

NATURE OF LAND-HOLDING OF THE MECHEs.

In order to study the nature of land holding within the Mech community, we have further analysed the data with regard to the pattern of distribution of land holding of the Meches, presented in the previous chapter.

To be more specific we have compared ownership of land holding within the Mech community in 1906, 1916, 1935 and 1953. These years were not randomly chosen but selected to magnify the nature of land concentration among the Meches. It is necessary to justify the periods taken into consideration by us. We have taken those periods which from the point of view of the history of settlement is important. Secondly, we have taken and consulted those records of rights for which detailed records were available. Thirdly, we have taken those periods for which we can ascertain change in the ownership of land.

In the first stage we have gone through the records of rights in the four different periods. By studying the records of rights from the four different periods we have arranged it in a Tabular form. This may be taken as arrangement of data in terms of land ownership ~~and its~~ frequency distribution. After arranging the data we have measured the concentration in terms

of Lorenz curve of Equality or inequality.

Lorenz curve is a special type of cumulative frequency graph, known as curve of concentration. This curve is useful in studying the concentration of wealth or income in relation to certain segments of population.

Let $F(x)$ denote the percent cumulative frequency for the variable upto the value of x , and $\phi(x)$ denote the percent cumulative total for the variable upto the value of x . Naturally, both F and ϕ vary from $\overset{0}{\underset{\wedge}{\text{A}}}$ to 100.

The curve obtained by plotting ϕ against F for different fixed values of x is known as the curve of concentration or Lorenz curve. It is necessary to state that the curve is necessarily convex downwards.

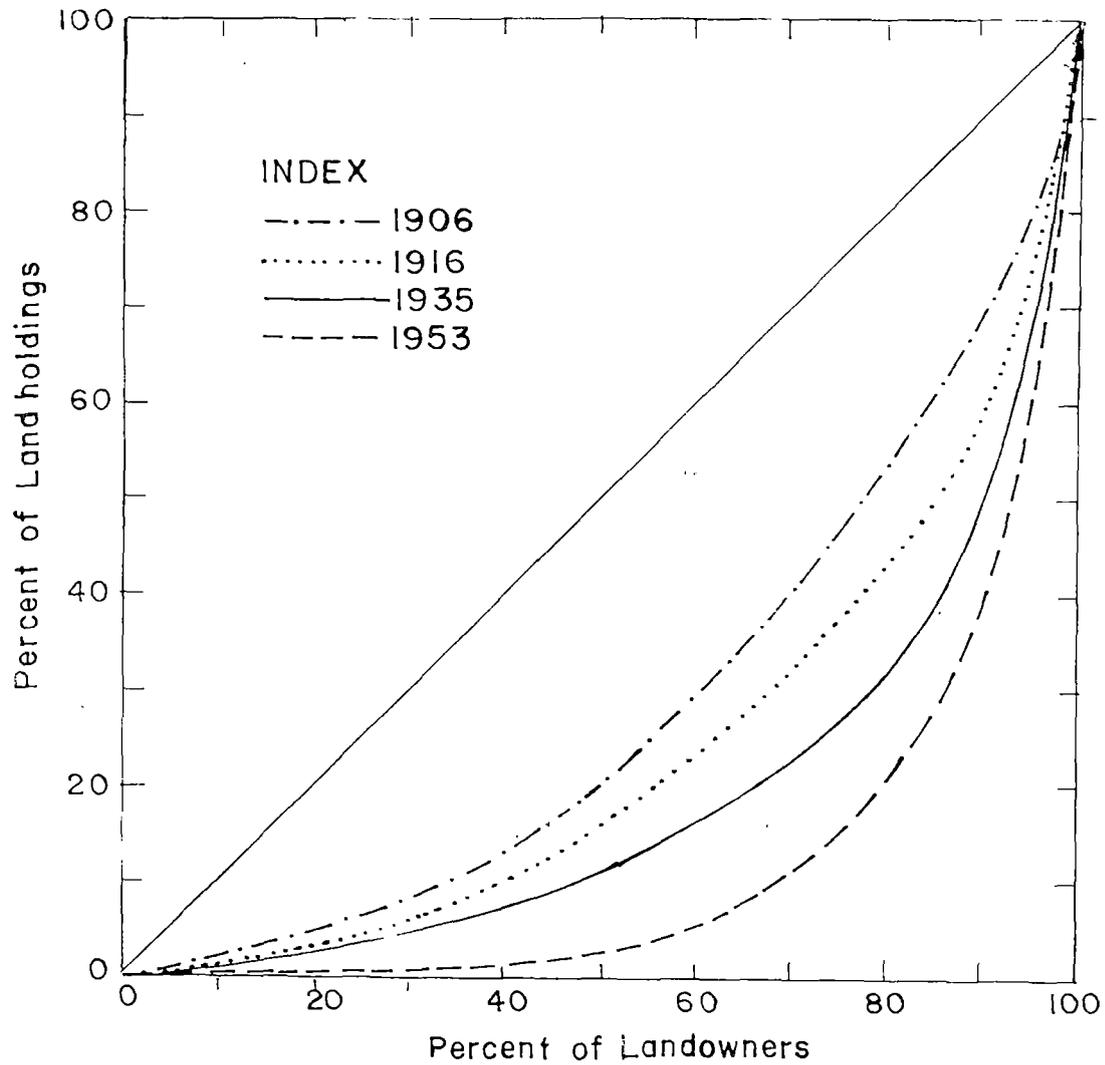
The line $\phi = F$ is called the line of equal distribution. Such a curve would indicate that any specified proportion of persons would have precisely the same proportion of total value. In the case of income distribution or land holdings it would mean that 20 per cent of the individuals would earn 20 per cent of the income, 50 per cent of individuals would earn 50 per cent of the income, and 75 per cent of the individuals would receive 75 per cent of the income and so on.

