Chapter 6

AGRARIAN THINKING OF SOME EMINENT INTELLECTUALS

In this chapter, the views of some eminent intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century have been analysed: Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Romeshchandra Dutt. Some of the ideas of Bankimchandra and Romeshchandra on agrarian issues have been discussed earlier. Contemporaries, they were the best representatives of the Bengali intelligentsia of the late 19th century. Highly educated and conversant with western ideas and education, they all had successful professional careers. While Vidyasagar was an educationist and a social reformer, the other three were reputed civil servants. All of them were writers of eminence whose literary works in Bengali were highly acclaimed.

In their writings they took up some of the contemporary socio-economic problems. Most of their works were produced in the period after Act X of 1859 had been passed. In the subsequent period the Bengali intelligentsia, became increasingly interested in some of the agrarian issues of the day. The indigo revolt(1859-60) and the rent struggle in Pabna and other districts in the 1870s, forced the intelligentsia to look into the grievances of peasants. It was only after 1885, when the Bengal Tenancy Act had been passed and the Indian National Congress was established, that the political movement attracted the intelligentsia more. They were much less concerned with other issues, including the agrarian question.

6.1 Agrarian thinking of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar

Iswarchandra Vidyasagar(1820-91) was one of the greatest intellectuals of the 19th century. His contributions in the spheres of social reform, education and Bengali literature is noteworthy. He was famed for his innate kindness, generosity and other humane qualities. It is therefore surprising that he was far less active in regard to alleviation of the condition
of the peasants, about whose miserable plight he had no doubts.

However, Vidyasagar was not wholly indifferent to the miserable condition of the peasant society. In spite of his silence on agrarian issues in his literary works, some of Vidyasagar’s activities and observations elsewhere, for instance in Som Prakash, show that he was far from oblivious of the peasant question. At a time when ownership of landed property was an important means for acquiring social prestige, Vidyasagar refused to accept the maharaja of Burdwan’s offer of a grant of patni taluk in Bir singha village. He said that, only when he was in a position to pay the rent of all the tenants would he accept a patni taluk. His refusal to become a pattanidar probably stemmed from his reluctance to join the ranks of the rentier class. He firmly believed that the peasants should not be rack-rented.

From its inception, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar was closely associated with the Som Prakash. In fact, the journal claimed it was Vidyasagar himself who first thought of the publication of this journal for the maintenance of a deaf student, Saradaprasad. It was proposed that Vidyasagar himself would write in this journal and Saradaprasad would be its editor. However, the latter soon got a job in the estate of the maharaja of Burdwan and the idea was temporarily shelved. Soon however, Vidyasagar felt the absence of a good journal. He was dissatisfied with the quality of the contemporary newspapers like the Sambad Prabhakar and Samachar Chandrika. Nor did the periodicals published by the Serampore missionaries, with their over-emphasis on religious matters, satisfy him. So he once again revived the idea of Som Prakash. He was supported in his endeavour by some of the leading scholars of his time. It was decided to make Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan the editor. It was because of this close association that, the views of the Som Prakash on some of the contemporary issues may be taken as being held by Vidyasagar too.

That Vidyasagar was very much concerned about the condition of the lower classes is borne out by what he once wrote to Debiprasanna Roy Chowdhury, editor of Nabya Bharat, which the latter published. He said that the educated class, which often lamented that the English hated them, themselves treated the lower classes as worse than animals. So there was no hope for the lower classes, as only the educated men could bring about any improvement in the condition of the country. He blamed the zamindars for the miserable plight of the peasants. He appealed to the educated men to put a stop to this oppression. Without their help the poor peasants could do nothing to better their condition. He said that the babus were busy with the Congress and with organizing political movements while,

3Ibid, p.2.
4Som Prakash, 24 July, 1882, editorial, ‘The Som Prakash was first projected by Pundit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, and we, believe the first number was written by him.’ Hindoo Patriot, 9 January, 1865, quoted in Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay, Bangla samayikpatra(Bengal contemporary journal), vol.I, Calcutta, 1379 B.S., p.158.
5Som Prakash, 15 Bhadra, 1293 B.S.
6Roy Chowdhury, Debiprasanna, ‘Amader nimnasreni o durbhiksha’(our lower classes and famine), Nabya Bharat, Chaitra, 1291 B.S., p. 547.
millions of people were dying of starvation.\textsuperscript{7} Again, the financial and medical help that he rendered to the poor Hindu and Muslim peasants in 1869, when there was a malaria epidemic in Burdwan, bears testimony to his concern. \textsuperscript{8} His concern for the Santals of Karmatar is well-known. There he undertook considerable humanitarian work for their benefit. He provided medical help to the sick. He also made arrangements for food in times of crop failures.

Vidyasagar was aware of the defects of the Permanent Settlement, the power and oppressive character of the Bengal zamindars and the miserable plight of the peasantry. The \textit{Sadharani}\textsuperscript{9} reported that, he was thinking of establishing a ryot \textit{sabha} comprising of the representatives of the ryots and their well-wishers from among the educated class. The aim of this \textit{sabha} would be to keep the government aware of the poverty and wants of peasants. The ryot \textit{sabha} was to be for peasants what the British Indian Association was for zamindars. Zamindars and their patrons would be excluded from the ryot \textit{sabha}. That Vidyasagar was sincere in his plan to establish a ryot \textit{sabha} is corroborated by the \textit{Education Gazette}\textsuperscript{10} and the \textit{Som Prakash}.\textsuperscript{11}

It was because of Vidyasagar's close association with the \textit{Som Prakash} and its editor Vidyabhushan that, any opinion expressed in the journal may be taken as having the indirect support of Vidyasagar. The journal often reiterated its closeness with him. Vidyasagar frequently wrote letters to him. The \textit{Som Prakash} throughout adopted a pro-ryot stand. It published articles describing the oppression of the indigo planters and the zamindars, the defects of Act X and the sorry state of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{12}

Regarding the effects of the Permanent Settlement Vidyasagar, like many of his contemporaries, was of the opinion that by fixing the land revenue it had rendered some benefits to the country. However, Vidyasagar pointed out that the Settlement suffered from two major defects. One was that, the Settlement had been made without a proper survey of the real value of the lands. Consequently, in some cases the revenue demands on lands of same quality widely varied. Secondly, even in cases where peasants had themselves introduced cultivation in hitherto waste lands they were given no security of tenure against the oppressions of landlords.\textsuperscript{13} The latter rack-rented them.

Vidyasagar, however, like most of his contemporaries did not suggest the abolition of the Permanent Settlement. But his concern for the peasantry and the lower classes was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{7}Bhattacharya, Shibaprasanna, \textit{Vidyasagar prabandha}(essays on Vidyasagar), Calcutta, 1305 B.S., pp. 92-93.
  \item \textsuperscript{8}ibid, pp. 90-92.
  \item \textsuperscript{9}\textit{Sadharani}, 30 Agraahayan, 1280 B.S.
  \item \textsuperscript{10}\textit{Education Gazette}, 30 August, 1872.
  \item \textsuperscript{11}\textit{Som Prakash}, 24 Bhadra, 1280 B.S.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}\textit{Som Prakash}, 25 Kartick, 1269 B.S.; 20 Sravan, 1269 B.S.; 9 Sravan, 1289 B.S.; See Benoy Ghosh (ed.) \textit{Samayik patre banglar samajchitra}(Bengal’s social life in contemporary journals), vol.4. The attitude of \textit{Som Prakash} towards contemporary agrarian issues has been discussed elaborately in chapter 4. From this it is clear that the journal had a decidedly pro-ryot stance.
\end{itemize}
undoubted. He, however, failed to formulate a comprehensive agrarian programme. He did not dwell on the intricacies of the agrarian problems or suggest concrete steps to solve these problems. His concern for the peasantry did not lead him to play an active role for the alleviation of their misery. This shortcoming becomes all the more glaring in the light of his success as a social reformer and an educationist. It is not difficult to partly explain this anomaly. In his movement for remarriage of widows and abolition of polygamy, Vidyasagar received help and support from such big zamindars as Joykrishna Mukherjee of Uttapara, the maharaja of Burdwan, the Raja of Paikpara, maharani Swarnamoyee and the maharaja of Nadia. He needed their help because of the strong positions they held in society. Probably that is why he could not openly criticise the zamindari system. He often strongly criticised the mode and content of politics of the British Indian Association, an organization mainly of the zamindars of Bengal.\textsuperscript{14}

6.2 Agrarian issues and Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay

The elder brother of Bankimchandra, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay (1834-1893) was a highly educated man. He rose to the rank of a Deputy Magistrate and was also a talented writer in his own right. He regularly wrote in \textit{Bangadarshan}. Among his famous works are ‘Palamau’, ‘Rameshwarer adrishta’(fate of Rameshwar), ‘Kanthamala’(collection of stories), and ‘Madhabilata’.

In 1864, he published the \textit{Bengal Ryots; their rights and liabilities: Being an elementary treatise on the law of landlord and tenant}. In the Preface of his book he has stated the reasons that prompted him to write such a book. He says that, there were valuable works on the law of landlord and tenant in Bengal. But while giving details of the procedure, none of them ‘refer the principles which have guided legislation’ on the subject, or to the historic changes which have, in process of time, revolutionised the legal and social relation between the two social classes. Sanjibchandra wanted to fill this gap in knowledge for he felt that to understand a result ‘we must always go to its antecedents and its precursors — there to seek its causes — we must study the revolutions which have led to it — and estimate its value by the light of the past’. He collected his materials from official publications. He was influenced by the ideas of Mill, Bentham, Matthus and other western scholars.

After describing the condition of the peasants in the pre-British period, he went on to analyse the impact of the land laws introduced by the latter. He discussed the Acts passed between 1793 and 1859. Establishment of British rule and the policies it adopted for popular welfare, he argued, gave rise to great expectations among the people. In some cases these expectations were fulfilled. The gradual improvement in the spheres of education and commerce led to the rapid emergence of a middle class. But the condition of the peasants remained the same. He divided the book into two parts. In the first part,

he has discussed the historical background of the rights of the ryots and the grounds upon which they were based. In the second part, he has summarized the existing Rent laws. Sanjibchandra admitted that he did not have much information about the condition of ryots in the Hindu period. But there was no doubt that their condition was 'wretched' during Muslim rule. This, he said, was because in those days, everything depended on the whims of only one person — the king. The ruler and his officials led a life of luxury which was possible because of the untiring efforts of the ryots. This miserable condition of the ryots continued under British rule. He blamed the Permanent Settlement which gave the zamindars proprietary powers on land, right to enhance rent and evict ryots. Consequently, the oppression of zamindars on ryots increased. There were no provisions in the Settlement to curb the powers of the zamindars.

Sanjibchandra observed that the greatest defect of the Permanent Settlement was that it recognised the zamindars as being the sole proprietors of land. It overlooked all the rights of the ryots. Prior to the settlement, he observed, the zamindar was 'merely an officer of government, or rather a contractor for the land revenue, and had no right in the land itself, except in such as he owned and cultivated as neej-jote in his private capacity, like other individuals.' In spite of severe oppression in the pre-British period, the ryots had their rights viz. those of enjoying the lands they cultivated, that is the right of occupancy and; the right of holding land at the established rent, that is at a fixed rent, which the zamindar could not enhance. Even Cornwallis, he said, had acknowledged these rights in his minute of 3rd February 1790. But ultimately, all these rights were overlooked in the actual settlement.

Sanjibchandra then goes on to examine the question of rent. He discussed Mill’s exposition of rent. He remarks that the rate of rent had been one of the most 'fertile' sources of disagreement between the ryots and the zamindar. The arbitrary exaction of rent on the part of the latter have been responsible for most of the miseries of the Bengal ryots. In the Hindu period, he observes, there was a fixed rate of rent i.e., a fixed rent-charge payable in kind, so carefully proportioned to the annual produce of the land, that it left ample means of subsistence to the ryots. In the Muhammedan period, as long as the rulers appointed independent officials to keep a check on the rents paid annually by the ryots to the zamindars, the latter could not collect more than what was due to them.

