

CUET · HISTORY · CLASS XII · CODE 314

Colonialism and the Countryside (Exploring Official Archives)

CUET unit: Theme IX — Colonialism and Rural Society: Evidence

from Official Reports

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Snapshot

- This chapter explores what colonial rule meant for the countryside through three regional case-studies: Bengal under the Permanent Settlement, the Rajmahal hills with the Paharias and Santhals, and the Bombay Deccan under the ryotwari system.
- It introduces the major colonial revenue experiments — Permanent Settlement (1793) and ryotwari (1820s onwards) — and shows how each restructured power, land rights, and rural distress.
- It demonstrates how peasants and tribal communities resisted: zamindars used fictitious sale, jotedars consolidated, Paharias withdrew into the hills, Santhals rebelled (1855-56), and Deccan ryots burnt bonds in 1875.
- It teaches students how historians use **official archives** — the Fifth Report (1813), Buchanan's surveys, and the Deccan Riots Commission Report (1878) — while reading them critically against their official bias.
- CUET frequently tests the dates, terms (jotedar, ryot, sahuakar, Damin-i-Koh, benami, Sunset Law), and the cause-effect chain linking the American Civil War to the Deccan Riots.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

- Colonial rule was first established in Bengal, where the earliest attempts were made to reorder rural society and establish a new regime of land rights and a new revenue system (NCERT §1, p. 228).
- The Permanent Settlement came into operation in 1793; the East India Company fixed the revenue each zamindar had to pay, and estates of defaulters were auctioned (NCERT §1.1, p. 228).
- Over 75 per cent of the zamindaris changed hands after the Permanent Settlement; in the Burdwan auction of 1797, over 95 per cent of the sale was fictitious as the raja's own agents bought back his estates (NCERT §1.1-1.2, p. 228).
- The Permanent Settlement was made with the rajas and taluqdars of Bengal, who were classified as zamindars; the zamindar was not a landowner but a revenue Collector of the state, paying a revenue demand fixed in perpetuity (NCERT §1.2, p. 229).

- Reasons zamindars defaulted: (a) initial demands were very high; (b) it was imposed in the 1790s when agricultural prices were depressed; (c) revenue was invariable and had to be paid punctually; (d) under the Sunset Law, if payment did not come in by sunset of the specified date the zamindari was liable to be auctioned; (e) the Permanent Settlement initially limited the zamindar's power to collect rent (NCERT §1.3, p. 229-230).
- The Company disbanded zamindars' troops, abolished customs duties, and brought their cutcheries (courts) under the supervision of a Collector (NCERT §1.3, p. 230).
- Jotedars — rich peasants documented in Francis Buchanan's survey of Dinajpur — had acquired vast areas (sometimes several thousand acres), controlled local trade and moneylending, and got land cultivated by sharecroppers called adhiyars or bargadars who handed over half the produce (NCERT §1.4, p. 231).
- Jotedars resisted zamindars, mobilised dependent ryots, delayed revenue payments, and often bought up auctioned zamindari estates; they were strongest in North Bengal and were called haoladars, gantidars or mandals elsewhere (NCERT §1.4, p. 231).
- Zamindars resisted displacement through fictitious sale (benami) — agents bought back auctioned estates and refused to pay the purchase money, forcing resale until the estate returned cheaply to the zamindar; between 1793 and 1801 four big zamindaris made benami purchases yielding Rs 30 lakh (NCERT §1.5, p. 232-233).
- Lathiyals (stickmen) of former zamindars attacked outside purchasers; ryots themselves felt bound to their zamindar as proja (subjects). Zamindari power finally collapsed only during the Great Depression of the 1930s (NCERT §1.5, p. 233).
- The Fifth Report, submitted to the British Parliament in 1813, ran into 1002 pages (over 800 pages of appendices) and became the basis of parliamentary debates on Company rule; recent research shows it exaggerated the collapse of zamindari power (NCERT §1.6, p. 233-235).
- In the Rajmahal hills lived the Paharias, who practised shifting cultivation — they cleared forest patches, scratched the ground with hoes, grew pulses and millets, and collected mahua, silk cocoons, resin, and wood for charcoal (NCERT §2.1, p. 236-237).
- Paharias raided plains for survival; zamindars on the plains paid tribute to hill chiefs, and traders paid tolls to use the passes (NCERT §2.1, p. 238).
- In the 1770s the British embarked on a brutal policy of extermination of the Paharias; by the 1780s Augustus Cleveland, Collector of Bhagalpur, proposed a policy of pacification giving chiefs an annual allowance (NCERT §2.1, p. 239).
- The Santhals began coming into Bengal around the 1780s; by 1832 a large area was demarcated as **Damin-i-Koh**, declared the land of the Santhals, with the stipulation that one-tenth be cleared in the first ten years (NCERT §2.2, p. 240-241).
- Santhal villages grew from 40 in 1838 to 1,473 by 1851; population grew from 3,000 to over 82,000 (NCERT §2.2, p. 241).

