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Reaction of Bengali Intellectuals after Introduction of Permanent Settlement in Bengal

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Abstract :- From 1765 A.D onwards, the main objective of the British East India Company was to increase revenue collection .And in agrarian countries like india, land revenue was the main tool. In this context the company introduced the Permanent Settlement in Bengal on 22 March 1793 to secure its income.

This system was introduced in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Later this system was introduced in North – Western Province, Varanasi and some areas of Madras Presidency. Another objective of introducing the Permanent Settlement was to create a middle – class aristocracy in association with the British. We find that this class once became the most powerful supporter of the colonial powers. When the Permanent Settlement was introduced ,many Muslim intellectuals sought to improve the condition of Muslims by remaining loyal to British rule. That is, they supported the Permanent Settlement. But some exceptional Muslim intellectuals are also to be found. Such people were Mir Mosharrif Hussain and Syed Amir Ali. Two classes were also noticed among the Hindu intellectuals.

However, if the subject of my discussion is Permanent Settlement introduced in Bengal, how will the intellectuals view this matter? That is, What was the real attitude of the intellectuals? What is the attitude of Hindu, Muslim, Brahma, Congressmen and Communist intellectuals in this regard? I will briefly discuss this topic:

THE REACTION OF ELITE CLASS :- Permanent settlement led to the decline of old Aristocracy. Ownership of Zamindaris went to inexperienced many landers and businessmen, who had no connection with the land.As a result ,the condition of the Mughal landlords started to deteriorate. The decline of two-thirds of the ancient

aristocratic families of lower Bengal began in the 1770 S. Later it was not possible for many old Zamindars to retain their Zamindari. New capitalists took over their Zamindaris. Those who previously had no connection with the land.This class became the permanent landowning class. Hunter noted, “Hitherto the Hindu Gomastas who were engaged in very menial occupations became Zamindars as a result of the Permanent Settlement”After the Permanent Settlement the number of Zamindaris increased to more than One Lakh.

Lord Cornwallis was already aware of the fact that the local wealthy class, merchant class etc, would be attracted to invest in the Zamindari. Cornwallis’s words came true.The famously rich and wealthy of Calcutta, all invested their accumulated wealth in purchasing town and village Zamindari. Cornwallis said that-“For our own interests ,we have to take the elite landlords of this country as our collaborators.” Governor General Lord Bentinck also commented that this led to the creation of a large number of wealthy elites who were particularly interested in perpetuating British rule. These words of Lord Cornwallis and Lord Bentinck later proved to be literally true. All the new aristocratic landlords of Bengal actively supported the British colonialists during the Sepoy war of Independence. They did not help the Sepoys .They are given all kind of Government Support .They are even allowed to organize. This special class played an important role in the formation of modern Bengal.

THE REACTION IN INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY :- Now is the point ,what was the real attitude of nineteenth century intellectuals towards Permanent Settlement?

ATTITUDES OF MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS :-

Prominent among those who attained erudition in the practice of Islam were Shariat Ullah (1781-1880 A.D), Titumir (1782-1831 A.D) and Dudumiya (1862A.D).They were the leader of religious and social reform movement of Muslim society. Their movements sought to protect the socio- economic interests of the peasantry against the landlords and European indigo –growers. The Farazis prevented the collection of additional revenue from the peasants.They preached that ‘God is the owner of the land’. Thus the Farazis led a movement against thr Zamindari system.

But within a few days the educated Muslim leaders could realize that British rule was firmly established in India. And so it is impossible to awaken the Muslim society by conducting an anti-British movement .And it is difficult to improve them. They tried to improve the condition of Muslims by remaining loyal to the British rule. The point to note is that the Muslim intelligentsia expressed great concern at the plight of the Muslim landlords .But they were not disturbed by the deplorable condition of the common peasants as a result of the Permanent Settlement.

However ,some Muslim intellectuals protested the Zamindari oppression. Mir Mosharraf Hossain in his play ‘Zamidar Darpan’ has presented the story tyranny of Zamindars.Another Muslim who spoke on behalf of the farmers was Syed Amir Ali.