Since the introduction of the Permanent Settlement, the zamindars had been collecting rent at a very high rate. Under British rule, he says, the progressive state of education and commerce led to the emergence of a middle class, but the condition of the ryt remained materially unchanged. Ragged and penniless as before, he could scarcely afford to provide himself with the most urgent necessities of life, although the price of agricultural produces rose greatly. Sanjibchandra blamed the defective provisions of the Permanent Settlement for this. It declared the zamindars to be the actual proprietors of lands and permitted them to increase the rent or to oust the occupancy ryots. This permission, he says, was abused 'as a license for unlimited exaction and oppressions,' for which the settlement made

16 Ibid.
no sufficient provision.

He says that, there was nothing wrong in the principle of the Permanent Settlement: that the claims of the government on the produce of the soil should be permanently fixed and that the proprietorship be vested in private individuals, interested in its improvement. But the settlement did not give proprietorship to the ryots who were, most likely to prove the greatest improvers. Besides, the rights of the ryots were not provided for with sufficient care. The fundamental right and obligation of the ryot, observes Sanjibchandra, were very simple. The tenant who used the land of another for his own benefit had a single right and a single obligation. His obligation was to pay a rent to the person whose land he enjoyed. Once the rent was paid, he had a right to enjoy the remainder of the fruits of his labour. To enjoy this, he should be allowed to retain the land he cultivated and not be dependent on the whims of the landlord. It would not be fair to give the landlord the power to deprive him of the land which he had laboured to improve. So the ryot should have the right of occupancy.

Sanjibchandra has briefly narrated the changes introduced during the four decades, from the administration of Sir John Shore to that of Lord William Bentinck. The initial pledge that regulations should be enacted, as and when necessary, for the protection and welfare of the cultivators remained unredeemed. The government, he observes, having once cut off themselves from any direct communication with the ryots, forgot about the pledge. As Lord Hastings observed, since the zamindars had been recognised as the sole proprietors of the soil, the government could not interfere in their relation with the ryots or place restraints on their right to property.17

The government, he says, frequently used its powers to further the interest of the zamindars. Lord Wellesley's sympathy with the zamindars is attributed by Sanjibchandra to his 'well known aristocratic feelings'. He himself belonged to a rich landholding family in England. His administration in India concentrated on military achievements. The condition of the ryot was too negligible a subject to deserve any particular inquiry. Wellesley thought that the ryots sometimes abused the protection of the courts to withhold the ‘just dues’ of zamindars and to compel them to take recourse to law. So he introduced Regulation VII of 1799, to give landholders the right to attach and dispose of the property of the ryots for actual or alleged non-payment of dues. The position of the ryots was made worse by regulation V of 1812 passed by the government of Lord Minto. By the time of the administration of Lord Hastings, writes Sanjibchandra, the Permanent Settlement had taken its final form on the basis of the Regulations of 1793, 1799 and 1812.18

It was only in its despatch dated 10th November 1824, during the administration of Lord Amherst, that the Court of Directors acknowledged the needs for securing to the ryots some of the rights which they had enjoyed prior to the introduction of the Permanent Settlement. But nothing much was done in the subsequent period, he observed, even though the government was convinced of the need for fixing the rent due from the ryots.19

17ibid., chapter II, section I.
18The provisions of Regulations of 1799 and 1812 have been discussed earlier.
19Chattopadhyay, Sanjibchandra, op.cit., p.42.
It was during the administration of Lord Canning that the greatest concessions were made in favour of the ryots under the provisions of the Rent Act of 1859. Sanjibchandra analysed the classification of the Bengal ryots into three classes with regard to the rate of rent paid

(1) ryots who could hold at ‘fixed rates of rent’;
(2) ryots who were entitled to ‘fair and equitable rates’ of rent;
(3) ryots holding at rates agreed upon by the contracting parties.

The Act provided against the arbitrary exaction of the zamindars by insisting on the exchange of *pattahs* and *kabuliyats*.20 It said that every ryot was entitled to receive a *pattah* from his zamindar and every zamindar who granted it was entitled to receive a *kabuliyat* from the ryot in conformity with the terms of a *pattah*. If the zamindar refused to deliver a *pattah*, the ryot could institute a suit before the Collector or his Deputy. But, observes Sanjibchandra, this remedy could not be availed of by a ryot whose term of *pattah* had expired and who was not entitled to a renewal of the same. It would solely apply to those ryots whose right of occupancy had accrued under Section VI of the Act or; if such a case ever occurred to those who had given a *kabuliyat* to the zamindar without receiving from him a counterpart *pattah*. The third category of ryots constituting the most numerous class was, observes Sanjibchandra, denied the privilege of demanding *pattahs* through the courts.

The Act also conferred upon the ryot, observes Sanjibchandra, protection against enhancement of rent. His analysis of the crucial provision under Section 17 is preceded by a brief historical survey of the problem since 1793.21 He discusses the three grounds for enhancement recognized by the Act which were all subject to the limitation contained in Section 5. Under no circumstances could a ryot with a ‘right of occupancy’ be called upon to pay more than a ‘fair and equitable rent’. He says that recognition of a right of occupancy in the ryot implied necessarily, some limit to the discretion of the landholder in adjusting the rent of the person possessing such a right. No such limit to the discretion of the landowner was implied, he says, in case of the tenants-at-will. With them the landowner had every right to fix his own rate of rent, be it fair or unfair. The third category of ryots, he says, had thus no rights of occupancy nor were they entitled to *pattahs* at fair and equitable rates. They had to pay at such rates as was agreed upon between them and the person to whom the rent was payable.

Section 17, he says, was intended basically to serve the landlord’s interest. Under no circumstances would he be required to pay a larger revenue to the government. But he would be entitled in certain circumstances to demand enhanced rent from the ryot. This privilege was based on the theory that the zamindar was the proprietor of the land. But, as Sanjibchandra points out, the Act did not look upon the enhancement with indulgence. On the contrary, it would seem, that the law ‘has discountenanced it whenever with justice it could do so’. Enhancement of rent, he says, was not meant to be the general rule, but only an exception. In ascertaining what amount of increase to the original rent would

21 *ibid.*, chapter III.
be necessary to make it fair, no rule of proportion needed to be observed. The law, he emphasizes, insisted that the rate should be fair and equitable.

Section 18 of the Act provided for abatement of rent. If the zamindar was entitled to add to his income in certain circumstances, Sanjibchandra observes, the ryot was entitled to some relief when the circumstances were adverse to his interest. He mentions the three grounds of abatement: if the area of the land had diminished by dilution or otherwise; if the value of the produce or the productive powers of the land had been decreased by any cause beyond the power of the ryot or; if the quantity of land held by the ryots had been proved by measurement to be less than the quantity for which rent had been previously paid by him. On two points, he says, judicial interpretation extended the scope of the ryots’ privilege. Under Section 18, only ryots having a ‘right of occupancy’ were entitled to this privilege, but the High Court decided that ‘other ryots and under-tenants can also sue for abatement when they can show that they are justly and equitably entitled to it.’ Again, it was held that the three grounds mentioned in this section were not exhaustive, i.e., it was not stated that abatement was permissible on any other ground.

Another privilege conferred on the ryots by the Act, he observes, related to immunity from ejectment. A zamindar had the right to eject a defaulting tenant and to let the land to some other person who was likely to prove punctual. This right extended to all ryots, whether holders of permanent tenures or of temporary leases. But, from his analysis of Section 21 of the Act Sanjibchandra concluded that this section had three implications. First, a ryot could not be ejected for an instalment of rent which fell due in the middle of the year. Secondly, the liability of the holders of a mokaruri istemraree ijarah was to be determined by the conditions of his lease, and not by this section. Thirdly, if a landlord ejected a ryot with the right of occupancy or holding land under a pattah the term of which had not expired, on his own authority and without the intervention of a court, the ryot could sue him. This provisions, he says, marked a distinct improvement in the ryot’s position, for under Regulations of 1799 and 1819 the zamindar was permitted to exercise the right of ejectment on his own authority, leaving the party ejected to seek redress in the courts. However, he also admits that all other ryots excepting the two categories mentioned in Section 21, could be ejected for arrears of rent by the zamindar without any interference from any court.

Sanjibchandra has also explained the provisions relating to another ground of ejectment: public sale of a zamindari for arrears of revenue payable to the government. Under a Regulation of 1793 all engagements, with a few exceptions, which the proprietor of the zamindari had contracted with under-holders stood cancelled from the date of sale and; the sale-purchaser could eject tenants and dispose of the land, as if those had never been engaged for. The extracts quoted by him from official documents show that this arrangement remained in force till the passing of Act X although, the question of the insecurity of under-tenures was seriously considered on several occasions.

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22 ibid., chapter IV.
23 ibid., chapter VI.
24 ibid.
Sanjibchandra then discusses another benefit derived by the ryots from the Act. This was the abolition, under Section II, of the zamindars’ power of compelling the attendance of their tenants for the adjustment of their rents or for any other purpose. The Act of 1859, he says, also amended the existing law of distraint in certain respects. Safeguards were provided against the abuse of the zamindar’s power. Again, no legislative provision was ever made, he says, defining the tenants right to alienate his holding by sale. The matter was determined by usage. The Act of 1859 merely provided for registration of transfers in the zamindar’s sheristah. The only object of the provision was that the zamindar might have information as to who was his tenant.25 The provisions of the Act of 1859 relating to the measurement of land, he further observes in his concluding chapter, were modified and supplemented by those of Act VI of 1862, passed by the Bengal Legislative Council. Every person in receipt of the rent of land was declared to have a right to measure that land, unless he had himself given up his right by agreeing with the tenant not to measure. The procedure to be followed in regard to measurement was laid down in the Act.

Some of the provisions of the Act, he says, were given such judicial interpretations that they necessitated litigation detrimental to the interests of zamindars and tenants alike. In Hills vs. Ishur Ghose case the High Court accepted the Malthusian definition of rent26. Sanjibchandra’s work constitutes an important and elaborate exposition of the impact of this decision on the position of the ryots. The full bench of the High Court ultimately reversed the decision in the case. For enhancement of rent it prescribed the ‘rule of enhancement’.27 This was beneficial from the tenants’ point of view, but it disturbed the zamindars. They now increasingly resorted to ‘improper’ methods for securing enhancements which they could not get through the judicial process.

Sanjibchandra’s work dealt with the ‘rights and liabilities’ of the ryots. At a time, when his contemporaries dealing with the history of the revenue system in Bengal during the period of early British rule, generally approached the subject from the standpoint of government-zamindar relations and confined themselves to incidental references so far as the impact on the ryots was concerned, his was a pioneering effort. His was the best exposition on the rights of the ryots. It speaks of his profound interest in the condition of the ryots. He adopted a comprehensive method in describing the legal and social relation between the zamindars. He studied the ‘antecedents’ and the ‘precursors’ of the Permanent Settlement and illustrated its working by an analysis of its legislative history. But he did not discuss how a new middle class had emerged in Bengal as a result of the land system introduced by the British. He was also silent on the need to abolish the Settlement and a change in the intermediary tenures. This was greatly because of the fact that his faith in the benevolence and the good intentions of the British was unshaken. In this, he was not much different from his compatriots. Yet, by recapitulating the grounds upon which the ryots’ rights were based, he probably hoped to bring about moderation and mitigation of

25 ibid., chapter VII.
26 Rent is ‘that portion of the value of the whole produce which remains to the owner of the land after all the outgoings belonging to its cultivation, of whatever kind have been paid, including the profits of the capital employed, estimated according to the usual and ordinary rate of agricultural capital at the time being.’
27 The rule has been discussed earlier.
the severity of the landlord's demands and strengthen the rights of the ryots. However, in none of his later works did he take up the agrarian problems. He was silent during the marathon controversy preceding the Tenancy Act. He had nothing to say on the Tenancy Act of 1885.

6.3 Agrarian thinking of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), novelist and satirist, was easily the most acclaimed man of letters in the Calcutta of his day. He was widely read in European literature, particularly in 19th century sociology and political economy. He wrote a great deal on social and political questions, using several literary forms. Acquaintance with western social philosophy and a first hand experience of the poverty of the peasants developed in him a faith in social equality. His official career gave him the opportunity to acquire direct experience of rural Bengal. He travelled and worked in thirteen districts of Bengal. Most of these districts are now in west Bengal, Orissa, and Khulna and Jessore, western districts of Bangladesh. It is to be remembered that he had no direct contact with the Muslim minority districts of Bengal. So his poor oppressed peasant was Paran Mandal not Rahim Khan, — although the majority of Bengal's peasants were Muslims. In 1872, he wrote an essay 'Bangadesher krishak' in the journal Bangadarshan where he discussed the land system in Bengal, the oppression of the zamindars and the miserable condition of the peasantry. In his essay 'Samya' (equality), published in 1879, he analysed the economic basis of human civilizations. He then suggested the total reformation of the class-ridden social systems. Here, there is an analysis of the condition of the suffering common people, particularly the peasantry, for whom he felt a genuine sympathy. He emphasised the need for the establishment of a society based on equality. In fact, a section of intellectual society was greatly influenced by the idea of 'equality'. This trend of thinking was started by Derozio and his students. Their criticism of exploitation of indigo planters and the judicial system and their demand for appointment of Indians in government services partly stemmed from their belief in equality. Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay even said that equality was man's 'birth right'. The Bengali intelligentsia was inspired by political developments in Europe — reform acts in England, the establishment of the third republic in France and also the democratization of the American political system. These were manifestations of attempts to establish some sort of equality in society. Louis Blanc became an ideal. His works including Letters on England (1866), Observation on Economic, Political and Social Life in England (1867) were widely read.

