

CHAPTER - VI

EARLY OCCUPATION:

FROM MONEY LENDERS TO MONEY INVESTORS

The Marwaris were the forerunners of an indigenous banking system in colonial India. James Tod writing in 1832 stated that nine-tenths of the bankers and traders were inhabitants of Marwar (Maroodesh) and that again, chiefly of the Jain faith. (1) John Malcolm had noticed in 1829 that nerarly the whole of Sowcars and shroffs (bankers and money - lenders), and a great number of Bunias (or retail dealers), in Central India, were either from Gujarat or Marwar and generally not every old settlers. The principal bankers at Oojein, Gujarat origin, came there about 3 centuries ago and those of Marwar at a later period. But of them, the Marwaris were more numerous than the Gujaratis. (2) A recent researcher on the Marwari community also writes that in Rajasthan, the traders and merchants have clung to the traditional profession of usury and banking. Apart from the traditional system, the Marwaris have conducted banking in the English style also. M/S G. Raghunathmal, bankers, were the first to conduct their banking business in this style in 1918. The researcher writes that the Marwaris charged insurance commission on goods called 'Hunda Purja' which was aimed at helping those Marwaris who did not possess sufficient

wealth. This approach of money lending became one of the major causes for the success of the Marwaris in the year to come. However, Gadgil thinks that the ability and the excellence of the Marwaris in banking was responsible for their success.(3)

With headquarters at Shekhawati and Ajmer or in Bikaner, the Marwaris were initially money lenders to the rulers of Rajputana. The Daddas were specially prominent in Jodhpur, Bikaner, Indore, Hyderabad and Jaisalmer. The papnas of pathua were prominent in Indore, Kotah and Jaisalmer. The Lodhas were in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kishengarh, and Shapura; and the Pittys and Ganeriwals in Hyderabad. A reference could be cited here that Bhagoti Ram was a banker to a Nawab, and that his descendants' business incorporated money -lending to the rulers of Bikaner and the Punjab.

(4)

Dr. Taknet has cited a few examples of this kind. Joharimal Roongta had lent Rs. 20,000 to Thakur Shivnath Sing of Mandawa. The scholar has searched out with the light of early gazetteers that because of the Maharaja's protection, equally important banking centres had emerged at Bikaner and Jaipur. In 1879, leading bankers of Jaipur had a capital of 7 million pound sterling. Similarly Bikaner's bankers were owners of Rs. 55 million in cash in 1930. (5) Timberg is of opinion that the Marwari bankers in Rajasthan got security against the capital lent to the rulers with the help of criminal and civil jurisdiction which the Rajput rulers were compelled to codify, having

fallen a victim to their bargaining. The codification of these jurisdiction helped the Marwari bankers both to protect their employees from harassment and to strengthen their own control over their firms. (6) Secondly, they were so crafty that they did not invest their money in bank stocks, lest this practice would serve general trading interest, instead of favouring the interest of this caste. This was another secret of Marwari success in the banking business. (7)

The Marwaris, however, did not confine their enterprises within Rajasthan. They began to search new avenues where money could be advanced against high rates of interest. Astonishingly enough, they were greatly helped in the banking business by the British who really opened various avenues to extend their commercial interest. By the end of the 18th century and the 1st half of the 19th century, the British power in India was firmly consolidated and now the British rule in India became the British rule of India. This consolidation helped the British, to a great extent, to think of extending their commercial net-work all over India. Opium, jute, indigo, cotton and tea were developed as export commodities. By the end of the 18th Century, when British demand for cloth had declined in England, the company fell in distress in respect of its trade with china as to how the chinese tea could be purchased to satisfy its great demand at home. P.J. Marshal writes, " The rise of Calcutta's trade with China was a response

to two developments : to the increasing need of the East India company for funds at Canton with which to purchase cargoes of tea for London, and of the makers of fortunes in Bengal to find new ways of transferring money to Britain." (8) Several measures had been undertaken by the company but the scarcity of silver foiled these measures. At last, the solution was found in opium, the only Bengal commodity sold extensively in China. Thus a triangular trade developed between Bengal and England via China. Indian opium exported to China was to be sold there for financing the Chinese tea which again was to be sent to and exchanged in England for various manufactured goods and services of the British occupation, to be returned to India.

So a great demand for Indian opium in China necessitated its wide cultivation in India. The Marwaris at once reached those regions where opium could be widely cultivated. One such region was Malwa in central India which had a long tradition of opium cultivation. The Marwaris reached there for financing the production of this crop at high rates of interest entering into a contract with the opium cultivators. At the same time they wanted to take advantage of its speculation in stock markets. The same thing also happened in Bihar where the East India company at Patna established its monopoly control over Bihar's opium. (9) Calcutta's trade with China also facilitated Bengal's trade with Indonesia and Malaya. Calcutta

ships on their way to Canton, anchored at the ports of Indonesia and Malaya to take pepper and tin there, and then reached Canton. After the conquest of Bengal, the wealth which the British acquired and the control which they won over some of Bengal's commodities, such as opium, enabled them to carve out routes of their own. Trade between Calcutta and Malaya and Indonesia was essentially a British creation in response to British needs.

(10) British needs opened new routes of commercial enterprises in which the Marwaris became partners.

They financed specially the growth of the new cash crops which the British urgently needed. Timberg writes, "The greatest impetus to Marwari outmigration, however, was British rather than Moghal." (11)

In Bengal, the Marwari Banking Business was operated by the house of Jagat Seth first at Dacca and then at Murshidabad after it became the capital of Bengal Nawab, Murshid Quli Khan. The money-lending or banking business was then exclusively a monopoly venture of this House. Fateh Chand on whom the Great title "Seth" was conferred by the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah, was the illustrious son of this House and it was under him that the banking business of the House expanded far and wide so much so that he could provide the Nawab's government from time to time with enormous sums of money and by this means, he could induce the government to take such measures and pass such regulations for the rate of money exchange as would favour the House. (12) After the death of fateh Chand, the banking

business of this house was on the wane. But the model of this business, left by this house to posterity, was of great importance. It had really been a model, to be imitated by the Marwaris. The Marwari money lenders were also present in the adjacent districts perhaps earlier than in the three districts under review. Hunter states that Marwari money lenders carried on banking operations in Rangpur and Dinajpur. In Rangpur, the Jain population appeared to be confined to the Kyahs or Marwaris, most of whom were money lenders. (13) The most important of the permanent seats of commerce was Mahiganj. A large number of Marwari marchants lived here and carried on business in every description of produce. Banking operations were also carried on by one or two houses. (14) Dr. Buchanan Hamilton has mentioned in his book that Marwari bankers were in operations in West Dinajpur. He said, "The proper bankers in this district are confined entirely to the capital where there are seven houses. The principals live generally at Murshidabad; but some of them occasionally visit Dinajpur, and are all of the Osho-yaI sect,..... their principal business is granting bills of exchange for money..... Bills are never discounted by these bankers, except by the House of Jogot Seit". (15) In the district of Malda, silk and cotton weavers were financed mainly by the Marwari Mahajans. The Khamru market was also largely financed by the Marwaris of English Bazar in Malda. (16) According to another source, the trade of silk cloths of Murshidabad and Malda were transacted by

the 'Dadans' advanced by the Marwari money lenders to the weavers. (17) In the entire North Bengal Region, the role of the Marwaris as money lenders or bankers had indeed been conspicuous.