REACTION OF HINDU AND BRAHMO INTELLECTUALS TO THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT :-

Hindu and Brahmo intellectuals highlighted the plight of the peasants of both the Hindu and Muslim communities through their writings. Ishwar Gupta highlighted the sufferings of the farmers through his writings. But he was not able to distinguish between landlords and cultivators as a separate class. Akshay Kumar Dutta expressed deep pain at the plight of the farmers in ‘Tattvabodhini’ newspaper. Rammohan Roy took up the pen about the plight of the cultivators. But he never spoke of the end of Permanent Settlement. Harish Chandra Mukhopadhyay condemned British oppression of Indian peasants

in his newspaper ‘Hindu Patriot’. Basically he discussed a lot about indigo farmers .He could not raise the issue of tyranny of landlords in village life. In 1859,Naveen Krishna Bose exposed the tyranny of the landlords to the people of india. Navin Bose was only trying to strengthen the rights of the cultivator on the land.

A number of newspaper also discussed various aspects of Permanent Settlement at that time. The newspaper ‘Grambarta Prakashika’ plays an important role in this regard. Harinath Majumdar used to edit this magazine. This newspaper brought to the public the story of the tyranny of landlords and moneylenders and reminded the British Government of its duty to the people . Harinath Majumder was known as ‘Kangal Harinath’to common people .At that moment Harinath Majumdar was outside the aspiring intellectuals.

Sanjeev Chandra Chattopadhyay took up the pain for the suffering of the farmers at that time. Sanjeev Chandra blamed the land revenue policy introduced by the British for this plight of peasants.

Some historians, however ,feel that Sanjeev Chandra Chatterjee did not take any active action against the oppression of an entirely new middle class based on the land system.

Bankim Chandra’s writings also reveal the terrible description of the tyranny of the landlords and the plight of the peasants. Bamkim Chandra felt sorry for the farmers .But Bankim Chandra was not in favor of changing the social order created by the introduction of Permanent Settlement .He welcomed the ‘Tenancy Act’ but it did not improve the condition of farmers.

Another intellectual was Ramesh Chandra Dutt. He highlighted the evils of Permanent Settlement through his Writings. He feels farmers have a limit to their tolerance .When they see all laws fail, Law – Courts are helpless, then they rebelled desperately against the landlords and middle men. But surprisingly later Ramesh Chandra Dutt also changed completly and started speaking in opposite tone. He once elaborated his views in favor of a Permanent Settlement.

Tarini Das, Abhay (Bengali book) Charan

Das and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay have also discussed the helpless position of farmers.

THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT IN THE EYES OF 20 TH CENTURY INTELLECTUALS :- Twentieth-century intellectuals were less concerned with Permanent Settlements. They did not hesitate to say that “The Permanent Settlement made Bengal prosperous”. Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru announced plans for the Swarajya Party but said nothing about the Zamindari System. Not even a single sentence was spent on this in the famous manifesto called ‘Hindu-Muslim Pact’. But on the other hand, many scholars have said that somewhere, the problems created by the introducing of the Permanent Settlement did not escape the notice of the Swarajya Party. But it needs to be said here that in the end the Swarajya Party failed to take the right decision on the land revenue system.

Moreover, the Congress intellectuals did not want to change the land system in the 20th century. Later the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee planned the upliftment of the common man in the countryside through the ‘Deshbandhu village Reorganisation Fund committee’. But there was no system for the development of Zamindar – farmer relations.

They could not trust the Congress leaders. little by little they began to unite. A group of educated Muslim intellectuals and politicians seized this opportunity. One such man was Ak Fazlul Haque. He advised the cultivators to stand up against the landlords and moneylenders. Especially the Muslim farmers put him in the seat of God. Incidentally, the name of another political party comes up. Its name is Muslim League. They also did not allow Fazlul Haque to advance far. They did not take any initiative for land reform. In this context, the Communists continued to accumulate strength. They formed farmers associations locally. And it was through their efforts that the ‘Nikhil Bharat Krishak Sabha’ was created. Later ‘Bengal Provincial Farmers Council’ was formed in Bengal.) They continue to encourage the farmers to join the direct movement. But they could not free the farmers

from the grip of the National Congress and the League. They were unable to divert the politics of Bengal.

Conclusion :- From the above discussion it is understood that even if some intellectuals want to change the Permanent Settlement, a large section of the Bengali intellectual community wanted to sustain the Permanent Settlement. Congress intellectuals failed to realize that how severe is the result. They saw a horrible sight. Muslim peasants in droves became Supporters of the League. The result of Hindu –Muslim struggle. By the time intellectuals and nationalist leaders realized this, it was too late. Nationalist leaders failed to quell the riots. Everything ends with the partition of Bengal and partition of the Country.

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