Apart from these outward influences, Bankimchandra was also driven by an urge to discover his country. He realised that in spite of the beneficial impact of British rule and western culture, there was no great improvement in the condition of the greater majority of the people. In 'Samya' there is mention of 'communism' and 'international'. But this does not mean that Bankimchandra was acquainted with the ideas of Marx and Engels. Das Capital was first translated into English by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling in...
1887 and *Communist Manifesto* by Samuel Moore in 1888. In ‘Samya’ Bankimchandra has mentioned the ideas of Proudhon, St. Simon, Robert Owen, Fourier and Louis Blanc. He was not familiar with scientific socialism. It was John Stuart Mill who really influenced him. By communist movement Bankimchandra understood the contemporary attempts to remove all inequalities between men. The aims of nineteenth century bourgeois humanist political systems was to remove inequalities and establish some sort of equality by overhauling the existing structure. It all began in England through the Reform Bill(1832), Emancipation of Slaves(1833) and System of National Education(1834). This struggle found its ultimate philosophical expression in the works of Mill.

Bankimchandra tried to analyse the reasons for the socio-economic malaise of the peasants. He observed that with advancement of civilization, society became divided into two classes — toilers and intellectuals. Increase in population contributed to the misery of the toiling masses. Expounding various philosophical traditions, he observed that Indians from ancient times had been taught not to give any importance to material being. The problem arose when Indians came into contact with the highly materialistic western civilization. Consequently, Indians began to crave increasingly for wealth and its accumulation. Social inequalities increased. The lower classes became increasingly dependent on their labour. Bankimchandra believed that social progress could be possible only through mutual cooperation. Deterioration in the condition of any social class would adversely affect society in general. It was this social inequality, Bankimchandra was convinced, which was responsible for all ills. From 16th century onwards Europe had been trying increasingly to end all such inequalities. As a result of which it attained happiness and prosperity and became civilized. Social equality, he held, also included equality between men and women. So he said that women should be given equal rights — the right to inherit paternal property and to earn a living. They should be given equal opportunities for education. The widows should be allowed to marry at their will.

In the first half of century, Europe witnessed speedy progress of industrial revolution and establishment of capitalist production relations. Consequently, the conditions of the workers deteriorated. They began to struggle for a change. During this time the ideas of St. Simon, Fourier and Owen became gradually popular. Though their ideas differed from one another, they raised some common issues. Even though they did not visualise the working class as the architect of a new society or even advocate a revolutionary struggle, they tried to find an alternative to capitalism from the point of view of the working class. They were called Utopian Socialists. Even Engels agreed that scientific socialism owed a great debt to them.

It is true that Bankimchandra did not view the early socialists in the same way as Marx and Engels did. At that time there were hardly any industries in India. There was no working class yet. But that he was inspired by their ideas is clear from his views on the question of the condition of the lower classes. He wrote that no one had come to this world to die of ‘hunger’. On this issue of ‘hunger’ he saw no difference between peasants and workers. He was inspired, in particular, by the ideas of John Stuart Mill, by his ideas of free development of man and moral development. Just as Mill thought that real improvement in the condition of the human race would be possible through reform of the
existing system, Bankimchandra believed that the excessive socio-economic inequalities
could be removed through the good intentions of individual men. For this, individual’s
sense of morality should be nurtured. Interpreting Mill in his own way, he concluded that
there should be inequalities and, social divisions were necessary. However, in both cases,
esscesses should be avoided. Through reform of the existing system excessive inequalities
should be reduced.

Adopting the philosophy of Mill, Bankimchandra tried to find a solution to inequality.
Mill was his guide. This was why in ’Samya’ even though he mentioned racial inequalities,
he did not analyse it. An analysis would have led him to raise the question of British
domination in India. Mill was in favour of continuation of Company’s rule in India even
after the revolt of 1857. Bankimchandra did not want the end of British rule in India.
’Samya’ was essentially an attempt to explain Mill’s ideas.

However, in his search for the philosophy of life, Bankimchandra adopted certain hypothe­sis
and came to certain conclusions in ’Sammy’. Later they resulted in certain contra­dictions in him. For instance, in ’Lok rahashya’(human mysteries) and ’Kamalakanter
daptar’(chamber of Kamalakanta) he expressed great scorn for the intelligentsia. Yet it
was to this class that he gave the responsibility of improving society through their ed­ucation
and reason. They were expected to remove inequalities and establish equality.
Bankimchandra later realised the contradiction in ’Samya’ and that is why he probably
stopped any further reprints of the essay. Besides, his whole attitude towards life had also
changed. From the collective his emphasis had shifted to the individual, to the complete
development of man. Man would have to be responsible for his own good, no one could help
him from outside. History of civilization was the history of gradual development. Main was
its unit. So man would have to attain completeness. To formulate a new philosophy of life
Bankimchandra gradually fell back on the philosophy preached in the Gita, Upanishads,
by Seeley and Carlyle. From a synthesis of their ideas he prepared his doctrine of culture
or anusilan dharma. He was no longer interested in the scope of a materialistic society.
Besides, Comte believed that the aim should be ‘greatest good for the greatest number’.
But if the existing social structure could not be modified for the better then it should
not be destroyed. Gradually, even though Bankimchandra moved away from Comte, Mill,
Bentham, yet those ideas of Comte continued to influence him. His opposition to social
revolution and withdrawl of ‘Samya’ was a continuation of his positivist belief. Though
’Bangadesher krishak’ which was originally a part of ’Samya’ was later published sepa­rately,
he did not allow a reprint of the theoretical part of the latter. He said that in order
to set up a society based on equality and remove all class conflicts it would not be wise to
cause confusion in contemporary existing society. He wanted no social upheaval. That is
why he tried to restrict further sale of this long essay. Probably he no longer believed in
it.

In ’Bangadesher krishak’ Bankimchandra has first shown how British rule had benefited the
country. The British had established law and order. They had built roads and railways and
ensured medical facilities, educational opportunities, peace and prosperity. Consequently,
there was an increase in population, resulting in expansion of agriculture. Enhanced com­mercial
activities had also caused agricultural expansion because cotton, silk, rice, jute,
indigo and other agricultural products were the main items of trade. Increasing agricultural production, observed Bankimchandra, had been responsible for increase in agricultural and national wealth. Prices of agricultural commodities had gone up. This, according to him, indicated that the value of rupee had declined and not that essential commodities had become scarce. He believed that, it would not be an exaggeration to say that since the introduction of the Permanent Settlement agricultural income had increased three to four times. It was the zamindars, the state, moneylenders and the traders who shared the enhanced agricultural income.

Bankimchandra then analysed the reasons for the poverty of the peasants. He says that there were some natural causes for their poverty. Increase in population was the most important natural cause. From the ancient times, no attempts had been made to curb population growth. Marriages were common. Inability to support a family did not deter anyone from getting married and begetting children. Besides, the warm climate and the fertile soil acted as deterrents to hard work. Little efforts sufficed to feed oneself. There was no education among the poor. So they lacked the urge to improve their own conditions. Consequently, they became easy victims of the oppression of the 'intellectually superior' classes. This state of affairs went on for ages.

However, the poverty of the peasants was not solely due to natural causes or the oppression of the zamindars. The government could, if it so willed, have brought about an improvement. Bankimchandra observed that, there were no zamindars in the Hindu period. There were no cases of peasant oppression then. The class of zamindars, he wrote, was created during Muslim rule. They were actually revenue-collectors. Whatever they collected over and above the dues of the ruler they kept for themselves. So they began to exhort as much as they could from the ryots. The latter's condition worsened during British rule. Cornwallis, he felt, erroneously concluded that the zamindars would begin to take an interest in the improvement of land if they were given proprietary right in land. Thus the revenue contractors became landlords.

Consequently, observed Bankimchandra, the ryots who were the actual owners of land lost all rights in land. The Permanent Settlement thus permanently ensured the deterioration in the condition of the peasantry. There were no laws to prevent peasant exploitation. The subsequent Acts of 1812 and 1819 further weakened the position of the peasantry. He said that the Permanent Settlement of Cornwallis was erroneous, unjust and harmful, not because the English relinquished their rights to the land and gave it to the people of this country or because they gave up the right to increase the revenue. This, Bankimchandra felt, could not be criticised, because it was wise, just and conducive to social welfare. His central argument was that the Permanent Settlement should have been made not with the class of unproductive zamindars but with the tenants. It was a land settlement which could only have worked if the zamindars were kind and sympathetic to their tenants, but this of course was an unrealistic expectation. What had happened to the Bengal peasantry

28Mukherjee, S.N., Maddern, Marian (translated and edited), Bankimchandra Chatterjee, sociological essays, utilitarians and positivism in Bengal, Calcutta, 1986, p.143.
29Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra, 'Bangadesher krishak'(Bengal peasantry), Bankim rachana-bali(collected works), vol.2, Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta, 1361 B.S., p.310.
was that greed and rapacity of a certain section of landlords,\textsuperscript{30} instances of which he
catalogued at great length in his essay on ‘Bangadesher krisak’ and later incorporated
into his book \textit{Samya}, led to their impoverishment.\textsuperscript{31} The zamindars were vested with the
authority to enhance rent and in most cases, Bankimchandra observed, it had become
easier to increase the rent due from the ryots.

The most impassioned passages in his work are those dealing with the condition of the
peasantry in Bengal. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
The goddess of agriculture is smiling on the land. Wealth is raining down by
her grace ... Everyone prosper through that prosperity — the king, landlords,
merchants, money-lenders, everyone, only there is no prosperity for the peasant.
The bigger animals like the tiger devour smaller animals like goats... The big
man known as the zamindar devours the small man called the peasant.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

He defended his stringent criticism of the Bengal zamindars as follows:

\begin{quote}
Let that voice which fails to cry out in pain for those suffering pain be choked.
Let the pen which fails to write for the benefit of people (living) in misery dry
up.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

He claimed that, his portrait of the fictional Paran Mandal — a description of unending
harassment by exploiters, big and small and consequent hopelessness — was true to life.

Increase in population had led to an increase in demand for land. This had increased the
bargaining powers of the zamindars. They were now in a position to increase the rent
and lease out their lands to whoever agreed to pay the highest rent. After the Permanent
Settlement, there had been an overall increase in the rent of the land. The exploitation
of the zamindars increased in cases where they doubled as moneylenders. After paying
the dues of the zamindars and the moneylenders the ryots were left with very little. Out
of this, they had to meet the demands of the \textit{naibs} and the \textit{gomasthas} of the zamindars.
Bankimchandra has drawn up a list of different types of cesses extracted from the peasants
by the zamindars and their officials like \textit{nazar} to the co-sharers of the zamindars and their
\textit{gomasthas}; dues of the zamindar’s priest, guards, the \textit{kutcherry} sweeper and the palanquin
bearers etc. Apart from these, the ryots also had to bear the expenses of the taxes imposed
on the zamindars by the government like the income tax, road cess, hospital cess etc.

In his elaborate discussion on the reform of the existing system, particularly the socio-
economic structure, he has mentioned the relationship between the zamindars and ryots

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30}Chatterjee, Partha, \textit{Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse}, Delhi, 1986,
p.63.
\item \textsuperscript{31}Samya was published in 1879.
\item \textsuperscript{32}Mukherjee and Maddern, \textit{op.cit.}, p.180.
\item \textsuperscript{33}\textit{ibid.}
\end{itemize}
in Bengal. He observed that the zamindari system had created a class of intermediaries, thereby increasing the misery of the peasants who constituted 99 per cent of the population. He requested the good zamindars to force their exploiting counterparts to mend their ways. It was Bankimchandra’s firm conviction that not all zamindars were oppressive. They were responsible for considerable constructive work.

