

THE AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

During the 18th century great changes took place in agriculture in England. The open field system disappeared. Rotation of crops was introduced. Scientific methods were applied to agriculture. The causes for the revolution were many.

1. The open field system resulted in a large waste of land. Every year, one of the three fields was out of cultivation.

2. The old system of distribution of land resulted in wastage of time. A farmer's lands were scattered. He had to walk distances to reach his land.

3. Population was increasing and more food was needed. Less food grains, more prices. The farmers wanted to produce more so that they could earn more.

Enclosure Act: A number of Enclosure Acts were passed. This resulted in reallocation of lands which could be enclosed. A Commissioner visited the villages to reallocate land. The enclosure system gave scope for experiment.

Scientific Inventions:

Jethro Tull made pioneering work in agricultural improvement. He invented the drill for sowing seeds. He did experimental work regarding the depth at which the seeds must be sown. He also assessed the seeds to be sown per acre. He emphasized the necessity of careful selection of seeds.

Charles Townshend introduced the Norfolk or four course rotation of crops. The rotation consisted of turnips, barley, clover and rye—grass and wheat. Thomas Coke fed the soil with manure including bones. He also introduced new artificial food such as oil-cake. This led the way in fattening cattle. He conducted yearly meeting of farmers and gave advice. He changed the appearance of the countryside by planting trees.

Robert Bakewell altered English methods of stock-breeding. Earlier, sheep was valued only for wool. The production of mutton was only secondary. Bakewell succeeded in producing a breed of sheep which fattened quickly. For the first time in history, wholesale slaughter of stock stopped. Salted meat was replaced by fresh beef and mutton.

Royal support was also given to the experiments. In fact, King George III was called 'Farmer George' by the people. Along with the enclosure system the banking system also grew.

Disadvantages : There were some disadvantages also. The enclosure system forced small farmers to sell their lands. They became labourers or went to the cities in search of jobs. The enclosure of common land prevented grazing of cattle by the poor. They could not cut wood for fuel from the common land. During the re-division, many poor people were unable to show a legal right to their lands.