The more the Lorenz curve diverges from the

line of equal distribution, the more is the concentration of the total value (say land in our case) in a few individuals. Thus in a particular case if we find that 50 per cent of the individuals only receive 20 per cent of land (or income), 75 per cent of the individuals receive only 30 per cent, 90 per cent receive 50 per cent and so on, then it means that there is a lot of concentration of land/income in a few individuals in the upper income groups. Thus the area between the line of equal distribution and the curve of concentration called the "area of concentration" is an indicator of concentration. From the actual data the computed Lorenz curve has been fitted into the graph (3.A). From the fitted curve it is quite evident that the concentration of land in the hands of a few is increasing over the years. The nature of concentration is such that it is changing over the years, and over the years the degree of inequality as measured by Lorenz curve is increasing. In other words, it means that land among the Meches have been concentrated in the hands of a few over the years.

The situation can further be analysed in terms of percentile position. The results from the Lorenz curve can be approximated in the Table 3:1 (P. 96)

GRAPH - 3A



Lorenz Curve Representing Land holding of
the Meches (1906, 1916, 1935, 1953)
(Source Appendix, 3:1)

Table - 3:1Nature of concentration of ownership of land

Category	Year 1906	Year 1916	Year 1935	Year 1953
Top Ten	30.00	42.00	51.00	59.00
Second Ten	15.00	15.00	15.00	21.00
Third Ten	14.50	11.00	10.50	9.50
Fourth Ten	11.25	8.50	7.70	5.25
Fifth Ten	8.75	7.00	4.80	2.75
Sixth Ten	7.00	6.50	4.00	0.80
Seventh Ten	5.50	4.50	2.20	0.62
Eighth Ten	4.00	2.50	2.00	0.55
Ninth Ten	2.75	1.90	1.80	0.45
Bottom Ten	1.25	1.10	1.00	0.08
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

From the above Table computed by us, we can draw certain conclusion tentatively --- 1) The upper ten per cent of people who used to own 30 per cent of land in the beginning of the century own nearly 59 per cent of land in the fifties.

2) The upper twenty per cent of people used to own 45 per cent of land in the year 1906 but proportion of land holdings increased to 80 per cent in the year 1953.

3) The bottom twenty per cent of people who used to own 4 per cent

of land in the year 1906 own in the year 1953 only 0.53 (or less than 1 per cent of total land).