In the princely state of Cooch Behar, the Marwaris were the leading money lenders. (18) The rural agricultural economy of Cooch Behar led to the emergence of a new economic class, who became known as the money lenders. They played a significant role as an economic institution of the rural agricultural society. (19) But the fact which mostly helped the Marwari Mahajans in the money lending business in Cooch Behar was the absence of any landed aristocracy usually seen in the rural sector of Bengal. (20) Apart from the non existence of any landed aristocracy, there was also no state provision to advance agricultural loans to the peasants. Thus the state was totally devoid of any banking tradition or Indigenous banking system and this void no doubt made money-lending a profitable venture in the state. The Marwaris were the right persons to take advantage of the situation fully.

They established 'Kuthis' here as they did elsewhere. Two Kuthis doing brisk business, came to be known as the Baro Kuthi and Chhoto Kuthi. The old buildings of these Kuthis can still be seen at the Cooch Behar Town just opposite to the Rajbari gate. However, the Chhoto Kuthi was the largest Banking Institution and though its chief concern was money lending, it got involved in other busi-

ness activities too. The Kamala Bank deposited its surplus money at Chhoto Kuthi in exchange for interest at a very later period and the Kuthi like the present-day Reserve Bank, acted as the 'lender of the last Resort'. The Mahajans of Cooch Behar on many occasions used to take loans against hand notes from this Kuthi. (21) The Baro-Kuthi was also a banker to the Maharajas. They saved the Maharajas many times from financial distress by granting massive amounts as loans to the Raj families. So what the House of Jagat Seth was to the Bengals Nawabs, the Baro and Chhoto-Kuthis were to the Maharajas of Cooch Behar state. These two Kuthis also advanced loans on interest to the small cultivators. (22)

There were also many small Marwari money lenders in the district. They usually lent money to the distressed peasants. There were three types of money lending in the state: (1) The general loan, the interest of which was very high, i.e., about 37.50, lent to the peasants against the guarantee of land to be mortgaged to the money lenders; (II) Muli of value loans, provided to the peasants, to be repaid by crops within a stipulated period, failing which the debtors would have to pay high rate of cultivated crops as per present market price; (III) the Bhutali loans by which the debtors were contracted to render wage free labour on the lands of the money lenders. (23) However it seemed that the Marwari money-lenders were least interested in the third type of money-lending in the

following way : " The agricultural operations in the district were entirely financed by private money-lenders all of whom were unauthorised. They charged interest at exorbitant rates and the peculiarity of their system was that, instead of paying the loan in cash at a time, the village money-lenders supplied food and other necessities to the agriculturists against the security of the future crop. When the crop was harvested, the repayment of the loan was made by delivery of the produce at a previously arranged rate". as this system was a hazardous one and most of them did not belong to the landed gentry having enormous land holdings. (24) However, it seemed that the Marwari money-lenders were least interested in the third type of money-lending as this system was a hazardous one and most of them did not belong to the landed gentry having enormous land holdings.

There was no fixed rate of interest on money - loans. In small transactions, when the borrower pawned some articles such as ornaments or household vessels, equal in value to the sum borrowed, interest was charged at the rate of 6 pies per rupee a month, or 37.5% per annum. In large transactions, where a mortgage was given on movable property, the rate was three pies per rupee a month or eighteen and three quarters per cent per annum. In the same class of transactions, but with a mortgage on immovable property such as houses or lands, the interest varied from 12 to 18% per annum. In petty advances to cultiva-

tors, with or without a lien upon the crops, interest was charged at the rate of 3 to 6 pies per rupee a month, or from eighteen and three quarters to 37.5% per annum. No rate of interest, however, was recognised in the civil courts of the state, which was higher than 3 pies per rupee a month, or 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent per annum. The latest gazetteer on the Present district has highlighted the role of money - lenders in the following way ; "The agricultural operations in the district were entirely financed by private money - lenders all of whom were unauthorised. They charged interest at exorbitant rates and the peculiarity of their system was that , instead of paying the loan in cash at a time, the village money - lenders supplied food and other necessaries to the agriculturists against the security of the future crop. When the crop was harvest, the repayment of the loan was made by delivery of the produce at a previously arranged rate".

(24) The said gazetteer has also explained the scope of money lending business in the rural areas. As the district was abundant in cash crops like jute and tobacco, credit facilities in the rural areas were offered by big merchants. shopkeepers and farmers acting as money-lenders to whom repayment was made through the crop. (25) It admits of no doubt that these financial agencies were operated by none but the Marwaris who really developed an indigenous method of banking business in the district when it was an Indian state. (26) The Bothra family of Cooch Behar Town had a network of money-lending or banking establishments.

(27) So also, the Sharma family of Dinahata had been connected with money lending business. (28)

The Marwari money lending system proved to be ruinous in many instances. A contemporary administrative report of the Cooch Behar State has correctly sketched the portrait of Marwari money lending in the rural sector of the State. "The Marwari Mahajans, who have got most part of the trade in their hands have also been the principal bankers in the state. But the interest charged by them is very high and their Mooli system of advancing money has also proved ruinous in many in many instances. The people are purely agricultural and although the soil is generally rich and fertile and a good harvest is obtained with very little trouble, they themselves are involved and remain under debt to the Mahajans year after year. There is no landed aristocracy here as is known in Bengal, and the Marwari Mahajans are gradually acquiring extensive landed property as a necessary consequence of their system of banking business" (29) The ruinous effects of the money-lending practice of the Marwari Mahajans are also felt in an earlier Administrative Report of the State: "A ruinous practice widely prevails here, viz, the system of making advances to the cultivators for their crops. While the crops are still green in the fields, the cultivators take advances or undersell them at wretchedly low rates, while the inability to satisfy the Mahajans, brings about suits for the value of the crops at rates ruinously exorbitant

and the so called high prices, therefore, inevitably benefit the merchants and impoverish the people. A single season of poor crops and high prices plunges the defaulting cultivator deeper into debt, from which years of plenty and prosperity can not rescue him". (30)

However, the mode of Marwari money - lending had been so disastrous and slow poisonous that the state thought of rescuing the debtors from the clutches of the Mahajans either by making provisions in the state to advance loans to the peasants who already fell over head and ears in debt to the Marwari Mahajans or by promulgating laws to protect the interest of the peasants. That the state was thinking of protecting the peasants or debtors from the Mahajans is indicated in the State's Administrative Report: "To arrest the increasing indebtedness of your highness' subjects and to afford opportunity to those who are already involved in debt, the necessity of a Bank, worked on approved principles, was greatly felt". (31) with this end in view, the Cooch Behar Banking Corporation limited came into existence in 1913. This was the first time that a regular Banking business had been started in Cooch Behar at the close of the year. The company had been floated with a capital of a lac of rupees divided into 2000 shares of Rs. 50 each and most part of the Capital had been subscribed by the people of the state. (32) This institution was not the last of its kind. The co-operative financing society also came into being in 1930 to afford

financial help to the distressed cultivators. (33) At the same time, a firm step was taken under direct state patronage by enacting laws to rescue the cultivators from the dangerous Marwari practice of money-lending. According to the provisions of the laws, the money-lenders could not extract from the debtors unlimited amount of money and interest. Another aspect of the laws, enacted, was that the court would not allow any case of money lending which extracted interest exceeding the principal amount advanced. (34)

The present district of Jalpaiguri was once a part of Cooch Behar and was known as the Baikunthapur Paragana or Battishhazari. So here, the nature and scope of money lending and banking business were, more or less, the same as those in the district of Cooch Behar. The money lenders were and still are the main financing agencies in the district, specially in the rural areas. (35) There were no large banking establishments in Jalpaiguri. So the money lending business chiefly conducted by jotedars, shop-keepers, Marwari traders and others. (36) But the business of money - lending to the cultivators was almost entirely in the hands of Marwaris who were a few in number and formed a close ring. (37) This was so, as the Marwari money-lenders were always bent on making this profession a monopoly one, wholly and exclusively for their community.

