

‘LAND REVENUE SYSTEM AND FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN NORTH-WESTERN PROVINCES: 1822-1880’

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My presentation topic is Land Revenue System and Female Infanticide in North-Western Provinces. The period of this topic is 1822-1880. This paper is divided into six parts. The first part includes the geographical location of the North-West Provinces. The second part includes the land revenue system in NWP. The third part includes the position of women before and after the establishment of this land revenue system. The fourth part consists about the impoverishment in the agrarian society. The fifth part is about the adverse and beneficiary groups in the agrarian society and the sixth part consists of the tribe and clan among which Female Infanticide was found.

Geographical location of North-Western Provinces

Now first of all I will discuss about the geographical location of NWP. The Ganga Jamuna doab was the heartland of the North-Western Provinces.¹ The region mainly stretched from the upper Gangetic plain stretching to the central Indian plateau including the Doab region in the middle. North-Western Western Provinces was acquired by the authority under cession and conquest between 1801 and 1803. In present day NWP is called Uttar Pradesh with exclusion or inclusion of some districts.

Land Revenue System in North-Western Provinces

In colonial India agriculture was considered as the main means of economic resource. After obtaining the Diwani Rights in Bengal in the year of 1765 the East India Company craved for further power and money.² Consequently they began to deal with the land revenue management and adopted various policies in different parts of India .Mahalwari system was introduced in

¹ Eric Stoke, “ Agrarian Relations, Northern and Central India”, in *The Cambridge Economic History of India Volume – II c.1757-2003* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press , 1983) Reprint (New Delhi : Orient Longman Limited, 2004), p.36.

² Firoj High Sarwar, “ A Comparative Study of Zamindari, Raiyatwari, and Mahalwari Land Revenue Settlements: The Colonial Mechanisms of Surplus Extraction in 19th Century British India”, *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* VOL-2, NO.4 (Sep-October 2012) , p.16.

most areas of North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Central Provinces and undivided Punjab. In mahalwari system village was the unit of assessment. According to this system the revenue was settled with “Mahals” consisting of several villages for a limited period. The villagers paid their revenue through village headmen or body of villages of notable high caste who signed agreement with the government on behalf of the villagers.

Ricardo was mainly responsible for the establishment of the scientific foundation of the land revenue policies in India.³ James Mill was also involved in reconstructing land revenue policies.⁴ The new policy was newly framed in North-Western Provinces to reduce the power of the local magnets and the taluqdars and emancipate the common people from burden of land revenue.⁵ The first step towards constructing this land revenue policy was taken by Holt Mackenzie in 1819.⁶ He suggested 90% of the rental value would be payable by the cultivators in the Regulation VII of 1822.⁷ But after this there were various controversies regarding the proper rental exaction and its assessment and then the decision was taken that the state demand was fixed at 66 % of the rental value from 90 % of rental value and the system was made for 20 or 30 years.⁸ The 66% state demand was reduced to 50 % of the rental value under Saharanpur rules of 1855 by then Governor-General Lord Dalhousie.⁹ One of the important features of mahalwari system was that the villagers jointly paid revenue to the village lambardars who was responsible for giving to the colonial authority. In mahalwari system that were frequent revisions of settlement which brought fluctuation in rent payment. There was also a debate about whether the land tracts would be permanently settled or temporarily settled.

Before the advent of the British authority there existed the institution of village community which was based on mutual alliance.¹⁰ The production of crops was subsistence based and there was less scarcity of food and land transfer problems. The colonial authority destroyed the subsistence agriculture and began commercialization of agriculture.

Position of Women before and after the Introduction of the Agrarian System

We know that agriculture is the most important means of livelihood and land is needed for the purpose of agriculture. Therefore when a society consists of communal form of ownership then

³ *Ibid.*, p.18

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ M. Parwez and Md. Hamid Hussain, “Consequences of the Mahalwari Settlement: Village Community”, *Indian Journal of Research*, VOL-1, NO. 12 (December 2012), p.76.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

land is accessible equally both to men and women. For example women in Jatapu tribe of Andhra Pradesh get equal status to men because they practiced swidden agriculture jointly. As they do not have a definite village community their shifting habitation resulted in communal ownership of land.¹¹ There was rising inequality between men and women due to the domestication of large animals as private property.¹² When cultivation occurred mainly to meet the basic needs of the family then the work of men outside home and household work of women were of equal significance.¹³ Commercialization of agriculture led to the privatization of the land. In North-Western Provinces there was communal ownership of land. A woman who may be a mother, daughter, wife or a widow used to get equal ownership of land. This helped them to work in their own land with proper rights and also helped to accumulate capital. Women were not considered as burden in the family. It helped them when they get married because they had access to economic resource.

