

PEASANTS, ZAMINDARS AND THE STATE

STUDY NOTES

- During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, approximately 85 per cent of the population of India lived in villages.
- During this period, both peasants as well as landed elites were involved in agricultural production and both claimed their rights in the share of the produce.
- The main source for the agrarian history of this period are chronicles and documents from the Mughal court.
- The Mughal chronicle named *Ain-i Akbari* authored by *Abu'lFazl* is the most important source.
- This chronicle provides information regarding the arrangements made by the state to ensure cultivation, to enable the collection of revenue by the agencies of the state and to regulate the relationship between the state and the zamindars.
- However, the vision presented by the *Ain-i Akbari* is only the view of the ruling elite.
- Fortunately, details of revenue records from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries supplement the description of *Ain-i Akbari*.
- In addition, the extensive records of the East India Company provide useful descriptions of agrarian relations in eastern India.
- The seventeenth century sources refer to two kinds of peasants, that is, *khud-kashta* means the residents of the village in which they held their lands and *pahi-kashta* means non-resident cultivators who belonged to some other village, but cultivated lands elsewhere on a contractual basis.
- Three factors that accounted for the constant expansion of agriculture are abundance of land, available labour and the mobility of peasants.
- The main staple crops were rice, wheat or millets.
- Monsoon was the backbone of the Indian agriculture. Irrigation projects received state support, for instance, one old canal named *shahnahrin* Punjab was repaired during Shah Jahan's reign.
- Agriculture was organised on the basis of seasonal cycles, that is, the kharif (autumn) and the rabi (spring).
- For example, according to the Mughal chronicle *Ain-i Akbari* 39 varieties of crops were cultivated in the Mughal provinces of Agra, Delhi produced 43 varieties of crops over the two seasons and Bengal alone produced 50 varieties of rice.
- Crops such as cotton and sugarcane were termed as *jins-i kamil*, that is, perfect crop.
- During the seventeenth century, many new varieties of crops reached the Indian subcontinent, for instance, maize came to India via Africa and Spain. Some vegetables like tomatoes, potatoes and chillies were introduced from the New World. Similarly, new fruits such as pineapple and the papaya arrived in the subcontinent.
- Three constituents of the village community were the cultivators, the panchayat, and the village headman.
- In the Mughal period, there was evidence of a direct correlation between caste, poverty and social status at the lower strata of society.
- The village panchayat was an assembly of elders who were usually important people with hereditary rights over their property. In mixed-caste villages, the panchayat was usually a heterogeneous body.

- The headman of the panchayat was known as muqaddam or mandal.
- According to sources, the village headman was chosen through the consensus of the village elders.
- One important function of the village panchayat was to ensure caste boundaries among the various communities residing the village were upheld. The Panchayat was given the authority to levy fines and give severe punishment to those who work against their caste.
- Apart from the village panchayat, each caste or jati had its own jati panchayat in the village.
- The decision of the panchayat varies from case to case, but in cases like excessive revenue demands, the panchayat often suggested compromise.
- Marathi documents and village surveys made during the early years of the British rule have revealed the existence of substantial numbers of artisans, sometimes as high as 25 per cent of the total households in the villages.
- Jajmani system was prevalent and under this system, blacksmiths, carpenters and goldsmiths were paid by the zamindars of Bengal for their work by giving them daily allowance and diet money.
- Both men and women work together in the agricultural field. However, biases related to women's biological functions did continue, for example, menstruating women were not allowed to touch the plough or the potter's wheel in western India.
- Women were considered an important resource in agrarian society. Remarriage was regarded legitimate for divorced and widowed women.
- However, the household was headed by a male and women were kept under strict control by the male members of the family.
- From states like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, there were evidence of petitions sent by women to the village panchayat for seeking redress and justice.
- Amongst the landed gentry, women had the right to inherit property for example, Punjab show that women, including widows, actively participated in the rural land market as sellers of property inherited by them.
- In eighteenth-century, there were women zamindars in Bengal.
- Forest dwellers were known as *jangli* which means people whose livelihood came from the gathering of forest produce, hunting and shifting agriculture.
- Forest products such as honey, bees wax and gum lac were in great demand.
- The zamindars were landed proprietors who enjoyed certain social and economic privileges by virtue of their superior status in rural society. Many zamindars had fortresses and armed contingent.
- The Mughal Empire was mainly dependent on the land revenue; hence, state played a vital role in controlling the agricultural production. The land revenue arrangements consisted of two stages, that is, assessment and next actual collection.
- During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Mughal Empire was among the large territorial empires in Asia which had managed to consolidate power and resources.
- As a consequence, there was geographical diversity of India's overseas trade and also expansion of commodity composition in this trade.
- This expanded trade brought in huge amounts of silver bullion into Asia to pay for goods procured from India and a large part of that bullion moved towards India
- Subsequently, the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries was marked by a remarkable stability in the availability of metal currency, especially the silver rupa in India.
- The testimony of an Italian traveller, Giovanni Careri, provides a graphic account about the way silver travelled across the globe to reach India.

