

The Zamindar: It's Role in Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900 and Colonisation Bill, 1906

Dr. MD Naushad*

Abstract:

The Zamindar newspaper was launched to safeguard the interest of the land-owning class of Punjab in 1903. It supported the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 which designed to end the possibility of agitation in rural areas and to give some relief to the peasants in Punjab who were the victims of economic exploitation, famines and epidemics. It also created a Pan-Nationalist feeling among the general masses of Punjab in 1907 when the British Government passed the Colonisation Bill in 1906, which levied unjustifiably land taxation on the peasants of Punjab. Later on, this newspaper was turned into a model for the forthcoming newsprint in British India. Various nationalist leaders took the assistance of these popular agents of public opinion making to spread awareness of nationalism and make the masses aware of their activities to the freedom movement.

In the first quarter of the 19th Century, the major problem faced by the British government in India was the growing indebtedness of the cultivating class and the transfer of landed property by mortgage and sale to urban money-lenders¹. These problems were not entirely unknown in Punjab during the regime of Raja Ranjit Singh, still, the last quarter of the nineteenth-century indebtedness became so widespread and land transfer increased to such an extent that these became a matter of concern and embarrassment too many officials² because they feared that further worsening of the situation could affect the recruitment in the army, particularly among those working in West Punjab³. About the indebtedness of peasants of Punjab, Malcolm Darling has stated, "The bulk of cultivators of Punjab were born in debt, lived in debt and died in debt"⁴. Actually the thing is that they forced the people to pay their land revenue in cash instead of kind.

Even though, Lord Curzon was keenly interested in the welfare of the farmers. In one of his speeches, he declared that the Indian peasant should be the first and final object

*Archival Superintendent, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067