Bankimchandra’s horrendous account of what the zamindari system had done to the mass of the peasantry concludes with a recommendation of mild reforms and an appeal, to the better sense of all right-thinking zamindars because the abolition of the Permanent Settlement would result in ‘massive disorder’ and a breach of promise on the part of the British government. He did not suggest abolition of the Permanent Settlement. He said, there was no way in which the ‘mistake’ made by introducing the Permanent Settlement could be remedied. Contemporary society of Bengal was based on that ‘mistake’. Abolition of the Permanent Settlement would lead to total confusion in the social set-up of Bengal. Since he was not in favour of a ‘social revolution’, Bankimchandra observed, he could not suggest such a thing to the British government. That is why he did not support the peasant revolts which took place in Bengal in 1873. He voiced his dissatisfaction with Act X of 1859 for having failed to restore amity between the zamindars and the peasants. It did not restore to the ryots all the rights they had lost after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement. No provision was made to put an end to all kinds of oppression practised on them. The ryots whose rents could not be increased by virtue of Act X were insignificant in number.

All the acts connected with land enacted during British rule, he observed, had harmed the ryots. They had strengthened the powers of the zamindars. However, it had not been the intention of the government to impoverish the peasants. It was their ignorance of the condition of the country which had been responsible for their errors. There were various reasons which prevented the ryots from seeking legal redress against the oppression of the zamindars. Legal procedure was very expensive and beyond the means of the poor peasants. Since the law courts were situated far away, it was not possible for the ryots to stay away for long from their homes and carry on a lengthy legal battle. It was very difficult for the ryots seeking justice to prove their allegations as no one was willing to testify against the zamindar or their officials. Besides, the ignorance of the English judges about the condition of the country and the inadequate number of courts also delayed justice.

Bankimchandra was not prepared to disturb the superstructure of the Permanent Settlement. He did not want any change in the existing property relations. He believed that, not all zamindars were bad and the government should distinguish between good and bad zamindars. He himself made this distinction even while vividly describing the various methods of oppression practised on the ryots by the zamindars. Not all zamindars, he said, were oppressive. Many were responsible for welfare activities like building dispense-

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35 ibid., pp.309-312.
36 ibid., pp.306-310.
37 ibid., pp.297-298.
The number of oppressive zamindars was decreasing daily. Those zamindars who lived in Calcutta and were well-educated were not oppressive. All acts of oppression, observed Bankimchandra, committed in their zamindaries were committed without their knowledge, by their naibs and gomasthas. Similar was the case of the educated zamindars in the districts. The bigger the zamindari, the lesser were the acts of oppressions committed. It was only the smaller zamindars, who wanted to imitate the lifestyle of the bigger zamindars, but did not have their resources, who were most oppressive. Again it was the intermediate tenure holders like the pattanidars, dar-pattanidars and the ijaradars who extorted the peasants more than those zamindars who collected the rent themselves. For the increasing hostility between the zamindars and the ryots, observed Bankimchandra, the latter were in many cases responsible. Unless forced to do so, they often did not pay the rent. The smaller zamindars could not afford to go to court for every dispute over rent. Yet at the same time, Bankimchandra observed, unless oppressed the ryots hardly ever went against the zamindars.

It was idle, and perhaps impolitic, Bankimchandra felt, to attempt to reverse the Permanent Settlement. The only course open for landlords was to mend their ways. Unlike his contemporaries, Bankimchandra felt, zamindari oppression could be ended only by the zamindars themselves and not by the government or fear of public opinion. The good zamindars should try to stop oppression and the British Indian Association which was the representative of the zamindars should punish the oppressive zamindars. Censure by them would be more effective than any legal bindings. If they could control the wicked landlords, they would do a service to the country, which would be remembered in history for all time to come. If, he said, this was not done, then there was no hope for the prosperity of Bengal. He also advocated the extension of the Permanent Settlement to the ryots and insisted on a proper definition of the relationship between the zamindars and the ryots. This is all he could suggest as a remedy for the poverty of Bengal's peasants.

Bankimchandra's devotion to what he regarded as the fundamental principles of a rational science of economics makes it impossible for him to arrive at a critique of the political economy of colonial rule, even when the evidence from which such a critique may have proceeded was, in a sense, perfectly visible to him. There was no way in which Bankimchandra could arrive at anything other than a positive assessment of the overall social and economic effects of British rule in India. He has catalogued the beneficial effects of British rule — better and faster communication, telegraph, modern medical facilities, prosperous towns, ease of western life-style, education and freedom from superstitions. It had established, at least in principle, a fairer and more impersonal legal and judicial system, greater access for the lower castes to positions of power and status and made available to Indians the opportunities to acquire the benefits of western science and literature. He accepted, for instance, that free trade was a more developed form of economic organization than anything that had existed previously, including protectionism, because it represented a rational scheme of division of labour and was beneficial to all parties involved in economic change. He wrote that, the gravely erroneous theory of protectionism has been superseded by the modern theory of free trade, a feat for which Bright and Cobden would always

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38 ibid., p.298.
be remembered in history. Trade between Britain and India, he thought, had led to an expansion of agricultural activity in India. He wrote that, we pay for what we buy from England by exporting agricultural commodities, such as rice, silk, cotton, jute, indigo etc. It went without saying that as trade expanded, the demand for such agricultural commodities would also increase by the same proportion. As a result agriculture would expand in this country. Ever since the establishment of British rule, the trade of this country had increased, leading to a demand for more exportable agricultural products and hence to an expansion of agriculture.

He agrees that this probably meant a destruction of indigenous manufacturing, as many people in Bengal were already alleging. But again he felt that, if it was becoming difficult for Indian weavers to compete with imported textiles, the logical course to adopt would be for them to shift to those activities which were expanding as a result of this trade. He wrote that, the 'weaving trade may have collapsed, but why does not the weaver move to another occupation?' He probably was not able to feed himself by weaving cloth, but there was no reason why he could not do so by cultivating rice. Social theorists, he said, had shown that the rate of return from all production activities was, on the average equal. If the weaver earned five rupees a month by weaving, he could do the same by cultivating rice instead. The real reason, he felt, weavers were not seizing the opportunities opened up by expanded agricultural activities was cultural: the inertia of backward and outmoded social customs. He wrote that, people in our country were reluctant to give up their hereditary trades. This was unfortunate for our weavers, but it did not mean a loss of wealth for the country. The import of foreign cloth resulted in a corresponding increase in agricultural incomes, which was inevitable. What happened was merely that this income went, not to the weaver but to somebody else. The misery of the weaver did not indicate a loss of national wealth.

Much of Bankimchandra’s early radicalism underwent a change over the years. In spite of his sympathy for the peasants he did not support the widespread peasant revolt of 1873. In his review of the play ‘Jamidar darpan’ (mirror image of a zamindar) by Mussaraf Hussain in Bangadarshan he expressed his anger at the conduct of the rebelling peasantry in Pabna. While not denying the content of the play, which lucidly described the exploitation of the zamindars, emphasising his concern for the peasantry, he observed that the sale and distribution of the play should be stopped.

He also expressed his satisfaction with the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. In 1892, his essay ‘Bangadesher krishak’ was published in the form of a book. In its introduction Bankimchandra wrote that his earlier description of the conditions of the peasantry described in the essay was no longer true. There had been a marked improvement in their condition. The oppression and exploitation of the zamindars had ceased. The new Act had curbed their powers significantly. The ryots too had acquired more rights. But even though he welcomed the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, he did not indicate the extent to which it had

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39ibid., p.311.
40ibid., pp.289.
41Chatterjee, Partha, op.cit., p.62.
42Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra, ‘Bangadesher krishak’ (Bengal peasantry), op.cit., p.312.
been able to transform the existing framework of the land system. He still did not express his concern over the fact that the land system was responsible for the increasing separatist feelings in Bengal. Though sympathetic towards the misery of the peasants he was, even as late as 1892 in favour of keeping intact the Permanent Settlement. In fact, the 1885 Act kept intact the rights of the intermediary tenure-holders. Bankimchandra was silent on how in such a situation, would it be possible to reduce the hardships of the peasants. It is difficult to believe that he was unaware of this. In fact none of these men who expressed their concern about the condition of the peasantry analysed the problem from this angle.

6.4 Romeshchandra Dutt on agrarian issues

The real beginning of economic studies in India is to be found in the writings of the famous trio — Dadabhai Naoroji, Romeshchandra Dutt and Mahadev Govind Ranade, all of whom wrote around the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This period was one in which, political consciousness was awakening in the educated Indian mind and interest in the economic problems of the country accompanied the growth of political aspirations. Naoroji, Dutt and Ranade provided the economic ideologies that the rising political consciousness of the Indians required and demanded.

Romeshchandra Dutt (1848-1909) was one of the earliest Indian entrants into the Indian Civil Service. His success, along with that of two other Indians who had accompanied him — Surendranath Banerji and Bihari Lal Gupta, established a precedent and the beginning of an experiment, if we leave out Satyendranath Tagore who had passed earlier. Surendranath was removed from service very early in his career. Dutt preferred executive service as a challenge and an opportunity to serve his country. On the strength of sheer merit Dutt set an example of noble service as a district officer in several districts and finally, for short spells, as commissioner of two divisions.

The work for which he is best known today was accomplished after his premature retirement from government service in 1897, at the age of 49, and during a period of about only 12 years prior to his death in 1909. For Dutt this was a period of intense activity as a writer of economic history and as a politician who tried, by methods of persuasion and propaganda, to alleviate the misery of poor Indian peasants. During his official career, with the exception of his earlier work, Peasantry of Bengal, Dutt devoted himself to the enrichment of Bengali literature by writing historical novels. It was only after retirement that his scholarly works, Open letters to Lord Curzon, On famines and land assessments in India (1900) and Economic history of India (vol.1, 1900 and vol.2, 1902) were written. His years of practical experience of India’s agrarian system, of Indian poverty and famines gave him not only an expert’s knowledge but also the moral authority with which he articulated his policy prescription. He reasoned within the constraints of his times. He criticised the colonial system though there was no plea for its replacement by an indigenous

\[De, Amalendu, Chirasthayi bandobasta o bangali buddhijibi (Permanent settlement and the Bengali intelligentsia), Calcutta, 1981, p.20.\]
alternative. It is true that, the image of imperialism which he projected failed to reflect the basic contradictions of the British imperial system in India. But he must be placed in his context.44

R. C. Dutt’s two volumes entitled *Economic history of India*45 are well known. However his earliest work on that subject, *Peasantry of Bengal*, written more than 20 years earlier is often forgotten. This work created a great sensation in Bengal at that time. In the period between 1872 and 1891, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Lal Behari Dey46 and Romeshchandra Dutt, all lucidly portrayed the miserable condition of the Bengal peasantry. Though they expressed their ideas in different ways, there was a basic unity in their thought processes. They were all sympathetic towards the poor and helpless peasants and were able to attract the attention of the educated Bengalis to this problem. During this time there was protracted agrarian unrest in eastern Bengal districts.

In The *Peasantry of Bengal* Dutt portrayed the misery of the peasants. Knowing very well that it would earn him the disapproval of the British government, he still had it published. In this book, the problem of disputes between the zamindar and the ryots has been mainly discussed. His biographer rightly observes, ‘An ardent and whole-hearted sympathy with the ryot is the key-note of the work.’47 He concluded that ‘the true progress of this country will only commence when the poor Bengal ryot will be bettered in condition.’48 Discussing the land system in Bengal, Dutt observed that the zamindari system, a system which fostered oppression, existed in Bengal from immemorial times. It was the result of climatic conditions and of the national character. They had rendered the people so ‘imbecile and incapable of resistance’ that, every official vested with authority was likely to turn oppressive and tyrannical without evoking any active opposition.49 Under the Hindu rulers, the peasantry of Bengal always lived from hand to mouth. Yet, he says, among ‘patriarchal nations’ there was always to be found a feeling of ‘reciprocal kindness which tampers the otherwise harsh relationship between masters and servants.’50 So the peasantry of Bengal, he says, though living in complete and helpless dependence on their zamindars, were better-off than they were during British rule.

Under Muhammedan rule, the ryots lived in complete servitude under the zamindars. They, observes Dutt, had no rights except the plea of ancient custom and no protection from unjust exaction or acts of oppression ‘except such as was to be found in the clemency of the zamindars or their sense of self-interest.’ The zamindars were in the eye of the law, as well as of the sovereign, ‘mere rent-collectors,’ responsible for maintaining peace. But, he says, they were, except in certain occasions, virtually ‘feudatory chiefs’, armed with complete civil and criminal powers within the limits of their territories. They were bound to pay revenue to the subehdar of the country. However, they were frequently changed by

45Dutt, R.C., *Economic history of India under early British rule and Economic history of India, vol.2, the Victorian age*.
46Dey, Lal Behari, *Bengal peasant life or Gobinda Samanta*, 1874
49ibid., p.20.
50ibid.
the *subhedars* of Bengal. In some instances, they were actually imprisoned, the collection of
rent being taken off from their hands and given to other officers of the state.\textsuperscript{51} Besides the
Muhammedan governments with their thorough knowledge of the country and its people
shaped their demands in accordance with the circumstances and allowed remissions when
zamindars were unable to pay.