But the problem occurred when colonial authority structured the land revenue policy. The mahalwari system basically did not provide any benefit to the common people. It further distorted the institution of the village community and broke the bond between the villagers.

Therefore the communal form of ownership was lost and then emerged the private form of ownership. This brought economic hardship to the people and womankind suffered the most. The Oudh policy of Taluqdars 1869 had an immense impact on the taluqdari women of Awadh.¹⁴ By analyzing the impact of this policy on the taluqdar women we can relate it to the women of North-Western Provinces. Mahalwari system was established in both of these two provinces. The process of revision of settlement and the survey of the land was more or less the same. The provinces of Oudh also faced female infanticide. After the annexation of Oudh in 1856 it came under the rule of the British government. From the year 1877 the lieutenant Governor of the North-Western- Provinces and Oudh became same.

The taluqdari Succession Act deprived the women of the taluqdar families from accession to the lands. The eldest son would become the successor of the taluqdari estate and if the eldest son could not continue or failed to do it then the immediate senior most male living son would take up the responsibility.¹⁵ In the absence of the senior most living son, the adopted son would hold the position and if the adopted son failed then the collateral male heir got the position.¹⁶ The

¹¹ Smita Tewari Jassal, *Daughters of the Earth ,Women and Land in Uttar Pradesh*, (New Delhi:Manohar,2001), p.41.

¹² *Ibid.*,p.37.

¹³ *Ibid.*,p.36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.94.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

women were only considered heirs only if any of the male heirs was absent.¹⁷ This any of the male heir included all male lineal descendants and adopted sons. The estate managers were well aware that the taluqdar women did not have the knowledge of finance and accounts.¹⁸ The estate manager used this weakness of the taluqdar women and hence, it can be said that by doing this the authority started to interfere into the zenana of the taluqdarins.¹⁹ Scholar Satadru Sen explained that the British authority did not spare the zenana for the investigation of female infanticide.²⁰ Women of tenants' families and landless labourers' families suffered due to insufficient earning and the decreasing accumulation of capital.

Impoverishment in the Agrarian Society

The establishment of Mahalwari system brought immense sufferings to the common people and they also lost considerable quantity of property.

For example, the two villages of Aligarh Mursan and Hathras were indebted to such an extent that the amount rose to twelve lakhs by the year 1839.²¹ Thornton, one of the British officials also agreed and observed that the villages in Aligarh were in debt.²² The drought of 1838 made the situations of the villagers more deplorable and their indebtedness rose to such an extent that they could not take new loans.²³

It is very important to know that how mahalwari system did affected the economic and social condition of the taluqdars and the cultivators. We have to analyze the position of these two classes of people and its connection with female infanticide. The mahalwari system uprooted the village community system. There was a hierarchy in the villages but there was as such no rules and compulsion among the village people. Presently I will discuss about the position of the taluqdars in North-Western Provinces mentioned in the official document Thomason's Despatch.

In August 1851 the court of directors of the revenue department discussed various issues in context to the land revenue settlement in North-Western Provinces. One of the important issue arose from this was the position of the taluqdars which centered around the question that previously after the introduction of this land revenue policy they received 18 of the total revenue

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.106.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Satadru Sen, "The Savage Family: Colonialism and Female Infanticide in Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Women's History*, VOL-14, NO.3, p.61 (Autumn,2002) accessed on (30thSeptember 2013) online via Project Muse (<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jowh/summary/v014/14/.3sen.html>)

²¹ Thomas R Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj* (California: University of California, 1979), p.106.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p.110.