- The *Ain-i Akbari* which was completed in 1598 was the culmination of a large historical, administrative project of classification undertaken by Abu'l Fazl at the order of the Mughal Emperor Akbar.
- The book Akbar Nama which comprises of three books, that is, the first two books provide a historical narrative and the third book is *Ain-i Akbari*.
- The *Ain* gives detail description about the Mughal court, administration, army, the sources of revenue and the physical layout of the provinces of Akbar's empire. It also provides detailed accounts regarding the literary, cultural and religious traditions of the people.
- The *Ain* provides all important information of the Mughal Empire during the reign of Akbar.
- The *Ain* is made up of five books also known as *daftars*, of which the first three books describe the Mughal administration and the last two books deal with the religious, literary and cultural traditions of the people of India and also contain a collection of Akbar's "auspicious sayings".
- Historians who have carefully studied the *Ain* point out that it is not without its problems, for instance, numerous errors in totalling have been detected.
- Another limitation of the *Ain* is its skewed nature of the quantitative data, that is data were not collected uniformly from all provinces. For example, detailed information was compiled about the caste composition of the zamindars for many subas except for Bengal and Orissa.

QUESTION BANK

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Name the crops which were considered as *jins-i kamil*.**

(a) Cotton and sugarcane	(b) Sugarcane and potatoes
(c) Oilseeds and wheat	(d) Rice and wheat
- How many *daftars* (parts) of *Ain*?**

(a) Three	(b) Four	(c) Five	(d) Six
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- The Ottoman Empire was ruled by**

(a) China	(b) Iran	(c) Turkey	(d) Iraq
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- Which metal was more commonly used to produce coins during the Mughal Empire?**

(a) Gold	(b) Silver	(c) Tin	(d) Copper
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- What did the term *Jins-i-Kamil* mean under the Mughal Empire?**

(a) Half crop	(b) Perfect crop	(c) Rabi crop	(d) Kharif crop
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- Which of the following statements regarding *Ain-i-Akbari* is true?**

(a) Manzil-Abadi is related to the royal household.
(b) Sipah-Abadi is related to religious affairs.
(c) Mulk-Abadi gives information about the cultural aspect of the state.
(d) All of these
- Which of the following statements about the Mughal Empire is incorrect?**

(a) Irrigation projects received state support.
(b) <i>Jins-i-Kamil</i> was a rabi crop.
(c) Many new crops reached India such as maize and potatoes.
(d) Khud-kashta and pahi-kashta were two types of peasants.
- The zamindars owned vast areas known as**