In case of petty loans where the borrower pawned ornaments

or household utensils, equal in value to the amount borrowed, the rate of interest varied from 24 to 60% according to circumstances. When the loan was large, a mortgage was required by the money lender on immovable property such as houses or lands and the rate of interest in such cases varied from 18 to 36% . In petty agricultural advances, where a peasant took what was then called Bhutia or an advance from a jotedar, for enabling him to purchase seed for the cultivation of his land, he paid no interest at all. But if he borrowed the money as a loan or a supply of grain as food, he had to repay it with 50% interest at the close of the year or at harvest time. (38) Enquiries made in 1905 revealed that the rates of interest in the Mainaguri and Alipur Tahsils varied from 18 to 37.5% per annum and in the Falakata Tahsil, from 12 to 75%, the average rate per annum being 36%. It is, however, doubtful if a cultivator was ever able to borrow at such a low rate of interest as 12% and it is probable that he had often to pay more than 37.5%. (39)

In the district of Jalpaiguri, money-lending business was more profitable in the tea gardens of the Duars. Here also the pioneering money-lenders were the Marwaris. They sometimes advanced big loans to the tea garden owners. Some Kalu Kainya (Marwari) lent Rs. 15,000 to Gopal Chandra Ghosh of Mongol Kata Tea Estate in 1884 to save the garden from impending bankruptcy. (40). The usual rate of interest charged by the Marwaris and Shop Keepers was Rs.

5% per mensem on loans of Rs. 100 or more and one anna in the rupee per mensem if the sum borrowed was less than Rs.100. These rates were equivalent to 60 and 75% per annum respectively. There was no scope of loss of money as the lender got security against the loan by every possible means. The crafty technique of Marwari money-lending in the tea gardens has been explained in a Gazetteer in the following manner. " He (a Marwari money lender) is generally in no hurry to get the principal paid up and tells his debtors not to worry about it but to go on paying the interest. If the man has plenty of cattle and is well to do, he often encourages him not to pay the interest for a time ; the interest due is then added to the principal and the victim executes a new bond in which he acknowledges receipt of the whole sum as a loan with the result that he has to pay compound interest on the original sum borrowed and his debt mounts up faster than ever. When the debtor gets old or takes to drink, the money lender sets to work to squeeze him, depriving him gradually of all his cattle, his wife's gold ornaments and other property. As a last resort, when he can get no more out of his debt or the money - lender threatens to file a suit against him in the civil court and this threat always has the desired result if the debtor can, by any possibility, get the money from his relations, who are generally willing to help rather than see one of their people sent to prison. In some cases the creditor secures himself by getting the debtor's wife

or son to sign a paper stating that, if the husband or father fails through death or any other cause to pay the debt, they will be responsible for it".

I have come upon at least three old Marwari families whose ancestors or forefathers were directly connected with the money-lending business in the district of Jalpaiguri. (I) The family of Tansukhrai Mahesree whose present residence is at Dinbazar, Jalpaiguri, had a money lending business which had been conducted by 'hundi'. They charged Rs.1 only per hundred during inflation. But in the pre-second world war period the rate of interest was only 2 annas. (41) (II) The family of Malchand Dugar of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, was connected with the money lending business. (42) (III) The house of Hoshiary lal Kalyani of Mainaguri also had money-lending provision at their Gadi. However their network had been limited and the rate of interest which they charged on the debtors was also very meagre. (43)

The evil effect of indebtedness on the Paharia (Nepalese) coolies on tea gardens in the Duars was of many kinds. Mr. H. Bald, Manager of the Chunabati Tea Estate, who came to the Western Duars about 1900, writes, " There is no doubt about it that the indebtedness of the Coolie to the sardar are the greatest evils retarding progress amongst the coolies. The debt hangs as a heavy weight round their necks and as a result, more drink is taken than otherwise

would be taken, and this in time leads to gambling and a general want of thrift. I came out to this country in January, 1882, and at that time, although coolies earned less money than they do now on tea gardens, they were undoubtedly better off than they are now. More women wore gold and silver ornaments, the property of their husbands. It is sad to think that the coolies as a class are poorer and less thrifty than formerly, after all the efforts put forth by government for their benefit. It is so all the same and I put this down to the money lender the indebtedness leading to increased drinking and a general want of thrifty. The debts press harder on the coolies now than in former days as so many carry debts contracted not only by themselves but by their fathers who are dead and for whom they have become responsible ". (44) However, this remark was applicable to Paharia Coolies only within the tea garden area. Outside the tea-garden area the cultivators were not as a rule heavily in debt and seldom owed more than they could pay off after selling the next season's crops.

Legislative action to limit the rate of interest had been suggested against the money lenders and this might have got some effect but could not defeat the cunning of the money - lender who could evade the law by getting his debtor to sign a bond in such a way that it did not come into effect in favour of the debtor in the civil court. However, in the government's estates, steps were taken

against the money lenders by restricting the right of the jotedar to transfer his holding. If the money - lender could not get possession of the land, he would not lend such large sums and the cultivator would not be able to borrow as recklessly as he sometimes did then.

The Marwari banking or money lending business had been more comprehensive and striking in the district of Darjeeling than in the other two districts, i.e. Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. The increasing socio-economic and trading importance of Darjeeling and its all round development projects undertaken by the British after its occupation by them in 1835, its subsequent joining with the Terai and Kalimpong in 1850 and 1865 respectively, every encouragement given to commercial agriculture by the British, establishment of trade relations with Tibet, Central Asia through the trans-Himalayan trade routes, and above all, introduction of tea-plantation and growth of tea industry along with cultivation of fruits, herbs etc. made the tract extremely ideal for the money lending or banking business. Capital began to be largely expanded in trade ^{and} in extending cultivation. However, rates of interest on loans were very high. The local English Bank charged as high as 18% which was the lowest rate prevalent in the district. Native Mahajans and money lenders seldom charged less than 24% . The Deputy Commissioner estimated that the usual rate charged by them was 36% and that 48% and even 60% were by no means unknown rates of interest. For both

big and small loan transactions the same rate of interest was charged. Loans to the peasants were usually advanced in the form of grain which was to be repaid in kind at harvest time. The lender had a tacit lieu upon the crop. (45) Thus money-lending or banking had become a most profitable occupation in the district and the Marwaris at once entered into this venture.