Apart from the discussion of the above table, to magnify certain issues, it is necessary to look at the mean holdings of the Meches. Over the years 1906-53, the mean holdings have fallen in terms of size. This is illustrated in the following Table 3:2.

Table - 3:2

Mean - Land-Holdings of the Satali Meches.

Year	Size of the Mean-Holding (In acres)
1906	37.56
1953	15.16

Source: Records of Right (Settlement)

From all accounts it may be presumed that the land has been concentrated in the hands of a few. Further land has been fragmented more and more in the lower categories of the Meches as there has been a decline in size of the mean holdings. Therefore, some Meches have surely improved their position whereas the majority of Meches have lost their land or cultivating a

smaller size of plot and thereby increasing the pressure of land.*

The static and dynamic conditions of the Mech community can best be understood in terms of landholdings, because land is the most important source of livelihood and prime mover in the rural areas. Hence, it is imperative to study the modern pattern of distribution of holding and to relate the present economic conditions in the background of the past inequalitarian tendencies depicted above.

In order to study this land distribution pattern we visited all the Mech houses and looked into the Assessment lists kept in the offices of Anchal Prodhans.

*The raw data are given in the Table 2:7 of chapter 2. From these raw data we have prepared the cumulative frequency table necessary for our analysis. This is given in the appendix 3:1 of this chapter. To measure concentration we could have used the Gini's co-efficient. But in order to avoid repetition we have only given the calculation in terms of Lorenz Curve.

Distribution of land according to size of the holding:The current situation (the year of study: 1973)

We have adopted the following definitions** to describe the different categories of the farmers.

1. Marginal farmers are those who own less than 2.5 acres of land;
2. Small farmers are those who own 2.5 to 5.0 acres of land;
3. (a) Lower middle farmers are those who own land between 5.0 to 10.0 acres, and
(b) Upper Middle farmers are those who own 10.0 to 20.0 acres of land;
4. "Rich" farmers are those who own more than 20 acres of land.

For the 570 families of our study in the place of enquiry, the breakdown of the land-distribution is at (P. 90).

*There is no accepted definition of "middle" farmers. However, for our convenience and facility for comparison we have adopted the above definition. We have used the term "Rich Farmers" in lieu of big farmers. We have defined "Rich" farmers as those who own more than 20 acres of land. In some literature Big Farmers are defined as those who own more than 10 acres of land. But as our upper middle farmers belong to category 10 to 20 acres we have used a term "rich" in lieu of big farmer.

Table 3:3Distribution of Mech-House Holds According to Ownership of Land, 1973 (Satali Villages)

Categories	No. of owners	Percentage of owners	Percentage of land owned
Landless	217	38.07	0.00
Less than 2.5 acres	99	17.37	8.23
Bet. 2.5 to 5.0 acres	95	16.67	16.32
Bet. 5.0 to 10.0 acres	76	13.33	21.44
Bet. 10.0 to 20.0 acres	60	10.52	31.33
More than 20.0 acres	23	4.04	22.63
Total	570	100.00	100.00

Source: Assessment list 1973-74 and investigation.

Table 3:3 can further be summarised as below:

Table : 3:4

Percentage distribution of Mech Households according to Land-ownership and percentage of land owned, 1973 (Satali Villages).

Categories	Percentage of Population	Percentage of Land owned.
Landless	38.07	0.00
Marginal Farmers	17.37	8.23
Small Farmers	16.67	16.32
Middle Farmers (Upper and Lower)	23.85	52.82
"Rich" Farmers	4.04	22.63
	100.00	100.00

Source: Assessment lists, 1973-74 and investigation.

It is obvious from Table 3:4 above that 55.44% of the Mech families are either landless or owning only 8.23% of the total land. On the other hand, the middle and rich farmers who constitute 27.89% of the families own more than 75% of the total cultivable land.

Those who are landless are not necessarily operating as agricultural labourers. Some of them are working seasonally in the land but the rest are engaged elsewhere. To be

precise, out of 217 Mech house holds who do not own any land, 134 are operating on land and the rest 83 households are engaged either in petty non-agricultural works or working seasonally in the land or in allied agricultural works like tea-gardens, etc.