(a) Milkiyat	(b) Zamin	(c) Grih	(d) Bhumi
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9. Women zamindars were well-known in the 18th century in
 (a) Bengal (b) Rajasthan (c) Punjab (d) Gujarat
10. Name the crop which was banned by the Mughal emperor Jahangir.
 (a) Betel leaf (b) Chillies (c) Tobacco (d) Maize
11. The “auspicious sayings” of Akbar were included in
 (a) First book of Ain (b) Second book of Ain (c) Third book of Ain (d) Fifth book of Ain
12. What is the subject of Ain’s third book ‘*Mulk-Abadi*’?
 (a) Social side of the empire (b) Fiscal side of the empire
 (c) Administrative side of the empire (d) None of the above
13. Which of the following pairings is incorrectly matched:
 (a) Kharif - Autumn (b) Rabi - Spring (c) Makka - Maize (d) Muqaddam - Labourer
14. Which term was used frequently in Mughal Indo-Persian sources to describe a peasant?
 (a) do-fasla (b) khud-kashta (c) pahi-kashta (d) raiyat
15. Tomatoes, potatoes and chilies were brought to India from
 (a) Continental World (b) Middle World (c) New World (d) Old World
16. Under the Mughals, most regions generated a minimum of
 (a) one crops (b) two crops (c) three crops (d) four crops
17. What does the term *khud-kashta* mean?
 (a) Peasants who were residents of the village in which they held their land
 (b) Non-resident cultivators who belong to other village
 (c) Revenue collectors
 (d) Head of the jati panchayat
18. Which of the following crops made their way to India from Africa and Spain?
 (a) Chillies (b) Maize (c) Papaya (d) Tomatoes
19. Which one of the following statement regarding women role in agrarian culture is incorrect?
 (a) Women owed, weeded, threshed and winnowed the harvest.
 (b) Women worked shoulder to shoulder with men in fields.
 (c) During some days of the month women were not allowed to touch the plough.
 (d) Women took the produce to the overseas markets for trade.
20. Which one of the following statement about the jati panchayat is not true?
 (a) In Rajasthan, jati panchayats arbitrated civil disputes between members of different castes..
 (b) The jati panchayat never mediated in contested claims on land.
 (c) The jati panchayat decided whether marriages were performed according to the norms laid down by a particular caste group.
 (d) The jati panchayat determined who had ritual precedence in village functions.
21. Match the following.
 (i) Headman (A) Village accountant
 (ii) Patwari (B) Begar
 (iii) Labour (C) Kharbandi
 (iv) Scrubland (D) Mandal
- Choose the correct option.
 (a) (i)-(B), (ii)-(C), (iii)-(A), (iv)-(D) (b) (i)-(C), (ii)-(A), (iii)-(B), (iv)-(D)
 (c) (i)-(C), (ii)-(D), (iii)-(B), (iv)-(A) (d) (i)-(D), (ii)-(A), (iii)-(B), (iv)-(C)

22. Consider the following statements in the context of the village panchayat and choose the incorrect statement.

- (a) The village panchayat was an assembly of elders.
- (b) In mixed-caste villages, the panchayat was usually a heterogeneous body.
- (c) The panchayat was headed by a headman known as amil-guzar.
- (d) Headmen held office as long as they enjoyed the confidence of the village elders.

23. In the early years of British rule have revealed the existence of substantial numbers of artisans, sometimes as high as ____ per cent of the total households in the village.

- (a) 20
- (b) 25
- (c) 39
- (d) 40

24. Read the below statements in the pretext of the village artisans in the Mughal period.

- I. Village artisans were provided specialised services in return for which they were compensated by villagers by a variety of means.
- II. The most common way of doing so was by allotting land for the artisans.
- III. In Bihar such lands became the artisans' miras or watan – their hereditary holding.

Select the correct option

- (a) Only I
- (b) Only III
- (c) Both I and II
- (d) Both II and III

25. In the Mughal period, remarriage was considered legitimate among

- (a) divorced men
- (b) divorced women
- (c) widowed women
- (d) Both (b) and (c)

26. Which of the following statements in the context of condition of women during the Mughal period is not true?

- (a) According to established social norms, the household was headed by a woman.
- (b) Women were kept under strict control by the male members of the family and the community.
- (c) Wives protested against the infidelity of their husbands.
- (d) In most cases when women petitioned to the panchayat, their names were excluded from the record.