Here the Marwaris started advancing loans to both traders and cultivators. However, beside being traders, the Beharis were, to some extent, in the money lending business too. As A.J Dash writes, "The finance of trade and agriculture in the district is mainly in the hands of those who control trading, i.e, Marwaris and to a much smaller extent Beharis". (46) There was always a tendency of the hill men to borrow money from the money lenders both in the tea gardens and in the Khas Mahals, outside tea gardens. They never cared to accumulate capital, got hopelessly into debt and became virtual slaves to their lenders. Even when hill men made a life's business out of building, road or timber contracting or in driving motor cars lorries for hire, they hardly saved capital and always remained dependent on Marwari financiers for conducting their business. (47) In Kalimpong, how the need for agricultural capital arose and how the need was fulfilled, could be understood from the following comment made on the early Banking activities of the Marwaris : "With the advent of the Marwari traders who started large

scale buying of cardamoms and the impetus derived from the larger demand for agricultural products, with increased pressure on land caused by an influx of Nepali cultivators after the tract ceded to British India and with the Introduction by the Nepalese of new methods of intensive cultivation by means of the plough, the need arose for agricultural capital and the Marwari was ready to provide it. In the beginning, this was more in kind than in cash, the loan in kind being invariably computed in money value to the advantage of the lender. Gradually, the system developed into regular money lending in cash at definite rates of interest."(48) Besides cardamom, the marwaris financed the cultivation of seed potato, orange, chirata, majinth, rice, vegetables, etc. and took a share for financing them. The tea industry was financed and controlled from Calcutta but it also needed local movement of funds for the smooth working of the industry. This was supplied both by the various commercial banks and the tea garden Kayahs, i.e., Marwaris whose main apparent function was the retail supply of commodities. Sometimes, this capital was provided by the large Marwari private banking firms registered under the money - lenders Act. (49) The role of the large Marwari Banking firms to finance the trade and agriculture is to be dealt with later on.

The basis of the finance of trade and agriculture was unfortunately the improvidence of the small producer and consumer, his lack of capital and his readiness to borrow

or receive on credit. Crops were sold in advance by growers and goods were sold on credit to labourers on tea gardens and to cultivators outside them. Owing to his carelessness, or recklessness and lack of foresight, the hillman always placed himself at a disadvantage in these transactions. The hillmen practised same thing in the Khas Mahals outside tea gardens. Their crops were bought in advance and goods were supplied on credit at prices unfavourable to them. Here again this sort of transactions did not either benefit or assist cultivators but ruinously threw them in the midst of improvidence, gambling and showy display. (50)

Money lending conditions in the Terai were somewhat different. The Kayahs were found in tea-gardens and they were usually financed by the management. The managements freely lent money without interest to coolies for the purchase of carts or buffaloes; these were available for garden use. petty shop keepers, outside tea gardens got loans from the jotedars who charged upto 25% interest while the Adhiars cultivating under jotedars took advances of paddy from them for subsistence and were charged upto 50% interest. However, the money-lenders Act had been passed to check the abuses. This act had had some effects to the extent that instead of filing suits at law courts, more attempts were made at amicable settlement of debts. In 1942, the number of suit filed for debt at Terai was 15 against 55 of the previous average. (51)

But the money lending business had been really exhibited by the Marwaris by opening Banking firms in the district. In Darjeeling town itself, the firm of Jetmull Bhojraj was established in 1845 and Marwari firms were established in Kalimpong soon after its annexation from Bhutan. (52) The Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (1929-30) supplied evidences of the existence of similar kinds of Marwari Banking firms which transacted banking business in Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. " The Sub-divisional Officer, Kalimpong, provided further informations by listing the names of some important firms engaged in this venture, such as (i) Lachmandas Ramchandra (ii) Purukchand Lakhmichand (iii) Koramal Jethmul (iv) Joteram Ramrikdas (v) Siram Mulchand and (vi) Khtesidas Ramlal. Besides Banking, they also engaged in trade in piece goods, wool, cardamom, grains etc. employing about 75% of their resources in it. They obtained their funds from the proceeds of business as also from loans and financed agriculture, trade and contract work etc. charging interest varying from 9 to 18% per annum on big loans advanced to respectable persons and upto 37.5% per annum on minor loans granted generally for a year. They used two kinds of hundis, one paid on presentation and the other after a certain period as stipulated in them. In the case of banks run by Lachmandas Ramchandra and Purukchand Lakhichand, who had been in the business for long, the interest paid

on deposits for one year was 5%; for nine months, 4.5% for six months, 4% and on current accounts, 3% Even now the financing of trade and agriculture in the district is in the hands of the Marwaris and Biharis. Transactions in cash or kind between the private credit agencies and the agriculturists are now regulated by the Bengal Money lenders Act of 1940." (53)

The Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling and the Sub-divisional Officer, Kalimpong, stated before the Bengal provincial Banking enquiry Committee (1929-30) that the farmers of the district depended mainly on co-operative Banks and Mahajans (indigenous money lenders) for agricultural credit. These indigenous money lenders were obviously the Marwari Mahajans along with the others. However, the rate of interest charged by the money lenders varied from 30 and 60% per annum while that by the Co-operative banks was 12.5% per annum. The former further compounded the interest accrued at the end of each year to the principal. Bank lent on the security of landed properties but the Mahajans insisted on mortgage of ornaments. Paddy loans charged interest varying from 20 to 50% to be repaid usually at the time of next harvest. " The proportion of secured and unsecured loans was 1:3, which encouraged usury as a necessary cover. In case of default, realisation of loans was effected through the civil courts which usually ordered the farmer's land or other properties to be sold. In the opinion of the Sub-divisional Officer, Kalimpong,

agricultural indebtedness was on the increase in his area. The average per capita debt of members of rural co-operative societies to their societies and money lenders amounted to Rs. 172 in 1929. (54)

I have come across two Marwari families who had money lending business at Siliguri. (I) The family of Mohan Lal Dalmia was connected with the money-lending business practices. This house, however, charged only 1 or 1.5% interest on loans, while the rate of interest, then prevalent in the market, was 3 or 4%. (55) (II) The House of Toolaram Gidra had money lending business at Siliguri. (56)

The Marwari bankers also reached Sikkim, adjacent to Darjeeling. In September, 1899, Messers Jetmul and Bhojraj, bankers of Darjeeling opened a branch of their Bank at Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. During the Young - Husband expedition to Tibet in 1904, the Bank of Messers Jetmull and Bhojraj came to the service of the British Government. J.C.White was instructed by the Government to borrow money from this firm to meet the expenditure of the expedition. (57) The Sikkim people also used to borrow money on interest from the Marwari money lenders." These Marwaris, doing the money-lending business, were charging exorbitant interest from the Sikkim people and the Maharaja complained against them in the council meeting of Feb. 1990" (58) The state of Sikkim once had to borrow Rs. 3000 from

a Marwari at a higher rate of interest and in the council meeting of Feb. 1900 it was decided not to allow more than 12% interest per annum. (59) Dr. Jha has also shown in his book how usurious rates of interest, charged by the Marwari money lenders on the debtors told upon the general people of Sikkim. Dr. Jha writes, "The immigration of the Marwaris and other Plainsmen did not appear as a blessing to the Sikkim people. The Marwaris by lending money at usurious rates of interest, and against agricultural produce, ranging from 75% to 150%, caused widespread indebtedness among the Sikkim people. To check it, several resolutions were passed in the Sikkim council in 1908, and in 1914, some Marwari money lenders were expelled from Sikkim". (60) It is worth mentioning here that the other two Himalayan countries, Bhutan and Tibet, were also not free from immigration of Marwari money lenders.