Again, those who own land are not necessarily operating on land. They hire bargadars or others to cultivate their land. Again out of 353 households owning some land in the area under observation, only 63 are not operating on land -- some of them are engaged in non-agricultural occupation, some others are working as labourers in the Tea Garden.

In order to highlight these problems we have presented the following table (3:5) according to the nature of "Operation" as found by our investigation.

Table - 3:5

Nature of operation of Mech-households on land, 1973 (Satali Villages)

	No. of Households	Percentage of Households
<u>Operating no land</u>	<u>146</u>	<u>25.61</u>
1. Owning land but not operating.	63	11.05
2. Neither owning nor operating	83	14.56
<u>Operating land</u>	<u>424</u>	<u>74.39</u>
3. Operating own land	290	50.88
4. Owning no land but operating.	134	23.51

Source: Investigation.

From the Table 3:5 shown at (P.92), it can be seen that 50.88% of the Mech households are owner-operators, whereas 23.51% of the Mech households owning no land, are operating on land. These operators are to be distinguished from agricultural labours, daily labours, tea-garden labours and households engaged in non-agricultural occupations. This is because of the fact that some of the Mech households owning land but not operating have been found to have leased out their land wholly and are at present working as agricultural labours. In the Table 3:5 we have placed all such agricultural labours in the category "operating no land" because they are owning land but not operating. This category also includes those Mech land-owners who are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. But agricultural labours along with daily labours and tea-garden labours also appear in the category of "operating no land" because all of the daily and tea-garden labours and a portion of the agricultural labours have been found to be neither owning land nor operating. Thus, from the table we cannot ascertain the actual number of households belonging to the group of agricultural labours.

However, the following Table 3:6 would illustrate the nature of cultivation according to ownership.

Table: 3:6Nature of cultivation according to ownership of lands (Sahel Villages)

	No.	Percentage
Entirely owned land.	206	48.58
Partly owned land	84	19.82
Entirely leased in land.	134	31.60
	424	100.00

Source: Investigation.

Thus, of the 290 Mech households operating own land (Table 3:5) 206 households are operating on their own land only, whereas 84 households in addition to their own lands have also taken lease of lands from others (Table 3:6). The table above also shows that 134 Mech households owning no land, are operating on entirely leased-in land.

In the table 3:3 we have pointed out that 23 households owning 22.63% of land own more than 20 acres. However, the following breakdown of these households would show that some of them are holding lands above the statutory limit* as found by us in the year 1973.

* Please see foot-note overleaf.

Table - 3:7

Amount of land	No. of households
20 - 25 acres	7
Above 25 acres	16
	23

Source: Investigation.

The above table shows that inspite of the ceiling on land, there are at least a few (16) households who own land more than the statutory limit.*

"Mobility" within the different groups:

In the table 3:3 we have shown how land is distributed according to ownerships. But in order to facilitate discussion regarding the vertical mobility among the Meches, we have divided the Mech households according to size-groupings of

* This conclusion we have derived from personal investigation. As during our investigation, ceiling on land on a family basis was not yet imposed, in some cases a Mech family comprised more than one Mech land-owners and hence a family could hold lands above the statutory level of 25 acres.

the operational holdings. This is shown below:

Table - 3:8

Distribution of Mech-Households according to size-group of operational holdings, 1973 (Satali Villages)

Cultivating (In acres)	No.	Percentage
Below 2.5	148	34.90
2.5 - 5.0	135	31.84
5 - 10	78	18.40
10 - 15	10	2.36
15 - 20	32	7.55
20 - 25	7	1.65
Above 25	14	3.30
Total:	424	100.00

Source: Investigation.

If we compare the table 3:8 with the table 3:3 we would see that though 17.37% of Mech households own land less than 2.5 acres, 34.90% of the households are engaged in cultivating land which is marginal. So, nominally 17.37% may be termed as marginal farmers among Mech households but in reality from the point of view of operation 34.90% of the farmers are marginal. These marginal farmers comprise roughly 26% of the Mech households (148 households out of 570 households) of our area of investigation.

Similarly, though 16.67% of the farmers of the Mech households own less than 5 acres of land amongst the operating Meches, 31.84% are small farmers. These small farmers form roughly 24% (135 out of 570) of the Mech households.