27. What was the meaning of the term *jangli* in the medieval period? *

- (a) Uncivilised people
- (b) Those people whose livelihood came from hunting and shifting agriculture.
- (c) Those who reside in the forests only.
- (d) Uneducated and ill-mannered people.

28. Which factors were responsible for the elevation of the status of zamindars?

- (a) Religion
- (b) Caste
- (c) Khidmat
- (d) Both (b) and (c)

29. Consider the following statements in the context of the zamindars during the Mughal period.

- I. Milkiyat lands were cultivated for the private use of zamindars.
- II. Zamindars also derived their power from the fact that they could often collect revenue on behalf of the state.
- III. Religion was one factor that accounted for the elevated status of zamindars.

Choose the correct option.

- (a) Only II
- (b) Only III
- (c) Both I and II
- (d) Both II and III

30. The dispossession of weaker people by a powerful military chieftain was quite often a way of expanding a _____.

- (a) area
- (b) zamindari
- (c) revenue
- (d) All of these

31. How did the Panchayats use the funds available to it in the Mughal period?
- It was used to entertain revenue officials.
 - It was used to pay salary to muqaddam and chowkidar.
 - It was used to meet expenses for the community welfare.
 - All of these.
32. The *Ain-i Akbari* was the culmination of a large historical, administrative project of classification undertaken by
- Abu'l Fazl
 - Akbar
 - Faizi
 - Abdul Hamid
33. The Mughal chronicle *Akbar Nama* comprises of _____ books.
- two
 - three
 - five
 - six
34. Consider the following statements about the *Ain-i Akbari*.
- The *Ain* was part of a larger project of history writing commissioned by Akbar.
 - The *Ain* gives detailed accounts of the organisation of the court, administration and army
 - The third book of *Akbar Nama* provided a historical narrative.

Select the incorrect option.

- Only I
 - Only II
 - Only III
 - Both I and II
35. Name the Mughal emperor who issued the silver coin shown in the below image.



- Akbar
 - Jahangir
 - Aurangzeb
 - Shah Jahan
36. In which year the book *Ain-i Akbari* was completed?
- 1598
 - 1590
 - 1596
 - 1599
37. The *Ain* provides information for us about the Mughal Empire named
- Shah Jahan
 - Aurangzeb
 - Humayun
 - Akbar
38. The first three books of *Ain* gives detailed description about the
- Agriculture
 - Administration
 - Justice
 - Revenue
39. The first book of *Ain* is known as
- sipah-abadi
 - manzil-abadi
 - mulk-abadi
 - Accounts of twelve provinces
40. Choose the correct option.
- Assertion (A):** Historians who have carefully studied the *Ain* point out that it is not without its problems.
- Reason (R):** Numerous errors in totalling have been detected.
- Both (A) and (R) are correct and (R) is the correct explanation of (A).
 - Both (A) and (R) are correct but (R) is not the correct explanation of (A).
 - (A) is incorrect but (R) is correct.
 - (R) is incorrect but (A) is correct.

