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## Analysis of the Social Condition in Rajasthan with Reference to the Context of Industrialization in the Colonial Period

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**Abstract:** During the colonial period (16th to 18th century), the East India Company was a central force in the socio-economic structure of Rajasthan. It significantly impacted the region's social fabric. This article analyzes the social implications of the Company's rule in Rajasthan, particularly in reference to the British society, local rulers, and the intricate connections between the colonial administration and the native governance systems. The East India Company accelerated social stratification, where the Company's agents played a major role in local governance and cultural preservation. At the same time, they imposed taxes and economic controls on farmers and common people, leading to discontent and resistance. The Company supported princely rulers in governance, security arrangements, and cultural preservation (such as temple construction, arts, and festivals). In regions like Mewar, Marwar, and Amber, the presence of the Company took various forms that reflected cooperation and conflict in British-princely relations. The heavy taxes and labor demands imposed by the Company led to economic exploitation, creating social unrest. The varied forms of this colonial rule across different regions—like negotiations with rulers like Ekanath Singh of Amber or resistance by leaders like Raja Pratap of Mewar—illustrate both collaboration and rebellion. On one hand, this brought administrative stability and cultural growth at the local level; on the other, it gave rise to socio-economic disparities and frequent tensions between the East India Company and native rulers. From a long-term historical perspective, the East India Company left a lasting impact on Rajasthan's social structures, which continues to be analyzed in modern historiography. This article, based on primary sources (colonial-era documents, British records) and secondary sources (works by historians), thoroughly explores the historical importance of the Company and its socio-political consequences. It sheds light on both the positive and negative influences of the Company's rule—such as cultural development and socio-economic inequality—and outlines its historical significance.

**Keywords:** East India Company Rule, Social Structure, Social Stratification, Economic Exploitation, Cultural Preservation, Local Governance.

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### Objectives of the Research Paper:

1. To study the fundamental nature, objectives, and working system of the East India Company's rule during the colonial period.
2. To understand how this rule was implemented in various regions of Rajasthan and the role played by local rulers and intermediaries.
3. To identify which social groups were affected due to the structure of the East India Company's administration and what kind of social tensions or inequalities emerged.
4. To analyze the changes in the economic and social conditions of the land-holding peasant class.
5. To examine how this rule strengthened caste-based structures and hindered social mobility.

6. *To analyze the political and social relations between the British administration and the local princely states under the East India Company rule.*
7. *To understand the long-term implications of this system in both historical and contemporary contexts, which are still visible in certain structures of rural society in present-day Rajasthan.*

### Research Methodology

1. **The research is primarily based on secondary sources**, including books, research papers, historical records, gazetteers, archival reports, and contemporary historians' accounts.
2. **Under the historical method**, available sources have been critically analyzed in a chronological context, to present a well-structured understanding of the origin, development, and impact of the East India Company's rule.
3. **Alongside descriptive analysis of the structure, administrative system, and social implications** of the East India Company, an analytical approach has also been used to interpret these effects meaningfully.
4. **Data from historical records have been compared with folk literature, oral narratives, and poetic traditions**, to better understand the mindset of the intermediaries and the cultural essence of social life during that era.
5. **During the research, sources from the Rajasthan State Archives (Bikaner), National Archives of India, and Digital Libraries** have been utilized and critically examined.
6. **The authenticity, reliability, and bias** of primary sources have also been evaluated to ensure the research findings are presented in a comprehensive and objective manner.

**In the medieval period**, the development of a feudal social structure was established to describe the political, administrative, social, and economic functioning between a king or monarch and his subordinate nobles (zamindars or military chiefs). This society was **a hierarchical and dependent system**, wherein the interactions between the monarch and his subordinates were based on mutual obligations.

This relationship was centered on loyalty, service, and protection. It can also be described as a semi-organized socio-political structure, which during the medieval era was primarily sustained by the landholding aristocratic class that emerged due to the legal and economic subjugation of peasants.

This landholding aristocratic class was politically and legally empowered and was economically sustained through agricultural production. Their status and control were legitimized and preserved through their close links with political authority and the judiciary.