Similarly, in terms of ownership of land 23.85% of the Mech households are 'middle' farmers, but in terms of operation 28.31% of the Mech households are 'middle' farmers and they comprise roughly 21% of the Mech households (120 out of 570). And, normally although 4.04% of the Mech households may be termed as 'rich' farmers, 4.95% of the households in reality are 'rich' farmers and they comprise roughly 4% of the Mech households of our area of investigation (21 out of 570).

Hence, in terms of actual operation, it appears that marginal and small farmers amongst the Mech households constitute nearly 67% of the Mech operators and these farmers together constitute nearly 50% of the Mech households. This reflects to a great extent the poverty amongst the Meches.

Now, if we study the pattern of cultivation we shall find that the majority of the cultivators who are cultivating leased-in-land, are cultivating land below 2.5 acres.

The following table 3:9 would illustrate this:

Table - 3:9

Distribution of leased-in land according to size group of holding, 1973 (Satali Villages)

Cultivating	No	Percentage
Below 2.5 acres	90	67.17
2.5 - 5 acres	42	31.35
5 - 10 acres	1	0.74
Above 10 acres	1	0.74
Total:	134	100.00

Source : Investigation.

Similarly, we can present the distribution of entirely leased out land. This is shown in Table 3:10 below:

Table- 3:10

Distribution of entirely leased out land, 1973 (Satali Villages)

Land holding (In acres)	No	Percentage
20 - 25	2	3.18
15 - 20	3	4.76
10 - 15	3	4.76
5 - 10	4	6.35
2.5 - 5	18	28.57
Below 2.5	33	52.38
Total:	63	100.00

Source: Investigation.

However, no discussion would be complete unless we can identify the 'rich' farmers. In order to identify them we have presented ~~Table 3:11~~ in Table 3:11 below the distribution of the Mech households, categorised in respect of pre-ceiling land-owning position*, in accordance with the present operational holdings of the Mech-households.

An examination of Table 3:11 shows (P.100) that all the "rich" farmers of to-day are those who belonged to pre-ceiling land-holding category of above 60 acres, whereas about 67% of the "upper middle" farmers had more than 60 acres of land in the pre-ceiling period. Similarly, about 63% of the "lower middle" farmers had more than 40 acres of land and about 48% of the small farmers had more than 10 acres of land in the pre-ceiling period. It should, however, be noted that the operators designated as belonging to the category of "MISCELLANEOUS" appear as small as well as marginal farmers in our Table 3:10 above. Thus, about 17% of the 'small' farmers belong to the category "MISCELLANEOUS" and none to the category of 'New entrant'. But about 2% and 20% of the 'Marginal' farmers belong

*The pre-ceiling land holdings of the present Meches have been taken from the 'Records of right' of 1953 immediately before the imposition of the Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 and the subsequent Land Reforms Act of 1955. The land owned by either the present landowners or by the ancestors in the year 1953 as shown in the 'Records', have been compared with the land owned by the present owners as depicted in the Assessment list, of 1973-74. The method of computation has been given in the Appendix 3:2 of this chapter.

Table - 3:11

Distribution of the operational holdings of the Mech households of 1973 categorised in respect of pre-ceiling land holdings - 1973 (Satali Villages)

Pre-ceiling Landholding (In acres)	Present operational Holdings (In acres)															
	Above 25		20 - 25		15 - 20		10 - 15		5 - 10		2.5 - 5		Below 2.5		Zero	
	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage	No. of Households	Percentage
Above 100	12	85.71	3	42.86	15	46.88	4	40.00	7	8.97					13	8.9
90 - 100	2	14.29	3	42.86	5	15.63	1	10.00	4	5.13	6	4.44			9	6.1
60 - 70			1	14.28	3	9.37			3	3.85	8	5.93	10	6.76	8	5.4
50 - 60					4	12.50	1	10.00	3	3.85	7	5.19	7	4.73	15	10.2
40 - 50					2	6.25	1	10.00	32	41.03	2	1.48	2	1.35	2	1.3
30 - 40							1	10.00	14	17.94			21	14.19	1	0.6
20 - 30					2	6.25	2	20.00	10	12.82	9	6.67	20	13.51	24	16.4
10 - 20					1	3.12			4	5.13	33	24.44	33	22.30	20	13.7
Below 10									1	1.28	47	34.81	22	14.86	24	16.4
New* Entrant													3	2.03	2	1.3
Miscellaneous *											23	17.04	30	20.27	28	19.4
Total	14	100.00	7	100.00	32	100.00	10	100.00	78	100.00	135	100.00	148	100.00	146	100.00