The doleful picture of the evil effects of usurious Marwari money lending practice on the district has been narrated by L.S.S.O. Malley in a vivid and compassionate manner. Though general prosperity of the people prevailed in the district, the indebtedness of the people was one of the most serious economic problems of the district. This indebtedness was as much due to their reckless manner to contract debts as due to their customary obligation to incur heavy expenditure on marriage, funeral and other ceremonies, to their love of drinking, - they drank far

more than the inhabitants of any other part of Bengal - to their propensity to gambling, to their simple delight in display of all kinds, which led to an extravagant outlay on dress, ornaments, and jewellery, and finally to their improvident habits. Whenever, they needed money, they at once borrowed loan from the Marwari money lenders or Kanyas or Kayas as they were locally called. The big Marwari merchants were honest in their mercantile transactions. But their gomastas or agents were always eager for good profit as they worked as clerks for Rs. 30 to Rs. 50 a month. Their promotion largely depended on profit they could show. In some cases, they were commission agents. So they followed the old adage "Make money, honestly if you can but make it". They did it by usury without paying heed to morality. As they had virtual monopoly of the money lending business, they did it easily.

The innocent hill people were recklessly willing to sign bonds at high rates of interest on ready money. Interest began to mount and the unhappy debtor could hardly clear off his mammoth debt. Malley writes, "The money lenders are always eager to accommodate a fresh victim; and are willing to allow him to become involved fully upto the limit of what they think he can be made to pay. Till that limit is reached, they are quite content to allow the principal to remain unpaid, while they gather in the interest month by month, and the unhappy debtor goes on

blindly paying his monthly installments". Two instances may be cited here to gauge the extent of the exploitative mechanism. Once a poor old woman compelled by hunger to borrow 3 seers of rice on condition that she had to repay 30 seers of maize in two months' time. Again a peasant in dire scarcity borrowed 10 1/2 rupees worth of rice, but he only managed to pay off Rs. 76 in five years and he still owed to the lender Rs. 140. This is how the ingenious mechanism of the usurer was executed. Malley provided a further instance. " A sardar who wants to borrow Rs. 100, and agrees to pay at the rate of one anna in the rupee per mensem, has first to sign a note of hand for Rs. 106-4, i.e., Rs. 100 plus a month's interest. At the end of the first month he owes Rs. 112-14-3, compound interest being charged on the original Rs. 106-4, and at the end of 12 months he has actually been charged compound interest at 6.5% for 13 months and owes Rs. 219-14-9. The money lender then gets him to sign a fresh note of hand for this sum as if it was a fresh loan, and in this note he states that he has received Rs. 219-14-9 and agrees to pay at the same rate of interest as before. Sometimes, the old note of hand is destroyed, the result being that if a suit is instituted, the court has no means of knowing what was the original sum lent, or it is surreptitiously kept by the kaya and produced later for the purposes of the suit. In the later case, his dishonesty is rewarded, as he makes it appear as if the borrower had signed notes of hand year after year for ever increasing amounts, and there is

nothing to show that the larger amounts entered in the various notes really include the smaller sums for which the preceding notes were signed". This is an ideal example of Marwari cunning, deceit, and slyness.

The rate of interest depended on the nature of security given. Still the rate was very high. For loans on personal security, the debtor had to pay 'dua sud, 'i.e., one anna a month for each rupee lent. This was equivalent to 75% per annum (excluding compound interest). Another usual rate was Rs. 5 per hundred a month, which was equivalent to 60% as per simple interest. Compound interest was also charged. If the interest had not been paid off at the end of a year, a amount due was added to the principal and in that case a new hand note was taken for the increased amount. Then interest was charged on the total at the same rate as before.

In the government estates, the cultivators were more or less protected against such extortion - protection was given to them by the Deputy Commissioner who was entrusted with strong power of a civil nature by which he could settle many debt disputes and thereby could free the cultivators from the clutches of the professional usurers. Besides, the amount borrowed by the tenants was comparatively small. This was, to some extent, particularly the case with the Bhutias, owing to a curious custom observed by them. Still in this favourable area, cultivation of

cardamom afforded some facilities to the money lenders. This crop was mainly grown for export which could be disposed of to Marwari traders who on their term trapped the cultivators to debt by making advantageous bargains on the unreaped cardamom and by laying out advances on cultivation. So the poor Lepchas who grew it could not reap the benefit of this profitable cultivation of cardamom and remained miserably poor.

Outside this estate, the curse of money lending was very widespread, particularly among contractors and tea garden employees most of whom were financed by money lenders. The contractors made contracts with the money lenders in such a way that, while they began to make profit, their profit was swallowed up in the payment of interest to the money lenders. The plight in the tea gardens was still worse. Malley narrates, " The people incur expenditure recklessly, they look to their Sardar for money, and he gets it from the money lender. The hold of the latter over the labour force is so great that it is credibly stated that in some gardens , paying Rs. 2000 or Rs. 3000 a month as wages to their employees, the Kaya regularly attends on pay day, takes the whole amount from the sardars and then doles it out to the latter weekly, after deducting the interest due on the loans he has made." Malley quotes the experience of one of the leading planters of the district to illustrate general state of affairs. The planter writes - "one sardar told me that he had never owed less than Rs.

2000 for the last 20 years, and he said, 'I believe that the day I get out of debt, I should die.' It was meant to Malley that the environment under such circumstances would be so peculiar and abnormal that his constitution would never stand the awful and stupendous change. Malley further expressed his observation by illustrating another instance, which he himself came across in his own life. Three years before he wrote this account, he had lent his people there about Rs. 4000 at 6 percent by redeeming their hand notes (hath-chittas) for that amount from the Kayas. Then he reduced the proportion of principal and interest weekly, and at a time, they owed to Malley only about Rs. 700. When they paid up the sum, i.e., Rs. 700, Malley should have to give them more money as they could not sleep, eat, and even live without owing a good round sum to any one! According to Malley, their argument was : if somebody lent a debtor Rs. 100, why should he not take advantage of his splendid credit ? Any other course seemed to the debtors absolute lunacy! ". These remarks at least showed how blindly and willingly the Nepali coolie incurred debt and the evil was aggravated by the extraordinary readiness with which his relatives would back his bills.

Mr. Malley has supplied some statistics to show how prevalent the evil was and how exorbitant a rate of interest was charged. From 1898 to 1902, no less than 808 cases were filed in the civil courts for debts due and the interest claimed, varying from Rs. 2 to 8 a month for each

Rs. 100 lent, or 30% per annum, to Rs. 25 a month or 300% per annum. During this period 97 suits were instituted in which interest was claimed at 30%; 458 cases occurred in which interest at 36 to 37.5% was charged ; in 93 cases it was claimed at 48%, in 38 cases at 60%, in 113 cases at 108%, in 3 cases at 150% , and in one case at 300%. Besides there were many cases of similar nature which never came before the law courts. This was due to the simplicity and ignorance of the hill who were easily led by present necessity to agree to whatever was demanded in the shape of interest without caring for the future.