- Heavy taxes, high interest from moneylenders (dikus), and zamindari encroachment on the Damini pushed the Santhals to the **Santhal Revolt of 1855-56** led by Sidhu Manjhi; after the revolt, the Santhal Pargana was created, carving 5,500 square miles from Bhagalpur and Birbhum (NCERT §2.2, p. 241-242).
- Buchanan was a physician in the Bengal Medical Service (1794-1815), conducted surveys for the Company, was an employee of the EIC, and his vision was shaped by commercial concerns of the Company — he saw forests as wasteful and wanted them cleared for cultivation (NCERT §2.3, p. 244).
- The Permanent Settlement was rarely extended beyond Bengal because, after 1810, rising prices benefitted zamindars but not the state with its fixed revenue; new territories used temporary settlements (NCERT §3.2, p. 247).
- The **ryotwari system** introduced in the Bombay Deccan settled revenue directly with the ryot; soils were classed, revenue-paying capacity assessed, lands resurveyed every 30 years and rates raised — influenced by David Ricardo's theory of rent (NCERT §3.2, p. 247-248).
- The first revenue settlement in the Bombay Deccan was in the 1820s; demands were so high that peasants deserted villages. A famine struck in 1832-34 killing one-third of cattle and half the human population of the Deccan (NCERT §3.3, p. 248).
- The Cotton Supply Association (1857) and Manchester Cotton Company (1859) were founded in Britain to find alternative cotton sources to America; when the **American Civil War** broke out in 1861, raw cotton imports from America fell from 2,000,000 bales to 55,000 bales by 1862 (NCERT §3.4, p. 249-250).
- Between 1860 and 1864 cotton acreage in the Bombay Deccan doubled; by 1862, over 90 per cent of cotton imports into Britain came from India. Ryots got Rs 100 advance for every acre planted with cotton (NCERT §3.4, p. 250-251).
- After the Civil War ended in 1865, American cotton revived; export merchants and sahuikars stopped extending credit and demanded repayment. The next ryotwari settlement raised revenue by 50 to 100 per cent (NCERT §3.5, p. 252).
- The customary norm that interest could not exceed principal broke down; the Deccan Riots Commission recorded a case where Rs 2,000 interest was charged on a Rs 100 loan (NCERT §3.6, p. 253).
- The **Limitation Law of 1859** held loan bonds valid for only three years, but moneylenders forced ryots to sign a new bond every three years rolling unpaid balance into a new principal (NCERT §3.6, p. 253-254).
- The Deccan Revolt began on 12 May 1875 in Supa (Poona district); ryots attacked sahuikars, burnt bahi khata and debt bonds, and looted grain shops. The revolt spread over 6,500 sq km and 30+ villages; 951 people were arrested (NCERT §3.1, p. 246).
- The Deccan Riots Commission report was presented to the British Parliament in 1878. The Commission was specifically asked to judge whether government revenue demand caused the revolt; it concluded that moneylenders, not government, were to