He lamented that the British government, by a series of legislative acts, destroyed the
hereditary relationship between the zamindar and the ryot. Early experiment\textsuperscript{s} with land
settlements caused great sufferings to both the classes. The English, he said, with their lack
of knowledge of the country and fearing fraud, would hear of no excuse for remission. Some
estates were assessed at exorbitant rates which could not be paid. Defaulting zamindars
were treated with severity. Many estates were ruined. They were broken up and sold at
public auctions. This encouraged absentee landlordism. The new landlords, observes Dutt,
had no interest in the welfare of the estate, no hereditary affection for the people and no
regard for any custom which might have prevailed under former zamindars. Their only
object was to 'screw up the demands on the people to pay the demands of the government,
and to heap new claims and cruelties on the devoted head of an unfortunate peasantry.'\textsuperscript{52}

Even though Lord Cornwallis tried to rectify the defects of the early land settlements, his
Permanent Settlement, says Dutt, was a 'prodigious blunder'. He lamented that, 'the right
of property was given not to the cultivators but to their hereditary oppressors'.\textsuperscript{53}

Reviewing the effects of the Permanent Settlement on the condition of the ryots Dutt
observed:

\begin{quote}
Four scores of years have rolled away since the Permanent Settlement, — what
fruits have these eighty years of active legislation borne for the poor ryot? ... Commerce has thriened, but commerce to them is practically forbidden, and
if agriculture has been extended, the zamindars and not the ryots reap the
blessings ... Lord Cornwallis was succeeded by Lord Wellesley as Governor-
General of India, and as if to mock the misfortunes of the peasantry he passed
covercive measures to subject the persons and property of the peasantry to the
tender mercies of the zamindar! ... Despatch after despatch came from the
Court of Directors, minute after minute was written by Governors-General,
measure after measure proposed, rejected, and proposed again, enquiries set
on foot, regulations multiplied beyond number, — and all for the protection
and welfare of ryots. And yet the fatality which seemed to hang over the spirit
of English legislation ever since Warren Hastings left India, rendered every
proposal ineffectual, every attempt abortive.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Lamenting that Lord Cornwallis ignored all the rights of the cultivators, Dutt observed
further:

\textsuperscript{51} ibid., pp. 30,41.
\textsuperscript{52} ibid., pp.34-35.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid., pp.40-42.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid., pp.52-53, 55.
Seldom in the annals of any country has hasty legislation been productive of effects so calamitous as the ill-conceived Permanent Settlement. On the head of Lord Cornwallis will rest the blame, that the extortion of the zamindars and their underlings has not to the present day ceased — that the ill-feeling between the ryot and his master has advanced with the advance of years. On his lordship's head will rest the guilt, that the most fertile source of revenue in a fertile country has been closed up for ever, that the extension of cultivation has increased, not the wealth of the cultivators but the number of a class of impoverished idlers, the zamindars with a two anna or one anna share of the ancestral estate. On his lordship's head rests the blame, that we do not yet see the faintest glimmerings of rural civilization ...

The changes in the relation between zamindars and ryots, observed Dutt, were due to the significant changes that occurred in the powers and position of zamindars in relation to peasants. He said that, Lord Cornwallis did not try to check zamindari exaction or to define the rights of cultivators. He did not include provision to save ryots from oppressions. And yet 'the Act was, we believe passed with the best of intentions.' The Section VII of the Act stated:

To conduct themselves with good faith and moderation towards their dependent taluqdars and ryots are duties at all times indispensably required from the proprietors of land, and a strict observance of these rules is now more than ever incumbent on them in return for benefits which they will themselves derive from the orders now passed.

From this it was evident, Dutt observed, that the Governor-General-in-Council expected that the proprietors of lands and anyone they appointed to collect revenue would adopt a benevolent attitude towards their 'dependent taluqdars and ryots'. But, Dutt bemoaned, not only had British legislation ignored in the Permanent Settlement 'all rights of the cultivating classes, but it had also been sadly negligent in redeeming the only pledge it gave them as feeble compensation for the injustice done'. The Permanent Settlement had declared that, it being the duty of the ruling power to protect all classes of people and more particularly those who from their own situation were most helpless, the Governor-General-in-Council should enact 'such regulations as he may think necessary for the protection and welfare of the dependent taluqdars, ryots and other cultivators of the soil.' Yet, observes Dutt, no such regulation was enacted. Nor was the pledge redeemed.

Analysing the next series of legislation which further strengthened the position of the zamindar, he says:

55 ibid., pp.42-43.
56 ibid.
57 ibid.
58 Section VIII of Act I of 1793.
59 Dutt, R.C., The peasantry of Bengal, p.45.
There was a still lower depth to which English legislation could descend. The Board of Revenue received from collectors and transmitted to Government harrowing accounts of zamindari oppression, and yet no one knew how there could be any redress. A fatal fear seems to have seized everyone lest the so-called ‘right of property’ of the zamindars were interfered with, and every proposal therefore of saving the ryots, and setting some limit to zamindari oppression fell through.60

The result was Act V of 1812 which ‘declared in so many words that the ryot had absolutely no rights of occupancy as against the zamindars’. The English, he observed, were unable to rid themselves of certain legal ideas which they had imported from England or to adopt legislation suitable for the peculiar circumstances of the country. Their notion of the ‘right of property’, he said, proved fatal to all their good intentions, and prevented any action for the relief of the cultivators, notwithstanding that Section VIII of Regulation I of 1793 promised and provided for such action.61

It was Lord Canning, observed Dutt, who after a lapse of 66 years tried for the first time to give effect to the above clause. The result was Act X of 1859 which tried to ‘set at naught the absurd theories built up on the so called ‘right of property’ of the zamindars.’ Analysing the Act he writes that three classes of ryots were classified viz.
(i) those whose ancestors had held lands since Permanent Settlement,
(ii) those who held lands for 12 years or more and
(iii) those who had held lands for any shorter period.
Enhancement of rent was impossible so far as the first class of ryots were concerned. As regards the second class, it was allowed only on fair and equitable ground. The third class of ryots were in this respect left entirely at the mercy of the zamindars who could demand any rent from them and evict them in case of default. Again, while ryots of the first and the second classes could not be ousted by the zamindar so long as they paid their proper rent, those of the third class could be driven away from their homesteads at the will and pleasure of the zamindar.

Dutt suggested that any increase in income from land should go to the cultivators who were responsible for all improvements in land. He also advocated the bestowal on the second and third classes of ryots the rights which had already been secured to the first class to prevent them from being ousted of their lands at the will of the zamindar. This would create ‘a more glorious’ Permanent Settlement between the zamindars and the ryots and would form the Magna Carta of a ‘worthier class’ the peasantry.62

R.C. Dutt voiced his dissatisfaction with Act X of 1859 for failing to restore the amity between the zamindars and the peasants destroyed by the Permanent Settlement. It did not restore to the ryots all the rights they had lost after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement. No provision was made to put an end to oppressions practised on them. The

60 ibid., p.46.
61 ibid., p.48.
62 ibid., pp.49-50.
zamindar-peasant relationship therefore fast deteriorated. Consequently, he observed, the ryots were uniting against the zamindars.

Dutt’s sympathy for the ryots made him study the peasant revolts affecting different parts of Bengal. He expressed his happiness over the fact that the peasantry ‘have at least felt their power, and have on occasions exerted it.’63 The rising of the peasants, he asserts, was ‘a good sign of the times’. In this connection, he refers to the great indigo revolt of 1860. He writes:

Fifteen years ago this sort of oppressiveness of the great Bengal Indigo Company of Nadia called forth a loud protest from the people in the shape of a general rebellion.64

Coming to the peasant risings in Pabna and other districts of east Bengal he says:

And yet it were idle to deny that the differences and disputes between zamindars and ryots are daily assuming a serious aspect. We are aware that the combining of the ryots en masse against their zamindars is at the present day no rare occurrence.65

He declares that the idea propagated by some people that the ryot was to blame for these disturbances was ‘totally false’. The ryots, he asserts, would not turn against their masters till the latter first turned cruelly oppressive.66 They would never combine against their zamindars until there was no other alternative. The risk which a ryot ran of being harassed and ultimately ruined, if he fell out with his master, was so great that he made it a point never to fall out with him so long as it could be helped. In fact, he says, when estates of really kind zamindars were in danger of being sold to others, the ryots spared no pains or sacrifices to prevent such an eventuality. Yet, the rising of the people en masse in an entire district was certainly ‘a singular phenomenon among a peasantry so mild as that of Bengal’.67

Dutt then went on to enquire into the causes of these risings. The British government, Dutt observes, with its correct principles of equality, and its attempt to curb all acts of oppression with the help of its Penal Code and Act X of 1859 had already freed the ryots from that ‘galling servitude of thought and action’ in which they remained enchained for centuries. There were, according to Dutt, two ways that were open to the government. It could either put down the general awakening and leave the ryots once more at the mercy of the zamindars or; it could take a more enlightened and intelligent view of the general rising and create in a more satisfactory manner a ‘definite status’ of the ryot and a ‘definite status’ of the zamindar. The first step would be ‘illiberal and short-sighted’.68

63 ibid., p.138.
64 ibid., p.63.
65 ibid., p.110.
66 ibid., pp.61-62.
67 ibid., p.63.
68 ibid., p.66.
says that, if the general awakening of the present was put down once more with a strong hand and by mistaken legislation, those 'very English instincts' would in future cause fresh risings of the masses and the problem would arise repeatedly demanding a 'permanent and intelligent solution'.

The only way left for the government was to enact a permanent settlement between the zamindar and the ryot. Dutt suggested that the ideal solution to the problem of peasant unrest was to vest the Bengal ryot with proprietorship of land that he tilled or at least to grant him a long lease on a fixed rent, by making him the 'little zamindar' of his land. But this solution was not practicable since the Permanent Settlement, which had already been established, could not be abolished. The recognition of the principle of peasant proprietorship, though ideal, was not possible on practical grounds. Reforms had to be introduced within the framework of the Permanent Settlement. So the best possible alternative was to introduce permanent restraints on the powers of the zamindars. In concrete terms, his scheme of reforms sought to raise the status of the ryots by acceding to two of their main demands viz., no enhancement of rent and no ejection from land. Insisting upon the principle of fixed rents, Dutt declared:

Our rulers will not, cannot once more degrade the ryot to his pristine position of servitude under the zamindars, the only other measure then to heal the ill-feeling between two classes, and to put a stop to the mass of litigation that is eating into the very vitals of an agricultural population is to raise the status of the ryots. Let the rates of rent now payable be carefully ascertained after an extensive survey, and let such rates be declared fixed for ever.69

Dutt advanced some reasons for advocating the raising of the status of the agricultural classes by setting definite limits to the claims of the zamindars. If the ryot was assured that his savings were his own, that permanent limits had been set to the claims of the zamindar then, the motive of self-interest would make him 'prudent, provident, thoughtful' being.70 Again, belying the expectations of the Permanent Settlement, the zamindars had not taken any steps to improve the condition of the lands. Since a large proportion of the ryots were utbandi or tenants-at-will, observes Dutt, should they bring about such improvement, the law empowered the zamindars to rob them of the fruits of their labour by increasing rent or turning them out of land after the improvement had been completed. Only a small portion of the cultivators were occupancy ryots. But even they, though empowered by law to enjoy the benefits of any improvement which they themselves brought about, would find it difficult to prove their claims against the evidence which the zamindars could easily fabricate to prove in the courts either that the ryot did not have the right of occupancy or that he had not effected the improvement. So, pleading for the extension of occupancy right, by which he meant permanent rights to land which were enjoyed by the first category of ryots according to Act X, to all classes of ryots, Dutt wrote:

But declare that all ryots have right of occupancy, and are entitled to every

69 ibid., p.68.
70 ibid., pp.71-75.
increase in the productive powers of lands that may henceforth accrue, and a stimulus will be afforded for effecting improvements which even Asiatic indolence will scarcely resist.  

He believed that a permanent settlement between the ryots and zamindars would end all the problems of the former and bring about a change for the better. Adoption of the measure which he advocated would, he felt, provide the ryots with an incentive to improve their lands. It would put an end to the masses of litigation. It would raise the status of the ryots; develop in them such virtues as independence, prudence, self-reliance and economy; put a stop to zamindari oppression and; bestow the fruits of labour on the class which actually toiled for it.