**The history of Indian feudalism** is marked by a phase when, as a result of the weakening of state power and decentralization, the foundation for **centralized authority declined**, giving rise to **smaller feudal governments**, which became particularly prominent during the early and late medieval periods.

Great kings and emperors initiated the beginning of the feudal system in India. Indian feudalism represented a society that had begun shaping the socio-political structure of India even before the onset of colonial rule.

Land grants held significant importance in ancient Indian history. These often diverged from strictly financial interests and were connected to political and social transformations that distinguished Indian feudalism from its European counterpart.

**Indian feudalism began in the 6th century CE**, when **land grants replaced cash payments**. The practice of **land allocation and feudal administration** reached its peak during the **9th to 12th centuries CE**.

Feudalism transformed the administrative structure, and in both the early and later medieval periods, it laid down the path for adopting feudal policies across much of the Indian subcontinent.

During British rule in India, Lord Cornwallis introduced the Permanent Settlement system in Bengal, which became a significant step in shaping the feudal structure. Lord Cornwallis aimed to establish a land revenue system that involved creating a class of landlords (zamindars) responsible for collecting taxes. This system had lasting administrative and social impacts. William Bentinck later implemented reforms that expanded British control and administration. The Permanent Settlement was intended to stabilize revenue collection and ensure cooperation from local elites. Over time, this system became the foundation of the colonial administration in India. The political structure of British India was a complex feudal framework, largely based on the Permanent Settlement system, which created various classes of intermediaries, including landlords, tax collectors, and village headmen. These intermediaries exercised significant power both politically and socially. In the traditional social setup, the **feudal system in British India** involved a hierarchical order based on land ownership and control over peasants. This created a socio-economic division that entrenched inequality and allowed British authorities to maintain indirect control through local elites. The Permanent Settlement fundamentally altered the relationship between the British administration and Indian society. It institutionalized landlordism, where zamindars gained hereditary rights over land, often leading to exploitation of peasants. This system also institutionalized certain caste hierarchies and socio-political privileges.

The British Raj's administrative framework was thus deeply intertwined with the feudal structure. The zamindars, supported by British legal and political mechanisms, acted as intermediaries enforcing colonial policies. They collected taxes, maintained law and order, and controlled rural populations. The caste system under British rule was also influenced by this structure. The British often codified caste identities and privileges to consolidate control, leading to further social stratification and rigidity. In summary, the British Permanent Settlement created a **semi-feudal political economy** where local landlords served as agents of colonial power, entrenching social inequalities and shaping India's political and social landscape during the colonial era.

The feudal system in colonial India was a unique form of governance. William Bentinck played a crucial role in shaping this system through administrative reforms. Because of this, it cannot be simply stated that the feudal system and landlords in India were identical or directly comparable to those in other parts of the world. The colonial feudal system in India was essentially a semi-feudal, semi-colonial structure, where the British administration had established a form of indirect rule through landlords. Within this system, there existed a class of landlords who acted as intermediaries between the British rulers and the rural population, enjoying considerable authority and privileges. The landlords were mostly representatives of the local elite or influential classes, who often held hereditary rights over the land and exercised control over peasants. These landlords were not merely tax collectors but had significant administrative and judicial powers granted by the colonial state. Because of their relationship with the British government, these landlords often had significant legal authority and enforced colonial policies at the local level. Their status was protected and legitimized by the British administration, which helped them maintain control over their tenants and rural society. Despite being labeled as feudal, this system was fundamentally different from classical feudalism because it was embedded within the colonial structure. The landlords' power derived from their alliance with the colonial rulers rather than independent feudal authority. In summary, the landlords in colonial India were part of a semi-colonial feudal system that was created and sustained by British administrative policies. This system allowed landlords to consolidate power locally while serving colonial interests, and this arrangement had a lasting impact on India's rural socio-economic structure.