The evil of money lending was also prevalent in the Terai and here the victims were tea garden coolies who were mostly Rajbansis and the aboriginal tribe such as Oraongs, Santals and Mundas, Nepalis, etc. Sometimes, they settled down here as cultivators. It was found in 1903 that out of 834 jotes, with an annual demand of revenue amounting to a Lakh of rupees, no less than 272 jotes with an annual demand of Rs. 23,000 or nearly one-third of the total number, were owed by professional money lenders. Altogether 150 jotes had passed into their hands in the preceding 5 years, 139 being taken over from the local agriculturists and the remainder from the money-lenders, who held them previous to the transfer. This transfer of ownership of the Terai jotes from the hands of the local agriculturists was undoubtedly due to the ignorance of the people and the high rate of interest demanded by the

usurer. The usual rate of interest until recent years was 75% per annum. In later years, this rate was reduced to 36% per annum in a majority of cases. " All payments made by a debtor are credited as interest until all the sums due are paid up, so that the jotedar, like the coolie and cultivator of hills, once in the clutches of the money lender, does not escape till he has lost his property ", Says Malley.

It was explained that the reason behind the higher rate of interest in the district than elsewhere was the proximity of the Nepal frontier so that the debtors could easily escape to Nepal without paying his debts and the great risk which the money lender had to incur subsequently. But Malley does not think so, though this was to some extent true in the case of tea garden coolies who had no ties. But the Marwari money lenders, so long as they were not fully satisfied with the prospect of a debtor's repaying capacity, did not lend money to any one, especially to an ordinary cultivator. Without a valuable pledge, a Marwari did not lend money, so that he could very seldom be an entire loser even if the debtor absconded. So the reason for the high rate of interest lay elsewhere. In fact, the number of money-lenders was few. Moreover, there were no credit banks. Few agricultural banks were started in the Kalimpong Govt. Estate. But here agricultural credit was least needed. So a few Marwari money-lender formed a close ring and thus they had practically a monopoly of usury. (61)

The lamentable condition of the hill people at the hands of the sucking Marwari money lenders naturally led many to think for some ameliorative measures to protect the debtors from the creditors (1) The Bengal Money lenders Act was passed in 1940. This act was designed to check the unsound domination of money lenders. This Act had done much to check excessive interest and the abuse of credit sales. But it was no entirely successful, " Partly because of the hillman does not want to break away from his Mahajans, partly because neither party wishes to take recourse to the law and partly because methods of evasion by means of a kind of barter are practised." (2) Another effort was made at imposing restriction in the hill on transfer of holdings and on their size. The Khas Mahal authorities forbade the hillmen to transfer holdings to Plainsmen or to transfer holdings in such a way that a cultivator had less than 5 acres or more than 20. The authorities in Kalimpong insisted transfers by Lepchas or Bhutias to Nepalis. This measure also did not produce the desired effect as evasion by subletting was possible. A.J.Dash writes, " The policy of limiting holdings to a maximum of 20 acres may discourage enterprise among hillmen and in any case the whole policy of restricting transfers is merely a negative one at preventing deterioration. It does not offer any positive cure for the economic dependence of the hillman on the foreign money lender." (62) (3) Legislative action had also been pro-

posed by which interest should not be levied at a rate exceeding 24% per annum, whatever agreement the ignorant Cooly or cultivator may have entered into, and to lay down that the total interest should not be allowed to exceed one-fourth of a one year's debt, and should not in any case exceed the whole amount of the debt." Still, the possibility of the extent of success of such legislative action with its so many loopholes of evasion was anybody's guess and was a matter of the future to dispose of. (4) Furthermore, a remedy was sought in the establishment of Agricultural banks Joint stock Banks or co-operative credit societies with the provision of advancing loans to the cultivators at a minimum rate of interest to make the debtors or tea garden coolies least dependant upon the professional usurers. At the same time, it was proposed that if the Nepali Coolies who were spendthrifts by nature, were to be paid weekly wages instead of monthly, they would get small wages at a time. So the kayas, who were reluctant to lend money to the small earners, would check their temptation to make a coolie a victim of their usury. So Malley concludes, " It seems probable, therefore, that such an arrangement and the establishment of agricultural banks would tend, in some measures, to minimize the mischief which is at present caused by the professional money-lender."

This speculative measure, above other proposals, was given importance. In order to save the cultivators, tea garden

coolies and traders from the usurers, various rural co-operative credit societies came into being and to finance these societies many co-operative banks were also set up. The Kalimpong Central Co-operative Bank was established in 1911 for societies in Kalimpong Sub-division and the Darjeeling Central Co-operative Bank in 1914 for societies in the sadar and Kurseong Sub-divisions. In 1919, the Pedong Central Co-operative Bank came into being at Pedong in Kalimpong Sub-division. The Darjeeling Co-operative Banking Union Ltd. was established in 1955 mainly for the purpose of financing crop loans to rural credit societies in the Sadar, Kalimpong and Kurseong Sub-divisions. All these Banks were amalgamated in 1959 to form the Darjeeling District Central Co-operative Bank Ltd. whose financial position during 1966-67 was as follows :

Working Capital	:	Rs. 8,68,840
Loans issued	:	Rs. 42,780
Loans outstanding	:	Rs. 3,92,896
Deposits	:	Rs. 2,13,275
Loss	:	Rs. 24,325

In the same year the district had 196 agricultural Co-operative Credit Societies with an overall membership of 12,151 and a total working capital of Rs. 9,46,389. (64) A few joint stock banks were subsequently established in the district. The State Bank of India had their Branches established at Darjeeling, Siliguri, Kurseong, and Kalimpong in 1923, 1957, 1958 and 1962 respectively. The Dar-

jeeling Branch played an important role in financing the tea industry during 1923 to 1937. The National & Grindlays Bank has a Branch at Darjeeling Town and the Central Bank of India at Kalimpong and Siliguri while the Punjab National Bank and United Commercial Bank have each Branches at Siliguri and the dates of their opening these Branches being 1935, 1943, 1944, 1936 and 1965 respectively. (65) At present, these credit societies, Co-operative as well as joint stock banks have almost replaced the mode of indigenous usurious banking practices and the role of the professional money lenders has now been in a state of whimper.

However, the usurious Marwari Practice of money lending to the ignorant cultivators, and coolies sometimes produced social tensions between them and the original inhabitants of the region under study. At Madarihat, a flourishing market centre, such tension was heightened on 12 Feb 1922 when a Marwari Shop-keeper had an altercation with a Santal labourer (or peasant) over the price of two gunny bags. In this incident, the former assaulted the latter. Then the Santal hired some members of his tribe and with their assistance he ransacked the Marwari's shop. There upon a case was filed at the nearby police station on 21 Feb. and accordingly a police officer of the Madarihat Thana searched some houses at village Salkumar and arrested four Santals who were involved in the sacking on 12 Feb. 1922. (66)

A peasant revolt against a Marwari Mahajan also took place in Rangpur. Here a share cropper who lost his land to a Marwari Mahajan and jotedar, as he failed to repay an agricultural loan, revolted against the lender with his supporters Manick Krishna Sen, Bipin Barman and others. Then the Marwari jotedar and his party struck Manick Krishna on the head and wounded Bipin Barman seriously. At this the unprepared peasants fled away for the time being but became united and prepared to take revenge. The peasants of Gayabari and Tapa Kharibari areas joined them with lathis, das and axes. The peasants thus in a body chased that Marwari Mahajan who fled to Jalpaiguri bag and baggage and saved his life. (67) A cultural member of Gaibandha, Panu Pal by name composed a song on a distressed Marwari. The first line of the song is : "Phande Paria Kaiyan (Marwari) Kandere " (68) Similarly, the peasants and Adhiars' uprising against the Mahajans in the nearby District of West Dinajpur occurred, to a certain extent, against the oppression and coercion of professional Money lenders and it admits of no doubt that a section of these money lenders or bankers comprised Marwari Mahajan or usurers.

