

20

***ON A BILL TO ABOLISH THE KHOTI SYSTEM**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Bombay City, Byculla and Parel): Sir, I rise to move for leave to introduce a Bill to abolish the Khoti system. The brief statement which you have directed us to make in support of the motion will, in my case, consist of nothing more than a reference to the statement of objects and reasons. And before I do so, I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that this is the shortest statement of objects and reasons ever drafted to a Bill which is so important as the abolition of the Khoti system.

The Khoti system is one of the minor land tenures in the Bombay Presidency. It is found mostly in the Ratnagiri district and in some parts of the Kolaba and Thana districts.

The terms of the Khoti tenure are in some cases regulated by law, in some by custom and usage and in the rest by grant. In the Ratnagiri district the terms are regulated by Bombay Act I of 1880, in the Kolaba district the terms are regulated by custom and usage, and in the Thana district by grant.

The Khoti tenure differs from the ordinary Rayatwari tenure inasmuch as in the latter the Government collects revenue directly from those who are in occupation of the land while in the former the Government is required to employ the services of the Khot for the purpose of collecting revenue.

The system of Khoti tenure, while it binds the Khot to pay revenue to the Government, leaves him free to do what he likes to the inferior holders, and this freedom has been so grossly abused by the Khots that the inferior holders are not only subjected to all kinds of exactions but they have been reduced to a state of abject slavery. In recent years, the inferior holders have been carrying on a great agitation against the Khots and have been demanding the abolition of the Khoti system. The relations between the Khots and the inferior holders have been so strained that three Khots were murdered by them.

While the Khoti tenure may have the advantage of facilitating the collection of revenue, its disadvantages are so great that the tenure cannot be allowed to continue hereafter without causing grave disturbance to the

*B.L.A. Debates, Vol. 1, pp. 1087-89, dated 17th September 1937.

The Bill introduced by Dr. Ambedkar is reproduced at pages 96-100.

peace and tranquillity of the Presidency. It is therefore imperative to abolish the system.

The Bill aims (1) to abolish the Khoti system and to establish direct relationship between Government and those who, are in possession or occupation of the land which is under the management or beneficial enjoyment of the Khot, (2) to make provision for the payment of reasonable compensation to the Khot for the loss of his rights, and (3) to give those inferior holders who are in actual occupation of the land the status of occupants within the meaning of the Land Revenue Code, and (4) to provide for other incidental purposes.

With these words, Sir, I beg leave of the House to introduce the Bill.

Question proposed.

Mr. S. L. Karandikar (Ratnagiri North): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to oppose the introduction of this Bill. (Interruption.) I would not ordinarily have opposed the introduction, because it seems to be a formality in this House to allow introduction unopposed. But I think it my duty to oppose this Bill at its very introduction for one reason only.

When the land revenue question was being discussed in this House at the time of the demands for grants, it was made clear to us by the Honourable the Revenue Member, when he gave us an assurance, that the whole question of land revenue policy in the Presidency would be taken up some time in ensuing February, and therefore, we have to wait before we do anything. We should not accept any piecemeal legislation in regard to any item of land revenue. Therefore, even the members on the Treasury benches will agree with me when I say that this piecemeal legislation that is being proposed should not be allowed to be introduced in this House.

There are so many other remarks that I would have liked to oppose, because the introductory remarks were read out to the House ; but, I believe, there is sufficient time ahead when all these matters will have to be discussed and fought for. Therefore, I do not want to take up any more time of the House. But I think this is a matter of principle. Government have given us an assurance that the whole question of land revenue in this Presidency will be taken up for consideration and that legislation on a broad basis will be brought before this House some time in January or February. There is no reason why an exception should be made so far as this legislation relating to Kolaba and Ratnagiri is concerned. With these remarks I oppose the introduction.

The Honourable the Speaker: I do not think that any other member has a right to participate in this, treating it as a debate. The honourable member who begs leave to introduce the Bill has a right of reply ; and if he wants to reply, I will give him a chance.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Sir, I do not think that any very detailed reply is called for by the observations made by my honourable friend Mr. Karandikar. He said that the Honourable the Revenue Minister has

given an assurance to the House that he is going to bring in legislation in order to overhaul the whole of the revenue system. Unfortunately, I was not present when this assurance was given; and I personally myself do not know exactly the extent and the scope of the assurance that he gave to the House. But, Sir, what I should like to submit to the House is this. The Khoti system is a system which stands by itself. It is not a system which comes under the Land Revenue Code and therefore can be said to be a part and parcel of the general land tenure of this Presidency. It is a separate item altogether. Therefore, I do not see any objection to a system which does not come under the general system being considered by itself.

My second submission to the House is that if the honourable members who occupy the Treasury Bench do in fact intend to carry out what they have assured the House they will, and if I find that the measures that they are bringing forth in order to deal with the subject with which this Bill deals are of such a nature that I should be content with the remedies which they propose, then I have no hesitation in saying that I will withdraw the Bill if I find that their legislation is superior to mine. I do not think anything more is necessary for me to say on this occasion.

Question put, and leave granted.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Sir, I introduce the Bill.

The Honourable the Speaker: The Bill is introduced.

••