The decline of the feudal system had a significant impact on the landlord class in colonial India, and during this period, they lost much of their influence and power. Many landlords started losing control over their lands and rights due to administrative and legal reforms. The colonial government began implementing policies that gradually undermined the traditional landlord authority. Landlords were increasingly challenged by peasants, moneylenders, and local officials, and their dominance started to erode. This shift brought about a decline in the old feudal relations and introduced new socio-economic dynamics in rural areas. Due to reforms in the government and administrative systems, the landlords were also pushed out of certain positions of power, and their role as intermediaries in revenue collection and local governance weakened. The traditional ties between landlords and tenants, which had been based on feudal loyalties and obligations, were increasingly replaced by contractual relations regulated by colonial laws. This led to a situation where landlords had to defend their interests through legal means, and many faced litigation over land disputes. Moreover, the colonial state sometimes intervened directly in rural affairs, bypassing the landlords, which further diminished their influence. As a result, landlords lost their exclusive control over land and peasants. Some landlords tried to adapt by modernizing their estates or by becoming involved in new economic ventures, but many could not maintain their traditional status and power. The decline of the feudal system and the weakening of landlords' power were key factors that contributed to the transformation of rural society in colonial India, setting the stage for later social and political changes.

Several conflicts arose between landlords and tenants during the colonial period. However, it is not always the case that only the tenant suffered losses. In many instances, landlords lost their control over tenants and their income sources. The conflicts related to landlords often involved disputes over land rights, revenue collection, and control over villages. The region of Assam had influential landlords such as Lakhya, Chukhul, and Kasi. Similarly, in Bengal, landlords like Jatkhola, Lanjhi, Ekalnha, and Phukrar were notable. These landlords managed large estates, and they held considerable power over the peasants and land. The interactions between landlords and tenants often resulted in violent clashes and law enforcement actions. Many landlords used their influence to protect their rights and maintain control over their estates. This also meant involvement in local administration and cooperation with colonial officials. In some cases, landlords were responsible for maintaining law and order in their territories, including collecting taxes and organizing village assemblies. Their influence extended into religious and social affairs as well. The colonial government sometimes depended on landlords to administer revenue collection and local governance. In return, landlords received certain privileges and judicial powers over their tenants and villages. These landlords, referred to as zamindars or landholders, played a crucial role in the colonial system of land revenue and rural administration. Their cooperation with British officials was essential for the smooth functioning of the colonial state. This complex relationship between landlords, tenants, and colonial authorities shaped the socio-economic structure of rural India during British rule.

For everyone, although, due to various reasons, these administrations and officials faced many challenges in maintaining control, they had to establish their authority within the broader context of governance. By the end of the 18th century, the zamindars (landowners) of the region were exercising their powers effectively.

The officials and administrators under the British rule had significant authority over the zamindars and the land they controlled. It was observed that in the revenue and administrative systems, the zamindars were given important powers. The assessment of revenue from the land and the obligations of the landlords were closely linked to these powers. The influence of the landlords was notable in both the social hierarchy and their families, who also held considerable power.

Officials like the **district collector**, **sheriff**, and **magistrate** were appointed to supervise these zamindars' activities and ensure proper administration. Many zamindars started to show loyalty to the British government,

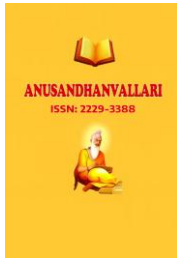
securing their position and influence in the local society. As a result, these zamindars gradually gained power not only in administrative matters but also in social and cultural affairs. For example, Soyla, Batohiand Gola were terms related to administrative functions: Jatohi<sup>3</sup>, Lajnath<sup>4</sup>, Ugratna<sup>5</sup>, and Gunair<sup>6</sup> referred to tax collectors appointed by the state who worked under zamindars, while shrigagri Rathi were officials responsible for maintaining law and order, often employed by zamindars for their protection and the enforcement of their authority. The zamindars were also responsible for collecting taxes (known as the rebellion of the tribals), and they maintained a hierarchy of officials who managed different aspects of administration, such as Neskhi<sup>8</sup> and Gatujhi<sup>9</sup> who oversaw judicial and policing functions. The zamindari system created a complex social and administrative structure that reinforced the zamindars' dominance in rural India. Thus, zamindars acted as intermediaries between the British administration and the rural population, managing land revenue, law enforcement, and social order, which consolidated their socio-political power in their regions.