The indigenous banking or money lending system has now been replaced by modern computerised joint stock banking ventures. But the great banking heritage, left by the

Marwari community of India, had and still has always been a conspicuous example to posterity.

The usurious Marwari practice of banking or money lending over the years in this region transformed them into a new professional class, i.e., jotedars. The Marwari money lenders became money investors; they began to invest money in land and thereby to get their hold on it. However, the Marwari money lender not only invested capital in land, but also in various kinds of business. But that is a separate history, to be dealt with later on. At least three factors constituted to their prospect of becoming Jotedars or land - holders. Firstly, their way of money lending practice, to a great extent, helped them to be owners of land holdings. The debtor or cultivator drew advances or loans from the Marwaris in lieu of bond or mortgage over their land, the only source of subsistence of the debtor or cultivator. The contract of mortgage was done in such a way that, if the cultivator failed to repay the loan within a stipulated period of time, the ownership over the mortgaged land would automatically be transferred to the lender as soon as the contracted period expired. This type of defaulting occurred frequently, for the debtor or cultivator was illiterate and ignorant. He could not see through the tricky trap of the wily Marwari money lender. Consequently, the debtor could seldom repay his loan to the lender who, by virtue of the mortgage, became automatically the owner of the debtor's land. As years

rolled on, the same thing happened and the area of land holding passed into his hand over the years became larger and larger to the extent that he became known as a jotedar. Secondly, there was no existence of landed gentry in this region, notwithstanding their very much presence in other parts of Bengal after the introduction of the permanent settlement in 1793. This paved the way for the Marwaris to enter into Jotedari profession as they had not to face any competition in this area of economic venture. Thirdly, investment in land necessitates huge amounts of capital which the Marwaris had and which the native people of this region did not have. It would indeed be surprising if the Marwari money lenders, with vast amounts of capital at their disposal, did not invest in the purchase of land holdings when a new opportunity of economic venture opened up before them by circumstances.

These are the circumstantial factors behind Marwari investment in land, but there are also some inherent factors which could not be overlooked. (1) Since time immemorial, land had been considered as a great immovable property as human beings could simple live by agriculture. (2) Land is the basic component of sustained economic growth, the lifeline of man and it is the only source of national wealth which could simply make a country rich and prosperous. (3) No less important was the consideration that land, through ages, had been considered as a

symbol of social status and prestige. So Marwari craving for land holdings in his place of migration was quite natural. (4) when a man migrates from his native land to a new place, he becomes a refugee. In new social surroundings and a different environment, he suffers from an identity crisis as every thing of the place where he migrates to, seems to him unknown. But a piece of land in his name could remove his refugee calumny and help overcome his identity crisis. (5) The native land of the Marwaris was a desert due to scanty rainfall, rocky dust, aridity and infertility of the soil. The scope of economic development there was very magre. So they migrated from their homeland to other places in search of subsistence and it could be said with certainty that they invested capital in land for the same reason for which they left their homeland.

A jote was a revenue paying estate and the owner of it was called jotedar. Jotes could be had in the estate of Cooch Behar Maharaja on payment of a fixed revenue to the Maharaja who was the owner of the soil. In lower Bengal, what a Zamindar was to his ryots, the Cooch Behar Maharaja was to his Jotedars. So a person, holding revenue paying land immediately under the Raja, was called a jotedar or proprietor of a jote. A jote was hereditary, transferable and divisible by the customary law of the country. The state had always recognised the right of ownership, subject to the payment of revenue at the prevailing rates,

although there was no written code extant from which such a right could be proved. The rent payable to the Maharaja by a jotedar was liable to enhancement. (69)

Apart from jotedars, the immediate tenants to the Raja, there were different classes of sub-tenants found in the State, such as Chukanidars, Dar-chukanidars, Daradar-Chukanidars, tasia - chukanidars and adhiars (holders under the Metayer system). The chukanidar was an immediate sub-tenant or an under-tenant of a jotedar, a holder of a certain portion of the jote or farm. This kind of holding was known as a chukaini which was saleable, under tenure, subject to the permission, to be had of the jotedar, for transfer. A chukanidar had a right of occupancy, his under tenure was also hereditary like a jote and divisible. He paid to the jotedar, as rent, a sum not exceeding 25%, over the rates that the jotedar paid to the State. What a chukanidar was to a jotedar, a Dar-chukanidar was to a chukanidar. Similar orders had been maintained in the ranks of Daradar - Chukanidar and Tasia - Chukanidar. This was the revenue and land relations in the state of Cooch Behar.

In the district of Jalpaiguri, the land relations were somewhat different. Here land relations were directly settled with the jotedars by the Raikats, not by the Raja, for the Raikats were the appointed hereditary zaminders of the Baikunthapur or Battrishhazari estate. However, other feudal relations remained the same as they were in

the Cooch Behar State. (70) But in the Western Duars, the government itself was the Zamindar. (71) Gruning writes about the power and position of the Jotedars : " the country (Jalpaiguri) is divided into small hamlets, the most important homestead belonging to a substantial farmer, often the Jotedar, while round it are the houses of his relations, under tenants and farm labourers. The Jot is the social unit and not the village ; the Jotdar, or if he is an absentee, the chukanidar under him, keeps the little community together ; he maintains a store house from which he makes subsistence loans of rice to his dependents or furnishes them with seed." (72)

In the district of Darjeeling, land relations were maintained in a completely different set of framework. The most important feature of the land relation here was that there was no king or zaminder with whom the land question could be settled. In their place, the jotedar or guarantor held his land directly from government and parcelld it out either to a praja or Thikadar. (73). Malley has divided the district into four distinct tracts for giving a scientific exposition of land relations the various tenants and sub-tenants, viz. (I) the government estates in the hills, (II) those of the Terai, (III) the strip of land lying to the North-west of the little Rangit and (IV) the land granted for cultivation of tea. In addition, however, were reserved forests and lands reserved for Chinchona.