blame — illustrating the colonial reluctance to admit popular discontent against government action (NCERT §4, p. 255).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Raja	A term often used to designate powerful zamindars	228
Taluqdar	Literally "one who holds a taluq" or connection; taluq came to mean a territorial unit	229
Ryot (raiyat)	British spelling for peasant; in Bengal often leased land out to under-ryots	230
Sunset Law	Rule under Permanent Settlement: if revenue did not come in by sunset of the specified date, zamindari was liable to be auctioned	230
Jotedar	Rich peasants of (especially North) Bengal controlling vast lands, local trade and moneylending	231
Adhiyar / Bargadar	Sharecroppers who cultivated jotedars' land for half the produce	231
Amlah	Rent-collecting officer of the zamindar	230
Lathyal	Literally "one who wields the lathi"; strongman of the zamindar	233
Benami	Transactions made in the name of a fictitious/insignificant person while the real beneficiary stays unnamed	233
Fifth Report	1002-page 1813 report to the British Parliament on EIC's administration in Bengal and Madras	233
Paharias	Hill folk of the Rajmahal hills who practised shifting (hoe) cultivation	236
Damin-i-Koh	Land demarcated in 1832 as the land of the Santhals	241
Dikus	Term used by Santhals for outsiders/moneylenders	242
Ryotwari	Revenue system introduced in the Bombay Deccan: revenue settled directly with the ryot, resurveyed every 30 years	247
Rentier	One who lives on rental income from property	247
Sahukar	One who acted as both moneylender and trader	246
Bahi khata	Account books maintained by moneylenders/shopkeepers	246
Limitation Law (1859)	Law making loan bonds between moneylenders and ryots valid for only three years	253

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Fig. 9.5 — Power in rural Bengal (p. 236):** A flow chart showing Company → Zamindar (controls villages) → Jotedar (rich ryot/trader/moneylender) → Ryot → Under-ryot, with arrows showing revenue upward and loans/produce/rent downward.

- **Fig. 9.15 — The cotton boom (p. 249):** Index graph showing the rise and fall in cotton prices between 1860 and 1869.
- **Timeline (p. 256):** 1765 Diwani of Bengal; 1773 Regulating Act; 1793 Permanent Settlement; 1800s Santhals arrive in Rajmahal; 1818 First Bombay Deccan revenue settlement; 1820s Agricultural prices fall; 1840s-50s slow Deccan agrarian expansion; 1855-56 Santhal rebellion; 1861 Cotton boom begins; 1875 Deccan ryots rebel.

2.5 Timeline / Key events

Year / Period	Event	Significance
1765 CE	EIC granted Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa	Begin of company land-revenue rule (NCERT timeline, p. 256)
1770 CE	Bengal Famine; one-third of the population perishes	Backdrop to revenue rethink (NCERT §9.1, p. 233)
1773 CE	Regulating Act regulates EIC governance	(NCERT p. 256)
1793 CE	Permanent Settlement enacted under Cornwallis in Bengal	Zamindar made proprietor; revenue fixed forever (NCERT §9.1, p. 234)
1794 CE	"Sunset Law" — full revenue must be paid by sunset of due date or estate auctioned	Auctions of zamindari (NCERT p. 235)
c. 1800 CE	Santhals start migrating to Rajmahal foothills	Set the stage for Damin-i-Koh (NCERT §9.2, p. 241)
1810–11 CE	Francis Buchanan surveys Rajmahal	Detailed colonial ethnography (NCERT §9.2, p. 240)
1813 CE	Fifth Report on Indian Affairs presented to British Parliament	Highly cited but biased official source (NCERT §9.1, p. 232)
1818 CE	First British revenue settlement in Bombay Deccan	Pitched at very high rates (NCERT §9.3, p. 246)
1820s	Ryotwari system introduced in Bombay Presidency by Munro & Elphinstone	(NCERT §9.3, p. 246)
1820s	Agricultural prices fall sharply	Deccan ryots distressed (NCERT p. 256)
1832 CE	Damin-i-Koh declared a Santhal homeland in the Rajmahal area	Settled cultivation expands (NCERT §9.2, p. 242)
1840s–50s	Slow Deccan agrarian expansion; rising rural indebtedness	(NCERT p. 256)
1855–56 CE	Santhal rebellion under Sidhu and Kanhu	Led to creation of Santhal Pargana (NCERT §9.2, p. 244)
1857 CE	Revolt of 1857	