Dutt admitted that the best thing for the peasants would have been if the zamindars could be ‘turned adrift and an end put to the oppression of centuries’. But since the Permanent Settlement had already been established, he believed that such a solution was not practicable. He also dissociated himself from those who entertained a radical view on the peasant question, demanding abolition of the Permanent Settlement. He writes:

We may declare once for all that we do not entertain such views, and have no sympathy for such thinkers.

He goes further to declare that he is not even in favour of the recognition of the principle of peasant proprietorship on practical grounds. He says:

Considered in the abstract, the system of peasant proprietorship may deserve the high econiums bestowed on it by Sismondi, Mill and other political economists, — but it is a question entirely different, as to whether such a system would suit the habits of people and conditions of life as existing in Bengal.

The introduction of such a system, he says, would mean the exchange of a state of things whose defects were known from the experience of a century and could be remedied, for another full of uncertain evils, which he does not specify would possibly prove entirely unsuitable to the country. Dutt advocated another reason for not proposing abolition of the zamindari system. He says that, this system had existed in Bengal for centuries and the people had become used to it. So to abolish it would be ‘to convulse society at a time of profound peace’.

So Dutt categorically states that he was far from being a revolutionary. He stood for reform and that too within the framework of Permanent Settlement. He was for the introduction of permanent restraints on the powers of the zamindars and his views on the subject

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\text{\small 71 ibid.}, \text{Preface, pp.3-4.}
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extended no further. Like his contemporary, Bankimchandra, Dutt too probably believed that the zamindars would one day take an interest in the welfare of the ryots. This hope was expressed in one of his novels published at almost the same time as *The Peasantry of Bengal*. Here he drew up a picture of an ideal zamindar who was benevolent towards the peasants. He wrote about Indranath, the hero of his novel 'Bangabijeta', that though he was the son of a rich zamindar, he was not interested in wealth. He loved talking to the peasants and living with them. He was always their friend. On many occasions he used to visit their villages in disguise to find out about their conditions. In this way, Dutt gave a vivid description about the ideal method of work of the zamindars. But, he failed to realise that the age of Indranath was gone. With the change in the economic structure, it was no longer possible for zamindars like Indranath to exist.

Another aspect of the agrarian question which Dutt discussed was the relationship between the ryots and the moneylenders. This had no less an impact on the peasant relationship. Like many of his contemporaries he too was aware of the oppressive character of the moneylenders. Yet, he believed, they were indispensable to the Bengal ryots. He observed:

> The *mahajans* discharge a very important function in the social economy of Bengal, so important indeed, that all agricultural work would be at a standstill without their assistance.

When the ryot needed money to pay a tax or; for his own support or; to pay the zamindar's rent or; to sow his land, he had to borrow money or *dhan* at any rate at which it could be had. He said that exorbitant rates had led to the emergence of a class of people 'who following different pursuits of life depend mainly on lending money.' Not only the ryot, even the zamindar, the *taluqdar* and the *granthidar* resorted to moneylender in times of need. The latter lent money and *dhan* at rates of interest which were never less than 25 per cent and seldom less than 37.5 per cent. Referring to the disfavour with which the class of moneylenders was viewed by the government and the proposals forwarded from different quarters to put a stop to moneylending activities by government interference, Dutt observed:

> We are afraid such steps if taken will produce much harm and no good. The prudence and foresight of the moneylenders compensate for the improvidence of the entire village population of Bengal, and they, as a body, save entire classes of people from utter ruin year after year.

Dutt said that many of the zamindars could hardly pay revenue to the government every year without the assistance of the *mahajans*. Hardly 10 per cent of the ryots could without such assistance, carry on their agricultural work year after year. They borrowed *dhan* mostly in *Baisakh* for the purposes of sowing as well as to live upon, and paid off this

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73 Dutt, R.C., 'Bangabijeta' (victors of Bengal), published in 1874.
74 Dutt, R.C., *The peasantry of Bengal*, pp.96-104.
agricultural debt at a high rate of interest either at the Aush harvest in Bhadra, or at the Aman harvest in Magh. Dutt further observed:

Nor would the rates seem exorbitant when we consider it a tax which shameless improvidence pays to the only means that can save it from ruin, — when we further consider the risk undertaken, the difficulties which often attend recovery, and above all universality of the demand.\textsuperscript{76}

Since the laws of demand and supply regulated and determined the rates, government interference with moneylending activities, advised Dutt, would only create mischief. Any usury laws that might be enacted, he felt, were sure to be evaded, and the poor ryots who constituted the bulk of the borrowers would have to pay the cost of such illegal evasions over and above the rates. However, he said:

It is not our intention to defend moneylending as a profession; we admit all that has been said against it, we admit it has a demoralizing effect on those who borrow, and smothers all noble feelings in those who lend, by teaching them to extort heartless gain in the coolest and cruelest manner from poverty and distress. But admitting all this, we maintain that the profession has become a necessity and settled down into a custom, and government interference will only do harm. It is expected that a single enactment will in one day change the improvident habits which the people ... have acquired in centuries? If not, the only other means to do away with moneylending at high rates would be for government to advance money and dhan at smaller rates, — taking upon themselves the burdensome duty of realizing their loans from poor ryots. We hardly believe our government are prepared to go far, as it would involve them in endless complications, and law suits. Then, there is simply ‘no’ other alternative than to leave matters alone.\textsuperscript{77}

Over the years many of Dutt's views changed. But his policy of restricted military expenditure, light taxation, beneficial public works and political reforms were nullified in Dufferin's time through a permanent and massive increase in military expenditure. Dutt in his later works raised many issues for the first time. His agrarian ideas during this time were closely linked to his ideas on another aspects of the Indian economy.

Dutt discussed the evils of high revenue assessments under the Indian system of land tenure and the related problems of mass poverty and famines as parts of an integrated whole. According to him, these were interrelated problems. He was able to trace them as co-effects of a common factor the British imperial system. Dutt, like Naoroji, traced Indian poverty and famines to British imperialism, as seen in the context of the economic 'drain'. He conceived that lighter land tax and the associated land reforms, better economic administration, diminished military expenditure, more of beneficial public works and increasing

\textsuperscript{76} ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} ibid.

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association of Indians with administration could lighten the economic burden of imperialism. He blamed the irrational systems of tenure and assessment of land revenue for causing great misery to the peasantry. He felt that most of the economic ills of the country could be removed through better and enlightened administration. He advocated increasing association of Indians with economic decision-making and industrial development of the country. In fact, he is well known for his historical survey of India’s industrial decline. He blamed British rule for ruination of the indigenous industries. This deprived the people of an important means of livelihood. The erstwhile artisans fell back on agriculture. This increased the pressure of population on land. He favoured small and cottage industries as a kind of insurance against famines, although he saw no alternative to the development of modern industries. Yet he was opposed to large scale industrialization because of its negative implications.

It is necessary to analyse Dutt’s view of British imperialism in some detail and particularly his historical appraisal of this mechanism. What he said in his *Economic history of India* was presaged by a book entitled *England and India* published in 1897. In this book, he had propounded the thesis that English history and Indian history ‘had run in parallel streams’, that the twists and turns of British politics and the alternation of liberalism and conservativism represented the ups and downs of a zig-zag path along which, Dutt was convinced, India progressed on the path indicated by England. Dutt recounted the progressive economic effects of British India rule, leaving aside its political aspects. But the ‘progressive’ face of imperialism did not conceal its adverse economic consequences which, he however, ascribed to blunders of economic administration, not to anything else. He said that the British Empire in India would be judged as ‘the most superb of human institutions in modern times’.78 The British Empire, in the course of its evolution through the phase of old imperialism to that of new ‘liberal imperialism’ had no doubt developed certain unique characteristics, but ‘liberal imperialism’ concealed many of its ugly features, the full development of which Dutt seemingly ascribed to either economic maladministration or failure of the liberal spirit in British politics.79 But there is no doubt that Dutt recounted these ugly features clearly and in unequivocal language.

Dutt, studying the evil economic consequences of the Age of Imperialism, observed that in spite of a civilized administration, construction of railways and a vast expansion of the cultivated area, famines recurred more frequently causing increasing hardships. This was because inordinate expenditure of the government had to be met by increased land tax on people who depended for subsistence only on land and who could not save in years of good rainfall and were resourceless in bad years. Besides, a system of unlimited borrowing of British capital to increase India’s public debt in times of peace was a drain on resource, which was especially heavy because the interest had to be paid in gold.80

He wrote that the British could look back ‘with some legitimate pride’ on ‘Pax Britannica’, the regime of which they established in India, and on the introduction of Western education and the British Rule of Law. But they should ask themselves why ‘the poverty

79 *ibid.*, chapter II.
80 *ibid.*
of the Indian people was unparalleled in any civilised country' and why 'by a moderate
calculation, the famines of 1877 and 1878 and 1892, of 1897 and 1900 (all falling within the
era of imperialism) had carried off 15 million people — a population equal to half that of
England.' Dutt rejected the myths like pressure of the population, the improvidence of the
farmer and the exaction of the moneylender as the probable causes of famines. According
to him, the main cause was the narrow subsistence of the economy, viz, agriculture, and
the inordinate demand made upon it for running a top — heavy, belligerent government.
He suggested that the Englishman should ask himself the following questions: 'Does agricul­
ture flourish? Are industries and manufactures in a prosperous condition? Are the
finances properly administered, so as to bring back to the people an adequate return for
the taxes paid by them? Are the sources of national wealth widened by a government
anxious for the material welfare of the people?'

Dutt further said that 'the invention of the power loom in Europe completed the decline
of the Indian industries', and the subsequent development on modern lines was stifled by
an excise duty on cotton textiles produced in 'new steam mills of India.' Agriculture,
'virtually the only source of national wealth in India,' was burdened by an 'excessive
land tax'. In Bengal it was fixed at 90 per cent of the rental and in northern India at
over 90 per cent between 1793 and 1882. Such rates were unprecedentedly high. They
were also uncertain, because the state, 'having fostered no new industries and revived
only old industries', depended for its wherewithal on taxation of agricultural land. The
worst feature of taxation was that the proceeds of taxation were largely drained out of the
country. This was not true under despotic rulers of golden times.

In this connection, Dutt mentioned the abnormal increase of India's public debt and 'home
charges, so that 'one-half of the net revenues of India which were then 44 million sterling
pounds flowed annually out of India'. Dutt argued that British trade languished with
progressive poverty of India.

In the second volume of the Economic history of India Dutt began with India's poverty
indicated by the low per capita income. Commenting on the recurrent Indian famines,
he said that they were not famines of food, but of purchasing power. 'People', he said,
'are so resourceless, so absolutely without savings that when crops failed within any one
area, they are unable to buy food from neighbouring provinces rich in harvests'. Dutt
seems to have rested his thesis about the bearing of the poverty and resourcelessness of
the peasants, due to high land tax, on the incidence of famines on the foundation of his own
administrative experience in 1876. In that year, Bengal was hit by a cyclone and a tidal
wave, but in the district to which he was sent to re-organise administration and give relief
he had the pleasant experience of the peasants buying, in the years of distress, 'shiploads
of rice out of their savings' in the form of silver ornaments, because they had been lightly
taxed. But 'rents in western Bengal were higher in proportion to produce than in eastern
Bengal; and the land tax in Madras, Bombay and elsewhere were higher than in Bengal.

\(^{81}\) ibid.
\(^{82}\) ibid.
\(^{83}\) ibid.
\(^{84}\) ibid., vol.2, Preface.
The people were, therefore, less resourceful, and famines were frequent and more fatal.\textsuperscript{85} Since peace, retrenchment and reform, in the context of altered circumstances of his times, were essentially what the country needed for making a beginning with the development process and the actual reality was just the opposite, because of imperialism, Dutt’s economic history illustrated the validity of what he had in mind, viz., the necessary economic and political amelioration through relaxation of the excesses of imperialism. If peace could be ensured through reduction of military expenditure; if, thereby, the public debt could be prevented from swelling into dangerous proportions; if, further, there was an arrangement for a suitable sinking fund for the liquidation of debt and a proper division of civil and military expenditure between England and India; if retrenchment could also be practised in civil expenditure, the land tax and other regressive methods of the taxation of the masses could be reduced and Indian famine could become things of the past. He advocated the association of Indians with economic decision-making, without which the interests of the country could not be safeguarded.