assessed but afterwards the percentage was reduced to only 10 percent.²⁴ There was also discussion about the nature, extent and term of the taluqdars. Taluqdars were given an allowance of 22 percent from the net sum of revenue received by the government.²⁵ The authority handled the situation very tactfully. The Government decided that out of 22 percent of the land revenue 10 percent would be transferable and could be given to next generation of the taluqdars.²⁶ But another 22 ½ percent. would be taken by the government on the death of that taluqdar.²⁷ Moreover taluqdars could not legally claim or take advance more than 10 percent of the government demand.²⁸ It was the will of the British Raj that they would give 22 percent of the Government demand to the taluqdars for the rest of the settlement. Unfortunately it merely happened that the authority gave 22 percent of the land revenue. The new theory of agrarian reforms, especially the revision of settlement affected the taluqdars, who were the land holders and collected taxes or revenues both during the Mughal period and the British period. The landlords or the zamindars that had an aristocratic background also were bankrupted.²⁹ Initially the British government gave respect and position of zamindars to the taluqdars but gradually the scenario changed. They retained their position as intermediaries for the purpose of revenue collection. They invested their money in urban estates and industrial sectors.³⁰ Moreover district boards, law courts were established by the taluqdars to retain their position.³¹ The British government played a dual role in this. It uplifted the status of the taluqdars but they limited their power by diminishing the allowance of land revenue. The main basis of the reconstruction of the land revenue policy was to give relief to the cultivators from the hands of intermediaries. But in reality this theory was only to distort the agrarian relations of taluqdars, landlords and cultivators to fulfill their imperial quest and economic needs.

Another severe consequence of this land revenue policy was the famine of 1860-61. The limited circulation of money was mainly responsible for the famine.³² The quantity of wheat which was brought in the year 1803 and 1860 differed in the amount of quantity for example by paying the amount of a rupee 28 seers of wheat was available in the year 1803 but in 1860 one got only 11 ½ seers of wheat by paying the amount of a rupee.³³ The main reason of the famine was not due

²⁴ *Selection of the Records of the Government, North-Western Provinces, Mr. Thomason's Despatch, Volume-II*, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1858), p.199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.200.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Metcalfe, Op.cit, p.379.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.386.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² C.E.R Girdlestone , *Report on Past Famines in the North-Western Provinces*, (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces, 1868) ,p.100.

³³ *Ibid.*

to unavailability of food but due to the inability to buy food.

Adverse and Beneficiary groups in the agrarian society

The main aim of constructing the land revenue policy was to eliminate the intermediaries so that the common people would get relieve from the pressure of giving tax. Due to the revision of the settlement operation the rent rate increased and the villagers faced problem due to this. But the government played assigned the taluqdars and zamindars to extract revenue from the villagers unitedly and transfer it to the authority. The British authority controlled the power of the taluqdars on one hand and extracted revenues from the cultivators as well as the taluqdars on the other hand. Taluqdars became victim of indebtedness. Their lands were mortgaged, auctioned and sold. It became difficult for a cultivator to bear his daily livelihood and for this reason they had to take loans from the mahajan .In this case we can say that the mahajans and the British authority was mostly benefitted with the introduction of Mahalwari system.

Tribes and clans among which Female Infanticide was found

Female infanticide was discovered in 1789 among the Rajkumar Rajputs in Jaunpur district. But the rate of female infanticide was increased after some years of establishment of the North-Western Provinces. The economic condition of the taluqdars declined to such an extent that they felt difficulty in giving marriage of their daughters. Moreover due to the private form of ownership women lost their access to land and were devalued in the society. The Nuwuk Rajputs in Jaunpur District killed their daughter due to the decline in economy and dispossession of land.³⁴ In the Benares district in one solitary village named Burthurra near Chaubepur about eleven miles from Benares there was prevalence of this practice.³⁵ The Rajputs of Raghubansis were mainly responsible for the problem and they gave their daughters marriage to Chauhan, Rajkumar, Oojein.³⁶ A mixed panchayat had also been organized by the Rajputs and the Brahmins to solve this problem.³⁷ But the main problem was the marriage expenses and everybody wanted economic assistance from the British authority.³⁸ Apart from Rajputs, Jats, Ahirs and Gujars were responsible for this practice. Jats, Gujars and Ahirs were land owning communities but Gujars and Ahirs also cultivated lands. Another important thing if one particular clan practiced infanticide it did not mean that in everyplace that clan practiced infanticide. The Infanticide Committee decided that in Saharanpur district the crime existed

³⁴ W.R Moore, *Report on Female Infanticide for Investigating the Extent of Female Infanticide in Benares Division* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1859), pp. 28-29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.45.

among the Gujars, Rajputs, and Jats in pargana Deoband, Nukoor and Roorkee where the girls being thirty-four to sixty boys.³⁹ There were various modifications done in the census by the authority. The tenant cultivators and landless cultivators also suffered to a large extent due to this. But we do not find any statistics in British official documents that whether female infanticide occurred among them or not. They also felt much difficulty in giving marriage of their daughter. It can be said that the authority may have concentrated on the proprietor due to their imperial quest.