Year / Period	Event	Significance
		Forms the backdrop to colonial fears of rural revolt (NCERT p. 250)
1861 CE	American Civil War begins; British turn to Indian cotton — Deccan cotton boom	Trigger of later collapse (NCERT §9.3, p. 248)
1865 CE	American Civil War ends; cotton prices collapse	Deccan distress deepens (NCERT p. 249)
1874 CE	Marathi peasants of Karde village begin organised resistance	(NCERT §9.3, p. 251)
1875 CE	Deccan Riots — peasants attack sahumars and burn debt bonds	Major rural uprising (NCERT p. 251)
1878 CE	Deccan Riots Commission Report submitted	Blames moneylenders but masks revenue policy (NCERT §9.4, p. 253)
1879 CE	Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act	(NCERT p. 251)

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Permanent Settlement vs Ryotwari:** Permanent Settlement (1793, Bengal) was with zamindars and revenue fixed forever; ryotwari (Bombay Deccan, 1820s) was with individual ryots and resurveyed every 30 years. NTA often swaps the regions.
- **Jotedars are NOT zamindars** — they were rich peasants/village headmen who often resisted zamindars and bought their auctioned estates. They were strongest in North Bengal.
- **Paharias practised hoe (shifting) cultivation; Santhals practised plough (settled) cultivation.** The "hoe vs plough" contrast is the title metaphor of Section 2.
- **Damin-i-Koh (1832) ≠ Santhal Pargana (post-1855-56).** Damin-i-Koh was created BEFORE the rebellion as a Santhal homeland; Santhal Pargana was created AFTER the rebellion as a conciliatory administrative unit.
- **The Deccan Riots Commission (1878) blamed moneylenders, NOT government revenue policy** — although evidence pointed to both. The Fifth Report (1813) similarly exaggerated zamindari collapse. Both illustrate biases of official archives.
- **The 1857 reference is not the 1857 revolt itself** — British officials in 1875 feared the Deccan Riots would echo 1857, leading to the Commission of enquiry.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a high-yield Theme IX favourite in CUET History — almost every year produces direct-recall questions on the dates (1793, 1832, 1855-56, 1875, 1878), the Sunset Law, jotedars, Damin-i-Koh, and the American Civil War cotton boom. Statement-based and assertion-reason items typically test the ryotwari vs Permanent Settlement contrast and the cause-effect chain linking US cotton supply to Deccan peasant debt. Match-the-following sets routinely pair Cornwallis-Permanent Settlement, Cleveland-Paharias, Buchanan-Dinajpur, and Sidhu Manjhi-Santhal Revolt.

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.28 (CUET 2023) Match the colonial officers with their duties. A. Collector B. Accountant C. Diwan D. Patwari 1. Revenue collection 2. Accounts management 3. Village record keeper 4. Land revenue system

- A) A-1, B-2, C-4, D-3 B) A-2, B-3, C-1, D-4 C) A-3, B-1, C-2, D-4 D) A-4, B-2, C-3, D-1
- Tests:** Colonial revenue officials and the Permanent Settlement **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.29 (CUET 2023) Satya's rule deals with the decline of the aristocratic zamindari style of living in which place?

- A) Meghji Dubla Taka B) Aparajito C) Patua Panchali D) Jalsaghar **Tests:** Cultural representations of the declining zamindari (Jalsaghar) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.30 (CUET 2023) Before the railway age, the town of Mirzapur was a collection centre for _____ from the Deccan.

- A) Indigo B) Rice C) Cotton D) Sugarcane **Tests:** Pre-railway internal trade — Mirzapur as a Deccan cotton mart **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.31 (CUET 2023) In the early 19th century Buchanan travelled through Rajmahal Hills. There were hill folk who lived there called:

- A) Paharias B) Santhals C) Gonds D) Bhils **Tests:** Paharias and Santhals of the Rajmahal Hills **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.32 (CUET 2023) The Santhal rebellion was led by:

- A) Gonoo B) Sidhu and Kanhu C) Birsa Munda D) Alluri Sitarama Raju **Tests:** Santhal rebellion (1855-56) — Sidhu and Kanhu **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.38 (CUET 2023) "Dubashes" were:

- A) Indian soldiers working with the British B) Indian traders working with the Portuguese C) Indians who spoke local language and English D) Indian bankers who

financed the British **Tests:** Indian intermediaries and the colonial economy — Dubashes **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.86 (CUET 2023) The British East India Company was established in:

- A) 1498 B) 1600 C) 1707 D) 1757 **Tests:** English East India Company and early trade in India **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.87 (CUET 2023) The Battle of Plassey was fought in:

- A) 1757 B) 1764 C) 1857 D) 1773 **Tests:** Battle of Plassey and the rise of Company power **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.4 (CUET 2024) Madras, Bombay and Calcutta were the anglicised names of where the British first set up trading posts.

