

THE EVOLUTION OF LAND TENURES IN INDIA

P. T. GEORGE

Rights in land, the principle of assessment and administrative arrangements to collect revenue are three aspects of the relationship between the Government and the cultivator. Of these three, the problem of land tenures or of rights in land is of the greatest contemporary interest. It is also the easiest to describe historically, if treated in isolation. Such a historical treatment can most usefully be begun from the establishment of British power. For earlier periods an examination of the question of private property in land presents many difficulties as regards data and involves comparisons between such radically different contexts that it is not useful to examine land tenures in isolation. The right to buy and sell, for example, had little meaning in contexts where a market for land had yet to emerge or had emerged to a limited extent, only where commercialization had taken place. Similarly, the right to resume, which is the real point of interest behind the controversy as to "whether the king owned the land", has to be discussed in a legal context which is of little interest to modern constitutionalists. On the other hand, the contemporary distribution of rights in land cannot be explained without reference to history. One can therefore start with certain very brief references to the pre-British situations and then proceed to discuss in greater detail the British period. The situation which the British had to handle in the early stages is first examined, and it is suggested that the early British administrators were trying to introduce the British model of landlordism under the permanent settlement, and later some sort of a capitalist model of peasant farming under the *ryotwari* system, without the ownership right. In the former system (*zamindari*), ownership rights were conferred legally on the landlords, while under the latter (*ryotwari*), though for all practical purposes the landholders were recognized as proprietors, that title was assiduously avoided. Much later it was realized that these systems were unsuitable to a country with India's