In these contexts, the power of zamindars was granted through official appointments and the recognition of their authority by governmental and administrative agencies. In this system, the collection of revenue and the enforcement of law and order were entrusted to the zamindars. The zamindars and their assistants acted as important agents of governance, holding various responsibilities. These officials were often responsible for managing the zamindars' authority and maintaining control over them. Many government and administrative departments were involved in overseeing this system. In some cases, this included appointing many officials in this administrative structure. As per the regulations for revenue collection, zamindars were authorized to conduct revenue offices, which involved conducting multiple revenue-related courts and hearings. For instance, in the judicial and police systems, these zamindari officials were assigned the power to enforce laws and administer justice on behalf of the government. They also held courts where they resolved disputes related to land and revenue. At that time, a well-known office was established in the region which worked under the zamindari authority. This office supervised the governance of the local population and their land holdings. In places like Tanjore, this office was responsible for managing disputes and administration among the people. By the year 1790 AD, many villages — numbering about 36,000 — were governed under this zamindari system, marking it as an extensive and effective administrative structure. This zamindari office essentially represented the government's direct control and administration through the zamindars. This zamindari system is an important part of the history of regional governance.

There is no doubt that the zamindari system in India was a hereditary institution. According to a particular document, the zamindari system was established in the year of the reign of Emperor Akbar, under which the local landholders were assigned the responsibility of revenue collection. Zamindars were entrusted with their lands and given rights and duties accordingly, acting as the government's representatives. Within this system, zamindars performed various roles and were part of a larger official administrative structure. The hereditary nature of the zamindari system was also recognized in this organization, and many decisions were taken at different levels.

From this system, several observations have been made regarding the socio-economic conditions in India:

1. A significant number of zamindars existed, many of whom owned land and controlled it.
2. Many people's social status improved under this system, and it was recognized by the government.
3. zamindars exercised administrative power and were involved in maintaining law and order, which led to the rise of feudalism.
4. Education and cultural activities flourished, extending up to the lower strata of society.
5. The relationship between the zamindars and peasants became deeply rooted and widely institutionalized, which led to the emergence of a powerful landlord class.



Thus, the zamindari system was established by the British government and was a formal institution with clear recognition. It is believed that the zamindari system was a formal and effective administrative framework under which zamindars exercised control over land, revenue officials, judicial powers, and the military. In India, a certain period saw the rise of zamindars who also acted as feudal landlords, contributing significantly to the socio-economic structure by acting as landlords, tax collectors, judicial authorities, and military officers. The zamindari system was a crucial part of the British administrative framework.

**The Zamindari system:**

1. Increased feudalism.
2. Created oppression and exploitation.
3. Reduced the freedom of peasants.
4. Strengthened social and economic inequalities.

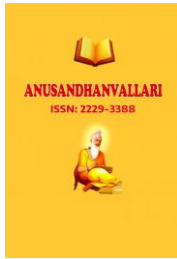
The essence of this system was that the hereditary zamindars became a dominant class in rural society and even today, their descendants are found in many parts of India. However, it should be noted that the Zamindari system was not merely a feudal institution but was a formal administrative arrangement that supported taxation, judiciary, and policing. This system was an important part of the socio-economic and political structure of colonial India.

**Summary:**

1. The Zamindari system was introduced by the British colonial government. It was designed to collect land revenue from landlords, cultivators, and peasants.
2. In the colonial government departments, especially in revenue and zamindari administration, the Zamindari system played a significant role and had to be recognized officially.
3. The Zamindari system was used to establish an efficient revenue collection, law enforcement, and judiciary system with the help of local authorities.
4. The zamindars exercised control over land and agriculture. Over time, this power increased significantly, and they were authorized to collect revenue and exercise administrative and judicial authority.
5. In the allied zamindari systems, many feudal landlords were present. Through this, allied peasants had to pay revenue as rent or tax.
6. The Zamindari system also required the authorities, courts, and police departments to be involved in the protection and enforcement of zamindari rights, because the zamindars were considered as institutional landlords.

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