Dutt then discussed the theme of reindustrialisation of India. He said that ‘when Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, the evil had been done.’ The British were anxious thereafter to see how cotton could be grown in India and British manufacturers sold, ‘not how Indian looms could be improved.’ In 1879, a year of famine, war and deficit, import duties on British textiles were abolished to assist Lancashire. When the deficits could not be met even by burdening the peasantry more, an excise duty was levied on Indian cloth consumed by the poor peasants. The Indian fiscal system was sharply regressive in its impact on the poor peasants. In a minute he wrote in 1875 Dutt said that, it was not itself a ‘thrifty policy’ to draw the mass of revenue from the rural district where capital was scarce, sparing the towns where it was often redundant and ran to waste in luxury. The injury is exaggerated in the case of India where so much of the revenue is exported without a direct equivalent.\textsuperscript{86}

There was also the recurrence of the theme of the ‘drain’ of resources. The argument that, the drain injured both the payer and the rich recipient was stated, in the following new formulation. ‘Those who earn 42 pound per head ask for 10 per head from a nation earning 2 pound per head. And this 10s per head which the British draw from India impoverishes Indians and, therefore, impoverishes British trade with India.’ One of the myths exploded by Dutt was that the whole Indian debt represented the capital sunk in the development of India. Dutt came to the conclusion that equitably India owed nothing at the close of the company’s rule. Her public debt was a myth. There was a considerable balance of over 100 millions pound in her favour of the money that had been drawn from her. The ‘Mutiny Wars’ as well as other wars added to the debt, the increase being from 139 to 224 millions pound between 1877 and 1900.

He had in mind a happy land of economically stable and viable peasant proprietors on whom the burden of the land tax must be lightened, in the first instance, and the uncertainty of assessment and the insecurity of tenurial rights removed, to encourage private

\textsuperscript{85}ibid.
\textsuperscript{86}ibid.
enterprise in farming. Dutt discussed the rampant poverty and indebtedness prevalent in the Bengal countryside. The cultivators were forced under the thraldom of moneylenders by the rigidity of the government revenue demand. The village industries like spinning and weaving had been killed by a free competition with the steam and machinery of England. The cultivators and the village industrial classes, therefore, virtually depended on the soil as the one remaining source of sustenance. Dutt thus concluded that:

The material well-being of the people ... depends on successful agriculture, on flourishing industries, and on sound system of finance ... four-fifths of the population of India depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. It is the main industry of India, the main source of subsistence for the people ... If agriculture flourishes, if the crops are safe-guarded, if the land is moderately taxed, the people are prosperous. If any of these conditions is wanting, the people must necessarily be on the verge of starvation, and must perish in years of bad harvest.\(^{87}\)

Neither over-population nor natural improvidence of the cultivator nor the extortion of the moneylenders was the real cause of the poverty of the agricultural population.\(^{88}\) Population, he said, did not increase faster than the area of cultivator. It was not the natural improvidence of the cultivator, 'for those who know the Indian cultivation will tell you that with all his ignorance and superstition', he was as provident, as frugal, as shrewd in matters of his own interest, as the cultivator in any parts of the globe. According to Dutt, it was not the moneylender who, by his fraud and extortion kept the tillers in a chronic state of indebtedness.

According to Dutt famines constituted the index of rural poverty. Famines had come to play an important role in Indian rural life during the time Dutt was gaining experience as an administrator, but he found it necessary to go behind the superficial symptoms and to seek for the fundamental causes of poverty. To him there were three main causes which explained rural poverty: first, the increasing burden on land on account of the diversion of former artisans and handicraft workers to agriculture; secondly, the increasing expenditure of the government; and thirdly, the increasing land revenue burdens in the ryotwari areas. This third factor became the central theme of a large part of Dutt's writings. He found the land tax in India higher than in other countries and he also found that the land tax burdens were higher in northern and southern India than in permanently settled Bengal. His remedial prescriptions were thus based on the major premise that the burdens on land should be reduced. He advocated the removal of all land taxes other than land revenue proper and the moderation of land revenue demands.

Before the first volume of the *Economic history of India* was published, Dutt had addressed four letters to Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, on the subject of Indian famines, linking up their effects and incidence with the over assessment of land revenue in areas where the

\(^{87}\)Dutt, R.C., 'The economic condition of India', (speech delivered at the Philosophical Institution, Glasgow on 4th September, 1901) in *Speeches and papers on Indian questions, 1901 and 1902*, p.70.

state was the landlord. These letters were subsequently published in 1900 under the title of *Open letters to Lord Curzon on famines and land assessments in India*. Dutt offered some proposals for land reforms:

(a) Where the state receives land revenue through landlords and the revenue is not permanently settled, we ask that the Saharanpur Rules (1855) limiting state demand to one-half of the rental may be universally applied.

(b) Where the state receives land revenue direct from cultivators, we ask that the rate may not exceed one-fifth of the gross produce of the soil in any case, and that the average of district including dry and wet lands, be limited to one-tenth of the gross produce which is approximately the revenue in northern India.

(c) Where the state receives revenue direct from cultivators we ask that the rule laid down by Lord Ripon, of permitting no enhancements at recurring settlements, except on the grounds of an increase of prices, be universally applied.

(d) Where the land revenue is not permanently settled, we ask that the settlements be not made oftener than once in thirty years, which is the general rule in northern India and Bombay.

(e) We urge that no cesses, in addition to the land revenue, be imposed on the land, except for purposes directly benefiting the land; and that the total of such cesses may not exceed 6\(\frac{1}{4}\) per cent (one anna in the rupee), in any province of India.

(f) We urge that, in the case of any difference between cultivators and settlement officers in the matter of assessment, an appeal be allowed to an independent tribunal not concerned with the fixing and levying of the land tax.\(^{89}\)

He said that he pressed for land reforms because the incidence of land revenue was not moderate and equitable and a sufficient margin was not left to the landlords and cultivators to meet the strain of occasional bad harvest.\(^{90}\) A joint memorial drafted by Mr. Puckle, the most experienced revenue officer and accepted with slight changes was sent to the Secretary of State for India. It was forwarded, for consideration, to the government of India and became the subject of a lengthy resolution on the land revenue problems and policies of the government. In the words of Dutt himself the proposals of the memorialists could be summarized as follows:

(1) half net produce rule for cultivators paying land-tax direct;
(2) half rental rule for landlords paying the land tax;
(3) thirty years’ settlement rule;
(4) limitation of enhancements from cultivators on the ground of increase in prices;
(5) limitation of cesses to 10 per cent of the land revenue.\(^{91}\)

\(^{89}\)See *Open letters to Lord Curzon on famines and land assessments in India*, Preface, *Economic history of India*, vol.2, chapter 17.

\(^{90}\)Dutt, R.C., Letter to *The Pioneer*, 12 March, 1902.

\(^{91}\)ibid.
The main arguments of the memorialists seem to have been accepted in Curzon’s resolution as follows:

It cannot but be their (government’s) desire that assessments should be equitable in character and moderate incidence, and there should be left to the proprietor or to the cultivator of the soil — as the case may be — that margin of profit that will enable him to live in ordinary seasons and to meet the strain of exceptional misfortune.  

In his reaction to Curzon’s resolution Dutt said that, Lord Curzon had virtually affirmed the principle, which they had urged, that in temporarily settled estates held by the landlords, the government revenue should generally be limited to one-half of the actual rental. He had raised hopes that the rule of thirty years’ settlement, which they had urged, would be extended to the Punjab and central provinces. He had also given the hope that the pressure of local cesses would be mitigated. If to all this, the Viceroy had added some clear and workable limits to the government demand in ryotwari tracts and defined some intelligible and equitable grounds for enhancement of revenue in such tracts, the government Resolution would have given to millions of cultivators the assurance, and the protection they needed so much.

As regards the ‘half-rental rule’ for the landlords, the government was prepared to accept such a rule as a general principle of guidance to which there could be general approximation, but it declined to accept a rigid mathematical formula. It was argued that there had been a gradual reduction of the percentage throughout the period of the British rule. This, however, did not meet the argument of uncertainty of demand, which did not exist in permanently settled areas after the passing of the Tenancy Acts of 1859 and 1885. As Dutt put it, the memorialists might feel satisfied that what was said in the resolution virtually proclaimed the abandonment of the practice of assessing estates on prospective rentals, or at over half the rental.

The resolution took a similar stand with regard to the half net produce rule for the cultivators, proposed in the memorial. The memorialists had not proposed a new rule, but had only recommended that the accepted rule should be fairly and universally worked. A part of the rule formulated by the memorialists had laid down a further limit, to provide that the land tax, estimated at one-half of the net produce, should not exceed the maximum of one-fifth of the gross produce. The government declined to accept this limit either, on the ground that the gross produce standard, if applied generally, would mean an increase of assessment all round. There seems to have been a misunderstanding because the resolution referred to tenants of private landlords in Bengal and central provinces, whereas the memorialists were thinking of the areas where the land revenue was paid directly by the cultivators as in Madras and Bombay. They had not suggested one-fifth of the gross produce as the standard of land tax, but had regarded it as the maximum which should never be exceeded. They had discovered that the government very often exceeded this

\[92\text{ibid.}\]
\[93\text{ibid., 28 March, 1902.}\]

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limit. The main point was, as Dutt said (referred to earlier) that the cultivators should
know and understand clearly what the state demanded and what they were entitled to
keep and that uncertainty in the state demand paralysed agriculture.94

As regards the enhancements of the land revenue demand, according to the memorialists,
the ground should be an increase in the value of the land
(1) in consequence of improvements in irrigation works carried out at state expense, or
(2) on account of a rise in the value of the produce based on the average prices of 30 years
preceding such revision.

As between private landlords and tenants, under the Rent Acts of Bengal, the courts did
not allow enhancements except, under these conditions. The memorialists wanted the same
rule to apply as between the peasant proprietor and the state as landlord. Lord Ripon had
tried to remove the uncertainty in the latter case. Lord Curzon, in his resolution, rejected
this by saying:

To deny the right of the state to a share in any increase in values, except those
which could be inferred from the general table of price statistics, in itself a most
fallacious and partial test, would be to surrender to a member of individuals
an increment which they themselves had not themselves earned.

Here there are two arguments rolled into one:
(1) That based on the rise of prices being a satisfactory indicator of the rising land values
and hence of the increasing prosperity of the peasants and
(2) that based on the theory of 'unearned increment' applicable to the Indian land situation.95

Dutt accepted the first argument and merely argued that all the real advantages which
the cultivator secures from new roads or railway lines are shown in a rise of prices which
could, therefore, very well be taken as a basis of revenue enhancement. The main consider-
ation, however, ought to have been whether the impoecunious peasant who sold his crops in
advance or was under pressure to sell immediately after harvests obtained a high enough
price for his agricultural produce. Increasing land values in most parts of the country were
merely an indicator of agricultural depression rather than prosperity, of which the state
was supposed to claim a share, the quantum of which was a matter of controversy. The
real beneficiaries were the classes other than the peasantry, like traders-cum-moneylenders
and the foreign traders.

The government took strong objection to Dutt's theory of the incidence of famines being
linked with over assessment of land tax in areas in which the ryotwari system prevailed.
It referred to the imperfect appreciation of the smallness of land revenue compared with
enormous losses resulting from a widespread failure of crops forgetting that, it was the
individual savings of the past which were an insurance against famines and that these
savings could be more if the land revenue demands were less. The resolution, however,
recognised the thrust of this argument a little later and tried to make out that there
would be no savings, because the abatement of state demand would only mean thoughtless

94 Bharati, op.cit.
95 Ganguli, B.N., op.cit., pp.94-95.
expenditure or would be absorbed by an increase of population, or appropriated by a particular section and therefore there would be no ‘famine insurance fund’ in the hands of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{96} One aspect of the problem of mass poverty and famines which Dutt did not refer to was the problem of the socio-economic structure and the land relations, which explain the phenomenon of transfer or swallowing of the profits intended for the cultivators and reducing the latter to a condition resembling serfdom.

He, however, wrote that the Famine Commission Reports of 1880 and 1900 did not clearly specify the demands of the government on the poor helpless peasants. He claimed that he was extremely dissatisfied with this attitude of the Viceroy because unlike in any other part of the world, in India it was absolutely essential for the peasants to know the exact proportion left with them after paying the governments’ demand. The uncertainty of the government’s share would destroy all peasant activities.

Reviewing the nature of the prevailing system of agriculture, Dutt observed that, throughout the period agriculture remained stagnant. It was a subsistence economy. The high land revenue demand, the growing antagonism between the zamindars and the ryots and the consequent increase in rent and illegal cesses, deindustrialization, increase in population and the consequent pressure of population on land, the lack of security of tenure of the bulk of the cultivators, the rural indebtedness and the lack of capital accumulation and investment in land were some of the factors he held responsible for the stagnant nature of agriculture. Moderation of the land tax and the extension of irrigation works — canals, tanks, and wells, suggested Dutt were two indispensable measures for the improvement of agriculture.