Note: * The meaning of the two terms used by us, have been discussed in the Appendix 3:2, where a discussion on the computation of the above table has been made. The blank columns of each row indicate 'NIL'

Sources: 1. Pre-ceiling land record of the Alipurduar Settlement Office
 2. Big intermediary register of the Jalpaiguri Settlement Office.
 3. The assessment list of the Anchal Panchayats.
 and 4. Investigation.

to the categories of 'New Entrants' and 'MISCELLANEOUS' respectively.

Hence, the presence of 'New Entrants' and 'MISCELLANEOUS' in the two categories of farmers, viz., small and marginal, does not permit us to identify clearly these farmers in terms of the pre-ceiling land-holding of either the present members of the households. But the table may to some extent identify the "rich" farmers in terms of pre-ceiling land-holding. Similarly, the identification of at least three-quarters of the "middle" farmers can also be made from the table above in terms of the pre-ceiling land-holding. Thus, we may be permitted to conclude that almost majority of the big landowners of the pre-ceiling period have also appeared as "rich" and "middle" farmers of to-day in the Mech community. It should also be noted that on enquiry it was evident to us that a great majority of the respondents of the category 'MISCELLANEOUS' could not tell anything about the amount of land either possessed by them or by their preceeding generation. Probably, they were landless in the pre-ceiling period.

The identification of the Mech-households in respect of the pre-ceiling land-holding has been done with a view to locate the present households of the Mech community in accordance with the economic position enjoyed by them in the past. In other words, we intend to examine as to whether the desire to change one's own economic position has been concentrated on that section of the Mech community which had an affluent economic background.

To sum up:

In this chapter we have attempted to show that concentration of land has increased in the hands of a few over a period of years. In this context we have seen the nature of concentration in four different periods before the imposition of ceiling.

In this background we have attempted to relate the present pattern of land-holdings with the pre-ceiling period. In this context we have noticed that small and marginal farmers constitute nearly 50% of the Mech households and more than 65% of the Mech operators. In other words, amongst the Meches, landless, marginal and small farmers constitute a sizeable proportion of the Mech community. But a few Mech families are still 'rich farmers'. We have attempted to identify them by pointing out that mainly those who were 'rich' during the pre-ceiling period remained 'rich' in the post-ceiling period.

However, it is interesting to point out that some of the Meches who do not operate on land or operate on small plot of land are affluent and well-to-do to-day. At the same time, it is also interesting to note that this opulence of some of the present Meches can be explained to a great extent in terms of land possessed in the pre-ceiling period (even though they are holding small amount of land now). To describe the present poverty or opulence of the Meches in terms of pre-ceiling land-possession, we have proposed to

undertake certain micro-family studies.

To this we turn in the next chapter where we present twelve case studies covering different kinds of Meches^{households} relevant for the purpose of our enquiry. In the background of these "typical" Meches we shall attempt to show the nature of occupational mobility by taking the macro-data. (Ch. 5).

Appendix - 3:1

Distribution of Mech Landholdings given in the form
of points on the Lorenz Curve.