41. Consider the following statements regarding limitation of the *Ain-i Akbari* and select the incorrect statement.
- Ain* is the somewhat skewed nature of the quantitative data.
 - Data were not collected uniformly from all provinces.
 - Many subas detailed information was compiled about the caste composition of the zamindars.
 - The detailed list of prices and wages that the *Ain* does provide is mainly derived from data pertaining to Orissa.
42. Our major source for the agrarian history of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are chronicles and documents from the
- Sultanate court
 - Mughal court
 - Deccan court
 - None of these
43. The central purpose of the *Ain* was to present a vision of
- Akbar's empire
 - Jahangir's empire
 - Shah Jahan's empire
 - Aurangzeb's empire
44. What do you understand by the term 'muzarian'?
- Trader
 - Peasant
 - Village
 - Asami
45. Read the clue and identify the name of the plant.
- This plant, which arrived first in the Deccan, spread to northern India in the early years of the seventeenth century.
- Tobacco
 - Mint
 - Paan
 - Tulsi
46. Who was the Mughal emperor when in northern India the state undertook digging of new canals and also repaired old ones like the shahnahr in the Punjab?
- Akbar
 - Jahangir
 - Shah Jahan
 - Aurangzeb
47. Consider the following statements.
- Though agriculture was labour intensive, peasants did use technologies that often harnessed cattle energy.
 - One example was the iron plough, which was heavy but easily assembled with an iron tip.
 - It therefore did not make deep furrows, which preserved the moisture better during the intensely hot months.
- Select the incorrect option.
- Only I
 - Only II
 - Only III
 - Both I and II
48. _____ and _____ were done simultaneously using a narrow iron blade with a small wooden handle.
- Sowing and harvesting
 - Thrashing and hoeing
 - Hoeing and weeding
 - Sowing and irrigating
49. Most regions of the Mughal Empire produced a minimum of _____ crops in a year.
- Three
 - Four
 - Two
 - Five
50. Which crop was grown over a great swathe of territory spread over central India and the Deccan plateau?
- Jute
 - Cotton
 - Maize
 - Lentils
51. In the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, for which crop Bengal was famous?
- Sugar
 - Cotton
 - Oilseeds
 - Lentils
52. What specific term was used for people who worked as menials?
- majur
 - peasants
 - shudras
 - untouchables
53. In Muslim communities, menials like the _____ were housed outside the boundaries of the village.
- mallahzadas
 - majur
 - shudra
 - halalkhoran
54. In the seventeenth century, what term was used in Bihar for the sons of boatmen?
- majur
 - mallahzadas
 - halalkhoran
 - None of these
55. Consider the below statements and select the incorrect statement.
- Women tilled and ploughed, while men sowed, weeded, threshed and winnowed the harvest.

- (b) Men tilled and ploughed, while women sowed, weeded, threshed and winnowed the harvest.
- (c) Menstruating women, for instance, were not allowed to touch the plough or the potter's wheel in western India.
- (d) Women were considered an important resource in agrarian society also because they were child bearers in a society dependent on labour.

56. Choose the correct option.

Assertion (A): The spread of commercial agriculture was an important external factor that impinged on the lives of those who lived in the forests.

Reason (R): In the Mughal political ideology, the hunt symbolised the overwhelming concern of the state to relate to all its subjects, rich and poor.

- (a) Both (A) and (R) are correct and (R) is the correct explanation of (A).
- (b) Both (A) and (R) are correct but (R) is not the correct explanation of (A).
- (c) (A) is incorrect but (R) is correct.
- (d) (R) is incorrect but (A) is correct.

Input Text Based MCQ's

Read the below source carefully and answer the following questions (57 to 58):

This excerpt from Giovanni Careri's account (based on Bernier's account) gives an idea of the enormous amount of wealth that found its way into the Mughal Empire:

That the Reader may form some idea of the Wealth of this (Mughal) Empire, he is to observe that all the Gold and Silver, which circulates throughout the World at last Centres here. It is well known that as much of it comes out of America, after running through several Kingdoms of Europe, goes partly into Turkey (Turkey), for several sorts of Commodities; and part into Persia, by the way of Smirna for Silk. Now the Turks not being able to abstain from Coffee, which comes from Hyeman (Oman), and Arabia ... nor Persia, Arabia, and the Turks themselves to go without the commodities of India, send vast quantities of Mony (money) to Moka (Mocha) on the Red Sea, near Babel Mandel; to Bassora (Basra) at the bottom of the Persian Gulgh (Gulf); ... which is afterwards sent over in Ships to Indostan (Hindustan). Besides the Indian, Dutch, English, and Portuguese Ships, that every Year carry the Commodities of Indostan, to Pegu, Tanasserri (parts of Myanmar), Siam (Thailand), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) ... the Maldive Islands, Mozambique and other Places, must of necessity convey much Gold and Silver thither, from those Countries. All that the Dutch fetch from the Mines in Japan, sooner or later, goes to Indostan; and the goods carry'd hence into Europe, whether to France, England, or Portugal, are all purchas'd for ready Mony, which remains there.