- A) Cities B) Villages C) Towns D) Capitals **Tests:** Origins of colonial port-towns — Madras, Bombay, Calcutta **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.9 (CUET 2024) Match List-I with List-II. List I A. Mahals B. Pahariyas and Santhals C. 1793 D. Taluq List II I. Territorial unit II. Permanent Settlement III. Rajmahal Hills IV. Estates Options:

- A) A-I, B-II, C-III, D-IV B) A-IV, B-III, C-II, D-I C) A-IV, B-III, C-I, D-II D) A-II, B-I, C-IV, D-III **Tests:** Permanent Settlement (1793), mahals and Rajmahal Hills **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.10 (CUET 2024) Which of the following statements are correct? (A) Moneylenders were called 'dikus'. (B) Zamindars hired the Santhals to reclaim land. (C) Santhals were merchants. (D) Land of the Santhals was demarcated as 'Damin-i-koh'. (E) Santhals charged heavy land revenue from dikus. Options:

- A) (A), (B) and (C) only B) (C) and (E) only C) (A), (B) and (D) only D) (C) and (D) only **Tests:** Santhals and the Damin-i-koh **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.13 (CUET 2024) Which report reproduced zamindars' and ryots' petitions for the British Parliament?

- A) The First Report B) The Seventh Report C) The Sixth Report D) The Fifth Report **Tests:** Fifth Report (1813) and zamindar/ryot petitions **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.18 (CUET 2024) Who was the leader of the Santhal Revolt (1855-56)?

- A) Birsa Munda B) Gonoo C) Sidhu Manjhi D) Shah Mal **Tests:** Santhal Revolt (1855-56) — Sidhu Manjhi **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.21 (CUET 2024) The Sunset Law was associated with:

- A) Permanent Settlement B) British Navy C) Imperial Court D) Freedom Movement **Tests:** Sunset Law under the Permanent Settlement **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.18 (CUET 2025) Arrange the following events in chronological order: (A) Santhals settle in Rajmahal hills (B) Permanent Settlement in Bengal (C) Cotton boom begins (D) Santhal rebellion Options:

- A) A, B, C, D B) A, C, B, D C) B, A, C, D D) C, B, D, A **Tests:** Santhals, Permanent Settlement and the Santhal rebellion **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.22 (CUET 2025) Arrange events in chronological order: (A) Ryots rebel in Deccan (B) Agrarian expansion in Bombay Deccan (C) First revenue settlement in Bombay Deccan (D) Regulating Act passed Options:

- A) D, C, B, A B) A, B, C, D C) B, A, D, C D) C, B, D, A **Tests:** Deccan Riots and the Bombay Deccan revenue settlement **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.24 (CUET 2025) In the late eighteenth century, which was not a reason for zamindars' default?

- A) High initial revenue demand B) Zamindars allowed to organise troops C) High demand at times of poor produce D) Revenue had to be paid punctually **Tests:** Permanent Settlement and the causes of zamindar default **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.25 (CUET 2025) What is the meaning of the term Benami?

- A) Transaction in fictitious name B) Property in name of Benam C) Transaction by hand D) Traceable transaction **Tests:** Benami transactions and zamindar evasions **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.40 (CUET 2025) Who was appointed the first Surveyor General of India in 1815?

- A) George Michell B) John Marshall C) R.E.M. Wheeler D) Colin Mackenzie 41–50 (Comprehension Passage) Based on the passage “The British element is gone, but they have left the mischief behind.” **Tests:** Colin Mackenzie — first Surveyor General of India (1815) **Answer:** Not in extracted key