class. Their relationship with peasants was based on inter change basis, paternalism and patronage.

6. Land Revenue System

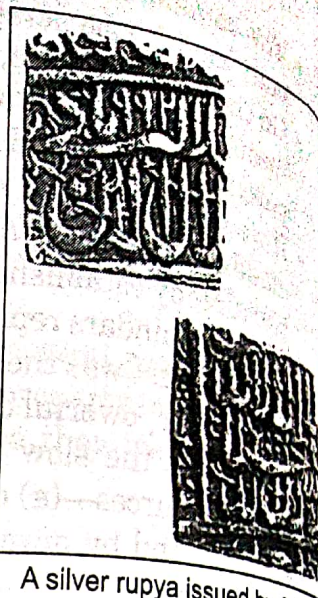
- Land revenue was one of the major sources of income of Mughal empire. It was important for the state to set up an administrative apparatus to keep a watch over agricultural production and to fix and collect revenue from rapidly expanding empire.
- The role of 'Diwan' was very important in this apparatus as he was responsible for supervision of fiscal system of empire.
- Before imposing the land revenue, Mughal empire first collected important information about the extent of agricultural land in empire and what the lands produced.
- While fixing land revenue, state tried to increase its demands. Sometimes local conditions did not allow to collect such a large amount of revenue.
- Cultivated and cultivable lands were measured in each province during Akbar's rule. Regular efforts were in continuation by the successors.

7. The flow of Silver

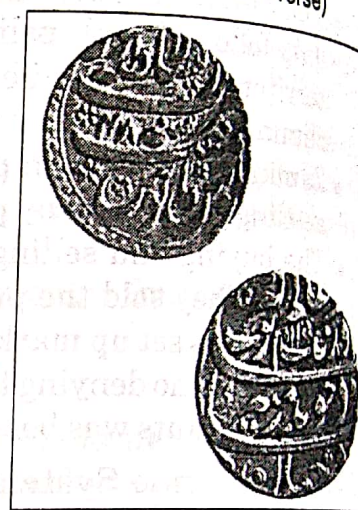
- (i) Mughal empire was one of the largest empires of Asia. It was able to consolidate the power and resources during 16th and 17th centuries. Contacts with Ming in China, Safavid in Iran, and Ottoman empire in Turkey were present in the empire.
- (ii) Due to the political stability in these empires helped to generate the vibrant networks of overseas trade from China to Mediterranean sea.
- (iii) Indian overseas trade expanded to a great deal in Mughal empire. The trade brought in big amount of silver bullion to India.
- (iv) India did not have natural resource of silver. As a result between 16th and 18th century remained a great in stability in the availability of metal currency especially, the silver rupaya, in India.

8. The Ain-i-Akbari of Abu'l Fazl Allami

- Ain-i-Akbari was the apex of a large administrative and historical project of systematic compilation of data. It was completed in 1598 after having gone through five amendments and 42nd year of Akbar's rule. It was the part of Akbar-nama that comprised three books.
- The first two books are given by historical narrative. The third book Ain-i-Akbari or Ain was organised as a compendium of imperial regulations and a gazetteer of the empire.
- The Ain provides a detailed description of organisation of following:
 - (a) The court, administration and army.
 - (b) The sources of revenue and physical layout of the provinces of Akbar's empire.
 - (c) Literary, cultural and religious traditions of the people.
- The Ain is a mine of information of Mughal Empire during Akbar's reign in all respects.
- The Ain is made up of five books (daftars)—first three parts provides administrative information.
 - (a) The first book '*Manzil-abadi*' is concerned with the royal household and its maintenance.
 - (b) The second is known as '*Sipan-abadi*'. It is about the civil and military administration and servants.
 - (c) The third, '*mulk-abadi*.' It provides a detailed information in the regard of fiscal aspects and revenue rates of centre and states. There are 12 provinces mentioned in it.
 - (d) The fourth and fifth books are related with the religious, literary and cultural traditions of Indian people and contain a collection of Akbar's "auspicious sayings".
- Ain is not without mistakes; it has a few mistakes in totalling. It has been marked as simple arithmetic errors or of transcription by Abul Fazl's helpers.
- Another limitations of Ain is the skewed nature of the quantitative data. Data was not assembled from all provinces uniformly.
- Ain—has been confirmed as an outstanding document of that period. Its writer, Abul Fazl had major achievements. He described the traditions of medical chronicles. He further wrote mostly about wars, conquests, political machinations and dynastic disturbances.



A silver rupa issued by Akbar
(obverse and reverse)



A silver rupa issued
by Aurangzeb