57. Name the foreign traveller who provides a graphic account about the way silver travelled across the globe to reach India.

- (a) Giovanni Careri
- (b) Domingo Paes
- (c) Bernado
- (d) Al-Biruni

58. Voyages of discovery and the opening up of the New World resulted in a massive expansion of Asia's trade with

- (a) America
- (b) Russia
- (c) Europe
- (d) Africa

Read the below source carefully and answer the following questions (59 to 61):

The following is a listing of criteria of classification excerpted from the Ain:

The Emperor Akbar in his profound sagacity classified the lands and fixed a different revenue to be paid by each. Polaj is land which is annually cultivated for each crop in succession and is never allowed to lie fallow. Parauti is land left out of cultivation for a time that it may recover its strength. Chachar is land that has lain fallow for three or four years. Banjar is land uncultivated for five years and more. Of the first two kinds of land, there are three classes, good,

middling, and bad. They add together the produce of each sort, and the third of this represents the medium produce, one-third part of which is exacted as the Royal dues.

59. Name the Mughal emperor who classified the lands and fixed a different revenue to be paid by each.
 (a) Humayun (b) Akbar (c) Babur (d) Jahangir
60. Which land is annually cultivated for each crop in succession and is never allowed to fallow?
 (a) Banjar (b) Chachar (c) Polaj (d) Parauti
61. Name the Mughal official who was responsible for ensuring that imperial regulations were carried out in the provinces.
 (a) Amin (b) Amil (c) Amil-guzar (d) Amir

Read the below source carefully and answer the following questions (62 to 64):

The Ain on land revenue collection:

Let him (the amil-guzar) not make it a practice of taking only in cash but also in kind. The latter is effected in several ways. First, *kankut* : in the Hindi language *kan* signifies grain, and *kut*, estimates ... If any doubts arise, the crops should be cut and estimated in three lots, the good, the middling, and the inferior, and the hesitation removed. Often, too, the land taken by appraisalment, gives a sufficiently accurate return. Secondly, *batai*, also called *bhaoli*, the crops are reaped and stacked and divided by agreement in the presence of the parties. But in this case several intelligent inspectors are required; otherwise, the evil-minded and false are given to deception. Thirdly, *khet-batai*, when they divide the fields after they are sown. Fourthly, *lang batai*, after cutting the grain, they form it in heaps and divide it among themselves, and each takes his share home and turns it to profit.

62. The land revenue arrangements consisted of –
 (a) milkiyat (b) jama (c) hasil (d) Both (b) and (c)
63. Who was amil-guzar?
 (a) Scribe (b) Court poet (c) Revenue collector (d) Artisan
64. Who became a decisive agent in shaping agrarian relations in the Mughal Empire?
 (a) Amil-guzar (b) Revenue officials and record keepers
 (c) Emperor (d) Administrative officers

ANSWERS

Multiple Choice Questions

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (a) | 2. (c) | 3. (c) | 4. (b) | 5. (b) | 6. (a) | 7. (b) | 8. (a) | 9. (a) | 10. (c) |
| 11. (d) | 12. (b) | 13. (d) | 14. (d) | 15. (c) | 16. (b) | 17. (a) | 18. (b) | 19. (d) | 20. (b) |
| 21. (d) | 22. (c) | 23. (b) | 24. (c) | 25. (d) | 26. (a) | 27. (b) | 28. (d) | 29. (c) | 30. (b) |
| 31. (d) | 32. (a) | 33. (b) | 34. (c) | 35. (c) | 36. (a) | 37. (d) | 38. (b) | 39. (b) | 40. (a) |
| 41. (d) | 42. (b) | 43. (a) | 44. (b) | 45. (a) | 46. (c) | 47. (b) | 48. (c) | 49. (c) | 50. (b) |
| 51. (a) | 52. (a) | 53. (d) | 54. (b) | 55. (a) | 56. (b) | | | | |

Input Text Based MCQ's

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|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 57. (a) | 58. (c) | 59. (b) | 60. (c) | 61. (a) | 62. (d) | 63. (c) | 64. (b) |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|