Year : 1906		Year : 1916		Year : 1935		Year : 1953	
Pcf	Pcfx	Pcf	Pcfx	Pcf	Pcfx	Pcf	Pcfx
1.52	0.05	10.10	0.61	4.45	0.21	52.54	4.19
4.58	0.35	18.61	2.17	17.19	2.03	62.74	6.64
10.68	1.57	35.63	8.42	47.13	10.61	69.80	10.02
22.90	5.64	56.38	21.10	59.23	16.39	73.72	13.15
35.11	11.34	69.14	32.03	68.15	22.36	76.86	16.66
41.98	15.46	78.72	42.56	71.97	25.64	83.52	26.24
54.19	24.41	85.10	51.15	79.61	33.67	83.92	26.94
60.30	29.70	88.29	56.22	82.16	36.84	87.05	33.95
64.12	33.50	90.42	60.13	83.43	38.66	89.41	40.72
67.93	37.84	92.02	63.83	86.62	43.83	91.76	48.99
74.04	45.57	94.14	69.56	87.26	44.99	93.72	57.14
83.96	60.12	94.68	71.25	90.44	51.68	96.07	71.42
89.31	69.37	95.74	75.15	92.35	56.43	97.25	79.32
91.60	73.95	97.34	81.73	94.26	61.91	99.21	93.73
95.41	82.60	97.87	84.26	95.54	66.04	100.00	100.00
96.18	84.74	98.40	86.99	96.17	68.84		
97.70	89.82	98.93	90.50	98.08	81.25		
98.47	92.57	99.46	94.53	98.72	85.88		
99.23	95.72	100.00	100.00	99.36	90.99		
100.00	100.00			100.00	100.00		

Source : Table 2:7 of Chapter - 2

APPENDIX : 3:2

In order to categorise each Mech household in respect of pre-ceiling land-holdings, we have first collected the names of the present landowners from the Anchal Panchat Assessment lists (1973-74) of the area of our enquiry and the Big Intermediary Register of the settlement office, Jalpaiguri. The names of the landowners of the pre-ceiling era was collected from the original records of right kept at Alipurduar settlement office, Jalpaiguri. We, then from the Records of right of 1953, have taken the name of a Mech landowner. From the Assessment list of 1973-74, we immediately check up whether the same name appears as landowner in the Assessment list or whether the name appears as father of the present landowner. This was checked and re-checked further during our investigation of individual Mech families. But during our investigation, we could also trace out certain landless Mech households which had possessed lands themselves or whose fore-fathers did possess lands in the pre-ceiling period. And hence, we could also categorise these households in respect of their pre-ceiling land possession. In this way, we could categorise about 85% of the Mech households of 1973 in our area of enquiry in respect of pre-ceiling land-possession. But the remaining 15% of the Mech households, could not be categorised by us in respect of pre-ceiling land-possession. But from the assessment list it is seen that some of them are owning land and on enquiry it is known to us that they have come to our place of enquiry after 1953. These land-owners were termed in our analysis as "New Entrants".

Having categorised and linked households with the pre-ceiling land possession, we have carried on individual household survey. We put questions to all the Mech households in our area of enquiry. During our investigation, we have collected from each heads of the households the amount of land he himself possesses as well as the amount of land of any other family members living with him. In this way, total lands possessed by the different Mech households (i.e. head of the family plus other cognate relations) were ascertained and compared with the pre-ceiling land holding. In some of the cases, however, we could not find some of the landowners as shown in the Assessment list, during our investigation; we were reported that they had left the place. And, hence we have excluded them. Furthermore, some of the Mech households were not seen in the Assessment list, but were found to hold lands during our investigation. They have been shown as 'MISCELLANEOUS' in our dissertation. In this category we have also included those Meches who were seen either to possess or operate land but could not tell anything about the pre-ceiling land possession. Further, in this 'category' also we have included those landless Mech households who could not be found in the Assessment list of 1973-74 and also those landless Mech households who, during our investigation, reported landless in the pre-ceiling period or could not give any information regarding pre-ceiling land possession. Therefore, the category 'MISCELLANEOUS' includes (a) those Meches whose names did not appear in the Assessment list but were found to possess land, (b) those Mech landowners and/or operators who could not identify their pre-ceiling land-

holdings. (c) those Meches who^{se}_^ names did neither appear in the Assessment list nor were found to possess land, (d) those Meches who reported that they did not hold any land during the pre-ceiling period and still remain landless even now and (e) those landless Meches who could not give any information regarding pre-ceiling land possession. Thus, our analysis of the Mech community has been made on the basis of categorising the Mech households in respect of pre-ceiling landholdings of the present families or of their previous generations, plus two other categorises termed as 'New Entrants' and 'MISCELLANEOUS'.