Conclusion

The British authority has always considered themselves superior and the Indian natives as inferior to them and has always blamed the Indian people for the prevalence of female infanticide. But the truth is that they themselves were responsible for the social evil. The land revenue system totally destroyed the agrarian structure which led to this social crime. Indian society is always embedded with social hierarchy and from the later Vedic age the matriarchal society transformed to patriarchal society. The British authority tried to strengthen the roots of social hierarchy and also played a vital role behind the declining status of women.

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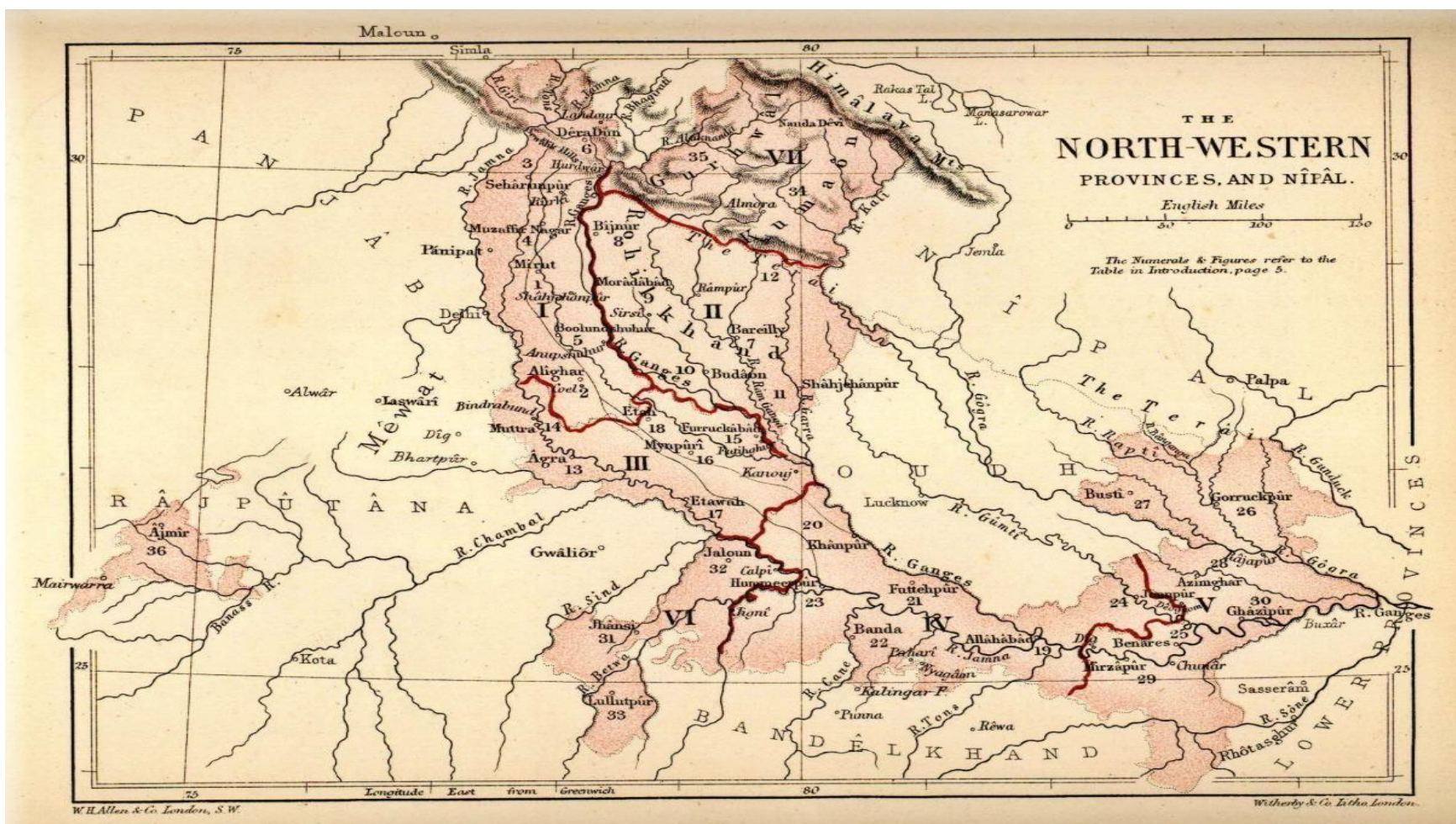
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Map of North-Western Provinces



The pink portion highlights the North-Western Provinces.