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### Title

The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India

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nature and pattern of village social, economic, and political life are thus of vital concern. One must note that, regarding rural development, no regime (not the Christian Democrats, Allende's Popular Unity, or the present dictatorship) really allowed the *campesinos* basic initiatives. None have had faith in the ability of rural people. No leaders were truly committed to relinquishing that modicum of power to the "torturable" class, to use Graham Greene's memorable term.

This is an essential book for students of Chile and anyone concerned with peasant life and rural proletariats in the development process. It is also an easily used reference and a model of scholarly achievement.

**The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India.** Eric Stokes. Cambridge South Asian Studies, 23. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978. viii + 308 pp. \$27.50 (cloth).

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Officials of the British East India Company sought to understand unfamiliar social and cultural systems, above all the system of land tenure, as they assumed administrative control of ever-larger portions of the Indian subcontinent from the late 18th century. It was certainly a problem in applied anthropology, one that produced voluminous records and debates over issues both theoretical and practical. According to much of the historical literature, British "mistakes" in the assignment and collection of land revenue led to large-scale transfers of proprietary rights to land and helped provoke peasant uprisings, notably in the Rebellion of 1857. Pointing to errors and overstatements in this literature, Eric Stokes has turned to British settlement reports to attempt a reconstruction of the complex Indian agrarian systems and their functioning under colonial rule.

Stokes is a historian. In this collection of 12 studies (all but one published previously in jour-

nals and books in England, India, and the U.S. from 1967 to 1977), he formulates hypotheses relating "secure agriculture" to population density, the various forms and functions of tenure, the degree of social and economic stratification, and participation in political processes. He tests his hypotheses in detailed case studies. Three examine particular North Indian districts during the 1857 rebellion; two trace the historical evolution of North Indian landholding and agriculture from 1860 to 1948; one focuses on moneylenders and peasants in central India; one tries to explain why tax-free (*inam*) tenure was least prevalent in northern India. The studies are densely written, demanding familiarity with 19th-century sociology, Indian revenue terms, and British legal categories. Stokes has couched his discussion in the terminology of 19th-century political economy, making his findings less comprehensible and useful for comparative purposes than they deserve to be.

While the detailed studies will be of most interest to regional specialists, three general interpretive essays synthesize historical evidence and the views of other scholars in a very readable and stimulating way. In one of these, Stokes assesses the impact of the first century of colonial rule; in another, he relates the 1857 Mutiny Rebellion to traditional resistance movements and Afro-Asian nationalism. The final essay, "Return of the Peasant to South Asian History," is particularly fine, combining conclusions reached in his own detailed studies with wide-ranging and critical comments on current social-science work on peasant societies. In an earlier, perhaps the narrowest, chapter of the book, Stokes explores official efforts to apply Western legal categories to Indian social reality (the Ricardian rent theory vs. Richard Jones's theory of peasant rents); in this final essay, he is able to show the relevance of that early 19th-century debate to neo-Marxist theories concerning the rich peasant and underdevelopment in rural India. His point is that theory has gotten ahead of empirical inquiry, and he succeeds in demonstrating the need for fuller explication of the historical dimension of India's agrarian order.