An important requirement for agriculture, observed Dutt, was not new implements and new methods of cultivation but a sufficient supply of manure and a sufficient supply of irrigation works.\textsuperscript{97} Cattle manure had always been and was till date, the universal fertilizer and the only cheap and available manure. But with the destruction of forests and scarcity of firewood, cattle manure was primarily used for fuel, and thus the supply of manure for land was decreasing. Forests should be preserved for both valuable timber as well as the supply of sufficient and cheap firewood for the cultivator.

Another requirement, observed Dutt, was a sufficient supply of water.\textsuperscript{98} The rainfall was uncertain and sufficient attention had not been paid in the preceding one hundred years to the construction of new irrigation works. In Bengal, he remarked, where the rainfall was copious and the fields were often inundated by the rivers, shallow ponds excavated in the fields were the most suitable irrigation works. Public revenues should be spent, not on railways but on irrigation. Had more attention been paid on irrigation, famines would have been impossible. 225 million sterlings had been spent on railways while only 25 millions had been spent on irrigation in India. He suggested that canals would contribute to the stability of agriculture.

\textsuperscript{96}ibid.
\textsuperscript{97}Dutt, R.C., ‘Indian agriculture’, in Speeches and papers on Indian questions 1891 and 1901, pp.98-100.
\textsuperscript{98}ibid.
Along with this, he suggested that the excise duty on Indian-made cotton goods should be removed, that active help should be given to new industries and that the government’s revenue surpluses should be used for constructing irrigation canals rather than new railway lines. And, of course, there was the demand for reduction of government expenditure and borrowing, and along with this, for Indianisation of the administration.  

Towards the close of the 19th century, there was a clear indication that his views on the Permanent Settlement had undergone a transformation. He no longer believed that it was the main source of misery of the Bengal ryots. He wrote in 1900 that:

If the object of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 was to create a thoroughly loyal class of landlords and a prosperous class of peasantry in Bengal, that object has succeeded beyond all expectation.

In 1901, Dutt published a long critique in support of the Permanent Settlement. He said that this Settlement had secured the economic interests of the common people. It had led to the extension of cultivation. He observed further:

Since 1793 there has never been a famine in permanently settled Bengal which has caused any serious loss of life. In other parts of India, where the land tax is still uncertain and excessive, it takes away all motives for agricultural improvements and prevents saving, and famines have been attended with the deaths of hundreds of thousands, and sometimes of millions. If the prosperity and happiness of a nation be the criterion of wisdom and success, Lord Cornwallis’s Permanent Settlement of 1793 is the wisest and most successful measure which the British nation has ever adopted in India.

Expressing his support for the Permanent Settlement he further observed:

The Permanent Settlement of Bengal has proved a blessing, not merely to landlords with whom it was concluded, but to all classes of the community. It has benefited all trades and professions by leaving more money in the country; promoted the well being of various degrees of tenure-holders under the landlords; moderated the rents paid by actual cultivators; and prevented the worst effects of famines ...

Dutt even advocated the extension of the Permanent Settlement to other provinces of India. It is, however, notable that his main stress here was on the permanent fixation of the government revenue demand. His assumption was that the appropriation by the

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99See his Open letters to Lord Curzon.
100Dutt, R.C., Famines in India, Calcutta, 1900.
101Dutt, R.C., The economic history of India under early British rule, London, 1901.
102Dutt, R.C., 'The Indian land question', Indian Review, October, 1902, p.4.
state of an increasing quantum of rural surplus in the form of land revenue tended to impoverish the peasant economy. It is difficult to explain this shift in his position on this issue especially in view of the fact that he had already retired from government service. He said that, in Bengal where the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 saved the cultivators from undue enhancements, the average rent paid by cultivators to landlords did not exceed one-sixth of the gross produce in any district, and fell far short of it in eastern districts. This Act, he said, effectively protected the cultivators of Bengal against all unjust enhancements and ejection by landlords. It was thus after the labours of a century, he observed, that British administrators had solved in a satisfactory manner the great 'land question' in Bengal, firstly by extending protection to the zamindars by the Regulation of 1793 and secondly by extending protection to actual cultivators by the Acts of 1859 and 1885. The consequence was that, in Bengal the cultivators were more prosperous, more self-relying, and more safe against the worst effects of famines, than the cultivators of any other province in India.

We may not agree with Dutt's open letters. But at the time he was writing at the turn of the century, his policy prescriptions were in line with the thinking that was represented by such bodies as the Indian National Congress, or by such public men as Gokhale. What was surprising was that Dutt, with all his experience of district administration closed his eyes to the evil effects of a permanent settlement with a body of intermediaries between the government and the actual cultivators. The plea that the settlement should be with ryots would be meaningless in a community where the exploited would become the exploiters. Dutt had a long experience of the rural life of Bengal. The Bengal Tenancy Act was passed in 1885 and there was an increasing realisation of the need to protect not only the statutory tenants but the actual cultivators. One wonders why Dutt did not ask himself some of the questions that naturally arose: Why was the Bengal Tenancy Act necessary? How could one prevent the subinfeudation of the type that one found, for example in the Bakhargunj district? What were the basic reasons for the Pabna riots in 1873?

An analysis of Dutt's views on agrarian issues gives the idea that towards the end of his life he wanted to establish the fact that as a result of the Permanent Settlement, Bengal witnessed great prosperity. Areas where such a settlement was not introduced suffered great economic hardships. This change in his view from what he had written quarter of a century ago is surprising. Besides, he is silent on why the Rent Act of 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 had become necessary. By the close of the nineteenth century it had become clear that there were different sets of rights to land and 'ryot' did not automatically signify one who cultivated the land. It is surprising that Dutt was posted in Bakhargunj district for long — between 1883 and 1885 where, there were about fifty to fifty-two intermediaries between the zamindar and the actual tiller of the soil. Even though during this time the zamindar of Bakhargunj became prosperous because of extension of cultivation in hitherto uncultivated land, the deterioration in the condition of the cultivators could not have escaped the notice of the collector.

103 Dutt, R.C., 'Presidential speech', 27 December, 1899, Lucknow Congress, in his Speeches and papers on Indian questions, 1897-1900, p.125.
104 Dutt, R.C., 'The Indian land question', in Speeches and papers on Indian questions, 1901-1902, pp.4-5.
Besides, Dutt observed that, the Rent Act of 1859 by giving some rights to certain categories of ryots ushered in a new age. If that is true, then the condition of the ryots between 1793 and 1858 was certainly not ideal. This contradicts his contention in *Economic history of India* that Bengal prospered because of the introduction of Permanent Settlement. He also did not discuss in details the Bengal Tenancy Act. He does not explain what necessitated these two later acts. He was mainly interested in the mutual relationship between zamindars and government. He was not much interested in how the Permanent Settlement affected zamindar-peasant relationship. In his account he does not analyse the reasons for the accumulating grievances of the peasants. Nor does he talk about the Pabna revolt of 1873 even though he became the collector of Pabna only fourteen years later, in 1887. In his attempt to defend the Permanent Settlement on the ground that 'it precluded the state from increasing the annual economic drain of wealth out of the country'\(^{105}\) he belittled the disastrous social and economic effects that attended the zamindari settlement in Bengal. In fact, he overlooked the fact of the oppression of the peasantry — a cause that he took up so strongly and so boldly in his earlier work.

There were many other facts also which escaped his attention. When he was writing the second volume of *Economic history*, already four census reports had been published. But he did not use any of the information available in them.\(^ {106}\) He was right when he said that the British government, most unjustly, imposed the cost of conquest of India on the Indian taxpayers. He also assessed that the combined effects of British tariff policy, the commercial policy of the English East India Company and the economic administration of British Indian administration was the ruin of Indian handicrafts industry. Yet, it is strange that while writing his history at the very end of the nineteenth century he was unaware of the gradual development of the Indian industries in the preceding half century. He has discussed in details the changes in the export-import pattern, the decline in the export of cotton textile and silk goods and the increase in the number of cotton mills, jute mills and the expansion of new industries.

Yet, Dutt could have strengthened his assertion of exploitation of India by the British from this angle. He has criticised the investment of British capital at high rates of interest in the expansion of Indian railways. But he did not highlight how huge profits from the jute industries, most of which were started with British capital, and the tea plantations were transferred from India. Indian workers were paid paltry wages and the producers of raw materials were paid low prices. But the English shareholders who had invested in jute industries and plantations made huge profits which was remitted to England. This also constituted an economic drain. But Dutt did not emphasise on this aspect of the drain. He highlighted how the British Indian government paid interests at high rate to English capitalists by imposing high taxes. According to a recent scholar, Dutt had repeatedly discussed how Indian tariff policies were repeatedly changed under the pressure of the Manchester lobby. But he failed to highlight how the labour Acts in the last two decades of the century were not geared to benefit the cause of the workers.\(^ {107}\) In fact, he

\(^{105}\) Dutt, R.C., *Economic history of India*, vol.l, chapter V.


\(^{107}\) ibid.
has failed to discuss how India underwent the changes associated with the first phase of industrialization in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In regions like Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Jharia, Ranigunj, Assam, Duars and others a considerable working class gradually emerged. Changes that took place in the years following the Industrial Revolution in England had already begun to take place in India like — the increasing importance of an industrialist class, lower wages and more work for labourers particularly in the plantations, growing misery of the working class etc. He was writing at a time when a slow process of industrialization had started in India, but aside from his criticism of the much criticised excise duty on Indian cloth production, he had little to say about the problems and prospects of industrialization. There was also practically no explicit recognition of the need for industrialization, if not for anything else, at least for the transformation of agriculture itself, even though he realised that the problems of agriculture had been accentuated by the reverse process of decline in cottage industries.

6.5 Concluding remarks

What Dutt wrote about agrarian issues, particularly the condition of the ryots, was very much the result of a trend of thinking that gradually took shape in the course of a half century that preceded him. It had been initiated by Rammohun Roy. The threads were subsequently picked up by Young Bengal, Tattvabodhini Sabha as well as some of the leading contemporary journals like Sadharani, Som Prakash, Bengalee etc. Some of the best representatives of the intelligentsia were associated with these journals as editors or contributors like Pearychand Mitra, Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan, Bankimchandra, Lalbehari Dey, Akshaychandra Sarkar and others. Some of them made an in-depth study of the peasant question like Pearychand Mitra’s ‘The zamindar and the ryot’,108 Bankimchandra’s ‘Samya’ and ‘Bangadesher krishak’, Sanjibchandra’s Bengal Ryots and Abhaycharan Das’s The Indian Ryot.

The peasant question was treated in these studies in all its aspects. It was considered to be a social-cum-economic question, a question of landlord-tenant relation, in which the landlord was privileged to exploit and the tenant obliged to suffer. It was also realised that the peasant question in its political aspect was bound up with the policy of the government. Since the zamindari system had the sanction of the government, it was felt that it was the task of the educated community to formulate a scheme of peasant reforms and place it before the government for its consideration. It was also realised that as the peasant was the main producer of wealth for the community, without their emancipation the emancipation of the country would not be possible.

What is new in the intelligentsia’s approach is the conscious presentation of the peasant question. But there was a big gap between the theories they preached and the practical solutions they offered. Linked with the colonial masters as government servants or feudal set-up as petty rent receivers, they were not bold enough to propose a radical solution

of the peasant question. What they demanded was reform; reform within the framework of Permanent Settlement. But even then, the contribution of the nineteenth century intelligentsia is quite significant. By repeated criticism of the Permanent Settlement they brought home to the people the realization that the zamindari system was unjust. Though they did not support the peasant risings, they were convinced that unless the zamindari system was modified, they were inevitable.

Their main solution was a sort of Permanent Settlement between the zamindar and the ryot. Their aim was to prevent enhancement of rent by accepting the principle of fixed rents and to prevent ejection from the land by the recognition of the right of occupancy. Acceptance of these suggestions, they felt, would have set a definite limit to zamindari oppression and brought much relief to the peasants.

However, there were some intellectuals who were bold enough to suggest that the recognition of the principle of peasant proprietorship alone would lead to a permanent solution of the peasant question. They held that nothing short of the abolition of the Permanent Settlement would settle the question. Abhaycharan Das for one advocates the repeal of the Permanent Settlement with compensation to the zamindar. He recommends the recognition of proprietary rights of the peasants.\textsuperscript{109}

But most of them did not want a complete overhauling of the existing land system. Since most of them were connected in some way or other with land, it was difficult for them to deal with the land question impartially. They failed to realise the fact that unless a viable solution to the land question could be found, particularly in a region like Bengal, where the majority of the zamindars were Hindus and the peasants Muslims, it would encourage communalist tendencies.

\textsuperscript{109}Das, Abhaycharan, \textit{The Indian ryot}, vol.2, p.638.