In the government estates of Kalimpong, government was

direct proprietor of the estate. There were no private landlords or tenure - holders, and there was no one between government and the ryot, who was in most cases, the tiller of the soil. The estate was divided into 48 blocks. East block was placed in charge of a village headman or Mondal who was the direct representative of government on the estate. It was his duty to collect the rent from the ryots and to deposit it with the manager to whom he was a sub-ordinate and to report all transfers of land. In fact he was an intermediary between the government and ryots. The ryots of the estates were composed of lepchas, Bho-tias, Nepalis, etc. The rent of their holding was fixed for ten years. If they failed to pay their rent, their property might be sold up. They could not sublet or transfer their holding to others without prior permission from the Deputy Commissioner. Besides, the ryots had some obligations to the government and in any violation of these, their possessions over holdings were liable to be cancelled. (74)

Still, unauthorised subletting was rampant and difficult to check. As a result of subletting by absentee or Bhadrak lok tenants, three types of under-ryots sprang up on the Kalimpong government estate, such as (I) Pakhurias who paid a fixed cash rent to the tenant of the land, (II) Khutdars who paid a fixed produced rent, and (III) Adhiars, or half - crop under ryots. (75) So far as the other government estates in the hills are concerned, the

which were bankers to the Cooch Behar Maharaja, were also associated with the Jotedari profession and they had about 1 Lakh bighas of land ? The Chho-kuthi had under their occupancy, a big plot of land, measuring 93 bighas, 17 kathas and one Dhur at Taluk Banskantha in Paragana Mathabhanga. (84) Babu Tularam and Dalimchand Saroigi whose kith and kin still own large and leading business establishment in motor-parts, electrical and electronic goods, modern scientific equipments of daily life at Cooch Behar town were once jotedars. They possessed jotes in the Khas Mahal estate of Koch Maharaja. (85) So also Babu Jharanmal Oswal was a great Jotedar at Mekhligunj. (86) Again, Babu Janoki Nath Tiwari was a resident Jotedar of the Dinhat Sub-division. (87) As at Dinhat, Babu Hukum Chand Oswal had land holdings of 93 Bighas, 13 Kathas and 17 Dhurs in Paragana Mathabhanga. It was a Lakheraj holding (88).

Some information of Marwaris in the Jotedar profession has been collected through sample surveys conducted by interviewing some of the old Marwaris, who now live in the district town and in the various sub-divisional towns of Cooch Behar. Those interviewed were : (i) The family of Motilal Lakhotia (ii) Mongiram Jain (iii) Toolaram and Binraj Jain of Cooch Behar Town, (iv) Amar Chand and Lalchand Oswal, Iswar Chand Oswal of Paragana Tufangunj. (v) Gouri Shankar Agarwal of Bakshirhat, (vi) Tansukhdas Bhadani, (vii) Chhatidas, Chhagmal and Hanuman Bothra of Paragana Mathabhanga, (viii) Lunkaran Kothari of Chandra-

bandha and (ix) Giridharilal Mahesree of Mekhligunj who had their respective jotes in the estate of Cooch Behar Maharaja. The Bothra family was the owner of atleast (6/7) Six or seven hundred bighas of land. (89)

Jalpaiguri was the Baikunthapur Zamindari of the Cooch Behar State. Naturally the wave of Marwari mission of holding jotes also reached here. Like Cooch Behar, here also professional money lending helped the Marwaris a lot to be owners of jotes. That the Tenants, having fallen victim to Marwari craft on money-sucking, were losing their land to the latter, has been stated in contemporary Gazetteer : "Unfortunately, some of the land has passed into the hands of middlemen, e.g., Marwaris, Pleaders and other who were not cultivators, these men hold as Jotedars under the zamindari, but are mere land receivers" (90) In another gazetter, it is pointed out that many of the jotedars, while they were holding lands for generations, a tendency of passing some land into the hands of some Marwaris and Bengal Bhadrals grew among them. (91)

Though many jotes were transferred into the possession of Marwari middlemen and others, the material condition of the people was good. The increasing prosperity of the district made the people well-to-do. In the large two Zamindari estate, i.e. permanently settled portion of the district and the government estates, rents were low and and the cultivators were not badly off. Grunning writes, "It is difficult to estimate to what extent the money

lenders is succeeding in getting the hold of land, but he has probably been more successful in the permanently settled portion of the district than in the government estates. In the Baikunthapur estate many of the jotes are held by middlemen, while in the Cooch Behar Zamindari nearly all the land in the vicinity of Saldanga has passed into the possession of Marwari firm locally known as the "Saldanga Kaya". (92) A reading on the Falakata Tehsil in 1905 will make the picture clear. In that year 115 jotes, measuring 6,551.13 acres passed into the hands of the Marwaris. According to another set of statistics, 272 Jotes, measuring 1409.20 acres, 14 Jotes, measuring 381.41 acres, and many other jotes went into the possession of the Marwaris, up-country men, Kabulis and other persons (mostly Bengalee babus) respectively. (93)

Prof. Ranajit Dasgupta, who has done pioneering research on the District of Jalpaiguri, has given us percentage statistics about transfer of Jotes to the Marwaris. According to him, the percentage of Jotes and that of the total area, transferred, to the Marwaris, were 2.80 and 3.77 respectively. (94) The researcher has provided us with another set of statistics for the Mainagrui Tahsil : Out of 227 Jotes of the Taluks of Tatgaon, Udalbari and Saoga Fulbari in the said Tahsil, 102 of 45% were transferred in 1904 - 1905. The mainagrui Tahsildar reported that many of them had got into the clutches of professional money-lenders. In the same year, The Falakata Tahsildar

had noted a list of 71 jotes, measuring 1,882 acres, which were sold to the known money-lenders. So also Chukanidars mortgaged and sold their landholdings freely to the money-lenders. (95) However, according to Milligan, the process of transfer continued during the period of settlement operations. (96)

According to the sample surveys, carried out by me, the following Marwaris, or Marwari families were directly connected with the Jotedari profession, a profession which they could join because of their early money lending operations. Tejmal Ramprotap and Ramchandra Behani and their house were owners of jotes of about 1500 bighas at Mainaguri Tahsil. (97) Govinda Ram Kalyani, Kaluram Kalyani and their family were Jotedars. They possessed about 3000 bighas of lands. (98) Santlal Kalyani of Dhupguri was a partner of Jotedari occupation of the Kalyani family of Mainaguri. He was a scion of the great Kalyani family of Mainaguri. (99) Ramlal, Kisanlal and Sen Narayan Saswat of Dhupguri and their family possessed small land holdings. (100) And lastly, Malchand Dugar was a big Jotedar at Alipur Duar. (101)

In the district of Darjeeling, the Marwaris entered into the Jotedari profession only in the Terai Khas Mahals. Their appearance as 'Jotedars' in the region other than the Terai, could hardly be seen. J.C.Mitra writes that

the ubiquitous Marwaris could be seen even in the remotest corner of the Terai Sub-division not only as traders or usurious money-lenders but also as 'Owners of the Jotes.' and sometimes as planters. The writer also recorded in his report, "With the establishment of the British Government in the tract, the Marwaris, Pleaders, merchants and others came in and bought many of the jotes or portions thereof".

(103) The latest district Gazetteer has highlighted this report of Mr. Mitra and said that the jotes were originally let out to be brought under cultivation by the lessees themselves or by their tenants. But at later stage Marwaris, pleaders, merchants, speculators and others made their appearance in this field and bought up many of the Jotes. (104) The number of jotes and grants also increased with the Sub-division of the existing ones, reclamation of waste lands and conservation of service grants etc. into ordinary agricultural jotes. Land grabbing by speculators became rampant and this was accelerated by the settlement of the land under the old waste land rules for tea cultivation. The original settlers of the soil were gradually pushed out by the rich and influential immigrants who were mere receivers of the rent and the tenants holding under them were the actual tillers of the soil (105) In 1925, some notable Marwari Jotedars were Hanuman Prosad, Manturam, Kajarimal and Mahunga lal Agarwal. (106)

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