

**SPEECHES AND PAPERS
ON INDIAN QUESTIONS,
1901 AND 1902**

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Speeches and Papers on Indian Questions, 1901 and 1902 by Romesh C. Dutt

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ROMESH C. DUTT

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ON

Indian Questions,

1901 and 1902

BY

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THE second series of the Speeches and Papers of MR. R. C. Dutt is published with his permission. They contain his important speeches made before the Fabian Society of London, and at Liverpool and Glasgow, on the Economic Causes of Indian Famines ; his papers on Indian Agriculture and Indian Manufactures ; and his four Replies to Lord Curzon's recent Resolution on the Indian Land Revenue. Other important speeches, delivered in 1901 and 1902, have also been included.

THE PUBLISHER.

CONTENTS.

| | PAGE. |
|---|-------|
| I. PAPER ON THE INDIAN LAND QUESTION <i>[Imperial and Colonial Magazine, February</i> <i>1901]</i> | 1 |
| II. SPEECH ON INDIA AND THE NATIONAL LIBERAL FEDERATION <i>[Delivered at Rugby, February 27, 1901]</i> | 19 |
| III. SPEECH ON SOCIAL PROGRESS IN INDIA <i>[Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the</i> <i>National Indian Association, March 25,</i> <i>1901]</i> | 24 |
| IV. SPEECH ON THE LAND TAX & C. <i>[Delivered in the Westminster Town Hall,</i> <i>May 24, 1901]</i> | 27 |
| V. SPEECH ON RESTRICTIONS ON LAND ALIENATION <i>[Delivered at a Meeting of the East India</i> <i>Association, June 24, 1901]</i> | 34 |
| VI. SPEECH ON THE ECONOMIC CAUSES OF INDIAN FAMINES <i>[Delivered at a Meeting of the Fabian</i> <i>Society, London, June 28, 1901]</i> | 37 |
| VII. SPEECH ON FAMINES & C. <i>[Delivered at Liverpool, October 18, 1901]</i> | 51 |
| VIII. SPEECH ON THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF INDIA <i>[Delivered at Glasgow, September 4, 1901]</i> | 69 |
| IX. PAPER ON INDIAN AGRICULTURE <i>[Read at Mansfield House, London, October</i> <i>27, 1901]</i> | 89 |
| X. PAPER ON INDIAN MANUFACTURES <i>[Read before the Sukha Samiti, London,</i> <i>December 20, 1901]</i> | 106 |

| | | | |
|-------|---|--------|-----|
| XI. | SPEECH ON THE BOMBAY LAND REVENUE AMENDMENT ACT | | |
| | [<i>Memorial Presented in Nov. 1901</i>] | ... | 129 |
| XII. | ENQUIRY INTO THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF INDIA | | |
| | [<i>Memorial Presented in January 1902</i>] | ... | 150 |
| XIII. | SPEECH AT MADRAS | | |
| | [<i>Delivered February 4, 1902</i>] | | 157 |
| XIV. | FIRST REPLY TO LORD CURZON | | |
| | [<i>Pioneer, March 12, 1902</i>] | | 165 |
| XV. | SECOND REPLY TO LORD CURZON | | |
| | [<i>Pioneer, March 27, 1902</i>] | | 176 |
| XVI. | THIRD REPLY TO LORD CURZON | | |
| | [<i>Hindu, March 29, 1902</i>] | | 197 |
| XVII. | FOURTH REPLY TO LORD CURZON | | |
| | [<i>Pioneer, April 7, 1902</i>] | | 201 |

SPEECHES AND PAPERS
ON
INDIAN QUESTIONS.

I. THE INDIAN LAND QUESTION.

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February 1901.*]

I.

IN the latter half of the 18th century, a variety of administrative problems presented themselves to the new rulers of India, but none of them was so deeply interesting or presented itself in such varied forms as the Land Question. And the servants of the East India Company, familiar only with the English system of landlords, farmers, and labourers, were fairly puzzled when Zemindars and Polygars, Village-Communities and Peasant-proprietors, appeared before their astonished eyes with all their archaic customs and ancient rights.

The Province of Bengal, the first great acquisition of the East India Company, presented the problem in its simplest form. The country was parcelled out into great estates, owned by hereditary Zemindars, who had under the Mahomedan *regime* virtually ruled their own

estates, encouraged literature and arts in their courts, and often commanded troops for the Imperial service. It was obvious therefore, that any revenue settlement of Bengal, based on the ancient institutions of that land, must be a settlement with Zemindars.

For a time, however, the administration of the Province was in disorder. The battle of *Plassy* was won in 1757, and the Company assumed the direct administration of Bengal in 1763, but the Company's servants, bent on making large fortunes for themselves, endeavoured to take over the inland trade of the country into their own hands, and drove the traders of the country to despair. Farmers of the land-revenue were also sent to the different districts where they made collections from zemindars or tenants oftē by coercion, and the agriculturists were grievously oppressed. A great famine,—the greatest that is recorded in the history of India,—then occurred in 1770-71, and is estimated to have swept away one-third of the population of that rich and fertile Province.

Warren Hastings was then appointed Governor of Bengal in 1772, and became Governor-General in 1774; and the Land Question naturally came under his consideration. Hastings himself, trained in the old methods, made the harsh and unwise proposal that the estates of Bengal should be sold by public auction or farmed out on leases and that settlements should be made with the purchasers or lessees for life. A juster and a more humane view of the situation was taken by a large-minded statesman, known to English readers as

the writer of the "Letters of Junius." In one of the ablest minutes ever recorded in India, Philip Francis, then a member of the Governor General's Council, dwelt on the calamities through which Bengal had passed since the British Conquest, and recommended that a permanent settlement should be made with the Zemindars. "If there be any hidden wealth still existing," he wrote, "it will be brought forth and employed in improving the land, because the proprietor will be satisfied he is labouring for himself."

When these varied proposals came before the Court of Directors in London, the Directors were fairly puzzled by the strangeness of the problem and the magnitude of the issues involved; and following a policy of drift peculiarly British, they allowed the problem time to ripen towards its own solution. On the Christmas Eve of 1776 the Directors wrote to India that "having considered the different circumstances of letting the land on leases for lives, or in perpetuity, we do not for many weighty reasons, think it at present advisable to adopt either of these modes."

For nine years more, Warren Hastings administered the affairs of India, and the Land Question in Bengal ripened towards a solution. The short leases and the prompt demands of Hastings caused much suffering to the people; ancient houses which had virtually ruled large districts in Bengal were swept away; money-lenders and auction-purchasers came in their place as new landlords; and much land went out of cultivation. When, at last, Lord Cornwallis succeeded Warren